

Knowledge and Behaviors of Parents in Planning for and Dealing with Disasters and Emergencies at Schools

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Background



- Data indicate that most US families are unprepared for emergencies or disasters
- Less than a third have basic family emergency plans and most do not feel prepared
- Additional barriers exist for immigrant populations
- Emergent behavior as a sociological theory

Study Aims



- Overview of parental levels of preparedness
- Parents' planned response to a school emergency
- School challenges as a result of parent response
- Recommendations

Methods



- Two school districts in South Los Angeles
- Randomly selected one elementary, middle, high, and alternative school from each
- Mixed Method Multilevel Design
 - Quantitative survey with school staff (N=158)
 - Key Informant Interviews with staff (n=24) and parents (n=7)
 - Focus Groups with staff and parents
 - Conducted in English and Spanish

Preparedness – What Does it Mean?

- Parents do not feel well prepared for disasters

- Preparedness is a shared responsibility between parents and schools
- Preparedness is not just about water and fire drills

- Also, parents and schools should provide information and resources to help families prepare at home too.

- Parents and schools should work together to ensure that all children are prepared.

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- Some parents and schools are not prepared for violent events.

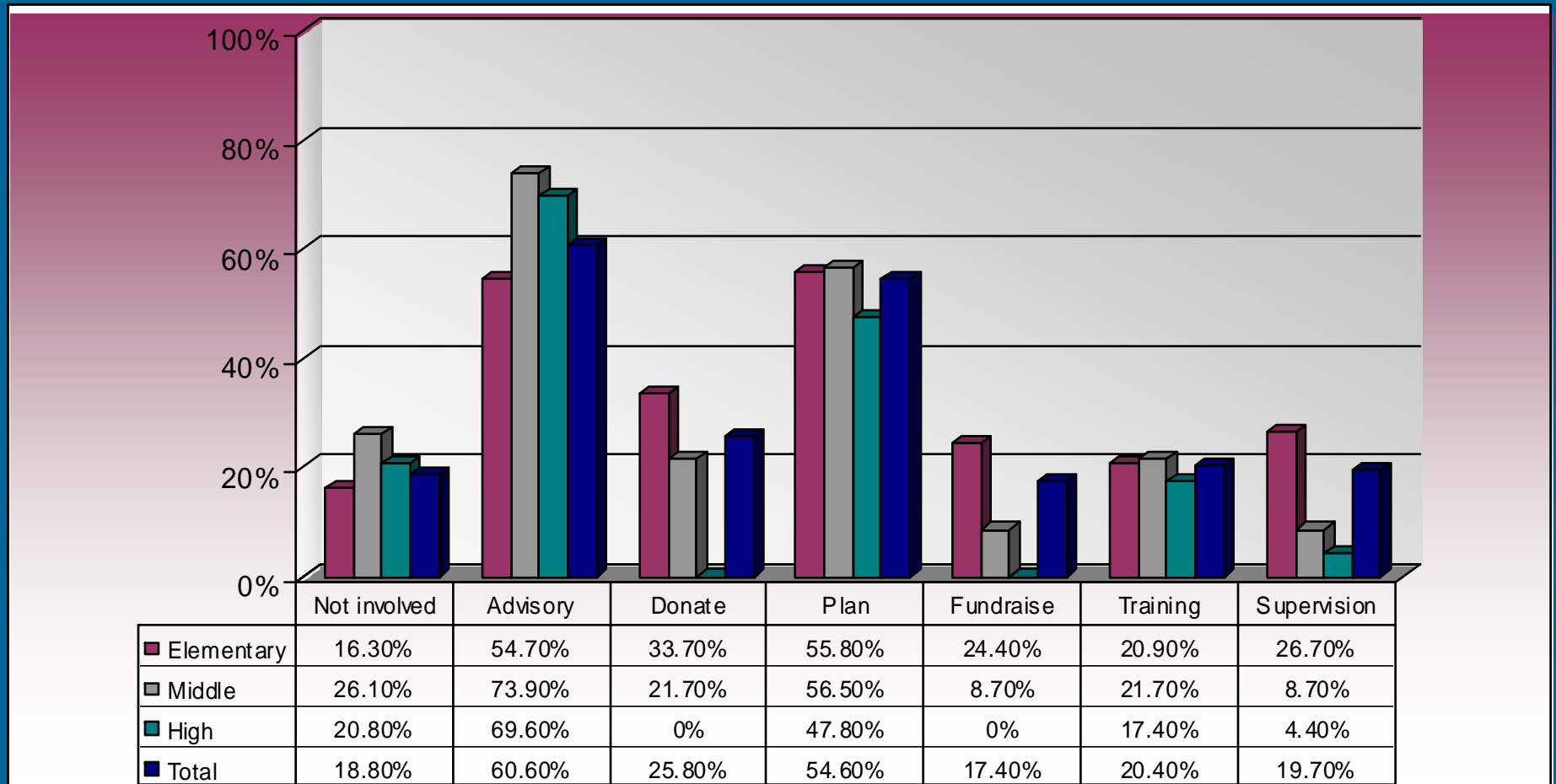
R1: As one of the first teachers for our children, the school has to continually remind them of what to do in case of an earthquake or fire.

R2: The school teaches them but also, they should also require us to prepare ourselves at home too.

R1: Sure.

R2: Because there are many parents that tell their kids – ‘oh they will teach you that at school’...but we don’t pay attention so we aren’t prepared. The school should keep insisting, ‘hey, you told your father, you told your mother’...until we are really interested in the well-being of our kids.

Parental Involvement in Emergency Preparedness at Schools



Available Training for Emergency Preparedness

- Most

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- n
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- E

R1: *The truth is I am not informed.*

R: *^*

F *I know when my kid was in elementary, they*
F *had them pick up an evacuation kit with like a*
F *couple of bottled waters, some non-perishable*
F *food items, different little things, a small blanket,*
F *a flashlight and like a little gym sack...they did a*
F *couple drills on that, and I know this is a high*
F *school, and I know it's a little bit different, but*
F *this is how they did it.*

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Parents' Response to an Emergency: Staff Concerns - Emergent Behavior

- Most common concern is the safety of the students
- Past experience with "block" and "push" drills
- "in my experience, the most helpful thing to do is to follow the instructions of the staff"
- Fear that staff may not be authorized to take action without proper authorization
- Reaction could be mitigated through increased communication – but barriers exist

My biggest concern is with the parents. They want to know that their child is safe. And my biggest

I've been in this school, in this district when we had an earthquake and the parents panicked. They came running through the community, gathered around the gates, the fence of the school, where total hysteria. The kids had evacuated calmly and were sitting out in the grass where they were supposed to be, the hysteria of the parents passed to the kids.

Parents' Response to an Emergency: Parent Perspective

That is what the school should send home, information about this. (You [parents] should do this, you should) The kids have cell phones so they will not be able to deal with this, you should plan for the parent call because they need to have know what the problem is. The kids have cell phones so they will start calling and then all these parents would come. So to me, that makes the situation a little bit worse because now you got to attend to them and their questions and they're talking and you can't attend to the school.

R3: The principal called all the parents outside, and we were all asking to get inside because our children were inside and there was shooting.

Are cell phones the answer?

Parental Roles in Case of Emergency

- Parental roles in case of emergency
 - Limited communication with regular parents
 - Suggesting liaison with parents
 - Changing names of schools
 - Some parents feel unwelcome at the schools
- It is all about the administration. If there is a good administrator in the school, meeting with teachers and meeting with the parents it won't be like that [lack of communication]. It all depends on the administration the school has in case of an emergency. Or even you know, if they have something at home, some kind of plan at home that they can...maybe share with other parents.*

Conclusions

- Primary challenge: staff expect and parents confirm a somewhat chaotic parental response
 - Perception that parents will not pay attention
 - Remove children without authorization
 - Most pronounced during lockdown incidents
- In spite of universal concerns – little planning around this issue
- Communication another challenge
- Dissemination of information to parents can be a challenge with limited parent involvement and language barriers

Recommendations

- Parents learn
- Research increase family prep
- Offer additional support to parents
- Take advantage of emergent behavior at schools and organize parent leaders to facilitate communication with other parents

I would say, you'd actually would want someone in this neighborhood, someone bilingual to help facilitate and feel like, "Mom, I need you to go over, stand by that that group of Kindergarteners, I need to move the teacher to help with search and rescue. Can you just stand here read and show them the books?" "Keep them calm and in the same area?"...I think parents are more than willing to do that.

Contact Information

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