

ON THEIR OWN?: MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS' ASSISTANCE
BY GOVERNMENT, NGOS, AND SELF-HELP
AT TIMES OF NATURAL DISASTER
IN WIMAUMA, FLORIDA

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN HUMANITIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Long ago there was a young girl who had the most amazing rock collection consisting of sulfur, lava, mica, and every shade of granite. Then, as a college student, the girl experienced her first archaeological dig while studying the Etowah Indians and their Georgian Mounds. From the study of fossils to the history surrounding past cultures, the girl, now a woman, secretly harbored a dream. Now, after all these years of merely dreaming, she is a step closer to actually becoming what she always wanted to be, an anthropologist. If, as Tennyson wrote in his “Ulysses,” “I am a part of all that I have met,” then the part of me that is the richest comes from those who have guided me on this thesis journey. My guide and mentor, Dr. Christian Zolniski has been a most brilliant committee chair who has inspired me by example. He has worked tirelessly guiding, reading, discussing, correcting, and planning. Those times that he told me something was “good,” I will forever cherish. I hope that I can make him proud. To my sister, Elizabeth Hunnicutt, who first mentioned Wimauma, provided me a safe place, and helped me with the school system, I thank you and love you. As for keeping me out of trouble while doing my fieldwork, I owe many thanks to Edner Guadaramma who without his work as my translator, my purpose would have never been accomplished. He was also my teacher, because he taught me much about the Mexican culture, his culture. I am indebted to Sonya Newman who translated and transposed the taped field interviews and then told me stories of her own family’s ordeals as migrant workers.

The people of Wimauma, the agencies, churches, schools, and Beth-El Ministry and Mission, I thank you all for accepting me and allowing me to be a part of your community and your lives. Of course, my first contact, Javier Izaguirra opened the door for my entrance into the world of the Other, providing me a comfort from within the community that made me confident that I could present the Self and the Other with a true “narrative ethnography” (Tedlock 1992; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Reed-Danahay 1997). It is to Javier that I owe much gratitude.

I thank my son, Adam Scott, whose computer expertise has given a face to the life histories I gathered and with the pictures of Wimauma another dimension of my documentation is added to my study. Though he was not always happy when pictures needed to be moved around to make room for more copy, I want him to know that I love and thank him for being there when I had computer issues.

Others I would like to thank are Dr. Deborah Reed-Danahay whose “Ethnography and Narrative” class was the inspirational beginning for this thesis, Dr. Kathryn Brown who taught me how to write archaeological scientific papers and to be patient in the dig, and to Dr. Susan Hekman who taught me to question and theorize the empowerment of women in all cultures.

November 12, 2008

ABSTRACT

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2008

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During the 2004 hurricane season, four successive storms struck Central Florida causing catastrophic damage to crops and displacing close to 195,000 migrant and seasonal workers. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis examines how government agencies and NGOs respond to such natural disasters by reaching out to Latino immigrant workers and families in Wimauma, Florida, and the diverse ways in which the immigrant community itself organized to confront the needs and problems brought about by these disasters. I pay particular attention to the role of Mexican immigrants' kinship and social networks in developing adaptive strategies during times

of stress and to how class and gender differences shape these strategies. Also, I examine how immigrants respond to programs implemented by government agencies and NGOs. Scarce resources, lack of cultural sensitivity, and underutilization of the cultural and social resources of the Latino immigrant community represent important obstacles for the effective implementation of government aid programs. Meanwhile, NGOs that were embedded in the social structure and networks of the local Latino community and those that relied on the key role women play as community builders proved to be more successful. This study seeks to contribute and to enlighten public policies that aid Latino immigrant communities in times of natural disasters.

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CHAPTER 1

A MEXICAN COMMUNITY: LIVING AND WORKING IN THE PATH OF DISASTER

“...But, I can’t imagine why any migrant in need, any farmworker, would have occasion to refuse any of our services, because it is with no exceptions, they are all pro-bono, free to them.”

–Dave Moore (Executive Director of Beth-El Mission)

Introduction

“Preparaciones Para un Huracán” signals the title on one side of a bright yellow handout. On the other side are the bold specifications for an emergency, “El Equipo de Emergencia.” Listed are the items a family’s emergency kit should contain: food for seven days, two gallons of water per person per day, full tank of gas in the car, prescription medications for two weeks, paper plates and other eating utensils, battery powered radio and extra batteries, can opener, candles and matches, and the list continues to the end of the page. The stack of handouts, neatly displayed for all to take, remains untouched in the foyer of the Beth- El Farmworker Mission. Instead, each immigrant¹ takes a number and waits in a long line for two pounds of flour, two pounds of beans, three cans of vegetables, and two loaves of bread. For some who arrive early, a Publix Supermarket may have donated day old breakfast pastries or a container of cookies.

¹ The use of the word “immigrant” in this context refers to those individuals from another country who have settled in Wimauma. “Migrants” are those who are in the community to work for a period of time and then move on to another region.

Every Tuesday, during their lunch break, ten to twelve Hispanic ladies, still wearing their tomato stained plastic aprons and web hairnets, pile into a van and rush to the mission for assistance. “This food helps my family, because my wages go to rent on the trailer and my husband is not well. Soon, the packinghouse will shut down for the season and I must find other work. I always petición Dios for help.” Maria speaks and her friends acknowledge in silence trying not to show their distress when they are told that the special gift of frozen chickens is gone. Flor Perez arrives with three small children. She prays that there might be a birthday cake for her five-year-old son. She is not disappointed. Today, Flor Perez, Maria, and other immigrant workers who come to the Beth-El Farmworker Ministry will receive the basic foods to feed their families for a short time. An immediate disaster has been averted. Preparation for a hurricane must wait for another day.

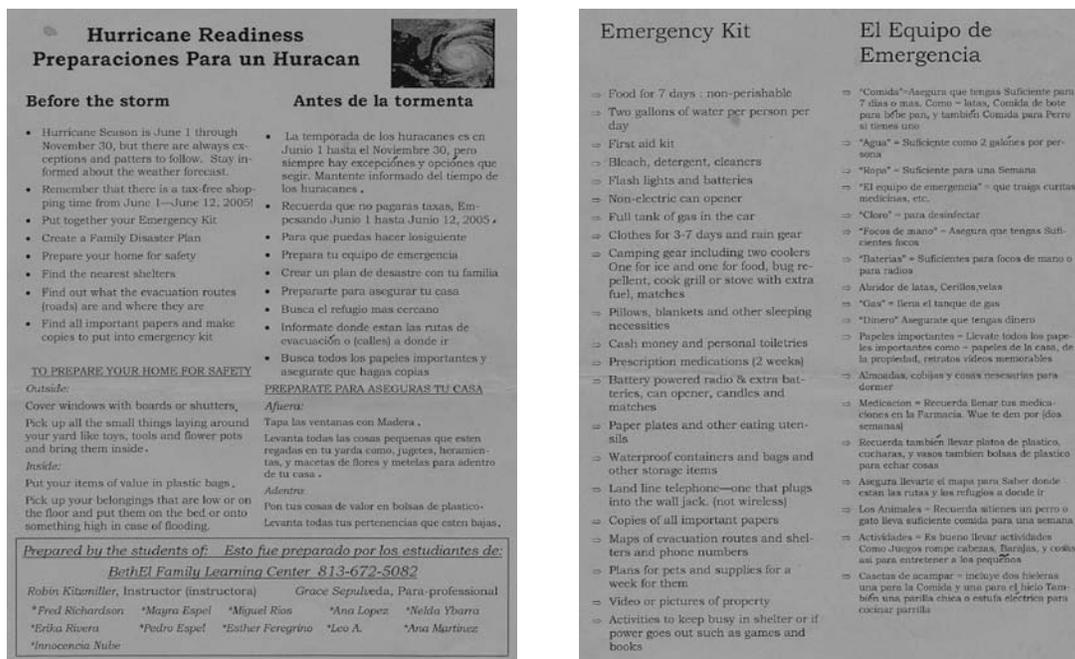


Figure 1-1. Beth-EL Farmworker Ministry prepares all emergency information in English and Spanish. I noted few immigrants taking this handout unless I specifically gave it to them. (2005)

This is not a scene observed in a remote village in Mexico, but my participant observation of a Mexican immigrant population and the assistance provided to them before, during and after a disaster such as a hurricane. As an agricultural community, situated in southern Hillsborough County, Wimauma has for decades been luring Mexican immigrants to cross the border in search of work and financial reward. Historically, those who came were individuals and families, but knowledge of financial gain and plentiful jobs is like a drumbeat to the poor villages of Mexico and Central America. As more immigrants came to work and wire money to family members left behind, the migration process literally began to envelop an entire village. Word spreads fast in the communities of departure and the dream of translating work into a better life becomes the goal of all involved in the migration process that eventually turns the journey of the transient Latino workers into an established community that is referred to as home. However, this vulnerable population, which is already stressed by hunger, housing, education, employment, and the fear of deportation, also faces another obstacle. They have settled in an area that is prone to numerous natural disasters, which adds to their survival burden. Agencies designed to provide protection and assistance to this population in predisaster and post- disaster situations are also stressed by the need to help large numbers of immigrants survive such disasters.

With four successive hurricanes striking the central part of Florida during the hurricane season of 2004, I found myself questioning the plight of thousands of migrant and seasonal farmworkers. Newspaper articles emphasize how migrant populations lose everything, but because so many are illegal, large numbers hide in the shadows

with no assistance or relief. Few articles discuss humanitarian relief and only a few national organizations seek funds so that they might further assist those in extremely adverse conditions. Guide manuals outlining services and programs to Florida farmworkers are developed to serve farmworkers and their families in times of severe disaster, but too often those left on the outside of services have only one place to turn, agencies classified as non-government or those with religious affiliation.

In the summer of 2005, I began my examination of Wimauma, Florida's, Mexican immigrant population, a population who are often left on the outside of agency services. Who provides help to this population? Is the help needed and is the help accepted? I followed the deep scars left by hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. My drive from Texas to Florida to begin my fieldwork took me through the small towns and cypress knee swamp waterways of Louisiana and Mississippi. Mobile, Alabama, greeted me with bent and downed trees while a makeshift gulf bridge welcomed me to the panhandle of Florida. Highway 10 held reminders and remnants of destruction and Interstate 75 revealed even more damage as home after home wore a FEMA blue tarp and protective plywood buckled awaiting repairs after almost a year. Not only was the vulnerability of communities being exposed, but also the vulnerabilities of those resources and agencies established to assist in times of disaster.

Research Problem

The purpose of my research is to examine the effect of natural disasters on the immigrant farmworkers through the context of government agencies, non-government agencies (NGOs), and religious institutions who are the primary providers of assistance

to this agricultural community. My study examines the problems and challenges encountered by a predominately Hispanic population as it adjusts to social, cultural, and economic issues both before and after a disaster strikes. Focusing on the human dimension, this study explores how government and non-government organizations² prepare a marginalized community before a catastrophic weather event occurs and how these same agencies provide post disaster assistance. As a participant observer of this process, I examine how profit and non-profit agencies provide aid to both documented and undocumented Hispanic immigrant workers; how these agencies perceive the immigrant workers and the problems they encounter accomplishing these goals. Furthermore, while living in the community, I participated and observed how the immigrants respond to the aid provided, and how the immigrant workers and their community as a social family perceive the agencies and services.

This is an ethnographic study of a population considered to be vulnerable outsiders whose lives are at risk because of social, cultural, and economic inequalities. Collecting oral narratives from informants provides qualitative data necessary for examining how immigrants perceive disasters. Through these narratives, I examine the social structure of this community and how specific culture affects the Mexican residents' responses to disaster and their responses to the assistance from government and private agencies. Communicating to the Mexican residents the availability of an assistance plan is a critical step in the disaster process. Without this initial communication, immigrants become a more vulnerable group, alienating this population

² Non-governmental organizations will be referred to as NGOs.

further from culture, society, and the economics of a new community. These immigrants have crossed the border possessing nothing but the hope for a prosperous future. The shaping of an acceptable immigrant reality does not always include looking for help from the agencies established for the purpose of relief, assistance, and support. However, I suggest that those immigrants who unify through kinship, church, and community are better able to withstand the vulnerability, suggesting “cultural systems incorporate harmonies by making adjustments and overcoming the challenges that confront their environment” (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 1999: 3).

Research Goals

This study examines the immigrant community’s response to NGOs and government agencies as they provide aid and assistance before, during, and after hazardous weather related situations and further examines the response and attitude of the agencies to the immigrant community.

My purpose as a cultural anthropologist and a student of humanities is not only to observe the ongoing social and economic life of the immigrant workers, but to document what agencies have been effective in the community, what obstacles are encountered when developing and instituting programs, and what cultural differences exist in the immigrant community itself.

My research was narrowed to the following research questions: How do government and other organizations respond to the needs of the immigrant workers in times of catastrophic events and what problems exist? Do government agencies and NGOs treat the immigrant community differently according to peoples’ status? How

does the agencies' perception of immigrants help their response to programs? How does the immigrant community respond to the programs and actions taken by both the government and non-profit agencies? How do immigrants themselves, both men and women, respond to disaster? Do immigrants rely on resources provided by organizations or does self-help from within the immigrant community provide assistance?

Agriculture is one of the leading industries in Wimauma, a small predominately Hispanic community with a permanent and static population that is primarily dependent on agricultural labor. However, the agricultural industry cannot provide employment year round. This southernmost part of Hillsborough County relies heavily on assistance because it experiences a periodic influx of population, weather related disasters, and poor socioeconomic conditions. The purpose of this study is to provide ethnographic insight and to capture the voices of those immigrants who have endured disaster and to examine structural difficulties that small communities composed of minority and low-income populations experience in preparation for natural disasters and also during and after the natural disaster.

My research and field study examines the involvement of local and state agencies³ in a community whose population is part of the 200,000 migrant and seasonal farm workers living in central Florida. Often defined as the hidden and unseen community, the undocumented in times of crisis are fearful of those agencies controlled

³ The following agencies play a role in aiding the migrant community in Wimauma: Beth-El Farmworker Ministry Inc., Redlands Christian Migrant Association, Wimauma Childcare, Catholic Charities Immigration Services, FEMA, and local churches.

by the government. Data suggests that 90% of the migrant worker population is undocumented and stay far away from the centralized relief stations (Talbot-Roberts Interview 2005). Considering fear as a leading factor, I explore the options needed to reduce the fear of the government in those who so desperately need humanitarian assistance by addressing what happens to those Mexican immigrants who are illegal and poor. It is my purpose to examine and develop an understanding of the attitudes of agency to population and population to agency, revealing preexisting characteristics of not only the community in times of stress, but also the agencies in times of stress.

Hypotheses

Studies suggest that hurricanes act as a stimulus and influence entire communities to develop adaptive strategies that significantly affect the migration and stability of the population (Konrad 1985; Garcia-Acosta 1996). Imperative to this study is the core educational system that links the immigrant population to all agencies and organizations that function within the community.

The theoretical framework for this thesis is developed through four concepts. First, I suggest that “convergent catastrophes” challenge the dynamics of both the individual and the community (Moseley 1999: 59). For the immigrant laborer, emergence into another culture is often the first challenge. If a natural disaster collides with the insecurities of cultural differences, I suggest that for the Mexican immigrants to become productive members of the community and escape the label of vulnerable outsiders, the role of kinship and social networks in a disaster context can be heuristically applied to explain how immigrants react in times of crisis, taking the

traditional use of this concept and expanding it beyond just migration. Secondly, I suggest that the immigrant individual and community develop adaptive strategies relevant to both anthropological and disaster studies. Disaster studies often assume that the environment causes the specific disaster or that disasters are removed from the society in question, because it directs attention away from other social factors implicated in disaster. What becomes visible after such a disaster are issues of homelessness, cultural and ethnic inequalities, and legal status (Bolin and Stanford 1998: 24). Strategies to address these social factors rely on the education provided by each government agency and NGO. However, what is often forgotten in the process of educating the immigrant population is their cultural resiliency (Moseley 1999) and the strengthening of identity through social and cultural resources. Third, I suggest that the role of class is significant in shaping the outcomes and responses to disaster. Class is an issue of the “haves and the have-nots.” Educational support can solve issues of class inequality and make available those resources that stimulate awareness of impending disaster. Fourth, I suggest that the role of gender, especially the role of Latino immigrant women in shaping the response to disaster and disaster aid in community building, has often been ignored in disaster studies. Previous disaster studies have portrayed women as vulnerable (Bates and Peacock 1993), not only because they are women, but also because they are women of color (Hooks 1990). I suggest that immigrant women are a part of community preparedness and the voice of trust, because many of these women have become aware and even active in community agencies and organizations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Enarson and Morrow 1998).

Research Methodology

As an ethnographer, I was an observer, but embedded within this culture, I quickly became a participant in the worship services, in the pulling of plastic in the fields, and in each of the agencies I considered to be major players. This study reaches beyond disaster and addresses the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the immigrant worker, both those who remain stable and those whose transitory lifestyle allows for little of or no stability.

My fieldwork was conducted over a period of two and a half months. Data was gathered initially through open-ended interviews that were tape-recorded. This methodology leads me from general questioning to a more focused and fact-finding questioning. Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan (1994) define this interview process as person-centered, open-ended interviewing which allows the interviewee to move back and forth between open-ended probes and the more specific questions. There were times in the field when I conduct semi-structured interviews using a written list of questions. I used the semi-structured interview when I knew that I would only get one chance to interview a particular informant. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Because I moved from the aid agencies, the working field, to the intimate surroundings of the immigrant homes, I was perceived as an individual who could be trusted. In fact, my field interviews were brought about through a trust aided by my relationship to the churches, schools, and the overall community. Twenty-eight informants were recorded. Other data was collected with field notes. The methodology

for analyzing data from interviews is an interpretational analysis using specific content and grouping of informants.

My first task was to establish a community setting, a site which had a substantial migrant population year round. The significance of the community's location in Florida did not have a major influence on the research because of the migrant workers mobility. I did however seek a community whose social structure was predominately immigrant and a community that had a developed government and established non-profit agencies designed to aid the migrant population in times of disaster. I chose Wimauma, because this area of Florida depends on the agricultural laborers who migrate in very large numbers. The influx of labor is welcomed during the prime picking time, but large numbers looking for short-term work pose enormous problems when disaster strikes placing unscheduled demands on the society and on the management of affected populations (Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 1999).

Selecting appropriate qualitative methods for my research, I first addressed the literature that surrounded the cultural context of the immigrant farmworkers vulnerability to disaster. All population and demographic data used in this thesis is compiled from the 2000 census, because Wimauma is an unincorporated census-designated place.⁴ Officials within the community have also collected population and demographic data. This data and also the last government census will be used collectively in this study.

⁴ CDP means that Wimauma lacks a separate municipal government, but otherwise appears to resemble an incorporated place. This is significant because the census and demographic characteristics are updated only every ten years.

The interview method I primarily used was the open-ended interview that provided me the opportunity to maintain a recurring dialogue with key informants throughout my stay in the community. A few times when meeting with specific governmental officials, I did use the semi-structured interview method, but I did encourage the informant to freely express information not included in my questions.

The early process of meeting many individuals became a list of everyone I met and spoke with, if only for a brief time. The snowball technique, also known as the chain referral method, allowed me to move from informant to informant through a population that is often hard to find. From this list, I then chose my primary informants who would become the substance of my study as they related oral stories and life histories relevant to the cultural context of disaster and agency assistance.

The strength of my research is developed through ethnographic methodology of participant observation. However, I prefer to think that it is as Barbara Tedlock states, “observation of participation,” which allowed me to establish, using my own social skills, an intimate human relationship (Tedlock 1992). This enabled me to observe and experience while interacting within each setting. Specific settings changed, but I was able to remain the same whether in the missions or the government agencies. Using this methodology gave me direct observation inside the agencies and very soon I was participating in agency processes (Liebow 2002). Beth- El Mission gave me a small room to record my findings and though an outsider, I was a participant in the distribution of food and clothing and the processing of required information. Through

the snowball method of obtaining informants, the migrant community became a very familiar place and I was a part of the process.

The first observation I made on entering the field was to take enough time to make sense of my surroundings. Then, using the snowball method to meet informants, I was able to explore and examine the relationship of the individual to his or her society and culture. This enabled me to document the social and cultural reality of this community and to examine patterns of behavior and thoughts among the migrant workers with focus questions relating to hardships, crisis, and weather related disasters. This same methodology functioned well for the agency interviews because informants were interconnected to numerous agencies. I focused on the vulnerability of my chosen community using both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to my specific population.

The 2000 census shows the population of Wimauma to be 72.9% Hispanic, so I established this as my target group before I had ever visited the community. My initial contact with Wimauma was an email sent in early March 2005 to the Director of Operations for the Beth-El Farmworker Ministry or Beth-El Mission.⁵ At the outset I discovered that the trajectory of my research would involve me moving back and forth from the government agencies and NGOs to the immigrants in the field. Establishing an ongoing interaction with the immigrant worker community gave me the ability to move from observation to participation and allowed me to become a part of the “Other” within a short period of time. It is important to note at this point that there is a major

⁵ Preparation for my fieldwork was conducted Spring 2005 and time spent in the field was summer 2005.

difference in being a part of the Other and the Other. I use the term loosely, because as much as I felt connected, I knew I was an outsider.

The role of observer was brief because contact with Beth-El Mission made the entrance into my fieldwork a process of acceptance that developed quickly. I was introduced to the congregation attending a Tuesday evening church service. This introduction was pivotal to my methodology, because it not only opened the door to offers of a place to live, but it began a bond of trust. I am not a Spanish speaker, but any language barrier was overcome with the help of a translator⁶ and the children of the migrant community who spoke English. I did carry with me a Mexican-Spanish dictionary and found that communication was much easier than anticipated.

I was constantly aware of patronizing or “being an emotionally engaged participant or coolly dispassionate observer” (Tedlock 1992). My purpose in collecting the oral narratives of the migrants, immigrants, community leaders, organizational leaders, and agency leaders is not to confirm that his or her perceptions are accurate or true reflections of a situation, but rather to insure that the research findings accurately reflect the perceptions, whatever they may be. Laura Nader (1972) cites an essay written by one of her student’s who defines ethnographic participation in two ways: first, as a participant who is able to interact as a native in the situation studied and able to use himself or herself as an informant, and second, as a participant who is an outsider

⁶Edner Guadarrama came to the United States from Mexico when he was eleven years old. He has been here almost five years. I met Edner through his sister Nelly Polamo, who I met at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church. He is responsible and mature with a talent for translation that is pure and accurate. He will be a junior at East Bay High School in Hillsborough County, Florida. Edner is my friend and my teacher of the Mexican culture.

and who has achieved the status of insider (Serber 1971). I mention this because Beth-El Mission accepted me as an insider and allowed me to become a member of the group I was studying. This Mission was a multipurpose homebase for social, cultural, and agency access.

Local non-profit organizations fought for my attention, and I soon realized that because of my limited amount of time in the field, my research should be with major players within the community. My methodology for agency selection was conducted through historical evidence, ethnographic research, observation, and participation while living within the community. Both direct and participant observations were used. Direct observation involved watching the workings of the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center as preparation was made for hurricane Dennis on July 9, 2005, and observing migrant advocates interviewing families at Wimauma's Elementary School. All informants in both agencies and the immigrant population were directly affected by environmental hardship as giver and receiver.

From sunup to sundown, I was always mindful that this was a working agricultural community, careful never to disrupt the work of the migrant and immigrant laborers. A moment's rest in the heat of the Florida sun was not a place to conduct interviews, but it was definitely a place to bond with the community while participating and observing and collecting data.

Experiences in the Field

Uprooted orange trees, tattered plastic nursery covering, and rusted trailers with broken windows offered the first hint that nature was a key player in this part of Florida. Then, in a split second came my introduction into another world as I drove past the “Welcome to Wimauma” sign. I had arrived, and for the first time came that moment of excited panic; what now? Every cultural anthropologist must feel this way at some point when contacts have been through words in emails and brief phone conversations and the echo in the mind is “stranger and alone.” So the first contact in the field was the local sheriff. Now, someone knew I was within the community. In theory, my use of snowball sampling did begin at this point. However, in this first stage, I also received advise on those informants that I should stay away from. I call this negative chain referral an invaluable part of my research, because with caution I found a population not seen by general observation. I felt the local law enforcement was concerned for my safety, primarily because I was a woman. The issue of gender became apparent within the first few days of my fieldwork.

Meeting my initial contact Javier Izaguirra, Director of Operations for Beth-El Mission, was like being greeted by an old friend as he said, “Raylene, you made it, welcome.” With each introduction from this primary informant, contacts were continually opening. Using the methodology of snowball sampling proved very effective both in the agency network and the migrant network, because Beth-El Mission is an overlapping player for migrant and immigrant services providing spiritual and physical resources, both government and non-government.

Religion is a major force in the life of the Wimauma immigrant population and my first day in the field ended with a service conducted by Reverend Ramiro Rios, minister for Beth-El Mission. In retrospect, it was this service and the Reverend that allowed me to collect ethnographies and document the people and their sociocultural activities. I was not only introduced to the congregation, but also placed in a prayer group, where at the end of the service, I was asked to give the closing prayer. I gave the prayer in English with just a few Spanish words, “petición Dios.” I was welcomed with strong handshakes and kisses on the cheek. Reverend Rios later told me that he wanted to see what I was made of and if I could handle what was to come. His statement proved to be quite profound as I witnessed fear, suffering, anguish, sorrow, and joy.

My first day in the field was exhausting, but I had accomplished more than I could have ever imagined. I had directly observed and participated, and I had found a place to live, in a small, blue, storm- ravaged, overcrowded trailer. I was now a part of what one informant called “the cluster.” Through my acquaintances within “the cluster,” I came in contact with migrants who had made Wimauma their home and those who traveled the migratory stream from South Florida to Tennessee, but I also became aware that migrant communities are changing and a new paradigm is taking place as once mobile households are now seeking more stability.

In Chapter 2, I develop the theoretical background that connects disaster and its effect on the Hispanic culture by examining the consequences of early natural and man-made disasters to present day hurricanes. Because Disaster Anthropology is a relatively new field, the primary literature focuses on defining disaster through FEMA and the

local government agencies. I have further researched documentation of survival, vulnerable populations, and the behavior of the population and the agencies providing assistance.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the fieldwork setting of Wimauma, Florida. I provide data for the demographics and the social and economic networks that make up an agricultural community whose population has migrated from Mexico and Central America for the purpose of obtaining work.

Chapter 4 offers the findings related to government agencies and NGOs. The chapter begins with a detailed analytical comparison and contrast of the four agencies examined in my fieldwork. My study centers around what I found to be two significant governmental players providing service to the community, the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center and the Hillsborough County Schools, and two non-government organizations, Beth-El Farmworker Ministry and Catholic Charities. Narratives from those involved in the agency process support this chapter with perceptions and attitudes toward the immigrant population.

The focus of Chapter 5 is the Mexican immigrant response to government and non-government organizations (NGOs). Data is gathered through the oral stories and personal narratives collected from informants in the community who have faced disaster and subsequently turned to agencies for assistance. This chapter examines the Mexican immigrant community's attitude and perception of agencies through the context of culture and gender issues.

Chapter 6 examines the ability of the immigrants to help themselves in times of disaster and further examines the resiliency of those at greatest risk. This chapter answers the question of how resourceful is a community that has many services provided through agencies and local organizations. It also examines the bond of cultural experience that unites the community in times of crisis and examines what motivates immigrants to help one another on a much broader scale.

Chapter 7 concludes with an examination of my perceptions, my participation, and my observations while living with an immigrant family and becoming a part of the immigrant experience. From their stories and an examination of the agencies that are major players in Wimauma, I draw my conclusions and recommendations and seek to understand how those who are making decisions affecting life and disaster can better incorporate policy, practice, and the human condition.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Earliest Studies on Disasters

Disaster literature has historically been concerned with the effect of catastrophic weather on the land and rarely focused on the human dimension. Early studies held only a moderate awareness of the social problems caused by disasters and the question of how an entire population performs under chronic and acute stress had been limited to scattered references in ethnographic literature describing violent deaths, acute hunger, disease, and property loss resulting from floods, droughts, hurricanes, and epidemics (Torry 1979).

The body of literature relating to disaster studies and the effect on a specific population is rooted in the social sciences whose early findings focused on the behavioral patterns after a catastrophic weather event (Prince 1920; Wallace 1956) rather than delving into the attitudes and perceptions of the population affected. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the concern for the human being or a specific population began to focus on one phase of the disaster process that Susanna Hoffman and Anthony-Oliver Smith (1999) refer to as “warning, impact, and immediate aftermath.”

The study of disaster and how a catastrophe affects an entire community was first explored in Samuel Prince’s assessment of the implications of social change in the munitions explosion in Halifax Harbor. Prince’s dissertation *Catastrophe and Social*

Change: Based Upon a Psychological Study of the Halifax Disaster (Prince 1920) is regarded as the first systematic study of a disaster and the relief efforts that followed. Prince examined the social consequences of past disasters seeking to answer the question of how much of man's advancement and knowledge of private initiative and governmental control is stimulated after a disaster. Prince observed this entire process through the lens of social organization trying to translate theory into knowledge.

Not until the 1950s did attention to disaster and its aftermath link an examination of individual and group behavior to the causation of emotional stress on an entire population. One such study, after hurricane Audrey in 1957, examined disaster through only a philosophical ideology concluding quite simplistically that after death and destruction life goes on (Fogelman and Parenton 1959). These earliest studies examined the emergency period and the response of emergency organizations only after a disaster had occurred (Dynes, Tierney, and Fritz 1994) and according to Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman in *Catastrophe and Culture* (2002) only one anthropologist, Anthony F.C. Wallace, actually conducted research "in which the primary focus was the human structuring of the disaster experience" (5). However, investigation of a specific population and the social services available after weather related disasters, specifically hurricanes, did not receive attention until the late 70s and early 80s. Until recently, ethnographic research has remained within the study of social collective behavior (Aguirre, Wenger and Vigo 1998; Quarantelli 1985) with little or no reference to perception and attitude of the affected population and those agencies that serve that population.

Anthropological Studies

Since the 1970s, researchers of anthropological disaster studies have developed basic applications of theory building: how people respond to disaster and how relief agencies respond to people after a disaster. Anthropological studies have examined disasters in the context of the human condition's relationship to the environment with the community context defined through individual behavior, but few studies have addressed the attitude of agency to aid recipient, aid recipient to agency or the recipients' ability to overcome vulnerability in a community setting that is more than imagined (Prince 1920; Chavez 1991). After researching the history of the agricultural immigrant in Florida, I found that documenting the life history was common in the social sciences and anthropological studies. Documenting the voices that provide assistance and the voices of the population the agencies serve was and still remains a relatively new topic.

Research that provides the groundwork for this study includes the literature of disaster as relevant to the Hispanic culture and the agencies that provide assistance within a specific Mexican community designated as at-risk by government agencies and non-government organizations. For the purpose of this study, theoretical framework combines the anthropological themes of population adaptation through culture and disaster, natural and weather related catastrophes, and the agencies designated to provide assistance and aid. The developed model provides ethnographic insight into a culture that lives under a permanent condition of imbalance with the "normal" state generally characterized by social inequalities (Garcia-Acosta 2002).

Perspectives in anthropological research on disasters define a natural disaster as a destructive agent that produces a condition of environmental vulnerability challenging the structure and organization of society (Oliver-Smith 1996). For the purpose of this study, environmental vulnerability begins when the immigrant leaves what has been known as home and heads for the border, eventually finding himself in the migratory stream. Mexican migration studies of the farmworker population leaving Mexico for the United States have focused on the demographic origin of the immigrant worker, but researchers are quick to point out that representative data is difficult to obtain and often research is conducted in only selected industries (Cornelius 1992). Stories of the hazardous journey from Mexico and Central America that eventually places immigrants in the field tends to be the missing link in understanding how this population responds to disaster and assistance. Personal narratives provide insight and are significant to the understanding of the past demographic issues, because for most immigrants migration is brought about by economic and environmental disasters such as a deteriorating economy at home (Durand, Massey and Zenteno 2001) or increasing political violence as seen in 1992, in southern Mexico and northwestern Guatemala. During times of political unrest, immigrants are often recruited into the grueling harvesting crews of Florida and the eastern United States. Once a part of the migrant labor force, crew leaders find ways to make this population even more vulnerable by enslaving them or driving them into debt by charging for rides to work, food consumed and miscellaneous expenses (Griffith 1997).

Virginia Garcia-Acosta (1996) suggests that only two studies are directly related to disaster in Mexico and specifically environmental disaster relevant to hurricanes. The first of these is Richard E. Boyer's (1975) examination and case study of the 1629 flood in Mexico City. Boyer's study did not concentrate on the heavy rains, but rather the vulnerable conditions both before and after the disaster, focusing on the socioeconomic, cultural, and political context. Directly related to this disaster are the effects of the population's vulnerability: hunger, disease, and death. Historically, Mexican migration has been plagued with disastrous conditions, but this study further supports the resiliency and adaptive strength of the Mexican people as they form communities in the United States.⁷

The second study alluded to in Garcia-Acosta's essay are the findings of Herman W. Konrad. Konrad (1985) suggests that hurricanes "are environmental variables that influence structural change in ongoing developmental processes" and he further notes that "some factors have been identified as agents stimulating shifts, such as demography, disease, ideology, trade, warfare, migration, and subsistence" (Garcia-Acosta 1996:53). In this same study, Konrad considers hurricanes to be trigger mechanisms that lead to adaptive strategies. Konrad found that individuals developed adaptive strategies after a hurricane; therefore, seeking a choice of location and settlement patterns which in turn influenced migration and demographic stability (Garcia-Acosta 1996). This demographic stability is relevant to my findings both within the community and the social services that provide aid and assistance in times of crisis.

⁷ Further discussion of the resiliency and strength of the Hispanics living in Wimauma are addressed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Until the mid 1950s, social aid and its effect on cultural systems had been examined through the psychological study of disasters. It was soon recognized by several sociological studies that to understand disaster and its effect on a community, an understanding of human problems created by disaster should be addressed “through the disruptive impact on functioning social systems, and social organizations that must somehow arise to deal with human problems thus created” (Form, Loomis, et al. 1954: 180). Findings by William Form and Charles Loomis (1954) were completed in collaboration with social researchers Roy Clifford, Harry Moore, Gregory Stone (1955), Sigmund Nosow, and Charles Westie (1954) whose disaster research is a foundation for anthropological study of disaster recovery, aid, and relief assistance, as we know it today. The argument suggested in this study is that psychological studies of disaster are useful for assessing the effects of disaster on personality systems, but theoretically more could be learned from how individuals become integrated into emergent disaster systems and how identifying the group and understanding different cultural values of a society affect behavior in emergency situations (Ibid 1955). This study is in agreement with recent studies (Torry 1979; Oliver-Smith and Moseley 1982) by suggesting that the significance of understanding a community and its response to disaster and how best to help that community is through organizational and cultural context of the community being studied (Form, Nosow, Stone and Westie 1955).

I emphasize this study because the field methods applied were more than just observation of effects of disaster or an analysis of past studies, but direct field contact using 100 interviews that were conducted in the city of Piedras Negras, Mexico, and

Eagle Pass, Texas, following the Rio Grande flood in 1954. In Piedras Negras, Mexico, with a population of 30,000, 150 people died, 1,300 homes were destroyed, and 2,000 heavily damaged. Eagle Pass, Texas, located directly across the river with a population of 8,000, suffered no loss of life, 55 homes were destroyed and 300 were damaged.

The findings of this study presented by Roy Clifford (1955) to the National Research Council on Disaster Research are: (1) It was found that in each city informal groups gathered to discuss the initial danger and evidence showed that the Mexicans relied more frequently on kinship and family ties than did the Americans. (2) More Americans recognized that a personal threat existed from the initial warnings with both sides tending to play down the threat of flood; however, the Mexican side showed little reliance or confidence in officials or those in roles responsible for appraising the danger. (3) In evacuation, rescue, and rehabilitation family kinship obligations played a more important part in the Mexican community. (4) Social services and aid organizations were more available and more effectively coordinated on the American side than the Mexican side. (5) "Community responsibility for the poor was greater on the American side than on the Mexican side, as was the social integration of the poor in the community's disaster systems." (6) In the Mexican community after the disaster, there was bitterness and hostility directed toward city and other government officials. Local officials were accused of misappropriating food, clothing, and other relief goods and the local government was condemned for not accepting American assistance. (7) This study found evidence that a definite hostility developed within the lower classes

toward middle class organizations suggesting, “Hostility is conditioned by the character of the class structure” (Clifford 1955: 183).

The final analysis of this study lends itself strongly to my field study. Clifford applied Ferdinand Toennies use of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in describing the behavior of the two communities. The concept of community within the Mexican culture is grounded in the family and the families’ relationship to religion. Reliance in times of crisis is on the family (community) or *Gemeinschaft*. My study will provide evidence that once past cultural identity and a strong rooted sense of community are removed with migration, it is difficult for migrants to trust those agencies that are considered government or profit (*Gesellschaft*) (Loomis et al. 1955), however, my findings do provide evidence that trust and acceptance can be accomplished with education through the newly established community structure.

Disasters and the Immigrant Community

For decades, the plight of the immigrant worker has been chronicled in documentaries, newspapers, and novels. From John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* with its disastrous dust storms to Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the devastation caused by the 1928 Florida hurricane, migrant workers have been identified through poverty, dehumanization, and inequality. However, to portray an accurate picture of the immigrant worker in times of disaster is difficult because of legality, mobility, invisibility, and the evolving role of the immigrant worker due to political and social change. With an ever-changing dynamic, a reliable discourse or study can quickly become nothing more than a moment in time (Griffith, Kissam and

Camposeco 1995). To understand the immigrant worker in times of disaster, I first applied the theoretical concept of kinship groups and social systems to the structure of the immigrant community (Torry 1979). The strength of the immigrant laborer in times of crisis lies in the connection to the core culture or social network, which is the unit that allows for an accepted cultural behavior. Disasters create “breaks in patterns” which in turn cause isolation and an interruption of what is normal (Torry 1979), causing damage to the cultural core.

Social Networks and Coping Strategies

It is the family, united by culture and suffering, that sets social beliefs, decisions, and response to disasters (Clifford 1956; Dynes and Quarantelli 1968; Drabek 1971). A response often referred to as a “coping” mechanism is stimulated after each disaster occurs and for this population coping with hard ships and disasters has become a way of life (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis and Wisner 1994). Leaving their villages in Mexico is the immigrants’ first major hardship, particularly if migration is only one family member, because separation from the family invites “social and personal chaos” (Quarantelli and Dynes 1972) and a disruption of routine functioning (Kreps 1984). For decades migrant workers have endured the deadly deserts, dishonest *coyotes*, and the waters of the Rio Grande for the promise of an economy that could support those left behind. This marginal population, conditioned to economic disaster in the home country, has a pattern of vulnerability that is now met with social and cultural instability, not because the kinship unit has been separated, but because knowledge of assistance comes from the interaction of intermediary kin with larger social institutions

(Hareven 1978). The implication in such studies is evidenced in the theory that in order to survive the hardship of migration and accompanying disasters, the immigrant seeks out the kinship or those family members who have come before and settled within a community setting (Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994). Cultural sameness equals community and being the same ethnicity opens the door to a preexisting social relationship.

The interpretation of kinship for the purpose of migration and disaster is far more than immediate family, household, or relative; it is instead the community. During the 1970s and 1980s, much research focused on the process of migration across communities in Mexico and the incorporation of documented and undocumented people who migrated to the United States (Chavez 1985, 1988, 1991; Massey et al. 1994). The Diaspora from Mexico, as a result of economic instability, has caused migrants to confront conditions often far more difficult than those left behind. Without a related family member to endure the hardship, research shows that the migratory life is only temporary. However, if the migratory lifestyle is met with a community of social linkage, cultural sentiments, and economic ties, a stable kinship develops through the community (Chavez 1991). It is this kinship community that is so important both before and after disaster if a particularly vulnerable population is to maintain any stability, even if that stability is grounded in the context of cultural meaning (Oliver-Smith 1996). Ethnographic evidence suggests that when disaster research is linked to a specific social and cultural context only then can the disaster process become visible (Garcia-Acosta 2002). The construction of cultural meaning in disaster, when modeled

through the historical perspective, shows that no matter how vulnerable the perception of a particular people or community,

They are not, and have not been, passive actors in the face of disasters, either in their responses or in formulating the concept of disaster itself. Such cultural constructions are part of everyday life and as such need to be understood, considered, and explained (Garcia-Acosta 2002: 50).

An understanding of cultural practices is critical if there is to be an understanding of the human community and its behavior in times of disaster. Disaster knowledge, adapted for a particular at risk community, can make a significant difference in the efforts to aid victims and prevent disasters from occurring (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). Garcia-Acosta argues that disaster reveals hidden aspects of society and culture leading to changes and adjustments. After the Mexico City earthquake of 1985, institutes were formed to study human situations and programs were developed to alter physical danger (Hoffman 2000). Likewise, after hurricane Andrew, emphasis was placed on the building of community-based social organization through the family resulting in more attention given to long-term recovery (Peacock, Morrow and Gladwin 1997).

Far too often, one culture views another culture through blind eyes insinuating that just because someone does not speak English then he is ignorant to an understanding of his surroundings and that he will never be able to cope with disaster. Yet as Michael Kearney argues “cultures and societies exist in history, through time, and are constantly self-creating by responding to historically given conditions” (1984: 337).

Community Responses and Gender Issues

Ethnographic studies linked to migrants and the agencies providing assistance in times of crisis suggests that disaster brings issues of dependency and interdependency within a social network (Peacock with Ragsdale 1997). In order for a specific population to accept the leadership of agencies providing assistance, the government and NGOs must understand the culture they are serving. The strongest keys to understanding the migrant worker confronted by disaster are those studies relating to “social linkage” (Freeman 1989; Peacock 1991; Bates and Pelanda 1994; Peacock and Ragsdale 1997). I refer here to those linkages that develop within a community; those brought about by social organization and kept in place by coordinated information and a flow of resources (Bates 1975; Peacock 1991; Peacock and Ragsdale 1997). If the migrant voice is quiet in times of crisis, it is perhaps because Mexico has instilled in much of its population a “perceived inequality” (Gawronski 2000) that translates into vulnerability in migration. Gawronski suggests “that Mexicans perceive themselves as suffering and that the perceived inequality of income distribution has a powerful effect on perceptions of instability” (293).

Social networking is the means by which the Hispanic immigrant forms a perception of whether the leadership within the community structure can be trusted. It is this social process that is tested in times of disaster, because the most accessible resources initially come from the local organizations or agencies in the community. Research conducted by Mahler (1999), Hondagneu- Sotelo (1994), and Menjivar (2000) combine social networks with gender suggesting that the male and female experience is

significant when addressing resources and barriers encountered when migrating from one country into another country. Menjivar (2000) suggests “male migrants can be more isolated in places of destination and know less about the wider array of social services and support available to ensure safety and survival, which are especially important for prospective female migrants” Studies show that migration to specific areas is not a matter of chance, but a kinship driven process directly related to economics and social support with men and women living the migration process differently and responding to social services differently (Arrias 1995; Arizpe 1975; Lomnitz 1977). The role these agency services play in the migration process and how gender affects attitude and perception is compiled in a study by Sara Curran and Estela Rivero-Fuentes (2003). The authors concluded that males and females handle the migration experience differently with women seeking those destinations providing quality resources not only for themselves but also for the family network (Ibid). The studies thus far examined show little evidence of the migrant workers’ voice and even less about how these individuals perceive aid and assistance. Reasons cited in many studies are stereotypes, poverty, language barriers, and cultural isolation (Oliver-Smith 1996; Gonzalez 1991) with relevant data acquired by observation of services provided by NGOs or government agencies. Karen Jacobsen and Loren Landau (2003) find evidence that researchers refer to the subjects who experience disaster as “objects for research,” thus raising questions of ethical concerns. Furthermore, disaster studies have treated gender as a background characteristic often associated with dependent variables (Bolin and Stanford 1998). I suggest that within the Mexican population of this specific community vulnerability has

no gender, and the role of women in times of crisis and resource distribution is significant in maintaining a strong social, economic, and cultural community.

The voices and the way Mexican immigrant workers, both male and female, respond to emergency relief after a hurricane or other catastrophic weather events are often lost in the need to measure and evaluate data. In “Demographic Effects of Natural Disasters: A Case Study of Hurricane Andrew,” Stanley Smith and Christopher McCarty (1996) suggest that studies on disasters have included the effects of disaster on economics, institutions and organizations, recovery and restoration, and emotional and behavioral responses, but studies have neglected the individual voice. Studies further suggest that “cultural marginalization” does not allow for an immigrant voice, because fear is a powerful barrier and as one community worker in California reported, “many Latinos around here think the federal government can just load them up in a boxcar and ship them off to Mexico, no matter how long they have lived here” (Bolin and Stanford 1998: 27).

Elaine Enarson and Betty H. Morrow (1999) found that after Hurricane Andrew, ...communities turn in many directions for help-to government and their elected leaders, to state and federal agencies, and to the military-historically male dominated institutions. And yet, female employees are a majority in many, if not most, organizations providing relief and recovery services. While disaster work typically assumes a male persona in public discourse, the skills and training, as well as social and emotional resources, of women are central to both short and long-term community recovery (171).

I suggest that Enarson and Morrow’s observation is true even within an immigrant community if agencies have been in place and the population has been educated in disaster issues.

Agency Perceptions and Response

Studies with a focus on the Mexican immigrant's perception of disaster aid and relief assistance found its way out of sociology and into the anthropological literature in the 1970s, but much of the data pertained to the political economy of disaster relief and "neglect and abandonment of local needs" within the Mexican villages (Tory 1979). Further examination of Mexican migration from Mexican communities demonstrates a focus on the migration stream and its economic effects as migrants move back and forth to and from the United States. Douglas Massey, Luin Goldring, and Jorge Durand (1994) concluded in their analysis of nineteen Mexican communities that "as migration grows and network connections to the United States ramify, the costs and risks of international movement drop and migration becomes more attractive" (1528). This back and forth movement is significant in understanding community vulnerability and the response to assistance provided by both government agencies and NGOs. Furthermore, the emotional stress caused by this need to move back and forth is seldom addressed through the voice of the immigrant and rarely discussed in studies as a deepening problem in the context of disaster assistance.

Lessening vulnerability of at risk communities represents a daunting task for both government and non-government agencies. How an agency performs is one thing, but how that agency perceives and responds to those in need is quite another. Relief agencies are by design perceived as lifesavers in times of emergency, but we live in a world of biases where 'One man's humanitarian relief is another man's aid to the enemy' (*The Times* 1992). As I discussed earlier, the Hispanic immigrant worker lives

on the edge of disaster with poverty and insecurity in his homeland and on the transnational journey to the United States. The role an agency plays before, during, and after a disaster determines the recovery of the specific population.

After the 1994 Northridge Earthquake in southern California, issues arose with the availability of housing for those on low-incomes, particularly Latinos, the elderly and farmworkers. Robert Bolin and Lois Stanford (1998) examined disaster and vulnerability through agency aid relevant to the earthquake. Their findings and those of others (Blaikie et al.1994; Morrow and Enarson 1996; Watts 1992) suggests that “disasters are the result of two usually related phenomena: the depth of already existing social inequalities that create vulnerable populations, and inadequacies in institutionalized disaster-assistance programs from governments or disaster NGOs. Social inequalities such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and national origin are key elements in people’s vulnerability to environmental calamities” (43-44). Further studies conducted by Blaikie (Ibid) show that vulnerability arises from a lack of access to resources such as employment, healthcare, social support, financial credit, legal rights and education. All of these resources were lacking in the Mexican immigrant and migrant worker population affected by the earthquake and since migrants are perceived as not able to understand federal assistance or invisible (illegal) in the official census, they did not come forward to seek public resources and disaster related needs. Bolin and Stanford (1998) also found that people in the country illegally completely avoided assistance programs. To involve those who were legal, but reluctant to use the relief agencies, community activists who had established trust in the communities, worked

with the NGOs. Gaining this trust is not easy, because “a pervasive distrust hangs like a cloud over all relationships” (Harrell-Bond 1986).

Examining agency relief through the eyes of Ugandan refugees, B.E. Harrell-Bond’s (1986) case study of the impact of humanitarian assistance in times of crisis is one of the first studies directed toward the role of relief and the “imposing” effect caused by government and NGOs, both from the home country and international assistance. Perhaps the weakest link in her fieldwork was the ability to obtain the voices of those refugees forced to migrate. Her interview technique was a lengthy questionnaire and specific appointments during the workday meant that informants would lose valuable labor time. Her team of researchers would then compensate with food or money. The interviews were vague which suggested that no clear-cut understanding of how these refugees responded to aid was ever established. In her closing notes Harrell-Bond states, “ A more authentic description of a complex social reality is obtained by observing actual relationships rather than by asking about ideas” (1986). Harrell-Bond’s study is significant because the imposing effect of aid and assistance was an issue brought to my attention by both the immigrant community and the agencies within the community.

Harrell-Bond’s study is one of the few that delves into the attitudes of both refugees (immigrants) toward the aid programs and the attitude of agency personnel toward those receiving aid. Her data on perceptions in African relief programs parallels my study of the Mexican population and assistance provided by agencies, particularly the attitude of negative stereotypes. Questions raised by Harrell-Bond’s research are

found to be problems in both government agencies and NGOs. Though her study was published in 1986, her questions concern the ability of government to manage its own agencies and what significant role voluntary organizations should have in the disaster relief efforts. She further questions the ability of aid agencies to perceive the differences, such as gender, age, and social status, in the population affected by disaster. Other studies deal with attitudes through an analysis of “the institution and personnel who deal with immigrants and how they perceive and manage what they refer to as “the ‘problem’ of the immigrants” (Kearney 1986; Grillo 1985; Bustamante 1983). If agencies view migrants, legal or illegal, as a problem to society and attempt to cut off social services such as those providing health care, education, employment opportunities, and low-income housing, then a cultural marginalization develops that allows a disaster to become even greater (Bolin and Stanford 1998).

How agencies perceive those they service has not been ethnographically examined, but has been examined theoretically as a political and economic factor. Most disturbing is the influence that local government plays when assistance, particularly housing, is needed for Mexican laborers and farmworkers. Studies in certain counties in California show resistance to issues of community development and restrict low cost housing for the working poor (Menchaca 1995; Bolin and Stanford 1998). All too often, federal programs focus on the short term and rarely address the problems of long-term vulnerable marginalized people. Issues of attitude and perception permeate all levels of government and non-government programs when the question concerns aid and assistance to meet the needs of vulnerable groups who are subject to disaster.

After Hurricane Andrew, public and private agencies were flooded with demands and many agencies could not meet the needs with adequate facilities and volunteers tired of dealing with the poor families. Even FEMA realized that the situation called for new procedures that “reflected a better understanding of the nature of this victim population, including more outreach and flexibility” (*Miami Herald* 1993).⁸ Betty Hearn Morrow’s examination of the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew suggests that “the poor get left behind and working class neighborhoods are likely to be ignored by government, as well as private agencies.” The Northridge Earthquake study reveals that “disasters affect a broad spectrum of the community...and only rarely will the wealthy become poor and never will the poor become wealthy.” Social factors implied in disaster studies tend to gravitate to an exposing of poverty, gender inequality, lack of entitlements, economic underdevelopment, and ethnic marginalization (Bolin and Stanford 1998).

Inequality in times of disaster is a problem that local NGOs try to address, but disaster impact and recovery requires money and manpower. Sadly, race and ethnicity are important “determinants of economic resources” and are often linked to the quality of housing (Peacock and Bates 1982; Peacock and Girard 1997) and the providing of basic needs after a disaster. The Hispanic migrant worker is a vulnerable population only if agencies have been silent and not educated this group about “predisaster systems of social relationships associated with specific institutions” and developed plans to incorporate “post disaster response, interaction, and the distribution of aid and other

⁸ I use this outdated information for the purpose of past studies, but Katrina and its aftermath contradicts what FEMA had planned to correct.

resources” (Torry 1986). A theoretical understanding of human-environment relations is just one facet of the disaster process, but it is one that requires accountability and access to resources (Blaike et al. 1994).

How a specific group perceives government and non-government assistance both before and after a disaster seems to be filtered through studies that evaluate risk perception, such as evacuation. These studies explore the “cultural norms and values that both govern and are embedded in the relationships that human communities have with their physical and social environments” (Oliver-Smith 1996). Again, when physical risks are addressed after a disaster, too often, studies tend to focus on single aspects of how to deal with the risks people take. Hurricane Katrina has shown us once again that human societies are vulnerable to the elements of a hazardous weather event and as anthropologists, we must identify what went wrong if we are to coexist harmoniously with nature. In this study of disaster and its effect on a vulnerable community, I intend to show that with social organization and preparedness (Colten 2006), an immigrant community can provide the services that address the human factor by developing mechanisms that not only cope with disasters (Oliver-Smith 1996), but also these same immigrants can become a part of the educational process within the communities which are at the greatest risk.

A question often raised in ethnographic studies is “the voice and its authenticity” (Reed-Danahay 1997). I convey the authentic voices of Wimauma’s Hispanic population, its agency leaders, and its organizational leaders by living within the community. Unlike past studies that tend to be one dimensional, I integrate the

perceptions of government agencies and NGOs with the perceptions of the immigrants themselves. Through this examination, I reveal specific social and cultural issues that arise before, during and after a disaster, such as a hurricane.

Furthermore, I show that the strength of the community develops as a continual process requiring enduring social relations and “collective behavior” (Aguirre et al. 1998). The life histories of the informants reinforce the fact that there are still many barriers for immigrants to overcome. Information in interviews conducted with government agencies, NGOs, and religious institutions provide insight into not only perception, but also the inequalities encountered by vulnerable populations.

CHAPTER 3

WIMAUMA: THE SETTING AND ITS REGION

As a flaming red sun dropped slowly behind moss-draped live oaks and mangrove trees, I thought of the west and the terrain I had left behind. My fieldwork was taking me south on a narrow two-lane road past lush wetlands that formed a never-ending canopy of trees. Gray sand drifts were sprinkled with palmettos and cabbage palms. I drove between the dark green hammocks, the ancient sand scrubs, and the cypress knee swamps. The ground cover and climbing ferns were so thick that even downed trees from the past hurricane season did not detract from the beauty, but blended with the plant life. Areas of native Central Florida vegetation are few and it is an ecosystem that has been threatened since the first settlers arrived in Florida. The older Floridians call this terrain “Old Florida,” or another way of saying, “this is what Florida looked like a long time ago.”



Figure 3-1. "Old Florida" landscape reveals gray sand that has been weathered by storms.



Figure 3-2. Central Florida Wetlands are filled with damaged and down trees. (2005)

The land continues to change; the foliage becomes less dense and clusters of cattails mark the end of the wetlands giving way to dry fields that hold giant foxtails and saw grass. The road widens to four-lanes and the landscape is no longer indigenous growth. The countryside is now farmland. It is a mixture of orange groves, in various degrees of development and deterioration. Some groves have trees bearing hundreds of round, hard, green balls that will be harvested in the winter. While other groves contain dead or dying trees that have been destroyed by the hurricanes of 2004. There are for sale signs and a couple plots of land that are being cleared for housing developments. Rusted trailers, whose occupants work the nurseries where ornamental and landscape plants are grown, sit amid large debris piles of plastic and wood left by storms. Few of the greenhouses have been repaired.



Figure 3-3. Greenhouses for ornamental plant farms are not yet rebuilt. (2005)

Land that has been cleared for pastures and crop production stretches as far as the eye can see. Hundreds of cows graze under trees or are clustered in waterholes to escape the summer heat. Acres of tomato fields are in the last stages of being cleared so that the next crop can be planted. Only a few workers remain to remove the stakes and stack them in huge bundles. A tractor-trailer moves between the once neatly plowed rows collecting the plastic that is being pulled. The remaining tomato plants are being burned.

I referred to this field all summer as “my field,” because this is the field where crew leader, Juan, after much persuasion, permitted me to work for two days. He warned me of the long hours, extreme heat, back breaking lifting of plastic that was heavy with chard rotten tomatoes, and the rattle snakes.

Dressed in long pants, long sleeves, a head bandana, and a bandana covering my nose and mouth, I began my two days of experiencing what thousands of men, women, and children have experienced all of their lives. My eyes rarely strayed from the row I was walking for fear a snake might be coiled and ready to strike. I gathered the huge piles; he had not warned me of how “hot” the plastic would be. I heaved, as hard as I could, onto the flat bed tractor-trailer rig that moved slowly beside me. Dirt fell back onto me stinging my eyes; sometimes-rotten tomatoes and plastic fell too. The work was grueling; a nauseating, dizziness settled in and the heat from the gray sand, combined with the black plastic, and the hot smell of the diesel burner attacking the remaining plants took over. Slowly, I lost all feeling, mechanically doing my job; and I then understood why Juan smelled of liquor so early in the day.

On the other side of the truck was a very young Hispanic man. He said nothing; nor would he acknowledge me. Juan simply told me, “He is illegal.”

Within these surroundings is the small agricultural community of Wimauma, Florida, located near the Manatee County Line, just west of the intersection of County Road 579 and State Road 674.



Figure 3-4. Bundles of tomatoes stakes wait to be picked up.



Figure 3-5. A plant burner travels the field burning plants and unpicked tomatoes. (2005)



Figure 3-6. Fields wait to have plastic pulled.



Figure 3-7. Plastic is bundled for workers to walk the rows and place on trucks. (2005)



Figure 3-8. A young Mexican worker pulls plastic and tosses it onto a flatbed truck. (2005)

Wimauma: Historical Context

According to historical sources compiled by Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management, it is thought that the first settler in this region was Pleasant Franklin Stanaland, who moved from Thomasville, Georgia, to southern Hillsborough County in 1875 to grow citrus. With the birth of a nearby community, Plant City, Stanaland now had a place to have his oranges packed for shipment. Without a railroad, this trip took two days by ox-drawn wagon. It was not until 1902, that Captain C.H. Davis and D.M. Dowdell, Davis' son in law, helped build the Seaboard Air Line railroad through the area, connecting Turkey Creek to Braidentown (Bradenton) (Hillsborough County Historic Resource Survey Report 1998).

Since this region was the halfway point between the two communities, Davis decided to build a town and his first venture was to establish a depot and a post office. Davis christened the Post Office and his new town on October 24, 1902, by taking the first letters of each of his three daughters' names: Willie (WI), Maude (MAU), and

Mary (MA). With the railroad, Wimauma, which is pronounced “Why mama” soon became highly agricultural, with citrus, lumber, cattle, turpentine mill, packing plants, and a nearby phosphate plant (Hillsborough County Historic Resources 1998; U.S. Census Bureau 2000; Shuen and Smith 2003). Within five years, Wimauma had expanded to include Tiger Lake (present day Lake Wimauma).

Dowdell became the primary grower in the region, and by 1911, Wimauma had two general stores, the Florida Naval Stores, and the Lumber and Cattle Company. The population of Wimauma reached 500 in 1918 and by 1925 the population was 1000. During this boom period, the number of churches grew to four and Wimauma became the camp meeting location for the Church of God. In 1912, Zeno Tharp, a Church of God minister, purchased a ten-acre plot that he felt was desirable for camp meetings. A large hall was built for the thousands who came from all over the country. Other structures included: a church, two story dormitories, and approximately 200 privately owned cottages, which now house some full time residents consisting of retired ministers and family members (Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report 1998).

Today the site has grown to 70-acres and the meeting halls and dormitories have been renovated to accommodate the 10,000 or more who come to the grounds for ten-day meetings each year. There are now acres of gas hookups for recreational vehicles and youth camps are treated to a swimming pool and a putt putt golf course built near the main sanctuary. The main hall is significant in the lives of those who live in Wimauma, because it functions as a private hurricane evacuation facility for the

population that does not have transportation to a FEMA sanctioned shelter. Charles Adkins, Director for Disaster Relief for the Church of God of Florida, agrees that without this Church of God convention center building hundreds of immigrants living in Wimauma would have no place to go for safety.

I moved here from doing disaster relief in South Carolina and I got here last year in June (2004) right before the first hurricane hit. I barely had time to get to know anyone. On a Tuesday before that first storm (Charley) hit, I prayed so hard, I said, "Lord, please give me an avenue in this community." I had not had very much time to talk to people about what to do and I was just begging for an avenue, because with my eyes and my heart, I could see a way to reach out to these people. I was really scared that they would stay in their trailers. When we saw that the storm was headed this way, I took one of my employees and got on a bullhorn from my pickup and just yelled, "We have a place for you to come." They came; first hurricane 450; the second hurricane (Francis) 525; and the third one (Jeanne) was 650 people. Without the help of FEMA or the county, we are educating the community on what to do, but there is so much more to be done (Interview with Charles Adkins summer 2005).

Education in Wimauma began with a one-room log schoolhouse that was "set up on a strawberry schedule so that the children could help their parents harvest their crops." Sometime around 1910, the school was replaced by a two-story brick building, still on "strawberry schedule." Then, in 1927, the school board demolished the older brick building to construct and even larger two-story brick building (HCHSR 1998).

In 1925, Wimauma became Hillsborough County's fourth municipality. The town charter called for a Mayor, Vice-Mayor, and Town Clerk, but sometime during the 1930s, the government "ceased to function." Representative of this time period, the municipality was given the power to segregate White, Black, and even foreign residents into separate wards. Wimauma experienced numerous set backs in the 1930s due to tax

delinquency and the stock market crash, but the population still remained around 1,000 and livelihoods were made in truck farming or citrus. Whites and African-Americans worked in the farm fields and the sawmills. With jobs plentiful, by the end of World War II, Wimauma's Black population was 50 percent of the community (HCHSR 1998).

A series of freezes heavily damaged the areas citrus crops in the 1950s and the packing house closed its doors. This did not appear to affect the population and during the 1950s and the 1960s, Wimauma's population remained fairly constant with nearly 1,200 people residing in the town. The population was still 50 percent African-American and jobs on the railroad and in sawmills were plentiful. During the 1960s, Wimauma served the region with freight, express, and direct passenger service all the way to New York City, but sometime between 1968 and 1976, the railroad cutback the shipped carloads. In the fall of 1976, the railroad shut down Wimauma's station and the only economic stability was in the production of citrus, tomatoes, and strawberries.

After the elimination of the Jim Crow laws⁹, Wimauma's African- American population left farm work for better paying jobs in surrounding towns, particularly Tampa. Many Blacks found work in construction, automobile repair, janitorial services, and the food industry, while Black high school students could be closer to the integrated high schools in Tampa. Wimauma's only high school was segregated and Black

⁹ The term Jim Crow originated around 1830 when a white, minstrel show performer, Thomas "Daddy" Rice, blackened his face with charcoal paste and burnt cork and danced a ridiculous jig while singing lyrics to a song called "Jump Jim Crow." From the 1880s to the 1960s, a majority of American states enforced segregation through the "Jim Crow" laws. It meant that states and cities could impose legal punishment on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owner and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated (http://www.nps.gov/archive/malu/documents/jim_crow_laws.htm).

students had to travel long distances to receive an education (Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report 1998). However, the loss of so many black workers was detrimental to the workforce that was needed in Wimauma and workers had to be obtained by other means.

Historically, Hillsborough County and Central Florida had been known to exploit workers through slavery and debt peonage and even with the passage of laws after the Civil Rights movement, debt peonage for African-American workers “remained a central element of the black farmworker experience up through the 1970s, gradually diminishing in the 1980s, and to some degree continuing up until the present” (Rothenberg 1998).

Along with the exodus of African- Americans, Wimauma experienced another change, migration from Mexico (Shuen and Smith 2003). From 1980 to 1990, Wimauma’s population grew from 1,477 people to 2,932. The 1990 census shows that of 2,932 people 1,887 were of Hispanic origin with the Mexican population accounting for 1,825 or 62% of Wimauma’s population (US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1990). Hillsborough County records indicate concern for Wimauma because Whites and Blacks were not finding employment while the Mexican population was. According to the Wimauma Improvement Authority, with the influx of the Mexican workers, the town became more run-down, home to former sharecroppers, mill workers, and small farmers. Mexican immigrants were soon moving into the trailer camps and working the farms as laborers, drivers, and crew leaders (Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management 1998; Unterberger 2005). Wimauma’s

agricultural labor force, predominately poor African-Americans, was now replaced with poor Hispanic and Latino workers.

This area of Hillsborough County has historically experienced extreme poverty brought about by a population of undocumented workers who owe *coyotes* and smugglers large sums of money and labor contractors who use documentation status as a fear factor. Stories of exploitation and debt peonage still exist in the Florida fields today. As recently as 2004, a large slavery ring was exposed in Wimauma. Men and women who worked the tomato fields were found locked in trailers while being forced to work by a labor contractor who had bought them from a *coyote* and they were now working off smuggling debts (Lydersen 2004).

Constantino Esquivel, a shy, diminutive man who came to Wimauma in the mid 90s, has worked in the fields from Texas to Florida for 54 years. He is 67 years old and his leathery face wears the mark of field labor.

I am *Mexicano* and I am from the region called San Luis Potosi. I was the oldest and I could not go to school. There were 16 brothers and my father say for me to go to work. I was 13. You ask how 16 children. We were born by two all the time. My poor father; he was always trying to maintain such a family. And he made no money. So I go to work with him when I am 7. When I get older my father must take care of my brothers not me. At 13 I had no pants and I was just a boy and I did not have anything. So I leave my father and mother and I walk for 9 days from my town to San Antonio. I walked alone. If you walk with people you get caught. They could have thrown me in the river and killed me. My worst suffering was trying to find work. I make two dollars an hour, but now I make six dollars an hour. I came here and lived in the camp, but now I rent a room. I do everything alone. I ask no one for help. I don't like the police. I don't drink and I go to church at Our Lady Guadalupe. If there is a bad storm I will stay in my room or maybe go to the Church of God (Interview summer 2005).

Constantino can neither read nor write and his small “X” on my interview consent form was placed with apologies. He said that telling his history was painful, but at the end of our interview he said, “I feel much better saying all of this to you.” After this evening, Constantino often sat with me in the back pew of Our Lady Guadalupe Church at the 8:30 mass. Constantino is undocumented, but does not feel like an outsider in Wimauma. I jokingly called him the common-law citizen and he laughed. Constantino is a citizen of the United States in his heart, but not on paper. The years of working passed quickly and the literacy requirements for citizenship seemed out of reach; Constantino never learned to read or write in Spanish or in English. He says that now it is too late and he is happy with his work and his church.

In the 1990s, the Hillsborough County Planning Commission nominated Wimauma to be considered an Empowerment Zone “eligible for millions of community improvement dollars under a Clinton-Gore effort to enhance economic opportunity in at-risk communities. The bid was unsuccessful” (Hillsborough County 1995; Unterberger 2005). Perhaps because it was discovered in 1993 that at one time Wimauma had been a city, “but no one remembered it.” With documentation somehow lost, the government of Wimauma had not operated since the 1930s, so it was decided by Hillsborough County that Wimauma would remain an unincorporated community (Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report 1998).

As Wimauma moved into the twenty-first century, a local book, titled *Migrant Workers: In Wimauma Area of Florida*, (Shuen and Smith 2003) states in the Preface:

...life in a small community in central Florida with a large percentage of immigrants from nearby Latin countries that have chosen to leave their homes

with the hope of improving their quality of life. Once here they have found their problems overwhelming. From their position of poverty and lack of the necessary language skills the pittance they make from their backbreaking “stoop labor” makes their dream nearly impossible. Their situation has awakened the compassion of residents in nearby towns who have offered help in many ways. They have made possible low cost housing, education for adults as well as children, spiritual reinforcement through Missions, childcare and mentoring and also legal advise for those who need it (ii).

Wimauma’s ability to survive the ups and downs of the economy is a result of its agricultural success brought about by the thousands of immigrant farmworkers who for decades have past through in search of work and a place to call home. Wimauma is an ever-changing landscape, but in times of crisis and disasters, it has always been a community that relies not only on the core culture of its people, but also on the agencies affiliated with the churches and disaster systems designed by nongovernmental organizations.

Map of Hillsborough County

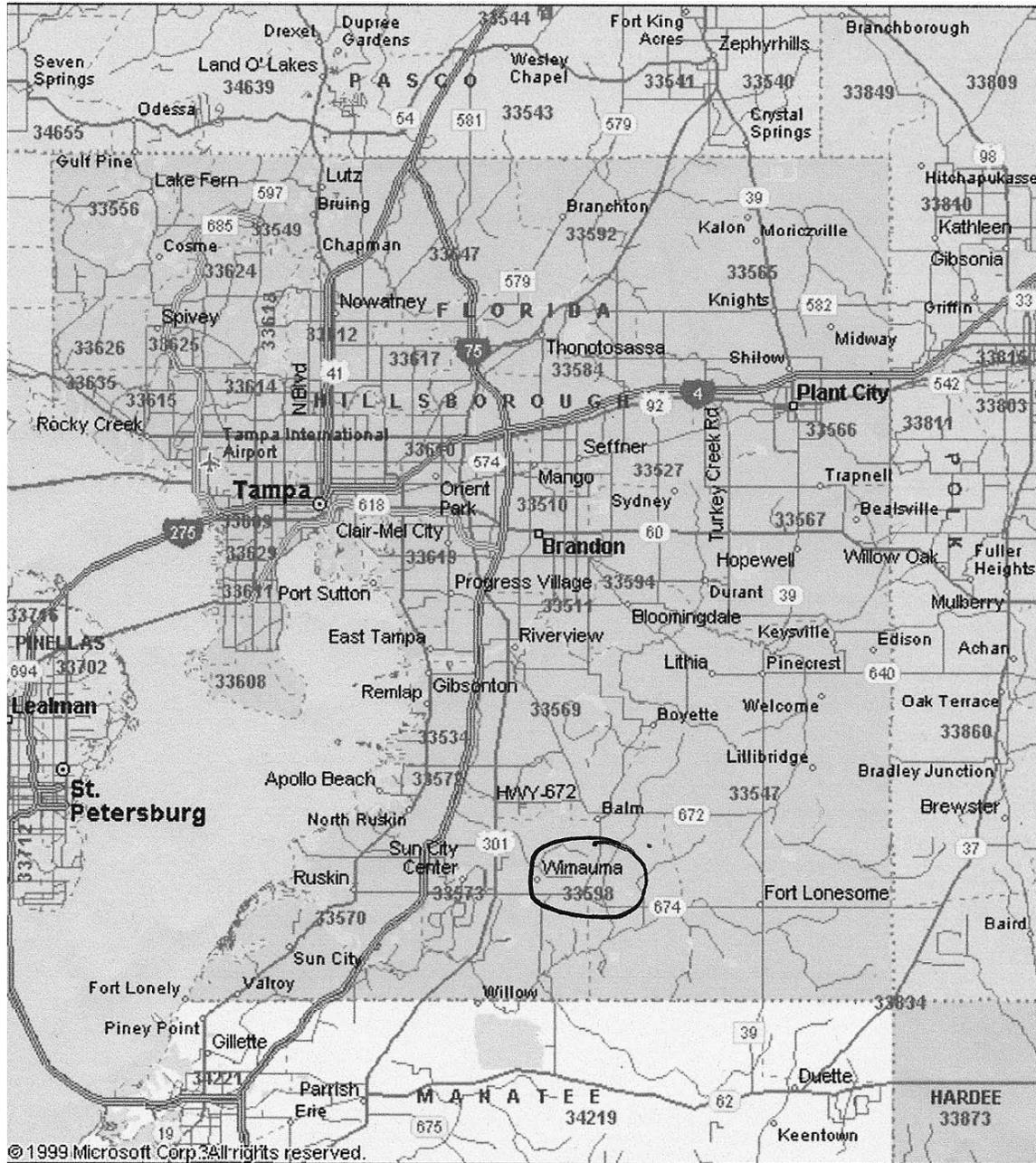


Figure 3-9. This is the location of Wimauma in Central Florida. (Provided by Beth-El Mission 2005).

Wimauma Today

The hurricanes of 2004 crisscrossed the state with central Florida taking hit after hit. My research of the small agricultural communities affected by the storms lead me to Wimauma. The locals refer to its location in the southern part of Hillsborough County as “the t-bone of the county;” or some called it the “arm pit of the county.” Said either way, it is not a favorable description. Wimauma is still an agricultural community and since the late 1970s composed of three ethnic groups, Mexican, White, and Black. Today, each group has created its own organized community. The framework of social linkage is fragile with a population that is predominately Mexican infused with a small black and white community.

Entering the city limits of Wimauma, ownership and community identity belongs to one ethnic group, the Mexican (Community Outreach 2003). Census data shows that the Hispanic population of Wimauma has grown dramatically since 1980¹⁰. In 1980, Hispanics comprised only 296 residents, or 20% of the total population of 1,477. Of those 296 Hispanics, 284 were Mexican. Ten years later, the Hispanic population had swelled to 1,887, or 64% of Wimauma's population of 2,932. Mexicans were, once again, the predominant Hispanic group, numbering 1,825. According to the most recent Census, in 2000, Wimauma's population is 4, 246, with 3, 095 or 73% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino. During peak harvest season, the Hispanic population can jump to 85%, but the African-American population remains around 10% and the Caucasian population hovers around 5% (United States Census Bureau 2000).

¹⁰ Earlier data, from 1960 and 1970, does not include the Wimauma community, but refers only to the total population of the Hillsborough County subdivision of Wimauma-Lithia.

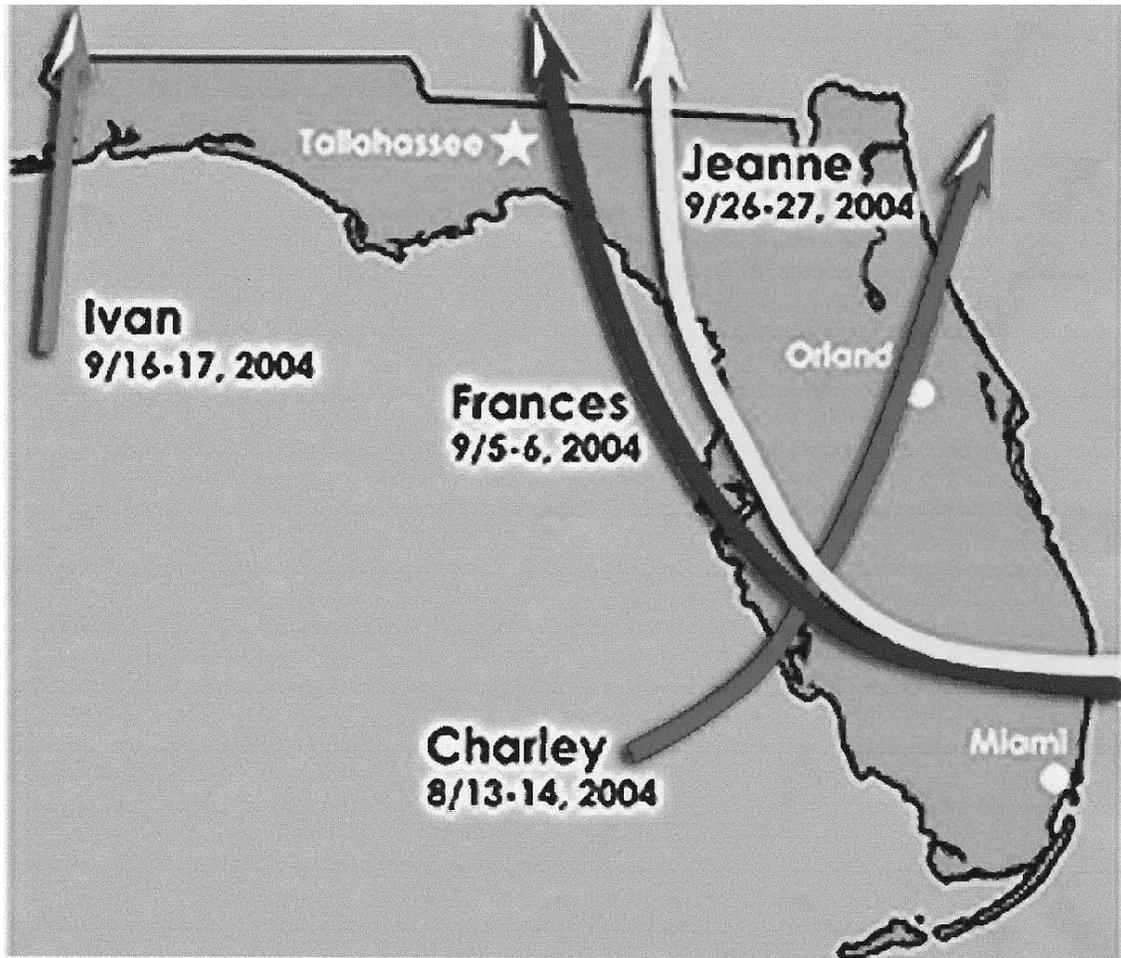


Figure 3-10. Only Ivan was not a direct hit, but all 4 hurricanes caused damage to Central Florida. Credit: National Science Foundation.

Today, Mexicans continue to make up the vast majority of Wimauma’s Hispanic population. As shown in Table 3-1, the Mexican population, according to the 2000 Census, is 2, 816, or 66% of the total population. The growth of the total Hispanic/Latino population has almost doubled since the 1990s. About 6% of Wimauma’s population is identified as “other Hispanics, with most of those coming from Guatemala and El Salvador with only 1% of the population classified as Cubans and Puerto Ricans.

Table 3-1 Distribution of Hispanics in Wimauma from 1980 to 2000

Year	Hispanic/Latino		Mexican		Puerto Rican		Other	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
1980	296	20.0%	284	9.2%	2	0.1%	10	0.7%
1990	1,887	64.4%	1,825	62.2%	22	0.8%	40	1.4%
2000	3,095	72.9%	2,816	66.0%	36	0.8%	243	6.1%

Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2000, 1990, 1980

While working with the three faith based non-government local organizations in Wimauma, Beth-El Mission, Good Samaritan Mission, and Our Lady Guadalupe, I observed a large number of indigenous groups from Mexico and Central America. The difference in language, appearance, and cultural habits magnified the internal diversity of the Hispanic population living in Wimauma. At Good Samaritan Mission’s Hurricane Awareness Day, I conducted a random poll with approximately 100 immigrants. I asked the question “ De donde es usted?” or “Where are you from?” Almost half of the immigrants, approximately 48% were from Oaxaca, the state of Michoacan, and Chilapa, Guerrero. Another 42% were from Guanajuato, Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Acapulco, Chiliapancingo, Morelos, Chiapas, Cuyoacan, Nuevo Leon, Veracruz, Jalisco, Hildago, Puebla, and Placiri. The remaining 9% of the population was made up of 6% from Guatemala and 3% from El Salvador. This small population of immigrants, who had the features of Mayan Indians, spoke languages indigenous to their villages and carried their babies in blankets wrapped around their backs. This small population appeared far more vulnerable, because most were new arrivals to the area and all of those I spoke with were undocumented. According to Beth-El Missions

list of food recipients, Wimauma's Hispanic population is growing more internally diverse exposing issues of language barriers, cultural identity, and cultural behavior. The cultural framework from which a specific population such as Hispanic interprets awareness and warnings might come from Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico or South America (Lindell and Perry 2004).



Figure 3-11. Like so many, this woman who has so little looks through clothing and other items at a mission. (2005)

According to long-time residents of Wimauma, the census numbers are not ever going to be exact and local leaders say problems with undercounting Wimauma's immigrant population has always been an issue because of illegality, poverty, and education. Hal Kee, Wimauma's Sheriff, explains the reason why, "There are many

nameless streets and the illegality of many residents keeps them hidden and they will never fill out a census form. Other immigrants live in large groups and share living quarters.” Wimauma’s population is the “working poor” since one out of every three people in this region of Hillsborough County live in poverty. At the time of the 2000 census, the per capita income in Wimauma was \$8,597, compared with \$21,587 nationally (US Census Bureau 2000).

Fifty-five year old Jose, an immigrant from Oaxaca, uses a rusty bike for transportation. He has left his family in Mexico and works in the tomato fields of a nearby grower. His moldy green trailer has no floor; only rotting pieces of plywood overlap one another. Jose has three roommates and he tells me “they are bad, loud, drunk all the time, but not me. I don’t fight. I just work.” Jose works an eight-hour day in the fields for minimum wage. A van picks him up each morning and brings him back in the evening. Jose’s story:

I don’t think you understand me because in my town different Spanish from Oaxaca. I come to work. I take bus from my home and go to Matamoros. I cross the river at evening and morning and work all day for a dollar of peso. I cross the river and go to Nebraska to work and I send money to my wife and two sons [in Mexico]. I was 20 when I first came here to work. I come in 1986 and then I go back. I like to cook, but nothing [to] cook. A storm comes and I will stay here, only in here. One son is here now for four years. He goes behind my footsteps. He is a mechanic. [He has a] better job.
(Interview July 2005).

Jose invites Edner, my translator, and me into his trailer to show us that he has a little kitchen and likes to cook, but he has no money to buy the ingredients he needs to cook. I see that his dinner has been opened, a pound of gizzards bought for two dollars

at the corner store. Jose tells me that most of his money goes for rent and his family still in Mexico. I ask him if he knows of La Mission Bet-El, their food pantry, and other services for those in need. His reply is “no.” Jose’s knowledge of his surroundings relates to work and his weekly paycheck. Jose is representative of the vulnerable at-risk population in Wimauma. Jose gives no thought to disaster, because his life is consumed by just finding work. Jose’s has limited options and his access to resources offered by agencies is also limited by lack of communication and transportation. Brenda Phillips and Betty Hearn Morrow (2007) suggest that for many “socioeconomically vulnerable families, surviving the challenges of daily life surpasses disaster preparedness even as threats loom.”



Figure 3-12. This informant was in need of so many necessities, because his weekly check was sent back to his family in Mexico. He never complained. (2005)

Census data gathered in 2000 shows that of 222 households in Wimauma, 27% lived below the poverty level. Of 134 families, who had related children under five years old, 47% lived below the poverty level (US Census Bureau 2000). Many immigrants are trapped in the lowest paying jobs, because of the lack of education and inability to speak English. The profile of social characteristics gathered by the 2000 census shows that of or 1,999 individuals 25 years and older, 761, or 38.1%, attained less than a 9th grade education, and 495, or 24.8%, attained a 9th through 12th grade education but received no diploma. Of 3,754 residents 5 years and older, 1,247 individuals, or 33.2%, spoke only English, compared with 2,507 individuals, or 66.8%, who spoke a language other than English. Spanish speakers totaled 2,474 individuals, or 65.9%, and 1,205 individuals, or 32.1% spoke English “less than very well” (US Census Bureau 2000).

Many families in Wimauma work together in the fields. Kinship units working together came about for a number of reasons, but one informant explained that it is primarily “an economic decision” and “for protection of each member of the family, particularly the women who are at risk when working in an occupation often associated with abuse.” According to a study conducted by The Pew Hispanic Research Center in 2005, the United States is home to approximately 3.9 million adult women or 42% who make up the unauthorized female immigrant population. In contrast, females accounted for 52% of the adult female legal immigrant population. Studies concerning the health of legal immigrant women conducted through the University of California at Berkeley, found that in 1998 women made up 53.5% of the immigrant population and

their median age was 29 years (Ivey and Faust 2001) These two studies suggest that from 1998 to 2005, the number of legal immigrant women in the United States dropped by only 1.5%. Christian Zlalniski, in his study of Mexican families living in a Silicon Valley community, observed that the number of single immigrant women with families and head of household was far greater than expected (Zlalniski 2006). I observed a similar pattern in Wimauma. I saw many immigrant women taking on the role of caregiver and financial provider. For these immigrant women, going it alone was better than the alternative, which often meant being subservient and exploited by relatives and employers (Zlalniski 2006).

Wimauma’s sex breakdown in the 2000 census shows that for every 100 females there were 116 males and for every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 125 males (US Census Bureau 2000). As shown in Table 3-2, a majority of Wimauma’s population is male. Males comprise 2,283, or almost 54%, of the community’s 4,246 residents. Females number 1, 963 and make up 46% of the total population. However, in Wimauma’s workforce, schools, churches, and agency assistance programs, women were far more visible than men.

Table 3-2. Sex Composition of Wimauma’s Total Population

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	2,283	53.8%
Female	1,963	46.2%
Total	4,246	100%

Source: Census 2000

A significant number of women are head of household with no husband present. Woman with no family made up 14% and those with a family made up 18%. Maria,

one of my most lively informants, came from Guatemala to work in the tomato fields.

She has remained a single women taking care of an elderly parent.

I come [here] when I was 16 and bring my mama. It has been 20 years and I take care of her all the time. She is 92. She is my family. I never ask help from nobody. No agencies, no government, no churches. No, you know I don't like that. If I come here, I don't bother nobody else. I learn English in the street. I fight black people. They say for me to go back to my country. I say okay I leaving to my country, but you have to go back to Africa. I fight, always, I fight. But I have learned. Two most important things in my life are God and my mother. I used to go to church with my mother, but I work for church and get very tired and I sleep in back room, but someone comes from the church and touch me every single day. He touch me. When he try to touch my butt, I punch him in the face. After this I never go to church. I feel like [I have] lots of enemies. I worked and not paid and I don't trust nobody. I just take care of my mother. I put her no place, no place, but with me. (Interview summer 2005).

Maria has experienced many painful moments, but she depends on her own strength to make a living. She has never sought agency assistance from any of the services in Wimauma or nearby. Maria came to this community to work and stayed to make it her permanent home. Maria no longer works in the fields; she manages, cooks, cleans tables, and socializes at an outdoor taqueria, Julia's Tacos, a symbol of the community.

For many of the inhabitants of Wimauma, the journey from Mexico was filled with severe hardship and suffering. The challenge facing Wimauma today is how does Wimauma and its immigrant community survive and become stronger. There have been efforts in the past to better the quality of life, but this is still a town in need of a stronger infrastructure. Wimauma is a poor agricultural community trying to maintain

a cultural identity. The problem, according to Charles Adkins, Church of God Director of Disaster Relief, is that “as a church we never reached out to the community. As long as I am here, it’s not going to be like that; because if you are a part of a community; then you have to be a part and reach out in good times and in bad.”

Wimauma has experienced the good and the bad. From past experiences, Wimauma must move towards a plan that will maintain cultural identity while providing effective community services designed to educate, protect, and maintain stability within a population labeled vulnerable or at-risk. When so many people live their lives with limited options, who provides the material and emotional support needed to survive disasters? Are the agencies prepared to take on the challenges of a population filled with fear and distrust? Next, I examine the perceptions and responses of government agencies and NGOs toward Mexican immigrants in times of disaster.



Figure 3-13. This sign holds hope for immigrants who have come to Wimauma for a better life. (2005)

CHAPTER 4

HOW GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs), AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS RESPOND TO THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN WIMAUMA

“The study of man is confronted with an unprecedented situation; never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species”

Laura Nader 1974: 284

Introduction

The Mexican farmworker population came to Wimauma initially as part of the migratory stream of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the largest numbers came as a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This act gave legal status to more than 2.5 million Mexican immigrants with undocumented farmworkers making up 33% of those given legal status (USDOL 1997). The number of undocumented immigrant farmworkers increased greatly during the 1990s in Hillsborough County Florida, because the workers who were now legal residents brought their undocumented relatives to the United States. Immigrant farmworkers in Wimauma expressed the reason for the exodus from Mexico by simply saying, the “American Dream,” but many of the immigrants who shared their journey with me discovered that attaining the dream requires more than just arriving and finding work in a foreign country. “I did not know where to go or what to do,” admitted one sixteen-year-old informant who came to Wimauma alone and totally unprepared. Now, he sat nervously waiting to speak to a

counselor from Catholic Charities whose responsibility was to provide, in a very short time, an orientation into a new culture.



Figure 4-1. At highest risk with cultural adjustment difficulties are the young undocumented Hispanic men who come to the U.S. only to work and do not seek agency assistance. (2005)

For Wimauma's immigrant population, the incomprehensible leads to an even greater vulnerability and further weakens the sustainability of those at greatest risk when disasters strike. As an agricultural community, Wimauma relies heavily on some type of assistance for its immigrant population because it experiences a periodic influx of workers, weather related disasters, and poor socioeconomic conditions. This assistance provides physical, spiritual, and emotional support making easier the

adjustment difficulties encountered by the sudden emergence into another culture. Educating the immigrant population to the environmental hazards relevant to the specific area and teaching them how to access needed resources should become a priority if adaptation to new surroundings is to ever take place (Cutter 2000). Consequently, for a social and cultural adaptation to occur in Wimauma access to resources provided by government organizations and non-government organizations must closely link to the needs of the community (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). If a natural disaster collides with the insecurities of cultural differences and the inequality of resources, “convergent catastrophes” continually challenge the immigrant population and the community (Moseley 1999) resulting in a cycle of instability.

Disaster studies conducted after hurricane Andrew in 1992, (Peacock and Ragsdale 1997) and the Northridge Earthquake in 1994, (Bolin with Stanford 1998) suggest that governmental agencies have historically responded poorly to the needs of immigrant farmworkers. Since the late 1970s, anthropologists and sociologists have investigated the effects of disaster on specific populations concluding that vulnerability in disasters comes about because of shared inequalities such as gender, age, ethnicity, and economic status (Torry 1979; Oliver-Smith 1979, 2002; Hoffman 1999, 2002). These same studies have examined the structural difficulties that small communities composed of minority and low-income populations experience during normal periods further suggesting that these difficulties are magnified during post disaster situations. However, federal, state, and local emergency planners have failed to adequately provide resources to improve conditions before, during, or after a disaster for the immigrant

farmworker population. These same studies have labeled the transient seasonal farm workers and permanent farm workers, legal and illegal, in vague generalities such as “at risk,” “vulnerable,” “outsider,” “marginal,” and “invisible.” Though identified by governmental sources, I found that this population remains isolated and often ignored throughout the disaster process.

Harvey Averch and Milan Dluhy (Peacock, Morrow, and Gladwin 1997) found that after hurricane Andrew, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reported that “despite the existence of plans and preparations to make the county government the nerve center for intelligence on damage and for resource allocation, coping with the crisis phase was clearly beyond its capacity,” suggesting that government agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) are often unfamiliar with the true needs of the specific community. “FEMA is not accountable before or during a disaster and only after the disaster does FEMA become involved at the request of the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC),” says Steve Porter, Emergency Manager for the Hillsborough County EOC. My observation of FEMA and the county EOC revealed to me that both agencies are familiar with the identification of cultural issues in Wimauma; however, neither agency provides an ongoing implementation of emergency services, and emergency preparedness is left to local and community NGOs and religious institutions.

With resources coming primarily from local organizations, how is this marginal population expected to become a self-sufficient part of society before, during, and after

catastrophic events such as hurricanes? Do government and other organizations respond to the needs of the immigrant workers in times of catastrophic events? What problems exist in the implementation and providing of these needs? Do government and NGOs treat the immigrant community differently? How do the agencies' perceptions of the immigrants help in their response to programs?

Because hurricanes are the greatest natural disaster threat to Hillsborough County, a comprehensive emergency management plan (CEMP) was developed “to provide uniform policies and procedures for the effective coordination of actions necessary to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate natural or manmade disasters which might affect the health, safety, or general welfare of individuals residing in Hillsborough County” (Hillsborough County CEMP Manual 2005). However, an assessment of the effect disasters have on the immigrant farmworkers, particularly the illegal, is not addressed in the emergency management plan. The only governmental agency providing direct assistance to the immigrant community is the Hillsborough County Public Schools whose services are far reaching, because they are made available within the local non-government organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs).¹¹ If Wimauma’s immigrant population is to be prepared before, during, and after a disaster, the responsibility falls to the local non-government organizations (NGOs), the faith-based organizations (FBOs), and the local churches.

¹¹ I am referring to NGOs and FBOs as the umbrella for all other local, community, and faith-based community organizations.

The Role of Governmental Organizations

“My family came here from Cuba so I understand the Hispanic culture,” says Tony Morejon, Hispanic liaison for Hillsborough County. Morejon is a governmental official who has developed a trusting relationship with the Hispanic community. He fears for the Latino immigrants. “They say if I can make it through the desert, I can make it through anything, but a Category 3, 4, or 5 hurricane in a metal trailer is a death trap. It’s just, so many live their lives in a continual crisis and allow people to take advantage of them.”

Migration, agricultural crisis, and weather related crises are the “convergent catastrophes” that affect the already fragile infrastructure of the community (Moseley 1999). Wimauma has been identified as a vulnerable at risk community by its own institutions, stakeholders, and policy makers. The level of collaboration between the agencies serving Wimauma is an invaluable tool that Tony Morejon uses when working with the federal government and local community organizations (LCO) to educate the immigrant population about the dangers of hurricanes. After the chaos of the 2004 hurricane season, Morejon planned hurricane awareness conferences throughout the 2005 season.

“Last year I started the biggest safety campaign. All the cable channels... We broadcast over and over. No one had ever done any type of disaster preparation in Spanish, anywhere. We told everyone [immigrants] that the Red Cross and 300 volunteers would come to get them. We explained that we are here to serve them regardless of where they are from. But what happened is they [disaster responders] would drive their trucks out there [migrant camps] and the people that needed help would leave. They would be afraid of who was coming and just take off.”



Figure 4-2. Four men occupy this rusty moldy mobile home with a floor made of plywood planks placed over large rotten holes. (2005)

Coping with the fear of deportation and loss of jobs overshadows the fear of a natural catastrophic event. In the aftermath of hurricane Andrew's destruction in 1992, the immigrant farmworker population in Homestead, Florida, remained in destroyed and condemned trailers and low-income housing without electricity or running water. Fear of being arrested by immigration officials kept them from temporary FEMA housing, food, healthcare, and supplies. Law enforcement often tries to help, but the uniform and the figure of authority, who rarely speaks Spanish, caused the immigrants to not just hide but disappear (Yelvington qtd. in Peacock, Morrow and Gladwin 1997: 92-95).



Figure 4-3. On payday, a harvesting bus filled with men and women stops at a convenience store in Wimauma. I observed checks being cashed with a large percentage being sent by Western Union back to family in Mexico (2005).

Morejon explains that the Sheriff and the Emergency Operations Center of Hillsborough County had the same problem. “They [government agencies] would deliver ice, perishables and non-perishables and the people would leave. So they ended up going out there [migrant trailer parks and camps] and putting everything on the ground and then leaving just so the people would come and get it. Last year, that 2004 hurricane season, my office was bombarded with panicked callers. No one in the Hispanic community knew what to do” (Interview summer 2005).

Through observation and participation in the community, I became increasingly aware of two governmental agencies whose role in the immigrant population of Wimauma established them as central players in the emergency process. As a branch of FEMA, the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center plays a key role in emergency preparedness before, during, and after a hazardous event; however, the EOC

lacks the development of procedures designed to penetrate the barriers in the immigrant population. On the other hand, barriers are penetrated by the Hillsborough County Public Schools, a governmental branch of the Department of Education, and unlike the EOC, is capable of functioning within the local NGOs and the faith-based community organizations (FBCO).

Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Steve Porter's job, as the emergency manager for the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), is to plan. He adds, "No, we are not the first responders. Those are the firemen or policemen. This emergency operations center is the shopping center and nerve center when there is an emergency, like a hurricane."

I was quite fortunate on my first day spent with the Hillsborough County EOC; Hurricane Dennis was being tracked, reports were continually being updated, and communities were being told to prepare. I observed a process much like a war room with the media seated at tables watching large screens with tracking data and Doppler radar. Updated press releases focused on landfall, time frames, and before the storm preparation. I was taken into a room where warning crawls were being written to run across the bottom of television screens. Porter explained his responsibilities:

We are responsible for the mobilization and evacuation before the storm. All public shelters or evacuation centers have been made known. It is my job to go out and evaluate school buildings that are provided to us by the School District of Hillsborough County. We retrofit them and make them hurricane ready. In the aftermath, we act as a clearinghouse. We coordinate between FEMA and the public systems program. We find out what has been damaged in the county and where help is needed and county agencies and FEMA get to those places. We find FEMA a place to set up their field office. (Interview 2005)

The EOC has a comprehensive emergency management plan, but on this day I find two major problems. All communication is in English and warnings are being televised while the immigrant farmworkers are in the fields. I experienced these problems while working in a tomato field with a crew and crew leader. The goal of completing the work and the payment for that work are the priorities, not awareness of impending disaster. In fact, we had no way of hearing weather reports and no one around me spoke English. Consequently, no emergency plan or preparation was made known to any of us. Porter explains that he has gone to local missions and churches and given presentations, but that he does not speak Spanish and must use an interpreter. He further comments, “I really don’t know why they [immigrants] come here when you can get a livelihood picking tomatoes in Tennessee and not worry about being run over by a hurricane. When FEMA is in the field, they will rarely, if ever come forward. They rarely will come forward for shelter or the transportation to a shelter. They will not come forward to be sheltered even if they have lost everything they own. Their turn out for help before and after the hurricane is very, very low, they may lose everything but their fear of not having a green card and it’s going to be used against them. We are not a law enforcement agency, but we are official; we are government and they are wary of government.”

Early in my fieldwork, I found that the EOC’s influence in the community had a negative impact both in disaster preparedness and recovery after the disaster. In fact, my observation found that the EOC showed a lack of proper communication tools needed to reach a marginal population and unrealistic expectations in the transmission

of hurricane warnings. I further found that the EOCs major communication gap affected the poorest fieldworkers who had little access to radios and televisions. Porter blames the lack of emergency preparedness and the communication gap on two obstacles, manpower and funds. “With four hurricanes hitting in one season, our resources were pushed to the limit and we needed many more people working closer with specific communities. Federal money that could be used for NGOs never seems to get to the state and local level quick enough.” (Porter interview 2005)

The EOC of Hillsborough County had very little effect on the documented immigrant population and no effect on the immigrant informants who were undocumented. In their study of the Northridge Earthquake, Robert Bolin and Lois Stanford (1998) suggest that Federal programs tend to have a “collective tunnel vision” and are inclined to overlook the cultural, social, and environmental circumstances. Information about shelters and disaster preparedness that was developed by the EOC held significance only if that information were filtered through the local churches and the public schools. After a disaster, the assistance provided by the EOC rarely penetrated the barriers of language, the distrust of governmental authority, the deep-rooted religious beliefs, the transportation problems, and the independent cultural pride of Wimauma’s Hispanic population.

Porter acknowledges the language problems and admits that FEMA does not provide enough Spanish speakers in the field, but they do try to recruit them locally after the storm so that everyone is provided for. If the undocumented immigrant does not seek assistance, then what happens to the thousands who are affected by hurricanes?

Porter reflects, “For government agencies, it looks as though they disappear. If we can find them, we help them. If we can’t, then the private non-profits will help them. They know that they can go to the Beth-El Mission. If the Beth-El Mission tells us that they need something then we are there to assist, but historically, what happens is Beth-El, through some other non-profit, will take care of their needs. And we may never find out.”

The Hillsborough County EOC rarely partners with Faith-Based Organizations such as Beth-El Mission, Catholic Charities, Our Lady Guadalupe, Good Samaritan Mission, and the Church of God. Mitigation,¹² preparedness, response, and recovery, the primary components of disaster management, are left to the local providers in Wimauma. Charles Adkins, Director of Disaster relief for the Church of God, is being certified by FEMA. “I will always go into disaster areas under the name of the church. During the hurricanes, FEMA gave us ice, but the NGO “Operation Blessing” gave us tractor trailer loads of food.” Adkins explains, “FEMA knows that anything government will not work with the immigrant community and maybe that is why they leave it to us.” Porter does admit that government controlled aid is not the answer unless it can go through the faith-based community organizations and the local community organizations having been fed from community and faith-based organizations at the national level.

¹² Mitigation is the means by which people strive in advance to reduce the effects of disaster. The goal of mitigation is to find ways to minimize injuries and death and property loss in the event of a disaster. Often involves strengthening of buildings and structures (Solis et al 1997).

Javier Izaguirre, Operations Manager at Beth-El Mission, agrees that FEMA can only help a small number and the community organizations are faced with an enormous task. He has served on mitigation committees and has watched as many immigrants have settled into the community and worked hard at improving their quality of life. Izaguirre's main concern is housing. "Housing for protection in disaster is a problem in this poor rural community." He explains that there is affordable housing, but not enough for everybody.

Then, there is the cultural issue concerning long-term responsibility of a mortgage. Izaguirre adds, "They wanted to pay cash; they wanted mobile homes so that in case they had to move, it wouldn't hurt that much and if they had to sell it they could sell it quickly. A real house would make them so much safer." An elderly informant who had spent fifty years working in the tomato fields said, "I have my trailer...it is not much, but I will stay with it in a storm." I asked him why and he responded, "Because I have no place else to go."



Figure 4-4. Javier Izaguirre keeps the operation of Beth-El Mission running and works closely with housing assistance for those who are in greatest need. (2005)

Not until after the hurricane season of 2004, did the city of Tampa launch a web site in Spanish, but one immigrant informant who worked for an NGO stated that “the site is more concerned with where to dump storm debris than giving me a working knowledge of emergency preparedness.” County Hispanic Liaison, Tony Morejon, says he is not relying on the Internet alone. Unlike the EOC, he plans to take hurricane preparedness to the churches and the schools. “I will have with me as many Spanish speakers as I can possibly find.” In theory, the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center functions as a key governmental agency, but in reality, the EOC remains disconnected from the small rural community.



Figure 4-5. A doublewide trailer damaged during previous storms remains a home to many immigrant farmworkers. (2005)

Chart 4-1 shows that even for those immigrants who are legal residents of Wimauma, any government agency assistance before, during, and after a disaster is quite limited. The Federal Emergency Management Agency does not provide services before or during a disaster and services provided after disasters are for those immigrants with legal status. The governmental agencies are aware of the distrust found throughout the documented population as well as the undocumented immigrant population. However, instead of establishing a relationship that nurtures community empowerment and develops a trust between the local non-profit organizations and the state agencies, I observed numerous opportunities to strengthen that bond being missed. This caused

communities such as Wimauma to be pushed further to the outside for help, thus remaining highly at risk and vulnerable in times of disaster.

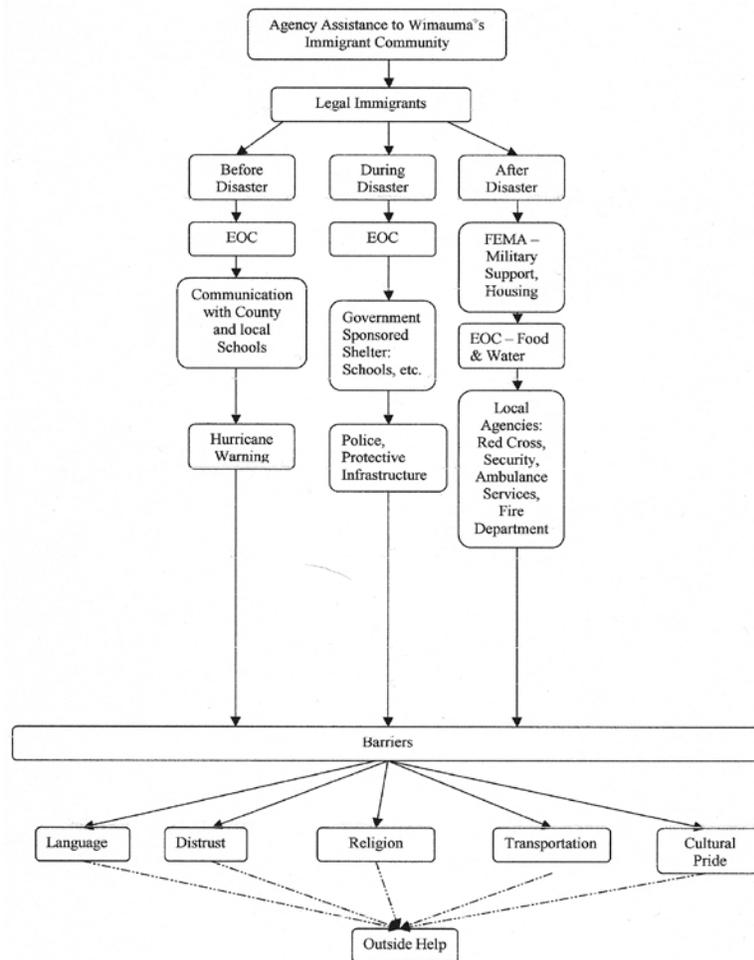


Chart 4-1. Agency Assistance Provided to Wimauma’s Legal Immigrant Population

Anthropologist Paul Doughty’s long-term study of the Peruvian earthquake of 1970, suggests that governmental disaster preparation tends to overlook the most vulnerable level of society, because “the poor require less assistance because their needs and wants are fewer” (Doughty 1999). So as the chart above shows, the outside help provided by local organizations and churches is the main source of assistance for

those immigrants whose legal status is connected to a community where so many are illegal.

Hillsborough County Public Schools and Migrant Education

Most relevant to the needs of the immigrant community is the educational system of Hillsborough County and its Migrant Education Program that links the immigrant community to an awareness of all the programs that will help families achieve economic self-sufficiency and develop skills that will keep them aware of any impending disaster. The immigrant community of Wimauma trusts the schools because the effort is made to communicate with the individual families through the educating of their children.

Carmen Sorondo, Director for Title One: Migrant Education, explains the importance of the kindergarten through adult education migrant programs. “Our migrant population values the education of their children. Really they always have, but poverty and cultural and language difficulties often leads to social isolation causing both parents and children to not seek educational programs.” The school system has staffed elementary, middle, and high schools with social workers, migrant advocates, classroom aids, and teachers for the adult migrant programs. All programs developed with one major goal and that is to link services to the needs of the immigrant families. I observed the migrant advocates whose responsibility is to identify those students who are moving constantly, those students who need medical care, those students who need bilingual psychologists, and those students who lived in families having difficulty finding work. “Some of the families are trying so hard,” Sorondo states, “and they just

need a little help with food, childcare, or guidance so that as adults they too can enroll in educational programs.” Informants of governmental agencies agreed that a correlation existed between vulnerability and language difficulties. Language barriers caused both parents and children to not seek assistance and were most often the source of problems that lead to lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, and eventually caused identity problems in those students who were torn between cultures.

The Hillsborough County EOC and the Hillsborough County Public Schools have two different perceptions when preparing and working with the immigrant population in Wimauma. The EOC tends to focus on the negative aspects of the community and treats the immigrant population as a burden; whereas, the Hillsborough County Public Schools embraces the culture and is eager to develop educational opportunities while not only identifying the problems, but going directly into the community to make better the human condition.

Morejon, partnering with government agencies, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of Hillsborough County, the Hillsborough County School System, along with Faith-Based organizations, Beth- El and Good Samaritan Missions, and Catholic Charities,¹³ has developed a hurricane awareness program that focuses on the way unsafe conditions arise in relation to income and lack of resources (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, and Wisner: 1994). Most importantly, Morejon takes into consideration cultural identity and social networks that exist in communities like Wimauma. “My first workshop will be in a church in Plant City. Not my idea,” smiles Morejon. “Last year,

¹³ Other agencies and businesses play a funding and public relations role.

the priest called me and said, 'Tony, I want you to do it here.' I said, "Why? Why do you want me to do it in your church?" He goes, "Last hurricane season, every time we had a storm, people would come to my church and they would park outside. They couldn't get in because it's not a shelter and they thought they were safe."



Figure 4-6. Tony Morejon, Hispanic Liason for Hillsborough County, gives a presentation on Hurricane Safety at Good Samaritan Mission. (2005)

Past studies have connected vulnerability in times of disaster to gender, age, ethnicity, and immigrant status, (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, Wisner 1994), but strong spiritual beliefs deeply embedded within a culture can also contribute to vulnerability. Those immigrants who use the services of the local churches and the NGOs associated with the church perceive the grounds and building as a metaphorical place of sanctuary

and help. A car in a parking lot on church property is protected by the sacred ground and therefore protected by God. As an anthropologist, the cultural context is critical in the understanding of disaster behavior in Wimauma's Hispanic population. The application of disaster strategies often means dispelling cultural symbols or showing cultural sensitivity and respect for beliefs (Quarantelli 1973, 1998). Interpreting disaster through the myth and symbolic ritual of the culture provides a coping and survival mechanism and becomes an influence of shared behavior within a community (Turner 1974; Hoffman 2002). Immigrant informants spoke symbolically of water related disasters in Wimauma. The waters are needed for the crops to grow; too much water will wash away the fertilizers and pesticides; and torrential rains associated with hurricanes cause loss of our wages and flood our homes. But with a clear remembrance in each immigrants mind is the water they had to cross in the dark of night. "I never want to cross that river again," confided one informant as she made the sign of the cross and directed her eyes to the heavens.

In the community, services have been designed to provide aid and assistance to a "culture that lives under a permanent condition of imbalance with the "normal" state generally characterized by social inequalities" (Garcia-Acosta 2002). The immigrant community of Wimauma is poor and so few have a dependable means of transportation. It was not uncommon to see a family size van that safely seats 7-8 passengers filled with double that number. With no public transportation, Wimauma's immigrant population travels within a very limited area and has difficulty obtaining the basic necessities unless purchased from local convenience stores where items are often

overpriced and variety is lacking. Jose rides his bicycle each day to meet a van that will take him to the tomato field. For Wimauma’s immigrant population, a bicycle or walking was the most common means of transportation. Since the nearest FEMA sanctioned shelter was in Ruskin, approximately six miles away, government agencies had not planned for the evacuation of Wimauma’s population who had no transportation to get to shelters located in other towns.



Figure 4-7. Bicycles were the most common means of transportation for many immigrants. (2005)

Articles written about Wimauma refer to the community as a “Third World County in our midst.” Javier Izaguirre, the Operations Manager for Beth-El Mission in Wimauma, explains

The services are here, but there are a lot of people who look for others to transport them back and forth for services. For food, for healthcare, because they either don’t have a driver’s license because they can’t get a

driver's license, because they can't afford a car that's in operable condition; because of the insurance as well...there are many different factors. And there is no public transportation. No public transportation that comes south of 674. People say things about, you know, and if you drive through Wimauma you'll see a lot of people out on the side of the road; and they are just standing around, walking around. You don't see that very much in Brandon, you know, or Tampa. However you see it where there's a lot of Hispanics...the reason why it's custom, you know, in Mexico, for example the bus stops right in front of your house to pick you up. And people are all over the place walking and they take many bus stops. They are used to public transportation. If they have no transportation, then how do they escape their mobile homes?

They escape from their mobile homes because the local grass roots organizations and churches have planned and are prepared to combine resources. The Church of God's Charles Adkins assures me that he and other volunteers will never allow any one to remain in their mobile home during a hurricane and his preparation has begun long before a storm hits.

The local residents often view the Hispanic immigrant population in Wimauma as a threat to their rural society because the Mexican culture does not easily blend into the local culture. Morejon and Izaguirre agree that part of the problem is cultural perception and cultural sensitivity. "I heard a man the other day make a comment about handing out groceries to the people driving the big trucks." He yelled, "They have a better truck than I have got." "Yeah and they depend on it to...to get from state to state and work," I yelled back. "I just could not help it," says Morejon. Another resident was heard saying, "They even bring the cactus with them across the river." Izaguirre knows the feeling of being an outsider.

I am a third generation who has spent time working in the fields. My family migrated to Brownsville, Texas, and that is where I was born. My

dad was laid off as a shrimper in Port Brownsville so we migrated to Florida in 1979. My dad worked mostly as a crew leader in Plant City for 25 years and my mom worked right beside him. We picked strawberries and that was my primary job from 14 until I was 21. I have not left the fields completely just because I work in an air-conditioned office here at Beth-El. My wife works in blueberries and sometimes she picks strawberries and so there are times when I go and help her (summer 2005).



Figure 4-8. Cactus brought from Mexico grows near a trailer home in Wimauma. For immigrant families, it is a symbol of the life they left behind and the new life they are making in the U.S. (2005)

Izaguirre is an insider who can identify as an outsider and understands the marginal community of immigrant workers. He adds, “If you can not speak the language, life is very hard. We can provide help if they will just come here to *la Mision Bet-el*.”

The Role of NGOs and Faith-Based Organizations

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of Hillsborough County and the Hillsborough County Public Schools are the most financially equipped providers of the tools needed by the immigrant population, but for these two agencies to reach this population, an effort must be made to communicate the available services. Establishing a communication link was not an easy task in Wimauma, because social inequality negatively impacted the community's response abilities to disaster assistance and governmental authority further isolated those in greatest need (Morrow, Peacock and Ragsdale 1997). This disconnect was even more apparent in the presence of first responders and government run organizational services. Charles Adkins and the Church of God have established an unsecured link to the EOC. "I have never worked directly with them. All I have done is let them know that we are here. They've said that if there is anything you need such as ambulances then we will go ahead and send them. I have worked with the fire department and since I have gained the trust of the immigrant community, they are not afraid if they see me with the fire department."

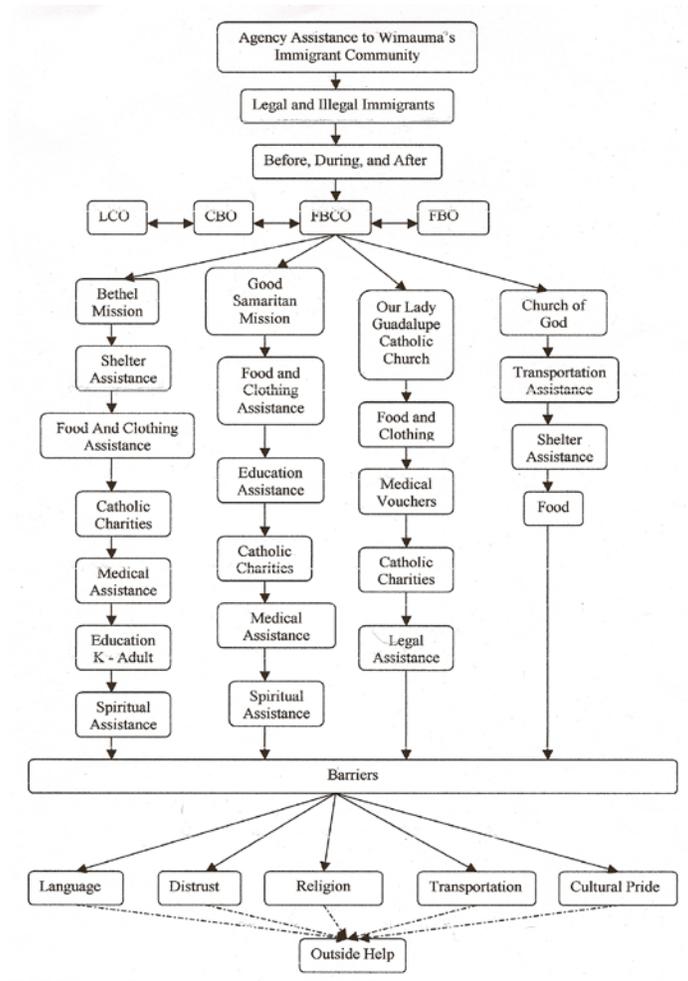


Chart 4-2. Flow chart showing local churches as the umbrella for numerous NGOs. (2005)

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based community organizations (FBCOs) and local churches are eager to help in Wimauma, but it is the latter that develops the strongest bond with the immigrants because they attempt to break down the barriers and focus on combining services as a one-stop resource center. Chart 4- 2 (page 81) shows the various resources provided by the faith-based community organizations such as Beth-El Mission and Good Samaritan Mission.

Hispanic liaison, Tony Morejan, agrees that federal money can be channeled to the multi-purpose organizations that do the “greatest good” so that legal and illegal workers can seek assistance without fear from numerous agencies all housed under one roof.

Local Community Organizations (LCOs) are the non-profit organizations serving the needs of Wimauma with an emphasis on specific issues. The PTA (Parent Teacher Association) at Wimauma Elementary School is an LCO uniting cultural diversity and the educational experience by helping parents feel comfortable in the educational surroundings. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) also identify specific community needs, but these organizations are found in surrounding communities. Sun City, Florida, a retirement community with numerous social organizations, is often host to fund raisers used to meet the needs of immigrant families and their children in Wimauma. LCOs and CBOs provide informal assistance and often interconnect with faith-based organizations giving the most availability of resources to the faith-based community organizations (FBCOs)

Chart 4-3 provides an overview of one NGO, Coalition of Florida Farmworkers Organizations, Inc. (COFFO, Inc), which is designed on paper to be the key organizational communicator. This organization ties all agencies together that serve the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) in Florida. The organization’s intent is to guide all agencies that engage in serving farmworkers and their families when they confront severe natural disasters, which in turn affect their jobs and job conditions. Among such disasters related to agriculture are drastic temperature changes, freezes, droughts, floods, hail, fires, crop infestations, tornados, and hurricanes which take away

jobs in agriculture by the thousands. According to the Coalition for the Florida Farmworkers Organization, Inc., it is up to Agricultural Services, Education, Health, Housing, Immigration, Legal Services, and Cooperative Extension agencies to provide information on disaster to the immigrant community (COFFO, Inc Directory 2004).

I found that many of those working in the fields had only a vague understanding of any NGO and no one had seen a directory of services. After pulling plastic in a tomato field, I sat in the shade with three informants who had never heard of the COFFO and as one informant said, “I trust outside under the sky and the [work] is what I know. Yes, someone tries to make it better for us, but it stays the same.” During the summer of 2005, my fieldwork found little evidence of non-government organizations providing services unless those services were filtered through other organizations. With NGOs being headquartered throughout the state, some organizations providing services before a hurricane are often unknown to the immigrant community while others such as the Red Cross are visible only after a disaster.

The Chart 4-3 that follows shows the immigrant involvement with NGOs. I was provided a manual through the Coalition of Florida Farmworkers with NGO listings, but few organizations worked directly with the immigrants I interviewed.

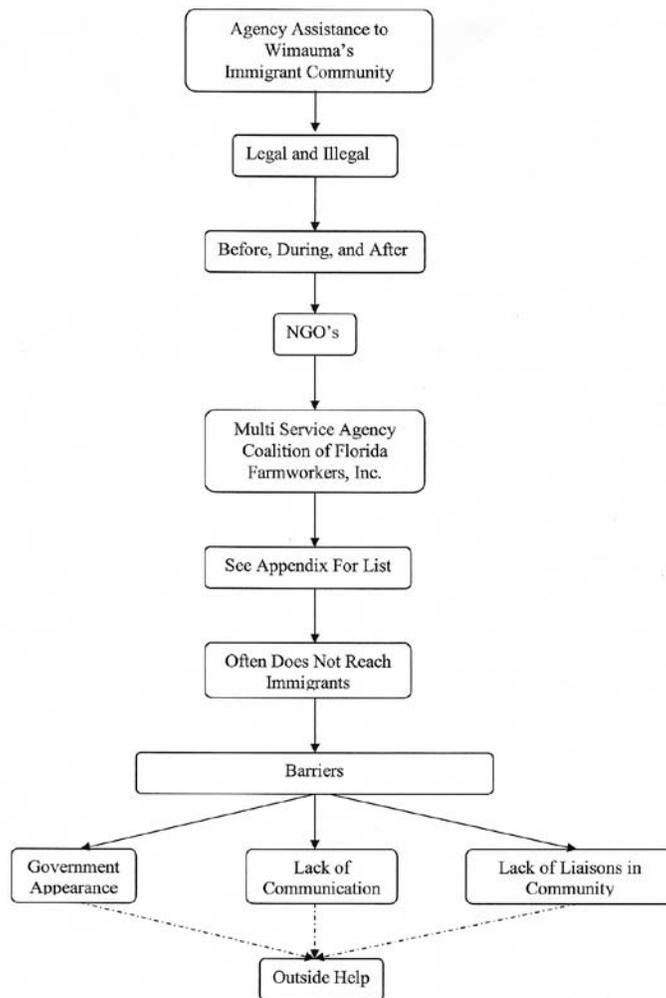


Chart 4-3. Chart shows that multi-service agencies designed to protect farmworkers have trouble communicating with legal and illegal workers. (2005)

Wimauma has a number of institutions, all Faith-Based organizations that provide assistance to its immigrant community. Wimauma's churches are all major players reaching out to the community, but the most significant contributions are from Our Lady Guadalupe Catholic Church, Beth-El Farmworker Mission, Church of God, and Good Samaritan Mission. Each church has a food bank and a clothing room and on a designated day opens their pantries to those in need. However, only Beth-El

Farmworker Ministry and Our Lady Guadalupe distributed services through a method of accountability by keeping records and names of those obtaining services. Beth-El Mission's record keeping was a very simple questionnaire while Our Lady Guadalupe had only a list and all that was asked on the open pantry day was "*Como se llama usted?*"

Beth-El Farmworker Ministry

In preparation for my fieldwork, I researched the social services provided to the migrant population in Wimauma and then began communicating with numerous agencies. I found that the multi-resource agency Beth-El Farmworker Ministry offered services from government and non-government organizations, community agencies, and on-site providers. Javier Izaguirre, the Operations Manager for Beth-El Mission, became my most important contact before entering the field and while in the field. At Beth-El Mission, Izaguirre's introduction permitted me access to the mission and all surrounding agency services. I became a participant-observer of the assistance process that was designed to meet the spiritual and physical needs of Wimauma's immigrant community.

Spending a part of the hurricane season in Wimauma gave me an insight into not only the struggles of the immigrant population, but also the struggles of the many agencies who work to make a better life for the hundreds of individuals who establish full or part time residence in this small rural community. At Beth-El Mission, I too was put to work filling bags with beans, rice, and flour. I gathered information pertaining to household size and wages. I listened as men and women searched for legal help,

childcare, housing, and healthcare. I worked side by side with agency workers, caring individuals, who believed in providing “the promise of a more secure and ordered life” (Rothenberg 1998).

As a multi-agency non-governmental organization (NGO) and Faith-Based Community Organization (FBCO), Beth-El Farmworker Ministry, Inc. partners with the Federal Government, the local and National Presbyterian Church, and numerous other agencies. It is a Mission that began in 1976 in a small house in Ruskin, Florida, for the purpose of holding church in Spanish, but as Beth-El’s Pastor Romiro Ros explains, “The families came to worship, but they were hungry; some slept in cars or trucks; many could not read or write; and most lived in fear of deportation. The efforts of the Mission grew and now we provide outreach to thousands in the farmworker community.” Dave Moore, the executive director, makes clear that the Mission “does not ask for documentation; we ask for need. We don’t ask if they are in the country legally or without papers. We focus on assisting farmers and their families with spiritual and physical needs and we focus on bringing the community together. We don’t wait for disasters like hurricanes. We are preparing the community now, each day.”



Figure 4-9. Dave Moore is the Executive Director of Beth-El Farm Worker Ministry, Inc. (2005)



Figure 4-10. Beth-El Mission's Family Learning Center provides services in English and Spanish. Skills in computers and everyday basic survival skills are taught here through the Hillsborough County Schools. (2005)

Located on twenty-seven acres, Beth-El Farmworker Ministry operates numerous programs while also providing space for organizations it supports. The core of the mission is the worship service held on Tuesday nights after a social gathering of food, friendship, and faith. It was at my first social gathering that I came to know Irma and her eleven-year-old son and nine year old daughter. Irma cannot speak English; her son and daughter can. Since I do not speak Spanish, the children translated for both of us. Irma worries about the clash of cultures for her children. “Some places look down on me because I cannot speak English, but no one looks down on me at Bet-El.” A volunteer serving food interrupts with “the Lord looks down on you.” Laughter is all around as Irma continues, “Here I am treated with respect and my children do not feel embarrassed when we come for the food pantry, school supplies, and to get cooking gas. When I am working they come here for field trips and summer camps and everyone is always nice.” Others seated at nearby picnic tables are also engaged in the

conversation with positive comments about youth groups, Sunday School, and a childcare nursery.

Beth-El Mission’s method of accountability for the purpose of receiving services was quite simple, but required information concerning the number of members in a household, household annual income, monthly income and weekly income. It was not uncommon to find the head of household supporting five individuals with an annual income below \$15,000. The following chart determined food eligibility:

Table 4-5. Eligibility for Emergency Food Services

No. in Household	Annual Income	Monthly Income	Weekly Income
1	12,441	1,037	240
2	16,679	1,390	321
3	20,917	1,744	403
4	25,155	2,097	484
5	29,393	2,450	566
6	33,631	2,803	647
7	37,869	3,156	729
8	42,107	3,509	810

Immigrants received services according to the above eligibility chart. (2005)



Figure 4-11. This number, “mil quinientos tres” gave Jose enough ingredients to last almost two weeks. (2005)

Partially funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) provided food to those on Food Stamps,

Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Supplemental Security Income, or Residence in Public Housing funded by Municipal, County, State, or Federal Government. I observed that no one was ever turned away. Clients were given a control number and their names were placed on a master list. My informant, Jose, had only his bicycle and very little money for food after sending the majority of his paycheck to his wife and children in Mexico. So, I obtained a control number for him and each Tuesday I would see the smile on his face as I handed him the two bags of groceries that allowed him to cook his own food.

Dave Moore, the Executive Director of Beth-El Mission is passionate about providing for the immigrant population, but does admit that all services have at some time or another been taken advantage of “those folks that say they qualify for income levels the federal government has established possibly don’t.” Beth- El Mission screens clients¹⁴ as best they can while local churches distributed food in a rather chaotic frenzy allowing those individuals with transportation to take away more than others. I observed that volunteers distributing everything from bottled water to shampoo asked no questions, because in this community, everyone seems to need help. Moore believes that access to resources helps the immigrant community through adversity and he knows that not all agencies are easily accessible to all those who need assistance in the community.

We touch well over 10,000 families and people with our food distribution. We prepare three hundred bags of food each week and over the course of a year that is 15, 600 bags of food. We don’t advertise, but somehow the community knows we are here. In the case of disaster, we are an after-event feeding facility.

¹⁴ It is the respectful name used for the immigrants who seek services at Beth-El Mission.

We receive FEMA funds through grants and in the event the rainy season comes and the workers are not in the fields; if they are not working then they are getting no wages; so the weekly food pantry is their emergency food.



Figure 4-12. Canned foods used to feed immigrant farmworkers.



Figure 4-13. Bags of beans and rice are part of the emergency foods distributed by Beth-El Mission. (2005)

Beth-El Mission is a source for spiritual and physical needs and has other agencies on site; Catholic Charities, Tampa Bay Area Legal Services, Redlands Christian Migrant Association child care center, the RCMA Charter School, and an Adult Education Program that focuses on teaching adults to speak and understand English and learn basic skills such as banking, parenting, understanding medicine labels, and above all protecting their families and themselves from hurricanes.

Pastor Ramiro Ros, whose ministry at Beth-El is a faith-based social service, preaches the gospel with an infectious enthusiasm. In the next breath he is preaching what to do to keep your family safe in a hurricane. “It’s all about education,” Ros admits,

“and they listen because it is the word of God and because I too am Hispanic. You must form a level of trust or they will not listen.”



Figure 4-14. Local merchants provide backpacks and other school supplies to children of farm workers. (2005)



Figure 4-15. Boxes of canned goods are donated by large local grocery stores such as Publix. (2005)

Morejon agrees, “All of my presenters are Hispanic and no one will be wearing a uniform. I show graphic pictures of twisted metal trailers and I ask them if they want this to happen to their children. I always use children as the example, because so many of these immigrants have sacrificed so much to get here. Migration from home to here is a very emotional subject. They do not want their children to go through the same hardships; kin protects kin and family units protect each other.” Anthony Oliver-Smith (1999) calls this solidarity born of crisis the “Brotherhood of Pain.” Alliances form out of the emotional stress, common pain, and the response to crisis. Bonds are formed affecting not only the immediate kin, but also the entire community.

Catholic Charities, an NGO working within every agency, has offices at Beth-El Mission and Our Lady Guadalupe Catholic Church. Catholic Charities Family Support and Resource Center (FSRC) are housed at Beth-El Mission. FSRC is part of the Rural Social Services Partnership Collaborative, funded by The Children’s Board of

Hillsborough County. Programs provided in Wimauma include Case Management, Adult Basic Education (ABE), Parenting classes, Immigration Services, Kinship Support Group, and a Youth Group.



Figure 4-16. Nurses from Catholic charities go from mission to mission providing healthcare. (2005)

Catholic Charities was also the only agency providing immigration related services along with the Bay Area Legal Services, Inc. also with offices at Beth-El Mission. The role of Catholic Charities is to assist the church in “welcoming the stranger” by providing services targeted to the specific needs of the Central Florida immigrant community. They work with family resettlement and promote justice,

compassion, and acceptance of all newcomers.¹⁵ In addition, a mobile clinic for healthcare, funded by St. Joseph's Hospital in Tampa and other agencies, provides services to those who are not insured or have a limited income. The mobile unit arrives at the Missions on Tuesday when food and clothing is distributed. Materials about the hurricane season and family health are made available in Spanish. The Sisters, directing the mobile health care, warn, "We tell them to put all their prescriptions together in case of a weather disaster. They may be forced to leave their homes, but that is a worry for tomorrow and they have too many worries today.

As I reflect on the time spent with the state agencies, local agencies, and churches, an article by anthropologist Edward Liebow (1995) titled "Inside the Decision-Making Process: Ethnography and Environmental Risk Management" comes to mind. Liebow's argument is to broaden the base of cultural knowledge and engage the local knowledge in the decision making process. Liebow advocates a voice to the individuals whose lives are most affected rather than decisions coming from a select few. I was permitted, an ever so brief moment in time, when I could look inside this decision making process that as Laura Nader says at the beginning of this chapter "never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species" (1974). In hindsight, this statement echoes the disaster response to hurricane Katrina and perhaps should be taken as a warning for catastrophes to come. Liebow reminds us of Nader's words and suggests as I have in this chapter that as long as governmental agencies do nothing to address cultural

¹⁵Information has been obtained through brochures given to immigrant families and interviews with numerous volunteers for Catholic Charities.

knowledge and reach out to the most vulnerable segments of society then the members of an at-risk community will remain vulnerable to disasters. I suggest that only when open discourse and policy actions include those at greatest risk will the barriers no longer exist and the community will become safer and stronger.

CHAPTER 5

MEXICAN IMMIGRANT RESPONSES TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND NGOs

“Almost without exception, migrant parents dream of better lives for their children—stable jobs, higher wages, the promise of a more secure and ordered life. Most farmworker parents also understand that the best opportunities for their children lie in education—learning English, gaining basic skills, and finishing high school.”

Daniel Rothenberg 1998

The People of Wimauma

As an outsider, I was accepted into the community of Wimauma because I was not afraid to “put up with” what the immigrant population endures as a normal lifestyle: the stifling hot trailers, the dirty and often dangerous field work, the hundreds of flies hovering around and on food, and the lack of resources needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. As a cultural anthropologist, I also was accepted because I listened to the stories that everyone was eager to tell me; life histories full of intense emotions; memories of childhood and family, memories of home and country; and memories of pain and survival.

Anthropologists and disaster researchers have long suggested that cultures view hazards as normal occurrences (Torry 1979; Dynes 1974; Quarantelli 1972; Oliver-Smith 1999). Furthermore, these studies and others suggest that disasters serve as a measurement of resilience and the strength of a community is defined by its response and resiliency to disaster. I observed this resiliency in the Hispanic population of

Wimauma. Many of the immigrants I spent time with had become so accustomed to some type of hardship that hardships had become a way of life (Blaikie, Cannon, Davis, Wisener 1994). Hardships are not only accepted, but also expected.



Figure 5-1. He came to Wimauma in the 1980's and stayed, but his hat tells where his heart is. (2005)

If disasters and hardships are to be considered as recurring aspects of human life, then how do assistance and relief agencies, both government and NGOs, win over the confidence and support of the immigrant community, a community whose perceptions are influenced by cultural beliefs? What prevents the immigrant community from responding to assistance? Furthermore, do the immigrants in Wimauma respond to agency assistance according to gender and legal or illegal status?

Is there a distinction in the processing of assistance for those who are permanent and those who are temporary? What are the obstacles encountered by the immigrant population?

Research suggests that the Hispanic family unit places emphasis on family values and self-reliance on family rather than relying on other social support networks (Griffith 1985; Keefe 1984; Massey 1987) or government agencies. In fact, research conducted by Griffith and Villavicencio (1985) suggests that Hispanics are “chronic underutilizers” of formal sources such as government agencies, social, charitable, and support organizations. Further research by Rodriguez and O’Donnell (1995) found the cultural value of reliance on kinships had not been given enough credit as a reason for Hispanics lesser involvement with support networks outside family and relatives. Just as Weeks and Cuellar (1981) found in their examination of families in San Diego, I too found that a small number of Hispanics were most likely to request help from no one, not even family members in the same area, and instead suffer in silence. I witnessed silent suffering in an elderly informant whose son also lived in Wimauma and though they saw each other often, the need for assistance was never mentioned.

In Wimauma, the family unit or social network sets precedents in relation to social beliefs, decisions, and response to disasters (Clifford 1956; Dynes and Quarantelli 1968; Drabek 1971). The strength of the immigrant farmworker in times of disaster lies in the connection to the core culture or social network, and it is this unit that allows for an accepted cultural behavior. I found that as a solidified family unit

both before and after a crisis, turning to agencies for assistance is not an accepted cultural behavior among the Mexican immigrants in Wimauma. A solidified family unit was most often a family made up of father, mother, children, relatives and friends who shared some aspect of stability and stakehold in Wimauma such as: children's education, ownership of property, or permanent seasonal work. Those immigrants recently migrated from Mexico or Guatemala were absorbed into the family unit. Merging together provided a core system of security and a strengthened stability (Zolniski 2006). However, if the cultural core is damaged or the pattern of life is broken isolating and interrupting what is perceived to be normal, then a survival or "coping mechanism" (Blaikie et.al.1994) sets in and survival trumps cultural behavior.

In the summer of 2005, Wimauma's documented and undocumented Hispanic population expressed fear, lack of trust, language barriers, excessive bureaucratic red tape, and an independent, proud cultural identity as the main reasons for not seeking assistance from governmental agencies. In a period of three months, I was witness to each of these reasons as an observer, participant, and recorder of community secrets that Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) refers to as "secrets hidden from the view of outsiders." I mention community secrets because the documented and undocumented populations in Wimauma are interconnected and the undocumented are concealed through family, community social networks, and artificial networks. David Griffith and Ed Kissam (1995) define artificial networks as single males coming from the same village who travel together and live together thus making up a household. Each group is designed to

protect the immigrant who is vulnerable to deportation and exploitation or in the case of women, vulnerable to sexual harassment.

Protecting the identity of one another is important to the immigrant population, but this protection comes at a price. Disaster emergencies are often met with obstacles such as individuals living on unnamed streets; therefore no address and no way to be found or threatening “keep out” signs at mobile home parks where single men work all day and drink late into the night to soothe lost identities. My translator, knowing how much I wanted to visit a particular trailer park, told me daily that this was one place that I should not venture into. Needless to say, I did listen to the warnings, but from a distance I observed an isolated section of Wimauma that governmental agency services and NGOs would have great difficulty reaching in crisis situations. The vast majority of the men living here were not only illegal, but many had outstanding criminal warrants. Law enforcement also kept a distance from this area that was filled with guns, drugs, and alcohol.

Both men and women in Wimauma are faced with cultural prejudice and economic inequality which breeds distrust in the very population that needs agency assistance in crisis times. Javier Izaguirre speaks as a Mexican insider explaining how the immigrant population attempts to combat fear and distrust, “A lot of people live in clusters, because the resources are just not there. It is a custom thing; you don’t see Anglos doing that. They need their space; they need their privacy. But Hispanics, they think differently. They say it is all right to live together, because we need to live together. In this way, finances can be combined and family members who are illegal

can be protected. Many immigrants do not ever seek agency assistance because there is always someone in the extended family who has recently come from Mexico and is not legal.”

The Men of Wimauma

Men between the ages of seventeen and fifty contributed to the steady influx of arrivals from Mexico who had come to Wimauma to find work; some came for temporary work while others had dreams of permanent residency. Fear of deportation and distrust of authority, keeps these immigrants far away from law enforcement, public officials, and agencies operated by the government. Sunday evening at the Wimauma Laundromat always brought out a gathering of Hispanic men who passed the time watching, waiting, and socializing. My translator and I approached four Mexican men who at first appeared nervous and uncomfortable, but when I opened my map of Mexico, they immediately began searching for their villages. All were cousins from Chiapas de Corzo, located in the southern sector of Mexico, very close to Guatemala. They told me they had walked nine days before they crossed the Rio Grande and now they want to go home. It is late July and they have been looking for work since May. A small weathered man presses closer to me and through a mouthful of yellow-brown crooked teeth he says, “No money; no food.” He tells me he is not afraid, but he is not happy. In unison the four men say, “No, we are not afraid.” It is a manly no; one they want me as a woman to hear loud and clear. Ironically, they then admit to me their greatest fear, which is the same for all four men: They feared their time in the desert while making their journey to the United States.



Figure 5-2. A man I saw often who always thanked me for giving him one of my field bandanas. (2005)

In the community of Wimauma, these men are the most vulnerable at risk population in times of disaster. They have been trying to adapt to difficult circumstances, and their situation they find themselves in is often as difficult as the disaster itself. Government agencies are completely out of reach for these men and any effective disaster response would require a familiarity with the area's relief agencies, community connections, or a kinship support network. Historically, distrust and fear will always keep this group from government agencies and NGOs, because they want to remain hidden from view rarely asking for any social support.

The Women of Wimauma



Figure 5-3. This informant was so proud of her work as a mechanic and washer/dryer repair person. She had overcome many gender biases. (2005).

During my fieldwork, I observed a developing shift in the normal cultural behavior and what had appeared to be a patriarchal society from the outside revealed a strong matriarchal society on the inside with the women becoming the dominant strength and provider of the family unit or social network in times of preparation and times of crisis and disaster. The immigrant women who told me their stories refused to be victims, because like the immigrant men of Wimauma, they too possess the cultural pride that connects the community and provides a survival network. An emergency that affects the entire community, such as a hurricane, is viewed as a collective crisis and in

this context many more immigrants will feel less afraid to seek help (Kaniasty and Norris 1999).

FEMA and the County Emergency Operations Center do not hear the voices of the immigrant population, particularly the women. “As the Hispanic Liaison for the county,” says Tony Morejon, “it is my job to get the people to participate and the women will always come to my preparedness workshops, but the government agencies do not seem to care and there is no follow-up.” Morejon agrees that immigrant women are one of the best resources in disaster preparedness because women communicate through networking, show concern to keep the family prepared and safe, and are ready to take risks, which contradicts previous studies on gender and risk perception (Fothergill 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Past research on gender-based vulnerability has portrayed women as stereotypical passive, weak victims of disaster (Weist et al. 1994; Blaikie et al. 1994). Studies suggest that men and women face different barriers in migration; however, women not only seek out resources more often than men, but also open labor markets for men. As I discussed earlier, men tend to isolate themselves whereas women network through households and social support (Curran and Rivero-Fuentes 2003). In studies conducted after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow (1998) found that women responded by first organizing as mothers and responders, and then becoming a part of disaster response organizations. Enarson and Morrow’s study, viewed through a feminist lens, suggests that disaster management is inherently masculine. Though not blatantly gender-biased, the government agencies

such as FEMA and the EOC have not addressed the significance of the immigrant women and often continue to view this population as more vulnerable because they truly do not understand the culture and they see these women more prone to job injuries, illness, sexual violence, and domestic violence.

Women may not be a part of the government agencies in Wimauma, but they are major players in local NGOs such as Catholic Charities and in the Missions. Their work in Wimauma ranges from Mary who repairs appliances and works as a mechanic to Eleanor who runs the “Odds and Ends” store. In times of crisis, these women take charge and organize around disaster.



Figure 5-4. Hurricane Awareness Programs presented by Tony Morejon attracted women eager to learn about safety for their families. (2005)

Case Study: The Núñez Family



Figure 5-5 Trinidad and Renaldo shared their home with me and most importantly shared their life stories. (2005)

As I met Trinidad and Renaldo Núñez for the first time, they greeted me with warmth and sincere acceptance, as one would welcome an old friend. Trinidad walked me through her trailer home proudly showing me the walls lined with family pictures. The entire collection of pictures have been mounted on wood and then heavily varnished. She explains the process and tells me water will not harm them and they are easily transported without fear of damage. She shakes her head while pointing to the torn linoleum, the damaged walls, the rusting appliances, and the lack of furniture. She repeats over and over in English “so poor, so poor, so poor.” She tells me that the cost of everything is too high and in the same breath explains that the trailer is so hot that it

would be better if we sat outside on the front stoop. She walks to a sprawling Acacia tree and breaks off a branch that is filled with seedpods. She is impressed that I know how to open and eat them. She takes me to a row of guava trees and expresses her concern for the hard round green fruit sensitive to birds and hurricanes. She begins her story of survival in a new country by explaining that often when she was hungry in the fields, Acacia pods were her only food. Now, she eats them to remember how hard life has been and how much better it is today.

Trinidad's life has been filled with risks over the last twenty-five years. She married Renaldo in Mexico when he was twenty and she was fourteen. Getting to the U.S. was not easy, but remaining in Mexico was not an option. "In Mexico we have no money and most of the time we did not eat. Because of all the poverty, we come to look for [better] life and even though we work every day, we live better than what we lived in Mexico."



Figure 5-6. Acacia pods were a common snack among immigrant workers. (2005)

When asked how she came to the United States, her reply still held the fear she had felt, “it was night time and we crossed the river.” Renaldo says jokingly, “and she can not swim.” Since the water was so deep, the men placed her in a floating tire to get across, but the fear of disaster was only beginning. They walked through the desert for almost a week, and for Renaldo, this was the hardest part; “at night animals were always coming and sometimes they bite other people and I was afraid that they would hurt us.” Now, seeking assistance could hurt them “because we do not understand what is said or written on all the papers,” says Trinidad. “Renaldo and me can not read or write English and because we did not go to school in Mexico, we can not read or write Spanish.”

Tony Morejon, the Hispanic liaison for Hillsborough County, views language barrier as major problem in times of disaster. Language barriers have a domino effect when trying to provide services to the immigrant population. A language barrier leads to information barrier and eventually escalates into a cultural barrier. Trinidad explains to me that she wants to learn English, but there never is time when she must work. Edner, my translator, explained the IRB consent form and showed Trinidad where to sign. She carefully placed an X on the line and smiled, “Someday when there is time, I will learn to write my name.”

The Núñez Family and FEMA

Wimauma’s permanent immigrant population is familiar with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), but the overwhelming majority wants nothing to do with any agency that is part of the federal, state, or local government. “If

it is government, it is immigration,” said one informant, a sympathy echoed by most of my informants. Even those immigrants who are documented lack an understanding of FEMA’s role in disaster. Renaldo is documented; Trinidad, his wife, is not.

After the hurricane, we went to FEMA and because I have my papers, they give us a little bag of food. They tell me that because I have papers, they can fix my windows and my roof on the trailer. The hurricane broke all the windows and moved the trailer. The top was leaking, but FEMA fixed that too. It would be bad if I [were] not documented. (Interview 2005)

Trinidad explains how afraid she was that they might send her back, but she went first to FEMA, all alone and “they said I didn’t have papers so they wouldn’t help, but they help when I tell Renaldo to go.” Trinidad’s fear of the government agency was not greater than her concern for her family’s home. I observed that with fear as a common motivator, the immigrant women of Wimauma, though vulnerable because of legal status and because they are not only women, but also women of color, would, in the worst of circumstances, take the risk and seek out assistance from the government agencies such as FEMA and the county EOC. I observed an attitude of slight empowerment even in those immigrant women whose fear of deportation was “everywhere, like pumping gas or just sitting in the car while others grocery shop.”



Figure 5-7. Because Renaldo is documented FEMA replaced the roof on their mobile home after the hurricanes of 2005. (2005)

The Núñez family owns their home and property, which provides stability and permanence within the community, but in late summer, just as they were leaving to pick tomatoes in Tennessee, a cousin from Mexico arrived unannounced and they opened their home to him as they had to me. Carlos kept close to the kinship unit specified by the Núñez family; he waited for the same ride to work every morning, isolated himself by watching television in his room every evening, and paid cash for everything. I asked him if he needed help and he would always respond with a gracious “no.” Carlos was so unfamiliar with his surroundings that if there had been a catastrophic disaster, such as a category 3, 4, or 5 hurricane, he, like the four cousins, would have had no idea about hurricane preparedness and agency assistance from any source. Carlos fears his surroundings, trusts only those he has been told to trust, and does not speak or read English, but is a proud Mexican man. According to Steve Porter of the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), “cultural identity plays a far greater role in times of disaster than the government agencies are prepared to admit.” He

acknowledges that of the three areas covered by the EOC, preparation, response, and recovery, a lack of proper preparation keeps immigrants away because “FEMA does not normally bring enough Spanish speakers into the areas most affected by disaster and the local government agencies are depending too much on the non-profit agencies for educational awareness.” Morejan agrees that the cultural barrier has not been addressed adequately by government agencies and the only way to truly get information about government agencies to the immigrant population is through the educational system.

Government agencies, viewed through the eyes of the immigrant Hispanic population in Wimauma, are not to be trusted. “They say for us to get assistance after the hurricane, but I see the Sheriff nearby so we turn around and go home,” admits one undocumented informant. An examination of FEMA assistance after the Northridge Earthquake suggests “the politics of immigration contributed to the avoidance of federal agencies” and further finding that FEMA’s recovery assistance required too much documentation in the disaster application (Bolin and Stanford 1999).



Figure 5-8. The Núñez brothers travel during the summer with the family to pick tomatoes in Tennessee. (2005)

Alberto Núñez, the seventeen-year-old son of the family with whom I lived, understands his family's distrust and fear of agencies and organizations offering assistance. He is a first generation American citizen, who anguishes over the fear he feels for his mother and guilt he feels for his father. "My father is documented and my mother is not. She thought she was, but she cannot find any papers. If my mother gets sick they must go to the wallet. So I try to help them as much as I can. I feel very guilty when I am sitting in the air conditioning at school and I look outside and it is so hot. I think of my father in the field and how he takes medicine now for arthritis in his hands and back. I want to get an education, but not so I will not have to work in the fields, but so I can get my mother and father out of the fields. Oh, I feel guilty, because

now they even send me back to start school on time when we are picking tomatoes in Tennessee.”

Immigrants know the injustice and the social inequalities; they know the feeling of living on the edge of disaster and the families in Wimauma want more for their children. Many immigrant families need help, but not always the kind that comes from a food pantry. Immigrant families need financial education. Dave Moore, Beth-El Mission Director, states, “So many of the people we help are hardworking and could qualify for low cost housing, but they need someone to help them through the process before it is too late. I had a family the other day tell me that they got into financial trouble before they really understood about credit and staying with the same job. In Mexico the bank will not even talk to you if you do not have lots of money.” Izaguirre explains further, “You can’t really go to a bank and borrow money unless you have money. So a lot of these people are left out of financial institutions and when they come here they do not know how to open a bank account or how to handle a checking account. They do know about saving, but they know about their own way of saving. You know; work, work, work, work, and stuff it under the mattress; don’t spend it.” Izaguirre agrees that education is the key to a better life for all immigrants in Wimauma, but institutions must also do their part. Many banks prevent undocumented immigrants from opening accounts, which only adds to the financial issues facing immigrants. I watched as Friday paychecks were diminished by five or ten percent check cashing charges and another fifty to seventy percent was sent to family members in Mexico

prompting one informant to tell me that it was okay because all he needed was enough for some cold beer, a little food, and change for the Laundromat and telephone.

Renaldo and Trinidad are proud Mexicans who explain that they have never wanted a handout from the government or any other agency. This quality of self-sufficiency has been instilled in their son who identifies the educational system as the greatest resource for his family. Though the Hillsborough County School System is a government agency, the immigrant community of Wimauma is eager to be educated, but the barriers are the same, fear, distrust, language, bureaucratic red tape, and cultural pride.

The Role of the Hillsborough County School System In Disaster Preparedness and Recovery



Figure 5-9. Computer training and learning English is a priority for many of Wimauma's immigrant population, particularly the women. (2005)

Inocenia Nube sat absorbed in the computer lesson, pressing enter and proudly telling me she was answering questions in English. Inocenia and I met at the Tuesday night church service at Beth-El Mission. She caught my eye because she prayed with such sincere emotion and often spoke of the new life Beth-El Mission had given her. With the help of the Hillsborough County School System and The Extended Learning and Adult Education Program housed at Beth-El Mission, she was provided courses in English and Computer Training. Today, she displays an accordion folder that her teacher has given her. Inocenia has labeled each section so that she and her three children will have the needed papers in case of a disaster. She hands it to me as if it were a most treasured item; it is. The opening flap is labeled “Records of Inocenia Nube” and the sections inside are labeled: paid bills, unpaid bills, medical, family, and income tax/financial. Large stickers on the inside flap define what should be in each section: under paid bills are bank statements (3 years), cancelled checks, receipts, house rent payments; under unpaid bills is found current payments due such as vehicles and house; under medical should be emergency contacts, prescriptions, doctors numbers, and clinic numbers; under family should be found birth certificates, residency forms, licenses, auto titles; and under income tax/financial is found 1040 forms, taxes paid, alimony, and child support. Inocenia knows that if she is evacuating because of a hurricane or any disaster, this folder will come with her. She tells me she has shown many of her friends and she is not afraid to trust the teachers, because they want to make life better and safer for her and her family.

The Migrant Education Service for the Hillsborough County Public Schools serves anyone younger than 22 who has not graduated from high school or does not hold a high school equivalency certificate. The Adult Education Program is an extension of academic support. The immigrant population of Wimauma eagerly supports the education of their children and do not shy away from the services provided by the school system. The strongest service provided to the families was the Migrant Advocate who went into the home of the immigrant children and established trust, broke down language barriers, and helped alleviate the fear of social isolation because of poverty and cultural differences. The schools are teaching the children what to do in times of disaster and in turn the children are teaching their parents. For the immigrant family to be aware of any impending disaster, it will take educational support, a government agency trusted by the community. The school systems implementation of programs that teach and train parents and students the value of education further strengthens the stability of home life and the stability to become a less vulnerable population. Carmen Sorondo, Director of Migrant Education for Hillsborough County, has witnessed the trust the immigrant community has in the school system. “When a family migrates here, the first thing they do is seek out the schools, because they now know that the support services needed for their family can be obtained through us and we know who to contact without making families feel ashamed or afraid.”

Response to Non-Government Organizations

Preparedness and planning for disasters, both natural and manmade, are on the minds of the immigrants in Wimauma, but the immigrant population does not depend

on FEMA or the Emergency Operations Center and few know very little about disaster management. Instead, they learn how to survive and protect their families through the services provided by the educational system, the churches, family and friends, kinship networks from their native country, and Wimauma's long time Hispanic residents, documented and undocumented.



Figure 5-10. Families work together for economic and safety concerns. (2005)

Eloy Flores is a crew leader and his field crew is his family. It is 11:30 and beginning to get very hot. He tells everyone it is time to take a break. We sit under the shade of a rusty tin roof surrounded by tractor parts and grease. I am introduced to his five children, ranging in age from seven to fifteen. Three of the children are legal residents and two are not. I then meet two male cousins, one a legal resident and one is not. I then assume that one of the two women is his wife. I assumed wrong and Eloy

laughs. One of the women is the mother of his two younger children both born in the United States and the other woman is her sister. They all agree that working together provides job security, lessens the fear of deportation, and above all, Flores says, and “We do not worry about the women and children being hurt. I keep them safe and I am the boss.” I asked one of the woman if she liked working in the tomato field and she placed her hands on the dirty cement and told me how awful they looked, black and rough with numerous cuts, but then smiled and said she loved being outside and did not mind the work as long as she worked with her family. She had sought agency assistance for food a few times, but only at the church and missions during a very stormy couple of weeks.



Figure 5-11. Primarily women, form long lines early at a Mission's "Back to School Days." (2005)

Eloy and his extended family trust one another; there are no language barriers; they are making money as a family; they rely on no one else. However, one of the women did confide that she had obtained food for the family a few times and maybe would have gone more often if transportation had been provided. Elaine Enarson (2000) suggests that women's lives are more visible in times of disaster preparation and recovery. The immigrant women of Wimauma stood in long lines to get food and items needed to meet life's daily struggles. Women attended relief efforts and NGO sponsored programs aimed at preparation and protection during hurricanes in far greater numbers than men.

As an insider/outsider, Izaguirre understands the immigrant community's fears. The fears of the Hispanic population of Wimauma are very real and trust is found only in those organizations asking the fewest questions. Whereas FEMA is an elaborate framework of Disaster Application Centers, eligibility for the services provided by NGOs does not delve into personal knowledge, such as gender, ethnicity, and legal status. Past studies suggest that government relief efforts have "sorted the poor by their relative moral worth" (Landis 1999; Gordon 1994) or in today's disaster relief effort the needy are often divided into gender and cultural disparities (Gordon 1994; Fineman 1995). The immigrant population perceives FEMA as an aloof bureaucracy whose federal and state relief assistance does not reach down to those who do not qualify. Documented and undocumented immigrants in Wimauma did not understand FEMA, its regional office, or the purpose of the EOC. Government agencies did not appear to share a vested interest in the community prompting one informant to say, "I can't read their questions or write answers so I'm not worth anything except in the field." Victims with the lowest income experience the greatest loss and receive the least assistance after a disaster (Bolin and Bolton 1986; Bolin and Stanford 1991).

As discussed in Chapter 3, Beth-El Mission requires the answering of two questions in order to receive assistance. Immigrants must give the number of people in the household and provide an estimate of household annual income, monthly income, or weekly income. Each recipient is given a control number and placed on a list. Proof of identification is used only to verify name and control number. There are no intimidating authoritative individuals questioning residency status and no one is turned

away and everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Two other faith-based NGOs used by Wimauma's immigrant community are Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church and Good Samaritan Mission. Both churches have a clothing shop and a food pantry with many other free services. Good Samaritan Mission asks no questions of clients while Our Lady Guadalupe asks for only a name. Many immigrants arrive without food and clothing, but greater numbers arrive without housing creating an immigrant population whose vulnerability to disaster becomes even greater.

Situated on State Road 674 is a small white building with a sign that says "Asistencia para Casas." For many immigrants arriving in Wimauma, this is the first stop, housing assistance. When I asked them how they knew to come here, the response was either "we saw the sign and it was in español," "the missions sent us," or "others who come before tell us." In the Wimauma Area Improvement Authority, I observed groups, primarily women with small children, entering in search of family housing. The scenario was always the same; with limited transportation, eight to ten adults with small children would exit a van and only two or three would come into the housing office. I witnessed fear, anxiety, dread, and embarrassment as they listened to cost and availability. When lease agreements and application forms were placed in front of them, most said they would take them to fill out and bring them back later. They never returned. Some forms were in Spanish, but most were in English. I was in the housing office many times, but never did I see anyone receive a place to live. So where did they go? "They come to us," says Izaguirre, "Because I speak their language and I am

affiliated with the church. Religion is deeply embedded in the cultural identity of the Hispanic population and they feel that God will provide for them.”

A study conducted in 2006 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human services found that immigrant farmworker housing remains substandard or non-existent in agricultural areas throughout the United States. Wimauma, however, has tried to address housing problems. Maribel Agosto is the Case Manager for the Balm-Wimauma Area Housing Partnership. Her job is “to find disadvantaged people a place to call home.” She tells me “We have so many homeless families coming to this area and I have a heartache when I see a family walk in this door and we have no way to help them. They trust me because I am Hispanic and they think I can make everything better.” Farm work is dependent on nature and in this region of Hillsborough County disastrous weather is year round. Agosto explains, “Sometimes it will rain all week and the farmworkers are not able to work.” Through no fault of their own farmworker families are at the mercy of the unpredictable Florida weather. From Agosto and the immigrant farmworkers I heard the same words, “If we can’t work, we can’t get paid.” Government agencies provide no help to the working homeless either before or after disasters.

Housing for the immigrant population is an issue with numerous sociopolitical problems, because residency status is a requirement for all housing in Wimauma. I found that one out of every three of the immigrant farmworkers I spoke with was illegal and all the places they could live were under the watchful eye of the governmental agency, Housing and Community Code Enforcement. The mission statement of this

agency is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing and timely public services to the residents of Hillsborough County, and to enhance the quality of life of our diverse population with a safe and healthy environment (Hillsborough County Government on line). I observed ground flood in a trailer park housing immigrant fieldworkers, but instead of making it safe, Housing and Community Code Enforcement knocked on doors and told everyone to leave. They had no place to go and no other place was provided for them, but they left out of fear of authority. Though they seemed to just disappear, the immigrant Hispanic community in Wimauma received support through



Figure 5-12. Finding safe housing for immigrant workers is an ongoing problem. (2005)

family, friends, and outsiders. In fact, as one study suggests, there is no “cowering

behind closed doors or living in a domestic capsule void of community (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994).

Wimauma's immigrant Hispanic population is proud and strong. They are a part of the disaster process providing support and assistance within the family network and beyond. Charles Adkins, Director of The Church of God's immediate response team, points out that Wimauma's immigrant population is eager to become involved in the community on a continual basis. "During the hurricanes, I asked for volunteers to cook; so many hands went up. I asked for volunteers to get bedding ready; everyone wanted to help. I asked for volunteers to take care of the sick and elderly; there were so many volunteers that I had to come up with other jobs. If it came down to it, the immigrant population could take care of Wimauma and its entire population."

Wimauma's Mexican population has one thing in common and that is that no one is afraid to work. They may be afraid of what lies beyond the work, but because the bonds of family, community, and cultural identity are so powerfully ingrained, they are able to go beyond the barriers without governmental assistance. Assistance provided by NGOs and religious institutions are used only when the crisis becomes too great.

Single, young, undocumented men had come to find work that they could not find in Mexico. This population is most fearful of authority and remains isolated from the core community. Occasionally, I would see a few men at one of the missions on pantry day, but it is this group that I suggest suffers in silence and is most difficult to reach.

Trinidad and other immigrant women with families confided that there were so many demands on their time and energy, but the perception they had of themselves never included at-risk or vulnerable. In disaster context, gender plays a significant role in household preparation, family recovery, and disaster survival strategies (Enarson 2000), with women reinforcing the resiliency of the community in all phases of the disaster process. Government agencies and local organizations gain acceptance through interaction with the women, further developing a trust that spreads throughout the entire Mexican community.

The prevailing attitude of the immigrant population toward government agencies is perceived as controlling enforcement. The Hillsborough County EOC has not been able to make a connection to the community because it is identified as law enforcement and has difficulty attracting documented and undocumented immigrants in crisis situations. On the other hand, the Hillsborough County School System has gained the trust of the immigrants. The immigrant population works in harmony with the Public School System because it is an institution providing the tools needed to live a fulfilled life in the U.S. Families who feel that they are treated with respect view education as a way out of poverty and way to break the cycle of field labor.



**Figure 5-13. A female informant shows me her hands that she tells me
“will never be pretty and clean.” (2005)**

Immigrants expressed a need to have a voice in the government agencies, NGOs, and the community service organizations. Instead of relying on agency assistance, the Mexican community wants to be a part of the assistance process. In Wimauma, the women are slowly becoming that voice and are major players in building an educated and safe community. This process begins with the religious institutions in Wimauma who work to combat the forces of vulnerability and stabilize the immigrant population. Mexican men and women, documented and undocumented, respond to the church and its NGO affiliations without fear because the church recognizes the significance of maintaining cultural identity. From the religious institutions, the immigrant population found solidarity and strength in times of disaster. Furthermore, they found a strength that would carry over and develop into self-help within their own community.

CHAPTER 6

SELF-HELP WITHIN THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

“There is no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible.”

Heart of Darkness Joseph Conrad

Introduction

The literature documenting the hurricanes of 2004 is abundant and I have read innumerable articles from journals and newspapers recounting the devastation, but found only one article, a brief FEMA press release, referring to the documented and undocumented migrant worker and disaster assistance. The release is titled “Help Flows To The Areas Hardest Hit By Hurricane Charley” and is dated August 14, 2004.

A paragraph near the end of the article states the following:

“FEMA is encouraging migrant workers and undocumented individuals in the region not to hesitate to come forward for ice, food, water, housing, and medical assistance.”

These same words were pulled from this press release and used as the last paragraph in a few Florida newspapers. FEMA openly called to those who needed assistance by addressing the most vulnerable outsiders; however, as suggested in Chapters 3 and 4, because FEMA had not prepared or encouraged individuals to come forward before the disaster, information delivered after the disaster never reached this

population. Once again the same issues arise with fear of authority and language barriers which result in a total breakdown of communication significantly decreasing

the chance that the immigrant population will take advantage of aid provided by governmental agencies. With previous studies (Konrad 1985; Garcia-Acosta 1996) suggesting that hurricanes act as a stimulus and influence entire communities to develop adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms, learning to cope with adversity becomes strength, not a weakness in the Hispanic population of Wimauma.



Figure 6-1. Hurricane Awareness Workshops held in Wimauma show visual images of what happens to mobile homes in a hurricane (2005).

As Cesar Chavez (1968) said, “It should be our duty to help direct the attention to the basic needs of the Mexican-Americans in our society...needs which cannot be satisfied with baskets of food, but rather with effective organizing at the grassroots level.” From the grassroots level, many immigrants in Wimauma are playing a

significant role in providing assistance both before and after not only hurricanes, but also any catastrophic weather event. The settled immigrant population living in Wimauma is proud. They are hard working and many have a vested interest in the community because this is the place that is “better than where we come from and the place that will educate our children.” The last thing they want is to feel insulted or looked down on because their livelihood comes from working the fields (Oliver-Smith 2002; Hoffman 2002).



Figure 6-2. This informant worked in the fields and saved enough money to buy his own trucks that are now used to haul plastic (2005).

As I observed and participated in the lives of informants, my questions were sometimes answered before I had a chance to ask. Do immigrants in Wimauma rely on resources provided by organizations or does help come directly from the immigrant

community? How does the immigrant community of Wimauma respond to disasters?

How does the immigrant community help itself?

“When we first came here, we lived about four years in crisis, without a car and buying old food or seeing if surrounding people would give us food. We would end up eating the oldest meat from close stores and sometimes it was like rotten with green stuff on it and I would try to cut it off” (Trinidad Nuñez interview summer 2005). Only a few weeks into my fieldwork, I sat with Trinidad Nuñez as she swatted flies and fanned herself while telling me the stories about her life in Wimauma. Trinidad’s stories were filled with unimaginable hardships, but yet, they were never told with a tone of regret or pity. Though her life has been hard, she is strikingly beautiful and every word she speaks reveals strength, endurance, fortitude, hope and happiness. Trinidad’s story of the rotten meat remained foremost in my mind throughout my stay in Wimauma and continues to be a symbol of the strength I observed in its immigrant population, particularly the women. I observed the impact of the immigrant women as reflected in self-help through family, kinship and social networks, self-help through church and religion, and self-help through generating income other than wages earned at a weekly job.

Wimauma is a town populated with Hispanic immigrants, men and women, whose first instinct is survival. They have survived what most informants considered the worst experience, the journey from Mexico, and all agree with the informant who said, “Because of the poverty in Mexico, we came to look for life, and well, even though we work every day, we live better now than in Mexico.” Now immigrants are

forced to cope with different survival issues: finding work and holding on to that work, overcoming environmental interruptions due to floods or droughts, developing an understanding of the language, and building trust in those who can provide assistance that strengthens the transition into a new culture.

Women, Family, Kinship, and Social Networks Generating Self-Help

Finding work is the number one priority for those immigrants who have declared Wimauma as home. For some it is a permanent home and for others it is home for the time that crops need planting or picking. Kinship is important in the process of finding work and most immigrants who come to Wimauma are there because someone in their family network has communicated “come to Wimauma for work opportunities.”

A social support network develops between members of the same household, the extended family, and kinship connections. Working together establishes a framework of shared identity enabling the community to come together in times of crisis. This support system allows those immigrants who have just arrived from Mexico or Central America not only a place to live, but provides a social and cultural network that functions as an extended family. This extended family provides a safety net and orientation into a different culture, while still maintaining the shared cultural bond. A protective concern and care for one another was evident in all of the families I observed; furthermore, I saw the same level of support in the kinship network as relatives, often single young men, arrived in Wimauma. Researchers suggest that after Hurricane Andrew the strong emphasis on harmonious interpersonal relationships, particularly within family was most evident in the Latino community (Rodriquez and

O'Donnell 1995 as qtd. in Kaniasty and Norris 2000: 549). Hispanic families valued one another and relied on one another far more than any other social support. Some studies go so far as to suggest that the cultural value of reliance on kinships is a reason Hispanics are less involved with support networks outside the family and other relatives (Beggs et al.1996; Ibáñez et al. 2003). To move outside the family and kinship network is breaking the circle of trust and removing the protective barrier for those who are in the country illegally.

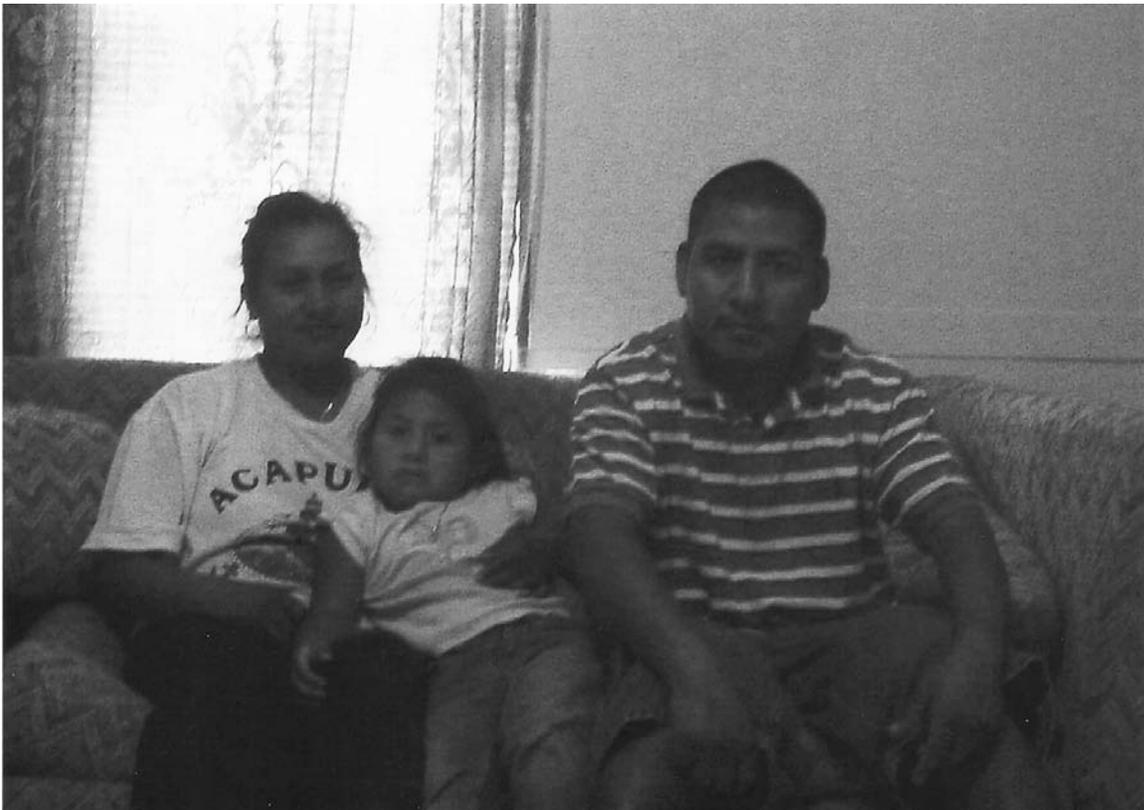


Figure 6-3. This couple followed numerous family members from Oaxaca and all have settled in Wimauma (2005).

I mentioned in Chapter 3, “the Brotherhood of Pain” that Anthony Oliver-Smith (1999) defines as solidarity born of crisis. As a response to disasters, immigrants who

have made a permanent home in Wimauma come to the aid of others who have also settled in the community or nearby. Many informants had extended family members living in other towns in Central Florida. “We decided it would be best if we all stayed together during the first hurricane,” said Trinidad Nuñez. “So we went further south where we have family in Frostproof, Florida. That way we can help each other.” Family members who are listening to her story begin to laugh. Tinidad continues, “The only problem was we went right into the hurricane, because it turned at the last minute. Two cousins lost the citrus groves they had been working in so we brought them back here with us to work in the tomato. We will help one another with work.”



Figure 6-4. These are the remaining dead orange trees destroyed by the hurricanes. This grove will not be replanted (2005).

For the Nuñez family, helping one another find a job in times of crisis becomes a priority. One informant said it was all about having enough money for the family or household. Combining resources and jobs within the family allowed individuals time to plan, particularly if there were a need to move because of economic or social issues. The greater the extended family, the easier it was to find and maintain a job during emergencies and the quicker the recovery time from a disaster. However, the Nuñez family has an advantage in crisis situations, because Renaldo is a legal citizen of the U.S. With legal status, Renaldo owns property, a trailer home, and a truck used for transporting the boxes of tomatoes he and his family will pick from Florida to Tennessee. However, my time with the Nuñez family uncovered an interesting dynamic; though Renaldo was the one documented, Trinidad was the creative entrepreneur who appeared to keep the family and business together. Trinidad and Renaldo's perception of themselves in times of disaster had evolved from begging for food, shelter, and work to a connected extended family with a permanent home and self-employment that kept them safe from exploitation.



Figure 6-5. Alberto built a soccer net for his little brother. He used strong limbs as the frame and tomato twine to make the net (2005).

Trinidad explains that it is the family that keeps everyone informed and points to the newly arrived cousin who must be taught “what to do now that he is here.”

Trinidad’s warnings come from her life experiences and she wants desperately to break the cycle of working in the field, “because” as she points to Renaldo’s hands, “he takes medicine for his hands and back because he has worked so hard stooping and picking.”

Her two youngest sons stand beside her as she tells me how important the education is for Miguel and Alberto. “They learn so much and come home and teach us. If we go to pick the tomato, I send them back with a cousin so that they can start school on time.

Two factors enabling the Nuñez family to be better prepared for a weather related disaster are children who are being educated and work that can lead to home ownership.

Lindell and Perry's (2000) study on how families decreased their vulnerability after the 1971 San Fernando earthquake suggest similar findings relative to emergency preparedness.



Figure 6-6. Javier and Laura welcomed me into their home and shared the stories of their lives (2005).

The overlap of work, social networks, and disaster preparedness is accomplished not only through family and extended family, but also through kinship and social contacts. Laura, Javier's wife, came from Ciudad Juarez in 1989, and immediately found work with a cousin in the strawberry fields. Laura is now a crew leader who runs the lines of approximately four farms during strawberry and blueberry picking. Laura's job allows many friends and family the opportunity to find work by social networking.

It is all about communication Laura tells me, “for the past ten years I have been recruiting for the picking seasons. I find workers who want to pick blueberries on Monday and Friday; we don’t pick every day of the week, because the berries go from field to market. I get fifty to sixty people to pick and package and now the word is out and everyone wants to work with me. I also make the baskets and have them ready for the pickers each morning. I teach others to oversee and I know that I am one of the few women who oversees workers.”

Laura and those immigrant workers she teaches are changing attitudes and opening doors within the community. With coxing from Javier, Laura admits that no longer does she recruit. The communication network is so strong that the people who need work call Laura. Javier says, “She is teaching so many workers to help themselves and one another. They call her Dona Laura and tell everyone that they must work for Dona Laura.”

Laura protects and educates those immigrants who work for her by “treating them as I would want to be treated.” Livelihood vulnerability is most significant after a disaster, (Bolin and Stanford 1998) but Wimauma’s immigrant population did not allow social class, gender, ethnicity, or age to restrict opportunities. Laura explains, “There are many ways to get work, but first we must help one another. I try to tell them that their job is secure with me and if there is danger such as bad weather or any other crisis then they must leave the field no matter what is told to them. I teach them not only about weather dangers, but also how to protect themselves from cruel and demanding

supervisors and other exploiters who think that because we get our hands dirty we are nothing.”



Figure 6-7. After working in the fields all day, this informant still maintained a household. In her work, she found support from other women (2005).

The level of disaster preparedness and awareness of agency services appeared to be closely linked to the family and the women in the household. Legal status did not seem to matter to the women when desperate measures called for assistance from both government and non-government agencies. In the case studies of the Nuñez family and the Izaguirre family, it is the women who have linked the migrant household to job access. Sara Curran and Estela Rivera-Fuentes (2003) also found that women sought support far more than men and were connected to the community through education, social support, and job opportunities. Because of this connection to the family and often the entire community through work, women helped provide stability that men

could not provide. In fact, my findings are supported by those of Hondagneu-Sotela (1994) whose study of a California immigrant community suggests that men may settle first in the community, but it is the women “who are the community builders.” Her studies on gender and migration provide evidence that immigrant women are “socially active in the private sphere of family and home as well as the public sphere in church, school, and the workplace.” In the context of disaster and preparedness, I found that the women were central figures in learning about and obtaining services “while the men were more isolated and knew less about the social services and support available to insure safety and survival (Menjivar 2000).



Figure 6-8. Women, documented and undocumented, came in large numbers to learn what to do during hurricane season (2005).

Self-Help Through Church and Faith-based Organizations

My fieldwork revealed much silent suffering caused by insecurities, disconnection from family, and lack of resources that are needed to make the transition into a new culture. Those immigrants who talked of this disaster of silent suffering found comfort and refuge in the church. “I go to Our Lady Guadalupe every Sunday,” said one informant who told me that it was the first place he went after coming to Wimauma. “Besides,” he adds, everybody goes there.” As I sat in the pews or extra chairs brought in because every service was full to capacity, I observed families, couples, and individuals whose devotion and deep spiritual beliefs gave comfort not just to them, but to all those surrounding them. It was in the sanctuaries of Beth-El Farmworker Ministry and Our Lady Guadalupe that I first saw the strength of the immigrant population of Wimauma. I also found that those immigrants who most frequented the church for assistance were the undocumented because they truly felt that they had no place else to go.



Figure 6-9 and 6-10. Hispanic volunteers gave haircuts to children at a mission "Back to School Day" (2005).

During one evening service I met Alicia. She whispered that she had come here with her five children and had worked very hard to make life good for them, but now she must pray for the son who was the “Bandido.” I understood; I could see the pain and suffering, but I could also see the strength in her eyes. The sanctuary of Beth-El Mission was a room with straight back-unpadded wood chairs. There were no fancy pews with kneeling benches for prayer. I watched as Alicia turned the chair around, knelt on the hard tile floor while resting her elbows on the chair seat and with hands clasped together proceeded to pray for the lost soul of her son. This connection to religion, which provides the spiritual direction that facilitates self-help and helping others, is at the core of the Mexican culture.

Disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes, reveal adaptive strategies linked closely to religion and the church as a religious organization (Garcia-Acosta 1996; Molina 1996). Wimauma’s Hispanic immigrants sought the religious community because the church or mission provided the services needed to help them adapt to their new country without destroying their religious identities, beliefs and practices.

Furthermore, each of Wimauma's religious institutions became centers of worship, education, socialization, and community organizing for Mexican immigrants (Selee 2006; Sanchez 2005). According to Leo Anchondo, national manager of the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform of the Conference of Catholic Bishops, "the principle role of religion goes beyond faith; it is ...a space for organization and for recognition of the existence of the migrant, who is otherwise part of an invisible community."



Figure 6-11. Hispanic women who once need assistance now volunteer their services and help maintain the clothing rooms (2005).

My field notes from a typical worship service suggest that religion developed social skills, involvement in society, and promoted the idea of community outside the walls of the church. I observed Hispanic men and women who first came to Beth-El Mission as immigrant workers in need of services who were now employees, volunteers, and respected members of the Beth-El Mission family. Jorge, Lourdes, and Javier had all worked in the field at one time and now held jobs within the mission

organization. Jorge performed all maintenance tasks, Lourdes was the secretary-receptionist-administrative assistant to everyone, and Javier was Director of Operations. Each had risen to positions of authority and each was now helping immigrants achieve just as they had once been helped. Other immigrants had just come from a day working in the fields and now took leadership roles in the worship service, in the preparation of meals, in the organization of the clothes closet, or in the sacking of the food pantry.

Beth-El Mission's worship services, though affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, were open to all denominations. Two greeters welcomed me into a sanctuary lined with rows of chairs. The walls stood whitewashed and bare except for the occasional icon, a cross or a picture of the Virgin Mary. On the front row sat the Reverend Ros with his back to the congregation. Wearing a microphone, he began to play his guitar and sing while members of the congregation slowly filed in. Soon a woman I had seen the day before working at one of the farms stepped forward to lead the singing. Lyrics were displayed from an overhead transparency in front of a rather empty altar. Voices rang out accompanied by clapping and rhythmic tambourines were held high throughout congregation. In a front corner two men were shaking tambourines while a third man played the drums. An open standing microphone beckoned anyone who wanted a turn to sing and many did. These were the same individuals I had seen working stooped in the heat of the sun. Tonight, as they worshiped, I saw who they really were.

Charles Adkins, Wimauma Convention Center Director and Disaster Relief Director for the Church of God Assembly, has also seen how the immigrants of

Wimauma come together to help one another. “After one hurricane when we had no electricity, I decided to set up grills in the parking lot and start cookin [ing] breakfast. It was seven o’clock and by nine o’clock, we had already fed a thousand people. But what amazed me was that so many of the migrant workers began to help with the setup and the cooking and the transportation. Catholic Charities and Operation Blessing are helping us provide services that will enrich the population spiritually and physically.

Those who came to Beth-El Mission’s evening services or to one of the many Sunday services provided by Our Lady Guadalupe Catholic Church came to worship because they wanted to worship. However, one mission had immigrants sit through a very lone morning service before they could get in line for food, clothing, and other services. As the summer wore on, I observed that fewer men were in attendance and the majority of those who sought assistance from the church were women.

Self-Help Through Informal Economic Activities

If, as Blaike et al. (1994) suggests, disasters are a complex mix of natural hazards and human action, then the Hispanic immigrant community of Wimauma has achieved much with very little in resources. Why is this? The immigrant community is innovative and resourceful. While a large majority of immigrants begin their journey in one of Wimauma’s many churches, some are so busy working that prayer must come in those moments alone working in the field or on the front stoop of a trailer house at the end of a hard day. “I only have my bicycle and it is too far to go to one of the missions so I cook in the Taqueria that is just down the road. When I am out of money, he pays me with food,” said an elderly informant.

Most Mexican immigrants in Wimauma found employment in low paying agricultural jobs and some informants told me that they were paid below the minimum wage. Since many of these individuals were undocumented, they accepted the salary without complaint. However, I found that the immigrant community had developed numerous adaptive strategies to bring in additional income. As one study suggests, this is the working poor population who confront poverty by organizing within the community and collectively finding ways to increase their economy (Zolniski 2006).



Figure 6-12. My translator, Edner, stands in front of a Taqueria in Wimauma. They served the best Horchata in town (2005).

One Saturday morning, I noticed a rather large gathering on a dirt road with no name where sat a mobile home with no address. It was here that women who had

worked all week in the tomato fields were now preparing food that would be sold under an awning throughout the day. This was an innovative little business that served the community and generated spending money for the family. Enterprises such as this required no paper work and no code enforcement, because those preparing the food just said, “We are feeding the family.” In this way the family composed of legal and illegal residents could protect one another while still earning an income. Business was always good and advertising was spread by word of mouth. In good times and in bad, such as after a disaster, the residents of these unnamed streets cooked for the masses.



Figure 6-13. All summer on Saturdays and Sundays, foods were prepared and sold in front of this trailer home by women who had worked all week "in the tomato" (2005).

Other women took in clothing that needed to be repaired, while some worked as seamstresses making the beautiful white dresses worn by the girls for their Quinceañera. The men often had small roadside stands that sold fresh fruit or melon waters and horchata. I frequented a stand owned by Manuel who not only sold the colorful melon waters stored in large glass barrels, but while you waited, he poured his own special batter into hot grease that smoldered in an iron fryer. The result was the most amazing buñuelos that I had ever tasted.

All informal economic activities tended to center around cultural identity and readily available resources. Everyone had roosters and chickens free ranging throughout the community and talents such as sewing and cooking that had been learned in Mexico were put to even greater use when no other work could be found. Wimauma's immigrant population, though poor, finds its richness in its culturally proud community.

If a community's vulnerability were to be measured in the context of self-help, then it would appear that Wimauma's immigrant population could take care of itself in times of disaster. However, with limited access to resources and a lack of communication outside the social support network, Wimauma's population remains vulnerable. As the community becomes stronger through work, language, education, and the economy, the cycle of vulnerability will begin to diminish. In order for the immigrant population to be able to take control of their own lives, NGOs, churches, and faith-based organizations need to promote programs that empower the population, both men and women. The voices of those who have made Wimauma their home represent a

Mexican community that is eager to learn how to protect their families and their community in times of disaster. The numerous gaps between the community and the government agencies that are designed to reach out to the immigrant population could be easily filled if government agencies recognized the communities ability to maintain itself if resources were made available.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fear is a door slammed in your face.
I'm speaking here of a labyrinth
of doors already closed, with assumed
reasons for being, or not being.
for categorizing bad luck
or good, bread, or an expression
-tenderness and panic and frigidity-for the children
growing up. And the silence.

“Not Fear” Rafael Guillén

As I concluded my fieldwork in August, 2005, I made my way home with two very special gifts, a four-foot tall clown piñata and my most treasured gift, a blue sleeveless shirt with a small heart the colors of the Mexican flag, green, white, and red. In the center of the heart are the words “Mexican at Heart.” Initially, I was flattered, but then remembered why I had come to Wimauma, not to be flattered by acceptance, but because here was a community who wanted a voice in finding the answers about how life could be made better, how suffering could be diminished, and how vulnerable populations could be better prepared for the disasters that often control their lives. And that is why as an anthropologist, I was permitted into some of the darkest moments of their lives; I was told many stories of doors being “closed” and fear so intense that existence became a silent suffering. As the Mexican poet Rafael Guillén writes,

“...reasons for being, or not being. ...And the silence.” Wimauma’s Hispanic immigrant population no longer wants to be silent. Instead they want action and a voice in their “being” that is more than rhetoric, not just words written for the glorification of academia or a regional disaster manual in which they do not exist.

Since I had grown up in Central Florida, I was familiar with the devastation caused to the citrus industry by hurricanes, but I did not recall the concern for the migrant workers whose livelihood came from the Florida agricultural industry. So after the catastrophic hurricane season of 2004, I began my study concerning the vulnerability of Florida migrant farmworkers and what happens to this population before, during and after a hurricane. Little did I know that as I drove west leaving Wimauma, the darkest and most devastating hurricane was right behind me and not only would it strike on August 29, 2005, exposing the vulnerability of an entire city, but Katrina would also expose the vulnerability and failure of government resources and agencies established to assist in times of disaster.

In the past five chapters, I have presented an examination of a small agricultural community in Central Florida and the government agencies and NGOs, both community and faith-based, established for the purpose of protecting and helping in the cultural adjustment process while meeting the needs of a community in times of disaster. The goal of my research was to address community and resource perception when the challenge of a natural disaster collides with the insecurities of cultural difference thus

creating the “convergent catastrophe” (Moseley 1999; Garcia-Acosta 1996). The research reveals that agency perception, community population perception, cultural identity and gender play a significant role in the effectiveness of a predominately Mexican immigrant community’s ability to become self-sufficient, politically strong, and economically secure, and as a result, become less vulnerable to disaster and eventually resilient to disaster.

My stay in Wimauma was a delicate balancing act as I moved among the participants and key informants in the immigrant farmworker community, the government agencies, NGOs, and religious institutions. Gathering information through ethnographic research while participating and observing what I considered the two most significant government agencies, the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center and the Hillsborough County Public Schools showed me a contrast in perception of the Mexican population of Wimauma. Both government agencies focused on the human condition, but the perception lens of the EOC tended to demonstrate an inequality of services to the poor immigrants living in the southern sector of Hillsborough County. On the other hand, the Hillsborough County Public Schools had implemented an educational support system linking the migrant population to all services developed to provide awareness and stability within the community. Furthermore, the educational system became the governmental agency providing the core means of communication and assistance in times of greatest need.

The study shows that the EOC has a disaster plan in place for Hillsborough County; however, this plan does not address significant barriers concerning at-risk

populations. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman use the word “condition” when discussing the behavior of individuals and organizations throughout a disastrous event (2002). For example, as human beings, we respond to the disaster process according to a learned cultural pattern. The EOC’s behavior is “conditioned” to respond with a lack of urgent concern to the immigrant population because there is a silent understanding that the responsibility will fall to a non-profit agency or a religious institution. The immigrant population is also “conditioned;” it is a population that has not developed a trusting relationship with the EOC and therefore, perceives the EOC as a threat that is often far worse than the disaster itself because the EOC appears authoritative and threatening before, during, and after a disaster.

On the other hand, the Hillsborough County Public Schools and the Migrant Education Program take on the task of education, safety, and accountability, while breaking down the barriers within the immigrant community. As an agency under the Florida Department of Education, the school system has provided programs that link the migrant community to an awareness of all programs that will help families achieve economic and social self-sufficiency. An examination of the migrant programs implemented by the schools found that from kindergarten to adult education, the primary focus was literacy, language, and overall communication. I found several established themes in the context of disaster education that the Hillsborough County Schools have implemented successfully.

The schools work diligently with the community providing social workers, migrant advocates, teachers, classroom assistants, and adult migrant students. All work

towards one goal and that is to identify the needs of migrant parents. I observed the presence of agencies from the Hillsborough County School System at Beth-El Mission's Pantry Days where they identify students and families in need of more than just food. I helped distribute bags of school supplies and food to immigrant children sixteen and over who were enrolled in the Adult Education Program at Beth-El Mission. I watched Jorge Donates, with Vocational Rehabilitation Services, work the crowded lines of immigrants. His questioning in Spanish allowed him to connect the individual to the services provided by the Florida Department of Education.

Educational support directed toward the immigrant parents developed a trusting relationship while at the same time solving issues of inequality and making available resources that stimulate awareness of impending disaster. I observed immigrant parents, particularly the women, clustered together outside Wimauma Elementary School waiting for their children to be dismissed for the day. Knowing that many of these parents were undocumented, I observed that when it came to the well-being and education of their children, fears of deportation seemed to disappear because educational agencies conform to the needs of the community and are perceived to be unthreatening. However, families acknowledge that deportation looms in the shadows if they are in the country illegally. Shortly before I began my fieldwork, the authorities apprehended an entire harvesting bus and all individuals without proper documentation were taken away. The responsibility for children left behind is with the schools whose advocates are equipped to meet the needs of these children because cultural knowledge has led to documentation of situations and plans are in place.

Poverty, cultural identity, and language difficulties are common causes of social isolation for parents and children. The effect of this isolation has a domino effect causing families to not seek assistance even though services are needed to maintain a minimal level of living. School guidance counselors are trained to address the effect of language, poverty, and cultural identity, barriers affecting a child's self-confidence and self-esteem. The children of immigrant parents learn very early that they are different, because many have been moved from school to school and state to state. However, the children I interviewed did not appear to lack self-esteem or self-confidence. I concluded that this was because I conducted informal interviews in the context of cultural setting. Church picnics, Vacation Bible School, and parties held in the comfort of the child's home provided me the opportunity to observe social interaction that strengthened the community and added another layer of resiliency to their culture. I observed a pride in the children as they translated the words of their parents so that I might hear their stories.

Much responsibility is placed on the immigrant children who are often torn between two cultures. As the family translator, these children provide their parents with a general knowledge of their community and make them aware of agency services such as food distribution, childcare, and disaster preparedness. Young teen informants felt enormous pressure to take care of their parents and younger siblings often neglecting school because they experienced guilt and the need to go to work for the family.

Immigrant women who once worked as laborers in the field have gained computer skills, language skills, and cultural adjustment skills that allow them the

ability to work in the educational setting thus becoming a bridge connecting the immigrant population to the resources provided by the Hillsborough County Schools. This group of women provided the cultural sensitivity needed to effectively communicate disaster preparedness to the immigrant population made up of the permanent settlers and those who sought stability in mobility.

In Chapter 3, I draw attention to the infrastructure of governmental agencies and the responsibility of those agencies to educate and protect all populations including those that are most vulnerable. Laura Nader's statement is as true today as it was in 1974, "never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many members of the species," With disasters a part of our existence in a world globally connected, the "inactions" of a few leads to disaster for many. I found that Wiamuma's instability during times of disaster is a lack of resources reaching the laborers who remain isolated and ignored throughout the disaster process.

While compiling this study, I have, occasionally, during hurricane season, sought information on line through Hillsborough County governmental sources concerning shelters and evacuation procedures affecting Wimauma. The results have been discouraging and perhaps even frightening. Most immigrant informants expressed concern because so many agricultural laborers had nothing but a day to day existence; no money, no permanent place to live, no transportation and no family connection, making access to a computer, radio, or television impossible. The EOC has no planned action in place to provide for the immigrant farmworker population. My observation of FEMA and the county EOC revealed that both agencies are aware that not enough has

been done to prepare the immigrant community, but the dialogue places the implementation of such services directly into the hands of the local NGOs and the religious institutions.

There are studies that support the concept that risk is “culturally constructed” and therefore, viewed differently by certain populations. Robert Paine (1998) suggests that normalcy for some populations is to live in a risky environment thus adapting to the situations brought about by disasters (Oliver-Smith 1986). I often heard a similar response when dealing with the EOC. As one informant stated, “Why do they [Mexican migrant workers] want to live here when they could go to Tennessee and pick tomatoes?” The Hillsborough County EOC is concerned about the welfare of the general population during and after disasters strike, but the concern never develops into an accountability and responsibility of the issues surrounding Wimauma’s immigrant population. The issues affecting the Hillsborough County Emergency Operations Center and the immigrant population are of concern to the local NGOs and religious institutions in Wimauma.

The EOC lacks communication with the grassroots organizations such as local NGOs and religious institutions causing an even greater gap in communication between those who are the decision makers and those who work daily with a specific population of individuals. This communication gap is not as extensive as it could be if it were not for the implementation of the Hispanic Liaison whose job it is to coordinate between the governmental authorities and the Hispanic population.

“Ethnic marginalization” leads to a lack of “collective action” which further alienates the immigrant community after a disaster (Blaikie et al. 1994; Dynes and Tierney 1994). Furthermore, Wimauma’s Mexican population functions within a forced marginalization. I found that because the population experiences isolation, it is often required to rely on resources outside the government agencies and often outside the NGOs. When resources from local churches are made available, hundreds of immigrants arrive for everything from shampoo to infant formula. The EOC has historically had problems getting services to this population; I observed an attitude wherein preparedness was taken seriously, but with an inequality of who would receive the services. .

As a government agency, the EOC does not supply spiritual or emotional support to the immigrant community, and this too causes a further disconnect which reveals a lack of cultural sensitivity. One informant pointed out that because “we speak a language other than English, they [authorities] think we are not smart. I observed this same attitude when dealing with the EOC. After a disaster, picture boards are used to gain information from non-English speakers instead of taking interpreters or Spanish speakers into the areas of destruction. The picture boards have provided a service, but an understanding of the culture in times of disaster has been neglected and informants told me that often they felt that it was demeaning to just point to a picture when they were capable of dialogue with agency workers.

Educating the immigrant population to the environmental hazards relevant to specific areas and teaching them how to access needed resources should be as much a

priority for the EOC as it is for the public schools, but I found that preparedness workshops in vulnerable areas of the county are not a priority for the EOC. Any town meetings or disaster preparedness workshops were organized by the school system, local churches or the Hispanic liaison for the county. In order to attract large numbers of immigrants, all information gatherings were held either in schools or churches.

The EOC provides no transportation for the movement of individuals living in Wimauma who have no way to seek shelters or safe areas. If it had not been for the Church of God, the majority of Wimauma's population would have had no shelter to go to because designated shelters are in other communities. The list of designated shelters is a distance from Wimauma and transportation and care of elderly and sick immigrants is not provided by government agencies. Transportation is a major concern in Wimauma, because there is no bus service. Everyone walks or rides a bicycle and those who do have vehicles transport many individuals and family members to and from work.

As suggested in chapters 3 and 4, government agencies and NGOs treat the immigrant community with significant differences. My study found that in Wimauma the number one barrier is language or the communication gap, because from this gap the barriers of distrust and fear become factors that keep the immigrant population from seeking governmental assistance at any time in the disaster process. Language opens doors for those coming from Mexico and other Latino countries, but for those who do not speak English, the only open doors are those provided by the religious institutions. The churches are an entrance not only into the spiritual and emotional needs, but it also

guides the immigrants to the other local resources provided by NGOs. The NGOs and religious institutions in Wimauma treat the immigrants with respect and dignity providing greatly needed services they could receive no other way.

The immigrant population primarily focuses on protection of the community as family and by being inventive they are able to make use of resources that already exist. To the casual observer a drive through this town would leave only the notion of old, run down buildings, businesses providing little economic value, but once off the main highway, every street provides a colorful insight into the Mexican heritage. Weekends find many of Wimauma's immigrant population involved in some sort of informal financial gain. Home cooking for the locals to purchase, stands with melon juice being sold, yard sales, and seamstress work are just a few of the ways I observed immigrants in Wimauma making extra money.

I found that this informal economy does more than provide a supplemental income; it also connects the community in times of disaster and provides a network of support that is visible throughout the entire disaster process. Earlier, I discussed that the initial vulnerability encountered by immigrants arriving in the U.S. weakened their ability to become self-sufficient and I further suggested that this vulnerability is a part of "convergent catastrophes"(Moseley 1999) caused by barriers that are imposed by society's view of cultural differences; these same perceptions often found within the government agencies. However, I found immigrants combating the stigma of vulnerability while unifying the community from within and making available to

Wimauma's immigrants a support system that addresses the barriers, provides a voice in disaster preparedness, and promotes resiliency in times of disaster.

Main Street Wimauma is lined with a sparse number of businesses run by the local Hispanic population. I frequented these places, La Frutería Mexicana, where I ate my first cactus pear or "tuna," Odds and Ends, where I purchased bandanas, and the convenience store that prepared fried gizzards all day long. These and other small businesses play a vital role in Wimauma, because as an isolated population money goes back into the community's economy further developing a pride and ownership in the settled and unsettled population.

A significant factor in Wimauma's ability to organize before, during and after disaster is the strength of its women. Not only do the women provide stability to those who have settled, but also they provide a comfort for those who are mobile. Previous studies concerning gender in the context of disaster have shown that women reflect a growing migration population (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Enarson 2000). In Wimauma, they are in the fields and the packinghouses and they can be found working in the restaurants and the small shops. The immigrant women discussed in this thesis are in search of a new identity, an identity that is not "marginalized as inferior," but rather one that embraces the self through culture (Hekman 1995).

Many of the women in my study were enrolled in computer and language classes through the Migrant Adult Education Programs which provides them not only the ability to get better paying jobs, but to also give them confidence which in turn makes them less vulnerable. Consequently, these should be the women who become

empowered and politically active. However, I found that within Wimauma, the women still held the lower paying jobs while a few of the men had moved from agricultural field work into higher paying jobs in construction. Key male informants had once worked the farms, but with educational opportunities had become politically active and had moved into management positions. Unlike the men, the women had not moved past the clerical jobs and the helpers and assistants in the missions, daycare centers, and local establishments.

Recommendations

Wimauma's population of Mexican immigrants lives in a politically, socially, and economically marginalized community. Wimauma's infrastructure does not provide services that most communities take for granted. Many side streets are not paved and roads are filled with deep gullies formed by the seasonal rains. Streetlights are seldom found in residential areas and darkness becomes the norm. Wimauma's one Sheriff works only Monday thru Friday, leaving the community vulnerable on the weekends. Medical care is provided by one small clinic at the edge of town. Lack of public transportation leaves immigrants stranded and isolated. Seeking less expensive resources in surrounding communities is impossible without transportation. Further study should address the specifics of what can be done to provide services for a community "that gets by on very little."

Wimauma needs a comprehensive emergency plan that has been designed with leadership from all citizens, including the Mexican population. For too long, legal and illegal has defined an entire ethnicity. Authorities who make the decisions affecting

Wimauma hold a negative perception and tend to treat the entire Mexican population differently, not as contributing members of society. Bringing the community together before disaster strikes should be a priority and one that could be easily accomplished if local NGOs set gatherings at schools and churches, non threatening environments where trust can be established. An effort was being made, but on such a limited level that only those immigrants not working during the day could attend.

As mentioned earlier, transportation provided by religious institutions will diminish the barrier of fear. Free transportation to and from meetings will begin a process that eventually will become familiar. This same transportation will move the immigrants to hurricane shelters that are sanctioned by FEMA and to those shelters within the community provided by the local organizations and churches. Prior preparation meetings should involve the entire community as a means to further develop trust, responsibility, and accountability within the population. Giving responsibility and providing the resources will nurture security and hope, which would mean so much more than the occasional disaster-related information handed out at a mission on pantry day.

Open communication should focus on preparedness, response, and recovery with preparedness being the major focus. Preparedness requires planning and financial assistance for immigrants, government agencies, NGOs, and religious institutions.

I began Chapter 1 with an observation that became a familiar scene. Women, seeking assistance for their families, sought only the basic necessities, food and clothing. These same women were then told to prepare for a hurricane. I would

recommend that Hillsborough County find funding to provide every immigrant family a preparedness kit with all the supplies needed for survival. Money vouchers for medication and special needs provisions should be issued. Services such as these will change the perceptions of all who are a part of Wimauma. However, it will take more than just studies to bring change to a community whose identity is its culture.

Two and a half years have past since I spent the summer in Wimauma. I have kept in touch with a few of my informants and have been told that nothing has really changed. A google search reveals the same demographic information, news headlines are old and still about the transporting of illegal field workers, slave labor rings discovered, and the usual articles about poverty and fund raisers to help immigrant children. I am unable to detach myself from the memories because I know the stories of a Mexican community that held so much potential. Sadly, there is a new google search and it is titled “Addiction Centers in Wimauma.”

APPENDIX A
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ABE	Adult Basic Education
CBO	Community Based Organization
CEMP	Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
COFFO, INC	Coalition of Florida Farmworkers, Inc.
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FBCO	Faith Based Community Organization
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FSRC	Family Support Research Center
HCHSR	Hillsborough County Historic Resources Survey Report
LCO	Local Community Organizations
MSFW	Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers
NGO	Non Government Organizations
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RCMA	Redlands Christian Migrant Association
TEFAP	The Emergency Food Assistance Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDOL	United States Department of Labor

APPENDIX B
AUTHOR WITH INFORMANT



I stand to the right of an informant who has come to the Mission for assistance. Wimauma's missions introduce newly arrived immigrants to all aspects of an unfamiliar culture. Most importantly, she tells me that here she feels safe and the information she gathers will help her as a woman and a mother.

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