

**Reproduction of and alterations in gender roles in the rescue of material goods  
after the 2011 earthquake in Lorca (Spain)**

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**ABSTRACT**

After a disaster, the population undertakes a series of actions aimed at saving and rescuing other people who may be in danger, as well as the gathering of goods considered indispensable to ensure their safety. Numerous studies have indicated that gender is one of the factors that conditions the lived experience of a catastrophe and, therefore, the actions that people undertake during the emergency. However, previous studies addressing the issue of gender in this respect have focused on how people are evacuated from the danger area, rather than on the rescue of goods. With the aim of contributing to filling this gap, the current article studies the patterns of the reproduction of/alteration in gender roles in the rescue of material goods following the earthquake in Lorca (Spain) in 2011 through the analysis of raw data collected from four focus groups comprising people who survived this catastrophic event. The results demonstrate that during the rescue actions in the catastrophe the men and women studied behaved to a great extent in line with traditional gender roles, although there were certain actions undertaken that involved a degree of alteration to these roles.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender, roles, earthquake, risk, rescue.

**Introduction**

Since the 1990s various studies have tried to analyse disasters from a gender perspective. They have principally been carried out by scientists from Asia, the USA and the UK, and have focused on aspects such as the differential impact of catastrophes on the mortality and health of men and of women, the widening of gender inequality and the increased vulnerability of women and incidence of gender violence following a disaster, among others (Wiest *et al.*, 1995; Enarson, 1999; Oxfam International, 2005; Akerkar, 2007; Fisher, 2010; Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013; Seager, 2014).

In recent years, though, other territories, such as Spain and Latin America, have begun to be incorporated into studies of gender and disasters. Following in the footsteps of previous works, they have addressed the socioeconomic factors that impact on the lived experience of the catastrophe and, recently, have begun to consider the female leadership actions that women may undertake in its wake (Moreno & Shaw, 2018).

Another of the issues analysed, albeit to a lesser extent, has been the influence gender roles play both during and after a catastrophic event. Gender roles derive from the process of socialisation through which men and women learn how to behave in line with the social and cultural norms in place at the time (Risman, 2004). However, their dynamic character cannot be ignored, given that these roles change and/or evolve on the basis of the social context and moment in history analysed. In this sense, investigating the influence of gender roles in disaster situations provides information about whether, in exceptional and extreme circumstances, people act in accordance with such roles or, in contrast, whether the rupture of the everyday state of affairs produced by the disaster causes them to be transformed and/or altered. One of the pioneering works in this regard is that by Fothergill (1999), which applies the concept of the triple role, initially proposed by Moser (1989) in relation to development contexts, to analyse women's contributions in disaster situations. Fothergill concludes that in these situations women do perform

gendered reproductive, productive and community roles. However, her findings also indicate that any alteration of these roles that may occur is not always clear, especially in regard to women's productive and reproductive roles.

After a disaster, such as an earthquake, people focus on survival, carrying out tasks that are aimed at saving not only themselves, but also at rescuing other people and essential goods. However, the few systematic studies that demonstrate the extent to which these aspects play out in terms of gender refer to the rescue of people (Enarson & Scanlon, 1999; Shih *et al.*, 2002; Horton, 2012; Dema Moreno *et al.*, 2022) rather than to the rescue of material goods, which appears to be a lacuna in the literature, albeit one we hope to address in this paper. Systematically studying the goods that men rescue and how they go about it and comparing this with the goods rescued by women and their approach to such rescues enables the material priorities of the two sexes to be established. Furthermore, it shines a light on the extent of the risk taken in the rescue of goods and whether, in these exceptional disaster contexts, men and women simply reproduce gender roles, or if in fact these roles are altered. It is also a way of getting information on how other variables, such as socioeconomic inequality prior to a disaster, may interact with gender in disaster scenarios. To try and analyse these questions, this article is based on primary data from four focus groups carried out with people who survived the earthquake in Lorca (Spain) in 2011.

### **The influence of gender roles in the study of disasters**

Since the 1990s, various feminist researchers have demonstrated that the impact of disasters of natural origin is conditioned as much by gender inequalities as by the socioeconomic status of men and women (Enarson & Morrow, 1998; Fothergill, 1999; Enarson & Scanlon, 1999; Kumar-Range, 2001). Specifically, a number of studies have

evidenced the differential impact on men and women of disasters with respect to mortality and health (Oxfam International, 2005; Akerkar, 2007; Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013), while others have highlighted the increase in gender violence (Enarson, 1999; Fisher, 2010; Seager, 2014), and others still the greater impact that increases in economic inequality (Wiest *et al.*, 1995; Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013; Llorente-Marrón *et al.*, 2020a) and social vulnerability after a disaster (Llorente-Marrón *et al.*, 2020b) have on women.

Another aspect which has been studied, although to a lesser extent, is the impact of gender roles during and after a catastrophic event. In the last two decades in particular, various studies have shown that the gendered division of labour is maintained after disasters such as floods and earthquakes in that while men in general are involved in tasks related to the reconstruction of buildings or infrastructure, the tasks that women carry out are principally reproductive in nature and take place within the home or the temporary accommodation they find themselves in (Enarson & Scanlon, 1999; Shih *et al.*, 2002; Horton, 2012). What is more, some studies indicate that the reproductive role of women is not only maintained after a catastrophe, but rather intensifies as a result of the increase in reproductive and care work that follows a disaster (Fothergill, 1999; Singh *et al.*, 2013). However, and despite the importance in terms of survival of many of the actions women carry out in a disaster and/or its aftermath, their work is often 'masked' or invisible because it is linked to the care of the family or community (Enarson & Scanlon, 1999; Bradshaw, 2001; Horton, 2012; Dhungel & Ojha, 2012; Hou & Wu, 2020; McNamara *et al.*, 2020).

More recently, certain researchers have begun to focus their attention on the roles undertaken by men and by women in the emergency phase, specifically with respect to evacuation and rescue (Bateman & Edwards, 2002; Shih *et al.*, 2002; Tyler & Fairbrother,

2013; Whittaker *et al.*, 2016; Parkinson & Duncan, 2018; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2018; Hou & Wu, 2020; Dema Moreno, 2022; K.C. & Hilhorst, 2022). The scientific literature to date has generally focused on the evacuation and rescue of people, evidencing that both men and women are actively involved in this phase, although it also suggests that they do not necessarily act in the same way (Hou & Wu, 2020; Dema Moreno, 2022; K.C. & Hilhorst, 2022). Some studies highlight the prominent role played by men in this scenario, which is also reinforced by the images disseminated through the media, where capacities that are linked to hegemonic masculinity, such as strength and bravery, are foregrounded (Cox *et al.*, 2008; Tyler & Fairbrother 2013; Enarson & Pease, 2016; Rushton *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, the active role played by women during an emergency has passed largely unnoticed, women traditionally being considered as mere victims of catastrophes. However, when women's rescue actions have been studied, it has been observed that women may in fact put their own lives at risk in order to save children or people with dependency needs (Oxfam International, 2005; Hou & Wu, 2020; K.C. & Hilhorst, 2022). It has also been shown that women stay with those they rescue as well as the fact that they often organise themselves collectively in order to identify those in the immediate locality who may be in danger, thus widening the traditional notion of what rescue means (Dema Moreno *et al.*, 2022).

The current scientific literature has not, however, examined in any detail the role that men and women undertake with respect to the rescue of material goods in a disaster context. There is, though, some evidence that the skills and capacities of women in terms of the management of goods and resources are of great value after a catastrophe, for example their knowledge of how to safely store water and foodstuffs (Charan *et al.*, 2016) and the setting up and running of community kitchens (Moreno & Shaw, 2018). These skills and abilities of women are clearly not a question of chance, but rather a consequence

of the gender roles they fulfilled prior to the disaster, themselves a result of the gendered division of labour which influences the tasks which are socially ascribed to men and to women (Benería, 1979; England & Folbre, 1999). Therefore, as this article proposes, it is important to know the extent to which men and women are involved in the rescue of material goods during an emergency and what relationship these actions have to gender roles, particularly the gendered division of labour.

## **Study area**

Spain is part of the Iberian Peninsula, in the south of Western Europe, and north of Africa. The Iberian Peninsula is on the south-eastern edge of the Eurasian plate, where it collides with the African. This collision of the two plates is what is responsible for the seismic movements that are produced, not only on the Iberian Peninsula but also in other Mediterranean countries such as Algeria, Greece, and Turkey. However, despite its geographical location, Spain does not generally experience large earthquakes, although there being regular seismic activity (Instituto Geológico y Minero de España, 2011).

The earthquake selected for this study occurred in the Spanish town of Lorca, in the region of Murcia, and its surroundings. There is moderate seismic activity in this zone, meaning that low and/or moderate magnitude events of this type are frequent in the area (Instituto Geográfico Nacional, 2011). On May 11, 2011 at 18.47 hours there was an earthquake of  $M_w^1$  5.1 approximately three kilometres from Lorca, which had been preceded by one of  $M_w$  4.5 at 17.05 (Figure 1) which weakened certain buildings and

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<sup>1</sup>  $M_w$  is the abbreviation used in the seismological scale to indicate moment magnitude which was developed by Hanks & Kanamori (1979). It is a logarithmic scale which allows earthquakes to be measured and compared on the basis of the total energy liberated by a seismic event. No earthquakes above 9.6  $M_w$  have ever been recorded.

made them more vulnerable (Instituto Geográfico Nacional, 2011). On the European EMS-98<sup>2</sup> scale, this correlates to intensities of 6 and 7, respectively (Instituto Geográfico Nacional, 2011), making it the most destructive earthquake on Spanish territory in recent decades. It resulted in the deaths of 9 people –four women and five men–, 324 people were injured and 19,000 displaced, as well as more than 500 buildings being destroyed (Instituto Geológico y Minero de España, 2011).

[Figure 1 about here]

The impact of natural disasters is known to be influenced by the economic and social context of where the event occurs. In this sense, it should be taken into account that in 2011 Spain was in the grip of the financial crisis that hit almost all countries in the world. In fact, the crisis resulted in very high levels of unemployment in Spain, from which the country has still not fully recovered, and this had a particularly negative impact on domestic finances. In fact, of the OECD countries, Spanish households were among those whose incomes dropped most, along with their purchasing power, which was felt most harshly by those who were already poor, basically as a result of the austerity policies put in place by the national government at the behest of the European Union (OECD, 2014). The crisis also impacted gender relations. Whilst unemployment initially escalated mostly in the construction sector, which is highly masculinised, the rate of female employment was also negatively impacted, especially in particularly feminised areas such as health, education, and social services. The loss of income also fell disproportionately on women, who were overrepresented in jobs of a precarious nature and/or that were part-time and low-paid (Gálvez, 2013). In Lorca, these same dynamics were observed,

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<sup>2</sup> The European macroseismic scale measures the global intensity of an earthquake. It not only takes into account the damage produced, but also its effects on people and objects (Instituto Geográfico Nacional, 2011: 29). The intervals it employs goes from I, which means the earthquake has not been felt, to XII, indicating an earthquake that results in total devastation.

particularly the reduction in the number of women being employed and the increase in registered female unemployment, all of which, in the long term, made economic recovery particularly difficult for women (Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal, 2022).

### **Methodological aspects**

Our literature search having confirmed the lack of research focused on the role played by men and by women with respect to the rescue of material goods following a disaster, this study aims to analyse the issue within the scenario of the earthquake in Lorca (Spain) in 2011. We selected a disaster of this type, on the one hand, because of its intense nature, which required immediate evacuation and rescue actions by the population, and on the other, due to the fact that, compared to other socioenvironmental disasters, its origins are not the result of human activity, thus making it a particularly suitable event within which to comprehend the impact that gender relations may have.

In May 2019, eight years after the catastrophe, within the framework of the GENDER (Gender, Disasters and Risk) project, four focus groups comprised of people involved in the earthquake were set up. This technique is particularly suitable for research that is exploratory in nature, such as this study, in that it facilitates the comprehensive understanding of the social meaning that people attribute to the phenomenon under investigation. The focus groups in this case have therefore enabled the recovery of the collective memory of the disaster, constructed through the interaction of those affected by the event.

In designing the focus groups we tried, as required by this technique, to combine the homogeneity necessary for the discourse to flow easily with the heterogeneity needed to guarantee discursive diversity. With the aim of guaranteeing internal homogeneity, two of the focal groups was made up of women, and the two others of men. In separating the

groups along gender lines, we aimed to avoid power relationships being acted out in the groups, while also providing the opportunity to ascertain more clearly the differences between the lived experience of men and women, as well as the processes of the reproduction or alteration of traditional gender roles. At the same time, to ensure a degree of socioeconomic similarity, half the groups were composed of people who had the economic resources to pay for alternative accommodation or had second homes where they could stay in the post-disaster period (medium to high socioeconomic level), while the other two groups comprised those without such resources (low to medium socioeconomic level). To guarantee the greatest amount of within-group heterogeneity possible, in each focus group we sought to ensure variety in terms of age, marital status, family composition and caring responsibilities, accommodation circumstances, occupation, educational level and income (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

Finally, it is important to highlight that, although research into gender and disasters generally uses a binary conception of gender, some recent works have moved beyond this duality (Wisner *et al.*, 2016; Dominey-Howes *et al.*, 2018; Rushton *et al.*, 2019). In the present work, the focus groups were separated into those for men and those for women as participants did not declare any other sexual/gender identities. It should be noted that whilst the methodological design of the focus groups did not specifically take this variable into account neither did it consider ethnicity, but some people from the gypsy community did participate.

In carrying out the fieldwork, the usual ethical considerations for this type of qualitative research were taken into account, namely, participation in the focus groups was voluntary, participants were told their contributions would be used anonymously and

each person signed a written informed consent form before participating in a focus group. In addition, given the particular nature of this research, we also felt it important to address another issue; the need to wait to carry out the focus groups until a sufficiently long time had passed after the catastrophe for the participating to no longer be seriously impacted by the catastrophe. Even so, the formation of the focal groups was not an easy matter, as many people did not want to have to relive their experiences. This difficulty meant that it was only possible to conduct four focus groups, and although this number is not very high, Guest *et al.* (2017) found that 90% of the themes that are brought to light through the use of this technique appear in the first three to six focus groups conducted. Our experience not only corroborates this, but also leads us to believe that discourse diversity is related less to having a large number of groups, and more to the good design of the sample.

The recruitment of focus group participants was made using the snowball technique, the discussion in all the groups flowed easily and the moderators had very little need to intervene to move the conversation on. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed following a procedure whereby the information was first codified and then an interpretive analysis of each code was conducted with the aim of understanding the social discourse of the different focus groups. And finally, the analysis of the different focus groups was compared.

### **The rescue of goods that facilitate human survival**

The analysis of the women's focus groups revealed that one of the central elements in their discourse is their preoccupation, both at the time of the disaster and immediately after it, with the rescue of essential goods. Despite the speed with which the

evacuation was carried out, some women rescued clothes to help them deal with adverse conditions:

P3: [Imitating her husband] 'Grab some clothes and let's go'. And I grabbed some trousers, I don't know if they were winter or summer ones, for each of us, some shirts and some underwear. (Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

P5: I got some warm clothes, I don't know why but I thought that we'd perhaps be needing them, and this was the first earthquake, which wasn't very strong. (Women, medium to high socioeconomic level)

That said, the initiative to rescue clothing does not always come from the woman, as can be seen in the first excerpt above where it is the husband who makes the suggestion, though it is the wife who takes responsibility for choosing what clothes to take and then managing their care. The involvement of women in the rescue of clothing, however, is not random, rather it is an extension of the reproductive tasks they carried out before the disaster struck. Managing issues related to the clothes of other members of the family – including their acquisition, their washing, ironing, and organisation – has been shown to traditionally be women's work (Benería, 1979; England & Folbre, 1999). What is more, the fact that women make reference to finding and taking with them warm clothing even though the earthquake happened in spring, when it is quite warm in Lorca, is indicative of the women having the capacity to plan, even in this challenging situation. And this ability is not something that appeared spontaneously, rather it is a product of prior socialisation.

Another of the material priorities at the time of their evacuation from their homes that is mentioned by women is the rescue of medication:

P8: Me, the only thing I grabbed was my husband's medication; he's had depression for years, and it was the first thing I grabbed, nothing else ... (Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

Whilst we do not know whether in the case above it was the woman herself who was responsible for administering her husband's medicine before the disaster, the literature provides evidence that, both before and following a catastrophe, it is women who generally take responsibility for the care of family members, especially those with dependency needs or who are ill (Benería, 1979; England & Folbre, 1999; Dhungel & Ojha, 2012; Hou & Wu, 2020). In her role as carer, this woman recognises that medication is essential for the family's immediate subsistence and the well-being of her husband following the earthquake. Through her rescue of her husband's medication she executes a preventative action, relating on the one hand to guarding against shortages of the said medication in the post-disaster period, and on the other, ensuring that the illness is treated, which is particularly important in the case of mental health problems, which may well be exacerbated as a result of the catastrophe.

Another of the material goods which is alluded in reference to evacuating the home, especially by the participants in the women's low to medium socioeconomic level focus group, is money. Although no differences were observed between the women's groups of diverse socioeconomic levels with respect to the rescue of clothes and medication, there were differences where the rescued item was money, that indicate the intersection of gender and class. Specifically, the low to medium socioeconomic level women considered money to be essential for them to deal with what lay ahead for them, as can be seen in these excerpts:

P3: We ran out of the house in what we were wearing, and I grabbed my purse and what was in it, I don't even remember what I had, and we spent the night in the car.

(...)

P8: And I got my bank withdrawal book and my dog, and my husband, of course.  
(Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

This concern was not only manifested during the emergency, but also in the post-disaster where the participants explained their need to save money:

P3: So, later, a cousin of mine went and I said to him, "Right" I gave him the key: "Right, you go and see if you can rescue anything useful, and if not, never mind". He called me, and he said, he called me on my mobile and said: "Cousin, you can't get into the bedrooms, and if you want anything from the dining room...". And I say: "And do you think the dining room's ok?". He says: "I think the furniture in the dining room's ok". So, then we sent another cousin with a car and a trailer, and they saved that, they took it to a unit on the industrial park where that didn't charge us anything, because I said that if I'm going to rent somewhere to keep this then it's going to cost me more than the furniture's worth. (Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

Previous scientific evidence shows that, in more disadvantaged homes, men are not involved in the management of the household budget as women, whereas they are often in charge of this in more affluent homes. The centrality of economic aspects in the discourse of women of low to medium socioeconomic level thus supports the finding in the literature that it is the women in households of this social class who were mainly

undertaking this task before the disaster (Wilson, 1987; Hertz, 1988; Morris & Ruane, 1989; Coria, 1991; Vogler & Pahl, 1993; Vogler & Pahl, 1994; Mazzota *et al.*, 2019; Çineli, 2020).

For their part, in the focus groups of medium to high socioeconomic level, both men and women are aware of having savings and/or a second home, which provides them with additional economic security which could account for their lack of reference to this issue. And, given that these households are more comfortably-off financially, the management of household finances does not necessarily fall solely to the women, and nor does it imply an extra responsibility for them on top of other domestic tasks.

The female discourse with respect to the rescue of material goods suggests that women's priorities at the time of an emergency link to tasks that they were already doing before the catastrophe. These tasks are the result of the gendered division of labour and, for women, are manifested through reproductive and/or care roles, which do not disappear during the emergency, but are in fact intensified through the rescue of various goods that are able to guarantee the survival and care of their immediate family after the earthquake.

### **When the action is more important than what is rescued**

The discourse of the focus groups comprised by men differs considerably to that of the women. On the one hand, it focuses mostly on explaining what they had to do to get back into their homes after the earthquake and the state their homes were in and, on the other, it does not revolve around the goods they were able to rescue, which was the central aspect of the women's discourse.

P7: I was a bit stupid. At night I went to my house and went in. I went into the flat. And I had such a shock because there was this loud crash, I don't know what

it was... I was with a friend and I thought that [the building] was falling down with me in it...

P1: Yeah, yeah. That happened to me too; [the flat] shook, a huge crash, a wardrobe that fell over. And like, what I had in my hands at that moment was what I left with... I just ran out.

P4: I sent my brother-in-law, and when they were inside, they ran out [laughter]  
(Men, low to medium socioeconomic level)

P1: For me, I had this feeling like, come on, let's go and rob things from my house. That's the feeling I remember... that you went in when you weren't allowed to, like a game and you didn't even know what to take...

P3: I'm going to tell you a story because it's really funny. Along with a soldier from the UME [Military Emergency Unit], me and my wife were thinking: I can buy a rope and go up to the flat with two or three suitcases and then I can lower them down with the rope [laughing]... And later, when I went there at night, there I was with the rope hanging down the wall so I could pass the cases down to my brother-in-law, and with the soldier that I'd gone into the flat with, I realised I couldn't hold the weight of the cases. So, I asked my brother-in-law to come up because he was the only one strong enough [to lower the cases]. And when I got back to my wife, I'd only picked up all her winter clothes. (Men, medium to high socioeconomic level)

The discourse of the men's focus group is, thus, characterised by the dangers of the actions carried out rather than the objects rescued. Numerous studies have found that men and women perceive risk in very different ways, mainly because men appear to be

more confident in managing an emergency situation (Bateman & Edwards, 2002; Cvetković *et al.*, 2018). In this sense, many works indicate that men feel it necessary to stay in the danger zone for longer than women do, and they thus delay their evacuation (Bateman & Edwards, 2002; Whittaker *et al.*, 2016; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2018; Walker *et al.*, 2020) and also that, as is the case in the examples above, they are more inclined to return to their homes while there is still a risk of danger.

In the interventions from the men's focus groups it can be seen that they themselves realise that their actions were imprudent and carried a certain degree of danger. One of them even made reference to feeling like he was breaking into his own home. Actions of this type are linked to the characteristics of hegemonic, such as bravery, strength and taking control of a situation, found in previous research (Bradshaw, 2001; Hinojosa, 2010; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2013; Enarson & Pease, 2016; Parkinson & Duncan, 2018; Dominelli, 2020; Dema Moreno, 2022). Furthermore, these characteristics are the opposites of emotions such as fear, weakness and cowardice, which when mentioned by any of the participants in the men's focus groups results in laughter and teasing from others in the group. Another stand-out element is the existence of a male network of help that can be called on in these risky situations. It reinforces brave and/or risky behaviour and acts as to support men if the need arises, while simultaneously exerting pressure should any of its members show fear or cowardice.

Lastly, and in contrast to the findings in the women's focus groups, it is worth highlighting that men hardly make any references to the actual goods they rescue after gaining entry to their homes. This discursive absence may be related to the fact that the goods rescued are associated with the reproductive role, as explained in the previous section, and it is therefore the women who know which goods will be of value in the post-disaster context and take responsibility for ensuring their rescue during the emergency.

### **Alteration in gender roles in the rescue of material goods**

It was also observed that a small part, of the discourse alludes to a degree of alteration of traditional gender roles. In the case of the low to medium socioeconomic level women, they specifically make reference to the assumption of risk to rescue money:

P9: Yes, it's true that I left 1,000€ in the flat and they wouldn't let us in there, but when the police left, I said: "I'm going to get my money from work". I went up the stairs and I got it.

(...)

P6: After the earthquake I went up to my mum's flat to get the dosh, to get the money, because we needed it because otherwise, where were we going to go?, in fact, when I went to fetch stuff, the second [earthquake] caught me while I was coming down the stairs and it was like... boom, boom, boom, the windows, the cables, all on top of me (Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

Both participants assume a great risk when entering their homes, their behaviour resembling that of men analysed in the previous section. The women's behaviour in these cases does not coincide with previous scientific evidence for women having a greater perception of risk than men and that in a disaster situation they tend to want to evacuate the disaster area earlier (Bateman & Edwards, 2002; Cvetković *et al.*, 2018). In addition, in the first excerpt above the woman gives great importance to the source of the money she goes to rescue, i.e., from her work. Since employment and money are basic elements in the development of female individuality and autonomy (Dema Moreno, 2006), one can imagine that, faced with a disaster, women would not want to give these up, even going as far as taking risks to rescue the money necessary for them to maintain this

independence. The risk involved in both the examples therefore constitutes a certain alteration of gender roles. However, as explained earlier, in low-income homes it is commonly women who manage the household finances, as an extension of their domestic tasks (Wilson, 1987; Hertz, 1988; Morris & Ruane, 1989; Coria, 1991; Vogler & Pahl, 1993; Vogler & Pahl, 1994). As such then, these actions do not involve a complete transformation of gender roles because to a certain extent they are yet another means of women exercising their reproductive and caring role in the context of an emergency. The assumption of risk in order to carry out a reproductive task can be seen even more clearly in the next excerpt:

P9: I went out to get the washing that was hung up on the line. (Women, low to medium socioeconomic level)

This domestic task, which this woman apparently feels is essential to do, despite the risk involved, is undertaken after the first tremor and before the second, when the woman decides –together with other family members– to leave the home to avoid being inside if another tremor should follow. This is clearly another instance of women’s risk-taking contrasting with the evidence for them being keener to leave the danger zone sooner than men (Bateman & Edwards, 2002; Whittaker *et al.*, 2016; Tyler & Fairbrother, 2018; Walker *et al.*, 2020), although the nature of the task she undertakes suggests the enormous weight of traditional gender roles in an emergency situation.

In the men’s groups too there was some evidence of behaviour that breaks with the reproduction of traditional masculine roles, with one man explaining how he managed to rescue essential goods such as blankets and clothes:

P1: That same night, I went home and got blankets. I managed to open the door because, obviously, everything was... the walls were almost fallen down. In the

dining room, the wall, a wall had fallen down in the dining room. But in the hallway, I could get past and I grabbed a pile of blankets and stuff to keep us warm because there were loads of neighbours who had nothing either. And I gave them to [the neighbours]... and when I left, I saw that the door. I had to leave the door open because it was off its hinges. And the hallway, I could more or less get past, like, climbing over rubble. But I could get into the bedrooms and get clothes. (Men, low to medium socioeconomic level)

While this excerpt contains elements of the dominant male discourse in its focus on the conditions in the man's home after the earthquake and the risk involved in gaining entry highlighting both the usefulness of the goods retrieved and who they were destined for. This participant, then, to some extent produces an alteration in gender roles through his rescue of goods usually managed by women and also because the blankets he rescues are to give to other neighbours as well as his family, meaning that he undertakes a protective action similar to those traditionally carried out by the women.

The focus groups thus provide evidence of both men and women acting outside their traditional gender roles, namely, women assuming risk and remaining in or returning to the danger zone and of men carrying out actions with a caring and reproductive goal. However, traditional domestic labour roles underlie the women's risk-taking, while the man highlights his risk-taking as well as the domestic nature of the goods he rescues. To this end, we can say that these were alterations in gender roles rather than transformations.

## **Conclusions**

As was outlined at the start of this article, we have tried to ascertain which types of goods are rescued by men and which by women in an emergency situation such as that provoked by the earthquake in Lorca (Spain) in 2011, as well as to what extent men and

women take on risk in such rescues and how they execute them. On the basis of this, we sought to identify whether in the exceptional context of a catastrophe men and women continue to reproduce gender roles or if in fact there are alterations in these roles. The analysis of the data from the focus groups allowed us to discern that in this emergency the actions carried out by men and women to rescue possessions was closely linked to the gendered division of labour. Hence the data from the focus groups seems to support the fact that although a disaster can provide the opportunity for social transformation, the speed required when dealing with an emergency situation favours the reproduction of previously internalised gender roles.

In the discourse of the women, we observed that, in contrast to the social imaginary which considers women to be passive victims in catastrophes, they were actively involved in the rescue of goods, managing to rescue essential items such as medication and clothing that enabled them to ensure the well-being of their family members in the post-disaster. Given the link between these goods and the reproductive and care roles that women undertook prior to the catastrophe, these actions in fact constitute an extension of these roles. In addition, we observed a difference in the nature of the goods retrieved by the women in the two focus groups which was the result of the intersection of the gender and socioeconomic level of the participants. In this sense, the rescue of monetary goods, as well as their management following the disaster, is one of the central elements of the focus group composed of women of low to medium socioeconomic level, while these concerns form no part of the discourse of the women in the medium to high socioeconomic level, nor that of either of the men's focus groups.

The men in the focus groups act during the catastrophe and its aftermath to a large extent within the parameters of the prevailing masculinity. As such, their discourse revolves around the risks they take in gaining access to their homes rather than on the

goods they actually rescue. The material goods they rescue in the catastrophe situation are those which enable the survival and sustenance of the population, and since these have traditionally been tasks carried out by women they do not acquire any central value in the men's discourse.

However, there are two situations that involve a certain degree of alteration in traditional gender roles and can thus be considered indicators of a certain amount of social change. The first refers to the risk behaviour adopted by some women with a lower socioeconomic status in order to rescue cash from their homes. Although these actions are linked to the reproductive role of managing the household money, which is typically a role taken by women in low income homes, they also imply the management of risk, suggesting that the poorest women are disposed to risk their own lives in order to rescue monetary goods that they consider essential for their own survival and that of their family following the catastrophe.

The rescue of essential goods carried out by one of the men constitutes the other alteration of the traditional gender roles identified. While the majority of the masculine discourse revolved around the risk undertaken to be able to gain access to the home after the earthquake, a minority discourse was also evident which made clear the importance of male actions to protect the family and community members. This discourse evidences the appearance of new masculinities, through which men assume certain care roles in an emergency.

The findings of this paper have practical implications that could lead to improvements in disaster risk management protocols and, specifically, intervention in emergency situations. Firstly, it is important to involve women in developing evacuation protocols because of their clear knowledge of the essential goods that allow life to be

sustained in the post-disaster, as well as the management of these goods. This knowledge could therefore be used to help design evacuation guides for the general population which list the resources that people should have prepared in case, for example, they have to abandon their homes quickly. Secondly, involving women in the decision-making process is essential. Their input would, for example, be valuable in cases where homes can be re-entered in order to collect possessions after the immediate danger of the catastrophe has passed, since, as we have shown, men and women will not necessarily rescue the same types of goods. The knowledge women have developed could also be of use after a catastrophe in terms of deciding what goods those affected need for their survival, among other issues. In the case of men, it would be interesting if public authorities were to promote the equitable division of domestic and care tasks within the home, as well as to reinforce non-hegemonic masculinities as a standard approach, so that when a disaster does occur these new ways of acting outside traditional gender roles have been internalised.

Finally, we are aware that the research carried out here, due to its qualitative nature, is not representative of the population or generalisable to contexts beyond those analysed here, which reinforces the importance of beginning to focus on the rescue of material goods in other contexts and/or cultures. In addition, the analysis of non-binary identities and/or non-hegemonic gender roles would also offer complementary information to that presented here.

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