Building Community Resilience by Connecting Communities and Institutions

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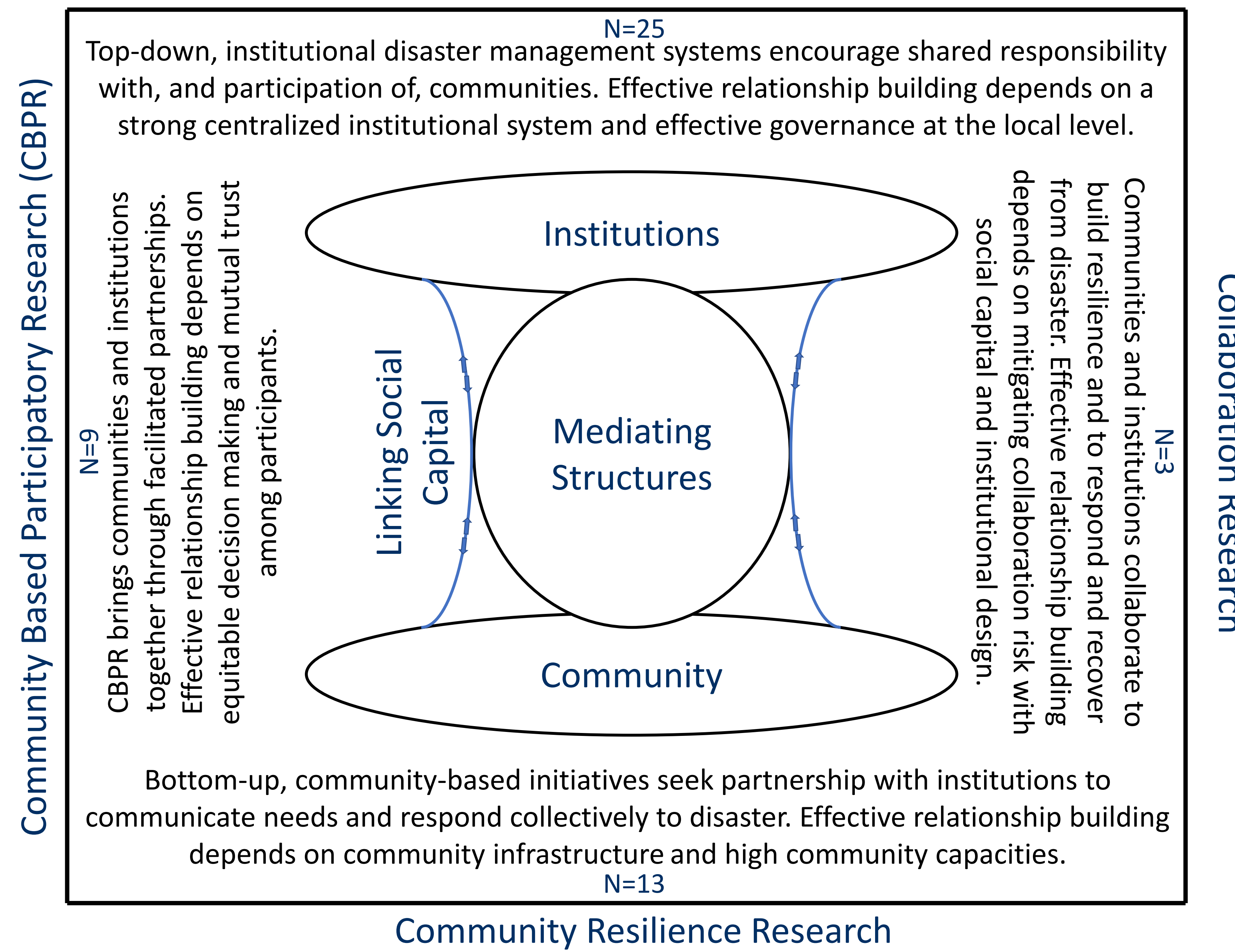
Introduction

Climate-related extreme weather events are expected to increase in frequency and intensity as the global temperature rises above pre-industrial levels (Steffen et al. 2011). Cities are particularly threatened because of their high population density and in many cases, their location in flood and disaster-prone areas (Hoffman 2014). Resilience building is driven by driven by cultural and contextual factors (Spaans and Waterhout 2017a), but also by institutional systems and by the communities who live there. Traditional responses to natural disasters often involve large, coordinated and 'top-down' initiatives by emergency management professionals (B. Pfefferbaum, Van Horn, and Pfefferbaum 2017a) while communities coordinate their own response by implementing 'bottom-up' initiatives, leveraging local capacities to address their short- and long-term needs (Morello-Frosch et al. 2011a). This research paper explores the ways that institutions and communities can form collaborative, constructive partnerships to better build community resilience to environmental shocks and stressors.

Background Understandings

Community Resilience: Today, community resilience is often defined as "a process linking a set of networked adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of functioning and adaptation in constituent populations after a disturbance" (Norris et al. 2008a). This definition characterizes resilience by the quality of *adaptability* rather than the quality of elasticity or stability. It recognizes the ability of a community to *bounce forward* on a positive trajectory as opposed to simply recovering and 'bouncing back' to an equilibrium state (Shaw 2012). And it frames communities as 'agents of change' rather than 'places of change'.

Linking Social Capital: Linking social capital describes connections between community members and institutions in power (Aldrich 2017). In other words, linking social capital is the 'adaptive capacity' that builds community resilience by connecting communities and institutions.

Methods

Literature Search: Systematic 'broad' and 'target' literature searches were completed from direction of the Healthy & Resilient Cities Project. Results were sorted into key research questions based on title and abstract. This paper addressed one of six key questions. The search parameters and results are shown below.

Thematic Sorting: Papers were read in order of recency and sorted based on themes that emerged across them. 47 papers were analyzed for this review.

Broad Search / Targeted Search

Generalized Academic Framings

Disaster Management Research
N=25

Top-down, institutional disaster management systems encourage shared responsibility with, and participation of, communities. Effective relationship building depends on a strong centralized institutional system and effective governance at the local level.

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

N=9 — CBPR brings communities and institutions together through facilitated partnerships. Effective relationship building depends on equitable decision making and mutual trust among participants.

Collaboration Research

N=3 — Communities and institutions collaborate to build resilience and to respond and recover from disaster. Effective relationship building depends on mitigating collaboration risk with social capital and institutional design.

Diagram labels: Institutions — Linking Social Capital — Mediating Structures — Community

Bottom-up, community-based initiatives seek partnership with institutions to communicate needs and respond collectively to disaster. Effective relationship building depends on community infrastructure and high community capacities.
N=13

Community Resilience Research

Recommendations for City Pilot Projects

1) We recommend that the City allow community partners to focus on short-term resilience building efforts aimed at crises the community faces daily (Koch et al. 2017). This strategy would better align the mandates and resource capacities of community partners while still strengthening connections between the City and the community that can be called upon when disasters strike (Koch et al. 2017).

2) A key concern to building resilience in cities is that the impacts of environmental shocks and stressors are often distributed unevenly as a result of geographic and social characteristics, with low-income, low-elevation populations often being disproportionately affected (Dodman and Mitlin 2013). Therefore, it is important to ask the questions: 'resilience to what?', and especially, 'resilience for whom?', so as not to neglect underlying vulnerabilities in communities and inequalities in community outcomes (Cutter 2016). The City should consider geography, but especially demographics, when choosing neighbourhoods for pilot projects.

2) When forming community partnerships, emphasis should be placed on organizations that show characteristics of community backbone organizations, as in the case of The East Scarborough Storefront (Gloger et al. 2017). These community capacity-building organizations tend to hold long-term community development perspectives and are well connected within the communities they serve (Fitzpatrick and Molloy 2014; Gloger et al. 2017), therefore offering themselves as a more strategic partner for the City.

4) To avoid collaboration risk (Jung and Song 2018), the City should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all parties and adequately compensate all community partners, recognizing the resources required to maintain a relationship with, and a flow of information to, pilot project organizers (M. U. I. Choudhury, Uddin, and Haque 2018; Gagnon et al. 2016; Ziegler et al. 2019).

Community Based Organizations

The term "community-based organization" (CBO) is used freely across all identified literatures to describe disaster, service, and civic organizations of various kinds (n=18). However, there is no consensus on whether these organizations are CBOs or not – some papers described them as such while others clearly distinguished them as being something different.

# of Papers that Classify an Organization in the Category as being a CBO	Category	# of Papers that Distinguish an Organization in the Category from being a CBO
4	Civic Organizations	3
10	Service Organizations	8
4	Disaster Organizations	1

Furthermore, there is no clear line between service-delivery and community-development organizations – the term CBO is used freely to describe both.

Mediating Structures

Mediating structures are the organizations or individuals that create vertical linkages between communities and institutions – engaging in external network building while also maintaining their own networks internally. Structures identified in this review include local-level institutions, community-based organizations, and community backbone organizations. However, further research is required to clarify the ambiguity between these overlapping organization types, and to identify the unique roles that each play in building linking social capital between communities and institutions.

Healthy & Resilient Cities Project

This research paper was completed along-side of a CIHR-funded project called Healthy and Resilient Cities: A Connected Community Approach (Healthy & Resilient Cities Project), headed by Dr. Blake Poland of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. The Healthy and Resilient Cities Project is a collaboration between the City of Toronto, the University of Toronto, and local community-based organizations aimed at applying the Connected Communities Approach (Gloger et al. 2017) to inform community resilience building efforts within in the City of Toronto.

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