

## INTERDISCIPLINARY DISASTER RESEARCH

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Disaster research is asking scientific questions about Acts of God. During the last ten years efforts have been made to understand the causes of natural and man-made disasters, to determine how people are affected, and how material and mental relief can aid recovery. Such research as has so far been carried out in isolation, has followed the old academic tradition of investigating separate disciplinary problems. Yet to come, and urgently needed, is the interdisciplinary investigation of disasters, where for example seismologists, social scientists and civil engineers work together as a team to study earthquakes in general and together make an in-depth hindsight review of a particular seismological event. This paper will attempt to point the way to more interdisciplinary disaster research.

### DEFINITIONS OF DISASTER

Asking scientific questions about Acts of God is hardly an adequate definition of the subject. I have defined interdisciplinary work elsewhere as originating from the joint and continuously integrated effort of two or more specialists of different disciplinary background and training. Research is easy to define and it appears as: "a course of critical or scientific inquiry" in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, 1977. It is only when we come to Disasters that our difficulties begin as there is no agreed definition, nor is there a scale of magnitude. In a previous paper I gave on this subject (Disasters Past and Future, 1972) I suggested the following definitions :

ACCIDENTS	1 - 1000 people dead or in immediate danger of death.
DISASTERS	1000 - 1 million people dead or in immediate danger of death.
CATASTROPHES	More than 1 million people dead or in immediate danger of death.