

Dilemma in the Midst of a Crisis

Project I, II & III

PACER Research Project
Johns Hopkins University
& Howard University



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Purpose of Research

- The nation has been preparing for natural and man-made disasters with little consideration of what can be expected when 1st responders are personally impacted by a disaster.





Project I
Summer 2006

Dilemma in the Midst of a Crisis:
Case Study of the New Orleans
Police Department During the
Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

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Central Goals of Project I

- Examine what happened during and after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast
- Examine human response to disasters
- Examine the state of pre-disaster planning of NOPD before Hurricane Katrina; and assess the central issues that emerged after the storm
- Examine the operational challenges faced by NOPD during and after Hurricane Katrina



Methodology

- Exploratory Research Design
- Data collected from a variety of sources (i.e. media reports, Congressional Reports, scholarly publications, & key informant interviews)

Findings Project 1

Individual & Organizational Challenges

- Preparedness plans of NOPD did not factor in the failure of the levee system
- Preparedness plans did not include total communication failures
- Major infrastructure damage
- 80 officers were stranded & had to be rescued
- 2 officers committed suicide
- 147 officers abandoned post





Findings Project 1

NOPD Operations after Katrina

- Absent communication with headquarters individual districts developed rescue plans
- Damage to police stations lead to creation of make-shift police stations
- Damage of communication systems led to use of informal communication systems
- Mid-level managers played essential role

Project II
2007-2008

Dilemma in the Midst of a Crisis: Case
Study of the Divergent Responses of
New Orleans Police Officers during
the Hurricane Katrina Crisis

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Research Questions Project II

- What factors contributed to the abandonment of duty during the Katrina disaster?
- What coping strategies were employed by officers at the height of the disaster?
- What motivated adaptive responses despite the dilemmas and hardships faced at the height of the disaster?



Theory & Methodology

- Case study
- Quantitative & qualitative methodology
- Concepts associated with response behavior in disasters are measured, i.e. threat perceptions, role conflict, feelings of isolation, coping mechanisms, motivational factors, perceptions of professional responsibility.



Preliminary Findings Project II

- 92% of sample reported participating in the Katrina recovery activities.
- While most of the participants reported being able to assist love ones in evacuating, 25% reported not being able to get their love ones to leave.
- 11% reported that a love one experienced physical harm during the disaster.
- 72% reported that their concerns for their love ones impacted their ability to perform during the crisis.

Did you ever consider leaving?

- “I knew my family was safe/girlfriend was safe. No reason to leave. Main thing was oath of the job, up holding my end...staying and rescuing was part of my job.”
- “Yes. Hell Yeah. But both cars were underwater. There was chaos, no communication. The situation was Hell - we were stuck in the hospital. Captain said before we go, we have to save the people, I didn't want to at first, but it was the best decision. The Captain was strong. I didn't know where my family was, yet I had to save other people. Didn't know for 3 weeks, I was helping other people, couldn't help my family. Hardest part was not knowing where my family was...helping people but could not help my family....police helped my Momma.”

How were you able to function and perform your duties and responsibilities?

- “Experience and other experienced members and rank structure in 6th district...we were able to keep the rank structure...we did everything together and built cohesion...kept rank structure...kept professional attitude...did not get swallowed up by the conditions.”

Project III
2008-2009

The Divergent Responses of Law Enforcement Officers in the Midst of a Crisis: Katrina

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Questions

