

Low-Income Minorities' Preparedness, Response and Recovery Experiences During Hurricane Isabel and a Tornado: Were They Ready for the Unexpected?

Randy Rowel, Bazle Hossain, Myrtle Evans-Holland, Angela Cross,
Morgan State University; Thomas Kirsch, Johns Hopkins University

Center for the Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response

Project Scope: The goal of the project is to identify cultural-specific disaster needs and to develop educational materials. An initial survey was conducted using a convenience sample of 292 low-income ethnic/racial minorities in 3 areas of the Maryland that had experienced a tornado (Spring 2002) or Hurricane Isabel (Fall 2003). The quantitative survey explored the participants' experiences with these events during preparedness, response, and recovery phases of the natural disaster by various demographic variables (i.e., income, race/ethnicity, age, gender, etc.). Of those surveyed, 67% were African Americans, 22% Spanish speaking Hispanics, and 11% other. The majority of respondents were females (68%) and between 18 and 44 years of age (70%). Nearly half (40%) had less than a high school degree or were high school/GED graduates (34%). Key findings resulting from this study were: 1) Risk Perception (66% felt completely or somewhat safe from natural disasters and 51% felt completely or somewhat safe from a terrorist attack); 2) Preparedness Behavior (43% indicated they were somewhat prepared and 27% were not all prepared when Hurricane Isabel or the tornado hit their community; 50% were not too or not at all confident that the system would do a good job protecting the public's health while 32% were very confident; 3) Warning Communication Response (47% indicated they would change their daily routine if the alert level were high or severe while 39% reported they were likely or not at all likely to change; 4) Recovery (48% indicated the government was not too or not at all supportive in helping them get things back together after Hurricane Isabel or the tornado hit their community. In addition to the survey, 20 focus groups were conducted involving 140 low-income African Americans and Spanish speaking Hispanics; one set of 10 focus group sessions provided an in-depth understanding of the quantitative data and a second set of 10 focus group sessions solicited input needed to validate and develop cultural appropriate educational materials for the target audience.

Recent Progress: A follow-up study was conducted this past summer with a subset of low-income African American populations to further assess disaster service needs, perceptions about pandemic and avian flu, and the impact Hurricane Katrina had on their perceptions about disaster preparedness, response, and recover.

Future Plans: Working with other PACER researchers, we plan to publish papers to: 1) examine the role of faith-based organizations in disasters; and 2) explore how vulnerable and underserved populations are defined within the context of disasters.

Publications Since Beginning of Project: None