

TITLE: The Reaction to and Coping with Hurricanes Katrina & Rita: A Cross-Campus Survey

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PROJECT ABSTRACT:

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (H-KR) were among the most costly natural disasters in U.S. History. The devastation of African-American victims, in particular, as depicted in the media, led to soul-searching among Americans across social strata regarding seeking answers for healing and for solutions regarding the disasters and for that of the future, as well as for emotional healing. Further, following H-KR, professional and lay volunteers served the needs of 386,000 evacuees, providing care for depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Under drastic conditions, social agencies for community services, especially around New Orleans, were partially paralyzed or even forced to close. The devastating *collective trauma* passed extraordinary public demands onto volunteer workers. For the present study, a sample of over 500 African-American and European-American students were recruited for this study at three months after H-KR, of which 94% had been heavily involved in altruistic volunteer actions. This study was conducted at three months after H-KR among student volunteers who heavily involved in disaster reliefs. Data were collaborated from five universities in the Deep South impacted by the disaster. We assessed coping strategies, level of trauma experienced, symptoms of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse, use of spirituality and altruism to cope, and resilience with respect to positive attitudes and posttraumatic growth. Four articles have been published on the first wave data, and the fifth using structural equation modeling to demonstrate parallel pathway to resilience is in revision. These studies have demonstrated the similarities and differences between mainstream and minority volunteers. For example, African American respondents reported higher levels of symptoms and higher rates of recollection of prior traumas during H-KR than their European American counterparts. However, the latter group reported higher level of substance use. Hierarchical regression analyses found that previous trauma recollections predicted symptoms among European Americans but not among African Americans. Disaster related stressors affected African Americans more than European Americans. Minority race was associated with greater spiritual strength whereas white race was related to higher altruism, a relatively more secular strength. The follow-up wave data have been cleaned and are waiting for analysis and publications.

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Co-Investigators:

Varies with co-authors in the ongoing publication effort, mostly involve those at the five schools.

Community Collaborators:

None
