

Social Networks after Hurricane Katrina: Economic and Social Outcomes

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Focus of Research

- We investigated the role that social networks, and the resources they provide, play in affecting individuals' preparation for, response to, and recovery from hurricanes.
- Initial work on this topic was conducted in Hurricane Andrew. We then investigated Hurricane Georges, and now Katrina.

Genesis of Research

- We initially did not intend to study hurricanes.
- Our initial focus was on how individuals activate social networks to obtain resources.
- We knew a great deal about what kind of ties help people get jobs, on the one hand, and on social support, on the other.
- We did not know much about networks from which those ties were drawn or about the process by which individuals activated ties from their social networks.

Social Networks and Tie Activation

- To study that question, we looked at individuals' social networks and studied how they activated ties from those networks for resources. We needed a situation in which a large number of individuals would activate ties simultaneously.
- We were planning to study a base or plant closing, situations where large numbers of people would need to activate networks for job-finding and support, all at the same time.

Why Not Hurricane?

- Then, Hurricane Andrew struck south Louisiana in August 1992.
- We realized that we had an opportunity to address our central question in a different context.
- We had a situation in which a large number of people needed to get help at the same time.

Hurricane Andrew Study

- With support from the National Science Foundation, we conducted a telephone survey with residents of St. Mary and Iberia parishes, two to three months after Andrew struck the area.
- We collected information on the structure of individuals' social networks, pre-Andrew—the extent to which they activated ties from their networks for help to prepare for and recover from the storm.

Hurricane Andrew Study (cont.)

- We also collected a wide range of demographic information: information about prior hurricane experience; measures of loss and harm in the storm; and depression in the short-term recovery period.
- We gathered a wealth of information about how individuals relied upon both informal help from their social networks and from formal sources in preparing for and recovering from this storm.

Andrew Findings

- One of the key findings was that individuals who received more social support from their social networks in the short-term recovery phase experienced lower levels of depression than people who received less social support.
- Stronger (closer, particularly kin) ties to people who tended to be similar served as key support conduits.

Implications from Andrew

- The findings are consistent with general literature on social support, which emphasizes the importance of strong ties and dense network sectors in which they tend to occur.
- The findings suggest that, for Katrina's victims, having dense social networks with more strong ties will prove beneficial for recovery.

Will This Story Hold for Katrina?

- As we all know, though, Katrina was different, in many respects.
- First, Katrina was not a “standard” disaster. It was a catastrophe—the nature and scope of the effects extending far beyond what had been previously seen in the U.S. from any natural or man-made disaster.

How Katrina Was Different

- The scope and duration of evacuation also distinguished this event, as did the level of social and economic disruption.
- For many of Katrina's victims, the disruption was long-term and involved not just the need to repair houses but also the need to find new housing, schools for children, and jobs.

What Will the Story Be for Katrina?

- The question, then, is how the recovery process will unfold for Katrina's victims, and what role social networks will play in the process.
- There are many fundamental questions regarding the effects on individuals, organizations, and the community as a whole.
- Answering those questions is critically important because of the unprecedented nature of this event.

Key Foci for Presentation

- The focus of this presentation is on data from residents of post-Katrina Orleans and Jefferson Parishes and examines three main issues:
 - First, the structure of social networks
 - Second, how people are doing in terms of stressors, physical health, and mental health
 - Third, economic outcomes, focusing primarily on income