Disaster Hits Home: Displaced Family Adjustment after Hurricane Katrina

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Katrina’s Diaspora

The victims of Hurricane Katrina have filed for assistance from FEMA from every state. The map shows the distribution and number of the 1.36 million individual assistance applications as of Sept. 23.

They are scattered through all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico — 823 in Utah, 1,114 in Kansas, 101 way out in Alaska. They are clustered by the thousands in large Southern cities like Dallas, Atlanta and Memphis, and huddled in handfuls in unlikely hamlets like Shell Knob, Mo. (pop. 1,383) and Fountain Run, Ky. (pop. 286).

Evacuees fled Hurricane Katrina and the floods that followed in caravans of cars and fleets of buses, on helicopters and chartered planes, by boat and, a few, on foot. A month after the storm, a map emerges of where they landed, based on ZIP codes from which applications for aid were submitted to the Federal Emergency Management Agency as of Sept. 23.

Of 1,367,064 applications, 86 percent came from Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alabama, but 35,359 families were more than 1,000 miles from the Gulf — among the farthest: one in Nome, Alaska, 2,011 miles from the French Quarter and another in Lihue, Hawaii, 4,379 miles away.

Residents of New Orleans, a city that was two-thirds black, seem to have flocked to the nation’s African-American population centers. On average, the applicants came from counties where blacks were 28 percent of the population, more than twice the national average.

Baton Rouge, La., appears to be temporary home to 10 percent of evacuees, Houston 6.3 percent. But after the top 10 hubs, applicants are spread like the wind that whirled through their old neighborhoods, none of the other 500-plus metropolitan areas has even 1 percent of the total. Some 4,000 ZIP codes — among them Pocahontas, Miss.; Promise City, Iowa; and Hope, Mich. — had just one applicant.

Applications by state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Applications</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>523,149</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>363,460</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>156,899</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>109,469</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>35,542</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>31,005</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>15,829</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>11,207</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>10,553</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>6,143</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>73,065</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applications by distance from New Orleans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from New Orleans</th>
<th>Number of Applications</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>629,232</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>336,080</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-400</td>
<td>184,169</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-800</td>
<td>143,497</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800-1,000</td>
<td>46,371</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-3,200</td>
<td>13,408</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,200+</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: FEMA, Census Bureau, Queens College Sociology Department, Matthew Ettner, Aridie Sia and Jill Walpency (The New York Times).
Study Context

• Denver, Colorado

• ~1,400 miles from New Orleans

• ~14,000 evacuees in Colorado

• ~6,500 evacuees in Denver
Study Purpose

• Explore displaced family adjustment in the aftermath of the storm.
  – Rates and modes of adjustment between parents and children within households?
  – Factors that aided or hindered adaptation?
Data Collection

• October 2005 – October 2008
• Participants
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Families (N = 23)</th>
<th>All Parents (N = 30)</th>
<th>All Children (N = 55)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black (n= 15)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parents (n = 19)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children (n = 41)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Father/Father</td>
<td>3 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>1 Boy, 2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>1 Boy, 2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>3 Boys, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Boy, 4 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Boys, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Boy, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Boys, 2 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Boy, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3 Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White (n = 6)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parents (n = 8)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children (n = 11)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>2 Boys, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>1 Boy, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>2 Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Boy, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latino (n = 2)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parents (n = 3)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children (n = 3)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Mother/Father</td>
<td>1 Boy, 1 Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>1 Girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

• October 2005 – October 2008
• Participants
• Methods
  – Multiple in-depth interviews
    • Parent + child interview schedules
  – Participant observation
Data Collection

• Participants

• Methods
  – In-depth interviews
  – Participant observation
  – Visual elicitation
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Shock Stage

Disaster
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Shock Stage**: Families unified; protection and comfort paramount
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Shock Stage:** Families unified; protection and comfort paramount
  - *Had* to stay together for survival
    - *I really thought we were going to die. But we made sure and stuck together. I would not let my girls out of my sight.* ~Russell, 41 years old
    - *I became the protector of my family. When they pointed guns at us, I told my mom “If we stay here, we are going to die.”* ~Greg, 17 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

• **Shock Stage**: Families unified; protection and comfort paramount
  – *Had* to stay together for survival and support
  – Strategies
    • Refusal to separate during evacuation
    • Altered temporary child care arrangements
    • Altered routines
    • *You know, this is a big house, a nice house. All of the kids have their own space, but they choose 9 times out of 10 to be sleeping all together. They just want to be together more after Katrina. They’ll stay together either in our bedroom or in my daughter’s room. At night, Kody will come sneak in the bottom of the bed in our room. It’s okay for now... I think we all just want to be together.* ~Darrian and Terri
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Shock Stage:** Families unified; protection, support, and comfort paramount
  - *Had* to stay together for survival and support
  - Strategies
    - Refusal to separate during evacuation
    - Altered temporary child care arrangements
    - Altered routines
    - Recreate culturally familiar patterns
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Parents: Prioritizing Safety

Family in Conflict over Resettlement

Shock Stage (family unified)

Disaster
• **Prioritizing Safety:** Parents want to “stay put” for safety and well-being of children.
  
  – Lack of options for return
  
  – Positive aspects associated with life in Colorado
    
    • “Better” schools, “cleaner” environment, “more efficient” services, “less corruption” in government
    
    • Less hazardous
    
    • *There are no hurricanes here. No earthquakes. I checked that. That’s why I won’t live in Golden [Colorado], because a fault line goes right through there. I’m not taking my family over there.* ~Veronica, 30 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Shock Stage (family unified)

Family in Conflict over Resettlement

Parents: Prioritizing Safety

Children: Missing Home

Disaster
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

• **Missing Home:** Strong desire to return among children and few perceived “positives” in Colorado.
  
  – *Because the whole Katrina thing had me depressed. So I tried to find every excuse in the world to go back home after that happened.* ~Desiree, 14 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Missing Home**: Strong desire to return among children and few perceived “positives” in Colorado.
  - Loss of the familiar
  - *It was like everyone in the neighborhood was friends. I lived right across the street from all my friends… I lived right here and they lived right there and down the street, around the corner. We would just meet at one persons’ house and play.* ~Taneisha, 12 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Missing Home**: Strong desire to return among children and few perceived “positives” in Colorado.
  - Loss of the familiar
  - Stressful resettlement experiences
    - Crowded households
    - Unfamiliar neighborhoods
    - Schools
  - Uncertainty
  - *I thought for so long that I was going to go back home. So why make friendships with these people, long term friendships which aren’t going to be long term?* ~Erica, 16 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Disaster

Shock Stage
(family unified)

Family in Conflict over Resettlement

Parents: Prioritizing Safety

Children: Missing Home

Parents: Confronting Reality
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

• **Confronting Reality:** Meeting basic needs becomes increasingly difficult for parents—especially single mothers; questioning whether to stay or go.
  
  – Cost of living
  – Secure employment
  – Affordable housing
  – Child care
  – Lack of support networks

  – *Before Katrina, as long as the kids were happy you knew you could always count on your friends or neighbors to watch your kids for a while if you just needed to get out of the house. I didn’t need to worry before because I could always call their father and he would come over for a little while. In Colorado, there is just no one around to help.* ~Annika, 34 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Shock Stage
(family unified)

Disaster

Parents: Prioritizing Safety

Family in Conflict over Resettlement

Children: Feeling Settled

Parents: Confronting Reality

Children: Missing Home
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Feeling Settled:** Children begin to adjust—with support—and start to think of Denver as “home.”
  - Reconnecting with friends and family
  - *I am scared all of my friends may be dead.* ~October 2005, Calvary, 9 years old
  - *My friend Becca, she was like, “Calvary, make a MySpace.” And she made it for me in December. Since December, I’ve found, like, all my friends. I’ve found 95% of them already. Because MySpace, everyone has one now, so people that you haven’t talked to since Katrina or before Katrina, you can find them on MySpace most likely.* ~February 2006, Calvary
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Feeling Settled**: Children begin to adjust—with support—and start to think of Denver as “home.”
  - Reconnecting with friends and family
  - Building new relationships
    - Peers
    - Teachers and other supportive adults
    - *When I first came here I didn’t really know anyone. I wrote a paper about how I met a lot of people and how I learned to trust them and how I finally became integrated in school. In that paper, I wrote about the principal, because she’s really nice. And our math teacher, which was my regular teacher, Miss Cougan. I wrote about how nice all the teachers were, like my science teacher, Mrs. T.* ~Terrance, 10 years old
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Feeling Settled:** Children begin to adjust—with support—and start to think of Denver as “home.”
  - Reconnecting with friends and family
  - Building new relationships
    - Peers
    - Teachers and other supportive adults
  - Schools and extracurricular activities
    - Routine
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

Disaster

Shock Stage
(family unified)

Family in Conflict over Resettlement

- Parents: Prioritizing Safety
- Children: Feeling Settled
- Parents: Confronting Reality
- Children: Missing Home
- Reaching Resolution
Displaced Family Adjustment Model

- **Reaching Resolution:** Should we stay or go?
- 18 of 23 families stayed in Colorado
- Ultimately the parent(s) made the decision
  - Shaped by parental concerns for children’s well-being
  - Shaped by children’s desires
Conclusion

• Dynamic nature of post-disaster adjustment within households
• Child and parental adjustment may vary and follow divergent trajectories
• Importance of considering the perspectives of both adults and children
Thank You!

Questions? Contact:
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