

A Qualitative Analysis of Coping Strategies for Financial Losses After a Natural Disaster

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Much of the research surrounding the effects of natural disasters focuses on the psychological impact on individuals and families. Limited research is available on how families cope with and recover from the loss of financial resources after a disaster. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the coping strategies and resources that were available and utilized by families from different socioeconomic statuses following Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding of New Orleans. This study also examined the similarities and differences that existed in how families made decisions and managed the available resources. This study was framed around the Double ABC-X model of family stress theory and family resource management theory. Nine individuals from eight households located in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area were interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with resource providers as well as other citizens of New Orleans that have been involved in the rebuilding process. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcribed interviews, information and documentation obtained from resource providers, as well as the researcher's field notes were coded for themes to identify coping strategies and resources. Information provided by the participants showed that social support, stranger volunteers, and faith-based organizations made a significant contribution to the recovery process. Families who relied mainly on government resources were still struggling with the recovery process. Pile-up stressors such as uncertainty of available resources hampered participants' ability to manage resources effectively. All of the participants attempted to gain access to whatever resources they perceived as available, however mid to high-income participants were more likely than low-income participants to actively seek out and successfully secure the external resources provided by the government, organizations, and businesses. Low-income families were more likely to rely on stranger volunteers and donations indicating that barriers to information about less-publicized resources and securing government and business resources presented an obstacle for low-income families. The results of this study suggest that there is a need for future research to examine several aspects regarding coping with and recovering with financial losses brought about by a natural disaster. Longitudinal studies would increase the body of knowledge surrounding what resources proactively assist families in meeting their demands over time and aid in long-term recovery of their losses. Additional research is needed to determine ways that individuals and families, when faced with pile-up stressors and uncertainty concerning available resources after disaster-related financial losses, can practice proactive as opposed to reactive management of available resources.

References

Bradley, Linda A. (2007). *Recovering From Financial Losses: A Qualitative Analysis of Coping Strategies and Resources Among Hurricane Survivors* (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Kentucky, August 2007, prepared under the direction of Raymond E. Forgue, Ph.D.)

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