

A Rapid Assessment of Disaster Preparedness Needs and Resources during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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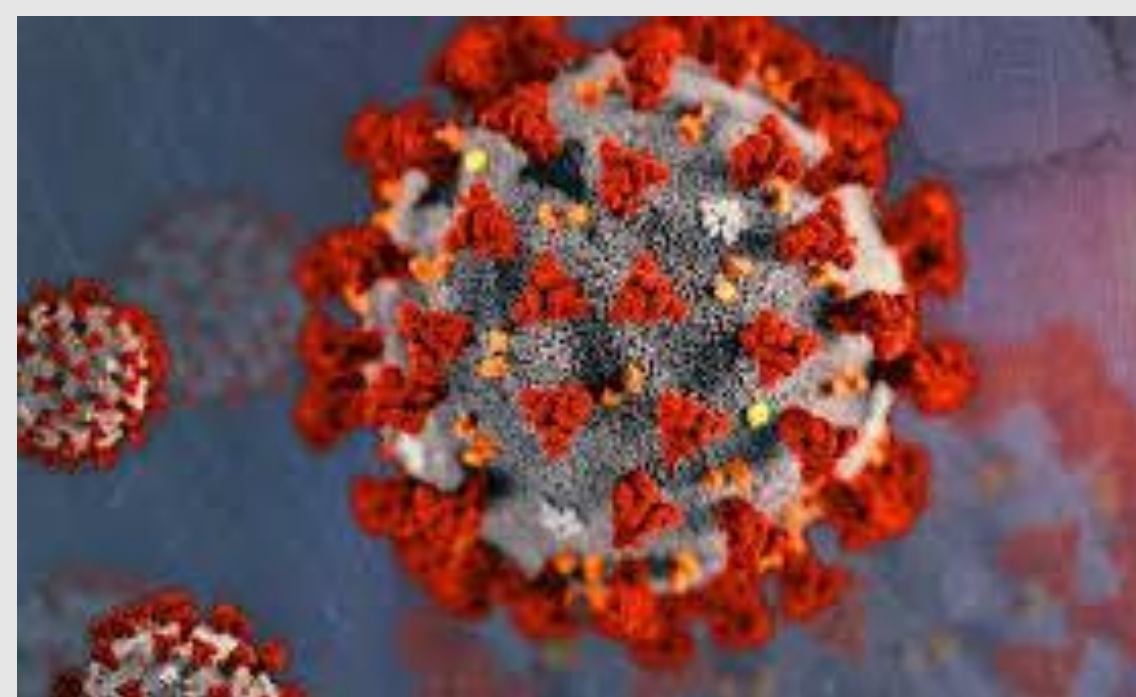
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Introduction

- In 2020, the Gulf of Mexico region and the State of Louisiana was impacted by two concurrent crises: The COVID-19 pandemic and increased frequency and severity of natural disasters.¹⁻³
- Five storms made landfall in Louisiana, the most on record in one season.⁴
- In addition to the delivery of intensive care for individuals who have become severely ill due to the virus, the need for mental health services in the general population has also increased.^{5,6,7,8}
- There have been no studies to date that have examined the impact of the pandemic on disaster preparedness and recovery.¹

Research Questions

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted disaster preparedness and recovery in Louisiana?
- How has the state's past experience with disasters impacted its response to the pandemic?



Methods

- Setting:** Disaster-prone communities of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and two predominantly rural parishes (St. Bernard and St. John the Baptist) in Southeastern Louisiana.
- Participants:** 26 representatives of 24 different community-based programs in southern Louisiana.
- Data Collection:** Semi structured interviews using a guide co-developed by members of the C-LEARN Leadership Council were conducted over the phone or online using the Zoom platform.
- Data Analysis:** Rapid Assessment Procedure – Informed Community Ethnography (RAPICE)

Results

Table 1. Services and themes per number of CBOs regarding COVID-19 response and disaster preparedness responses.

Disaster preparedness and response services provided	
Service	No. of Participants
Pre-disaster	
Community education	7
Training	5
Evacuation planning and assistance	4
Distribution of emergency supplies	4
Assist other CBOs in preparedness planning	3
Environmental risk management	3
Financial preparedness	3
Distribution of food and water to survivors	5
Debris removal and remodeling	3
Mental health services	3
Rescue and recovery	3
Health services	2
Fund raising	2
Post-disaster	
Follow up with evacuees	1
Themes relating to the impact of COVID-19 on disaster preparedness and response.	

Theme	No. of Participants
Difficulty providing assistance virtually	8
Difficulty implementing evacuation plans	6
Difficulty enlisting volunteers to help with response and recovery	4
Difficulty for households to acquire resources in the event of natural disaster	3
Has forced organizations to place disaster planning activities on hold	3
Difficulty providing food and supplies	3
Difficulty acquiring donor support for disaster-related activities	3
Shift in funding priorities for COVID response	2
Difficulty assisting community in preparing for disasters	1
Led to a greater focus on equity in disaster response	1
Disaster fatigue	1

Themes relating to impact of disaster preparedness and response to the pandemic.	
Theme	No. of Participants
Resources	
Partnerships with other CBOs	12
Disaster training	12
Mental health services	8
Community trust	4
Response framework	2
Healthy donor base	1
Connecting survivors to resources	4
Increased confidence in ability to respond	4
Information sharing	2
Importance of assessing community needs	2
Avoid mission creep	2
Reliance on technology	1
Mental health self-care	1
Staying connected to clients	1
Lessons learned	
How to bring people together	6
Response coordination	4

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of study parishes.

Parish	2019 Population	2019 Median Household Income	2014 Percentage Living in Flood Zone
East Baton Rouge	443,763	59,948	20-30
Orleans	390,845	41,604	90-100
St. Bernard	46,266	44,661	40-50
St. John the Baptist	43,242	57,429	20-30

Results Summary

STRENGTHS

- Snowball sampling ensured a representative sample of CBOs in the region among leaders new to C-Learn.
- Use of semi-structured interview allowed for identification of significant themes in disaster preparedness and response.

CHALLENGES

- Interpretation within the specific context of study location
- Generalizability is limited to specific region of the US
- Unable to assess resource changes over time

IMPLICATIONS

Public health and disaster preparedness authorities should work now to incorporate the expertise and experiences of community NGOs into their plans for the upcoming hurricane season.

Conclusions

- Supply and demand structure of organizations preparing for disasters such as hurricanes have been profoundly altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These changes can be attributed to a decline in available financial resources and constraints on services delivery imposed by COVID-19.
- Networks of partnerships and prior experiences with disaster preparedness and response have fostered resilience to adverse events, and these represent key assets. In coping with the pandemic and with the current hurricane season.

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