ABSTRACT

Evaluating the Black Family: An in-depth examination at the Stress & Resiliency associated with Survivors of Hurricane Katrina

By Eric Dion Harris

As a researcher, I am most interested in the journey in order to understand how families have responded once exposed to specific familial stressors. A qualitative research paradigm was used to understand how the six adults from New Orleans were affected by Hurricane Katrina. Results indicated that the same stressors that were in the African American families after Hurricane Katrina were a staple well before. Limitations were also addressed. The data collected from these contributing adult members of African American families suggest there is a lot more research that need to be conducted concerning forced relocating that includes the effects on family life and the need for government intervention.
Evaluating the Black Family: An in-depth examination at the Stress & Resiliency associated with Survivors of Hurricane Katrina

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................... iv

CHAPTER I (INTRODUCTION) ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER II (LITERATURE REVIEW) ....................................................... 6

Introduction........................................................................................................6
Family Structure.................................................................................................7
Family Stress & Coping.....................................................................................8
Family Consequences ......................................................................................11
Crisis Management Skills/ Disaster Policy Implementation ..........................13
Family Resiliency ............................................................................................15
Research Questions .......................................................................................19

CHAPTER III (METHODOLOGY) ........................................................... 20

Research Paradigm...........................................................................................20
Sampling Strategy ............................................................................................20
Procedure .........................................................................................................21
Data Analysis...................................................................................................23
Verification ......................................................................................................24

CHAPTER IV (RESULTS/INTERPRETATION) .......................................... 25

Financial Stress .............................................................................................25
Family Structure .............................................................................................26
Society & Culture ..........................................................................................27
Crisis Management Skills/ Disaster Policy Implementation ...........................28
Demographic Characteristics of Sample .......................................................30


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Chapter One:

Statement of Problem

The hurricane we have become well acquainted with known as Katrina swept through the Florida Keys and the Gulf Coast on August 26th and 29th, 2005 respectively. It was the most financially devastating natural disaster to hit this country; reports estimated the damages to be over $100 Billion (FEMA, 2006). The financial impact of Hurricane Katrina did not only affect American citizens who lived in the Gulf Coast region of the United States of America, but the aftershock touched every citizen in the United States and the World. The price of regular unleaded gasoline climbed about 40% higher than the national average between the end of the month of August to the beginning of September. The economic growth of the U.S. was substantially hurt by the sudden loss of 400,000 jobs (FEMA, 2006). This hit to the economy would directly affect the citizens of the city of New Orleans, especially the predominantly poor and low-wage earners. The majority of these low-wage earners and the city are predominantly African American. The city of New Orleans happens to be an 80% African American population (Urban Institute, 2006).

This was not the first time African American Families have been touched by a Hurricane, in 1965 Hurricane Betsy and the Flood of 1927 ravaged the city. After the flood of 1927, the United States Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1928. This legislation authorized the Mississippi River and Tributaries (MR&T) project which operates and maintains four major flood control methods: Levees, Floodways, Tributary Basin Improvements, and Channel Improvement and Stabilization (Homeland Security, 2005). Up until Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Betsy was the most expensive Hurricane in American History. Hurricane Betsy killed 76 people in Louisiana, and caused $1.42 billion in damage in 1965 that was inflation adjusted to $10-12 billion dollars in 2005 (Homeland Security, 2006).

As most of us watched every move that was made by contrasting entities involved, there was an obvious social disparity amongst “Who were relevant and who were not.” It began as a battle of words and continued to progress into perception of
racial resiliency. Racial resiliency can be described as the means in which different ethnic approach survival tactics in crises. The lost and forgotten people of New Orleans were soon known as refugees. The word refugee can be defined as: a person seeking asylum in a foreign country in order to escape persecution, war, terrorism, extreme poverty, famines, and natural disaster (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2006). The term further insinuated that the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans no longer could call the United States of America or at least New Orleans, Louisiana home. Government intervention or the lack thereof further ignited how insignificant the poor of New Orleans happened to be in the eyes of the hurricane victim. Video images captured a few African Americans looting electronics and a few Caucasians looting perishable goods. The video images were an example of the hypocrisy of the media that continued to perpetuate the stereotypes of African Americans. Hurricane Katrina brought to light the problematic issues that socially decimated the Gulf Coast region long before the natural disaster touched down, most evident in the parishes (counties) of New Orleans, Louisiana.

New Orleans is a multiethnic community with distinct social, cultural, and language backgrounds. Due to many African American families’ vulnerable financial situations before experiencing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina their best efforts to relocate were futile. The unemployment rate in New Orleans was twice the national average of 5.1% (Department of Labor, 2005). At the conclusion of segregation in the “old South” many of the white families transferred their children to private schools, which further limited African Americans the chance at a decent education due to obsolete tax revenue for the school districts in which they dominated (Hill & Hannaway, 2006). These students became the forgotten many, rather than the remembered few. Most recently in 2005, the educational system of New Orleans was in total disarray; 60% of African American students dropped out of school before they enter the 9th grade (Hill & Hannaway, 2006). The prisons in the New Orleans area are overwhelmingly inhabited by African Americans, where 70% are illiterate (Hill & Hannaway, 2006). The prisons in the city of New Orleans graduated the most people with General Equivalency Diplomas (G.E.D) compared to any other educational resource in the city (Hill & Hannaway, 2006).

The 9th ward in the city of New Orleans, predominantly African American, and was hit the hardest by the after-effects of Hurricane Katrina, because of flooding and the
complete loss of safe drinking water and electricity (Urban Institute, 2006). According to the Homeland Security (2006), the lower 9th ward proudly proclaims homeownership levels at 70 percent. Despite this important fact, there were very limited resources available for the disadvantaged and vulnerable to improve upon their financial and social well-being.

The shock and utter dismay of many Americans towards the government response was reciprocated and discussed by every media outlet. The American government was suspected of being “Missing in Action” when some of America’s most needy of families found themselves to be dependent upon them the most.

In January of 2006, the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey had identified about 1.2 million Hurricane Katrina evacuees age 16 and older (Winston, Finegold, Turner & Zuckerman, 2006). Due to the lack of sufficient and timely responses to individuals and dependents such as children and the elderly families in need of basic goods for survival in the city of New Orleans, many would not live to see the rebirth of such a cultural vast and unique city. The series of unfortunate events that soon followed Hurricane Katrina, such as the further depletion of limited resources, pushed the deeply rooted families of New Orleans to seek relief and refuge in other areas in the United States of America. Formal Employment opportunities were not a vast resource in New Orleans; many employers left the area because there was not a substantial amount of educated workers (Urban Institute, 2006).

Justification of Research

One of the purposes of the present study is to examine the pressing issues and questions that surround the family dynamics of those who have been uprooted and how their families’ new found situations complicated or relieved stress within the family.

Given how recent the natural disaster took place, the phenomenon that will be addressed resides within the resiliency efforts of the heads of household, or the expected leaders in families.

Another purpose will include observing how Hurricane Katrina victims approached their physical crises, psychological crises, and financial crises during a situation of high-level stress. Examining the family dynamics of African Americans
before and after Hurricane Katrina will lead to the further examination of the usefulness and effectiveness of social service agencies that are withstanding from government policy and influence. The significance of Hurricane Katrina is monumental. I am often times struck by the images of the suffering of the African American families. I am drawn to the struggles that surround suffering and doubt and most importantly the method individuals resolve these issues. A crisis gives an insightful depiction of where things may go wrong and how things must be approached in order to derive positive solutions.

The research question I will attempt to answer is simply stated as: What stressors did African American families face and how did they combat these stressors brought on by Hurricane Katrina? There are several important ideas that will be examined, which include: (a) the level of performance/behavior of members in the household who are classified as adults before & after their relocation; (b) the understanding of how family situations and cultural trends of African American families who had previously resided in New Orleans, Louisiana changed once relocated to Southwest Ohio; (c) and the understanding into the specific financial consequences, crisis management skills, family infrastructure, and response to and from their new neighbors and surrounding communities.

In summary, the potential contribution to research knowledge will be found within qualitative research interpretations of the data obtained concerning African American family adjustment and adaptation to crises. The physical damage caused by Hurricane Katrina has left a permanent mark on American history which has spiked interest in the social and political infrastructure of New Orleans and the hardships of the African American family in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina. But there continues to be a distinct lack of research surrounding the effects natural disasters such as hurricanes have on impoverished African American families as well as the effects of government-influenced mass relocation. There is also a pressing need to evaluate the disparity of resources for families that remain in impoverished urban areas such as New Orleans and how dysfunctional public policy is concerning social equality in the Gulf Coast. The revamping government policies and organizations created primarily to assist in disaster relief in order to ensure prevention of future social disasters is paramount. It is evident that more research is needed that goes beyond the financial hardship, researchers
must examine the cultural hardships that can just as effectively cause distress within a family. This study will fill a void that exists in our knowledge concerning African Americans’ resiliency to the stress associated with natural disaster using ideas from renowned family researchers, Patterson (2002) and McCubbin (1983). Along with the potentially ground breaking data that can be used to examine specific coping methods in a certain demographic when faced with natural disasters. These results will permit the formation of future hypotheses about the strength of family dynamics in time of crises.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction (The Digression of the African American in New Orleans)

During the 19th century, the Native-American Movement was widely protested against, because it protected the rights of native-born citizens of Louisiana such as the Creole. These native-born citizens of Louisiana whether of French, Spanish, African, or American Indian descent, tended to mix freely with one another, resulting in a cultural and racial mixture later defined as Creole (Anthony, 1978).

The protest later turned to hatred of anything not traditional Caucasian and Protestant. The movement further pushed the divide of New Orleans into three municipalities in 1836 and relinquished ethnic relationships (MacDonald & Davis, 1966). The fear of slave revolt along with the encouragement and support of abolitionists lead to more restrictive state structures on races and ethnicities beyond Anglo-American which had a negative effect on the free black population (MacDonald & Davis).

During the initial times of racial inequality during and soon after the Civil War, Creoles in the area did not receive proper treatment. In the days of Jim Crow laws, some of these families ended up being classified as "white" while others were classified strictly as "Negro," projecting backwards-racial dichotomies inconsistent with much of the city's complex history and ethnicities (Anthony, 1978). Jim Crow laws began in the 1870’s and lasted until the Civil Rights Movement. It was used directly as a tool to segregate White and Black America. The rise of Jim Crow Laws set the African American in New Orleans even further behind the ethnic and racial curve when it comes to education and the economy.

The research available indicates and supports the idea that New Orleans, along with many other Southern states digressed after the Civil War. The core race purity of the definition of Creole receives magnified confirmation in the specific insistence that no black or person of mixed blood can or ever could have been correctly coined a Creole, no matter his parentage, place of birth, language, or cultural orientation (Tregle, 1989). Since these moments in history there have not been any significant changes made in these
systems to improve family structure and dynamics from one generation to the next, which has given way to the impoverished and socially inadequate city of New Orleans today.

**Family Structure**

The finances necessary for many African American families in comparison to Caucasian families to reside within the same household have been well documented. The average income for African Americans in the city of New Orleans is around $11,000 dollars whereas the average income of Caucasians in New Orleans is around $43,000 (Urban Institute, 2007). The disparity amongst wages in comparison to Caucasians has had a direct impact on the infrastructure of African American families for generations. Before and after 1940, the presence of single parents and parentless children in black communities and the higher percentage of extended kinship households amongst blacks can directly be connected with a lack of finances (Ruggles, 1994). The high percentages of blacks residing in multi-generational households are also suggested because blacks have higher mortality rates than other ethnicities. Fertility, poor educational opportunities, and finances have played large roles in furthering reasoning behind the idea of extended family member households. Two alternative explanations for the origins of the deconstruction of African American households are focused on the idea that children without both parents could have been a response to the socioeconomic conditions faced by newly freed black slaves after the Civil War. This pattern could reflect a difference in social norms between blacks and whites that could have developed during slavery or even European and African cultures (Ruggles, 1994).

The financial pressures of raising a family, on only one poverty-defined income, can limit the ability of the mental and emotional growth of the children involved. The single African American mother does not have the time to develop progressive child-rearing tactics to teach and encourage her children to be “free” thinkers (Jones et. al, 2002). It has been suggested that the financial sacrifices of the single mother have led to the raising of her children in an authoritative environment even though they are physically away from home because of their financial responsibilities (Brody et. al, 2002). The natural progression from dependent child to decision-making adult is not initiated or followed through because of the lack of parent-child interaction. How can a
parent-child relationship be effectively developed if there are some many stressors placed on the two within their family?

Relocating to other geographic areas as means to ensure and improve the family has been done for generations within the African American family. Not only would the move provide more economic opportunities for the family, it could potentially change the trends of educational underachievement and intergenerational poverty that have encased African American families for generations. This idea has been seen throughout history from the escaped slave traveling north for social justice and the sharecropper looking for better opportunities in the manufacturing plants of the northern metropolitan cities.

The specific effects that “sudden relocation” after a natural disaster the response of these families to the cultural and social trends in suburban and rural America, such as Southwest Ohio have not been thoroughly examined. Many New Orleans families who relocated to other areas relinquished their physical presence in the cultural stronghold that their home city possessed; this could not be found in any other city in the world. For the first time, a generation in many of these families would have to grow up in a totally different cultural environment than their ancestors.

The issue of “sudden relocation” and its impact on the African American family will be addressed. Multi-generational households within African American kinships are not of new interest, but exploring the unplanned creations of multigenerational households along with the pressure on fictive kinships to ensure “family” survival will add to the area concerning the African American family.

**Family Stress & Coping Framework**

Familial stress has an impact on the quality of care within families, especially those of African decent (Brody et. al, 2002). Many of these families are single parent households and resources such as time, energy, and finances are limited (Urban Institute, 2006). How can a single parent of three combat the negative impacts associated with a natural disaster? The greatest problem that single African American women face is poverty, millions of these families live at or below the poverty line. A four-person family unit with two children, the 2005 poverty threshold is $19,806 (Census Bureau, 2005).
The accessibility of sufficient labor that provides a decent wage is rare; these women are often burdened by low education levels (Hill & Hannaway, 2006).

Struggles such as death of a family member, retirement, and adolescent behavior issues can be defined as normative stressor events (McHenry & Price, 2005). The Family stress theory has played a major role in examining the unmentioned and often neglected social hierarchy that limits many African Americans resulting in their tendency to reside very low on the social ladder when concerned with education (Jones et. al, 2002).

The unique social positioning of African Americans only furthers the ideas that have led to an enhanced perception of incompetence in crisis management, financial responsibility, and a deficiency in family recovery as after-effects to any stress. Throughout the years many researchers have attempted to describe the various types of stressor events (e.g., Boss, 1988, 2002; Hansen & Hill, 1964; Rees & Smyer, 1983.) Family stressor events can be classified into ten dimensions: internality versus externality, pervasiveness versus mildness, transitoriness versus chronicity, randomness versus surplus, perceived solvability versus perceived insolvability, and substantive content (Lipman-Blumen, 1975).

Non-normative stressor events are the events that result from unique situations that could not be predicted and are not likely to be repeated, such as natural disasters, automobile accident, and loss of employment (McHenry & Price, 2005). As mentioned before, family demands are comprised of normative and nonnormative stressors within the changing events in life, continuous family strains left unresolved increase daily hassles (Patterson, 2002). Familial capabilities that include tangible and psychosocial resources and coping behaviors are primary factors in the extent and ability to recover in times of stress for families. On a daily basis, families engage in relatively stable patterns of interaction as they try to balance the demands they face with their existing capabilities to achieve a level of family adjustment to daily stress (Patterson, 2002). However, there are times when family demands significantly exceed their capabilities. When this imbalance persists, families experience crisis, which is a period of significant disequilibrium and disorganization within a family, leading to the destruction of the family structure. Each member of the family is now charged with the seeming
insurmountable task of persevering exponential amounts of hardships (financial, emotional, and physical).

The theory of family stress has been concentrated in the area of poverty. African-Americans are susceptible to the effects of poverty, since poverty has become increasingly concentrated in urban neighborhoods often occupied predominantly by African Americans (Hammock, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004). A low socioeconomic status directly correlates with mental health problems, defined as stress. These problems can only be heightened when faced with a traumatic event such as a hurricane. The African-American derives much of its character from both African heritage and its unique position in American society (Hammock, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004). Most of the employment opportunities for single African American women that have children offer decreased wage earning potential, especially in the South. The poor in the South have access to fewer services and amenities than do the poor in the North and African Americans living in the South must cope with what Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) have termed “an oppressed social structure.”

This position is an area of interest that can compound family stress to unforeseen levels of stress that allow for the disparity within particular coping skills amongst different ethnic groups and can go as far as distinguishing gender coping practices. African American males and females have distinctive coping reactions to situations that they come across; they diverge in coping techniques during adolescence, and appear to respond differently to family stress (Hammock, Robinson, Crawford, & Li, 2004).

Providing an opportunity for natural disaster victims to voice their experiences is essential. The identifications of stressors associated with the unmet needs within African American families before and after natural disaster is a subject that needs to be thoroughly examined. Families engage in active processes to balance family demands with family capabilities. The interaction of these constructs directly within the structure of family will provide a level of family adjustment or adaptation (Patterson, 1993). The idea that uncommon and common shifts in society and one’s cultural values of interest have a direct impact on family stress discrete events such as Hurricane Katrina and continuous events such as intergenerational poverty can be described as one’s impacts on the other. Specifically observing and referring back to the *Ten Dimensions of Family*
Stressor Events will allow for any resiliency efforts made or the lack thereof to be brought to the forefront. The process by which families restore balance thus causing a direct reduction in demands, leads to increased capabilities are known as regenerative power in stress theory, if the outcome is to be perceived as acceptable (Patterson, 2002). On the other hand, families can also engage in processes leading to poor adaptation, which is called vulnerability in stress theory (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Coping is an undefined process that cannot be instructed. Coping is an emotional, physical, and mental process that should not be looked upon as an outcome to the stressful events within a family, because family is conceptualized as a process (McHenry & Price, 2005). Coping actions are vastly different from resources and perceptions. Coping can be defined as the actions a person takes in order to deal with stress. A particular family’s resources or a perception of an event does imply whether or how that family will react to the event (Boss, 1988).

The coping mechanisms and cognitive coping strategies of African American families are of extreme interest. Research in recent years has shifted from crisis and family dysfunction to the process of coping (McHenry & Price, 2005). Rather than focusing on why stressful events have encompassed families such as African American it is more sensible to examine why some families within certain cultures are more equipped to manage and endure stressful events such as a natural disaster. Relocation after a natural disaster is common practice for many families. Sociological theories of coping emphasize a wide variety of actions directed at either changing the stressful situation or alleviating distress by manipulation the social environment (McCubbin et al., 1980). Family coping skills have been conceptualized in three unique responses: direct action, intra-psychic action, and control of the emotions generated by the stressor (Boss, 1988).

Family Consequences

Intergenerational poverty has been a mainstay throughout New Orleans African American communities. Many citizens had problems obtaining employment long before Hurricane Katrina. In 2004, the unemployment rates in the metropolitan area of New Orleans were nearly 12 percent, more than twice the national rate (Herzer & Lerman, 2006). The overall city unemployment rate was 20 percent higher than the national
unemployment rate of all black workers (Herzer & Lerman, 2006). Poverty rates of
individuals in the city (at 23 percent) were 10 percentage points higher than the national
average in 2004, and median family incomes were only two-thirds of the national average
(Census Bureau, 2005). Hurricane Katrina’s violent winds and killing waters swept into
the mainstream a stark realization: the poor had been abandoned by society and its
institutions, and sometimes by their well-off brothers and sisters, long before the storm
(Dyson, 2006). The events that soon followed Hurricane Katrina concentrated the focus
on inequity and inequality within the economy and education in America specifically on
New Orleans and the surrounding Gulf Coast families.

Racial segregation in the city of New Orleans metropolitan area was among the
highest in the South in the 2000 Census (Frey & Myers, 2005). Residential segregation
by race is usually associated with low levels of employment and earnings among blacks
(Cutler & Glaeser, 1997). And rates of crime and drug abuse in New Orleans were among
the nations highest as well. Indeed, even compared to other large American cities, New
Orleans was a city with declining employment and population over the past several
decades.

The impact of basic demands to sufficiently clothe, feed, and shelter the
immediate family members for impoverished heads of household can be very
overwhelming. Adding to this pressure the uncommon demands of uncontrollable events
can lead to the destruction of what bonding a family had in their possession. The times
that soon follow a natural disaster are unimaginable, let alone, rather difficult to manage
if a family’s resources were limited long before the occurrence of such a natural disaster.
To expect any less than the total devastation of the city of New Orleans was to be
expected given the status of African American family for generations within a city that
continued to invest it resource in events such as Mardi Gras and sporting events such as
the Super Bowl. Another research question asked, where has the billions of dollars these
events have generated gone to in the city of New Orleans? Does the government care
about the economically disadvantaged? Based on the aftermath that soon followed
Hurricane Katrina, not much must have been invested in improving families to be self
sufficient in order to better cope with and withstand any situation.
The Crisis Management Skills of the citizens of New Orleans, let alone, African American families are a reflection of the societal and cultural influences to mistrust the government. Many of the families who fell victim to Hurricane Katrina waited until they were faced with the “eye of the storm” before they decided to react and actively pursue adequate shelter. The lack of awareness of the severity at hand was fueled by government response. Aug. 29, 2005, HURRICANE KATRINA: The president declared a state of emergency in Louisiana two days before Katrina struck, but didn't visit the area or allocate funds until Sept. 2—the same day federal troops first arrived with food and water (Romano, 2005). The hesitation and inability to effectively cope with the issue at hand portrayed by the federal government could have brought about many underlining problematic issues of the Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

A particular issue that was discussed through open-ended dialogue is the shift in familial trends. The effects of suddenly moving from one region to another can be associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD), which is defined as Psychological and emotional distress which develops following a stressful, traumatic event or series of events (war, rape, natural disaster). The response of extended family members and the culturally unique communities that New Orleans evacuees were now expected to be viable members of may have added insurmountable pressures. Escaping a natural disaster with your life is a feat in itself, but that is only the beginning of a long heroic battle. The real danger lies in making emotional decisions in a climate of fear and uncertainty (Temple, 2002).

These issues were discussed through the interviews with members of African American households. Although millions of people and hundreds of thousands of families were relocated few has studied familial results concerning family coping and crisis management skills associated with such an event. Affleck and Tennen (1993), stated when families think about their situation in ways that make it more manageable, they are said to be using cognitive coping strategies. In New Orleans, when the infrastructure of family is concerned, about 200,000 people did not have automobiles or access to an automobile. There were an additional 20,000 special needs people that could not be easily moved. Finally, there were several hundred thousands of people that would
not evacuate because of the difficulty of actually evacuating and finding suitable shelters (Homeland Security, 2006). The decision to wait the Hurricane out was made for a lot of families because of their previous experiences in surviving Hurricane Betsy and being able to recover. Hurricane Betsy was one mile per hour (mph) from being considered a category five hurricane. One research question consist of: what happens if that category five hurricane ever touched down in New Orleans? Are the people ready? Are the protective levees able to withstand a Category 5 hurricane storm surge?

One of the important aspects of coping involves managing the many outside systems of the family that are essential to the family’s well-being such as government agencies. From its inception, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was a “disaster”- a play on words, waiting to happen because of its slow implementation due to change in political personnel. From July of 1979 until months into President Reagan’s administration problems began to mount, which led to indecisiveness concerning the existing agendas and how to reconcile the many missions attached to the newfound agency (May & Williams, 1986).

The federal government has not always been responsible for responding to natural disasters, to add, the nation’s first disaster legislation was enacted in 1803. The United States of America lacked a coherent and unified federal strategy for addressing natural and man-made disasters for the first 160 years of its history (Dyson, 2005). Many of America’s earliest disasters went financially unmet and unresolved by government intervention. Between 1803 and 1950 one hundred and twenty-eight acts were passed to help ease the financial hardships associated with catastrophes. It was an unwritten rule that social service agencies, churches, city and state offices outside of the disaster area would give support as well. As time went on and government intervention became more of a common occasion into the daily habits of all Americans, dependence on the government became expected and counted upon. This problem is magnified by idea of shared governance, where those in federal government have significant management responsibilities but sub-national governmental entities are solely responsible for operations (May & Williams, 1986).

Organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) have lead the push to restore the
spirits of the people and the city of New Orleans. Addressing the issues that relocated families had is very vital. A few ideas must be considered: The struggles that one undergoes to support his or her family after enduring profound hardships. The impact that financial ruin has as on a dependent adult is now thrust into the leading role in family financial support. The influence that distant relatives and “fictive kinships” have in ensuring the survival of families in need must be considered. Where would these organizations be when African Americans solely depended on the government needed them most? Would they provide all the services needed to ensure the survival of African American families affected by Hurricane Katrina?

**Family Resiliency Theoretical Framework**

The disciplines of public health, medical sociology, psychology, and family science converged at a similar place asking a similar question: What accounts for why some stay healthy and do well in the face of risk and adversity and others do not? The phenomenon of *doing well* when faced with trials and tribulations is known as resiliency (Patterson, 2002).

Resiliency Theory can be defined as the belief in the ability of every person to overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that particular person’s life. Resiliency Theory is founded on the proposed idea that if members of one's family care deeply, possess high expectations, and purposeful support and value your participation, you will maintain a faith in the future and can overcome almost any adversity (Krovetz, 1999). Family resilience can be examined from the perspective of family stress and coping theory (Boss, 2001). Family resilience is similar to family regenerative power when good outcomes follow significant risk situations confronting a family (Patterson, 2002). The idea of family resiliency has been a highly debated topic amongst family researchers and family clinical practitioners. The incorporation of the family resiliency perspective while including the conceptualized meaning from family stress theories will allow for specific clarification in utilizing the proper constructs of family resiliency while defining the connection of family stress and family resiliency (Patterson, 2002). Resiliency as a outcome, the characteristics or protective factors that contribute to families being resilient, the nature and extent of risk exposure and the
process of resilience is an issue that must be take into consideration when understand family survivorship (Patterson, 2002).

The concept of resilience emerged primarily from the studies of children who functioned competently despite exposure to adversity when psychopathology was expected (Werner & Smith, 1992). The idea of resiliency was introduced to the field of family studies in the early eighties. Successful adaptation to crisis in many military families during the Vietnam War when the loss of a loved one was presented allowed variability to be observed in the families (McCubbin et al., 1980). Further research has defined resiliency as positive behavioral patterns and functional competence individuals and family unit demonstrate under stressful and adverse circumstances, which determine the family’s ability to recover by maintaining its integrity as a unit while insuring, and where necessary restoring, well-being of family members and the family unit as a whole (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1996). Resiliency within individuals in families could be classified within three categories. Initially, (a) family-levels outcome must be conceptualized in order to assess the degree in which a family is competent in accomplishing the outcomes (b) there must be some type of risk associated with the expectation that a family will not be successful and (c) there is a need to understand what protective mechanisms prevent negative expected outcomes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Families that have underwent a traumatic event such as a natural disaster experience many uncommon demands and are surrounded by unexpected and unanticipated risk. These unusual demands on a family are not limited to a range of such events from natural disasters, to the premature death of a parent or child (Patterson, 2002). Understanding the process that surrounds family resiliency is to first comprehend family protective processes. Families often times show their true character when faced with insurmountable pressure and stress. The emotional and financial outcomes are frequently negated but the story continues on for generations in a family that has survived by any means necessary. The coping of family stress brought on by the elements of the world and the success of family in remaining a unit gives the family its identity and strengthens their resiliency. The key to understanding family resilience is the identification of protective factors and processes that moderate the relationship between a
family’s exposure to significant risk and their ability to show competence in accomplishing family functions (Patterson, 2002).

A task for disaster survivors is to integrate the experience into a changed but intact identity that leads to an improved lifestyle. It is a common occurrence to analyze one’s life after surviving a near-death event. Ultimately, a survivor must come to terms with how the trauma has changed his or her self-concept, relationships, and aspirations (Shalev, 2004). After a disaster or trauma, people are left with many questions. With proper support, both from outside or within the family, human beings can display an amazing capacity to spring back from the deepest distress and helplessness (Halpern & Tramontin, 2007). It has been suggested that after experiencing stressful events in their lives people will feel a renewed commitment to life and relationships along with gaining awareness and personal growth (Raphael, 1986).

 Adaptation is another term that can be used to describe family resiliency (Patterson, 2002). In recent years there have been assessments conducted in order to view how families are able to recover from stress or crisis. The purpose of a family’s post-crisis or post-stress adjustment is to reduce or eliminate the disruptiveness in the family system and restore balance (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Family adaptation is the degree to which the family system alters its internal functions (behaviors, rules, roles, perceptions) and/ or external reality to achieve a fit between the system (individual or family) and the environment (McHenry & Price, 2005). Adaptation is achieved through reciprocal relationships in which system demands are met by resources from the societal environment and environment demands are satisfied through system resources (Hansen & Hill, 1964).

There are three broad categories of potential perceived benefits in connection with traumatic experience: changes in self-perception, changes in interpersonal relationships, and changes in philosophy of life. These ideas can be tied in with the central aspects of family relationships that outline family interconnectedness and familial elasticity (Tedechi & Calhoun, 1995; Halpern & Tramontin, 2007). The relocation of an entire family desperately involves instrumental communication skills because it facilitates the capabilities of families to achieve the simplest of normal functions. When these ties are broken it represents the beginning of the destruction of the family which is seen as a
unified entity during times of trauma. Having the ability to successfully verbalize and resolve problematic issues as a family is crucial in adjusting to stressful periods in their lifecycle (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). The evidence of outside resources should be considered an “added bonus.” A family’s resiliency must reside on their belief in themselves to negotiate solutions and derive plans to ensure their livelihoods and continue to protect their family. The belief in people outside of their family must remain or become steadfast. Maintaining clear family boundaries involves family protection of integrity, sense of identity, values, routines and rituals from overdirectedness by health, education, and social service providers who are trying to help meet special family needs (Patterson, 2002).

When a family’s opinion of the world is broken down into a negative idea because of unusual experiences, the family’s ability to recover, regroup, and persevere often involves reconstruction of a new view of the world that allows them to make sense of such an event (Taylor et. al, 2000). How can families combat the stressors of a natural disaster? What are the affect effects for African American families that have underwent the trauma of a crisis such as Hurricane Katrina?

According to McCubbin and Patterson (1982), resources in response to normative and non-normative stressors are similar. Resources included in non-normative stressor events for individuals in families, including (education and psychological stability), family (cohesion and adaptability) and environmental (social support and medical services) attributes (McHenry & Price, 2005). Most importantly, adaptation cannot share meaning with Adjustment. Adjustment consist of short-term responses to stressor events whereas Adaptation happens over an extended period of time which yield evident long-term consequences that include changes in familial roles, interactions, and perceptions of individual family members (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Familial roles, family interactions, outside influences and self identity may influence how the African American family portrays resiliency to the stressors brought on by the devastating aftermath of natural disasters. In completing the Literature Review, I was able to develop certain research questions that lead to the development of the interview guide (refer to Appendix iii). These research questions can be found within the Literature Review.

Taking the time to observe an individuals and his or her family’s experience during a seemingly uncontrollable time of need are essential in comprehending their individual situations. Utilizing an exploratory approach is a necessity in order to uncover the process to overcome tragic real-life experiences of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. This approach will provide enhanced insight into how each individual dealt with the changes that have taken place within their lives “after the storm.” The research questions were created to represent the individual concepts that effect families identified. These research questions are designed to yield descriptive recounts of individual experiences:
Chapter Three

Methodology

Research Paradigm

The methodology for this qualitative (exploratory) study relied on in-depth open-ended interviews. Interviews and demographic questionnaires were used to interpret individual actions. In a given situation, each will yield descriptive data concerning the severity of the different forms of stress and resiliency of research participants that have relocated to Southwest Ohio from New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina. The specific goal of the research was to examine how people make sense of their own lives, experiences, and the structures of their world (Creswell, 2000). Qualitative research refers to studies that produce research finding that cannot be determined by using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

This specific population of people, those that have relocated to Southwest Ohio from New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina has been recently created. Using an exploratory method to collect information about family life during and after natural disasters is essential because of the allowance of motivations and personal meaning for each research participant involved. According to Creswell (2000), within a qualitative paradigm the only reality is that which is constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation. As a researcher and interviewer I must be able to immerse myself into the research participants’ social and cultural realm in order to better comprehend their individual perceptions on their realities. This concept is very important when the idea of examining and interpreting the individual experiences of members of households that have been effected (positive & negative) by forced relocation. This exploratory research design was constructed to yield in-depth answers and provide an observation into the resiliency efforts of African American families that faced the stresses from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Participants (Sampling Strategy):

Ten adults were initially targeted to be interviewed. When the time to be interviewed approached, only six were interviewed. The other potential research
participants decided not to go through with the interviews because of various reasons. These reasons ranged from being no longer interested to questioning the intentions of the interviews and data collected. This sample of six African American adults was obtained mainly through the “snowball effect.” I was first introduced to a family that came to visit a church I frequent and was able to establish a relationship. Through this relationship I was able to get into contact with others in the area and after each contact was made the question of: “is there anyone else you may know in this area that relocated here because of what happened in New Orleans”, was asked. This particular method of collecting research participants had a profound effect in regards to contacting potential research study participants that were willing to be of assistance, thus significantly reducing the potential sample size from ten to six. There were many contacts made in order to ensure participants from those that qualified; but almost half were reluctant to be interviewed. I also anticipated multigenerational households, (containing at least 3 generations) but I only encountered one. I expected to encounter adults that were Heads of Households but could be categorized as low-income earners that possess little formal education and this category resonated throughout the research participants.

Six Adult members of families that relocated to southwest Ohio from New Orleans, because of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, agreed to participate. Each prospective research participant was also required to be at least eighteen years of age. Each research participant filled out a demographic questionnaire that was used to provide essential background information that may or may not have affected their experiences. The demographic questionnaire consisted of: age, gender, marital status before and after Hurricane Katrina, formal education level, and primary occupation before and after Hurricane Katrina, and their role within their family, meaning, how would that classify their contributions to the family. The choices were dependent adult, contributing adult, or head of household.

**Procedure:**

Given the relatively small number of possible research participants to being with, I made the decision to establish a “relationship” with each of the ten initial possible participants. Three of these ten potential participants suggested that they knew someone who may be interested; I had planned to interview up to ten evacuees. Once I was given
these contacts, the focus of the research was reestablished; there would be an equal amount of Heads of Household, Contributing Adults, and Dependent Adults interviewed. There were approximately three phone calls given and three voicemails left a week for those who I was not able to contact for four weeks. I decided to discontinue the phone call attempts after speaking with my advisors and ensuring them that all had been done to get in touch with the potential participants for the study. Of the ten potential research participants, five of the initial contacts decided not to participate, along with one of the contacts made through a potential participant decided to participate. After numerous attempts to get into contact with each person who voluntarily gave me their contact information, I was only successful in interviewing six. Before each interview was scheduled, a brief synopsis of what the interviews would consist of was given to each willing participant. Before I began to interview the research participants, the research proposal for this subject was reviewed and accepted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Miami University. This acceptance gave me permission as the principle investigator to conduct this specific research for up to one year.

At the beginning of each interview, a letter of consent (refer to Appendix A1) was received by each participant to read, sign, and keep (the top portion). The letter that each research participant received outlined the goals of the study, solicited their participation, and introduced the researcher. In “plain English”, I explained to each interviewee that the focus of the interview was to examine and explore their family experiences before and after Hurricane Katrina. These experiences consisted of, but were not limited to: the importance of their decision-making, familial relationships, sentiments toward local and federal leadership, and the opportunities or lack thereof since enduring Hurricane Katrina. The identity of each research participant would be protected through the use of pseudonyms. Building a rapport with the participants is very essential in gaining the as accurate and insightful information possible. I was familiar with the city New Orleans to and Southwest Ohio, this made an impact on the fluidity of their participations. The location of each interview was conducted in the homes of research participants. The six interviews conducted lasted between 25-45 minutes each and were tape recorded with the permission of participant and finally transcribed by the principle investigator and a research assistant. Personal observation notes were taken in order to
document the context of discussion and mannerism (comfort levels) of each research participant that could not be captured on using audio equipment.

**Data Analysis:**
The in-depth responses that yielded descriptive data from the study were analyzed using open coding. Open coding involves breaking the data into discrete parts, closely examining it, comparing it for similarities and differences, and asking questions about the phenomena reflected in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data analysis used can be described in the following manner. Mile and Huberman (1994) described the process of open coding: “first the data must be conceptualized that calls for the responses to be separated by question which determines similar concepts. Categories are then established based on these concepts. The properties and dimensions of the categories help to develop patterns among the individuals involved in the study.” The patterns were then structured in a manner to better understand what particular stressors and what particular resiliency efforts were made by each individual and his or her family after their relocation from New Orleans to Southwest Ohio. After the interviews were typed out verbatim, the research participants’ answers were divided into six individual groups. The demographic questionnaires were reviewed to further allow distinction between the sample, which evolved into the three separate groups. Each group was coded according to the differences and similarities between each. Categories were created based on this coding to indicate themes. In order to be classified as a theme a stressor or resiliency effort had to be repeated at least four times throughout the six individual interviews. The families were again compared once again based off in what city in Southwest Ohio each individual research participant currently lives. This data analysis was reviewed by Dr. Kevin Bush’s research assistant Ms. Darla Dixon, who he previously trained. She is a prominent member in the Master’s Degree program of Family Studies & Social Work at Miami University.

Following the guidelines of Miles and Huberman (1994), I used a generalized content analysis with an ethnographic framework. After initial identification and coding of text units that addressed stress and resiliency, I conducted axial coding to distinguish
patterns of activities and meaning within and between the individual role within the family and the family. Axial Coding is defined as separating core themes during qualitative data analysis (Gatrell, 2002). In the final phase of selective coding, according to (Strauss, 1990) I integrated patterns across families in order to “tell a story” about the central concepts of stress and resiliency in African American families that have relocated to Southwest Ohio from New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina. If the data indicates disparity among the experiences of the research participants’ new concepts will be introduced (LaRossa, 2005). It is important to mention that families involving fictive kin as primary care givers for families in crisis will be considered to be a new phenomena within this area of interest. At the conclusion of the interviews, I integrated the data in order to show relatedness or lack thereof between the experiences of the research participants'. Discourses on family stress and resiliency were analyzed from a historical perspective of the experiences for African Americans in the United States.

Verification:
As proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I relied on a range of established criteria to enhance credibility and dependability of the data. Creditability and dependability was enhanced through repeating coding techniques, member checks with participants and triangulations with my Research Assistant, Ms. Rachel McMillan. I trained Ms. McMillan on how to code each research participant’s response and gave her the guideline pertaining to the how many times an idea had to be repeated in order to be a theme.
Chapter Four

Results

The demographics of each research participant are presented in Table 1 (see page 31). The participants have resided in Southwest Ohio (Cincinnati, Hamilton, or Middletown) ranging in time from almost 6 months to 18 months. Four categorical stressors provided the context resiliency efforts (positive or negative) made for each individual and his or her perceived resiliency efforts of his or her family. Often times these stressors overlapped, as many times research participants felt that one stress was caused by the other. The research participants descriptively noted how their individual families were in constant crisis mode and how they overcame those socioeconomic crises even though they were at a heightened state after Hurricane Katrina; which yielded profound resiliency efforts that led to survival and eventually adaptation. The Themes Recognized in Families before and after Hurricane Katrina: Financial Stress, Family Cohesiveness, Society & Culture, and Government Intervention.

Financial Stress

A lack of finances was expressed by over eighty percent (n=6) of the research participants as the main stressor that encompassed his or her family before Hurricane Katrina and its after-effects. The lack of economic mobility limited the ability of the poor African American family in New Orleans long before Hurricane Katrina. Chelsea, a 19-year old store clerk, described her family’s financial situation before Hurricane Katrina as “living paycheck to paycheck.” It was recognized that New Orleans provided exponential opportunities to make a “living,” but most of those opportunities centered around tourism where there were no guarantees. Once the need to evacuate was evident, five of six research participants believed his or her family was unprepared because of the lack of finances present in the home long before the disaster. After Hurricane Katrina, the ability to provide financially for the family began to mount for adult members in the family. “I was scared as hell, but I could not let my kids see me panic,” one single father said. This is one of the areas in which Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) were displayed involved specifically finances. “I expected to be able to talk to somebody and
they could direct me to someone or something,” Beverly, a diabetic from New Orleans stated.

Once relocated to Southwest Ohio every research participant suggested that finding employment was the first priority for every member of the family. Employment opportunities were far scarcer in Ohio; sixty-six percent (n= 6) of the research participants suggested this idea. The higher wages were evident but the opportunities were few and far between. Byron, a 20 year old student stated that Southwest Ohio is an area where people come up to “relax” and New Orleans allows a person to make money and provide the venues to do such a thing. The employment opportunities for the research participants were not greater. Even though there were not many employment opportunities five of six participants did believe that money went a lot farther here, which allowed for ownership of property and better living conditions. “I believed that when I got here I would finally be able to work in my trade as a mechanic…I ended up doing the same thing as I did in New Orleans,” said Wayne, a father of two. Only a few months after relocating to Southwest Ohio five of six research participants stated that they had secured employment and was now living in a house in the area. Even though there has been an exponential amount of employment opportunities presented in New Orleans since the rebuilding efforts began relatively, few workers have returned to the city of New Orleans (Rogio-Franzia & Connolly, 2005).

**Family Cohesiveness**

Due to the lack of economic stability within the households often times there was not much energy dedicated to improving familial relationship between the former New Orleans residents. The data indicated four of the six research participants currently reside in or came from single-parent households. All referenced the need to provide financially as the main reason his or her family did not possess strong family relations. Kendra, a 24 year old teacher, stated that her father worked a lot and she really did not see him much. This lack of parent-child interactions suggested a lack of respect for the perceived role of the parent from the child. Often times the research participants, over eighty percent suggested that financial comments left family relationship in constant turmoil and conflict. Ironically, once relocation was seen as the only viable source of positive
family adjustment to the crises of Hurricane Katrina, family members once seen as inadequate and selfish stepped up in order to ensure their family’s survival. Fathers, husbands, uncles, cousins, and mothers were given the respect he or she deserved. *Hurricane Katrina* was used as a “rite of passage” for many family members struggling to establish themselves as viable members of the family.

Family relationships were put to the test once family members were recognized as victims of Hurricane Katrina. Every research participant was only able to relocate to Southwest Ohio through the assistance of “family.” Initially, when forced to relocate with family members and fictive kinships that were not strong before relocation, the living situations were very uncomfortable. Theodore, a 53 year old minister, said, “We were very fortunate to have a relative step up and take us in but after about three weeks we felt like we were intruding and we needed to have our own.” Five of Six research participants suggested that kinship outside of their immediate family was not essential before Hurricane Katrina, but after, all six believe that they were necessary and important. The respect for family and the role each individual possessed was increased. Family and Fictive kinships allowed for the families of all the research participants to “start over.” The theme of Family Cohesiveness received the most attention in explaining stress and resiliency.

**Society and Culture**

83% (n=6) of the research participants lived in impoverished neighborhoods within New Orleans. The housing provided to these families was unstable and relatively expensive given their income. Over 75% of African American families in New Orleans live below the poverty line (FEMA, 2006). Five of Six research participants stated that there was two incomes with their respective households, but resources such as educational programs in order to assist in the improvement of the socioeconomic positioning of the family was null and void. This particular family situation was something that they were accustomed to. Every research participant suggested that New Orleans being a “chocolate city” was a major factor in why the people are so behind.

Four research participants (n=6) said that they no longer have the desire to be residence of New Orleans. 66% of the research participants stated that when the arrived in Southwest Ohio they were in extreme culture shock because of the environment that
they now called home. One research participant stated “Everything from the paint on the walls and the smell of the streets is different…” All the research participants suggested that the cuisine in Southwest Ohio is vast different than New Orleans; the culture of Southwest Ohio allowed for the evidence of (PTSD) to set in when the merchandise and items they were accustomed to were no longer available. Theodore, stated, “The food up here is terrible, it took me forever to find my way around here to find some decent southern food. I knew once I crossed the “tracks” to the black side of town I would be o.k.” Five of six research participants suggested that a person could achieve a lot in Southwest Ohio given its fallbacks as a “slow” area. Four of six suggested that educational opportunities were better in Southwest Ohio when compared to New Orleans. Chelsea stated that due to the fact that she is classified as a Hurricane Katrina evacuee is eligible for grants and scholarships that she would not be eligible for in New Orleans because she is considered the majority at the schools she was applying to for cosmetology. Wayne, a single father of two, stated that his kids were now talking about college whereas in New Orleans that topic never was mentioned by the two children respectively.

**Government Intervention**

Every one of the research of the participants express displeasure in the local, state, and federal governments’ efforts to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina; especially his or her particular family. “The levees are surrounded predominantly by black communities, do think that is a coincidence?” one research participant stated. All of the research participants believed that the government did not care about the poorer areas of New Orleans. Once the Hurricane hit they believed that there should have been more of an effort to save the communities. “Bush is worried about what’s going on over in Iraq more than he his about his own country, he should be taking care of home first,” a primary caregiver stated. Four of Six research participants did not receive assistant from did not receive any assistance from *FEMA*. The biggest concern with the government was the accessibility to financial relief. Every research participant suggested that the government should have given more financially to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The increased allotment would allow families to effectively *start over* and better adjust themselves to their new surroundings. Beverly suggested that before Hurricane Katrina
she could just go to Office A and almost get anything that she was eligible for after
Hurricane Katrina that did not happen. All six of the research participant stated that
financial relief is the key in allowing victims of natural disasters to become better
accumulated to their new cultures after forced relocation. All six of the research
participants did not wait around and become dependent on government handouts and
were very active in ensuring his or her family’s survival. Beverly stated, “Every month
we were threatened that our assistance was going to get taken away, so my husband went
out to every office he could find to look for employment and help.”
Table 1.
Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Place of Residency in Southwest Ohio</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Occupation Before</th>
<th>Occupation After</th>
<th>Self-Identified Role w/in family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Cincinnati High School</td>
<td>Adm. assistant</td>
<td>Store clerk</td>
<td>Contributing Adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byron</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Cincinnati High School</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Store clerk</td>
<td>Contributing Adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodore</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Middletown College</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Middletown Some college</td>
<td>Adm. Assistant</td>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>Contributing Adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendra</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Hamilton College</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Contributing Adult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Cincinnati High School</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pseudonyms were used in order to maintain confidentiality.*
Chapter Five:

Discussion:

Open-ended interviews allowed for the interpretation and assessment of personal experience when faced with the crises of Hurricane Katrina. The descriptive answers given provide qualitative knowledge of the respondent’s trials and tribulations during a specific crisis within his or her family. The excerpts and interview data also indicate how research participants perceive their family issues to be similar amongst the widespread Hurricane Katrina survivors. The perceptions that family finances, family cohesiveness, societal and cultural acceptance, and government intervention are family stressors were found to be universal among the respondents.

Stress is a variable in life that everyone will encounter; it is a factor of life that is unavoidable. Throughout history, before African Americans were thought to possess and reside in families, let alone grasp the concept of what the idea of family was, they have endured countless crises. Being faced with a crisis is something that Black America has dealt with for years and ironically grows worrisome when the threat of a crisis is not looming. Examining the history of Blacks in America, from physical slavery to the social injustice of today (refer to government response to Hurricane Katrina) there have always been stressors. A poor family is more likely to live in a social context with fewer social supports, have difficulties accessing health and education services, have less parental understanding of ways to minimize family stress, have less control over the physical environment that exacerbates reactivity in a child’s life, and experience more challenges in meeting basic economic needs of the family (Mansour, Lanphear, & DeWitt, 2000). Thee open-ended interview questions provided insight and allowed me as the principle investigator to obtain a unique view into the implicit values of specific African Americans and their families.

In this study, I found that the stressors that African Americans faced before and after Hurricane Katrina were no different. I found that the African American families of New Orleans had problems with finances, family relationships, society & culture, and government intervention long before Hurricane Katrina. Experiencing the loss of present resources and having the existing problems that manifested generations before were only
magnified in these specific African American families that intensified their struggle for family survival. Working to support your family was not rewarded; the wages were not high enough. It was a “blessing” to be primarily financially dependent on the government one research participant gladly stated. That should never be the perception or reality; but for the African American families of New Orleans it was a harsh reality. Given the destruction, these African Americans adjusted rather quickly, which suggested that the financially incapacitated are not behaviorally incapacitated.

The resiliency efforts of these African American families were exemplified in their behaviors in their personal shift from individual wants to familial needs. The role of adults was intensified and expectations were far greater of each member of the family. Of the four themes of family stress identified during the interviews; family cohesiveness clearly illustrated the push for family survivorship. These prominent members of African American families that endured Hurricane Katrina’s ugly dimensions described personal experience that transmitted important values about faith, finances, and “family” relationships. It was in “family” relationships both relative and fictive that these African Americans were able to move from the adjustment period to adapting to their new surrounding society and culture. The importance of family relationships have been a staple in African American families since its conception; without the “village” there would not be a child. Finally, the lack of government involvement in ensuring the upward social mobility of African American families is not a new phenomenon. The time it took for the government to effectively respond to Hurricane Katrina gave an objective view of who is important and who is not. Hurricane Katrina provided an important marker to what extent African American families in New Orleans rely on the government aid and the value the governing bodies place on those in need in the area. Given work schedules, and the new family resources, led to the improvement of the family status after Hurricane Katrina and it has opened the door to create new strategies to prepare themselves for the tasks at hand in surviving any crisis.

**Adaptation vs. Adjustment**

Adjustments are made in the short-term whereas adaptations are observed in longitudinal studies. Forced relocation is defined as being forced out of a society or culture. This can be described in the physical sense, emotional sense, or financial. The
displacement of over a million people and the relocation of hundreds of thousands of families cannot be the sole resolution to the uncalculated devastation of natural disasters. There has been evidence that relocation has been an immediate remedy but what about the long-term impact on the structure of families and their abilities to rejuvenate from the onslaught of negative effects from an uncontrollable cause especially in African-American families. There must be more proficient Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for all levels of government when faced with the after-effects of a natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. Boss (1988), cautions that coping should not be perceived as the maintaining the status quo; rather, the active management of stress should lead to progressively new levels of organization as systems are naturally inclined toward greater complexity. The maintaining the institution of family must be the primary concern of government officials when relocation is the only viable option. In fact, sometimes it is better for a family to “fail to cope” even if that failure precipitates a crisis. After the crisis, the family can reorganize into better function system (McHenry & Price, 2005). FEMA provided many families with economic relief for the short-term; but these families would have been better served if services and educational programs were provided in New Orleans years before Hurricane Katrina. The saying, “Give a man a fish and he will live for a day; teach a man to fish and he will never go hungry again,” definitely applies to the African American community of New Orleans.

**Limitations**

There are several possible limitations that exist with this research study. These limitations are methodological. The limitations of this research study included: interviewing two people from same family, the small sample size, the small geographic area in which the research participant previously resided, the close-ended questions found within the interview questions, and demographic characteristics of the research participants. The research should have included children or young adults under the age of eighteen as well as other ethnicities and people from different ethnic and cultural as well as socioeconomic statuses in order to gain a well-rounded experience.
Future Research Implications

Academics can perform this study using quantitative research methods therefore gathering the input of the entire Gulf Coast Region; including Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Texas, and Florida. The Double ABC-X Model created by McCubbin & Patterson (1983), should be applied to this larger sample size which includes young adolescents (≤18 years old) and looking at their individual adjustments and ability to adapt which can be used in longitudinal studies. Most importantly, the reform of government policies and agencies such as FEMA, geared towards disaster relief and mass relocation as a resolution to the destructs of natural or man made disasters. As the research has shown, social reform in major metropolitan cities is of great necessity. The best approach is prevention of the stress by attending to the needs minority and impoverished communities have. Research suggest that family survivorship is negatively impacted in communities where there is a lack of family finances during crisis which often times to leads to higher violent crime rates. Forest (2002), believed high unemployment rates, high rates of illegal drug use, high rates of school dropouts, chaotic, disorganized, or physically and emotionally abusive families or classrooms and periods of hot weather contribute to violent behavior which are a part of physical and social make-up of New Orleans.

Taking more of an invested interest in the communities will curb this patterned-generational behavior. Family Scientists & Researchers must have a clear understanding of what individuals can do to manage stress or deal with unexpected issues that have a direct impact on family. Increasing the number and type of community-based self improvement programs and job training programs will assist African American families in historically disadvantaged areas in securing a meaningful place in their families and communities. These programs must be identified, developed, and implemented with the input of the individuals, families and communities who are directly dealing with disproportionate socioeconomic family backgrounds.
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September 5th, 2006

Appendix A1:

Informed Letter of Consent

Informed Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study that is concerned with family life before and after Hurricane Katrina centered on family finances and trends. I will ask you to address a few questions about your thinking on the economic opportunities and adjustments made to the family as a result of such a dramatic and swift move from New Orleans area to Southwest Ohio. These interviews will be completely confidential. I will then ask you to make some analysis about the Gulf Coast area and address the government’s response to Hurricane Katrina. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes. Overall, approximately ten to fifteen subjects will be included in this study.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the session at any time or you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Upon completion or withdrawal from the interview at any time, you will receive monetary compensation for you time and travel.

You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risk beyond those of everyday life. Essentially, your participation poses no risk to you. Socially, the benefit of the study is to help us, the researchers, understand more about particular family approaches to many the situations associated with relocating from New Orleans to Southwest Ohio.

If you have further questions about the research study, please contact Dr. Alfred Joseph at (513) 529-4902, josephal@muohio.edu or Eric Harris at (513) 464-0756, harrised@muohio.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at Miami University of Ohio at (513) 529-3734.

Thank you for your participation in this research study. We are very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting session for you. You may keep this portion of the informed consent.

I agree to participate in the study of family finances and trends. I understand my participation is entirely voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses.

Participant’s Signature__________________________________     Date_____________
Participant’s Printed Name__________________________________
Investigator’s Signature___________________________________ Date_____________
Investigator’s Printed Name__________________________________
Appendix A2:

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire (circle all that apply)

1. Age:
   18-25  26-30  31-40  41-50  51-65  66+

2. Gender:
   Male          Female

3. Martial Status before Hurricane Katrina:
   Single       Divorced       Married

   Marital Status after Hurricane Katrina:
   Single       Divorced       Married

4. Highest Education level obtained:
   Less than High School       Graduated High School       Some College
   Graduated from College      Obtained an Advanced Degree (Master’s, PhD, etc.)

5. Occupations Before & After Hurricane Katrina: (Please List):
   5a._____________________________  5b._____________________________

6. Role within Family:
   Head of Household       Contributing Adult       Dependent
Appendix A3:

Research Interview Guideline

Clarify and Illustrate quantitative findings

1. How would you describe your family before Hurricane Katrina? Financially and Physically, and Socially.
   - Did these play a role in your lifestyle, as far as education of family members and employment opportunities?
   - Describe the relationship between family members in your household?
   - What impact did having or not having a multi-generational household have on you?
   - Tell me to what extent were “Fictive Kinships” made available to you and your family before and after Hurricane Katrina.

2. How did your family respond to the news that a category 5 Hurricane was going to directly hit the city of New Orleans?
   - Do you feel that your family had the resources to relocate suddenly?

Develop Basic Knowledge

1. How has life and the opportunities in Southwest Ohio been compared to New Orleans for your family? (Socially, Economically, Education)

2. How has the transition to another culture affected you and your family?

3. It has been over a year since you came to this area; what needs to be done for you and your family to return? (Physically & Socially).
**Build Research Instrument**

1. Describe to me the stress that Hurricane Katrina placed on you, as an adult, within your family?
   - What were the aftereffects of trauma associated with Hurricane Katrina on you as a caregiver in your family?
   - How did your family members respond to the disaster?
   - How did it bring your family closer or farther apart?
   - Describe what took place for you and your family to begin a new life after experiencing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

2. Tell me the story of what happened that indicated that your family was resilient to the stressor of Hurricane Katrina
   - How did your family cope with the after-effects of Hurricane Katrina?
   - How did you interpret your ability to make decisions within the family after Katrina?

**Develop policy/ Evaluate Programs**

1. What do you feel the “powers that be,” your local, state, and federal government could have done to make the situation more manageable for you and your family?

2. How could have the destruction of Hurricane Katrina been sustained?

3. How do you feel about the impact of the relocation efforts made by the social services agencies such as Red Cross?

4. If relocating mass numbers of citizens from one geographic area to another is going to be government policy after a natural disaster of this magnitude, how can this transition culturally better be served for the victims?
Develop Social Phenomenon

1. What has been most difficult in relocating to Southwest Ohio?

2. How long has your family been rooted in New Orleans?

3. Describe for me, if there was a “silver-lining” within this situation as far as the improvement of family structure, educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and social mobility as a result of relocating from New Orleans, please describe?
Principle Investigator Name:  Eric D. Harris
Study Title: Evaluating the Black Family: An In-depth observation at the Resiliency to the Stress encountered by African American Families who have relocated to Southwest Ohio because of Hurricane Katrina

1. **Purpose**: The purpose of the present study is to address the pressing issues that surround family dynamics of those who have been suddenly uprooted from an area because of Hurricane Katrina and how these newfound problems complicated or relieved some of the stress within the family which penetrated the family. These issues and questions will include but are not limited to family describing individual ideas of stress & coping/ resiliency. The significance of this research is found in the idea that it will shed some profound light on the financial, emotional, and social effects on the institution within the African American and other families who experienced forced relocation after a natural disaster. The aim of the research will consist of collecting data and observe overlying themes from the research participants which will lead to future studies and eventually government reform of policies concerning the relocating of individuals within families after a natural disaster. The physical and social areas of New Orleans and Southwest Ohio will have to be taken into a more consideration when ideas of cultural diversity and social mobility are discussed. The specific outcome I expect is to see various examples of family resiliency which allowed for family structures to become stronger units. The general outcome I expect is the idea for the need for social change throughout the United States with substantial assistance of government agencies.

2. **Subject Population**: The anticipated number of participants will approximately be ten to fifteen and the ages will be no younger than 18 years old. The ages will range from eighteen to seventy years old. All participants will speak English. I will strive to interview at least five males and five females, whom are in good health and mentally stable. All participants will be required to read and sign a copy of an informed letter of consent. I do expect to encounter some vulnerable populations, such as those who are economically and educationally disadvantaged, but none that are psychologically unstable.

3. **Recruitment and Selection of Subjects**: Participants will be recruited from Southwest Ohio, particularly the cities of Middletown, Hamilton, Oxford and the major metropolitan city of Cincinnati. Contacts will be made with potential
participants through colleagues that have been in contact with relocated *Hurricane Katrina* victims here in the area, creating a “snowball effect”. As of now, I do not anticipate using advertisements because I believe that there will be a sufficient amount of possible participants identified through the snowball effect method of recruitment that will provide a very unique prospective on family experiences before and after Hurricane Katrina.

4. **Potential Risks and Discomforts:** There are no costs to participants in this study. The potential risks and discomforts associated with this research study are primarily psychological. In order to limit the psychological risk, participants will not be asked any directly sensitive questions. Participant will be encouraged to talk openly about whatever they want. There will be no specific time limits to the interviewee; however, it is anticipated that interviews will last approximately 90 minutes. The research participant will be given an *Emergency Contact Reference Sheet* that contains phone numbers of social service agencies that can provide family counseling, educational, and employment assistance.

5. **Potential Benefits:** The potential benefit of the research study is to allow the subjects to get their point of view out about what happened to their family situation before and after Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, by discussing the trials and tribulations associated with their lives before and after with the disaster brought by *Hurricane Katrina*, the subjects will become more aware of the stress each endured and the resiliency efforts (positive & negative) of their families and the benefits or lack thereof, behind relocating to a culturally homogenous area. The potential benefits to the field of family studies is to examine how families are able to persevere and possibly improve their family structure when faced with adversity and forced to relocate to areas un-chartered in previous generations.

6. **Informed Consent:** The research participants will be given an Informed Letter of Consent with an attached reference sheet of emergency contacts. I will instruct the participants to read over and sign the informed letter of consent before the Demographic Questionnaire is given to each respectively. This process will be conducted at the Interviewing location before the interview is scheduled to begin.

7. **Exempt Status Request:** Not Applicable

8. **Research Procedures/Methods:** The subjects will be actively participating in one-on-one interviews that will allow for the discussion of topics rather than answering specific questions in order to limit bias with leading questions. The interview will be conducted in a discreet location that will allow for confidential data reporting. The data gathering instruments will consist of a demographic questionnaire, interview questions, tape recorder, blank tapes, a pen and a notebook to record information that cannot be recorded on tape such as emotions. Approximately ten to fifteen adults within these specific families will be interviewed. As stated before, the interviewee will not be given a time limit, but each participant will be informed that the informed may take up to ninety minutes both in writing and orally. At the
time of the interview I will have completed training on how to conduct professional exploratory interviews with potentially vulnerable subjects from Dr Kevin Bush and Dr. Elise Radina, respectively in the Family & Child Studies Departments on the Oxford campus of Miami University. Each adult interviewed will be compensated for their time and travel. Each participant will receive $25 as compensation and will be prorated to $15 if the participant does not complete the interview.

9. **Research Location:** The research interview locations will be in Oxford, Middletown, Hamilton, and Cincinnati. The specific locations will be done in public places such as libraries and private locations such as places of residence.

10. **Procedures for Safeguarding Confidentiality of Information:** The research study will be considered confidential in order to protect the participants. Only one copy of the taped interview will be kept and the tape will be locked in a personal cabinet when not in use. Once the data is collected, it will not be applied to the specific individual or family member introduced. The data collected from the audio tapes will be retained until my thesis is complete and published on a USB port drive saver and my personal file save accessible account with Miami University. I as the principle investigator will be the only one privileged to access the information on the audio tapes.

11. **Deception:** Not Applicable