

Break up of New Orleans households after Katrina

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How well a family recovers from a natural catastrophe may be tied to the household's pre-disaster make up and socio-economic status. In a recent study, Dr. Michael Rendall of the RAND Corporation compared the number of households in New Orleans, LA that broke up following Hurricane Katrina to the national rate of household break-ups over an equivalent period. An estimated 1.3 million people fled the Gulf Coast during that emergency in 2005 – the largest urban evacuation America has ever seen. The results are published today in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

Relying on survey data from the RAND Corp's Displaced [New Orleans](#) Residents' Pilot Study and a comparable national study, Rendall reports that a year after the hurricane the incidence of household breakup associated with post-hurricane displacement remained more than double the national rate over the same period. His comparison of living arrangements before and after Katrina indicates that 50% of grown children who were living with their parents at the time of the storm – and 33% of other non-head of household adults – were still separated from the household some 15 months later.

Unlike other studies on 'the Katrina-effect', this investigation explores the impacts of catastrophe when these pre-disaster socio-economic conditions are factored in. "A family and household perspective throws a very different light on social vulnerability to natural [disasters](#) than does an individual perspective," Rendall says.

Age, education, and employment status of the person surveyed as well as the person's relationship to the head of the household, the race of the household head, and whether the home the family lived in was owned or rented served as variables in the survey.

The research reveals a significant correlation between the number of extended-family households in an area and the rate of household break up following a catastrophic event. At one time, New Orleans had considerably more multi-generational households than the national average. In fact, 50% more adult children were still living at home in pre-Katrina New Orleans than was the case in other parts of the country.

Overall, the rate at which extended-family households broke up after the storm exceeded comparable national figures. By their very composition, these types of living arrangements were especially vulnerable to breakups in the wake of the displacement following [Hurricane Katrina](#), the research suggests. Moreover, because extended-family [households](#) tend to form in response to economic and physical need, understanding pre-disaster household structure is key to planning for successful recovery and reconstruction phases following a disaster.

Provided by Wiley

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