



Research on Disasters' Effects on Americans' Civic Behaviors

Youth and Young Adults Step Up and Respond to Katrina

- A Harris Interactive survey in September 14-20, 2005, found that 42% of young people between the ages of 8 and 18 donated money to relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, while 32% donated supplies and 18% collected donations for relief efforts. (Martin, S. (2005). "Young People Dealing with a Real-Life Series of Unfortunate Events." *Trends and Tudes*. Harris Interactive.
- More than 45 million young adults between the ages of 18 and 28 contributed to Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. According to the Transitions to Adulthood Survey, conducted in November and December of 2005, 40% of young adults donated money, 23% donated food, clothing, or other materials, 15% collected donations, and 5% provided direct services, such as assisting with the cleanup or helping displaced families. (National Youth Leadership Council. (2005). *Transitions to Adulthood*. Minneapolis, MN.)
- Campus Compact reports that more than 250 of its member colleges and universities across the country have participated in relief efforts, including assistance with cleanup, collection of donations, and assistance to displaced students and families.
- Youth Helping America, a series of research conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service, indicates that the of youth volunteering is robust – with 55% of youth participating in volunteer activities each year. For more information, visit http://www.cns.gov/about/role_impact/performance_research.asp#YHA.

Do Disasters Lead to a Greater Sense of Civic Responsibility by Americans?

- According to the Higher Education Research Institute's annual survey of college freshmen, which in 2005 was conducted shortly after Katrina struck, two-thirds, or 66%, of entering freshmen believe that it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty, which is the highest mark attained by any group of college freshmen in the last 25 years and a marked increase of 3.9 percentage points over the previous year.
- Volunteer.gov, an initiative of the USA Freedom Corps, is the largest searchable database of volunteer opportunities in the nation. In the six months before Hurricane Katrina, 104,444 searches were conducted for volunteer opportunities – or an average of 572 searches each day. In the six months after Katrina, the number of searches increased to 559,640 searches – or an average of 3,066 searches a day. That represents a 535% increase in the number of volunteer searches conducted since Hurricane Katrina.
- With the 9/11 tragedy, terror management analysts at the University of Texas found that in the weeks and months following the attacks, most Americans actively searched for information that would help them understand the catastrophe and make sense of a chaotic and dangerous world. In a preliminary survey of college students conducted for this project, about one third of college students interviewed by these researchers reported increased levels of civic engagement after 9/11. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/features/2005/generation/>.

Highly Educated, Religious Families Most Likely to Respond to Disasters

- A study in the fall of 2005 involving 204 adult residents of East Baton Rouge Parish found that the characteristics of those who volunteered in hurricane relief efforts are consistent with those individuals who volunteer in typical contexts – that is, those individuals who have higher levels of education, have children under 18 in the home, are members of community organizations, and/or attend religious services are more likely to have volunteered. (Michel, L.M. (2006). "Personal Responsibility and Volunteering after a Natural Disaster: The Case of Hurricane Katrina." Southern Sociological Society Conference, New Orleans, LA.)

In Times of Disaster, Informal Groups Emerge to Provide Assistance

- Field research conducted by the University of Delaware's Disaster Research Center three weeks immediately following Hurricane Katrina shows that nontraditional, prosocial behavior was the primary response to the disaster, as traditional sources of social support were overburdened or disrupted. These prosocial behaviors most commonly involved search and rescue activities and providing necessities and assistance for those individuals in need. In local neighborhoods, hospitals, and hotels, these informal groups emerged to provide improvised assistance to hurricane victims. (Rodriguez, H., Trainor, J., & Quarantelli, E.L. (2006) "Rising to the Challenges of a Catastrophe: The Emergent and Prosocial Behavior following Hurricane Katrina." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 64: 81-101.)