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**Nonprofit Capacity to Manage Hurricane-Pandemic Threat:
Local and National Perspectives on Resilience during COVID-19**

Nicole S. Hutton^a

Nonprofit Capacity to Manage Hurricane-Pandemic Threat: Local and National Perspectives on Resilience during COVID-19

This paper examines nonprofits' capacity for responding to simultaneous hurricane-pandemic threat, addressing: (1) strategies nonprofits use to deliver services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) how natural hazards may affect nonprofit roles in emergency service delivery during a pandemic. Data come from a survey of New Orleans-based nonprofits demonstrating effects of pandemic on local nonprofit service delivery, and workshops with U.S. coastal community stakeholders exploring expectations for nonprofit roles in emergency operations nationwide. Nonprofits have applied resilient strategies including virtual operations, staff reductions, and funding diversification, but vulnerabilities remain. Findings guide a research agenda for building nonprofit and community resilience.

Keywords: nonprofit; resilience; COVID-19; hurricane; compound threat

Introduction

Responding to community needs in the event of a natural hazard during a pandemic – that is, a compound disaster event – presents challenges that are not well understood (Shultz et al., 2020). Natural hazards such as hurricanes and flooding may devastate the built environment and seriously disrupt economic and social normalcy. Nonprofits, often located in and serving the same communities devastated by the hazard, may likewise suffer damage to their facilities and experience disruptions to supply chains, an increase in staff absenteeism, and reduced revenue. Just as nonprofits help fill the gap in need among vulnerable populations during periods of normalcy, continuity in nonprofit service delivery throughout emergencies may be critical for community wellbeing, particularly during compound disasters.

In hazardous settings, nonprofits may act on behalf of vulnerable populations to address needs that are otherwise unmet. In addition, public emergency management functions (i.e., disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation) may be challenged by an increase in demand for critical services. Helping to meet this increased demand with truncated resources may over-tax nonprofits' ability to serve their communities. When the vigor of nonprofits is challenged, communities are less resilient and slower to recover (Behr & Diaz, 2013, 2014; Mendel, 2003; Young, 2000; Jang et al., 2016).

This exploratory study identifies factors that may either promote or hinder nonprofit resilience during a compound hurricane-pandemic by asking: (1) What specific strategies have nonprofits used to deliver services during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) How may a natural hazard affect nonprofit roles in emergency service delivery during a pandemic? This paper offers preliminary answers to the research questions through the lens of nonprofit resilience and adaptive capacity, and it proposes a framework and research agenda for prioritizing capacity-building interventions to enhance resilience.

Drawing upon a review of the literature related to nonprofit resilience, sustainability, and adaptive capacity, this paper posits a conceptual framework reflecting the intertwined nature of nonprofit and community resilience – defined as the organizational and collective capacities to withstand and recover from disruptive events – in public service provision during a compound disaster. Issues faced by nonprofits are identified through a practice-informed, two-pronged approach. First, data from a 2020 survey of New Orleans-based nonprofits are presented to explore how nonprofits are managing changes in service demand and resources stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis. Second, qualitative data from a series of workshops with disaster professionals and experts from across U.S. coastal communities are discussed to

community participation ensures a breadth of voices are heard and facilitates equitable decisions across stakeholder groups.

Conceptual Framework

The

cleaned version of the IRS Business Master Files (BMF) for December 2018. Following the Urban Institute's guidance, nonprofits that did not report at least \$50,000 in annual gross receipts over the prior two years were excluded from the sampling frame, as well as religious congregations and large outliers such as hospitals, clinics, universities, charter schools, and foundations.

Email contact information for the list of nonprofits (specifically for the Executive Director when available) was collected through a review of public websites and contact lists furnished by a community foundation sponsoring the research. The final sampling frame included 734 nonprofits with contact information. Of these, 370 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 50.4 percent. Respondents were representative of the population of public charities in the region in terms of parishes represented, mission type (e.g., human services, art and culture), and total annual revenues. Survey responses were analyzed using comparisons of means with *t*-tests of significance for continuous variables, and contingency tables with chi-square tests of signifi

Participants were recruited from researchers' professional and academic contacts in emergency management and public health through a convenience snowball sample. Participation in individual workshops ranged between 74 and 198 participants. Attendees were randomly assigned into concurrent breakout group sessions, which were each led by a moderator through the same semi-structured questionnaire. Breakout sessions were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were manually analyzed to identify emergent themes and those associated with literature on nonprofit resilience, adaptive capacity, and emergency operations as integrated in

existing

deficits in adaptive capacity may have been overcome through training and intentional collaboration (Akingbola, 2020).

Direct service providers did not differ significantly from their counterparts in terms of organizational age or having been founded prior to Hurricane Katrina. While service providers were significantly more likely to have a continuity of operations plan for disasters at the start of the pandemic, only 37.1 percent had such a plan. Open-ended survey responses suggested these plans were tailored to hurricanes and rarely addressed pandemic or compound threats.

Financially, direct service nonprofits exhibited few significant differences with other nonprofits in the region, and may have been slightly worse off than non-service providers. On

addition to funding adjustments, volunteer recruitment, and planning to maintain service delivery (Akingbola, 2020).

Service providers were more likely than their counterparts to express interest in pursuing government funds in response to the pandemic, including federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) forgivable loans available to nonprofits through the Small Business Administration (SBA). Indeed, 77.8 percent of service providers sought government funding in response to the pandemic, compared to a still substantial 59.2 percent of other nonprofits. In fact, almost 33,000 of the regional nonprofit sector's jobs were retained for an additional two months in summer 2020, according to analysis of PPP data from the SBA (2020). Comparison to nonprofit employment estimates from the region provided by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2017) suggest that these saved jobs represent as many as three-fifths of total nonprofit jobs in the region. In addition to government funding, most nonprofits across the sample indicated a need

season due to COVID-19.” Participants suggested that nonprofits supporting sheltering activities need to know what the shelters will look like and the specific roles they will fill with the COVID-19 precautions to assist with training and reassure their staff, volunteers, and target populations about

They support a holistic portrayal of how nonprofit capacities intertwine to adapt to disaster by
(1) sustaining and even expanding services to meet the increased community demand, (2)

nonprofit services online can maintain service provision to some populations during the pandemic, but not necessarily during a hurricane evacuation because of potential power outages. Nonetheless, the protocols implemented by in-person service providers during the pandemic could be applicable to shelters. National workshop participants stated that responding to a hurricane-pandemic threat will require recruiting new volunteers and partners, strengthening leadership, realigning strategies to fit an expanded mission, and enhancing external communication, all within the context of a potentially reduced resource base.

Recommendations

Compound hazards offer opportunities for nonprofits to support long-term risk reduction. The following recommendations are offered to guide communities – and especially public emergency management professionals – in leveraging nonprofit capacity to support compound hazard response and long-term disaster recovery:

Nonprofits that expanded services, such as meal provision, during the pandemic might
-6.6 ~~and partner~~ growing resource to emergency managers because of their

Specialized nonprofits, such as those in health, may be able to reach a larger audience during a compound threat through adversarial roles, direct service provision, and referrals made at shelters,

Authors have no known financial benefit or conflict of interest from the direct applications of this research.

Data Availability Statement

Some of the data used during the study are available online in accordance with funder and partner data retention and sharing policies. Data from the Converge COVID-19 Working Group can be found online (<https://sites.wp.odu.edu/hurricane-pandemic/>).

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