

# Essay on disaster evaluation

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## **September 11 attacks**

September 11 attacks, also referred to as 9/11, is a series of commercial airplanes hijacking and suicide attack committed by 19 terrorists associated with the Islamic extremist group, Al-Qaeda against the United States (Pandya, 2013). The planes were carrying 11, 4000 gallons of jet fuel, which experts claim that the objective of the militants was to take control of the planes once they were airborne and turn them into weapons of mass destruction (Pandya, 2013). The attack targeting the U. S. was one of the deadliest terrorist attacks on the American soil in the history of the world. The attacks against Washington D. C. and New York City, caused extensive destruction and death, which triggered an enormous U. S. effort to combat terrorism. The tragedy led to death of about 2, 750 people in New York, 184 at the Pentagon, and 40 in Pennsylvania, where one of the hijacked planes crashed after passengers attempted to retake the plane, killing the entire nineteen terrorist aboard the plane. Those who were hardly hit were the police and fire departments in New York who had rushed to the scene of the attacks, leading to the death of 400 police officers and firefighters.

## **Hurricane Katrina**

Hurricane Katrina was an extraordinary calamity that spawned a human tragedy. The hurricane and the flood that followed resulted into death of about 1, 836 people in late August 2005 (Pauline, 2012). In addition, millions of people were left homeless along the Gulf Coast and New Orleans, which experienced the highest death toll. It was one of the most destructive natural disasters in the history of the United States, destroying 90, 000 square miles

of land, an estimated size of the United Kingdom (Pauline, 2012). The storm also left thousands of coastal communities in Mississippi destitute.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officials have reported that Katrina was the most destructive storm to be experienced in the history of the United States. It was ranked the sixth overall in strength of those recorded by Atlantic hurricanes. Hurricane Katrina cause property damages of \$81, but it is that the economic impact in Mississippi and Louisiana may exceed \$150 billion. Following the disaster, more than 70 countries pledged monetary assistance to the U. S. (Pauline, 2012)

### **Psychological symptoms of September 11 attacks**

The September 11 attacks caused great confusion, consternation, sadness, and grief throughout America and beyond. The tragedy had a tremendous impact on the mental well-being, resulting into psychological symptoms. The first psychological symptom experienced from the September 11 attacks was re-experiencing the trauma, whereby an individual has distressing recollection of the trauma. For example, the person may relive the experience as terrible nightmares or dreams or daytime flashback of events. In addition, external cues in the environment may remind the person of the event. Consequently, psychological distress of exposure to trauma is by internal memories, thoughts, or even fantasies. For example, some survivors fear low-flying planes or the sound of the revving engine.

Another psychological symptom experienced by the victims was persistent avoidance. This refers to attempts by the patient to avoid thoughts related to trauma, activities, feelings, or places that may trigger memories of trauma. For example, after the tragedy, some victims were not able to return to their

apartments and had to relocate to the new apartment because they claimed that they saw “ too many ghosts” in their houses. Some also developed diminished interest in activities they loved, detached from other people, or developed a feeling that they had no future.

## **Psychological symptoms victims experienced from Hurricane Katrina**

Psychologists have studied the psychological effects of natural disasters and concluded that such disasters leave a significant, disabling, and lasting psychological scar in their wake. Such calamities place individuals with pre-existing mental health problems at higher risk, even though everyone is vulnerable. For example, in New Orleans, 17 percent of residents reported symptoms consistent with serious mental illness, compared with 10 percent in neighboring regions, and 1 to 3 percent in the general population (Pauline, 2012).

Majority of the survivors suffered from post-traumatic stress symptoms, which include flashbacks, nightmares, a hair-trigger temper, and emotional numbing, which psychologists could consider normal during the first few months following the calamity. One of the healthcare policy professors at Harvard Medical University reported that it was natural to experience nightmares after having gone through a natural disaster (Pauline, 2012). With the help of health care professionals, these symptoms abated, and survivors were able to recover fully. However, survivors who fail to recover may develop some mood disorders such as depression and anxiety, which can ultimately lead to mental illness. This could hamper recovery efforts of survivors.

Another psychological symptom experienced by September 11 victims emanate from increased state of arousal of the victim. These symptoms include irritability, sleep disturbance, difficulty in concentrating, outbursts of anger, and increased vigilance. Some of the victims had little appetite and nightmares

## **Resources available to treat and assist victims from September 11 Attack**

The September 11 attack had a significant impact on the health of many victims, both physically and mentally. One of the sources of assistance is the World Trade Center Health Program, which provides medical care and tests for victims in any of the three affected states. The program assists many city workers who responded to the attacks and were affected by the dust coming from the building. A police detective died in 2006 after developing breathing complication resulting from rescue efforts at the building.

Another assistance program is the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund (VCF), which is part of legislation passed by Congress and signed into law so as to compensate for economic and non-economic loss to individuals or relatives of the deceased who were killed or physically injured during the attack. The original program ran from 2001 to June 2004. However, President Obama signed into law the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act of 2010, which reopened the VCF of 2001. The Zadroga Act expanded the scope of the original VCF to include died or suffered physical injury to benefit from the program.

Those who live on Long Island can receive assistance from Faithfull Response, which provides free mental health care and other counseling

services to people who are still struggling with the effects of September 11. It is a faith-based organization mental health care program designed to help Long Island residents who still struggle with mental illness, family, or emotional issues

([http://www. faithfulresponse. org/](http://www.faithfulresponse.org/))

Resources available to treat and assist victims during hurricane Katrina

The American Red Cross and its partners provide more than 68 million hot meals and snacks. They also offered 1,400 evacuation shelters for survivors across 31 states and the District of Columbia, helping about 450,000 evacuees. The Red Cross also offered direct assistance that enabled more than 1.4 million families to purchase clothing, groceries, diapers, and other basic needs. After the emergency response to the disaster ended, the organization started long-term efforts aimed at helping devastated families and communities. The Red Cross created the Hurricane Recovery Program to address the long-term needs of survivors.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had plans and resources to respond to the hurricane even before it began. FEMA expected a Category 4 or 5 storm and ensured that they had a standby supply of equipments and food that could help during the disaster. They also engaged in the evacuation process so as to ensure safety of the affected population. However, FEMA lacked situational awareness from the field back to the headquarters to aid in distribution of equipment and aid in movement. Assistance also came from psychologists who were prepared to assist the victims and disaster workers throughout the affected area. Majority of the volunteers were a member of American Psychological Association's Disaster

Response Network. The group collaborated with the American Red Cross in dispatching psychologist trained in disaster response with the aim of helping victims.

Long-term effects these disasters have had on victims and rescue workers' mental health and overall well-being

Millions of people were affected by the September 11 attacks and the Hurricane Katrina disaster. These events have had long-term effects on the mental health and well-being of victims and health workers. The 9/11 terrorist on the World Trade Center affected a large population with varying results. Studies conducted over the past decade suggest that while the majority of people exposed to the disaster are symptom free and healthy, thousands of individuals, including clean-up, rescue, and clean-up workers and people who lived, went to school or worked in Lower Manhattan on 9/11 have developed chronic, and often co-occurring physical and mental health conditions.

Studies have reported dramatic decline in pulmonary function among firefighters and emergency medical service workers who rescued people on the fateful day. It is estimated that the firefighters and emergency medical service workers had below-normal lung function for their ages six to seven years after September 11 as they did before the attack. Residents of Lower Manhattan have also reported low pulmonary functions. The dust emanating from the collapsed towers were highly toxic, according to air pollution experts. The dust from the pulverized buildings continued to fill the air for five months after the initial attack. To date, 75 recovery workers at ground zero have been diagnosed with cancer, and doctors have confirmed as

having been caused by exposure.

Nine years ago, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf region, killing many people and displacing many more. A recent study linked the disaster to the high incident of anxiety among children displaced by the hurricane while another found increased chances of asthma in children whose homes were flooded. Psychologists have studied the psychological effects of natural disasters and concluded that such disasters leave a significant, disabling, and lasting psychological scar in their wake. Such calamities place individuals with pre-existing mental health problems at higher risk, even though everyone is vulnerable. For example, in New Orleans, 17 percent of residents reported symptoms consistent with serious mental illness, compared with 10 percent in neighboring regions, and 1 to 3 percent in the general population (Pauline, 2012).

How the trauma from these disasters has affected children

Hurricane Katrina resulted to depression and posttraumatic stress, which greatly affected children because they are more vulnerable. A study conducted, which was on children from Louisiana parishes that were affected by Hurricane Katrina, found that many of the children had experienced a great deal of stress resulting from hurricane. The study concluded that the children had trauma symptoms such as depression, difficulties in concentration and sleeping, nervousness, and sadness. Many children who could not return to their homes for at least three months after the hurricane have been left with a combination of grief, anger, and loss. Children are more vulnerable because they do not have strong mechanisms as adults, especially after experiencing a life-altering event like Katrina.



A recent study found higher rates of clinically significant behavior among pre-school children who experienced 9/11 in the Lower Manhattan. Some pregnant women who developed PTSD transmitted to nightmare to their children, which has greatly affected the psychological development of such children (Yehuda, et al., 2009).

#### Role of the media

Many people are not able to resist media coverage of disasters and terrorist attacks. Research indicates a relationship between watching media coverage of disasters and stress symptoms. On the morning of September 11 attacks, many people were glued to their TV sets watching coverage and replays of the scenes that they never expect to see from a disaster movie. Some claimed that American had suffered prolonged negative and mental effects of these events, exacerbated by excessive viewing of television (Coyne, 2001). Displaying such images agitated the psychological symptoms victims experienced from these disasters because they make them feel as if they are such a situation for the second time.

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