

Building Resilience after Disasters through the Youth Leadership Program: The Importance of Community and Academic Partnerships on Youth Outcomes

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What Is the Purpose of the Study?

- The Youth Leadership Program is a school, community, and university partnership designed to better understand the concept of personal resilience and overcoming the mental and emotional components of extreme events such as hurricanes.
- Describe the program and how it was effective in helping youth and communities recover from the most costly hurricane in the history of the United States.
- The current project examined the role of positive activities in school and community settings.
- The importance of leadership through action, as a feature of resilience for personal recovery, begins with engagement of youth.
- Describe and demonstrate features of self-efficacy, and its positive influence on leadership skills, because studying trauma symptoms alone is only part of the recovery equation.

What Is the Problem?

- The impact of natural disasters is frequently studied from the point of view of individual loss.
- Resilience studies tend to focus on the threats to personal resilience, not on ways to increase resilience.
- Rarely is resilience in youth reviewed from the point of view of activities that build and strengthen resilience.
- Displacement of youth into new communities can increase loneliness and lead to the loss of community connectedness.

What Are the Findings?

- This study demonstrates how exposure to hurricanes and the mental health of individual youth influences their perceived capabilities to achieve goals and increase their resilience.
- Youth are exposed to different disaster experiences and vary in the type of trauma symptoms they experience.
- Decreases in trauma symptoms were more likely with increases in self-efficacy.
- Programs like the Youth Leadership Program can address issues of loneliness in displaced students after a major disaster incident.
- The Youth Leadership Program demonstrates the importance of providing leadership opportunities to help student's personal growth and resilience.

Who Should Care Most?

- Teachers of middle school and high school students.
- School administrators.
- Behavioral health professionals, guidance counselors, and coaches.
- Ministerial alliances.
- Parents and youth.
- Public mental health and social service providers.
- Community leaders.

Recommendations for Action

- Assess the availability of youth leadership programs in local schools.
- Engagement of students into their home, community, and school disaster preparedness plans.
- Establish community mentors and roles for students in the response and recovery aspects of disaster preparation activities.