

Understanding the Perceptions and Practices of Homeowners in the Event of Hurricane: A Case Study of University Employees in Louisiana

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and gain an understanding of Louisiana homeowners' perceptions and practices in preparing for hurricanes; contribute to academic research and student learning, while guiding the development of future projects. We focused specifically on how homeowners in Louisiana would protect their important documents and possessions. These documents and possessions include but are not limited to photographs, social security cards, birth certificates, and insurance paperwork. We collected the data throughout the fall semester of 2022 at Louisiana State University (LSU) by conducting a focus group and in-depth interviews. We collected a variety of answers, but most participants expressed a strong need to have their important documents and possessions protected and gave different strategies for how this was carried out, such as digitizing or protective storage. Participants also expressed a strong need for more information to be delivered to residents to talk more about ways they can protect their own documents and possessions. Emphases were also made on the need for: leaders of large institutions to be especially concerned with preparedness for vulnerable populations; outreach programs to be put in place to spread awareness of the importance of protecting important documents and possessions during a disaster; news outlets to switch their focus from normal survival tips to discussions on the importance of protecting documents and possessions; government and non-profit agencies to work together to share tips and information

through social media and other forms of handouts.

Keywords

Hurricanes, Disaster Preparedness, Environmental Education, Climate Change

1. Introduction

Louisiana is subject to several types of severe weather, and one of the more alarming types consists of hurricanes that frequent June through November every year. Impacts from climate change have been causing more severe storms due to rising temperatures in the ocean (Awolesi et al., 2019). This increase in temperature is causing hurricanes to gain more momentum and causes dire impacts on coastal communities (Mendelsohn et al., 2011).

Kapucu (2008) asserts that despite being aware of the need to prepare for disasters, most people do not actually take any steps to prepare. Levac et al. (2012) support this argument and claim that many people have an overinflated belief in their ability to cope with emergencies, leading them to rely primarily on emergency relief services for support after a disaster. Consequently, there is a widespread lack of household preparedness across the United States, as noted by the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction for the Red Cross (Falkiner, 2003). A study conducted by Diekman et al. (2007) aimed to understand homeowners' perceptions and experiences regarding household emergency situations and their preparedness practices. The study found that while participants had sufficient knowledge of how to prepare for emergency situations, many did not feel fully prepared. Participants defined household emergency preparedness as being able to survive with basic supplies for 48 hours or longer. Motivations for preparedness included protecting family members and personal experience with emergency situations. The study suggests that prevention efforts in Georgia should focus on closing the gap between maintaining preparedness levels and internalizing preparedness recommendations. In another study by Peacock et al. (2005), the importance of consistency between expert risk analysis and lay perceptions of hurricane risk, as it influences policy decision-making, compliance, and legitimization was highlighted. Data used was from a statewide survey of single-family homeowners in Florida to map and spatially analyze risk perceptions throughout the state. The study examined the influence of location and other factors, such as previous hurricane experience, socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and knowledge of hurricanes, on shaping homeowner perceptions. The findings suggest a good deal of consistency between expert risk assessment and homeowner perceptions, which have implications for land use and hazards planning. In a recent survey, Landry & Turner (2020) explored potential factors that affect risk perception and protective behaviors in coastal Georgia, an area with histor-

ically lower risk of natural hazards but recently affected by two major storms. The results show that most coastal residents expect future hazards to be worse, and several factors such as perceived damages, risk tolerance, wealth exposure, flood zone, flood zone awareness, and attitudes towards community risk management initiatives are associated with flood insurance purchase.

One of the major hurricanes to hit Louisiana's coast was Hurricane Ida in August of 2021. This storm left many without shelter and the loss of many important documents and possessions. It was conservatively estimated that Hurricane Ida caused around 18 billion dollars in property damage, but the total damage could be as high as 50 billion. This would make Hurricane Ida one of the more costly hurricanes in the United States (Lada, 2021). Additionally, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was one of the most infamous storms to hit the Louisiana coast. It took thousands of lives and caused an estimated 81 billion dollars in damage (US Department of Commerce, National Ocean Service, n.d.). It was a devastating blow to the residents of Louisiana as these storms left residents without basic necessities and caused important possessions to be lost or damaged. The residents of these areas have learned through past experiences and through trial and error the best ways to prepare for storm events. The ways people prepare for a storm vary greatly from person to person and is the result of years of experience being passed down from each generation.

The goal of this research was to gain an understanding of the steps that the homeowners in the LSU community, located in Baton Rouge, take in protecting their important documents and possessions in case of a hurricane event. One of the reasons for this study is to show the great lengths that residents go through to protect their important documents and possessions. Louisiana is a state in the Deep South and South-central regions of the United States. The LSU community contains a variety of people with diverse backgrounds as many are originally from other states or countries, while others may have grown up in the same city. These diverse upbringings lead to a range of education on preparing for severe weather. This led to an interesting collaboration between the research team and participants in this study and helped to answer the research question—"How do Louisiana homeowners protect their important documents and possessions during hurricane preparation and how do they perceive their hurricane preparation strategies?" With this information, we hope to be able to shed new light on what residents currently do to prepare and protect their important documents and possessions during hurricane season and what needs to be done in the future to improve education and outreach. It is important to note that of all four researchers who conducted the interview, only one of them had no experience with a hurricane. We consider this an exemplary researcher's bias. This research was carried out as a result of effective collaboration between all researchers and interviewees. Data collection was made, followed by analysis and discussion of results and/or findings. A map is shown in **Figure 1** showing the locations of the major cities in Louisiana with LSU Baton Rouge community.

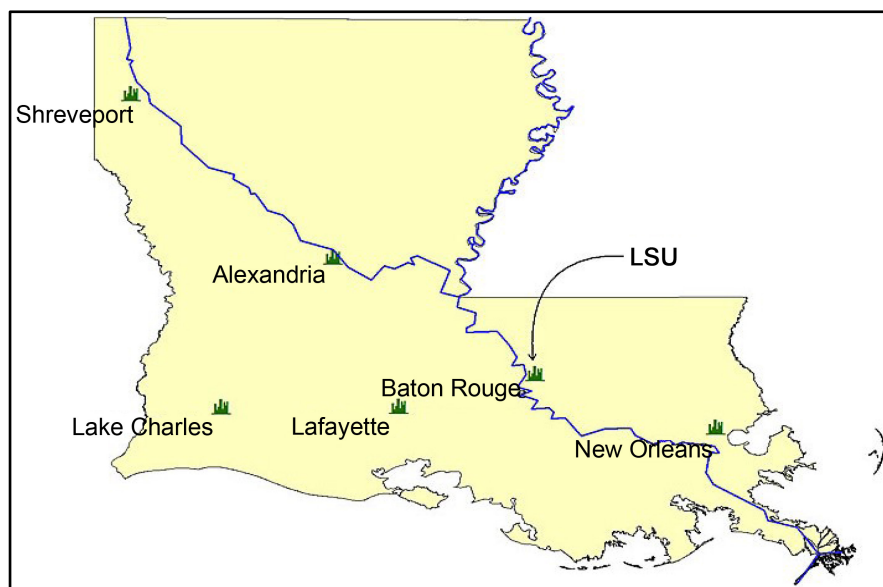


Figure 1. Map of Louisiana featuring LSU Baton Rouge (Credit: Roger W. Porzig, Jackson District, U.S Army Corps of Engineers).

2. Methods

The research methodology involved collecting data in the Fall of 2022 through a focus group and in-depth interviews with seven participants who were LSU employees and homeowners. Qualitative research was chosen as the best approach to answer the research question. The researchers underwent CITI training and submitted a study proposal for IRB approval. Participants were chosen through criterion and snowball sampling, and Zoom meetings, lasting no longer than 60 minutes each, were used for the interviews. Prior to the interview, a consent script was read to assure anonymity. Questionnaires were given to participants before the interviews to prepare for the discussion. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for similarities between participants' statements and topics. An illustration of the process is shown in **Figure 2**.

3. Findings

Themes and subthemes derived from this study are provided in **Table 1**. The subthemes are the keywords discovered from the coding technique used.

3.1. Participant Characteristics

Table 2 contains descriptive characteristics of the 7 participants. The median age for participants was 41.7 years, with a range from 24 to 65 years. The maximum age was estimated as one participant did not provide this data. Participants were predominantly female and Caucasian. Participants lived in their current residence for a median of 6 years, however, it should be noted that the time lived in their current residence may not consider the time living in a coastal state or area experiencing a high frequency of storms and/or hurricanes. The household size

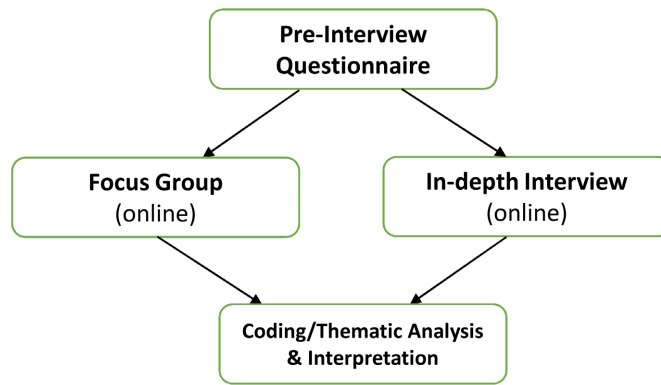


Figure 2. Research methods.

Table 1. Themes and Subthemes from the study.

Themes	Subthemes
Strategies during Storm Events	Hurricane preparedness, food, nonperishable food, gas, water, flashlight, charger, generator, physical supplies, physical and mental needs, physical and mental well-being, news outlet, survival hobbies, extracurricular activities.
The Culture Surrounding Hurricanes	Generation, outreach, transgenerational culture, internet information, social media information.
Storm Conditions/Area	Self-dependence, flood insurance, bad thunders-torm, documents, possessions.
Hurricanes Katrina and Ida	100-year storm, monstrous storm, Hurricane Andrew, New Orleans, hitchhiking, strategies, hurricane preparation, cultural resets, new foundations.
The Historical Flood of 2016	Catastrophic event, flooding, school photos, digital saving, documents, possessions, insurance companies, phone, laptop.
Important Documents and Possessions	Documents, possessions, vaccine cards, driver’s licenses, marriage licenses, photos, COVID cards, birth certificates, divorce documentation, Social Security cards, health insurance, home insurance, mortgage, cash, tea set, electricity, power charger, insurance agent, insurance documents, computer, passport.
Technological Influence	Digital age, documents, possessions, phones, Eastern Baton Rouge, storms, communications, access, storage, drop box, computer, driver’s license, COVID card, technology, Wi-Fi.
Impacts on Mental Health	Proximity, Katrina, anxiety, stress, emergency situations, survival instincts.
Different Preparedness Levels	Precautions, gas cans, generators, mental checklist, flashlights, enough nonperishable foods, batteries, water.

Table 2. Description of focus group and in-depth interview participants.

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Years as LA homeowner	Salary (USD)
P7	32	M	8	75,000 - 100,000
P2	24	F	1	30,000 - 40,000
P5	42	F	12	>200,000
P1	51	F	11	>200,000
P4	65	F	27	100,000 - 200,000
P6	36	F	9	50,000 - 75,000
P3	42	F	6	75,000 - 100,000

ranged from 2 to 4 individuals. The majority of participants make above US\$75,000 per year.

3.2. Strategies during Storm Events

Participants talked about what the term “hurricane preparedness” meant to them, how they would expect to cope during a storm event, and how they would prepare for such a situation. In general, participants defined hurricane preparedness as making sure that their home has the correct necessities to last them through the storm and the inevitable damage after. Items such as water, food, and gas were often mentioned as important needs during hurricane events.

For instance, one participant defined hurricane preparedness as “you want to make sure you have your generator... [and] keeping your documents safe. That’s part of having flashlights ready, having your portable chargers charged up [too].” One participant puts it this way: “[it involves] keeping that running list like starting in June or whatever going, what are some documents that we possibly could need”. Staying ready ahead of time was an important strategy that participants mentioned and making sure everyone in the household is up to date on those needs. Another participant stated, “So, hurricane preparedness for [me] is making sure you have enough food, water, and necessities to survive. [It] is... what you are not willing to lose should a hurricane hit your house and/or your region. I guess if you’re boxing things, you’re not willing to lose, you’re probably gonna leave but, if you’re staying you probably should have food or water.” Many participants mentioned the importance of having physical supplies ready to prepare for the worst of the storm. Participants usually mentioned protecting documents and possessions as a secondary need. The physical well-being of household members comes first.

A participant talked about the importance of having their physical and mental needs met as “having physical, mental resources ready in case a hurricane comes... mostly physical resources, but also... being emotionally prepared and intellectually prepared for changing situations and possible emergencies”, in order to be prepared for any situation they follow varies weather services and other state agencies, some on Twitter or Instagram or Facebook to stay as up to date as

possible during a storm event. Another participant who has lived in her residence for 27 years and counting added that “there’s something called Louisiana House, or LA House with the LSU Ag Center and they have good pointers about things either preparing ahead of time, what to do afterward if you lose electricity or you’re worried about food spoilage and things like that. I certainly don’t just Google it. I’ll make sure that it’s a reputable source, a reliable source that I’m getting information from.” Staying well-informed during a storm was a main strategy used in the preparation for a storm. Participants discussed the importance of staying connected to news outlets to know what the latest update is for the storm and to stay on top of any new information that is released during a hurricane. The above participant also mentions the importance of having good and reliable information during a hurricane. In an age of endless online information, it is important to know that the information they are getting for an important event, such as a hurricane, is correct and will be helpful to their well-being.

Survival Hobbies

An interesting antidote that came up during the interviews was how hobbies could relate to storm preparation. A participant stated that “I’d also say that I do a lot of tent camping and that has... translated to weather preparedness. They go hand in hand. I feel like you need a lot of the same things if you’re kind of going off the grid. Preparing to be off the grid.” Using skills gained from extracurricular activities, this participant gained important skills related to off-the-grid survival techniques that have helped them navigate through difficult storm events.

Additionally, another participant stated that she is what is known as a “prepper” which we define as someone who believes that a catastrophic event or other disasters could possibly occur in the near future and prepares by having stocks of supplies such as nonperishable food, water, and other necessities. This added preparation and awareness also decrease the urgency and stress hurricane preparation brings.

3.3. The Culture Surrounding Hurricanes

Many participants grew up in Louisiana and have had generations of family live in Louisiana as well. Knowledge of storm preparation gets passed down from generation to generation. As one participant stated, “I’m just thinking [hurricane preparation] is common just because it’s what I’ve been brought up in” and “Well, I grew up in Louisiana, so I’ve been experiencing hurricanes and learning about hurricane preparedness for a long, long time”. One of the participants also emphasized that “if hurricanes are a part of your normal life growing up, then having the resources to prepare for a storm comes a lot more naturally to you than to others”. Not all residents have been passing down this vital information. One participant stated, “Unfortunately, like my kids, I send them to Houston... with my grandma who survives Katrina, and she’s got PTSD. So, if anything, I think my kids will be less prepared because I’m not sharing that common know-

ledge with them.” The mental toll of storms can be great and can cause generational trauma as seen by the above participant. The idea of wanting to keep family safe trumps the notion of preparing their children for any future storm events that they could endure. One participant who is a grad student at LSU also stressed the importance of outreach to those who have not grown up in hurricane prone areas. They stated that LSU enrolls approximately 30,000 new students a year and a significant fraction of those students are from out of state and have never experienced a hurricane and will be alone. They recommended outreach forms such as mass emergency texts and other forms of social media.

Similarly, another participant supported the emphasis on the influence of transgenerational culture, and the current reliance on social media information: “Some of it in the old days was [from] the television news person [who] would tell us or my parents [who] would tell me, and then things have changed a little bit, but mostly there’s a lot of internet information, social media information [today].” The difference in storm preparation from past generations to now has changed drastically. As more information is available online the ability to stay informed has become a much easier task than in the past. Social media allows quick access to information as well as an increased ability to efficiently send information to those who may be naive about hurricane preparation. Social media additionally allows residents to stay up to date on new updates during a hurricane.

3.4. Storm Conditions/Area

Hurricane preparation may vary with the surrounding environment and conditions, as a result, some of the participants expressed their views.

3.4.1. Surrounding Environment

The areas that people live in have a great impact on the way residents prepare for storms. Residents living in rural and urban areas adopt distinct approaches when it comes to storm preparedness. A participant residing in Gonzales stated: “I already have a chainsaw that I had just as a part of my house...I think it just depends on the culture and what you live in. Definitely... the community and what you live in, because, like, all my neighbors have chainsaws, and everybody was out cutting [after Ida hit]”. Living in rural areas requires different tools needed for storm preparedness and in this case, having a chainsaw on hand helps to cut down fallen trees to allow for easy travel on roads. Another participant mentioned, “Just to give you an example when Ida came through, I had to cut five trees out of the way just to get out basically to a road”. Hurricane preparedness for Louisiana homeowners might be closely associated with the milieu of individuals, as well as the type or nature of the neighborhood in which they reside. As one participant stated, “I live in [the] rural part of Baton Rouge and, like, the outer banks of Gonzales, and so I’m just surrounded by a bunch of woods”. Being surrounded by nature brings in new challenges during a storm and the ability to navigate these problems shows the resilience that these communities hold.

Another participant residing in Eastern Baton Rouge Parish stated, “I do know the vulnerability of our home, and I know that the chances are slim to none that things that are in the safe places we have inside of our house for our documents are gonna be flooded”. Living in rural areas also brings in many aspects of uncertainty during a storm. Being isolated from large populations brings in a sense of self-dependence and having the correct knowledge on how to problem solve different issues is important.

Additionally, living in Louisiana and especially along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico or the Mississippi River leads to many areas being highly susceptible to floods. According to the questionnaire, five participants have flood insurance. One participant who is a new homeowner expressed feeling “pretty prepared, we took out additional flood insurance on our house since we do live in a hurricane area”. It is impossible to prepare for everything though, so living in environmental factors such as having large trees or bodies of water also brings in levels of ability to adapt to whatever is going to happen during a hurricane.

3.4.2. Hurricane Category and Path

Many of the participants revealed that the conditions of the hurricane itself will influence their preparation concerns and strategies as well. One participant specifically stated “if it’s just gonna be a category one it’s just pretty much a bad thunderstorm but, if we’re having a really serious [hurricane], like category 3 to 4, then that’s usually... when it’s getting really bad” and even alluded to having her important documents and possessions waiting by the door in case they are ready to leave should a higher category of storm occur. Another participant also supported this claim by emphasizing the dependency of their decisions on the severity of the storm, “It depends on the level. I’m gonna be honest, it depends on the level. Now, will I stay for another four again? I don’t know... but if it’s just a storm or a one it’s like, you know, I might go get a couple of things in the store and pull out the camping fire grill, you know, just in case. But like if it’s a three or higher, I’m going and putting the generator someplace and I’m grabbing the wall unit, it just depends”. Given the experience of many of the participants, they have explained that to ensure the safety of their documents, possessions, and themselves, they are willing to evacuate should a hurricane reach an extreme category, However, they also have expressed using the strategies, whether minimal or maximal, if the hurricane is at a level that they feel they can prepare for.

One participant also brought to our attention the concern with the path of the storm. They said, “if the hurricane is gonna hit us dead on or if we’re on the east or the west side because which side of the hurricane you get hit with matters because one is worse than the other,” also influences the range of preparation to take. For a hurricane in the northern hemisphere, while it is never safe to be caught on either side of the hurricane, the right side has stronger winds and is considered more dangerous. For those preparing for a hurricane, the cone and trajectory of the hurricane are just as important as the category.

3.5. Hurricanes Katrina and Ida

Hurricanes Ida and Katrina hit approximately the same region of the Gulf Coast 16 years apart, yet these two hurricanes shared many differences along with similarities. Hurricane Katrina, which occurred in 2005, was a monstrous storm that churned the waters of the Gulf of Mexico for several days, some participants even referred to it as the “100-year storm”. Ida was a fast and formidable upstart in its field. When comparing and reminiscing on the aftermath of these hurricanes in Louisiana in the past years, a participant from the focus group relates, “Katrina got me more than any of them. But then again, I remember [Hurricane] Andrew and going through Andrew, but Andrew was scary, but Katrina was the most unprepared. I guess I was especially dealing with, you know, friends that were in New Orleans and coming down, hitchhiking from New Orleans to Baton Rouge just to find me, and... wake up in the middle of the night having night terrors, you know, and things”.

The mental toll that was caused by previous storms is something that stays with residents for a lifetime. This trauma can help build new knowledge for future storm preparation. As terrifying as a hurricane can be for people it can help build future strategies for better preparation. The strategies people use between storms can change over time as people gain new skills and knowledge. These kinds of storms also increase people’s awareness and emphasis on the importance of hurricane preparation. One participant also recalls how they lived through Hurricane Katrina and noticed that “what a lot of people struggle with is they didn’t take it seriously and they didn’t have a lot of those documents including, like, their children’s, um, birth certificates and their insurance cards and when something happens and you need to go to a hospital or a doctor or something and they ask for those you should have them prepared and on hand a lot of people didn’t.” Hurricanes that cause mass damage make the consequences of being underprepared very prominent to society. When the community experiences such a loss as, during these catastrophic events, cultural resets happen, and new foundations are set for the future. Not only do people unite to create new and more efficient strategies to prepare, but they begin to prioritize the outreach and importance of, in this case, hurricane preparedness.

3.6. The Historical Flood of 2016

Some individuals are not only prepared in the event of a hurricane, but also as a result of any other catastrophic event such as flooding. In the focus group, one participant said, “We have gone as far as to scan photos. When my kids have school photos come in. Now we scan a copy of it and save it digitally because [of] the amount of pictures that I lost, like, my grandfather and my grandmother and baby photos of my kids from previous flooding, not hurricanes, but just flooding” When random flood events happen, residents are not given time to prepare their belongings as they are with hurricanes. It is usually a sudden event and can result in the loss of many important documents and possessions. These

experiences help to prepare better for future events. Knowing what was lost in a previous event and then having procedures in place to make sure it does not happen again is the most common learning method people have described when it comes to preparing for major storm events. Many of these documents lost held significant value to their owners. When asked how protecting their documents would help them in the long run, another participant responded by referring to the historic flood of 2016.

“So, when we had the flooding in 2016, a lot of people had problems with their insurance companies if they didn’t have the documents they needed or even, just like I said, having pictures on your phone or your laptop, that’s helpful for an insurance company to provide proof of things I owned or damaged, I had. So, I wouldn’t want to lose that stuff and have a claim denied or delayed”. Similarly, another participant stated that, “... [preparation has] nothing to do with the hurricane and it has to do with the 2016 flood and losing that stuff”.

3.7. Important Documents and Possessions

When participants were asked what documents and possessions were important to them, one of them stated, “Anything that I don’t want to deal with getting a copy of. Basically, if I have to go through some kind of process to get a copy of the documents or I need the originals. For example, our vaccine cards”. Others mentioned driver’s licenses, marriage licenses, photos, COVID cards, birth certificates, divorce documentation, Social Security cards, health insurance, home insurance, mortgage, cash, etc. Most of the participants alluded to “things [they] can’t access online later on.” However, one participant stated, “the tea set that my grandfather brought from Japan, you know. I have a 1968 saxophone. Things that I can’t go out and get again”.

One participant emphasized the need for power as the key to ensuring important things are retrieved or put in place. “If you don’t have electricity and you’re trying to call or you don’t have power charge, for one thing, you can call your insurance agent, but you can’t access those records if you don’t have a computer. So, I think having multiple ways to get insurance documents and those are probably the most critical things, post storm. Passports can eventually be replaced. A lot of other things could eventually be replaced”.

Technological Influence

During the interviews, the moderator/interviewer asked whether living in the digital age may have impacted their hurricane strategies when it came to protecting their important documents and possessions. While most participants did not specifically mention that their phones were an example of “important possession”, this was inferred. According to the participant living in Eastern Baton Rouge, “... Cell phones are extremely important. They don’t always work in a storm. But having cell phones charged not only for communications but also having cell phones so that you could access storage, access... Dropbox on a phone... if you were displaced and you didn’t have a computer, that’s just sort of

a component of it”.

Another participant stated, “Honestly, my driver’s license and my COVID card and all that, it’s all on my phone now”. Another participant, in referring to how hurricane preparedness would help in the long run stated, “...Just like I said, having pictures on your phone or your laptop, that’s helpful.”

One participant did express the downside to being too reliant on technology, however, she discussed how “[on] the flip side of [having important documents being easily accessible online] because we rely so heavily on digital if we are without cellular service and Wi-Fi for a month, I don’t know how well I’d get by”. This leads to the concern that if future generations who have never been without technology and likely have very few physical documents cannot access their phone due to service or power shortages, then the rebuilding process post-hurricane will be immensely harder for those individuals as well as those trying to distribute help.

3.8. Impacts on Mental Health

As the saying goes, “experience is the best teacher”. Previous exposure to an event such as a hurricane within one’s own proximity could set individuals to be on the lookout and mentally prepare for a possible repeat of such. Preparation eases worry, and those who are not preparing or prepared to some degree become mentally overwhelmed. In light of this, one of the participants stated, “The mental overload that happened after Katrina got me more than anything else”. Another participant from the in-depth interview related, “...when I know a hurricane is coming, I certainly feel [to] some extent anxiety, because as you know, you can’t prepare for everything. You can’t prepare for a tree falling on your house, things like that”. The anxiety and stress that comes from an approaching hurricane is what leads to such strategic advances. One participant mentioned that “[preparing for a hurricane] makes [them] less stressed... because you can’t control, you know, a hurricane or if it’s gonna hit here and what’s gonna happen and everything and, so, I like to take control of the little, tiny pieces to make me less anxious about things”. Reactions to emergency situations are not always a bad thing, they are survival instincts, and it is crucial to rely on them in order to properly prepare for events such as a hurricane.

3.9. Different Preparedness Levels

Levels of preparedness can vary from person to person. For some, good preparation is vital to getting through a storm while others seem to prepare less than their peers. A participant used her sister as an example and said that she was “horrible” when it comes to preparing for storms. One of our participants also stated that “I was kind of worried I’d be the outlier here for [this] study, but I really don’t prepare at all for hurricanes, as weird as that may sound. Maybe just because I’m from Louisiana, but, yeah, I don’t—there’s certain things that I’ve done for important documents, but I don’t, like, take any extra precautions

when [a] hurricane comes through. They're just stored away and where they're normally stored away at."

On the contrary, one participant discussed how they "have a collection of about 16 gas cans that I fill up because we will need it for the generators." Another participant stated, "every year, my husband and I go through a mental checklist and check around the house that we have flashlights and batteries and enough nonperishable food and jugs of water and things like that. So, it's not something that I'm not cognizant of, it's just that it generally is not something I worry extensively about".

4. Discussion

Despite advancements in flood mapping and insurance, about 20% of all floods claims still come from moderate- or low-risk areas, where homeowners can buy insurance at reduced rates but typically do not unless obliged to (Horney et al., 2008). Information regarding storm preparedness should be incorporated in interventions that may target newer residents, such as educational materials included in new resident welcome packets. More people may be prepared for an evacuation if the public has a better grasp on the gravity of the circumstances that may lead to a necessary evacuation order. Protecting people and property requires raising everyone's understanding of the risks posed by natural disasters, including those who reside in moderate and low risk locations.

There is a complicated web of interactions between catastrophe exposure, risk perception, and emergency readiness (Donahue et al., 2014). Conventional wisdom holds that one's life experiences shape their level of comfort with taking risks. Multiple researchers have found that there is a positive correlation between one's amount of experience and risk assessment (Lazo et al., 2015). Some research has indicated a positive correlation; however, others have found either a negative correlation or no correlation at all (Lindell et al., 2005). As Lindell & Perry (2012) pointed out, there are a number of approaches to quantifying the impact of previous hurricanes, which may account for the contradictory findings. Individuals' levels of preparedness for Hurricane Emily (1993) were found to be positively influenced by prior experience with Hurricane Hugo (1989) but were not predictably affected by prior experience with Hurricane Fran (1996), according to research by Sattler et al. (2000). These findings indicate that prior experience is only useful for forecasting readiness when the two events are quite close in time (Sattler et al. 2000). This may be seen as memory bias in anticipation (Rohli et al., 2018). Demuth et al. (2016) observed that people's past experiences are complex, with both reinforcing and inhibiting processes at play when thinking about danger. According to research conducted by Paton (2003), public hazard education can reduce people's perceptions of catastrophe risk and, in some cases, can help individuals mentally dissociate themselves from the duty they feel to be prepared. General hurricane knowledge is less important than experience for predicting preparedness, as suggested by previous research synthesized

by Miceli et al. (2008), because knowledge is often obtained from a second-hand source, and any knowledge that is obtained indirectly will not invoke visceral responses to the extent that first-hand experience might. The importance of such background information to the leadership of non-governmental organizations, such as university faculty, is often underestimated in comparison to its significance to state and community leaders.

Responses from participants show that hurricane awareness and preparation are both linked with the perception of risk of exposure of the residents to previous exposure and the alarming effects associated with it. In addition, this research revealed that all participants thought there were multiple positives to being prepared for storm events and negatives to being unprepared. Most of the respondents talked about the need of having a flashlight on hand in case of an emergency.

These results are consistent with those of a recent survey conducted by the American Red Cross, which found that "... most [Americans] have not taken even the minimum actions needed to prepare for a disaster or emergency situation" (Diekman et al., 2007). Individuals' lack of adherence to household preparedness guidelines may be due to the fact that their beliefs, as opposed to their knowledge, do not support adopting such activities. If a person has not yet internalized a threat to his or her own self, even if that person thinks it can be avoided by taking precautions, then that person should not be expected to properly prepare his or her home for an emergency (Rohli et al., 2018).

Even though it is difficult to prepare for catastrophes of this magnitude, valuable lessons can be learned from the stories that were told by the participants in this exercise. After a natural disaster, it would be beneficial for university staff members in general to have access to both formal and informal support systems as well as mental health services. The results may seem counterintuitive, but they point to an important truth: people are more influenced by their own interpretations of their storm experience than by the experience itself when it comes to deciding how well they are prepared for the next one.

Their understanding of the events they went through provides a compelling rationale for their level of readiness. It may be unrealistic for emergency management to assume that the elderly will take the necessary steps to protect themselves and their property during a hurricane. When it comes to hurricanes, it is also crucial that university staff members know what will happen to them on a personal level. It's important to have access to, and to properly interpret, data on storm risks and mitigation strategies. It is crucial to improve the general well-being of university staff, especially the older ones, during non-disaster times, and to reduce adverse outcomes that may be experienced during disasters, so it is important to consider preparedness in the broader context of multiple risks combining natural hazards and everyday strains by relating vulnerability reduction to larger development planning (Tuohy & Stephens, 2016).

As more homeowners become prepared, initial help could be aimed toward

vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, the disabled, and those who lack enough social and economic support. An ability to lead effectively in times of crisis is crucial. Significantly less attention has been paid to learning the level of understanding for hurricane preparedness among employees and those who must direct others within their organization during natural disasters, even though a great deal of research has been invested in understanding and enhancing the decision-making process and preparedness of government-level emergency managers during natural disasters (Ai et al., 2016). Leaders of large institutions housing vulnerable populations should be especially concerned; for example, those in charge of schools, hospitals, or senior care facilities. In terms of how to protect vulnerable communities, more outreach programs should be put in place to help spread awareness of the importance of hurricane preparation in terms of protecting important documents of possessions. During an in-depth interview, one participant states that “I don’t find that they really discuss that [Document protection] when they talk about hurricane preparedness its always the normal stuff about water, flashlights, radio. I think they should focus on that [document protection]”. This shows that the focus for news outlets should switch from normal survival tips to having discussions on the importance of protecting documents and possessions. The government and non-profit agencies can work together to spread information through social media and other forms of hand-outs to share tips that would help homeowners be as prepared as possible.

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore and understand Louisiana homeowners’ perceptions and practices in preparing for hurricanes, specifically in protecting their important documents and possessions. Most participants expressed a strong need to protect their important documents and possessions and suggested various strategies to do so. The study highlights the need for more information to be provided to residents to help them protect their belongings in the event of a hurricane. This research has its limitations. These include technical glitches during Zoom interviews, self-selection bias in the sample of participants, a short research time frame, and a limited sample size. The researchers suggest that more interviews and focus groups with participants from different backgrounds should be conducted to obtain a fair and abundant dataset. Despite these limitations, the study provides insights into how homeowners in coastal areas view hurricane preparation strategies and awareness.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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