



After the Crisis: Victims of Violence Issue Brief

Issue Overview

Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there were a number of system and service breakdowns that resulted in—or at least heavily contributed to—violent crime victimization and other re-traumatizing experiences. The storms revealed alarming, and largely avoidable, emergency preparedness concerns related to violent crime victimization, mental health, and law enforcement, highlighting the need for a national response plan to provide victims with the short-term, intermediate, and long-term trauma support they so desperately need.

What we know from examining the longer-term impact of disasters and emergencies is that reported crime rates generally drop in every category except domestic violence, which can increase dramatically.¹ In fact, some communities have seen as much as a 50 percent increase in police reports of domestic violence after disaster.² Domestic violence is, of course, a major concern, but represents just one of the many types of violent crimes experienced.

A prevailing trait shared by victims of disaster (man-made or natural) and violence is the trauma experience—and its interrelationship with mental health and substance abuse concerns. Without long-term trauma support, disaster and violence victims are much less likely to heal from their experience(s), and much more likely to turn to unhealthy ways of coping (e.g. alcohol/substance abuse, self-injury, eating disorders, aggression), which themselves can have devastating human, social, and economic costs.³

The objective of this resource paper is to identify gaps in programs and services and other problem areas that need to be addressed, so that survivors of future disasters and violent crime will have their core victims' rights upheld and find support, understanding, and connection to heal.

Key Concerns

- Safety, security, and crime reporting protocols were not established at evacuation shelters.
- The lack of a national emergency crime reporting system left displaced crime victims without a means to report crimes or access victim assistance and compensation.
- An enormous amount of evidence and data were lost or destroyed by the hurricanes, resulting in the dismissal of many violent criminal cases—and a corresponding release of violent offenders—which itself was re-traumatizing for many victim witnesses.
- The whereabouts of sex offenders was unknown—some re-offended.
- Streamlined or integrated communications and services were not established.
- Poor communication among federal and state government agencies, service providers, and others led to immense inefficiencies and wasted resources.

Potential Solutions and Recommendations

- Advocate for an established, uniform, well-known, and clearly understood protocol for crime reporting for times of emergency or disaster.

¹ Tucker, E. (2001, September). Crime and disaster. *Business Recovery Managers Association Newsletter*.

² Norris, F. H. (2005). *Disasters and domestic violence*. Alexandria, VA: United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

³ Kilpatrick, D. G., & Freedy, J. R. (1994, Spring). Everything you ever wanted to know about natural disasters and mental health (well, almost). *NCP Clinical Quarterly*, 4(2).

- Create a data and evidence preservation toolkit that can be tailored and replicated by individual communities.
- Advocate for a National Trauma Education and Awareness Campaign.
- Establish culturally competent peer-support systems.
- Advocate for funding to be directed to peer-support and “trauma-informed” models.
- Create a central national disaster response database for government, nonprofit, faith-based, and other providers.
- Educate the news media on the trauma-related implications of news reporting.

Key Resources

[Congressional Victim’s Rights Caucus](#)

[Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault](#)

[National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – Prevalence of Domestic Violence after Disaster](#)

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence – Impact of Disaster on Battered Women](#)

[Survivors Taking Action](#)

[Witness Justice](#)

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