

Out of the Floodwaters, but Not Yet on Dry Ground: Experiences of Displacement and Adjustment in Adolescents and Their Parents Following Hurricane Katrina

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Abstract

Hurricane Katrina resulted in the relocation of 1.5 million Americans from the Gulf Coast to other parts of the country, including Colorado, where this study was conducted. Those displaced by natural disasters face significant challenges as they deal with the loss of their social networks, property, income, and sources of emotional support, while also having to adapt to significant social, cultural, institutional, and environmental changes. Using pilot data from adolescents and their parents, this study examines the challenges adolescents faced, including loss of friends, family, social networks, and schools, as well as the positives teens identified, including novelties and opportunities of life in Colorado. Despite identifying some benefits of the relocation, including material resources, better schools, and novel weather patterns, most reported their displacement as a significant source of stress, with parents describing significant negative changes in their behavior or emotional state. Thus, we suggest that those working with youth must recognize the unique ways they understand loss and transition, particularly as their appreciation for present circumstances can mask significant cultural and psychological struggles.

Keywords: Hurricane Katrina, evacuees, displacement, adolescents, stress, coping

Introduction

Hurricane Katrina was among the largest natural disasters in U.S. history. Making landfall on August 29, 2005, the storm affected more than 1.8 million households (FEMA 2006). Based on federal estimates, more than 1.5 million people evacuated the Gulf Coast and nearly 250,000 homes were damaged or destroyed (Chertoff 2005). Pointing to the significant emotional toll the storm took, as of January 2006, the American Red Cross had made more than 1.6 million mental and physical health contacts related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which struck shortly after Katrina and affected much of the same area. As agencies, mental health providers, housing advocates, and non-profit agencies strive to meet the needs of those affected by Katrina, the unique priorities and experiences of children and teens are sometimes lost. Further, as agencies work to assist parents in their recovery, they may not fully realize the struggles parents face in supporting or providing emotional care to their children.

In this paper, we relate parents' accounts of their children's adjustment to the evacuation and post-relocation life as well as teens' own assessment of their adjustment, stress levels, and causes of stress. In doing so, we provide evidence of both the struggles and resilience families experience during displacement. Specifically, we explore how families describe the experience of evacuation, the communities left behind, their lost networks and the challenges of settling in a new community, their adaptation to changes in the environment, and their view of the future. With better understanding of their perspective, service providers can more effectively work with families.

Displacement and Loss

Hurricane Katrina had an unprecedented impact on not only the Gulf Coast of the United States, but on communities across the country who received evacuees. As the country laments the fact that New Orleans is now and may remain half the size it was prior to Katrina (Nossiter 2007), evacuees struggle with where to call home. Colorado opened its doors to over 14,000 evacuees who arrived in the weeks and months following the hurricanes. Some evacuees relocated to Colorado voluntarily to stay with family or friends. Others came to Colorado after hearing through the grapevine that Colorado was doing a good job meeting evacuee needs. Several hundred evacuees did not actively choose Colorado—they were placed on government-sponsored airplanes from overcrowded, temporary shelters like the Houston Astrodome or New Orleans Convention Center; many only learned of their destination as the planes prepared to land. One year after Katrina, over 1,000 FEMA-registered households remained in the Denver metropolitan area, and many evacuees report that they plan to stay.

Existing research shows that children exposed to natural disasters are at risk for post-traumatic stress symptoms and depressive problems (Arsarnow et al. 1999; Lonigan et al. 1994; Shannon et al. 1994; Wickrama and Kaspar 2007) and that those whose families incur extensive property loss and are displaced as a result of a disaster are at greatest risk for developing psychological problems. Family form and the quality of parent-child interactions (Fothergill and Peek 2006; Proctor et al. 2007) affect risk for these sequelae, as does being female (Lonigan et al. 1994;

Shannon et al. 1994), being a member of a racial or ethnic minority group (Norris 2001), and being poor. Many of the evacuees who relocated to Colorado carried most of these risk factors. Thus, Colorado's child and adolescent evacuees were at high risk for developing significant psychological problems in the weeks and months following their arrival in Colorado. Additionally, they were forced to adapt to an unfamiliar environment and cultural landscape, all of which can be difficult.

With growing recognition that "it takes a village" to raise a child, this paper explores how teens fare when the village is lost. Research with immigrant families highlights several areas of daily life that affect families and teens in the aftermath of displacement (Perreira, Chapman, and Stein 2006). Changes to the community and neighborhood environments often bring problems for parents and teens such as lack of awareness or distrust of available services, and lack of understanding of the local culture of their new state, city, neighborhood, and neighbors. Similarly, families indicate that it is difficult to navigate unfamiliar work, school, and neighborhood contexts, especially as these contexts must be navigated simultaneously. Additionally, many displaced families find that the loss of connection with extended family and neighbors that had, prior to displacement, helped with everything from babysitting to employment opportunities makes adjustment to a new community difficult and stressful (Perreira et al. 2006; Yu et al. 2005). Finally, while all family members might experience these losses as significant stressors which may lead to similar presentations of psychological problems, adolescents and adults may arrive at these outcomes differently.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data in this study come from two sources. First, we draw on close-ended interviews with 11 children ages 12-18 that asked about their evacuation from Hurricane Katrina and relocation to Colorado. This questionnaire was verbally administered and included questions about their levels of stress, coping, and psychological and social adjustment. A few open-ended questions were included. In addition, we rely heavily on the longer, open-ended interviews with these adolescents' parents who were interviewed as part of a larger study of 93 adult evacuees. We recruited adults and teens through fliers, community organizations, social service agencies, and snowball sampling. We interviewed parents and teens in person either in their homes or in private offices, and interviews ranged from 70 minutes to four hours. Interviews were conducted between November 2005 and April 2006, between two and eight months after the evacuees' arrival in Colorado. Both populations received financial compensation for their time. We tape-recorded the adult interviews and transcribed them verbatim, while the teen interviews were recorded on structured surveys, with open-ended comments transcribed by the interviewer. We read the survey answers and interviews of both groups to develop thematic codes that represent patterns of responses, then analyzed and coded them accordingly (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Description of Sample

The sample of adolescents consists of nine girls and two boys, ranging in age from 12 to 17. Seven teens were African American, one self-identified as multiracial, two were white, and one was Hispanic. All parent interviews were conducted with mothers, who ranged in age from 27-49. The families who fled Hurricane Katrina took a number of routes to get to Colorado—65 percent of our larger sample of 93 adult evacuees came on their own, 30 percent were relocated to Colorado by the government, and 3 percent came via another route such as an employer located in Colorado. Most of the 93 evacuees in the larger study came from New Orleans, followed by other parts of Louisiana and Mississippi, respectively. Forty percent of the families stayed in three or more shelters in the course of evacuation. Adults in the larger sample reported the following hurricane-related stressors: 81 percent had significant financial loss, 31 percent had a family member die in the hurricane, 22 percent of the study evacuees were injured in the hurricane, 57 percent were separated from family members during the hurricane, and 46 percent had a friend die in the hurricane. These figures outline the significance of the events wreaked by Katrina and frame the issues facing the families within this study.

Limitations of the Sample

This article reports preliminary findings from pilot data. We are currently collecting and analyzing follow-up data collected one year after the storm and again 18 months later. Because the data used in this article capture a particular point in time, it is possible that some of the dynamics we describe will be different in subsequent interviews. Nonetheless, there is benefit to understanding the experience of dislocation during this window when families were newly adapting to their displacement and resettlement as it provides a window into their experience before they had fully settled into their new lives or returned to their damaged homes. Further, some research suggests that onset of symptoms of PTSD occur within the first six months following a trauma (Yule et al. 2000). The timing of these interviews allows us to better understand the struggles these youth face. However, the most serious limitation is that the questions posed to the adolescents were close-ended and lacked the rich detail we hoped to capture. This is a by-product of the institutional review board protocol that limited our questions because of concern for the well-being of these youth who they identified as especially vulnerable. We thus use their parents' descriptions to complement their responses. Additionally, the adolescent sample is not representative of the larger population of evacuee children. The sample is slightly more African American than the general evacuee population, is largely female, and is quite small. Many teens were not ready to talk to interviewers so quickly after the disaster, which restricted recruitment of teens. As a result, the issues and experiences described here are informative for understanding many of the experiences of disaster, displacement, and resettlement and issues that arise, even as they are not generalizable to all young people facing disaster.

Findings

Experience of Evacuation

Living on the Gulf Coast, many evacuee families had seen storm warnings before Katrina and had previously been advised to leave. However, since few such threats

had significantly affected the region in the past, many did not feel compelled to leave immediately. As a result, the actual evacuation was frequently described as one that arose quickly and in desperation. One mother explained, "Well, we always stayed through hurricanes or whatever, I didn't take it serious, you know. But somewhere inside, I was—it was gettin'—I was gettin' hints. I could feel the pressure." Her children also expressed concern. As she described, "So my kids, I wanted to just sleep, and my... 8-year-old... was like, 'Mama, look at the news! The hurricane is comin'!" This account, like many others, reveals how children were aware of the impending doom and were often catalysts for action.

Families often left without the time to organize their supplies and without knowing what they would need or how long they would be gone. Describing this, one mother of a 12-year-old explained the difficulties in leaving quickly and packing appropriately. "I just got in the car, me and my daughter and the dog, and threw what I could in my car. And I have a small car, we have a Mustang, so you can't pack much. I tried to think of, like, blankets, because I was thinkin' it was gonna be cold, you know."

Other parents expressed the challenges of unreliable transportation. One mother explained, "My car is—we call it the Hallelujah Buggy because it just got us everywhere we needed to go." Similarly, another mother explained, "My car was not gonna make it sittin' on I-10 for eight hours. It would get hot ridin' around the city too long. So I knew my car wasn't roadworthy, and neither was my boyfriend's car." Faced with difficulty leaving, her way of coping was to help her 16-year-old daughter first: "I did evacuate my daughter to high ground in a ritzy hotel on St. Charles Avenue, where her best friend's dad worked as security." Although moving her daughter was logical and provided reassurance that she would be safe, she did not anticipate how difficult it would become to reestablish contact with her as the city continued to evacuate. As she described it:

I started havin' nightmares. I didn't realize it, but it really started affecting me, and I started havin' nightmares, because I dreamt—the next morning, when I woke up, I dreamt I stepped into the flood out of my bed. It was like I was awake but I was asleep, and I was just terrified. Then I'd wake up out of my sleep every single night crying... I knew I was crying for my daughter, I knew I needed to get out and look for her.

She was not able to locate her daughter until "days later," when she called her grandmother in Houston who had heard from her daughter who had evacuated to Texas two days after the storm. (In contrast, this mother was not able to leave for eight days.) As she recalled, "that must have been when that whole weight just fell off me. I almost fell in the water. And I cried from that time probably till the time that I got here [to Colorado], just so grateful that she was alive."

Several parents were aware of the stress evacuation caused their children. One mother of three described the difficulties in staying in multiple shelters:

The first night we got there we slept in a truck stop. It was bad. The next morning we went to a church, and we were there about a couple of weeks and then the other hurricane [Rita] came, so we had to evacuate again. We went up to Alexandria, Louisiana, slept in a truck stop there. The next morning we started drivin' again. We went up to Shreveport, and we were there for a week... [It was] a lot of relocating, a lot of different schools that my children went to. Every time they'd get comfortable, we'd be packin' 'em up again, relocating, go out somewhere else, start in a new school all over again.

For those families who were not able to self-evacuate and required rescue after the storm hit, the evacuation was stressful in different ways. For example, a mother of three described waiting for a boat to come for them after the levees broke, flooding the city. She explained,

...it took forever for that boat to come. When the boat came finally and got us, we couldn't bring no clothes, we couldn't bring no nothin'. We was soakin' wet. They were sayin' we couldn't bring nothin' with us out [of] the house, like a change of clothes, because it was gonna get wet anyway...

Many families ended up in shelters, which carried their own challenges and demanded another set of strategies from parents struggling to care for their children. One mother of two described the difficult conditions of staying in the Houston Astrodome:

We stayed there about eight days... They had an activity room for the children where you could play puzzles and play games and stuff like that. They had a lot of volunteers to help keep the children occupied. If the children were under 12, you had to stay in the room. If they were over 12, you could leave 'em, just sign 'em in and sign 'em out... The teenage boys, they had recreation upstairs, and that's where they were supposed to stay, playin' with things upstairs on the second floor. But they brought footballs downstairs, and they were throwin' footballs over your head, 12 o'clock at night. They had little children with tricycles passin' your head while you sleep on the air mattress on the floor. It was just ridiculous. There was never a quiet—they would dim the lights about ten, but still, it was never a total quiet moment where everything was still and at peace. Never.

Another mother, who was housed in a smaller shelter, described her strategy to meet her children's needs and her frustrations with how materials were allocated:

They had cots, and the only way I got cots for all my family was if I would volunteer. And I made sure if I would volunteer; all of them was gonna have a cot because I didn't want my daughters to sleep on that floor. They didn't want to issue out blankets. So if you didn't have a cot, you needed a blanket. They was sayin' they was tryin' to get the blankets to the people that they thought most needed it, and they started out with the people that was really, really old. And they was sayin' that a child could go without a blanket.

For several evacuees, stress developed as they lived without electricity, running water, or access to information. Most described being worried about family members and loved ones, some who were injured or died during the storm. For example, a mother of three explained,

My dad's brother-in-law, he drowned, because he caught a heart attack and he fell out the boat. Two people that was real good friends of my mom, they didn't leave. They owned a laundromat down there... they didn't leave, and they was killed. And my first cousins' girlfriend, they just found her dead in a house.

Adolescents' experience of the hurricane was also informed by an awareness of loss of life and of harm affecting people they knew. Illustrating this, seven of the 11 children reported that a family member, close relative, or friend was seriously injured, ill, or died in the months surrounding the storm and identified it as a significant source of stress. Thus, for young people, a sense of loss as well as panicked dislocation saturated their experience of the storm.

Communities Left Behind

Initial media commentary suggested that evacuees may be better off for having left New Orleans, a city known for social, economic, and political troubles. Illustrating this, former First Lady Barbara Bush, while touring the Houston Astrodome—at the time sheltering thousands of displaced people—told reporters of the benefits displacement might bring. She explained, “so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them” (*New York Times* 2005). Despite the fact that all of our sample could be described as “underprivileged,” their descriptions of their community differed significantly from the one painted by Mrs. Bush. In fact, nearly all the parents described their life before Katrina as positive. As one mother explained, “It was very good, a very good life. I mean, you know, you're surrounded by family, friends you grew up with. You're comfortable.” Another mother described her neighborhood: “All the children in the neighborhood, they grew up together. I'd been there six years, and it was a real nice, quiet, family neighborhood.” Similarly, a mother of five described her old neighborhood where she lived in a single family home as “safe, clean, well-kept” with “my grandmother, my aunties, uncles, cousins, [and] a host of friends” living nearby. Almost three-fourths of the parents interviewed described having had family and friends close by and knowing the people in the community. Accustomed to living near loved ones, many evacuees found the process of evacuating and resettling in a new state to be especially difficult. Illustrating the traumatic effect this had for some, one mother, who lived with four of her five children—ages 8-21—and her 4-year-old granddaughter, recalled the devastation and its toll on her:

I felt like I was gonna have a nervous breakdown sometimes. I just had cryin' spells, you know, I'd just go in a room and cry and cry and cry... It was far worse than anything they showed on the news. You just can't imagine. The way everything smelled, it was so bad, that smell. Just to see everything that you knew. We'd been in the city about ten years. My children grew up

there. My son was born there. You see everything that you knew and everything you loved, and it was lookin' so bad, like we were at war with somebody and they just dropped a couple of bombs on our city.

As children assessed their own levels of stress, many (seven of 11) listed separation from family as one of their top stressors, with six of the seven scoring it a six or seven on a scale with seven denoting the most stressful. An additional four children listed their family moving as a significant source of stress. Thus, as young people arrived in Colorado, they were deeply aware of the loss of their community, family, friends, and all that was familiar to them.

Adjusting to Changes in the Environment

Colorado presented significant changes from Louisiana in terms of housing, climate, and landscape. Denver, the city where most evacuees live in Colorado, is located 5,280 feet above sea level, a significant change from New Orleans. Additionally, it snows in the late fall and winter and the climate is generally quite dry. The city borders a mountain range, also a notable difference from the flat lands of the Gulf Coast. Illustrating how these differences caused concern, one mother of three described her children's initial apprehension:

When we first said we was comin' out here, them girls cried, 'cause they thought it was only mountains out here... 'cause on our way here, that's all you saw. But when we got in the city, they went to seein' stores, and when they went to seein' stores, their eyes got big.

Parents and teens also commonly voiced concern over weather. One mother explained her 16-year-old daughter's dissatisfaction with Colorado: "She is not a happy camper. She's not adjusting to this whole weather, and she just doesn't like it." Another mother explained how the weather has negatively affected the health of one of her children: "The oldest one and the youngest one, they're adaptin' real good. The youngest one, she suffers with her sinuses. She suffered with it in New Orleans also [but] she suffers with it real bad, with the weather."

Even as some adolescents struggled to adjust to the climate and landscape, others found it to be a positive. Adolescents noted that "the environment is cleaner," "the weather is interesting," and that "the weather is cool in Colorado." Several adolescents and parents commented on liking snow. As one mother explained of her daughter, "We never seen the snow before. So she'll go out and play in the snow. She likes it, she really does." Another teen, age 16, commented that she liked the mountains, explaining, "They are beautiful and I like going there." In the same vein, one mother explained of her son, "He likes it [here]. I heard him comment to his buddy on the cell phone that the mountains are cool."

Changes in the environment—in terms of material resources available because of displacement—were also described as an asset for some families. For example, one mother explained that her 14-year-old son would like to stay in Colorado. When asked to speculate on why he doesn't want to return to Louisiana, she replied, "I'm not sure, but I know they don't want to go back home to the trailer park." Thus, the

out-of-state housing assistance provided by FEMA, in some cases offered better options than the housing that might have been available in Louisiana. Another child described the positives of being in Colorado as the family's acquisition of a "better car, house, and furnishings."

Lost Networks and the Challenges of Settling in Colorado

Parents frequently articulated that they liked many things in Colorado, but found it challenging to find employment. Many of these struggles were exacerbated by the loss of community, stable housing, and social networks—particularly those that helped with childcare. One mother explained, "I love Colorado. I love it a lot. The only thing, I plan on stayin', but I need to go to work." In explaining the limitations on her job search, lack of childcare was central:

It's hard, because you can't—I mean I couldn't go to work at Wal-Mart or anything like that, because of the hours. And my little girl, I don't know nobody that she could stay with at night, late. And... I'm not gonna just leave her with anybody, you know? So that causes a problem as far as, like, getting a quick job at a fast food place or Wal-Mart or anything like that. It ain't that I'm too proud not to do it, because I would do it. I need the money, you know? But it's the hours. She's too young to be by herself.

Similarly, another mother described her dual frustrations with both being unemployed and lacking the social networks on which she could rely for assistance with childcare or for social support:

The only thing that makes it stressful is that I'm not workin', I don't know nobody, I can't pick up the phone and call one of my friends and say we goin' out... I can't call anybody to say, 'Come with me to the grocery store.' ... I don't trust [my daughter] goin' with nobody, because I don't know who nobody are to be lettin' her go. I haven't lived here that long to trust anybody. They don't know nobody, I don't know nobody. So basically we be right here.

In losing access to communities where they knew people and where their children had friends, many parents were aware of the limits of their abilities to provide recreation, including safe places outside the house, to their children. Some commented on how the cooler weather and lack of friends in the neighborhood limited children's ability to go out and play. Others identified a lack of resources:

It's just me and my little girl, we kind of stick together. It's hard to get out into society, 'cause you don't have the means to do things with her, festivals or whatever is goin' on, you really don't have the means to get out and go do it. So you just kind of stay in.

For others, settling took precedence over recreation with their children. As one mother explained, "We haven't done anything yet except go to the mountains a couple of times; that was it. Before, we were just tryin' to find an apartment."

In addition to a lack of help with childcare or places to go that were perceived as safe for children, lost social supports also affected household functioning. In particular, many parents noted the loss of social support that might have otherwise helped to manage family conflict. One mother of three explained:

I think it was easier for me to cope with things at home. I was copin' in that environment. This is a totally different place. That's just like, for instance, if me and my husband was to have an argument. It's harder to cope with it because I'm here and I don't have no friends that I can run to. I just need somebody to talk to. It's nobody to run to. It's nobody to talk to. You just got to suck it all in and that's it. So I know it's hard for [the children]. They in here. If I'm gettin' on them and fussin' with them about somethin', they just got to sit in here and hear it, and that's all there is to it. There's nowhere to go. They can't go by their grandmother. They can't go outside. They just got to stay in here.

Descriptions like these illustrate the ways lost communities removed the ability for children to find safe refuge outside their homes and for their parents to find ways to benefit from confiding in those on whom they rely for emotional support.

In Denver, like in many cities that accepted evacuees, local organizations attempted to provide services to those displaced by the storm. However, some parents described feeling distrustful of available but unfamiliar resources. For example, one mother chose not to follow up on a referral to the Big Brother's program for her son, explaining, "The lady at the [resettlement] center, the social worker, she had suggested that organization Boys—I can't think of the name of it, like, the older boys... But I didn't trust that too much, so I didn't call them." In the handful of cases like these, parents' unfamiliarity with local resources or lack of confidence in the people making referrals limited their access to free community resources.

Like their parents, children were also aware of the loss of social networks, especially of their friends. Illustrating this, eight of 11 children rated being separated from close friends as highly stressful. For example, one adolescent explained that although he wanted to make more friends, he found that "the culture is different," and thought that "people could be nicer." Similarly, another mother described her daughter's inability to make friends: "She can't get how they talk. And I try to explain it's a different culture and stuff, and that's the way they talk."

Even with the sense of displacement, some children found ways to maintain their social ties with their friends from home. In describing her 16-year-old daughter, one woman explained, "I know she misses some of her friends. She stays on the phone or on the computer." Several parents referred to their teens' use of such technologies to maintain pre-Katrina relationships.

New Schools as a Resource and a Challenge

Like the children above who described their struggles with the unfamiliar culture in Colorado, the change to new schools with unfamiliar faces and norms was

challenging for nearly all of the adolescents in this study, consistent with other research (Fothergill and Peek 2006). As one mother explained of her daughter:

She says she don't have no friends at school, which, you know, I probably need to go and talk to the counselor and see what's goin' on. She wants to stay home more than she wants to go to school, and before, she was Miss Popular in school and had all her friends. Now it's like, she wants to stay home more. So I need to get her some kind of help somehow.

Another mother described how her children were faring, explaining, "I think my son's takin' it a lot better than my daughter... Everybody that she knows is still at home. She's only got one friend out here. She hasn't been able to get back into her activities, [like] track and stuff; she can't do that here yet."

Parents were aware of their children's struggles but could not see how to help them, even as they identified their need for assistance. Many hoped that their children would find school-based activities to fill their time and give them a sense of connection. As one mother explained of her teen daughter:

She hasn't gone to any of the parties or any dances at school. I asked her, I said, 'Why don't you go out for track?' She does play in the orchestra. She plays violin. She's been doing that since middle school. She lost her violin, but the school provided one for her. She's just not real active in any after-school activities. She just goes to school and comes home.

In addition to the social challenges of relocation, many families struggled with the differences in expectations for academic performance, as most families found the educational requirements to be higher in Colorado than they had been in Louisiana. Illustrating the challenges this has posed, one mother described her 12-year-old daughter's struggles:

...she cries, because she wants to go home and such, and like I said, the school, they're at different levels than she was in Louisiana. In math, they're much higher than where she was. She's always been straight A's. Since kindergarten she's been honor roll... Now I'm not sure. She's bringing home—her paperwork is, like, C's, D's, F's, and she's hiding the F's—things like that goin' on. I went to talk with her teacher, and he's tryin' to spend more time with her with the math, you know. But I think that she's just—I don't know, she's tryin', there's somethin' that's blockin' her from really gettin' into it.

Another mother expressed concerns about her 16-year-old son's progress and long-term options. She explained:

Oh, we talk about how he needs to take drivers' ed here so he can get a little vehicle, because he has some money in the bank that he's able to get to now, and he can have it and get a car and take drivers' ed so he can have a license, because if I'm working and he's going to classes, he's gonna need some transportation. I don't want him walkin' around, takin' a bus. I want

him to be like a normal teenager with a vehicle. I don't care if I walk or take the bus, it doesn't bother me. We're checking into alternative high school programs, because it's gonna be hard for him to fit in.

In this passage, this mother articulates both her desire for her son to be “a normal teenager,” which she imagines requires private transportation that she herself lacks, and her efforts to identify an educational outlet that can accommodate his inability to fold into a traditional learning environment. These dual hopes can be seen in many of the interviews.

Even with the challenges new schools brought, some parents noted that getting children situated in school provided much needed stability. As one mother explained, “the elementary school, for instance, they worked with [the kids] and they made them feel really comfortable, so I'd hate to take them out again.” At least two parents expressed gratitude for the assistance they felt the school provided:

Only thing I know I can say is that they accepted him in their school—when we first went there, she said that the class, they only had one seventh grade class, was already three students overfull. She still accepted him, and that was real nice, since that was a headache off of me. I called the counselor at the school, and she said she would just help him when he had anything he needed. They been real nice to him. They picked an evacuee over their own student. They been real nice. And they bought him a uniform. We didn't have any money or anything, so they bought him uniforms, and that was real nice.

Adults weren't the only ones to identify positives in the schools in Colorado. One adolescent, age 15, noted that one positive of relocating was that she was able to enroll in a training program that will allow her to become a nursing assistant upon completing high school and will make it possible to eventually attend nursing school. She explained that it would not have happened had they not moved to Colorado. Another teen, age 16, commented that the education system is much better in Colorado. In these ways, schools provided the promise of connection, community, and advocacy, but were also a source of alienation from the cultural norms of interaction and academic expectations. Given that virtually every child listed changing schools as a significant stressor, it is clear that this is in many ways the nexus of their displacement and reminder of what they have lost, even as it may hold some benefit.

Psychological Struggles and Signs of Resilience

Parents discussed how they felt their children were faring in Colorado post-evacuation. Only four of eleven parents said that their children were doing well or moderately well. Others expressed concerns or described ways their children were struggling with their new settings. In their assessment of their children's struggles, parents voiced concerns about their social networks, coping, and levels of internalized trauma. Most notably, many parents described their child's emotional struggles and signs of depression. For example, when asked how her daughter was doing, one mother replied, “Terrible. Everything about that situation is going sour.

It used to be my most prized asset was my child, and now... it's terrible. I cry every day. She[']s belligerent, disrespectful, depressed, lazy." She added that her daughter had made very few friends and was not doing well in school. In explaining how her daughter would cope with problems, she said that her daughter usually "tries to talk to other people, and tries to solve it on her own. But now she's not talking to anybody about anything. She just wants to go home." She added, "She's acting out, really bad. It's just been more blatant and more—pathetic. If I could use a word, that's what I'd say."

Other parents voiced significant concern for their children's well-being. One mother described her daughter: "I don't think she's really coping. She's just walking through it in a daze to me... numb." Another mother described her daughter's struggles:

It's been hard on her. When we first got here, she cried a lot, missed her friends, her family, wants to go home, but there's no home to go to, you know? And then goin' to a new school. And I don't know what—I really need to get her some medical help, I think maybe her stress and her nerves or whatever, but she's losin' her hair right here, and she's too young. It's startin' to grow back and I'm watchin' her to see if she's pullin' it or anything like that, and she's not, and I was thinkin' maybe she's pullin' it back maybe for a ponytail too tight, but that wasn't it. She's wearin' her hair down, you know, around like this. So yeah, that's really got me concerned, a lot. I'm thinkin' it's stress-related. I'm hopin' it's not somethin' that's worse than that.

In accounting for her delay in seeking help for her daughter, this mother described her limited resources: "I mean, there's been a few times where I wanted to call and make an appointment for me and my little girl, maybe get on some antidepressants or something, you know, for myself. And what doctor is gonna see me? I mean, I couldn't even pay for a visit."

Even with the difficulties children faced, several parents confessed that they thought their children were faring better in Colorado than they themselves were. One mother of two described her son's well-being, noting,

He's been real good. He was very helpful with helpin' me bring suitcases and stuff into the shelters and in the hotel and—uplifting in every way he could. He was real helpful. It wasn't—he missed his friends. After a while he started missin' his friends. But he did exceptionally well, better than I did.

Another mother explained of her teen daughter, "She's seen me cry more than anything. She worries about me crying."

Looking to the Future

In thinking through the futures they imagined for themselves and their children, parents expressed both anxiety and optimism. One parent explained that she hopes to buy a home after she finds employment. Others imagined staying in Colorado

solely to spare their children another move. As one mother who had planned to finish a technical degree and then move to California explained,

I thought before the hurricane that I would graduate from school and I would go back to California. I had no clue that we would be comin' here. And now we're here, and both of my children like it, so I think we're gonna be here. I'm not worrying about goin' to California, because I don't want to uproot 'em again.

Other parents voiced uncertainty or ambivalence about remaining in Colorado. As one mother explained,

Some days it's like, 'Forget it. I ain't going back to New Orleans.' I don't really know. It's like, I don't want to plant any roots, I don't want to get too comfortable, or maybe I don't want to let go or really relax, because maybe then I may not want to go back.

Another mother relayed her discussions with her son about her uncertainty:

I told him that, you know, we'll stay here for a while, until things get settled in every way. And then when I can think clear, I'll make decisions whether we'll move to another state or not. But right now we're gonna stay here. [My son is] satisfied with that.

Reiterating the difficulties of going back one mother explained her daughters' understanding of their relocation:

Well, they know why we're here. I think they old enough and they smart girls, they know what's goin' on. I mean, the youngest one [age 9], she don't really understand, 'cause she thinks we're able to go back home...But then, they seen pictures and stuff like that. They know you can't go back home.

Even as parents acknowledged challenges ahead, several tried to stay positive. One mother explained her strategy to keep her children strong and focused on their future:

We tell them that it was God's will and He's gonna make sure that everything turns out. You know, some things happen for the better. We're gonna go for it, we're gonna be here, and we're gonna keep movin' and do what we have to do to survive. And I just face forward so they can continue to be strong too.

Others identified the relocation as presenting opportunities for "a new life." Illustrating this sentiment, one parent explained:

It kind of wakes you up a little bit. I mean, I don't want to take nothin' for granted any more. It make you want to live your life right. If you had any skeletons in your closet, it makes you really want to change everything.

Gettin' right with God, goin' to church, I don't know if other people look at it that way, but I look at it that way. I think it should be just livin' your life all over.

Conclusion

In evaluating families' experiences of displacement and relocation to Colorado, we see signs of optimism and appreciation for the landscape, beauty, and opportunities they have found. At the same time, our data reveal that families are also struggling with loss of community and the barriers that exist to building new lives post-evacuation. Despite these efforts to find ways to maintain contact and community, displacement has significantly limited family functioning. Parents, lacking networks on which to rely for childcare, employment assistance, or emotional support, have struggled to rebuild their lives. At the same time, the lack of familial resources has limited adolescents' mobility, including the ability to find refuge with others such as grandparents when life at home became stressful. For adolescents, school has provided many additional challenges and benefits to their efforts to settle in Colorado.

Our findings suggest that those working with children must strive to recognize the unique ways young people understand loss and transition in their lives, particularly as their articulation of their appreciation for present circumstances can mask significant psychological struggles. It is clear that schools remain a resource to families, even as children struggle with new academic expectations and social demands. Educators and school administrators can and should reach out to children who arrive after displacement. Many parents described ways the school accommodated their children, either by making room for them or by providing resources like tutoring or replacing lost musical instruments. It is clear that more can be done to help adolescents become involved in activities, particularly those in which they had previously participated. A challenge for schools is how and when it is best to evaluate and support academic needs of displaced students, whose duration in the school is unknown.

After Katrina, many communities, like the Denver-metro area—provided significant access to services and referrals to evacuees. However, many social workers and volunteers may significantly underestimate the ways that the lack of cultural familiarity fuels distrust of new services, agencies, and referrals. This is a significant barrier to meeting families' needs.

Simultaneously, opportunities exist to reinforce points of optimism that new beginnings provide. Small resources like access to the Internet and cell phones were significant in allowing young people to maintain contact with friends. These findings suggest that service providers and those working with children after disasters can support these efforts to be self-efficacious in building bridges and finding opportunities, but must also be vigilant in recognizing signs of ongoing struggles, as these may be buried under signs of resilience and hope. In doing so, adults can provide assistance most appropriate to young people's needs.

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