A Faith-Based Organization’s Engagement of an African American Community in Disaster Preparation

Tronda L. Douglas
Walden University, tronda.douglas@gmail.com

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A Faith-Based Organization’s Engagement of an African American Community in Disaster Preparation

Tronda Douglas, PhD

**Problem**
Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are essential disaster resource tools that could be used to prepare and assist rural community members in recovering from disasters. Current research is lacking in understanding how FBOs could be utilized in African American rural communities for disasters (McGeehan & Baker, 2017; Muller et al., 2014).

**Theory or Framework**
Principles of Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory grounded the study. The principles are volunteerism; trust; membership in a network; neighborhood connections; togetherness; everyday connections; and generalized norms within the community.

**Participants**
Snowball Sampling
- 11 participants; 7 men and 4 women, including community leaders, church leaders, and fire department personnel

**Purpose**
This qualitative, exploratory case study investigated how an FBO in a African American rural community organized resources to build a community-based volunteer fire department

**Significance**
Findings of this study could provide information to human services professionals, government agencies, community members, and policy makers on how social networks can be galvanized to leverage the social capital needed to prepare rural communities for disasters
Bring awareness to community members in rural areas of the magnitude of resources available from the Internet on disaster preparations
Community members who are properly prepared for disasters may require less resources and manpower from governmental and disaster relief agencies after experiencing the impact of a disaster

**Social Change Implications**
This research empowers communities in society that are often not served well by traditional responses to disasters. Formally recognizing FBOs as disaster resource centers could help community members in rural areas be properly prepared for disasters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Research Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpretation</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: What strategies or approaches did an African American faith-based organization in a rural community use to establish a community-based all volunteer fire department?</td>
<td>Some key take-aways include</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ2: What recommendations do the organizations have that could be used to assist other communities in preparing for disasters?</td>
<td>• Community members trusted each other</td>
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**Data collection**
- Semi-structured 1 hour interviews with 12 questions
- Newspaper articles
- Photographs
- Church documents
- Fire department reports

**Analysis**
Used open coding approach to identify and create codes for recurring words and phrase. Allowed the themes to emerge from the data. Grouped descriptive statements into word clusters and categorical themes

**Findings**
Determination
- Too long for emergency services to respond
- Lack of knowledge, money, training, equipment, guidance
- Lack of support from city, state, and county

FBO Center of Activities
- Business meetings, fundraising
- Dissemination of information, work group organization
- Provided financial, physical, spiritual support

Dedicated to Building the Fire Department
- Community members donated time and skilled labor
- Local businesses donated material
- Community obtained franchise/charter
- Received adequate firefighting/CPR training

Resilience
- Rebounded from disaster - newly built fire station destroyed
- Fire station lost franchise

Persistence
- Overcame challenges, obtained required resources
- Rebuilt after disaster

**Limitations**
Possible limitations include:
- Sample were limited to only African Americans because no other ethnicity groups are represented within the selected community.
- The case study specifically addressed the issue of disaster preparations in African American rural communities.
- Case site selected was a faith-based organization in an African American rural community.
- Participant demographics showed an age and generational difference

**Recommendations**
Future Research
- Conduct a quantitative study of social networks and social capital resources in rural communities after an impact of a disaster
- Investigate the preparation requirements of a community before a disaster strikes

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