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Survivors with Disabilities: Elucidating Variations in FEMA Recovery Program Utilization

Survivors with disabilities often face substantial challenges in disaster recovery (Priestly and Hemingway 2007, Stough et al 2015, GAO 2017). Among the scant literature specifically studying the recovery experience for survivors with disabilities, however, almost all rely predominantly on qualitative and anecdotal data. In contrast, this poster presentation will depict the results of a predominantly quantitative study on disability and recovery, specifically looking at variations among survivors who registered for recovery grant assistance at the federal level.

This study was conducted through a partnership between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (ODIC), the Recovery Analytics Division (RAD), and other teams across FEMA. Data sources included registration intake data from the National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS), FEMA customer satisfaction surveys, and publicly-available U.S. Census data. Among survivors who applied for FEMA recovery assistance between 2012 and 2018, the study statistically compared survivors who reported a disability-related loss to a sample population of registrants who did not report a disability-related loss. Variations either considered or controlled for included demographic differences (e.g. owning versus renting, status of insurance), eligibility, time and geographical variations, and rates of appeal and denial.

Preliminary results indicate that there are differences in the “survivor journey” for the population reporting disaster-related losses; however, controlling for correlated demographic variables largely reduces variance. The results of this study will be published in an inaugural FEMA Disability Report, to be presented to the FEMA Administrator in mid-2019.