

Roni Fraser, MA

Graduate Student, University of Delaware

COMPETITIVE DIVISION - GRADUATE
STUDENT

Through a Mother's Eyes: The Compound Nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Hurricane Ida on Maternal-Infant Health

Pregnant and lactating persons, new parents, and infants represent some of the most marginalized populations that require special consideration and time-sensitive care in emergencies, disasters, and pandemics. This poster will provide a preliminary overview of data collected regarding the maternal experiences following Hurricane Ida. Hurricane Ida was a category four storm that made landfall in Louisiana, USA, in 2021. Using quantitative and systematic social media sampling methods, this study focused on evacuation/sheltering decisions, medical and childcare access, and infant feeding decisions. We also examined how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced hurricane experiences, including household risk perception, vaccine availability, and protective action decisions. Participants (n=131) were predominantly white (86%), had 4-year degrees or higher (59%), and were from Louisiana or Mississippi. The respondents had infants of varying ages, the majority either newborn-to-two-months-old (15%) or 12 months or older (28%). Similarly, respondents had varying approaches to infant feeding, with 25% breastfeeding at the breast only, 20% bottle-fed with infant formula, and 39% fed their child solid or complementary foods. Results suggest that

Hurricane Ida led to re-lived trauma from previous disasters, especially since the storm made landfall on the 16th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. Mothers also reported how challenging it was to navigate both Hurricane Ida and the pandemic in tandem, including disruption of feeding routines, lack of safe play spaces due to wind and water damage, poor access to healthcare, and fear of affording necessities for their families. Policy implications for this research include new interventions and programs that would provide targeted maternal and infant health support during hurricane evacuations.

Presentation Theme: Vulnerable Populations - Maternal/Child Health

Collaborators, Advisor(s) and Department(s) that assisted with this research: Dr. Sarah DeYoung, University of Delaware, Disaster Research Center & Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice.

