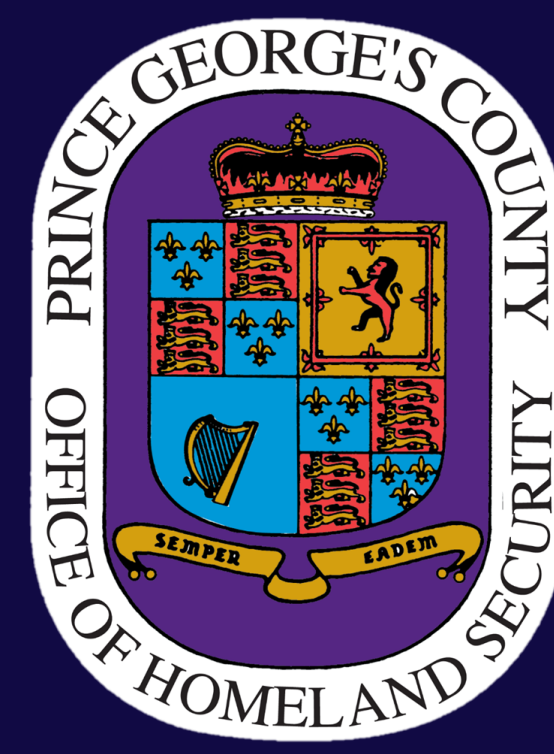


A REVIEW AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PREPAREDNESS IN PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, MARYLAND



Prince George's County Office of Homeland Security/Office of Emergency Management
University of Maryland, Baltimore County - Department of Emergency Health Services



UMBC

INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters have become more common, where there was an average of 5.4 disasters a year in the 2000s that increased to an average of 10.5 in the last decade. Since the year 2000, the State of Maryland has had just under 20 federal disaster declarations. Prince George’s County had 12 disaster declarations, where the majority were attributed to hurricanes and snowstorms. The threats and hazards vary across the county, and across the state of Maryland. With that, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requires jurisdictions across the country to complete a Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) every three years to ensure emergency plans/planning processes take into consideration jurisdiction specific hazards. The data from the THIRA also helps to inform preparedness efforts taken within a jurisdiction. As instances of natural disasters continue to increase across the nation, it is more important than ever to ensure that citizens are prepared for natural disasters.

BACKGROUND

As communities across the country continue to face the devastating effects of natural disasters, a critical element leading to resilience is emergency preparedness. Events leading up to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina were not anomalies and can be seen with many other disasters around the world, where those who are low-income minorities are disproportionately affected by disasters. So many low-income families live in areas where the land is the cheapest but are also more prone to natural disasters, such as floodplains. These families also lack adequate resources needed for them to prepare for and recover from disasters. Despite a substantial push towards increased preparedness after 9/11, the American Preparedness Project survey, launched by National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), found that:

- In 2015 only 50% of people in the United States said their family had a family emergency preparedness plan.
- Of people within the United States who had a family emergency preparedness plans, only 68% had adequate plans and the recommended items in their preparedness kits
- Overconfidence & trust in government shown to cause communities to be overall less prepared

THESIS STATEMENT

Despite the increased frequencies of natural disasters and events across the country, when compared nationally, Prince George’s County residents are not prepared for emergency events, even though they are aware of how to prepare.

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

Alexandra D. Harris, MS, MPH | adharris@co.pg.md.us

METHODS

FEMA National Household Survey:

- Annual survey aimed to assess the nation’s preparedness by looking at preparedness attitudes, motivations, and actions taken by the American public, but also assess how preparedness and resiliency has changed over time
- National Household Survey is conducted via landline or cellphone and in English and Spanish to a random sample of about 5,000-7,000 adults across the country (approx. 0.002% of total US population)

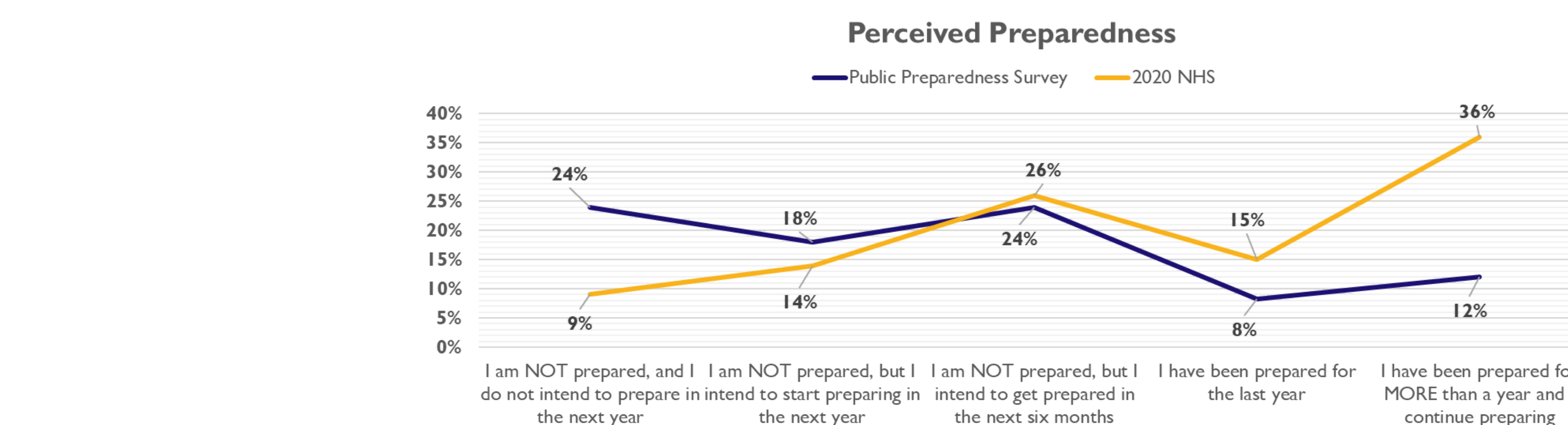
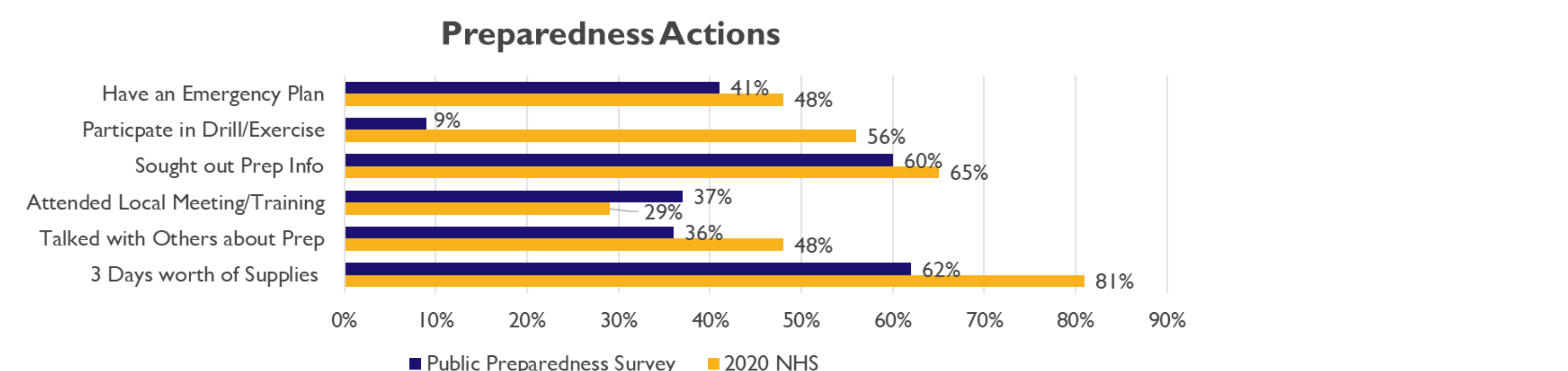
Public Preparedness Survey:

- Combined threat/hazard questions from the THIRA data collection process with select personal disaster preparedness questions from the FEMA National Household Survey.
- Utilized online survey platform, consisted of 52 questions, and the survey was made available in both English and Spanish.
- April 2022-August 2022
- Distribution Strategy
 - Shared via social media
 - Shared via County newsletters
 - Two-sided postcards (English/Spanish) were distributed throughout the County during outreach events

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS: PUBLIC PREPAREDNESS SURVEY



RESULTS



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DISCUSSION

Awareness of Information:

- The 2020 NHS found that 47% of respondents had read, seen, or heard preparedness information in the past six months, while the Public Preparedness Survey found that only 27% of respondents were aware in the last six months.
 - FEMA found that awareness of preparedness information appeared to be “strongly correlated with engagement with other preparedness behaviors”.

Experience with Disasters

- The 2020 NHS found that 47% of respondents had personal or familial experience with the impacts of disasters, while only 40% of Prince George’s County respondents have experience with disasters.
 - FEMA explained that disaster experience was a motivating factor for people to become more prepared, but the Public Preparedness Survey found that biggest motivating factor was associated with a personal responsibility to take care of themselves and their family

Preparedness Actions

- The 2020 NHS found that 81% of respondents have supplies gathered to last 3 days or more, 48% talked with others about getting prepared, 29% attend local meeting/training, 65% sought out preparedness information, 56% participated in a drill or exercise, and 48% had an emergency plan.
- The Public Preparedness Survey found that 62% of respondents have 3 days or more worth of supplies, 36% talked with others about getting prepared, 37% attended a local meeting/training, 60% sought out preparedness information, 9% participated in a drill or exercise, and 41% indicated that they have an emergency plan.
 - In comparison, the greatest disparity can be seen in regards to participation in drills or exercise.

Perceived Preparedness

- 2020 NHS found that 36% of respondents indicated that they have been prepared for more than a year and plan to continue preparing, followed by 26% who indicated that they are not prepared at the moment, but intend to get prepared in the next six months. Public Preparedness Survey found that 24% indicated that they are not prepared and do not intend to get prepared in the next year, while 24% indicated that they are not prepared but plan to prepare in the next six months, and 18% plan to start preparing in the next year.
 - Both surveys measured preparedness based on self-reported actions taken by the respondents, but no matter what actions have or have not been taken, levels of preparedness may be best gauged by an individual’s perceived level of preparedness. Even if a person has performed preparedness actions or behaviors, if a person does not feel like they are prepared, they will likely be less resilient in the event of an emergency.

CONCLUSION

This research found that despite Prince George’s County residents indicating that they have emergency plans, seek out preparedness information, and having money set aside, these residents are overall not prepared for disasters or emergency events, when compared nationally.

LIMITATIONS

- The Public Preparedness Survey was the first of its kind, conducted by the Prince George’s County Office of Emergency Management, so the response rate was not as high as it could have been.
- FEMA’s 2020 National Household Survey data and summary: FEMA explains the importance of the key indicators for hazard preparedness, and two out of the four, ‘preparedness efficacy,’ and ‘risk perception,’ are based on the results of multiple questions, but FEMA does not explain which questions or how the overall indicator was calculated.
- The Public Preparedness Survey was conducted soon after the “COVID-19 Pandemic” began to subside, so many of the responses may have been skewed due to work/school closures and other impacts from the pandemic.