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“Mapping Social Vulnerability to Enhance Housing & Neighborhood Resilience.”

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Social factors influence the ability of coastal communities and their populations to predict, respond, resist, and recover from disasters. The complex tragedy that is Katrina can be understood as the result of the interaction among the environment, human social systems and their built environment. An analysis of the communities themselves is important for understanding the nature of these disasters and their recovery processes. Community vulnerability is the risk level of a community or its parts to the harmful impacts of disasters.

Findings

This study describes geographic patterns of social vulnerability before 2008's Hurricane Ike and compares them to outcomes related to response, impact, recovery resources, and early stages of the rebuilding. Vulnerability factors can shape and influence access to and knowledge of physical, financial and social resources. These factors can also reveal real power or what people think understand power within the larger community or society. Households and neighborhoods that were identified using vulnerability mapping experienced negative outcomes: later evacuation, a larger degree of damage, less private and public resources for recovery, and slower and lower amounts of repair and rebuilding activity. There's continued inequality in regard to where people live for disadvantaged populations at every stage of disaster response and recovery. The research finds that households in socially vulnerable neighborhoods are more likely to apply for FEMA assistance.

Implications

Using community vulnerability mapping as a tool for emergency management, hazard mitigation, and disaster recovery planning, can help communities reduce losses and improve response and recovery. This would strengthen community resilience and reduce inequalities. Social vulnerability mapping can be used with hazard map and physical vulnerability mapping to make it easier for a community planning for disaster response, recovery, and mitigation. With the research from this article, our community can better plan for and track vulnerabilities. It can also develop more complete planning methods that can improve long-term community resiliency.