



Fact Sheet

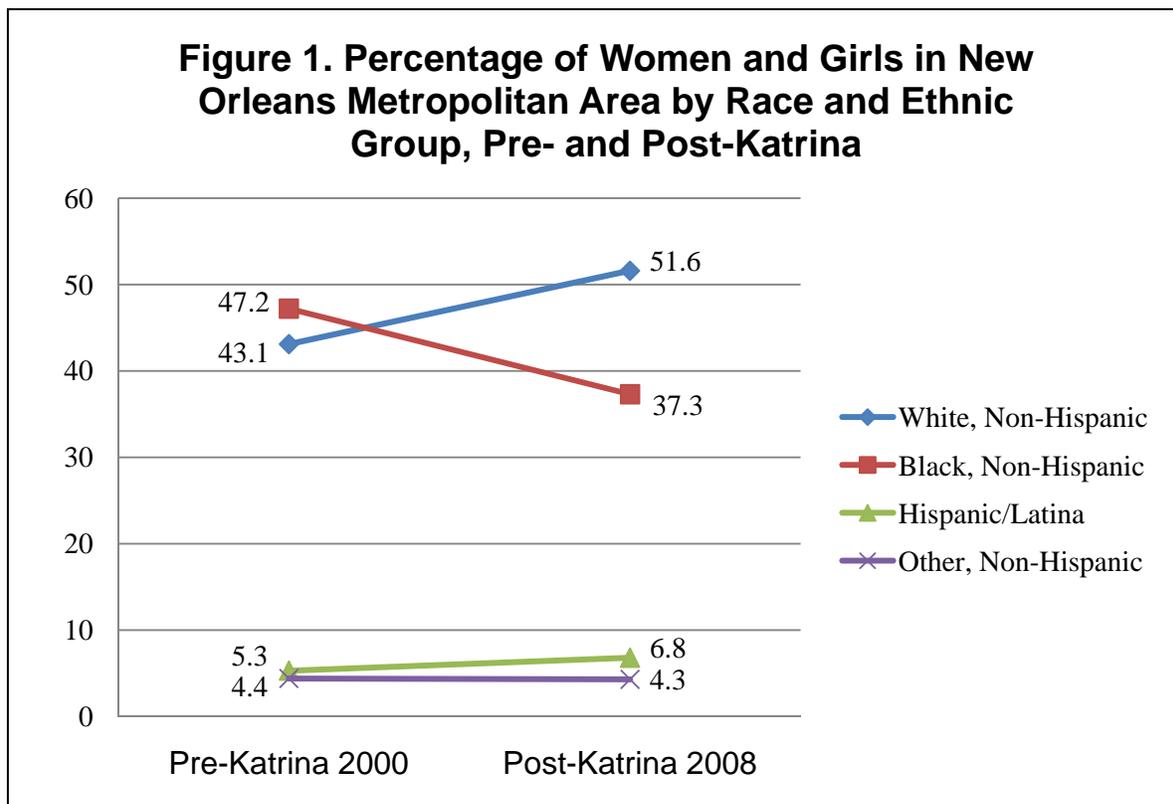
IWPR #D490

August 2010

Women in New Orleans: Race, Poverty, and Hurricane Katrina

IWPR analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) and U.S. Census Bureau data¹ reveals that after Hurricane Katrina and the evacuation of New Orleans in August 2005, the city's demographics have changed with respect to race and economic status among women.

The share of women and girls of the New Orleans metropolitan area² population has decreased slightly in the years after Hurricane Katrina—from 54 percent to 52.1 percent. At the same time, the share of women and girls in the New Orleans metropolitan area who are African American has decreased dramatically, from 47.2 percent to 37.3 percent (Figure 1). The total population of the New Orleans metropolitan area has decreased by 108,116 women and girls (15.5 percent fewer), and the number of women and girls who are African American has fallen by 65,423 (24.2 percent fewer).³ This suggests that relatively fewer women and girls, especially African American women and girls, returned to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

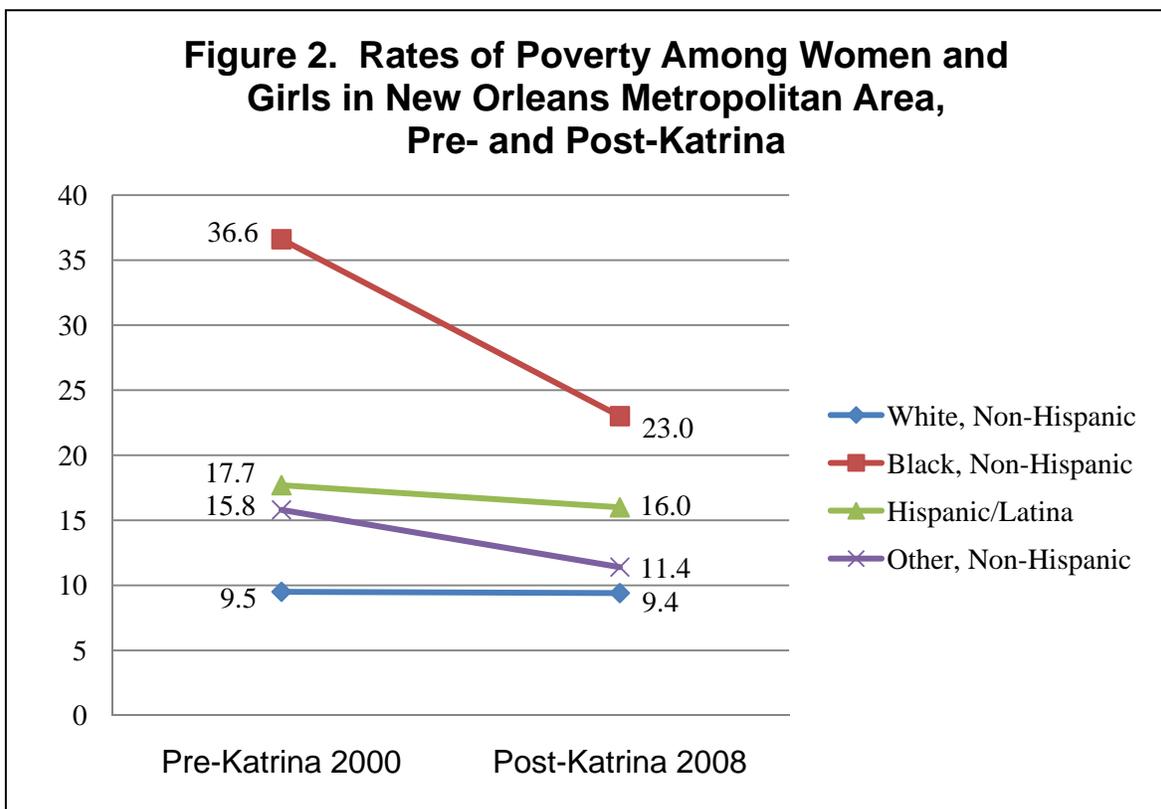


Note: "Hispanic/Latina" includes respondents of any race who identified as "Hispanic" or "Latina." Respondents who identified as Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or multiracial are included in "Other" due to a small sample size.

Source: IWPR analysis of 2000 U.S. Census Data and 2008 American Community Survey Data.

Poverty among all women and girls is now significantly lower in metropolitan New Orleans. Prior to Katrina, 23 percent of women and girls in the metropolitan area lived below the federal poverty line, a much higher percentage than the national rate of poverty for women and girls in the year 2000 (13.3 percent). By 2008, rates of poverty among women and girls in metropolitan New Orleans were 15.1 percent, only slightly above the national rate (14.4 percent).⁴

As Figure 2 shows, rates of poverty among women and girls in metropolitan New Orleans are also lower post-Katrina. Rates of poverty among African American women and girls changed from 36.6 percent pre-Katrina to 23 percent post-Katrina. Rates of poverty among women of color in all other race and ethnic groups are also lower post-Katrina. For Whites, poverty rates remained relatively unchanged both pre- and post-Katrina. In pre-Katrina New Orleans, 9.5 percent of White women and girls lived in poverty, compared with 9.4 percent in 2008.

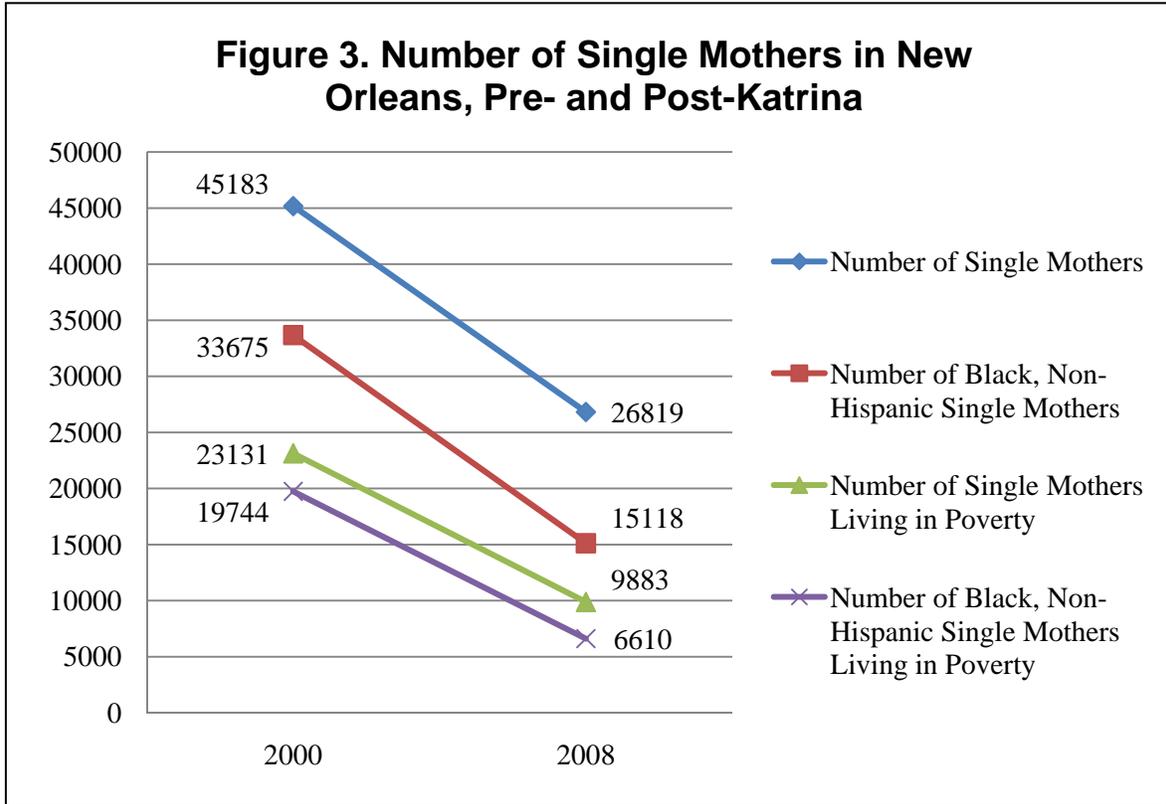


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Source: IWPR analysis of 2000 U.S. Census Data and 2008 American Community Survey Data.

The decrease in poverty among women of color in the New Orleans metropolitan area does not necessarily demonstrate that poverty declined for the women who lived in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. IWPR’s current longitudinal research with former residents of New Orleans public housing found that many poorer women have not returned.⁵ Lower poverty rates could reflect an overall change in the population of New Orleans,⁶ as well as the fact that until recently local employment rates stayed relatively high during the current recession.⁷

Figure 3. Number of Single Mothers in New Orleans, Pre- and Post-Katrina



Note: “Single Mothers” are women who are heads of their households with dependent children and no spouse present. “Single Mothers” include female householders who are a) married with an absent spouse, b) separated, c) divorced, d) widowed, and e) never married/single. These data do not include women who are single parents but not the heads of their households.

Source: IWPR Analysis of 2000 U.S. Census Data and 2008 American Community Survey Data.

Another vulnerable group affected by the disaster consists of single mothers caring for dependent children. The U.S. Census and ACS data reveal that significantly fewer single mothers live in New Orleans than did so pre-Katrina; in fact, the number of single mothers has decreased by 40.6 percent. Specifically, there are 55.1 percent fewer African American single mothers, 57.3 percent fewer single mothers in poverty, and 66.5 percent fewer African American single mothers in poverty (Figure 3).

Women and girls in poverty, as well as single mothers and single mothers in poverty, were already vulnerable groups in New Orleans prior to the disasters of Hurricane Katrina and the levees breaking in August 2005.⁸ To escape the flooded city, along with everyone else in New Orleans, poor women and girls had to leave their homes. As the city and surrounding area continue to rebuild, perhaps more of those with fewer resources will be able to return.

This fact sheet was prepared by Allison Suppan Helmuth and Jane M. Henrici, Ph.D. Financial support was provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation through the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Katrina Task Force.

IWPR began research along the Gulf Coast almost immediately after Hurricane Katrina to learn how women in particular were affected, and how post-disaster conditions for women and their families might be improved: please see IWPR publications #[D464](#), #[D465](#), and #[D481](#). A new IWPR study based on interviews conducted in Baton Rouge, Houston, and New Orleans with women who were residents of New Orleans public housing before Hurricane Katrina will be released in 2011.

For more information on IWPR reports or membership, please call (202) 785-5100, email iwpr@iwpr.org, or visit www.iwpr.org.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women and their families, promote public dialogue, and strengthen communities and societies. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.

¹ Steven Ruggles, Matthew Sobek, Trent Alexander, Catherine A. Fitch, Ronald Goeken, Patricia Kelly Hall, Miriam King, and Chad Ronnander. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS): Version 4.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2008.

² The New Orleans metropolitan area as defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) includes the parishes of Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, and St. Tammany. The year 2000 OMB definition includes St. James parish, and this definition is consistent with the variable used by IPUMS.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. American FactFinder. <<http://factfinder.census.gov>> (August 25, 2010).

⁴ IWPR analysis of 2000 US Census data and 2008 American Community Survey data.

⁵ IWPR's report on its four-year study with women who were residents of New Orleans public housing in August 2005 will be released in 2011.

⁶ Willinger, Beth and Jessica Gerson. "Demographic and Socio-Economic Change in Relation to Gender and Hurricane Katrina." *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans*. New Orleans, LA: Newcomb College Center for Research on Women.

⁷ Liu, Amy and Allison Plyer. 2009. "The New Orleans Index: Tracking the Recovery of New Orleans & the Metro Area." The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program & Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. <<https://gnocdc.s3.amazonaws.com/NOLAIndex/NOLAIndex.pdf>> (July 16, 2010).

⁸ Gault, Barbara, Heidi Hartmann, Avis Jones-DeWeever, Misha Werschkul, and Erica Williams. 2005. *The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery, Part 1. Poverty, Race, Gender, and Class*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.