

The Impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Mental and Physical Health of Low-Income Parents in New Orleans

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The purpose of this study was to document changes in mental and physical health among 392 low-income parents exposed to Hurricane Katrina and to explore how hurricane-related stressors and loss relate to post-Katrina well-being. The prevalence of probable serious mental illness doubled, and nearly half of the respondents exhibited probable post-traumatic stress disorder. Higher levels of hurricane-related loss and stressors were generally associated with worse health outcomes, controlling for baseline sociodemographic and health measures. Higher baseline resources predicted fewer hurricane-associated stressors, but the consequences of stressors and loss were similar regardless of baseline resources. Adverse health consequences of Hurricane Katrina persisted for a year or more, and were most severe for those experiencing the most stressors and loss. Long-term health and mental health services are needed for low-income disaster survivors, especially those who experience disaster-related stressors and loss.

Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). Beyond the physical devastation, the hurricane led to elevated health and mental health difficulties among survivors (Galea et al., 2007; Kessler, Galea, Jones, & Parker, 2006; Mills, Edmondson, & Park, 2007; Wang et al., 2007; Weisler, Barbee, & Townsend, 2006). Low-income, African American, single mothers were at particularly high risk for suffering these adverse effects (Adeola, 2009; Jones-DeWeever, 2008). Even among the most vulnerable groups, however, there is often considerable variation in survivors' resources, exposure, and responses (Dyson, 2006). The present study investigated how a sample of primarily single, low-income, African American women adjusted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Prehurricane data permitted an assessment of change in physical and mental health over time and of the role of material and social resources in protecting participants from both hurricane exposure and adverse outcomes following the event.

Background

Each year, excluding droughts and war, nearly 500 incidents across the globe meet the Red Cross definition of a disaster (Norris, Baker, Murphy, & Kaniasty, 2005). A substantial literature has examined the mental and physical health effects of exposure to disasters (Galea, Nandi, & Vlahov, 2005; Rubonis & Bickman, 1991). Much of this research focuses on the short-term implications and indicates that disaster survivors evidence a wide range of reactions, including symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as other, often comorbid, conditions such as depression, anxiety, somatization, substance abuse, and physical illness (Kessler et al., 2006; Pfefferbaum & Doughty, 2001; Solomon & Green, 1992). Specific transient symptoms may include distressing worries, difficulties sleeping and concentrating, and disturbing memories, many of which dissipate over time with solid emotional support (Norris et al., 2005).

Findings on the long-term health and mental health consequences of disasters are somewhat mixed. Whereas some studies have noted enduring effects (Green et al., 1990; Lima, Pai, Santacruz, Lozano, & Luna, 1987; Stein et al., 2004; Thienkrua et al., 2006), the majority find that problems are relatively short-lived, with survivors recovering from the initial shock and trauma within a matter of weeks or months of the event (e.g., Cook & Bickman, 1990; Salzer & Bickman, 1999; Sundin & Horowitz, 2003). Indeed, a meta-analysis of 52 disaster studies indicated that effects attenuate as the number of weeks from the event elapse (Rubonis & Bickman, 1991). Moreover, as many as

This study was funded by NIH Grant R01HD046162, the National Science Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Princeton Center for Economic Policy Studies. We thank Thomas Brock and MDRC.

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1 half of survivors show resilience in the face of loss and trauma,
2 displaying little or no grief beyond the first few months (Bonanno,
3 2008). Several personality factors appear to be associated
4 with such resilience, including a tendency toward self-enhance-
5 ment and positive emotions (Bonanno, Rennie, & Dekel,
6 2005). Likewise, certain demographic and contextual factors,
7 including gender, education, social support, health, and less
8 stress exposure, are associated with resilient functioning (Bonanno,
9 Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007). Nonetheless, the emotional
10 and behavioral effects of Hurricane Katrina—which
11 produced widespread community disruption, exposure to an
12 array of known risk factors, and a protracted recovery—were
13 more substantial than those resulting from most previous natural
14 disasters (Galea, Tracy, Norris, & Coffey, 2008; Rateau,
15 2009; Sastry & VanLandingham, 2009).

16 Hurricane Katrina

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18
19 Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region of the
20 United States, contributing to the loss of nearly 2,000 lives and
21 displacing approximately 1.5 million residents. Hurricane Rita
22 occurred just 1 month later, also affecting some of the partici-
23 pants in this study. Hurricane Katrina was particularly stressful
24 to the low-income and African American residents of New
25 Orleans, many of whom were left homeless and isolated from
26 their social and community networks (Adeola, 2009; Elliot &
27 Pais, 2006; Galea et al., 2008; Sharkey, 2007). In the city of
28 New Orleans, which was most heavily affected by the levee
29 breaks, it is estimated that 60% of the housing stock was
30 destroyed (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). The hurricane
31 also seriously damaged or destroyed educational and health
32 facilities in the city, leading to numerous school closures,
33 destruction of medical records, and reductions in the number of
34 hospital beds and health clinics. Large numbers of evacuees
35 have still not returned to New Orleans (Fussell, Sastry, & Van-
36 Landingham, in press).

37 Growing evidence suggests that the hurricane had both
38 immediate and lasting adverse health and mental health conse-
39 quences. A rapid-needs assessment of returning New Orleans
40 residents conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and
41 Prevention in October 2005 revealed that more than 50% of
42 respondents showed signs of a “possible” need for mental
43 health treatment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
44 2006; Weisler et al., 2006). A study of families living in
45 FEMA-subsidized hotels or trailers conducted in February of
46 2006 reported high rates of disability among caregivers of chil-
47 dren, due to depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric prob-
48 lems (Abramson & Garfield, 2006). The survey also yielded
49 high rates of reports of chronic health problems (34%) and
50 numerous new mental health problems (nearly 50%) among
51 children in these families. Another cross-sectional survey of
52 222 survivors found that over half (52%) continued to experi-
53 ence poor mental and physical health 15 months after Katrina
54 (Kim, Plumb, Gredig, Rankin, & Taylor, 2008). Other
55 researchers have noted an even longer term persistence of these
56 symptoms (Galea et al., 2008; Ginzburg, 2008; Kessler et al.,
57 2008; Schoenbaum et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2008), with young
58 adults, women, parents of small children, and those with low
59 income suffering the highest levels of PTSD and mental health

disorders (Bolin & Bolton, 1986; Galea et al., 2007; Jones-
DeWeever, 2008; Kessler et al., 2008).

A major difficulty in assessing such effects, however, is the
lack of information on the predisaster functioning. Few studies
have access to true “baseline” information collected prior to the
disaster. Among those studies of events that do have such data,
few have been on the catastrophic scale of Hurricane Katrina.
An extensive review by Norris et al. (2002) found that only 7 of
the 160 studies reviewed had predisaster data on the individuals
examined. Moreover, the samples used in these studies were
generally small, with a median sample size of 149 across the 160
studies. The vast majority of disaster studies relied on postdisas-
ter or retrospective data. Although it provides some measure of
predisaster functioning, retrospective information is likely to be
measured with error, leading to biased estimates of effects on
postdisaster outcomes. For example, responses to retrospective
questions about predisaster social support or living circum-
stances could be colored by postdisaster experiences. A closely
related issue is that measures of the actual amount of stressors
and loss during the course of a disaster may also be affected by
the individual’s state of mind or mental health. For example,
reports of actual stressors experienced during a disaster (e.g.,
fear that one’s life was in danger during the disaster) may be
heightened by preexisting anxiety or depression. If so, it would
not be surprising to find that anxiety or depression measured
after the disaster is associated with reports of stressful experi-
ences. However, this association would not provide information
on whether the stressors heightened mental health problems.

One study examined how 1,043 survivors’ mental health
changed from before to between 5 and 8 months after the hurri-
cane (Kessler et al., 2006). Survivors’ reports of health prob-
lems were compared to those of 826 people who lived in
hurricane-affected areas at the time of this survey and previ-
ously were participants in the National Comorbidity Survey–
Replication (NCS–R), conducted between 2001 and 2003. This
study found significantly higher rates of serious and mild–mod-
erate rates of mental illness (based on the K6 screening scale;
Kessler et al., 2002) among the post-Katrina sample, but found
less suicidality among those in the post-Katrina sample. The
much higher (doubled) rate of mental illness is striking. Unfor-
tunately, because this study does not track individuals from
before to after the storm, it is not possible to assess which pre-
hurricane factors were protective against increases in mental ill-
ness and which were not.

It is also difficult, in the absence of baseline data, to account
for variability in adaptive functioning among survivors. Even
among the most vulnerable populations, there is often consider-
able heterogeneity in survivors’ responses to traumatic events.
Baseline data permit an exploration of the economic, social, and
health and mental health resources, alone and in combination,
that might heighten vulnerability or strengthen resilience. Previ-
ous explanatory models of disaster responses have focused on
the interrelationships between the severity of exposure and the
resources available to the individual. Most of these models have
posited that resources function to moderate or “buffer” the
effects of hurricane experiences, influencing individuals’ percep-
tions of and their responses to the disaster. Survivors with ini-
tially low levels of health, social or economic resources are
thought to be more vulnerable to the negative consequences of

1 the hurricane, and to experience relatively steeper declines in
2 emotional and physical health outcomes. Social support has
3 been shown to buffer against stress, and the lack of social sup-
4 port has been identified as a risk factor of PTSD (Galea et al.,
5 2008; Kaniasty & Norris, 2008; Ozer & Weiss, 2004; Weems
6 et al., 2007).

7 Researchers have also looked at the loss of social support and
8 other resources in explaining variability in stress responses.
9 Within this context, the Conservation of Resources (COR) the-
10 ory posits that it is the threatened or actual loss of health,
11 social, or economic resources that leads to psychological distress
12 (Hobfoll, 1989). According to COR, individuals strive to obtain
13 and retain personal and social resources, and experience stress
14 when circumstances threaten or diminish these resources.
15 Resources tend to beget more resources, whereas a loss of
16 resources tends to result in further loss. In particular, those indi-
17 viduals who have fewer resources prior to a stressor are less
18 equipped to invest resources in recovery, such that efforts to
19 recover from losses lead to progressive depletion of resources.
20 Previous research on natural disasters indicates that the loss of
21 social, health, or economic resources is associated with declines
22 in psychosocial functioning (Kaiser, Sattler, Bellack, & Dersin,
23 1996; Sattler et al., 2002; Smith & Freedy, 2000; Sümer, Kar-
24 anci, Berument, & ve Güneş, 2005).

25 Resources can also affect the degree of hurricane-related
26 stress that is experienced. Differential access to resources prior
27 to the storm, such as reliable information, transportation, and
28 more geographically extended social networks, can affect varia-
29 tions in exposure to the disaster (Adeola, 2009; Lieberman,
30 2006; Stephens, Hamedani, Markus, Bergsieker, & Eloul, 2009).
31 Hobfoll and Parris Stevens (1990) have posited that social sup-
32 port may “directly prevent or limit resource loss and thereby
33 insulate people from stressful circumstances” (p. 458). Likewise,
34 Kaniasty and Norris (2009) noted that predisaster resources can
35 influence the degree of disaster exposure. This was clearly the
36 case with Hurricane Katrina, where low-income communities of
37 color were more vulnerable to its impact (Adeola, 2009). Most
38 high- and medium-income families evacuated in advance of the
39 storm and secured places to stay in hotels, or with family and
40 friends in other cities. Low-income families, in contrast, were
41 disproportionately stranded in the city or in shelters after the
42 storm, increasing the chance that they experienced deprivation,
43 stress and fear (Elliot & Pais, 2006; Lavelle & Feagin, 2006;
44 Spence, Lachlan, & Griffin, 2007). Brodie, Weltzien, Altman,
45 Blendon, and Benson (2006) found that, among survivors who
46 did not evacuate New Orleans, more than a third lacked a
47 means of transportation. Others have noted that those with
48 fewer economic resources are more likely to live in housing that
49 is unable to withstand natural disasters (Ruscher, 2006; Weems
50 et al., 2007). Moreover, those who are poor tend to receive and
51 heed fewer evacuation warnings, heightening their risk for expo-
52 sure (Dyson, 2006; Lieberman, 2006; Stephens et al., 2009).

53 54 55 **Current Study**

56 The current study examines the consequences of Hurricane
57 Katrina on the physical and mental health of a particularly
58 vulnerable group of survivors—low-income, predominantly
59 African American, single mothers. Using a unique panel

dataset that follows individuals from more than a year before
the hurricane to approximately 18 months afterwards, we docu-
ment changes in the physical and mental health of study partic-
ipants and examine how the degree of exposure to hurricane-
related stressors experienced during the hurricane is related to
their post-Katrina well-being. The existence of prehurricane
data permits us to examine whether prehurricane
resources—including economic, social, and health resource-
s—had protective effects on posthurricane health outcomes. In
particular, we examine the extent to which exposure to hurri-
cane-related stressors, level of property damage, and water
depth affected mental and physical health outcomes after Hur-
ricanes Katrina and Rita after controlling for demographic and
prehurricane mental and physical health. Given the extent to
which mental health can affect perceptions of difficulties, we
expected that objective measures of damage—such as flood
depths obtained via geo-coding—would be less strongly related
to prehurricane mental health than more subjective measures
of perceived stressors and loss.

We also examine the protective role of resources that were
available prior to Hurricane Katrina. Although previous studies
have examined retrospective accounts of predisaster resources
(or the buffering role of postdisaster resources), pre-Katrina
data permit an examination of whether the social and material
resources that the predominantly low-income, African American
mothers had at their disposal prior to the natural disaster
affected the severity of their exposure to the disaster.

Method

Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

Participants were initially part of a study of low-income par-
ents who had enrolled in two community colleges in the city of
New Orleans in 2004–2005. The purpose of the study was to
examine whether performance-based scholarships affect aca-
demic achievement and therefore also health and well-being
(Brock & Richburg-Hayes, 2006). Baseline demographic and
health information was collected for all of the 1,019 participants
in the study. By the time Hurricane Katrina struck, 492 partici-
pants had been enrolled in the program long enough to com-
plete a 12-month follow-up survey, which included information
on participants' economic status, social support, and physical
and mental health. After Hurricane Katrina, between May 2006
and March 2007, 402 (81.7%) of those participants who had
completed the 12-month survey were successfully located by a
survey research firm and surveyed over the telephone. The post-
disaster surveys, which were administered over the phone by
trained interviewers, included the same questions as the pre-
disaster 12-month follow-up survey, as well as a measure of PTSD
and module that collected detailed information about hurricane
experiences. Next, we refer to information from the baseline and
12-month surveys as “pre-Katrina” data, and information from
the more recent survey as “post-Katrina” data. The analyses in
this study draw on a sample of 392 respondents who reported
living in an area affected by Hurricane Katrina at the time the
hurricane struck.

All the participants experienced the hurricane and most
(98.0%) evacuated, however, their trajectories varied: 85.4%

Table 1. *Baseline Characteristics of the Sample*

	Study sample ($N = 392$)
Age at the time of Hurricane Katrina, mean (SD)	26.55 (4.45)
Female, % [95% CI]	95.9 [94.0–97.9]
African American, % [95% CI]	84.2 [80.6–87.8]
Non-Hispanic white, % [95% CI]	10.7 [7.7–13.8]
Number of children, mean (SD)	1.92 (1.05)
Single (neither married nor cohabiting), % [95% CI]	64.0 [59.3–68.8]
Monthly individual earnings (\$), mean (SD)	651.7 (686.2)
Monthly individual earnings (\$), median	600.0
Monthly family income (\$), median	1,358.4
Received public assistance ^a , % [95% CI]	64.3 [59.6–69.0]
Owned working car, % [95% CI]	72.9 [68.6–77.4]

^aAny time during the month prior to the survey.

departed before the storm struck, while 4.9% left during the storm, and 9.6% left in the week of, or after, Katrina. The participants had moved an average of 2.5 times ($SD = 0.4$). At the time of the post-Katrina follow-up survey, 47.7% were living in the New Orleans MSA, 12.5% were living elsewhere in Louisiana, 24.9% were in Texas, 4.7 were in Georgia, and the remaining 10.2% were in other states.

Table 1 presents demographic information for the participants. The average age at the time of Hurricane Katrina was 26.6 years ($SD = 4.5$). The majority was female (95.9%). The majority was African American (84.2%), reflecting the demographics of the City of New Orleans in which 67.7% of the population was African American in 2004 (see Jones-DeWeever, 2008). Most were neither married nor cohabiting with a romantic partner (64.0%). More than two thirds (64.3%) received public assistance in the month prior to the pre-Katrina survey. Nearly three quarters (72.9%) owned a working car prior to the Hurricane.

Measures

Economic Status. We used three measures of pre-Katrina economic status: the logarithm of total household income in the previous month; an indicator of the number of received public benefits in the past month including unemployment insurance, Supplemental Security Income, welfare and food stamps; and a measure of car ownership prior to Katrina. Car ownership is important both as a measure of wealth as well as a form of transportation that may have made it easier to evacuate in advance of the hurricane.

Social Support. Perceptions of social support were assessed at Times 1 and 2 using eight items from the Social Provisions Scale (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). These items assess the extent to which participants perceive that they have people in their lives who value them and on whom they can rely. Items are rated using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha of this scale in this study was .84 for Time 1 (T1) and .81 for Time 2 (T2).

Hurricane Experiences. We used three measures of hurricane experiences, two of which were based on individuals' survey responses. The first measure was a one-item question on respondents' assessments of the extent of damage to their personal property, rate on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*minimal*) to 3 (*enormous*). The second measure of hurricane experiences was a scale of the number of hurricane-related stressors experienced. The 17 questions, which assessed stressors experienced in the immediate aftermath of the storm, duplicated those used in a larger survey of the demographic and health characteristics, evacuation and hurricane experiences, and future plans of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. The scale was jointly designed by the *Washington Post*, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health (Brodie et al., 2006). Participants were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of the following conditions: (a) no fresh water to drink, (b) no food to eat, (c) felt their life was in danger, (d) lacked necessary medicine, (e) lacked necessary medical care, (f) had a family member who lacked necessary medical care, (g) lacked knowledge of safety of their children, and (h) lacked knowledge of safety of their other families members. These questions were asked about both Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. In addition, participants indicated whether a close friend or family member had lost their life due to the hurricane and its aftermath. A composite score (labeled as "hurricane-related stressors") was created with the count of affirmative responses to these 17 items. Inter-item reliability (KR-20) of the exposure scale was .84. The third measure gauges hurricane damage to the respondent's pre-Katrina home with the flood depth information for each address on September 2, 2005. This provides an objective measure of whether respondents lived in hard-hit areas. We were able to geo-code 372 of the 392 addresses; the remaining respondents used postoffice boxes which could not be matched with flood data.

Psychological Distress. The K6 scale of nonspecific psychological distress (Kessler et al., 2002) was used to assess DSM-IV mood and anxiety disorders within the previous 30 days. The K6 scale has been shown to have good psychometric properties (Furukawa, Kessler, Slade, & Andrews, 2003), and has been used in previous research on the psychological functioning of Hurricane Katrina survivors (e.g., Galea et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2007). It includes items such as "During the past 30 days, about how often did you feel so depressed that nothing could cheer you up"? Respondents answered on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 0 (*none of the time*) to 4 (*all the time*). Scale scores range from 0 to 24. A previous validation study (Kessler et al., 2003) suggests that a scale score of 0–7 can be considered as probable absence of mental illness, a score of 8–12 can be considered as probable mild or moderate mental illness (MMI) and a score of 13 or greater can be considered as probable serious mental illness (SMI). Cronbach's alpha of the K6 scale in this study was .72 for T1 and .80 for T2. Our use of the K6 permits direct comparisons with results in the Kessler et al.'s (2006) study of mental illness after Hurricane Katrina.

PTSD Symptoms. The Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R), a 22-item self-report inventory of symptoms of PTSD (Weiss & Marmar, 1997) with good psychometric properties

(e.g., Creamer, Bell, & Failla, 2003), was used to measure PTSD symptoms as a result of hurricane experiences. The total score for this scale ranges from 0 to 88. Unlike the other mental health measures we used, this measure was specific to the respondent's hurricane experiences and was included only in the post-Katrina survey. Participants were asked how often, over the prior week, they were distressed or bothered by experiences related to the hurricane, with sample items including "Any reminders brought back feelings about it," "Pictures about it popped into my mind," and "I was jumpy and easily startled." The scale was rated in a 5-point scale, ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*extremely*). Cronbach's alpha reliability for the IES-R scale in this study was .95.

Perceived Stress. The Perceived Stress Scale, or the PSS4 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983; Cohen & Williamson, 1991), was used to measure perceptions of stress. This four-item scale, which measures the degree to which events in one's life are perceived to be stressful, has been widely used in studies of the role of stress in the development of health problems. Participants answered on a 5-point ratingscale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*). Cronbach's alpha of the PSS4 scale in this study was .73 for T1 and .75 for T2.

Physical Health. We assessed physical health using three measures. Respondents rated their health on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*excellent*) to 5 (*poor*). Respondent's body mass index (BMI) was calculated using a baseline report on height and pre- and posthurricane reported weight. Finally, we included a count of the number of diagnosed medical conditions, including diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and other conditions.

Results

Missing Data

Although the missing variables were not missing completely at random, the missing rate on each item was generally low, under 10%. Missing data were handled with multiple imputation: From the original data, five complete datasets with no missing variables were rendered using Amelia II (Honaker, King, & Blackwell, 2008) in R program. Each analysis was

conducted independently across the five datasets. Each result presented next represents an average of the five separate analyses. When appropriate, Rubin's (1987) correction was performed to derive the standard errors.

Exposure

All but 8 individuals left their homes for at least one night due to Hurricane Katrina or Rita. Half (50.2%) of the sample reported "enormous" property damage associated with the storm. They experienced, on average, 4.08 hurricane-related stressors ($SD = 3.50$). The most common stressor reported was "did not know if other family members were safe after Hurricane Katrina" (76.9%), which is consistent with the mass exodus of people from the area at the time of the storm. Substantial numbers also reported experiencing serious deprivation during Hurricane Katrina, including inadequate drinking water (26.0%), inadequate food (34.9%) or feeling that their lives were in danger (32.3%). In addition, 28.6% reported the death of a family member or close friend.

Health and Mental Health Outcomes

Mental health outcomes, as measured by the K6, worsened significantly over the period from before to after the hurricane (Table 2). Based on established cutoffs (Kessler et al., 2003), the prevalence of MMI or SMI rose from 23.5% to 37.5% (McNemar test $p < .001$), and that of probable SMI doubled (6.9%–14.3%, $p < .001$). The prevalence of high perceived stress (scale score > 7) rose from 20.2% to 30.9% ($p < .001$). All physical health outcomes also experienced statistically significant increases in prevalence (see Table 2). PTSD symptoms were not assessed prior to the hurricane. At the time of the post-Katrina survey, 47.7% of participants were classified as having probable PTSD (average IES-R item score > 1.5 ; Weiss & Marmar, 1997).

Hurricane-Related Stressors and Property Damage as Predictors of Mental Health Outcomes

Sequential regression was used to determine if number of hurricane-related stressors, level of property damage, and the

Table 2. Prevalence of Physical Health and Mental Health Outcomes Before and After Hurricane Katrina

Outcome	Definition	Before Katrina	After Katrina	McNemar test
		% [95% CI]	% [95% CI]	<i>p</i> Value
MMI/SMI	Probable mild-moderate (K6 > 7) or serious (K6 > 12) mental illness	23.5 [19.3–27.7]	37.5 [32.7–42.3]	$< .001$
SMI	Probable serious (K6 > 12) mental illness	6.9 [4.4–9.4]	13.8 [10.4–17.2]	$< .001$
PTSD	Posttraumatic stress disorder: IES-R average score > 1.5	ND	47.7 [42.8–52.6]	NA
PSS	Perceived stress scale > 7	20.2 [16.2–24.1]	30.9 [26.3–35.4]	$< .001$
FPH	Fair or poor self-rated health status	12.8 [8.8–15.2]	19.1 [15.1–22.9]	$< .01$
HC	At least one diagnosed health condition	61.2 [56.4–66.0]	66.6 [61.9–71.3]	$< .05$
OVERW	Body mass index (kg/m^2) > 25	67.1 [62.4–71.7]	72.9 [68.6–77.4]	$< .01$

Note. *p* Value is from a *t* test of the hypothesis that the change is equal to 0. CI = confidence interval; IES-R = Impact of Event Scale-Revised; ND = not determined; NA = not applicable.

Table 3. Sequential Regression of Hurricane, Demographic, and Prehurricane Health Variables on Posthurricane Health Outcomes

Variables	K6		PSS		IES-R		BMI		No. medical conditions		General health	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Step 1												
No. hurricane stressors	0.40	0.07**	0.19	0.05**	2.34	0.31**	0.22	0.10*	0.13	0.02**	0.08	0.04*
Level of property damage	0.45	0.27	0.20	0.18	2.72	1.12*	0.16	0.36	0.14	0.08	0.08	0.06
Water depth (log)	-0.01	0.33	0.13	0.25	1.37	1.55	0.21	0.50	-0.24	0.10*	-0.12	0.10
<i>R</i> ² Δ	.09**		.05**		.18**		.02		.11**		.06**	
Step 2 (Demographic variables controlled, not shown)												
No. hurricane stressors	0.40	0.08**	0.20	0.06**	2.09	0.33**	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.02**	0.08	0.03*
Level of property damage	0.51	0.28	0.28	0.19	2.99	1.12*	0.17	0.36	0.15	0.08	0.09	0.06
Water depth (log)	-0.11	0.34	0.12	0.26	0.78	1.56	0.01	0.51	-0.27	0.10*	-0.13	0.12
<i>R</i> ² Δ	.02		.03		.03*		.05*		.01		.01	
Step 3 (Prehurricane physical and mental health controlled)												
No. hurricane stressors	0.30	0.07**	0.14	0.05*	1.82	0.33**	0.10	0.05	0.09	0.07**	0.05	0.03
Level of property damage	0.50	0.26	0.34	0.18	2.92	1.10*	-0.01	0.18	-0.09	0.07	0.07	0.06
Water depth (log)	-0.01	0.32	0.14	0.24	0.82	1.53	0.21	0.24	-0.20	0.09*	-0.12	0.09
Age	0.12	0.06	0.11	0.04*	0.89	0.27**	-0.01	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01
Own a car	-0.65	0.57	-0.17	0.40	-4.19	2.47	0.60	0.38	-0.15	0.16	-0.09	0.12
No. children	-0.34	0.25	-0.35	0.17*	-0.74	1.07	-0.11	0.17	-0.06	0.07	-0.01	0.05
Personal income (log)	0.12	0.17	0.08	0.12	0.50	0.75	-0.02	0.11	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.03
Single	-1.29	0.82	-0.36	0.57	-2.77	3.52	-0.04	0.54	0.03	0.22	0.04	0.16
Minority	-0.11	0.94	-0.49	0.06	7.99	3.83*	0.70	0.57	0.35	0.24	-0.05	0.16
Months since Katrina	-0.00	0.10	-0.03	0.07	-0.37	0.42	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02
Public assistance	0.20	0.36	0.25	0.25	-2.17	1.57	0.20	0.27	-0.08	0.10	-0.01	0.07
K6	0.20	0.08**	-0.02	0.05	1.02	0.33**	0.01	0.05	0.00	0.02	-0.02	0.01
PSS	0.35	0.09**	0.39	0.07**	0.53	0.41	-0.03	0.06	0.04	0.03	0.06	0.02**
BMI	0.01	0.04	-0.02	0.03	0.01	0.16	0.89	0.03**	0.02	0.01*	0.01	0.01
No. medical conditions	0.15	0.20	0.07	0.14	-0.39	0.86	-0.20	0.14	0.40	0.05**	0.02	0.04
General health	0.21	0.26	0.19	0.18	0.96	1.12	0.20	0.17	0.10	0.07	0.36	0.05**
Perceived social support	-0.00	0.06	-0.05	0.05	0.13	0.28	-0.01	-0.04	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.01
<i>R</i> ² Δ	.14**		.14**		.06**		.73**		.20**		.19**	
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	6.71 (5.19)		5.39 (3.59)		33.26 (22.97)		29.31 (6.72)		1.82 (1.50)		1.52 (1.04)	
<i>R</i> ²	.24**		.21**		.27**		.80**		.32**		.26**	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.21		.18		.24		.79		.29		.23	

p* < .05. *p* < .008.

flood depth at participant's pre-Katrina addresses were predictive of posthurricane mental health outcome variables (i.e., K6, PSS4, and IES-R) and whether the relationship holds after prehurricane sociodemographic variables and physical and mental health are taken into account. Controls for sociodemographic characteristics at the time of the hurricane included the respondents' age, indicators for ethnicity, the number of children, an indicator for whether she or he was single, the logarithm of monthly income, an indicator for the number of forms of received public assistance (i.e., welfare, food stamps, unemployment insurance, or Supplemental Security Income), ownership of working car, and, in addition, the number of months since the hurricane that the follow-up survey took place. Controls for pre-Katrina health measures included each of the five physical and mental health measures obtained prior to the hurricane: K6, PSS4, BMI, number of diagnosable physical health problems, self-reported health, as well as social support. Number of stressors, level of property damage, and flood depth were entered in Step 1, demographic variables were entered in Step 2, and prehurricane physical and mental health problems as well as social support were entered in Step 3. Bonferroni type adjust-

ment was made for inflated Type I error; all alphas in model statistics (e.g., *R*) were set at .05/6 = .008.

Table 3 shows the results of the six univariate sequential regressions of the mental health and physical health outcomes on the measure of reported property damage, the number of reported hurricane-related stressors, and flood depth on September 2, 2005. When no additional controls were included (Step 1), there were large and significant associations between the number of hurricane stressors and all mental health outcomes, while the level of property damage was only predictive of PTSD. Flood depth was not predictive of any mental health outcomes. These associations between loss or stressors and mental health outcomes held even after adjusting for pre-Katrina sociodemographic characteristics, although they generally declined in magnitude (Table 3, Step 2). The results in the second step may still be biased if loss or number of hurricane-related stressors are associated with pre-Katrina health status, that is, those with poor baseline health may have been less able to avoid stressors or protect their property against loss. Results in the third step of Table 3 controlled for pre-Katrina physical and mental health status in addition to sociodemographic characteristics,

1 which reduced the parameter estimates for the number of hurri-
 2 cane-related stressors and loss relative to those in the second
 3 step. Even controlling for predisaster health status, there were
 4 large and usually statistically significant adverse effects of loss
 5 and stressors on mental health. Notably, many of the pre-Kat-
 6 rina mental and physical health measures are predictive of post-
 7 hurricane mental health, showing that the parameter estimates
 8 for stressors are biased by their associations with pre-Katrina
 9 mental health.

11 Hurricane-Related Stressors and Property 12 Damage as Predictors of Physical Health 13 Outcomes 14

15 There were smaller but still significant associations between
 16 stressors and physical health outcomes (see Table 3). Even with
 17 additional sociodemographic and prehurricane physical and
 18 mental controls, the number of hurricane-related stressors was
 19 strongly associated with the number of diagnosed medical con-
 20 ditions. It was also predictive of BMI and general health rating
 21 before any of the additional variables were included. Once they
 22 were entered into the equation, however, the associations
 23 between number of stressors and BMI and general health rating
 24 were no longer significant at $p < .05$ level. Prehurricane phys-
 25 ical health measures are strongly associated with posthurricane
 26 physical health.

28 Pre-Katrina Resources as Predictors of Exposure 29 to Hurricane-Related Stressors 30

31 Given that exposure to a greater number of hurricane-related
 32 stressor was predictive of worse mental and physical health out-
 33 comes, we examined the extent to which pre-Katrina resources
 34 predicted the level of exposure. Higher resource individuals may
 35 have been more able to avoid hurricane-related stressors and
 36 loss. In addition, resources may have buffered individuals from
 37 the adverse effects of stressors and property damage. To exam-
 38 ine these hypotheses, we performed a standard multiple regres-
 39 sion, with nine indicators of pre-Katrina resources: (a) number
 40 of received public benefits in the past month (e.g., welfare ben-
 41 efits, food stamps, unemployment insurance), (b) household
 42 income (log transformed), (c) ownership of a working car, (d)
 43 level of perceived social support, (e) mental health as measured
 44 with K6, (f) level of stress as measured with PSS4, (g) physical
 45 health as measured with BML, (h) number of diagnosed medical
 46 condition, and (i) general health rating. We examined whether
 47 these prehurricane variables predicted fewer stressors and losses.
 48 Results (not shown in Table) indicate that owning a car prior to
 49 the hurricane ($B = -0.82$, $SE = 0.039$, $p < .05$), a higher pre-
 50 hurricane household income ($B = -0.35$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .01$),
 51 and a higher level of prehurricane perceived social support
 52 ($B = -0.09$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .05$) were predictive of fewer num-
 53 ber of stressors experienced. No other significant relationships
 54 were found. Apparently, these resources minimized exposure to
 55 stressors.

56 To test whether these resources buffered the impact of expo-
 57 sure to stressors, we estimated each of the six health and mental
 58 health outcome variables, using the nine pre-Katrina resource
 59 variables and the number of hurricane-related stressors experi-

enced (first block), as well as the interaction terms between the
 resource variables and measures of stressors as predictors (sec-
 ond block). Bonferroni correction ($p < .008$) was used and con-
 tinuous predictors were centered prior to analysis. Two
 significant interaction effects were found: exposure to Disaster
 Stressors \times Car Ownership on BMI ($B = 2.99$, $SE = 0.10$,
 $p < .008$) and exposure to Disaster Stressors \times Predisaster K6
 on postdisaster general health rating ($B = -0.012$, $SE = 0.004$,
 $p < .008$). We found no other evidence that the effects of expo-
 sure to stressors were smaller for those with higher prehurricane
 resources. Although resources may have reduced trauma expo-
 sure, they did not appear to have buffered individuals from the
 mental health effects, and to a lesser extent physical health, of
 trauma and loss.

Discussion

Rates of mental and physical illness rose sharply among partic-
 ipants in this study and remained elevated for at least 1 year
 following Hurricane Katrina. Fully 13.8% of the sample had
 probable SMI, up from 6.9% before the hurricane. Moreover,
 nearly half (47.7%) had probable PTSD, which is higher than
 rates reported in previous studies of Hurricane Katrina survi-
 vors (Galea et al., 2007, 2008; Kessler et al., 2008) and speaks
 the particular vulnerabilities of the mostly young, low-income,
 African American mothers in our study. Indeed, recent studies
 have revealed higher rates of mental illness among Hurricane
 Katrina survivors who were single, African American, low-
 income, Hurricane-exposed, female, or between the ages of 18
 and 34 (Galea et al., 2007; Kessler et al., 2008). When combined
 with the additional stressor of having small children, these risk
 factors conspire to create a high prevalence of PTSD. More gen-
 erally, these findings are consistent with previous research,
 which has highlighted the particular burden of disasters that is
 carried by women of color and the poor (Adeola, 2009; Norris
 et al., 2002).

There were also significant increases in reported fair or poor
 health, the presence of at least one diagnosed medical condition,
 and the proportion of our sample that was overweight. Although
 most previous disaster research has focused on the mental health
 consequences, these findings suggest that survivors also bear a
 significant toll to their physical health. Moreover, most earlier
 studies of both mental and physical health have relied solely on
 post-Katrina samples or compared separate samples drawn from
 before and after the hurricane. By taking into account prehurricane
 assessments of both mental and physical health, our findings
 provide more definitive evidence that mental and physical health
 declines were coincident with the hurricane.

There were strong adverse effects of hurricane-associated stres-
 sors and loss on mental health outcomes: Individuals who experi-
 enced more stressors and property damage were more likely to
 experience symptoms of mental illness, PTSD, and marginally
 higher levels of perceived stress. This is consistent with a previous
 study in which severe housing damage predicted psychological
 distress among Hurricane Katrina survivors 1 year after the
 storm (Sastry & VanLandingham, 2009). The effects of loss and
 stressors on physical health were more muted, although more
 stressors predicted more diagnosed medical conditions.

1 Although research indicates that individuals with higher
2 resources experience less loss and fewer stressors as the result of
3 disaster (Adeola, 2009; Sattler et al., 2002), we found only
4 mixed support for this pattern. Higher personal income, more
5 perceived social support, and ownership of a car predicted
6 fewer hurricane-related stressors, but other resources, such as
7 receipt of public benefits and mental and physical health, did
8 not. In the case of Hurricane Katrina, the degree of loss was
9 geographically widespread and devastating, producing relatively
10 egalitarian storm damage. These findings are consistent with
11 those of a study of Thai survivors of the 2004 tsunami, which
12 showed that those who were displaced by the tsunami had simi-
13 lar pretsunami levels of income and education as those who
14 were not displaced (Frankenberg et al., 2008; van Griensven
15 et al., 2006).

16 We found very little evidence that baseline economic, social
17 and health resources buffered the adverse effects of hurricane-
18 related stressors and loss on health. The lack of buffering
19 effect is surprising, particularly since the resource variables
20 include a measure of social support, which has a well-docu-
21 mented, positive association with disaster recovery (Kaniasty
22 & Norris, 1993). Weems et al. (2007) found a relatively low
23 association between post-Katrina social support and PTSD
24 symptoms suggesting that social support systems were over-
25 whelmed and had not sufficiently mobilized to mitigate dis-
26 tress. Indeed, in contrast to more circumscribed events, the
27 “collective trauma” of Katrina disrupted some of the very
28 resources that might have been marshaled, with potential sup-
29 port providers either scattered around the country or too
30 burdened themselves to provide ample help to network mem-
31 bers (Fussell, in press; Galea et al., 2007; Weisler et al.,
32 2006). Moreover, even in intact networks, an initial mobiliza-
33 tion of help is often followed by a deterioration of perceived
34 social support (Arata, Picou, Johnson, & McNally, 2000;
35 Erickson, 1976; Kaniasty & Norris, 1993; Norris & Kaniasty,
36 1996).

37 38 39 Limitations

40 In interpreting the results of this study, several limitations
41 should be kept in mind. First, this study relied largely on self-
42 report measures, which are susceptible to subjective biases. Our
43 reliance on a screening tool of nonspecific distress further limits
44 the scope of the study. An analysis of the effects of resources on
45 specific psychiatric problems commonly observed in the after-
46 math of a disaster (e.g., PTSD, depression, grief) could reveal
47 differential associations informative to the planning of therapeu-
48 tic interventions for disaster survivors. Moreover, clinical inter-
49 views would have been preferable to screening scales of mental
50 disorders, as the latter provide less precise and more conserva-
51 tive estimates (Kessler et al., 2008).

52 Additionally, our index of social support did not distinguish
53 among types of perceived social support (e.g., emotional, infor-
54 mational, tangible), limiting our ability to discern whether spe-
55 cific forms of support led to fewer hurricane-related stressors. It
56 would have also been helpful to obtain additional descriptive
57 information about the composition of the participants’ social
58 networks, a factor that was shown to influence depressive symp-
59 tomatology among Hurricane Andrew survivors (Haines, Beggs,

& Hurlbert, 2002). Data on the support provided by partici- 5
pants to others in the aftermath of disaster would also be bene-
ficial in future research, as social demands, particularly on
women, can increase stress and influence psychological out-
comes (Jones-DeWeever, 2008).

Although we were fortunate to locate over 80% of our pre-
Katrina sample, those who were not located may have been
more marginalized and have suffered even higher levels of psy-
chopathology, potentially rendering our prevalence estimates
conservative. Finally, participants in this study are not represen-
tative of the entire population affected by the hurricanes, reduc-
ing the generalizability of the findings. Nonetheless, by
highlighting the experience of poor, predominately African
American, single mothers—a population that is faced with mul-
tiple stressors and of higher risk of adverse outcomes—our find-
ings shed light on to a particularly vulnerable, underserved,
understudied group.

Implications for Research

In earlier research on Hurricane Katrina, Galea et al. (2007)
pointed out that the absence of baseline information limits the
ability to draw causal inferences about the effects of hurricane-
related stressors on mental health. More generally, baseline
information is often lacking in studies on the health and mental
health effects of disasters. Our results indicate that controlling
for baseline sociodemographic measures, mental health, and
physical health results in a modest reduction in estimates of the
effects of stressors and loss. Although our broad conclusion is
consistent with previous research demonstrating that disaster-
related stressors and loss produce significant adverse health and
mental health effects, our results suggest that estimates of the
mental and physical health consequences of disasters are likely
to be upwardly biased, but not so much as to eliminate the
effect of the disaster.

Future research should consider the longer term trajectories
of recovery and symptoms. Our findings document increases in
mental and physical health problems associated with the hurri-
canes, which raises questions about the persistence of mental
illness over time. Comparisons with other surveys are informa-
tive. Galea et al. (2007) found that, 5–7 months after the hurri-
cane, the rates of moderate to severe mental illness (MMI/SMI) 6
and severe mental illness (SMI) in their metropolitan New
Orleans sample were 32.0% and 17.0%, which are comparable
to our rates of 37.2% and 13.8%, respectively, approximately
1-year post-Katrina. Yet Kessler et al. (2008) reported signifi-
cant increases in rates of PTSD and SMI from the time period
of 5–8 months after the hurricane to approximately a year later.
It may be the case that, left untreated, PTSD and severe mental
illness become more entrenched over time, while more moderate
symptoms attenuate. Indeed, in models estimating the popula-
tion distribution of untreated mental health problems resulting
from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Schoenbaum et al. (2009)
determined that the prevalence of moderate symptoms peaked
at between 7- and 12-month post-Katrina, while severe
symptoms continued to climb over the 1st year, persisting for
25–30 months after the storm. Future research should employ
additional waves of postdisaster data to determine the longer
term trajectories and mediators of functioning. Growth curve

1 modeling of change would permit researchers to explore whether
 2 the associations between prehurricane resources and symptoms
 3 persist over time.

4 5 6 **Implications for Intervention**

7 The findings also have important implications for the plan-
 8 ning of postdisaster psychological care services. Efforts to iden-
 9 tify and provide timely, evidence-based services to those with
 10 preexisting psychological vulnerabilities could potentially
 11 prevent or attenuate adverse postdisaster outcomes and the pro-
 12 gression into more SMI (Schoenbaum et al., 2009). The persis-
 13 tence of negative mental and physical health symptoms 1 year
 14 after the disaster indicates that long-term treatment is needed.
 15 Regrettably, however, many of those in need of care in the
 16 months after the hurricane do not receive it (Chan, Lowe, Zwie-
 17 bach, & Rhodes, 2008; Schoenbaum et al., 2009; Wang et al.,
 18 2008). This is not unusual—even under normal circumstances
 19 the majority of low-income adults in the United States with
 20 health problems and SMI do not receive adequate care (Wang,
 21 Demler, & Kessler, 2002; Young, Klap, Sherbourne, & Wells,
 22 2001). Nonetheless, because survivors of disasters are known to
 23 have a higher risk of health and mental health problems, there
 24 is compelling reason to target services to members of this group.
 25 Most of the participants were single mothers, suggesting that
 26 timely intervention could offset problems in younger generations
 27 as well. Furthermore, since many survivors of disasters come
 28 into contact with service agencies after a disaster, there may be
 29 unique opportunities to offer or refer to treatment. The high
 30 rates of health and mental health problems among low-income
 31 survivors of Hurricane Katrina, coupled with the low rates of
 32 care, indicate that this was not successfully accomplished in the
 33 case of this natural disaster.

34 35 36 **Policy Implications**

37 In addition to health and mental health services, women of
 38 color, particularly those with young children, should be pro-
 39 vided with additional economic and educational resources
 40 throughout the difficult recovery process. Affordable housing
 41 would help to promote the immediate safety as well as the long-
 42 term stability of fragile young families that are represented in
 43 this study. Likewise, the inclusion of women in the post-Katrina
 44 work force, both through the skills-training and enforcement of
 45 anti-discrimination laws, will help the survivors benefit from the
 46 influx of economic resources into the region (Jones-DeWeever,
 47 2008). Finally, educational resources and assistance are vitally
 48 needed to ensure that survivors can return to their educational
 49 goals with a renewed sense of hope and strength.

50
51
52 **Keywords:** African Americans; women; single parents; Hurricane
 53 Katrina; New Orleans; natural disasters; post-traumatic stress
 54 disorder; health outcomes

55 56 57 **References**

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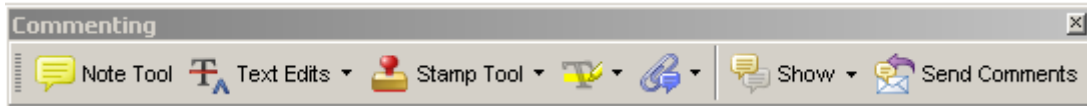
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USING E-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

Required Software

Adobe Acrobat Professional or Acrobat Reader (version 7.0 or above) is required to e-annotate PDFs. Acrobat 8 Reader is a free download: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

Once you have Acrobat Reader 8 on your PC and open the proof, you will see the Commenting Toolbar (if it does not appear automatically go to Tools>Commenting>Commenting Toolbar). The Commenting Toolbar looks like this:



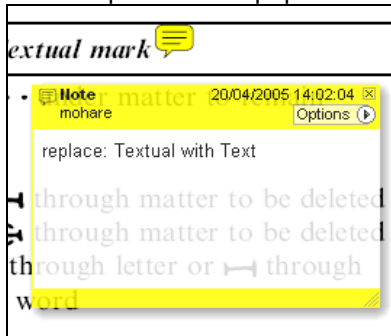
If you experience problems annotating files in Adobe Acrobat Reader 9 then you may need to change a preference setting in order to edit.

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Note Tool — For making notes at specific points in the text

Marks a point on the paper where a note or question needs to be addressed.

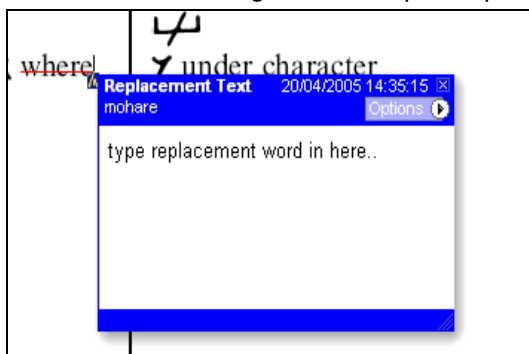


How to use it:

1. Right click into area of either inserted text or relevance to note
2. Select Add Note and a yellow speech bubble symbol and text box will appear
3. Type comment into the text box
4. Click the X in the top right hand corner of the note box to close.

Replacement text tool — For deleting one word/section of text and replacing it

Strikes red line through text and opens up a replacement text box.

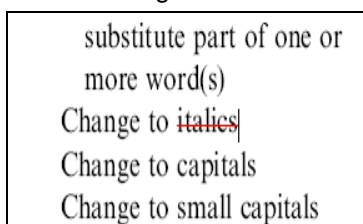


How to use it:

1. Select cursor from toolbar
2. Highlight word or sentence
3. Right click
4. Select Replace Text (Comment) option
5. Type replacement text in blue box
6. Click outside of the blue box to close

Cross out text tool — For deleting text when there is nothing to replace selection

Strikes through text in a red line.



How to use it:

1. Select cursor from toolbar
2. Highlight word or sentence
3. Right click
4. Select Cross Out Text

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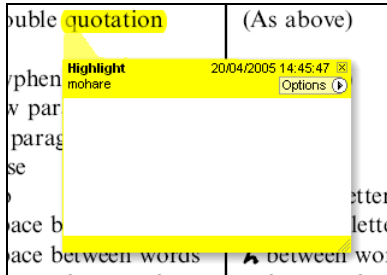


How to use it:

1. Click on the Stamp Tool in the toolbar
2. Select the Approved rubber stamp from the 'standard business' selection
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Highlight tool — For highlighting selection that should be changed to bold or italic.

Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box.

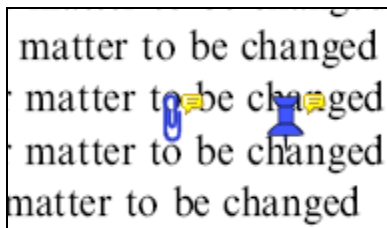


How to use it:

1. Select Highlighter Tool from the commenting toolbar
2. Highlight the desired text
3. Add a note detailing the required change

Attach File Tool — For inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures as a files.

Inserts symbol and speech bubble where a file has been inserted.

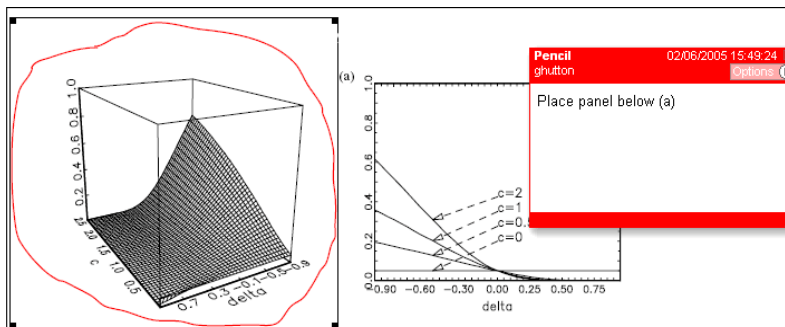


How to use it:

1. Click on paperclip icon in the commenting toolbar
2. Click where you want to insert the attachment
3. Select the saved file from your PC/network
4. Select appearance of icon (paperclip, graph, attachment or tag) and close

Pencil tool — For circling parts of figures or making freeform marks

Creates freeform shapes with a pencil tool. Particularly with graphics within the proof it may be useful to use the Drawing Markups toolbar. These tools allow you to draw circles, lines and comment on these marks.



How to use it:

1. Select Tools > Drawing Markups > Pencil Tool
2. Draw with the cursor
3. Multiple pieces of pencil annotation can be grouped together
4. Once finished, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears and right click
5. Select Open Pop-Up Note and type in a details of required change
6. Click the X in the top right hand corner of the note box to close.

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