

# Higher ground: Community-level response to a natural disaster and long-term impacts on health and identity in rural North Carolina



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# Presentation Overview

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- Background
- Method
- Results
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# Learning Objectives



# Learning Objectives

- Explore the ways the African American communities of Queenstown and Ramsville responded to flooding after a hurricane.
- Understand the communities' efforts to rebuild and reclaim their identities.
- Consider the various health impacts of the flood.
- Provide recommendations to the communities for ways to further improve the quality of life for African Americans in Ramsville and Queenstown.



# Background

# The Communities

- Queenstown and Ramsville, North Carolina are located in eastern North Carolina and separated by a river.
- African Americans comprise 98% of Queenstown's and 39% of Ramsville's populations.
- Per capita income for African Americans residing in the county is \$11,640 compared to \$14,435 countywide, \$20,307 statewide, and \$21,587 nationwide for all residents.



# The Flood

- In 1999, flooding following a severe hurricane decimated both towns.
- The flood destroyed all of Queenstown and over 40% of Ramsville.
- The flood had disproportionate impacts on African Americans in both towns, affecting the sense of community and identity that is so important in rural North Carolina.



# Rebuilding

- Despite the fact that 6,500 Queenstown and Ramsville residents were displaced, residents received a great deal of support in the aftermath of the flood.
- Today, more than seven years later, the majority of homes have been rebuilt and long-term revitalization efforts continue.
- Some residents now refer to the flood as “a blessing” for the towns.





# Method



# Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis

- An Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis (AOCD) was conducted over a seven-month period, guided by two community preceptors.
- Three qualitative data collection methods were used:
  - Participant-observation field notes
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Secondary data sources
- Data were analyzed using a transcript-based analysis approach to determine patterns of meaning related to community and identity.



# Project Timeline

<b>October – December 2006</b>	Met with community members; reviewed secondary data and background information
<b>December 2006 – January 2007</b>	Prepared and pre-tested interview guides; recruited interviewees
<b>January – March 2007</b>	Interviewed community members and service providers
<b>March – April 2007</b>	Analyzed interview transcripts
<b>March – May 2007</b>	Organized a community forum and completed final report



# Interviewee Characteristics

	Community Members	Service Providers
<b>Town of Residence</b>		
<i>Queenstown</i>	7	2
<i>Ramsville</i>	17	9
<i>Other</i>	0	7
<b>Race</b>		
<i>African American</i>	20	15
<i>White</i>	4	3
<b>Age</b>		
<i>21-40</i>	4	2
<i>41-60</i>	8	12
<i>61+</i>	6	3
<i>Unknown</i>	6	1
<i>Average Age</i>	50.13	51.88
<b>Sex</b>		
<i>Male</i>	13	9
<i>Female</i>	11	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>



# Results

# Flood Effects

- Interviewees indicated differences in flood impacts among areas within the communities based on a confluence of demographic factors.
- In discussions about flood effects, interviewees specifically mentioned the following:
  - High levels of stress (including PTSD)
  - Increase in chronic illness (stroke, hypertension)
  - Increase in negative health behaviors (drug use)
  - Cumulatively higher death rates (heart attacks)
  - Greater incidence of mental health issues





# Community Strengths

A number of interviewees considered one of the communities' most important strengths to be the resilience of the towns and of the community members:

*"The tradition of Queenstown—of being an incorporated black town and that—was shown in their choice to come back after the flood. There is something intangible about the historical significance of the town, and that seems to be a glue that...holds [people] together."*

-Queenstown Service Provider



# Community Challenges

While interviewees recognized the importance of community cohesion and identity within the African American communities of Ramsville and Queenstown, residents are still faced with the challenge of living in a flood plain:

*"The river flooding...it's always at the back of peoples' minds. If there's another flood, the same thing will happen. How do you start over when everything you had is gone?"*

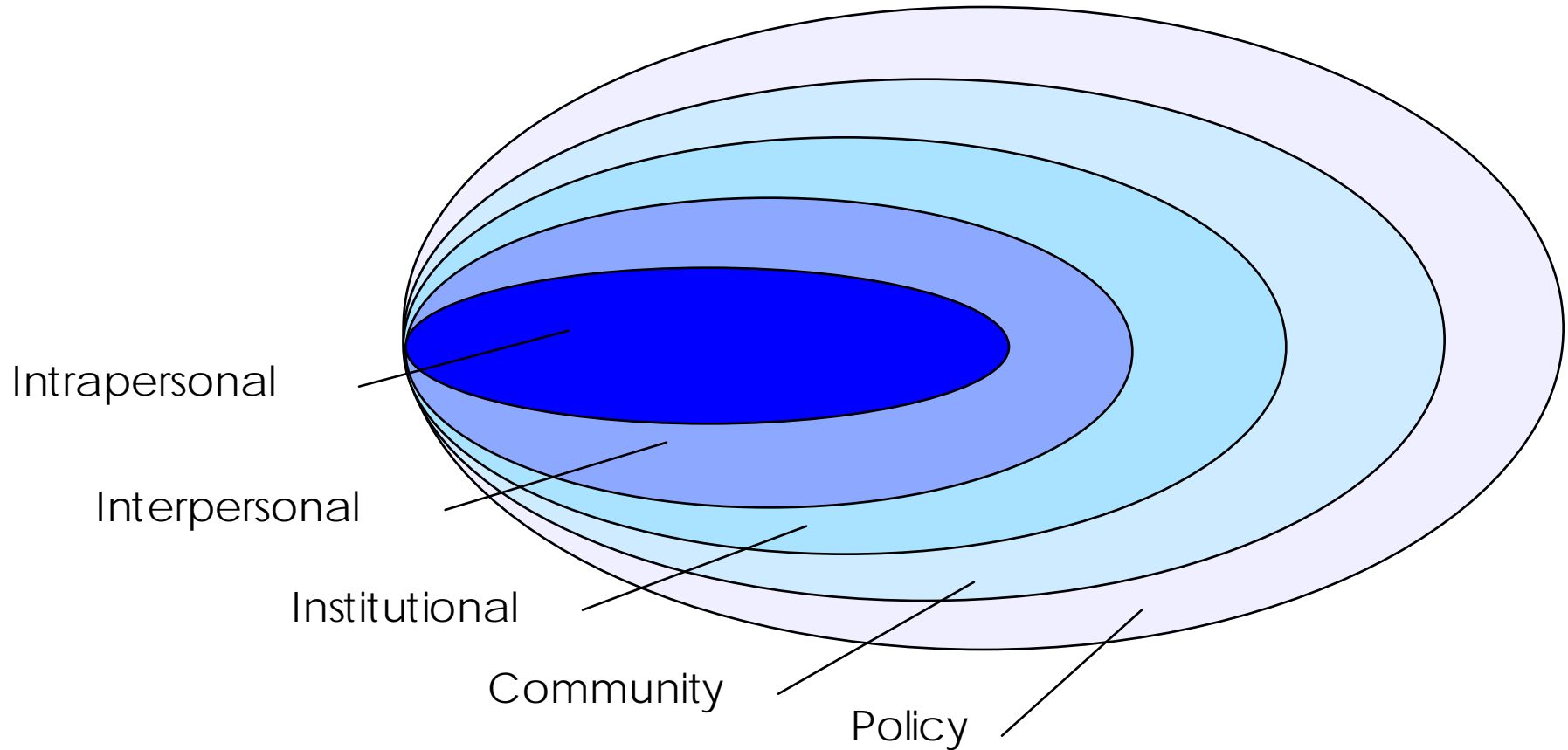
-Ramsville Community Member





# Recommendations

# The Socio-Ecological Framework



Source: McLeroy, K.R., et al. (1988).

# Points of Intervention

- Individual Level
  - Tailored individual emergency plans
- Interpersonal Level
  - Reinforced capacity of existing social networks to encourage personal disaster preparedness planning and offer social support during disasters
- Institutional
  - Strengthened capacity of places of worship to encourage personal disaster preparedness planning and offer tangible aid and assistance following disasters





# Points of Intervention

- Community
  - Dissemination of up-to-date information on disaster preparedness planning and available resources
- Policy
  - Identification of vulnerable populations
  - Improvement of health services infrastructure, inclusive of mental health
  - Promotion of local governments' cooperation
  - Reinforcement of federal government coordination



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