

WHO WHEN AND WHY OF COASTAL RELOCATION POST HURRICANE SANDY

Anamaria Bukvic and Andrew Smith, Virginia Tech

The future viability of some coastal communities has been severely challenged by the recent major disasters, as well as other episodic and chronic coastal hazards. These events also instigated a dialogue on their long-term resilience, adaptation options, and the possibility of permanent relocation from high risk areas. Little is known how exposure to disaster, in combination with other contemporary coastal challenges, affects willingness to consider relocation on a household level in highly urban societies. The main objective of this presentation is to provide a bottom-up perspective on this dilemma via identification of demographic determinants and other disaster-related concerns that may influence support for relocation among coastal residents. More specifically, this study takes an interdisciplinary approach to examine the effects of pre-disaster socio-economic household characteristics, level of preparedness, disaster exposure, experience with recovery, concerns with other coastal stressors, relocation assistance support needs, community embeddedness, and resource loss on relocation decision-making via 125 household surveys conducted in Hurricane Sandy affected oceanfront communities. The findings hereby reveal that the willingness to consider relocation is primarily influenced by the age of respondents, disaster exposure, level of experienced stress related to recovery, personal financial recovery concerns, future cost of living in high-risk area, concerns with increase in crime and future flooding, and disaster-induced resource loss. Lastly, the findings reveal that age by itself has a buffering/protective effect on stress and relocation consideration, such that older age predicts less stress and reduced interest in relocation, however, conditional on the level of experienced resource loss.

Specifically, as resource loss increased, being older no longer protected respondents from disaster-related stress or consideration of relocation. Considering that relocation process is likely to occur in incremental and successive stages rather than all at once, these observations can provide a vital guidance as of which constituents may and under what circumstances decide to relocate sooner or later. This bottom-up perspective on contemporary coastal concerns and stressors that could drive decision to relocate can help inform the development of relocation policy that will more accurately reflect local circumstances and preferences and therefore receive more support for implementation.