New Orleans hosts the largest population of Vietnamese immigrants of any U.S. city – and members of this ethnic group were the most likely to return after the devastation of Katrina. Despite barriers and inequalities in access to vital services, individuals proved extraordinarily resilient and, as SSNers Mark VanLandingham and Mai Do explain, the community made a remarkable recovery.

The KATIVA-NOLA study at Tulane University began as an immigration study – and then Hurricane Katrina struck. Before the storm, researchers led by Mark VanLandingham had already collected a wide range of health, social, economic, and demographic data on the pre-storm Vietnamese population, and were later able to
interview the same people again to determine the effects of the disaster on their lives.

Early data, as analyzed in Mark VanLandingham’s 2014 Basic Facts brief, suggested that individuals in the city’s Vietnamese population had fared better than others of similar status who experienced comparable damage. They reported better health and more often returned to their devastated neighborhoods. The Vietnamese did better for various reasons – including their general good health before the storm, the community’s cultural solidarity, and the fact that Vietnamese escaped many of the negative stereotypes that stigmatized African Americans. In a recent OpEd in the New York Times, VanLandingham takes a closer look at the factors that continue to explain the success of the Vietnamese community in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Further analysis by Mai Do, also of Tulane, shows that Vietnamese New Orleanians got more equal access to health care following the storm, as emergency services were provided in previously underserved areas. Do’s new Key Findings brief details the barriers faced by many Vietnamese prior to the storm, and tracks the ups and downs afterwards. Happily, on the 10th anniversary of the hurricane, Vietnamese neighborhoods enjoy improved access to health care facilities and professionals who speak their language. Community services are better than ever before.

Mark J. VanLandingham is the Thomas C. Keller Professor of Global Health Systems and Development at Tulane University’s School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. His research focuses on Southeast Asian migration, Vietnamese immigrant health, and the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans’ immigrant communities.

Mai Do is an Assistant Professor of Public Health at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, where she primarily studies reproductive health and family planning services in developing countries. Her current domestic research examines health care access and outcomes for Vietnamese immigrants.

Another research project based on interviews with people before as well as after Hurricane Katrina was led by SSN scholars Elizabeth Fussell of Washington State University, Jean E. Rhodes of the University of Massachusetts Boston, and Mary Waters of Harvard University. Their brief on psychological problems for poor mothers of all ethnic backgrounds five years after the hurricane explores how friendship ties
and family networks contributed to better mental health outcomes for displaced women and their children.

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