

## Study: Hurricanes linked with mental ills

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Florida State University sociologists say they have found a link between the effects of devastating hurricanes and mental health problems.

The scientists say they discovered some South Floridians who survived 1992's Hurricane Andrew suffered mental health problems many years later. That has led to a prediction of even more dire consequences for those who lived through last year's Hurricane Katrina that ravaged the U.S. Gulf Coast.

The researchers in Tallahassee -- sociology doctoral student and lead author David Russell and professors John Taylor and Donald Lloyd -- say although the short-term mental health consequences of Hurricane Andrew have been documented, their study of adolescents is the first to show the storm inflicted long-term effects on mental health.

"We found that people who ... had pre-existing symptoms of psychological distress were more adversely affected by exposure to hurricane-related stressful events," Russell said.

"Based on our findings, we believe intervention efforts should include assessments of the prior experiences and psychological well-being of disaster victims. Doing so will aid response workers in identifying those most at risk for developing post-disaster psychological problems."

The study was presented recently in New Orleans during the annual meeting of the Southern Sociological Society.

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