

Study: Katrina victims suffer mental ills

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An updated survey of Hurricane Katrina victims suggests those most affected by the 2005 storm are suffering increased emotional problems.

The Harvard Medical School study's latest findings were presented Wednesday to the Ad Hoc U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery.

The survey showed the percentage of residents in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi who suffer mental disorders such as depression and suicidal thoughts have increased significantly, compared with five to eight months after the hurricane.

Researchers said the findings counter a more typical pattern from previous disasters in which the prevalence of mental disorders decreases as time passes. Professor Ronald Kessler, who led the study, said the failure to find such a decrease is an indication Katrina produced more severe emotional distress than do more typical disasters, and might also reflect the slow pace of ongoing recovery efforts.

Hurricane Katrina was the deadliest United States hurricane in seven decades, forcing the evacuations of more than 500,000 people, with nearly 90,000 square miles declared disaster areas -- roughly equal to the land mass of the United Kingdom.

The study is to appear in an upcoming issue of the journal *Molecular Psychiatry*.

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