

Study shows serious emotional disturbances among children after Katrina

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A team made up of mental health professionals, emergency response experts, and researchers from several universities, including Virginia Tech, has published the results of a study that shows serious emotional disturbances among children who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. The Category 3 storm ravaged the Gulf Coast in August 2005.

The study, published in a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, showed the estimated prevalence of serious emotional disturbances (SED) among residents of the affected areas was 14.9 percent. Of those, 9.3 percent of youths were believed to have SED that was directly attributable to [Hurricane Katrina](#).

Characteristics of SED include inappropriate behavior, depression, [hyperactivity](#), eating disorders, fears and phobias, and [learning difficulties](#).

"Stress exposure was associated strongly with serious [emotional disturbances](#)," said Russell Jones, professor of psychology in the College of Science at Virginia Tech and member of the research team. "More than 20 percent of the youths with high stress exposure had hurricane-related SED."

The study found that youth who experienced death of loved one during the storm had the strongest association with SED. Exposure to physical adversity was the next strongest.

"The prevalence of SED among youths exposed to Hurricane Katrina remains high 18 to 27 months after the storm," Jones said. "This suggests a substantial need for mental health treatment resources in the hurricane-affected areas."

Katrina was the costliest hurricane in United States history as well as one of the five deadliest. Four years after the storm, nearly thousands of residents of Mississippi and Louisiana are still displaced from their homes.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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