

Depression soars among Gulf residents after oil spill

September 28 2010, by Alex Ogle

The number of US Gulf coast residents who say they suffer from depression rose by more than 25 percent following the catastrophic BP oil spill that sullied their shorelines and devastated their livelihoods, a Gallup poll showed Tuesday.

Pollsters said inhabitants of Gulf coast areas who said they had a clinical diagnosis of depression increased by four points -- a 25.6 percent jump -- in the 15 weeks after the April 20 Deepwater Horizon explosion and subsequent oil spill, compared to the 15 weeks before the disaster.

The survey found that over the same period, inland inhabitants of the same Gulf states reported a 2.2-percent rise in depression diagnoses, while residents of non-Gulf states reported a 0.6-percent rise.

Health officials have warned for months of a desperate rise in stress levels and depression among Gulf coast residents.

As the oil spill's scope became clear, touching virtually every aspect of life in the region, the US government compiled a tip sheet for residents on the threat of anxiety: pointing out symptoms such as frequent crying, being overwhelmed with worry and sadness, and increased alcohol and drug abuse.

Gallup also found a 15.5-percent rise in feelings of worry and sadness reported by Gulf residents, compared to a 1.8-percent decrease for Americans in non-Gulf states.

The pollsters, meanwhile, found a 14.9-percent decline in the number of Gulf coast dwellers who felt their community was "getting better as a place to live," against a 2.2-percent increase for Americans residing elsewhere.

The results "document the extent to which residents living alongside the [Gulf of Mexico](#) have experienced a decrease in emotional health and satisfaction with their communities since the BP oil spill," Gallup said in a statement.

The findings "provide supporting evidence of the need for enhanced psychological assistance for residents of Gulf Coast-facing counties," Gallup said.

In August, BP announced it would fund 52 million dollars for health groups dealing with stress and [depression](#) in the states hit by the oil spill, including grants for substance abuse services, and the children and family departments of state health agencies.

Two days after the April 20 explosion the crippled rig sank and ruptured the Macondo well, and over the next 87 days it spewed some 4.9 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico in the biggest maritime spill ever.

Earlier this month US officials declared the BP well to be finally capped, but residents face an uphill climb to recovery in a region still recovering from the 2005 Hurricane Katrina.

The Gallup poll was based on 2,598 interviews between January 2 and August 6 with residents of 25 Gulf Coast counties in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas.

Their answers were compared with those taken from more than 30,000 interviewees who reside in inland regions of the same five Gulf states, as

well as with more than 179,000 inhabitants of non-Gulf states during the same time periods.

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