

# Mental health relief efforts often overlooked in wake of disasters

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Recent events such as the ten-year commemoration of September 11th just weeks ago, Hurricane Irene striking the east coast this past summer, three months of oil spills off of the Gulf Coast a year ago, and the tragic earthquakes that struck Chile and Haiti in early 2010, are constant reminders that tragedy and catastrophe can occur at any moment. But what kind of effects do these devastating disasters have on those involved and what can counselors and psychologists do to help them?

A new issue of *The Counseling Psychologist* (published by SAGE) titled "Counseling Psychology and Large-Scale [Disasters](#), Catastrophes, and Traumas: Opportunities for Growth," discusses past efforts by [mental health professionals](#) in responding to international disasters, current research endeavors, and training and intervention programs that can be implemented at a global level in the future.

"Disasters affect individuals, families, communities, work places, and disaster responders. Thus, they require a multisystem analysis and response, which counseling psychologists can provide," wrote Sue C. Jacobs, Mark M. Leach, and Lawrence H. Gerstein, authors of the introductory article, "Introduction and Overview: Counseling Psychologists' Roles, Training, and Research Contributions to Large-Scale Disasters." "

Following Hurricane Katrina's destructive assault on the Gulf Coast in 2005, a group of psychologists came together to form the Special Task Group (STG) in order to encourage and support students and faculty

from counseling psychology programs in their efforts to organize [mental health](#) relief efforts for those affected by the disaster. After the effects of the hurricane lessened, members of the STG found that they needed a way to discuss what they learned from the experience as well as what they could do to improve their services when disasters occurred in the future.

Defining disasters as [natural disasters](#), human made disasters, and war and genocide, the November 2011 edition of The Counseling Psychologist reflects this proactive and systematic attempt to organize and prepare psychologists as they help those affected by traumatic events on their long road to recovery.

Jacobs, Leach, and Gerstein wrote, "As we discussed this contribution it became blatantly clear that [Hurricane Katrina](#) was just the latest in a series of disasters that had widespread effects. We decided, therefore, to invite other counseling psychologists with appropriate expertise to be part of this major contribution"

**More information:** The introduction written by the co-editors is available free for a limited time at:

[tcp.sagepub.com/content/39/8/1070.full.pdf+html](http://tcp.sagepub.com/content/39/8/1070.full.pdf+html).

Provided by SAGE Publications

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