

Greater risk for babies born during natural disasters

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Pregnant women exposed to natural disasters such as volcanoes are more likely to give birth prematurely, according to a new study from The Australian National University (ANU).

The study looked at pregnant women who've been evacuated from villages near Mount Sinabung volcano in Indonesia, which has been

active since 2010.

The study, led by Dr. Geoff Kushnick from ANU, showed that along with an increased likelihood of pre- and early-term birth, the babies of those [women](#) evacuated were also born shorter.

"The fact the babies were born at a normal birth weight, but shorter, is not something we've seen in previous studies," Dr. Kushnick said.

Associate Professor Alison Behie, who was a co-author on the study, said: "We expect it has something to do with the stress these mothers were under, which may have interfered with placenta development and disrupted regular growth patterns."

Premature births can have long-term health implication for both mothers and babies.

"We know premature births significantly increases the risk of mortality for the baby in the first year of life, and there's a higher chance of respiratory and other [health issues](#)," Associate Professor Behie said.

In total around 17,000 people were displaced by the Mount Sinabung eruption.

Dr. Kushnick and Associate Professor Behie say we need to look at building better support systems for those impacted by natural disasters in countries like Indonesia.

"This study shows [pregnant women](#) exposed to natural [disasters](#) are more likely to give [birth](#) prematurely and we've seen that happen here in Australia as well," Dr. Kushnick said.

"There's still a way to go. There's definitely lessons to be learned for us

here in Australia, especially given [natural disasters](#) are becoming more and more frequent."

The research has been published in the *American Journal of Human Biology*.

More information: Geoff Kushnick et al, Pregnancy outcomes among evacuees of the Sinabung volcano, 2010–2018 (North Sumatra, Indonesia): A matched cohort study, *American Journal of Human Biology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/ajhb.23628](https://doi.org/10.1002/ajhb.23628)

Provided by Australian National University

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