

# Hurricane Harvey led to poorer physical, mental health among Houston adults

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Credit: Brandon Martin

Hurricane Harvey had a significant impact on the mental and physical health of Houstonians, especially those living in areas that suffered the most structural damage, according to a new study from Rice University.

The study is based on a data-collection effort launched four years ago to evaluate mental and physical health of Houstonians. But the research by Robert Bozick, a senior fellow and associate director of the Kinder Houston Area Survey at Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban

Research was suddenly interrupted by the 2017 hurricane. The disruption created a natural experiment—the only one in existence—allowing a comparison of community health before and after the storm.

After Harvey, Bozick found that adults in Houston suffered an average of 1.12 more days of poor physical health and 1.31 more days of poor mental health every month. Those effects were felt most strongly in parts of the city where structural damage was most severe.

"While property damage and [financial losses](#) are the most tangible negative outcomes from storms like Harvey, this study shows that [health impacts](#), too, are widespread and substantial," Bozick said.

Bozick noted that the post-Harvey data was collected six months after the storm, so it's possible the impact on health was worse in the days and weeks immediately following the [storm](#) than the study shows.

He hopes the results will raise awareness among policymakers about the health impacts of catastrophic storms.

"As current atmospheric projections point toward an increasing number of hurricanes of a magnitude similar to or greater than Harvey, policymakers, urban health care leaders and emergency response organizations need to plan for the additional [health](#) care burden that these storms will inflict upon communities," Bozick wrote in the paper's conclusion.

**More information:** Robert Bozick, The effects of Hurricane Harvey on the physical and mental health of adults in Houston, *Health & Place* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102697](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102697)

Provided by Rice University

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