

STUDY EXAMINES HOW SOCIAL SUPPORT AFFECTS MENTAL HEALTH AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

APRIL 5, 2018 - A new Journal of Traumatic Stress study found that social support may have helped alleviate depressive symptoms for displaced and nondisplaced residents who survived Hurricane Katrina. Also, social support appeared to only moderate the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms for nondisplaced residents, indicating that displaced individuals may require more formal supports for reducing PTSD symptoms following a natural disaster.

Eighteen to 24 months after Hurricane Katrina, researchers surveyed 810 adults who survived the disaster. Participants reported the number of Katrina-related traumatic events experienced, perceived social support 2 months post-Katrina, and PTSD and depressive symptoms experienced since Katrina.

“This study is important because many previous studies have focused on people who met diagnostic criteria for depression or PTSD following a disaster. This approach misses a large portion of people since approximately 40%-60% of people who experience a disaster do not meet diagnostic criteria for depression or PTSD following a disaster,” said senior author Dr. Scott Coffey, of the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

“This study highlights factors that may help protect some people from serious mental health issues and identifies individuals who may need additional resources as they recover from a disaster.”

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