

3311.0: Monday, November 05, 2007 - 2:30 PM

Abstract #160882

Health and social impacts of disaster and displacement in the US Gulf Coast

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Recovery from large-scale disasters is often determined by individual and communal resilience, social stability and infrastructure, and political will. Hurricane Katrina tested all these elements, and based on data from two representative cohort studies, vulnerable populations find long-term recovery to be increasingly elusive. The Louisiana and Mississippi Child and Family Health Studies are community-based research projects estimating the health and social consequences of populations displaced or affected by the 2005 hurricanes, based on interviews with 1,244 randomly-sampled households. Among the studies' findings are the persistence of mental health disability and strain long after the precipitating event, the continued instability and inherent chaos among the lives of families and children, and the daily impact of persistent poverty, particularly among households that had been struggling to maintain subsistence wages prior to the hurricane. The data suggest a "Recovery Divide," in which those with access to resources are the likeliest to rebuild their homes and their lives, whereas those without such resources are left to languish. The premise of much recovery policy is to compensate local government for infrastructure loss and to subsidize housing and business re-investment. An economic development model may be more appropriate for the poorest and most vulnerable populations, who are dependent upon enhanced health and social services and institutions to support their well-being, as well as retraining and skill-building to enhance their economic opportunities. This presentation will focus on the long-term health, social, and economic consequences of the disaster and displacement, and consider issues of health access and utilization.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the health impacts of a large-scale disaster and social disruption among vulnerable populations, particularly children.
- Consider policy options to address barriers to long-term recovery.
- Identify patterns of health system need, access, and utilization among a disaster-affected population.

[Gulf Coast Recovery: Spanning Research and Practice](#)

[The 135th Annual Meeting & Exposition \(November 3-7, 2007\) of APHA](#)