

Hurricane Katrina Took Toll on Hearts Too, says Tulane University study

April 04, 2011 11:45 AM Keith Brannon
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The post-Katrina increase in heart attacks among New Orleans residents persisted even four years after the storm, according to a new study by researchers from Tulane University School of Medicine.

The study “an update to the researchers” two-year post-Katrina analysis “shows a persisting three-fold increase in heart attacks in New Orleans four years after Katrina. The report, presented at the American College of Cardiology’s 60th Annual Scientific Session in New Orleans, is the first long-term analysis of heart attacks following a disaster. Previous studies have only documented increases in cardiac events in the immediate hours to weeks after major disasters.

“To our surprise, the increase has occurred in the absence of any change in traditional risk factors—for example, age, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes,” said lead researcher Dr. Anand Irimpen, associate professor of medicine for the Heart and Vascular Institute at Tulane University School of Medicine.

While psychiatric conditions such as clinical depression, a history of coronary artery disease and marital status did not appear to contribute to heart attacks in the two-year analysis, these factors seem to play a significant role as time has progressed. Irimpen suggests there is a lag phase between the onset of psychiatric illness and its manifestation in the form of a heart attack.

The study analyzed the number of heart attack patients admitted to Tulane Medical Center two years before the storm and four years later. Researchers compared the two groups’ demographic information, lab test results, health insurance, first-time hospitalization, smoking status, substance abuse and employment. In the post-Katrina group, there were 629 confirmed heart attack patients, out of a total of 29,228 patients (2.2 percent), compared to 150 heart attack admissions out of a

total of 21,229 patients (0.7 percent) pre-Katrina. Post-Katrina patients were more likely to be unemployed, smoke, be less compliant with treatment plans and report substance abuse.

A copy of the full abstract is available online [here](#).