



## **Hurricane Harvey Will Have Lasting Mental Health Impact Says Leading Psychoanalytic Association**

**New York – August 31, 2017** – As Tropical Storm Harvey continues to pummel parts of Texas and Louisiana, and rescue workers struggle to bring victims to safety, the American Psychoanalytic Association (APSA) is raising concerns about the effects of this historic storm that will likely linger in the minds of victims for years to come. For example, [research](#) following Hurricane Katrina showed that survivors experienced a dramatic rise in emotional distress and serious mental illness such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress.

With natural disasters such as Harvey, traumatic loss goes beyond the loss of dwellings, personal belongings and pets. Even after the immediate dangers have subsided, survivors must attempt to cope with various traumatic events including the potential loss of life to themselves, their families and community members. Survivors can become displaced, often for days, weeks or even months, and may be separated from family, friends, their pets, and supportive communities. Fear and anxiety can be severe with lasting effects. Being a displaced person may also lead to isolation and alienation, particularly for vulnerable individuals, such as children, the elderly, those in frail health or with mental health issues, and the socially and economically-disadvantaged.

Special attention is needed for displaced children and adolescents. It is important for them to find an active way to cope with feelings of helplessness after a crisis. During times of disaster or great community distress, altruistic behaviors can powerfully aid healing. Children beyond toddlerhood age can be taught that the adult community cares for them, even if their regular caregiver is not able. Children do better when given a sense of being able to do something to help themselves and others. Most children can benefit from helping younger children, for example giving gifts of drawings, helping with bedtime, singing songs to each other, emailing and dictating simple stories about what happened.

“When flood waters recede and rebuilding begins, we must not forget that many will struggle with mental health issues,” said Harriet Wolfe, MD, president of the American Psychoanalytic Association. “As psychoanalysts we are keenly aware of the effects of trauma and urge governmental agencies and local community leaders to earmark significant resources to assist vulnerable individuals, including first responders, as they work to recover from this traumatic event.”

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