

The Aftermath

by

Phil Rasmussen

The aftermath of hurricane Helene, has left millions of people across the southeast stranded without power, food, clean water, access to family, friends, neighbors, and medical or emergency help. In the 6 days since the storm, while much has been done, there is still a lot to be done to rebuild our communities but more importantly our lives and souls.

Helene was a major national disaster and a life changing event for every American. The hurricane has permanently impacted our social, economic and the safeguard of our nation and individual lives.

As we repair our lives and communities, this is a time for greater vigilance over other political, social, economic, and security issues that preceded Helene. This is a time when our enemies – both internal and external – will and have taken advantage of the disaster that Helene has created.

In addition to the vigilance that we MUST exercise, there will be two phenomena that follow in the aftermath of Helene. One phenomenon closely follows the recovery efforts of the storm's impact. The second will occur in the not too distant future.

As mentioned, Helene was a life changing event. People had a lot of destruction to their homes and property, they lost mementoes of memories and family history, and many have lost family, friends, and/or neighbors.

Research indicates that Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) is substantial. Close to 1/3 of people directly impacted by a disaster experience negative mental health consequences such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and other physical or mental disorders. [[National Library of Medicine](#)]

Additionally, several social and environmental factors apply additional stress on individuals. These include:

- change in close relationships
- loss of job
- loss of property
- financial instability

The [National Veterans Homeless Support](#) (NVHS) organization has identified many symptoms of PTSD and other mental issues faced by veterans but also anyone who experiences a traumatic event. These include:

Warnings Signs of PTSD

Flashbacks and Intrusive Thoughts

- Flashbacks
- Repeated Memories
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Nightmares

Avoidance

- Include avoiding places, people, conversations, activities, objects, or situations that trigger memories of the trauma. This avoidance can interfere with daily life and lead to social isolation.

Distress

- Emotional Distress
- Physical Distress

Hyperarousal

- Hyperarousal/sensitivity
- Lack of Focus

Mood Changes

- Mood Changes
- Anger or Irritability
- Social isolation
- Difficulty Maintaining Relationships

Behavioral Changes

- Indifference in Activities
- Self-Destructive Behaviors
- Memory Issues

Visit the [National Veterans Homeless Support](#) for a fuller discussion of these signs and how to respond to them.

Treating PTSD should involve a combination of physical, mental, and spiritual healing, and takes time. While people avoided discussing their trauma in the past, survivors today recount their experiences in everyday conversations—even with strangers.

Such discussions often make others uncomfortable. However it is important that those who suffer these syndromes have the support of their community.

The Bible offers hope and healing for those who suffer PTSD. Two favorite websites for Bible verses about PTSD are:

- [30 Important Bible Verses About Ptsd](#)
- [25 Important Bible Verses for PTSD](#)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

The second phenomenon will take place in about 9 to 10 months. Often called the “Disaster Baby Boom Legend,” hospitals often observe an increased in birth rates. However the [National Library of Medicine](#) and other studies have stated, “a synthesis of the current evidence on how fertility changes after disaster does not exist.” What this really means is that empirical research has not been able to confirm the Legend.

Empirical studies have been problematic for several reasons. The early studies tended to look at the negative impact of disasters on fertility.

Instead of looking for reasons to support the Legend, researchers concentrated on the impact of disasters on the health outcomes of women who were pregnant at the time disasters occurred. [[National Library of Medicine](#)] The findings of these research studies are still incomplete as they do not address diseases relative to pregnancy or miscarriage.

Relative to the Legend, researchers have failed to address the psychological and physical conditions of men and women involved in the disasters. Furthermore their studies have not taken into consideration of the changing demographics in the aftermath of the disasters. Since many people left New Orleans when Katrina hit and never returned within the 9-10 month gestation period afterwards. It would take

extensive research and finance to track down where the people went, and much harder, to track the births as related to the Legend. [[Natural Disaster Epidemiology and Reproductive Health](#)]

Anecdotal evidence on the other hand supports the Legend. Richard Udry, University of North Carolina, in his study of the 1965 New York City blackout, gave this reason for why there appears to be increased birth rates after disasters, it “is evidently pleasing to many people to fantasize that when people are trapped by some immobilizing event which deprives them of their usual activities, most will turn to copulation.”

Whether large or small, disasters have a lasting effect on a community’s size and composition. While most empirical studies followed women who were pregnant prior to a disaster, there are other reports that indicate rising birth rates within the gestation period following a disaster. These reports did not directly address increasing birth rates but rather addressed increased sexual violence during the aftermath of a disaster. [[United Nations Population Fund](#)] In the US, we need to remember that the social stigma of women being raped, often results in the rape not reported. Thus any births resulting from rape during a disaster is not likely to be reported.