



National Center for
Disaster Preparedness

Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

Why am I receiving this report?

This community report of the Gulf Coast Population Impact Project is being mailed to households who participated in our survey, to participants who met with us in small-group meetings, and to other residents and stakeholders who have expressed an interest in this work.

About Us

The **National Center for Disaster Preparedness** at Columbia University is dedicated to understanding and improving the nation's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. We have worked on studies looking at 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the Joplin tornado, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

For further information about the Gulf Coast Population Impact Project you may contact study director David Abramson, PhD, at ncdp@columbia.edu. The views expressed in this Community Report are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the funder.

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Children's Health After the Oil Spill: A Four-State Study



A Community Report of the Gulf Coast Population Impact Project



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Project Background

What is the Gulf Coast Population Impact Project?

This project is focused on understanding the long-term impacts of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on children in the Gulf Coast region. We have conducted three phases, to date:

- **Phase 1:** In the weeks following the April 2010 explosion, we spoke to parents at Town Hall meetings in Louisiana and Mississippi.
- **Phase 2:** In July 2010 we interviewed 1,200 parents who lived within ten miles of the water. At the time, parents were very concerned about the potential long-term health impacts of the spill.
- **Phase 3:** Between April and October, 2012, with funding from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, we launched a four-state study to answer two overarching questions: (1) Where are the communities whose children have had the greatest health problems since the oil spill? (2) What factors contributed to these health problems? This phase had two elements to it – a household survey, and a “community engagement” effort.

Visit our website for the full Community Report and more information about this project.

www.ncdp.mailman.columbia.edu



Survey Findings

The 1,437 parents whom we surveyed reported considerable exposure to the oil spill as well as a number of physical and mental health problems among their children. The key findings were:

Exposure to the oil spill: Over half of the parents interviewed in these highly-impacted communities reported that their children had some type of oil spill-related exposure, whether it was through physical, environmental, or economic factors. One in every five parents said their children had direct contact with the oil; one in four reported smelling strong oil-related odors; and two of every five said their household had lost income or a job since the oil spill.

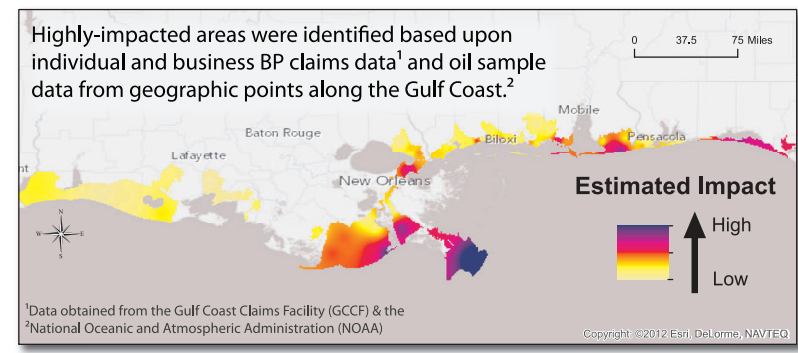
Health effects: A little over 40% of parents in these highly-impacted communities reported some type of health effect experienced by their children since the oil spill. About one in five parents said their children had experienced breathing problems and a similar number reported emotional or behavioral issues. One in seven reported skin problems.

Exposure matters: All other things being equal – regardless as to where people live, how much money they make, or whether or not they have health insurance and a family doctor for their children – *parents who reported that their children had been directly exposed to the oil spill or dispersants were three times as likely to report new physical or mental health problems among their children* when compared to those parents who reported that their children had not been exposed. Parents in households that had lost income or a job since the spill were nearly twice as likely to report new physical and mental health problems among their children.



How Did the Oil Spill Affect Children Along the Gulf Coast?

Findings from the Gulf Coast Population Impact Study.



Study Methods

Surveying Parents: We randomly selected households in fifteen “hard-hit” communities. These communities were selected as having high rates of BP compensation claims and evidence of oil washing up on their shores. These hard-hit communities are the dark red and purple shaded areas in the map above. From April through August 2012 our interviewers knocked on 6,800 doors across the four states and interviewed 1,437 parents.

Engaging Communities: In October 2012 we traveled to four communities where parents had expressed the greatest concerns about their children’s health: two in Louisiana, one in Mississippi, and one in Alabama. We spoke with 150 community leaders, health providers and administrators, school officials, grassroots advocates, service providers, and parents in small-group meetings.



Community Interviews

Participants spoke of *medical issues and lack of access* to high-quality pediatric care, particularly specialty and mental health care. Parents talked of children experiencing chronic headaches, nosebleeds, ear bleeding, unexplained skin rashes, and early and heavy menstrual periods among young girls, all of which seemed to have emerged since the oil spill.

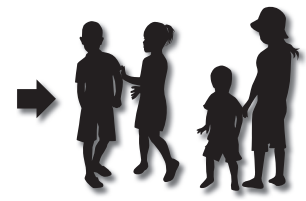
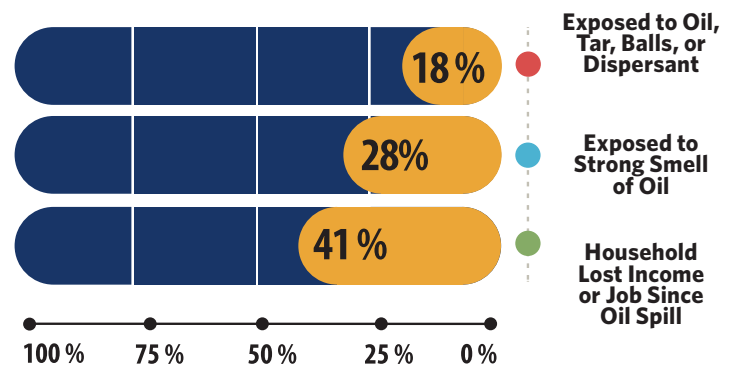
Many people described the *rising economic pressures on families* and the impact on children. We heard many stories of parents unable to meet their family’s need for food, clothing, or shelter, and of how this has led to parental depression. Many children are unsupervised after school, left to care for younger siblings or at risk for harmful behaviors. Community leaders and parents thought that teenage pregnancies and drug use were on the rise. There was also a consistent concern about dwindling recreational opportunities for children.

Some, but not all of the problems we heard about were attributable to the oil spill. Many communities regarded the oil spill as an additional stress added to so many others, including Hurricanes Katrina and Isaac, the economic recession, and chronic poverty.

What do the children of the Gulf need? Gulf Coast children need what all children need – stable and supportive homes, opportunities for play and growth, access to high-quality health care and education, and a healthy environment. Solutions proposed in our small-group discussions included: greater access to mental health and specialty care for children; improved opportunities for after-school recreational and educational support programs; and economic opportunities, job training and mental health support for parents and youth in coastal communities.



Exposure to Spill



Health Outcomes

