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Researchers explore impacts of Hurricane Michael on births

By The News Service of Florida

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. - Two Florida State University professors have received \$400,000 to examine how Hurricane Michael impacted birth outcomes in the Florida Panhandle as a result of infrastructure damage and exposure to carbon monoxide.

"Disasters like Hurricane Michael have severe and long-lasting impacts on our communities. The resulting stress, trauma, and decreased access to maternal health care may increase the risk of having a low birth weight baby," FSU Associate Professor of Geography Christopher Uejio, who will partner with researchers from Tulane University, said in a press release issued Wednesday.

Les Beitsch, FSU College of Medicine chair of Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine, will join in the study, funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Tulane University researchers Emily Harville, the principal investigator, and Maureen Lichtveld will partner in the research, according to the release.

The study will look into exposure to carbon monoxide, a poisonous gas that during pregnancy has been associated with fetal demise and other neurological complications.

It will also explore health-care access after the storm and birth outcomes in areas that were impacted by Michael.

"If our research finds that not having access to health care following a disaster has the greatest impact on birth outcomes, then the key focus will be getting health care facilities back up and running after disasters," Harville said in the release.

On the other hand, if carbon monoxide exposure is found to have a bigger impact, Harville said "we'll need to think more about generator safety and people knowing about the symptoms of poisoning."

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