



Report: Life expectancy for African-Americans in N.O. rival that of some developing nations

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NEW ORLEANS - It's a snapshot of Louisiana and New Orleans four years after the storm, but a new report called "A Portrait of Louisiana," paints a sobering picture about life expectancy in the state.

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"As sobering, and in some cases, quite frankly, depressing as the report is, it really gives is a great starting point," said Flozell Daniels, with the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation.

The foundation commissioned the study from the New York City-based "Social Sciences Research Council." Based on data provided by the Census department and

the state, the report examines every single parish in the Louisiana, breaking down everything from life expectancy to income to educational levels, based on age, race and gender.

One of the most glaring statistics in the report comes out of New Orleans. While the average life expectancy in the U.S. is 78.1 years, for an African-American living in New Orleans, the average life span is much lower: 69.3 years.

The report points out that life expectancy is also lower than that of some developing countries, like Colombia (72.8 years), Venezuela (73.6 years) and Vietnam (71.5 years) - and heading towards the level of that of North Korea (63.8 years).

Dr. Cassandra Youmans, with the LSU Health Sciences Center has practiced medicine in New Orleans for two decades. She said the findings of the study do not surprise her.

"What we find about African-Americans is that they generally are sicker longer, their average income is lower," Dr. Youmans said. "Generally, a large portion of African-Americans are uninsured."

However, the study found other factors may also be contributing to the low life expectancy numbers.

"Crucial to African-American men in Louisiana, particularly in New Orleans and other parts of the state, is the murder rate," Daniels said.

The director of the city's health department, Dr. Kevin Stephens, said he read the report and found the numbers distressing. He said, though, getting life expectancy numbers up will take more than just more access to health care.

"All of these things work together," Dr. Stephens said. "We just can't fix health care. You've got to fix education. You have to fix the crime. You have to fix the entire community."

The report also points out that whites in Louisiana, on average, will live four years longer than African Americans in the state, but even that is still lower than the U.S. average.

For a look at the complete report, go to