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Professor warns of post-tsunami traumas

By Edward Nguyen / Contributing writer
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The tsunami that ravaged the coasts of Southeast Asia has brought an influx of tsunami images to the forefront of the American media. But the most drastic effects of the Dec. 26 tsunamis may be unseen, warned UW professor Randall Kyes, a research associate professor of psychology who recently returned from Indonesia.

During his visit to Indonesia, Kyes visited multiple sites, including the homes of tsunami survivors. He said he noticed a drastic change in behavioral patterns of residents, including children, would become afraid of large bodies of water, some seemingly as small as water in a bathtub. Adults experienced severe insomnia and had difficulty sleeping.

Although Kyes is not a trained clinical treatment facilitator, his work in Indonesia involved helping set up an emergency psychological trauma center, according to a press release.

“People are past the tears and the immediate loss, and now reflection sets in and trauma is beginning to surface,” he said, noting that millions of people around the world may suffer mental repercussions as a

result of the tsunami.

Treating survivors early during prognosis will substantially decrease the possibility of trauma, according to Kyes. But if gone untreated, trauma could last as long as six months, he said.

Kyes, who participated in recovering the bodies of victims, estimated the death toll could reach up to 300,000. Although he has done work onsite to recover bodies, Kyes said his experience has never been this unimaginable.

Kyes holds workshops in order to help individuals who have dealt with loss because of the Tsunami cope with post-tsunami traumas. Experiencing symptoms of trauma, particularly under such harsh circumstances is normal, he said, and should not be viewed as a weakness.

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