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Rich, Poor See Poverty Very Differently

By WILL LESTER Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON; The dramatic differences between rich and poor that were on view during Hurricane Katrina also can be seen by how those two groups view the causes of poverty. The poor largely believe they were dealt a bad hand while the rich are more apt to say poverty is from lack of effort.

Polling by the Marguerite Casey Foundation also found that both rich and poor are optimistic about future prospects for their children.

Those at the poverty level or the near poor were almost twice as likely to say factors beyond their control are responsible for their impoverished state. Those who make higher incomes were evenly split on whether poverty is caused by external factors or by people not making enough effort.

Most in the public; at least three quarters; were aware of the big gap between rich and poor in this country well before Katrina put those differences in the spotlight.

"We're looking more and more like a developing country," said Luz Vega-Marquis, president of the foundation. "We have a concentration of wealth in the top 5 percent, but what is happening to the middle-class and poor people?"

People of all income groups said they felt optimistic that their own children will be better off in the future. The poorest were most likely to express optimism their children will be better off.

The polling found widespread recognition long before Katrina that poverty is a severe problem in this country, said pollster Celinda Lake, who conducted the second wave of polling.

"The conventional wisdom was that Katrina was catalytic to these attitudes about poverty," Lake said. "But these attitudes were evident before Katrina."

The polling found that "despite large income differences, there are very similar dreams and worries for both these sets of families," said Mary McIntosh of Princeton Survey Research Associates. "They're worried about money, affording health care and retirement, but they're hopeful about their children."

The poll findings are based on a survey of 1,546 parents of children under 18 taken from Dec. 9, 2004 to Feb. 12 and a survey of 1,000 adults from Sept. 30-Oct 3 of this year. The margin of error for each survey was plus or minus 3 percentage points, larger for subgroups.