Community mental health in the face of natural disasters

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Categories of human impacts

- Physical health

- Mental health and wellbeing

- Social relationships

- Broader ways of thinking

Physical health

- Death, injury, disease

- Subpar or inadequate food, water, shelter

- Disrupted access to health services

- Impaired immune system functioning

- Adverse birth outcomes

Mental health and wellbeing

- PTSD

- Depression, general anxiety

- Suicide

- Substance abuse

- Risky behaviors

- Sleep disorders
  - -- all of which may last several years or longer

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Mental stress mounting in Florida after devastating Hurricane Michael

E.g., following Hurricane Katrina

- 49% developed an anxiety or mood disorder

- 1 in 6 developed posttraumatic stress disorder

- Suicide and suicidal ideation more than doubled

Community impacts

- Disruptions to transportation

- Disruptions to availability of basic services, including food and medicine

- Occupational disruptions

- Negative environmental conditions (smells, mold, etc.)
  ...... All of which contribute to stress

"What we find is that people are being exposed to cirucumstances that are well beyond what they normally deal with"

Social impacts

- Domestic abuse

- Increases in violence, crime, interpersonal aggression

- Decreased social cohesion

- Increased inequity

Differential vulnerability

☐ Economically vulnerable

- members of low-income communities and nations

☐ Socially vulnerable

- women, members of marginalized communities

☐ Physiologically vulnerable

- The elderly are particularly vulnerable to heat
- Those already suffering from mental illness

Children and Infants

- Long-term and permanent effects on behavior, cognition, IQ

- Increased severity, prevalence of PTSD

- Loss of or diminished social support

More abstract impacts

- Threats to identity
  - Autonomy, occupation

- Threats to cohesion
  - Inequity, dispersion

- Threats to security
  - Instability, threat

Perceptions of place

- "You think your house is permanent… When you lose your house and everything you own, you learn *everything is temporary*"

(Hurricane Sandy survivor)

- "I just know I don't feel real, and home doesn't feel like home at all"

(Hurricane Michael survivor)

Becoming resilient: preparing communities

- Become informed
  - Identify local vulnerabilities
  - Provide clear and frequent communication

- Become prepared
  - Implement warning systems
  - Develop a post-disaster plan

- Strengthen social networks
  - Increase cooperation
  - Attend to inequities in vulnerability and needs

- Be adaptable
  - Diversity and flexibility are sources of strength

- Encourage meaning
  - Provide opportunities for meaningful action

Thank you!

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