**Health Concerns Following Natural Disasters**

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, and landslides are associated with increased public health risks. The risk factors for epidemic outbreaks and communicable diseases following natural disasters include accessibility to clean water, sanitation, overcrowding, and availability of healthcare services (Watson, Gayer & Connolly, 2007). Developing areas are particularly affected by natural disasters due to a lack of resources, infrastructure, and appropriate disaster-management procedures. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) outlines a number of health concerns for natural disasters. Sanitation and hygiene are a major concern. Access to safe food and water that has not been contaminated by germs and chemicals is a key priority during an emergency. Another concern is safe clean up. The presence of a large number of dead bodies increases the risk of epidemics if the deceased died of highly infectious diseases. Dead bodies also have the capability to contaminate water sources. The displacement of people from their homes also creates health risks. The 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Tōhoku, Japan, for example, left thousands of people homeless and living in shelters. Lack of food, water, and medicine in the shelters increased the risk of influenza and other infectious diseases (Shimbun, 2011).

Community health outreach is concerned with providing various services to local individuals including health education, social support, and counselling. In the event of a natural disaster, the role of a community health worker includes not only helping individuals cope with the disaster at hand but also keeping them safe from the health risks associated with natural disasters. Community health workers are unique because they understand the populations which they serve. This is particularly useful in the event of a natural disaster as knowledge of the community and its culture improves the ability to effectively mitigate public health risks. Community health workers further act as links or intermediaries between the community and other medical and emergency personnel during disasters.

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