FY 2025 Houston EMA/HSDA Ryan White Part A Service Definition **Emergency Financial Assistance – Other** (Revised April 2020)	
HRSA Service Category Title:	**Emergency Financial Assistance**
Local Service Category Title:	**Emergency Financial Assistance - Other**
Budget Type: **RWGA Only**	**Hybrid**
Budget Requirements or Restrictions: **RWGA Only**	Direct cash payments to clients are not permitted. It is expected that all other sources of funding in the community for emergency financial assistance will be effectively used and that any allocation of RWHAP funds for these purposes will be as the payer of last resort, and for limited amounts, uses, and periods of time. Continuous provision of an allowable service to a client must not be funded through EFA. The agency must set priorities, delineate and monitor what part of the overall allocation for emergency assistance is obligated for each subcategory. Careful monitoring of expenditures within a subcategory of "emergency assistance" is necessary to assure that planned amounts for specific services are being implemented, and to determine when reallocations may be necessary. At least **75%** of the total amount of the budget must be solely allocated to the actual cost of disbursements. Maximum allowable unit cost for provision of food vouchers or and/or utility assistance to an eligible client = $30.00/unit
HRSA Service Category Definition **(do <u>not</u> change or alter):** **RWGA Only**	**Emergency Financial Assistance -** Provides limited one-time or short-term payments to assist the RWHAP client with an emergent need for paying for essential utilities, housing, food (including groceries, and food vouchers), transportation, and medication. Emergency financial assistance can occur as a direct payment to an agency or through a voucher program.
Local Service Category Definition:	**Emergency Financial Assistance** is provided with limited frequency and for a limited period of time, with specified frequency and duration of assistance. Emergent need must be documented each time funds are used. Emergency essential living needs include food, telephone, utilities (i.e. electricity, water, gas and all required fees) and housing, limited to people who are displaced from their home due to acute housing need, for eligible PLWH.
Target Population (age, gender, geographic, race, ethnicity, etc.):	PLWH living within the Houston Eligible Metropolitan Area (EMA).

Services to be Provided:	**Emergency Financial Assistance** provides funding through: • Short-term payments to agencies • Establishment of voucher programs Service to be provided include: • Food Vouchers • Utilities (gas, water, basic telephone service and electricity) • Short term housing for up to 14 days The agency must adhere to the following guidelines in providing these services: • Assistance must be in the form of vouchers made payable to vendors, merchants, etc. No payments may be made directly to individual clients or family members. • Limitations on the provision of emergency assistance to eligible individuals/households should be delineated and consistently applied to all clients. • Allowable support services with an $800/year/client cap.
Service Unit Definition(s): **(HIV Services use only)**	A unit of service is defined as provision of food vouchers or and/or utility assistance to an eligible client.
Financial Eligibility:	Refer to the RWPC's approved *Financial Eligibility for Houston EMA Services*.
Client Eligibility:	PLWHA residing in the Houston EMA (prior approval required for non-EMA clients).
Agency Requirements:	Agency must be dually awarded as HOWPA sub-recipient work closely with other service providers to minimize duplication of services and ensure that assistance is given only when no reasonable alternatives are available. It is expected that all other sources of funding in the community for emergency assistance will be effectively used and that any allocation of EFA funding for these purposes will be the payer of last resort, and for limited amounts, limited use, and limited periods of time. Additionally, agency must document ability to refer clients for food, transportation, and other needs from other service providers when client need is justified.
Staff Requirements:	None.
Special Requirements:	Agency must: Comply with the Houston EMA/HSDA Standards of Care and Emergency Financial Assistance service category program policies.

FY 2026 RWPC "How to Best Meet the Need" Decision Process

Step in Process: **Council**		Date: **06/12/2025**
Recommendations:	Approved: Y:_____ No: _____ Approved With Changes:_____	If approved with changes list changes below:
1.		
2.		
3.		

Step in Process: **Steering Committee**		Date: **06/05/2025**
Recommendations:	Approved: Y:_____ No: _____ Approved With Changes:_____	If approved with changes list changes below:
1.		
2.		
3.		

Step in Process: **Quality Improvement Committee**		Date: **05/13/2025**
Recommendations:	Approved: Y:_____ No: _____ Approved With Changes:_____	If approved with changes list changes below:
1.		
2.		
3.		

Step in Process: **HTBMTN Workgroup #3**	Date: **04/16/2025**
Recommendations:	Financial Eligibility:
1.	
2.	
3.	

Assessing Social Equity in Disasters

E. Tate, C. Emrich

Disasters stemming from hazards like floods, wildfires, and disease often garner attention because of their extreme conditions and heavy societal impacts. Although the nature of the damage may vary, major disasters are alike in that socially vulnerable populations often experience the worst repercussions. For example, we saw this following Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey, each of which generated widespread physical damage and outsized impacts to low-income and minority survivors.

Social vulnerability researchers seek to understand the impediments and capacities of people and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme natural hazards. A major tool in this work is social vulnerability modeling, the use of which is expanding in large part because of growing awareness of the social equity implications of disasters.

This modeling applies knowledge garnered from disaster case studies describing how chronic marginalization translates to disproportionate adverse outcomes to identify the most vulnerable population groups. Such populations often include those living in poverty, the very old and young, minoritized ethnic and racial groups, renters, and recent immigrants [*National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*, 2019]. Social vulnerability modelers select demographic variables representing these groups and combine them to construct spatial indicators and indexes that enable comparisons of social vulnerability across places.

Mapping Social Vulnerability

Figure 1a is a typical map of social vulnerability across the United States at the census tract level based on the Social Vulnerability Index (SoVI) algorithm of *Cutter et al.* [2003]. Spatial representation of the index depicts high social vulnerability regionally in the Southwest, upper Great Plains, eastern Oklahoma, southern Texas, and southern Appalachia, among other places. With such a map, users can focus attention on select places and identify population characteristics associated with elevated vulnerabilities.

> Fig. 1. (a) Social vulnerability across the United States at the census tract scale is mapped here following the Social Vulnerability Index (SoVI). Red and pink hues indicate high social vulnerability. (b) This bivariate map depicts social vulnerability (blue hues) and annualized per capita hazard losses (pink hues) for U.S. counties from 2010 to 2019. Click image for larger version.

Many current indexes in the United States and abroad are direct or conceptual offshoots of SoVI, which has been widely replicated [e.g., *de Loyola Hummell et al.*, 2016]. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also developed a commonly used social vulnerability index intended to help local officials identify communities that may need support before, during, and after disasters.

The first modeling and mapping efforts, starting around the mid-2000s, largely focused on describing spatial distributions of social vulnerability at varying geographic scales. Over time, research in this area came to emphasize spatial comparisons between social vulnerability and physical hazards [*Wood et al.*, 2010], modeling population dynamics following disasters [*Myers et al.*, 2008], and quantifying the robustness of social vulnerability measures [*Tate*, 2012].

More recent work is beginning to dissolve barriers between social vulnerability and environmental justice scholarship [*Chakraborty et al.*, 2019], which has traditionally focused on root causes of exposure to pollution hazards. Another prominent new research direction involves deeper interrogation of social vulnerability drivers in specific hazard contexts and disaster phases (e.g., before, during, after). Such work has revealed that interactions among drivers are important, but existing case studies are ill suited to guiding development of new indicators [*Rufat et al.*, 2015].

Advances in geostatistical analyses have enabled researchers to characterize interactions more accurately among social vulnerability and hazard outcomes. Figure 1b depicts social vulnerability and annualized per capita hazard losses for U.S. counties from 2010 to 2019, facilitating visualization of the spatial coincidence of pre-event susceptibilities and hazard impacts. Places ranked high in both dimensions may be priority locations for management interventions. Further, such analysis provides invaluable comparisons between places as well as information summarizing state and regional conditions.

> Fig. 2. Differences in population percentages between counties experiencing annual per capita losses above or below the national average from 2010 to 2019 for individual and compound social vulnerability indicators (race and poverty). Click image for larger version.

In Figure 2, we take the analysis of interactions a step further, dividing counties into two categories: those experiencing annual per capita losses above or below the national average from 2010 to 2019. The differences among individual race, ethnicity, and poverty variables between the two county groups are small. But expressing race together with poverty (poverty attenuated by race) produces quite different results: Counties with high hazard losses have higher percentages of both

impoverished Black populations and impoverished white populations than counties with low hazard losses. These county differences are most pronounced for impoverished Black populations.

Our current work focuses on social vulnerability to floods using geostatistical modeling and mapping. The research directions are twofold. The first is to develop hazard-specific indicators of social vulnerability to aid in mitigation planning [*Tate et al.*, 2021]. Because natural hazards differ in their innate characteristics (e.g., rate of onset, spatial extent), causal processes (e.g., urbanization, meteorology), and programmatic responses by government, manifestations of social vulnerability vary across hazards.

The second is to assess the degree to which socially vulnerable populations benefit from the leading disaster recovery programs [*Emrich et al.*, 2020], such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Individual Assistance program and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Disaster Recovery program. Both research directions posit social vulnerability indicators as potential measures of social equity.

Social Vulnerability as a Measure of Equity

Given their focus on social marginalization and economic barriers, social vulnerability indicators are attracting growing scientific interest as measures of inequity resulting from disasters. Indeed, social vulnerability and inequity are related concepts. Social vulnerability research explores the differential susceptibilities and capacities of disaster-affected populations, whereas social equity analyses tend to focus on population disparities in the allocation of resources for hazard mitigation and disaster recovery. Interventions with an equity focus emphasize full and equal resource access for all people with unmet disaster needs.

Yet newer studies of inequity in disaster programs have documented troubling disparities in income, race, and home ownership among those who participate in flood buyout programs, are eligible for postdisaster loans, receive short-term recovery assistance [*Drakes et al.*, 2021], and have access to mental health services. For example, a recent analysis of federal flood buyouts found racial privilege to be infused at multiple program stages and geographic scales, resulting in resources that disproportionately benefit whiter and more urban counties and neighborhoods [*Elliott et al.*, 2020].

> Social equity has been far less integrated into the considerations of public agencies for hazard and disaster management. But this situation may be beginning to shift.

Investments in disaster risk reduction are largely prioritized on the basis of hazard modeling, historical impacts, and economic risk. Social equity, meanwhile, has been far less integrated into the considerations of public agencies for hazard and disaster management. But this situation may be beginning to shift. Following the adage of "what gets measured gets managed," social equity metrics are increasingly being inserted into disaster management.

At the national level, FEMA has developed options to increase the affordability of flood insurance [Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2018]. At the subnational scale, Puerto Rico has integrated social vulnerability into its CDBG Mitigation Action Plan, expanding its considerations of risk beyond only economic factors. At the local level, Harris County, Texas, has begun using social vulnerability indicators alongside traditional measures of flood risk to introduce equity into the prioritization of flood mitigation projects [*Harris County Flood Control District*, 2019].

Unfortunately, many existing measures of disaster equity fall short. They may be unidimensional, using single indicators such as income in places where underlying vulnerability processes suggest that a multidimensional measure like racialized poverty (Figure 2) would be more valid. And criteria presumed to be objective and neutral for determining resource allocation, such as economic loss and cost-benefit ratios, prioritize asset value over social equity. For example, following the 2008 flooding in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, cost-benefit criteria supported new flood protections for the city's central business district on the east side of the Cedar River but not for vulnerable populations and workforce housing on the west side.

Furthermore, many equity measures are aspatial or ahistorical, even though the roots of marginalization may lie in systemic and spatially explicit processes that originated long ago like redlining and urban renewal. More research is thus needed to understand which measures are most suitable for which social equity analyses.

Challenges for Disaster Equity Analysis

Across studies that quantify, map, and analyze social vulnerability to natural hazards, modelers have faced recurrent measurement challenges, many of which also apply in measuring disaster equity (Table 1). The first is clearly establishing the purpose of an equity analysis by defining characteristics such as the end user and intended use, the type of hazard, and the disaster stage (i.e., mitigation, response, or recovery). Analyses using generalized indicators like the CDC Social Vulnerability Index may be appropriate for identifying broad areas of concern, whereas more detailed analyses are ideal for high-stakes decisions about budget allocations and project prioritization.

Table 1. Major challenges in measuring social equity

Issue	Challenge for Equity Measures	Measurement Considerations
Analysis purpose	Aligning analysis with end use and users	Audience, intended intervention, hazard type, disaster phase
Equity mode	Assessing distributional versus procedural equity and individual versus compounding inequity	Measuring process equity, identifying appropriate compound metrics
Validity	Reflecting underlying processes of inequity	Connecting variable selection with vulnerability processes, choosing absolute versus relative impact measures
Scale	Linking spatial and temporal scales with underlying vulnerability processes	Data availability and acquisition costs
Robustness	Determining statistical reliability	Measurement error and sensitivity analysis

Selecting the relevant modes of equity for analysis is crucial. Is the primary interest to quantify disparities in the distribution of hazard impacts or procedural disparities in accessing resources? Is the focus on individual populations or on combinations of population characteristics? As social inequities often accrue to low-income households, analysts should consider assessing economic losses in both absolute and proportional terms.

Creating valid measures of equity requires not only statistical expertise but also a fundamental understanding of the underlying processes of social marginalization. This facilitates selection of optimal proxy indicators and their geographic scales. However, practical considerations like data availability and cost can lead to indicator selection that diverges from conceptual bases. For example, for disaster assistance received by households, an equity analysis should ideally be conducted at the household scale. Unfortunately, data describing some dimensions of inequity, like race, are rarely collected by disaster agencies, necessitating analysis using census data at larger geographic scales.

> A major challenge is to develop statistically robust measures and best practices for assessing disaster equity that strengthen the foundation for policy interventions

The final major challenge is to develop statistically robust measures and best practices for assessing disaster equity that strengthen the foundation for policy interventions. Doing so may require expanding current approaches to include sensitivity analyses to assess how choices of parameters (e.g., input variables, geographic scale) in building social vulnerability indicators affect the statistical stability of resulting measures, and how these measures correlate with observed disaster impacts like dislocation, assistance eligibility, and recovery time.

The stakes for improving our understanding of relationships among hazards, vulnerability, and social equity are high, as climate disasters from flooding, drought, tropical cyclones, and wildfire have been increasing in their frequency and destruction. By definition, sustainable solutions that empower communities to resist, recover from, and adapt to these threats must be not only economically viable and environmentally sound but also socially equitable. Well-designed measures of disaster equity are an important tool for quantifying disaster disparities, which is the first step toward dismantling them.

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Author Information

Eric Tate (eric-tate@uiowa.edu), University of Iowa, Iowa City; and Christopher Emrich, University of Central Florida, Orlando

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America's Sordid Legacy on Race and Disaster Recovery

Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, Christian E. Weller

Six months have passed since Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Category 4 storm destroyed houses and significant infrastructure, leaving mass devastation. Many Puerto Ricans—who are American citizens—remain without electricity, access to clean drinking water, employment, and even housing. While this storm's ferocity was nearly unprecedented, the Trump administration's reaction was predictable. People of color are frequently the victims of environmental disaster while their government neglects and underserves them time and again. Too often, public officials fail to make the necessary investments in preparedness and resilience solutions, then place savings and corporate profits over the health and well-being of residents of color. The global climate is changing, and extreme weather disasters will only increase in regularity. Unless the federal government prioritizes equity in preparedness and recovery policy, environmental hazards will continue to bring ruin, displacement, and death to communities of color.

Even in times without extreme weather disasters, the United States has an abysmal record when it comes to protecting people of color from environmental hazards stemming from dangerous industrial activity and harmful infrastructure. These failures undermine trust in government and persist even to this day.

For instance, in Louisiana, more than 150 industrial plants and refineries have been built along an 85-mile stretch that people of color predominately populate. Known as "Cancer Alley," this stretch is home to communities with high rates of cancer, illness, and death. While state officials have downplayed the risks and praised polluters for their commitment to health and safety, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports have indicated that some chemicals emitted from these plants are carcinogenic. Due to emissions, the five census tracts with the highest estimated cancer risks nationally are in Louisiana.

Meanwhile, in Flint, Michigan, officials diverted city water in an effort to save money but neglected to treat the water to prevent corrosion as it traveled through lead service lines. Their actions exposed more than 100,000 people to dangerous levels of lead. But, for months, the state ignored the predominantly black residents' concerns and reassured them the water was safe, even as state employees received "coolers of purified water." Many residents continue to use bottled water—for drinking, bathing, and even flushing their toilets—almost four years later.

Additionally, just last year, President Donald Trump signed an executive order reviving the Dakota Access oil pipeline, which jeopardizes the water resources of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. His blatant indifference to months of protests reemphasizes the administration's position that Big Oil profits take precedence over the health of native people.

While the failure to adequately respond to problems facing communities of color is ongoing, it's at its most blatant following natural disasters.

Even before Maria struck Puerto Rico, emergency personnel and public health officials understood that they faced a major crisis. But when President Trump arrived in San Juan two weeks later, he downplayed the disaster. So, while the president was throwing paper towels at the survivors of the

storm, there was no real effort to fix the approximately $100 billion in damage or help the families of the estimated 1,000 people who lost their lives. At a time when real policy solutions were needed, the president's misleading statements and actions undermined recovery and rebuilding efforts by diminishing the urgency of the situation.

Just weeks after the storm, Puerto Rico asked the U.S. Congress for $94 billion to fund recovery and rebuilding efforts. Since then, Congress has appropriated a mere $23 billion in direct aid, and the Trump administration has only spent a fraction of it. As a result, approximately 1 in 10 Americans in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands remain without power—and thousands still await permanent access to clean water and housing. These problems heighten the risk of respiratory illnesses, heart disease, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and myriad other health issues. Due to the slow response from Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have barely begun the long road to recovery. Now, as winter turns to spring, the people of Puerto Rico face the hottest and rainiest months of the year, as well as a looming hurricane season that threatens to worsen this nightmare scenario.

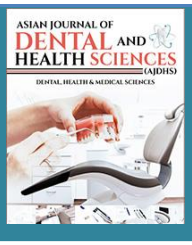
Hurricane Harvey dumped 27 trillion gallons of rain on Texas and Louisiana. Houston—which is now home to as many as 40,000 Katrina survivors—was inundated with water. Months after the storm dissipated, Hispanic and black residents were twice as likely as their white counterparts to report experiencing an income shock following the storm and then not getting the help they needed to recover. White residents were twice as likely as black residents to report that the Federal Emergency Management Agency had already approved their applications for relief.

However, inequitable disaster response transcends the Trump administration. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy tore through New York and New Jersey, killing 159 people and causing $70 billion in property damage. In much of the region, low-income people and people of color were hit the hardest. Yet, they did not receive equal attention or resources from government officials. In particular, New Jersey's policies and practices for recovery favored largely white homeowners at the expense of largely black and Hispanic renters. To this day, many buildings that house some of America's most vulnerable families remain unrepaired and unprepared for extreme weather in the future.

In 2005, under the George W. Bush administration, Hurricane Katrina resulted in nearly 2,000 fatalities and displaced an estimated 1 million residents. African American communities, especially in metropolitan New Orleans, were disproportionately affected by the storm and underserved by the federal government. Rather than receiving the resources they needed to recover, rebuild, and return to their homes, many were forced out of Louisiana completely. Ten years after Katrina, 90 percent of New Orleans residents had returned to their neighborhoods, yet just 37 percent of residents from the predominantly black Lower Ninth Ward had come home. Today, there are 92,000 fewer African Americans living in New Orleans compared with before Katrina.

Hurricane Maria—in addition to the past extreme weather events noted above—provides yet another chilling reminder of the consequences of systemic racism in America. Time and again, communities of color have been left behind. By 2043, these communities will constitute a majority of the U.S population. Therefore, policymakers must ensure they are fully equipped and prepared to withstand extreme weather fueled by climate change. Instead of employing dog-whistle rhetoric about how Katrina survivors are "a bunch of whiners" or how Puerto Ricans "want everything done for them," elected officials must promote equity; provide long-term aid to disaster-affected regions; and invest in resilient housing and infrastructure for a changing planet.

Connor Maxwell is the research associate for Progress 2050 at the Center for American Progress.



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Open Access Review Article

Mental Health and Psychosocial Effects of natural disaster on HIV Patients

*Emmanuel Ifeanyi Obeagu [1] and Getrude Uzoma Obeagu [2]

[1] *Department of Medical Laboratory Science, Kampala International University, Uganda,*

[2] *School of Nursing Science, Kampala International University, Uganda,*

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*Address for Correspondence:

Emmanuel Ifeanyi Obeagu, Department of Medical Laboratory Science, Kampala International University, Uganda, 0000-0002-4538-0161

Abstract

Natural disasters pose unique challenges to individuals living with HIV/AIDS, impacting their mental health and psychosocial well-being. This review explores the complex interplay between natural disasters and the mental health implications for HIV patients. Disruptions in healthcare infrastructure, medication access, and treatment continuity during disasters significantly affect disease management, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and trauma among this vulnerable population. Social support networks, crucial for those with HIV, often suffer severe setbacks, exacerbating mental health issues. The aftermath of disasters may induce long-term psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Understanding these multifaceted impacts is critical in developing tailored interventions and support systems to mitigate the mental health consequences experienced by individuals living with HIV in the wake of natural disasters. Further research and targeted interventions are essential to address the specific needs of this population and promote resilience in the face of such calamities.

Keywords: mental health, psychosocial effect, natural disaster, HIV, AIDS, emergency

Introduction

Natural disasters, ranging from hurricanes and earthquakes to floods and wildfires, present multifaceted challenges that extend beyond immediate physical devastation. Amidst the chaos and upheaval caused by these catastrophic events, individuals living with HIV/AIDS constitute a particularly vulnerable population facing unique mental health and psychosocial ramifications. The intersection of natural disasters and the complex landscape of HIV care introduces intricate challenges, disrupting access to crucial healthcare services, medication adherence, and psychosocial support networks.[1-11] The impact of natural disasters on the mental health of HIV patients is a topic of increasing concern and study.[12] Disruptions in healthcare infrastructure, exacerbated by the chaos following disasters, disrupt the continuity of care essential for managing HIV. This disruption not only amplifies the existing stressors but also triggers heightened levels of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty among individuals grappling with the dual burden of a chronic illness and the aftermath of a disaster.[13-19]

Moreover, the erosion of social support networks - a cornerstone of coping mechanisms for those living with HIV - during and after a natural disaster intensifies the psychosocial strain.[20] Loss of familial ties, community structures, or access to essential support services compounds the challenges faced by HIV-positive individuals, often leading to profound isolation and exacerbating mental health vulnerabilities.[21-28] While immediate relief efforts focus on addressing physical needs and infrastructural rehabilitation post-disaster, the long-term mental health implications for individuals living with HIV often remain overlooked. Understanding the intricate interplay between natural disasters and mental health outcomes in this population is pivotal in devising targeted interventions and support systems that cater to their specific needs. This paper aims to delve into the nuanced dynamics of how natural disasters impact the mental health and psychosocial well-being of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. By synthesizing existing literature and highlighting key challenges, it seeks to underscore the urgency of addressing the mental health repercussions of disasters among this vulnerable demographic. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the importance of tailored interventions and comprehensive support frameworks to mitigate the mental health burden experienced by HIV patients in the wake of natural disasters.

Disruption of Healthcare Services

Disruption of healthcare services due to natural disasters presents a critical challenge for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.[29] The aftermath of such calamities often leads to severe disruptions in healthcare infrastructure, hindering access to essential medical care, medications, and ongoing treatment for HIV-positive individuals.[30-34] Natural disasters, whether hurricanes, earthquakes, or floods, can damage healthcare facilities, compromise supply chains, and displace healthcare providers.[35] This disruption not only limits the

immediate availability of medical care but also impedes the continuity of treatment essential for managing HIV/AIDS. Interruptions in the supply of antiretroviral therapy (ART) and other necessary medications can have dire consequences, leading to treatment interruptions, viral resistance, disease progression, and increased morbidity among those living with HIV.[36-44]

Moreover, displaced populations or individuals forced to evacuate their homes due to disasters often encounter challenges in accessing healthcare services, including HIV testing, counseling, and follow-up care. This displacement can sever the established patient-provider relationships crucial for effective disease management, leaving individuals without critical medical guidance and support.[45-52] Furthermore, the overwhelming demands on healthcare systems in the aftermath of a natural disaster often divert resources away from HIV/AIDS care programs. The allocation of resources towards immediate emergency response efforts may result in a temporary or prolonged neglect of ongoing HIV treatment and care services, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of HIV-positive individuals.[53-60] Addressing the disruption of healthcare services during and after natural disasters necessitates proactive planning, resource allocation, and resilient healthcare systems. Ensuring the continuity of HIV/AIDS care amidst such crises requires pre-disaster planning, establishing contingency measures, and strengthening healthcare infrastructures to withstand the impact of disasters.[61-68] Efforts to enhance disaster preparedness within healthcare systems should prioritize strategies for maintaining the supply chain of medications, securing alternative care sites, training healthcare personnel in disaster response protocols, and fostering collaborations between disaster response agencies and HIV care providers. By mitigating the disruptions to healthcare services, it becomes possible to safeguard the well-being and health outcomes of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the face of natural disasters.

Stress and Psychological Impact

The experience of natural disasters significantly impacts the mental health and psychological well-being of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The combination of managing a chronic illness and enduring the traumatic aftermath of a disaster creates a complex and heightened psychological burden on this vulnerable population.[69-74] Natural disasters generate an array of stressors that exacerbate the existing challenges faced by HIV-positive individuals. The uncertainty surrounding access to essential medications, disrupted healthcare services, and the loss of stable living conditions can trigger acute stress, anxiety, and fear. The fear of treatment interruption, disease progression, or complications due to the unavailability of necessary medical care intensifies psychological distress among those managing HIV.[75-79] Moreover, the trauma experienced during disasters, including the loss of loved ones, displacement, property damage, or witnessing distressing events, compounds the psychological impact. Individuals living with HIV may be particularly susceptible to the mental health consequences of such traumas, leading to heightened levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety disorders. The psychological toll extends beyond the immediate aftermath, often resulting in prolonged mental health challenges. Chronic stressors stemming from the disruption of daily routines, loss of social support networks, and ongoing uncertainty regarding healthcare access contribute to sustained psychological distress among HIV-positive individuals affected by natural disasters. Addressing the stress and psychological impact necessitates comprehensive mental health support and interventions tailored to the unique needs of this population. Integrating mental health services into disaster response efforts and HIV care programs is crucial. Providing accessible and culturally sensitive mental health support, counseling services, and psychosocial interventions can aid in coping with trauma, reducing stress, and fostering resilience among individuals living with HIV in the wake of a natural disaster. Additionally, community-based support networks and peer-led interventions play a pivotal role in offering emotional support, sharing coping strategies, and reducing the isolation experienced by those affected. Empowering individuals with information, promoting self-care practices, and building adaptive coping mechanisms are essential components of mitigating the psychological impact of disasters on HIV-positive individuals, promoting mental well-being, and facilitating their recovery process.

Social Support Networks

Social support networks serve as a crucial lifeline for individuals living with HIV/AIDS, offering emotional, practical, and informational support.[80] However, the disruption caused by natural disasters profoundly impacts these support systems, leaving those affected by HIV more vulnerable and isolated. The aftermath of a natural disaster often leads to the disintegration or severe strain on established social support networks. Loss of family members, friends, or community ties, displacement, and relocation to unfamiliar environments can sever the vital connections that individuals living with HIV rely on for emotional support and solidarity. The breakdown of these networks intensifies feelings of loneliness, isolation, and helplessness among this already marginalized population.[80] Moreover, disruptions in communication infrastructure and community services hinder the ability to access support groups, counseling services, and peer networks that are instrumental in coping with the challenges of HIV/AIDS. Lack of access to these resources further compounds the sense of social isolation and exacerbates the psychological distress experienced by HIV-positive individuals.[80] Rebuilding and strengthening social support networks are pivotal in mitigating the psychosocial impact of natural disasters on individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Efforts aimed at community resilience and recovery should focus on reestablishing these networks, fostering community engagement, and providing platforms for mutual aid and peer support. Community-based organizations, NGOs, and healthcare providers play a critical role in facilitating the reconnection of affected individuals to support groups and community services. Creating safe spaces for dialogue, peer support initiatives, and support groups—whether in-person or through virtual platforms—can help individuals rebuild their social networks, share experiences, and access essential emotional support. Additionally, interventions that empower community members to become peer supporters or advocates within their communities can enhance social cohesion and resilience. Training programs aimed at equipping individuals with the skills to provide emotional support, disseminate accurate health information, and promote self-care practices foster a sense of empowerment and belonging among those affected by both HIV and natural disasters. By prioritizing the restoration and strengthening of social support networks, it becomes possible to alleviate the isolation and psychological distress experienced by individuals living with HIV in the aftermath of natural disasters, fostering resilience and promoting their overall well-being.

Medication Adherence and Disease Management

Natural disasters pose significant challenges to medication adherence and disease management among individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The disruptions caused by these catastrophic events often lead to barriers that compromise the continuity of care, medication adherence, and disease management for this vulnerable population.[81] The aftermath of a natural disaster can

result in the displacement of individuals, damage to healthcare facilities, and disruptions in supply chains, leading to difficulties in accessing essential medications, including antiretroviral therapy (ART). Displaced individuals may face challenges in locating healthcare providers or pharmacies that supply their prescribed medications, resulting in treatment interruptions or delays in accessing necessary drugs.[81]

Moreover, the chaos and upheaval following a disaster can create logistical obstacles that hinder adherence to strict medication schedules. Individuals may lose their medication supply, have medications damaged, or face difficulties in storing medications properly in emergency situations, impacting their ability to adhere to the prescribed treatment regimens. Disruptions in healthcare services, including the unavailability of healthcare providers, the loss of medical records, and the absence of regular follow-up appointments, further complicate disease management for those living with HIV. The lack of continuity in care can lead to challenges in monitoring the progression of the disease, addressing potential complications, and providing necessary medical guidance to patients.[81] Addressing medication adherence and disease management during and after natural disasters requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses both short-term and long-term strategies. Pre-disaster planning and preparedness efforts are crucial in ensuring the availability and accessibility of medications, establishing contingency plans for medication distribution, and securing alternative healthcare facilities in the event of healthcare infrastructure damage. Furthermore, educating and empowering individuals living with HIV/AIDS about emergency preparedness, including strategies for medication storage, retrieval, and adherence during disasters, can enhance their resilience. Providing emergency medication kits, promoting adherence reminder systems, and utilizing telemedicine or remote consultations where feasible can also support continued disease management amidst disruptions. Collaboration between healthcare providers, public health agencies, community organizations, and disaster response teams is essential in developing comprehensive strategies that prioritize the continuity of HIV/AIDS care during and after natural disasters.[80] By addressing the challenges related to medication adherence and disease management, it becomes possible to minimize the adverse effects on the health outcomes of individuals living with HIV in the face of such crises.

Long-term Mental Health Effects

The long-term mental health effects resulting from natural disasters among individuals living with HIV/AIDS can persist well beyond the immediate aftermath, posing substantial challenges to their overall well-being and quality of life.[82] The traumatic experiences associated with natural disasters can leave enduring psychological impacts on HIV-positive individuals. Prolonged exposure to stress, loss of social support networks, displacement, and uncertainty about healthcare access contribute to the development of persistent mental health conditions among this vulnerable population.[82]

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the long-term mental health effects commonly observed in individuals affected by both natural disasters and HIV/AIDS. Symptoms of PTSD, such as intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, and avoidance behaviors, may persist long after the disaster has occurred, significantly impairing daily functioning and exacerbating the existing challenges of managing a chronic illness like HIV.[83] Additionally, depression and anxiety disorders tend to linger as enduring mental health concerns among HIV-positive individuals affected by natural disasters. The ongoing stressors stemming from the disruption of routine, loss of stability, and difficulties in rebuilding life post-disaster contribute to a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms and anxiety disorders within this demographic.[83] These long-term mental health effects often lead to a complex interplay of physical and psychological health issues. Chronic stress and mental health disorders can impact immune function, potentially affecting HIV disease progression and treatment outcomes. Moreover, untreated mental health conditions can hinder medication adherence, further complicating disease management and increasing the risk of adverse health outcomes.[82] Addressing the long-term mental health effects necessitates sustained and tailored interventions that prioritize mental health support as an integral component of ongoing care for individuals living with HIV/AIDS post-disaster. Long-term mental health programs, counseling services, and access to psychiatric care should be integrated into HIV care settings to ensure continued support for those grappling with persistent psychological challenges. Psychoeducation, coping skills training, and trauma-focused interventions are essential in helping individuals build resilience, manage stress, and address lingering mental health issues. Moreover, fostering peer support networks and community-based initiatives that promote social connectedness and emotional support can aid in mitigating the long-term mental health effects, promoting recovery, and enhancing overall well-being among individuals living with HIV affected by natural disasters.

Recommendations and ways forward

Addressing the mental health and psychosocial effects of natural disasters on individuals living with HIV/AIDS requires a multi-dimensional approach that integrates various strategies and interventions. Develop comprehensive disaster preparedness plans within healthcare systems that specifically address the needs of individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Integrate strategies to ensure continuity of care, medication access, and psychosocial support during and after disasters. Establish contingency plans for the distribution of essential medications, including antiretroviral therapy (ART), during disasters. Ensure stockpiling, alternative distribution methods, and collaborations with local pharmacies or healthcare facilities to provide uninterrupted access to medications.

Integrate mental health services into routine HIV care settings. Provide access to counseling, psychotherapy, and support groups tailored to address trauma, stress, depression, and anxiety among HIV-positive individuals affected by disasters. Foster community resilience by empowering and engaging local communities in disaster response efforts. Develop peer support networks, community-based organizations, and initiatives that provide emotional support, information dissemination, and assistance in rebuilding social support structures. Conduct education and training programs aimed at raising awareness about disaster preparedness, stress management, and coping strategies among individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Empower them with knowledge and skills to navigate emergencies and mitigate mental health challenges. Forge partnerships between healthcare providers, disaster response agencies, governmental organizations, NGOs, and community groups. Collaborate to create a coordinated response system that addresses both immediate and long-term needs of HIV-positive individuals affected by disasters.

Utilize telemedicine and technology to facilitate remote healthcare consultations, medication monitoring, and psychosocial support services, especially in situations where physical access to healthcare facilities is disrupted. Encourage research initiatives to understand the specific mental health and psychosocial needs of individuals living with HIV/AIDS after disasters. Collect data to inform evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at better supporting this population.

Advocate for policies that prioritize the mental health needs of individuals living with HIV/AIDS in disaster response and

recovery efforts. Support policy changes that ensure equitable access to healthcare and mental health services in post-disaster scenarios.

Conclusion

The intersection of natural disasters and the lives of individuals living with HIV/AIDS presents complex challenges, significantly impacting their mental health and psychosocial well-being. The aftermath of disasters disrupts healthcare services, medication adherence, social support networks, and exacerbates stress, trauma, and long-term mental health conditions among this vulnerable population. Addressing the mental health and psychosocial effects of natural disasters on individuals living with HIV/AIDS requires concerted efforts at various levels. Integrating disaster preparedness plans within healthcare systems, ensuring uninterrupted access to medications, and strengthening mental health support services are crucial steps in mitigating the impact.

Community-based initiatives that rebuild social support networks, educate and empower individuals, and foster resilience within affected communities play a pivotal role. Collaboration between healthcare providers, disaster response agencies, policymakers, and community organizations are essential in creating a holistic response that meets the specific needs of this population. Sustained interventions focused on mental health, psychosocial support, and rebuilding resilience can contribute significantly to the recovery and well-being of individuals living with HIV/AIDS affected by natural disasters. By prioritizing these efforts, we can strive towards ensuring equitable access to healthcare, promoting mental well-being, and enhancing the overall quality of life for this vulnerable demographic in the wake of calamities. Ultimately, these actions are fundamental in creating a more supportive and resilient environment for individuals managing HIV/AIDS amidst the challenges posed by natural disasters.

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