

Ivy van Domselaar
September 12, 2023

Key Definitions of Disasters

An event that affects the function and stability of a community is a basic approach to defining a disaster. It is like other definitions in that it causes a disruption of services and is detrimental to a group of people. However, it fails to incorporate how the community is affected- whether it results in casualties, displacement, or lasting psychological effects and ignores the economic strain of rebuilding. The WHO's definition of disaster is the most encompassing of the effects on the public including how systems are impacted and highlights the response factor of disaster management.

The definition of medical disaster provides a different scope that not many people think of when a disaster occurs. Most people think of mass casualties and the destruction of homes and not how the medical system responds to an influx of people considering staffing, equipment, space, and supplies.

The public health disaster I believe is the most destructive is a volcanic eruption. Volcanic eruptions affect those in the surrounding area, emit pollutants, alter landscapes and affect global temperatures. Volcanic eruptions can also lead to other disasters such as mudslides, floods, damage to vegetation, wildfires and can lead to water contamination (1). Therefore, they have a tremendous impact not only on immediate populations but worldwide.

An acute incident refers to the time and expectation of a disaster, it is unassuming and happens quickly, which can result in unpreparedness. An example of an acute disaster is an earthquake. A slow onset/advanced warning allows for time and resources to be poured into affected areas before the disaster occurs in the specified area.

I believe the best indicators for public health impact are morbidity and mortality. This is reflective of the level of preparedness and resources that local and state agencies have. Communities most affected allow us to delve deeper into resource planning and allocation evaluation. The overall number of casualties and injuries is an excellent way to describe the public health impact, but getting more specific about who was affected the worst and what communities were more protected allows us to prioritize and plan more efficaciously in the future.

References

1. Key facts about volcanic eruptions. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. January 25, 2022. Accessed September 11, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/volcanoes/facts.html>