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## Differential and Long-term Effects of Disasters: The Need for Planning and Preparation

The psychosocial aspects of disasters have long been established as an area of research, service delivery, education and training, and policymaking and planning. Increasing attention has been given to the psychological impact on both victims and rescue workers in the emergency phase, in preparedness, in search and rescue operations, and in terms of immediate aftereffects. Yet, despite the fact that 45 years have elapsed since Lindemann [1] elucidated many of the principles of crisis intervention, following the tragedy of the Boston Coconut Grove fire, relatively little has been done to ameliorate the long-term psychosocial consequences of disasters. Even more important is that there is still precious little in the way of planning and preparation for disasters.

Disaster response remains largely a media-inspired and -"mediated" event. Prompted by media reports, people often rush to save lives in an airplane crash or famine. They may act generously and heroically; but without training or guidance, their response is not always helpful. For example, when a plane crashed recently in New York, people rushed to help—thereby clogging the roads and preventing trained personnel from reaching the scene quickly.

The effects of trauma resulting from a disaster, even when that disaster is of short duration, are not always short-lived. (And, of course, many disasters are far from brief in terms of time: witness the drought in the Sahel region of Africa, now in its tenth year.) Symptoms may appear immediately; but they may also develop, if not treated preventively, months or even years following the trauma.

A disaster is the impact of a natural or technological catastrophe on a specific population group, and its consequences are the product of that interaction. The destructive force will have different consequences depending on both its strength and the resistance of the affected community. Socioeconomic development is therefore at the core of disasters, and the International Decade for the Reduction of Natural Hazards recently launched by the United Nations has obvious social and economic components.

By the same token, disaster recovery is contingent upon community resources, and is not just a function of the initial impact. This is particularly the case in developing countries, where people are exposed to a harsher environment, are more vulnerable in

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