

# ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND TRAUMA

A significant proportion of people affected by natural disasters caused by climate change develop chronic psychological dysfunction including trauma, depression, and anxiety.

## Who is at risk for experiencing trauma?

children, pregnant and postpartum women, people with pre-existing mental illness, people who are economically disadvantaged, those who are homeless and first responders to the disaster.

Population growth and distribution, especially increased population density and urbanization, increases vulnerability to disasters.

The social and economic characteristics of a group may limit its members' abilities to protect themselves from harm, but the culture of social groups also plays an important role.

Poverty is a primary factor that affects how individuals perceive risk and how well they understand and respond to warnings.

Widespread poverty has played a critical role in increasing population vulnerability to many recent disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, the Indian Ocean tsunami

## Impacts of Extreme Weather

- o increased use of alcohol to cope with stress
- o increases in hospital and emergency room admissions for people with mental health or psychiatric conditions
- o an increase in suicide.

Communities with an aging population are supposed to become more vulnerable to natural hazards because older people usually suffer greater physical consequences

Certainly there are some individuals and groups who are highly and permanently vulnerable to many hazards, and to many consequences.

This includes the frail elderly; people living with chronic sensory, mobility, or cognitive impairments; and individuals dependent upon assistive devices or complex medical regimens in order to survive.