Ecological upheavals with special reference to desertification and predicting health impact.

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Abstract:

This paper begins with an introduction that touches on the ecological upheavals of earthquakes, floods, as well as other upheavals that result from sudden huge crowding of people in one place such as in refugee situations and situations of a famine disaster. The point is made that for sudden emergencies the health impact will very much depend on the nature of traumatic physical damage on the people's bodies and property as well as the capacity with which response is organised for assessment of damage and medical management. A number of texts are mentioned with respect to management in emergencies, including health, feeding and water and the point made that familiarity with these texts provides a starting point in responding to emergencies. These have put together information on how one goes about organising the response to save lives. Also mentioned are the consequences of the approach taken to providing food in these situations; whether it is through distribution of dry ration to be taken home, or whether one is dealing with shelter situations. In this introduction, land degradation/desertification is mentioned as being the largest and possibly the most devastating ecological upheaval. The rest of the paper goes on to address this ecological upheaval of land degradation/desertification. The magnitude of this upheaval is presented. The contribution of overcultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and irrigation to desertification are discussed. The health consequence of this process is then presented and finally, there is a discussion on the challenges that social scientists and health professionals could help to address in order to bring about some appropriate interventions that would contribute to arresting and possibly reversing the desertification process.