

The Impact of Climate Change on Persons with Disabilities in Developing Countries: A Scoping Review



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Introduction

Climate change stands as one of the most pressing global challenges of our time, affecting ecosystems, weather patterns, and human livelihoods. While the far-reaching consequences of climate change are well-documented, there exists a critical knowledge gap regarding its specific impact on persons with disabilities in developing countries.

Objective

This review aimed to identify the health impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities in developing countries as well as factors influencing the vulnerability and resilience of affected individuals to related natural disasters.

Methods

- PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Embase databases were searched.
- The studies included from 2005 to 2023 focusing on the keyword terms "persons with disabilities", "climate change" and "developing countries". Identified articles were screened for inclusion and qualifying articles received a full-text review.
- Of 463 articles identified, following the removal of six duplicates, 457 articles were screened; 412 were excluded.
- Of the remaining 45 full-text articles assessed for eligibility, 15 were selected and included in the review with 2 additional articles from a manual search.

Results

Impact on Physical Health:

- Increased susceptibility to climate-related health hazards.
- Exacerbation of pre-existing health conditions among persons with disabilities.
- Limited access to healthcare and rehabilitation services in the aftermath of climate-related events.

Impact on Mental Health:

- Elevated stress levels and psychological distress due to heightened environmental uncertainties.
- Disruption of mental health support systems in the wake of climate-induced disasters.
- Long-term mental health implications arising from displacement and loss of livelihoods.

Coping Strategies and Resilience to Natural Disasters:

- Government and community health workers play vital roles in informing PWDs about disaster preparedness.
- Special care considerations for cognitive disabilities during disasters, emphasizing technical support and basic needs
- The "Building Back Better" (BBB) strategy focuses on risk reduction and policy implementation for enhanced resilience.
- Telemedicine aids in providing immediate care for individuals with SCI during natural disasters.

Conclusion:

While there is increasing recognition of the psychosocial impacts of climate change-related natural disasters on persons with disabilities, there remain significant gaps in awareness of mental health needs and related service provision. Resolving these gaps is indispensable to achieving equitable climate change-related health outcomes in developing countries.