

# The impact of humanitarian crisis on the health and nutrition of older people



# Impact on Health...

- **Hurricane Katrina (2005):** huge mortality plus health of survivors aged 65 and above declined by 4 times
- **Other disasters:** Haiti, Sandy
- **Mobility and access:** reduced mobility due to pre existing disability, or wound, or weakness
- **Loss of aids**
- **Environment:** sensitivity to cold, high temperatures, dehydration
- **Isolation:** more risk of psychiatric disorders and death

# ...Impact on Health...

- **Communicable diseases:** lower immunity, more exposed to some infections:
  - Flu, respiratory chest infections
  - Malaria
  - Cholera (research on MSF data in Haiti and Zimbabwe)
- **Chronic non communicable diseases:**
  - Gap in treatment continuity, higher risk of complications
  - No treatment for chronic diseases in emergency kits

# ...Impact on Health

- **Mental Health**
  - Depression, withdrawal, apathy.
  - Decline in physical health; increased physical complaints; worsening of chronic illnesses.
  - Disorientation, confusion, and memory loss.
  - Appetite and sleep disturbances.
  - Reluctance to leave home; relocation adjustment problems
  - Multiple medication needs.
  - Despair, apathy, suspicion.
  - Anxiety with unfamiliar surroundings.

# Health Interventions...

- **Assess the health needs of older people**
  - Identify existing gaps
  - SADD
  - Involve older people in the needs assessment
- **Strengthen the health system so that it can cope with older people's health needs**
  - Health service delivery: age friendly
  - Human resources: training
  - Drugs and medical supplies
  - Health financing: free for older people

# ...Health Interventions...

- **Provide integrated essential health services to older people**
  - Prioritise health services: nutrition, surgery, geriatric care..
  - Non-communicable diseases
  - Mental health
- **Build partnerships and advocate for older people's right to health**

# Impact on Nutrition

- **Results of 2 nutrition surveys (Dadaab 2011 and Chad 2012)**
- **Risk factors**
  - Difficulties in chewing and swallowing, tooth loss and gum disease
  - Sensory loss and other physical problems, reduced mobility (looking for wood), difficulty in carrying bags or baskets
  - Social isolation, eating alone
  - Dehydration

# Problems in nutrition in emergencies

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- **Older people's nutritional status is not assessed**
- **Older people are not recognised as a vulnerable group**
- **Guidelines and policies do not include older people**
- **Health staff and NGOs are lacking expertise to treat older people malnutrition (severe)**



# Nutrition interventions

- **Assess the food situation of older people**
  - **General food ration**
  - **Availability of food in the household, in the market**
  - **Hunger scale, diet diversity**
- **Assess the nutritional status of older people:**
  - MUAC**
- **Treat micronutrient deficiencies**
  - **Vitamin B**
  - **Vitamin D and calcium**
  - **iron**

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**



Abdul, 63  
Badin flood, Pakistan, 2011