

Poverty and cholera in haiti

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Poverty and Cholera in Haiti Contribution of High Poverty Levels after Natural Disasters to the Spread of Cholera in Haiti Cholera is a disease that occurs when a person's intestines are affected by an acute infection, caused by eating food or drinking water that has been contaminated with the *Vibrio cholera* bacterium. Cholera has a short incubation period, ranging from a few hours of infection to five days, which when after maturity, the patient's body produces enterotoxin. The disease is characterized by vomiting, and painless watery diarrhoea that leads to severe dehydration and eventual death if not treated quickly. Mostly, the disease is spread by congestion, combined by poor hygienic conditions such as stagnant water, poor sanitation and infected food and drinking water. People living in highly congested places such as camps and towns are likely to contract the disease, due to its high contagious characteristic. After the earthquake that hit Haiti in the year 2010, many people were rendered homeless and moved to camps where they were crowded and congested. The living conditions in the camps were deplorable, with access to food and clean drinking water being a problem. The displaced persons were faced by a myriad of challenges, which included high levels of poverty, congestion and starvation. The problem was further worsened by the floods that later broke out in the country, increasing the chances of spread of contagious diseases. It was due to these factors that contributed to the fast spread of cholera when it broke out in the country, resulting into an epidemic within a short time. a number of challenges faced the government and the well-wishers who came to help control the spread of the disease. This paper will examine the effects high poverty levels in Haiti after the earthquake, and how this contributed to the spread of cholera in the country, latter giving a recommendation on the measures to be adopted

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to prevent future occurrence of similar situations. The earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January 2010 was described as the worst disaster to ever hit human beings in the modern history. Out of the disaster, 316, 000 people were displaced while another 3 million people were directly affected by the earthquake (Schuller, 2010). The outbreak of cholera worsened the situation since the government's structures had been crippled, with destruction of amenities such as hospitals, roads and communication channels. The government required to reconstruct infrastructure such as water, hygiene and sanitation in order to contain the disaster, which would boost the fight of cholera. However, this was not possible as there was not enough money and manpower, and thus it needed the intervention of the international community, support of the United Nations and international partners to help rebuild the infrastructure (Schuller, 2010). The country's poor water and sanitation infrastructure fueled the spread of the disease. Even before the earthquake, the infrastructure had not been properly laid down, and when the earthquake occurred, the situation became worse. Haiti, being a Third World country did have the finances to lay down a proper infrastructure to cater for water and sanitation. According to Schuller (2010), only 17 per cent of the total population in Haiti had access to clean water and proper sanitation in 2008. The remaining 83%, the biggest percentage of the population did not have access to clean water and sanitation, a situation that put them at a risk of contracting contagious diseases in case of an outbreak. The disease is believed to have originated in South Asia, brought to the country by peacekeepers that had gone to help victims of the earthquake. Due to the crippled government structures, visitors in the country were not tested for cholera and other chronic diseases. Their travelling papers were

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not routinely checked as the country needed their assistance more. This is the major reason why the disease found its way into the country, affecting a lot of people (n. a, 2010). During the epidemic, the country heavily relied on the international community to fight the disease. The government lacked the capacity to fight the disease, with its hospitals having been affected by the earthquake (n. a, 2010). Medicine was a problem, while doctors were scarce. Roads and communication lines had been affected, rendering it hard for people to travel comfortably in the country. The people could not afford to buy medication, leave alone food. The biggest task that faced the international community was how to feed the people and give them medicine. For the period that the people had been in camps, the economy was ground to a halt, since people could not work. The paper recommends various measures to be taken in order to avoid such disasters in future. The spread of the disease could have been contained in its early stages, and would not have resulted into a disaster, if the government of Haiti had invested in a strong and well elaborate water and sanitation infrastructure to avoid future incidences like the 2010 epidemic. Early report in the country had indicated that only 17% of the people in the country had access to sanitation and clean water. The earthquake worsened the situation, since it increased the number of people who did not have any access to clean water and sanitation. A strong infrastructure would help to eliminate the victims of the disease in places not affected by the earthquake. The cholera outbreak in the country ended in 2011, and an estimated 500, 000 people were infected by the disease. 7000 deaths were reported, with the disease spreading to other neighbouring countries. Although the earthquake was a major contributor to the outbreak and the spread of the disease in the

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country, the disaster was lying in the waiting, since a high percentage of the population did not have access to clean drinking water and sanitation. The earthquake acted as a catalyst to increase the spread of the disease. It can be concluded that, for Haiti to survive such epidemics in future, it should consider laying down a good infrastructure to cater for clean drinking water and sanitation. References Concern worldwide responds to Haiti cholera outbreak. (2010, Oct 22). PR Newswire. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/759599505?accountid=45049> Schuller, M. (2010, December 13). Haiti's Disaster after the Disaster: The IDP Camps and Cholera, The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance. Retrieved from <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/869>