

Establishing Evaluation Criteria for Local Public Health Emergency Drills

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State and local public health agencies have participated actively in improving emergency responses across the United States. While this largely has been a function of the attention to the potential for deliberately caused events such as bioterrorism, the improved response infrastructure is of value for any type of emergency in which there is a potential public health threat, such as contamination of the drinking water supply or rapid spread of an infectious agent.

The generic materials for developing and evaluating emergency drills and exercises provide no specific guidance on the sequence, rapidity, or composition of an effective public health response. Using a Delphi technique and a panel of 38 public health and emergency response experts, a menu of specific criteria for the public health component of an emergency response was developed and subjected to preliminary testing in local public health agencies. Selection of criteria from the menu depends on the scenario and objectives for the drill or exercise; once selected, these criteria guide the development of the observer checklists and other evaluation documents, and can be used to focus improvement plans following the experience.

Keywords: criteria; emergency drills; evaluation; public health

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Decisions in Complex Emergencies: Methodology Towards Sufficient Valued Evidence

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Introduction: The field of humanitarian nutrition programs in complex emergencies is becoming increasingly evidence-based, which is defined as: “the informed, explicit, and judicious use of evidence that has been derived from any of a variety of science and social science research and evaluation methods.” The benchmark of systematic literature review (SLR) for peer-reviewed publication is that it be comprehensive, transparent, reproducible, and have minimum bias. In this field, as with most complex situations, there is a need for including gray literature through a rigorous, systematic, gray literature review (SGLR) methodology, which takes into account these values, including comprehensiveness (within defined inclusion criteria), and the representativeness and quality of the evidence.

Methods: A robust SLR was undertaken to explore the values of the evidence from peer-reviewed publications in the area of complex emergencies. Pilots for a SGLR that incorporated the values of a gold standard SLR were undertaken to investigate and prioritize the challenges for the development of the SGLR methodology, and to explore the advantages and disadvantages of reviewing gray literature. A concept of a representative pyramid of different levels of stakeholders was developed through the SLR

and web searching. Current quality assessment tools relevant to the use of gray literature were explored.

Results: Two main issues were highlighted by the SLR findings, which are particularly relevant for complex emergencies: (1) publication bias; and (2) lack of comprehensiveness—insufficient evidence on process and context for policy decisions and implementation. The main advantage, which the SGLR highlighted, was the breadth of gray evidence containing process information for policy-makers and the local information for planning and implementation. The main issues, which must be considered in order to achieve this project’s objectives, were: (1) multiple priorities and stakeholders; (2) the mobility of researchers working in complex emergencies; and (3) systematically filtering Internet-based gray literature even through gray databases. Frameworks for the quality assessment of the best available literature should include lower hierarchy designs and qualitative and descriptive studies prevalent in recent literature.

However, there is a need for consensus on the appropriateness and relevance to the available gray literature in complex emergencies, and, as such, requires an agreed evaluation theoretical basis.

Conclusion: To tackle the problems and to mirror the rigorousness and validity of a standard SLR, a SGLR framework is now being advanced through a working partnership between academia and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The identification of such valuable gray literature can be time consuming and difficult, because such a framework aims to make the identification feasible for the evidence required for policy and implementation decisions required in complex situations.

Keywords: complex emergencies; comprehensive; evidence; literature review; methodology; publication bias

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Assessing Adult Malnutrition during Complex Emergencies

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Introduction: There currently is no agreed method for assessing the nutritional status of adults during complex emergencies as well as a method that takes into consideration both individual and emergency situation context variables. This study is based on a partnership between academia and humanitarian, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (Working Group on Nutrition in Emergencies) to ensure the robustness of methodology being used and the applicability of findings resulting from their use in the field.

Methods: A systematic literature review was conducted to investigate various methods used, both within and outside complex emergencies, which currently are used to assess the nutritional status of adults. The “usefulness” of the methods used outside of complex emergencies was assessed for applicability to field nutritional programs within complex emergencies. Next, a focus group was conducted to explore and analyze currently available adult nutrition routine data and reports. A questionnaire was developed and