INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Combating Infectious Diseases in Low-Resource Communities: Socioeconomic, Environmental, Climate Change and Gender-Based Strategies

IDRIS ZUBAIRU SADIQ[1]
[1] Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Life Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria

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Summary

Infectious diseases continue to pose a significant challenge to global health, particularly within resource-limited communities, where socioeconomic and environmental health determinants amplify their prevalence and impact. This letter to editor examines comprehensive strategies aimed at alleviating the burden of communicable diseases by addressing essential factors such as water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), housing conditions, climate change, gender equity, sociocultural influences, and poverty. Common infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, HIV/AIDS, cholera, and dengue fever are significantly influenced by poor sanitation, inadequate housing, climate change, and gender disparities. Key interventions, including enhancing access to clean water, promoting sufficient sanitation, improving housing quality, and fostering climate resilience, are identified as vital measures to prevent disease transmission. Moreover, empowering women through equitable healthcare and education, implementing culturally responsive health campaigns, and engaging community members in preventive actions are distinctly highlighted. Strategies for poverty alleviation, encompassing economic development and social protection initiatives, play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of disease and poverty. This letter highlights the need for a multidisciplinary strategy and cross-sector collaboration to tackle the complex relations of these health determinants, promoting health equity and improving the well-being of vulnerable populations.

Dear Editor,

Communicable diseases continue to adversely impact resource-constrained communities, presenting a significant global health challenge. This persistent issue is linked to a complex of overlapping determinants of health, including the availability of safe drinking water and basic sanitation, housing conditions, climate change risks, gender inequity, sociocultural factors, and poverty [1]. Safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is crucial for health and well-being [2]. Ensuring access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is fundamental to preventing the spread of infectious diseases (Tab. I). Installing water purification systems, sewage treatment facilities, and the promotion of hygiene practices can significantly reduce disease transmission in vulnerable communities [3].

Poor housing conditions, such as overcrowding and inadequate ventilation, facilitate the spread of communicable diseases. Initiatives to improve housing quality, provide adequate living space, and ensure proper ventilation can mitigate the risk of disease outbreaks. Research shows that infectious disease transmission can be reduced by improving housing conditions, including timely and adequate repairs and maintenance, and creating an environment that supports healthy behaviors [4]. Despite the low quality of evidence, the direction and consistency of effects indicate that housing is an important risk factor for malaria. Investment in such research and housing programs should be considered a natural component of malaria control efforts and a close complement to Integrated Vector Management and WASH as part of long-term, sustainable development [5]. A study found that unacceptable housing conditions in Indian urban slums significantly negatively impact the health of residents, particularly under-five children [6].

Climate change exacerbates the spread of infectious diseases by altering the habitats of vectors such as mosquitoes and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events. Climate resilience strategies, including early warning systems and environmental management, are crucial in mitigating these impacts. Addressing climate change is crucial for preventing the spread of infectious diseases, as highlighted in various research papers. Climate change influences the epidemiology of diseases through factors like changes in climatic variables, vector patterns, and pathogen adaptation [7]. The impact of climate change on infectious diseases, especially in Asia, is significant due to increasing temperatures, changes in rainfall, and alterations in vector ecology [8]. Climate change has a profound impact on the spread of infectious diseases endemic to Africa for example Ebola, malaria, dengue fever, and cholera are largely due to the continent's varied ecosystems [9]. Effective strategies to combat this global health crisis include utilizing

Tab. I. Infectious diseases, Socioeconomic and Environmental Determinants of health.

Disease	Causes	Water & Sanitation	Housing Conditions	Climate Change	Gender Equity	Sociocultural Factors
Tuberculosis	• Mycobacterium tuberculosis • Overcrowding • Poor ventilation	Improved sanitation	Adequate ventilation	Climate resilience	Gender-sensitive care	Culturally tailored education
Malaria	• Plasmodium parasites • Stagnant water • Mosquito bites	Mosquito control	Improved housing	Vector control programs	Mosquito net access	Community prevention efforts
HIV/AIDS	• HIV • Unsafe sex • Contaminated needles	Safe water access	Safe living conditions	Climate-resilient care	Gender-sensitive interventions	Culturally sensitive education
Cholera	• Vibrio cholera • Contaminated water • Poor hygiene	Safe drinking water	Sanitary living conditions	Rapid outbreak response	Equal access to health info	Community health education
Dengue Fever	• Dengue virus • Mosquito bites	Eliminate stagnant water	Protective housing	Early warning systems	Equal access to preventive care	Community awareness campaigns
Influenza	• Influenza virus • Airborne transmission • Seasonal variations	Clean water access	Well-ventilated homes	Climate-adaptive healthcare	Gender-sensitive health services	Health education
Hepatitis A	• Hepatitis A virus • Contaminated food/water • Poor sanitation	Improved sanitation	Hygienic living conditions	Disaster preparedness	Gender equity in health access	Public health education
Hepatitis B	• Hepatitis B virus • Bloodborne • Unsafe medical procedures	Safe water access	Safe housing	Resilient healthcare facilities	Equitable access to vaccines	Awareness campaigns
Measles	• Measles virus • Lack of vaccination	Safe water supply	Clean living conditions	Immunization programs	Gender-equitable healthcare	Community-based vaccination drives
Mumps	• Mumps virus • Direct contact • Respiratory droplets	Clean water access	Hygienic housing	Climate-adaptive healthcare	Equitable access to vaccines	Public health awareness
Rubella	• Rubella virus • Inadequate vaccination	Safe drinking water	Sanitary living conditions	Climate resilience	Gender-sensitive vaccination	Health education campaigns
Polio	• Poliovirus • Contaminated food/water	Improved sanitation	Hygienic living environments	Climate-resilient health systems	Gender equity in health services	Community vaccination campaigns
Typhoid Fever	• Salmonella Typhi • Contaminated food • Poor sanitation	Safe water access	Hygienic housing	Disaster preparedness	Equal access to healthcare	Community health education
Leptospirosis	• Leptospira bacteria • Contaminated water	Clean water access	Improved housing	Flood management	Gender-sensitive interventions	Public health education
Schistosomiasis	• Schistosoma parasites • Contaminated water contact	Safe water supply	Hygienic living conditions	Environmental management	Gender-sensitive healthcare	Community awareness campaigns
Zika Virus	• Zika virus • Mosquito bites • Tropical climate	Mosquito control	Protective housing	Vector control programs	Equitable access to preventive care	Community education
Yellow Fever	• Yellow fever virus • Mosquito bites	Eliminate stagnant water	Protective housing	Early warning systems	Equal access to vaccination	Community awareness campaigns
Ebola	• Ebola virus • Contact with infected fluids	Safe drinking water	Isolation facilities	Disaster preparedness	Gender-sensitive interventions	Public health education
SARS	• SARS coronavirus • Airborne transmission • Close contact	Improved sanitation	Safe housing	Climate-resilient healthcare	Equitable access to healthcare	Public health awareness
MERS	• MERS coronavirus • Camel contact • Respiratory droplets	Safe water access	Safe housing	Climate resilience	Gender-sensitive health services	Public health education

vaccines and vaccination as a mitigation measure against climate change-related health effects [10]. Collaborative efforts, strategic intersectoral partnerships, and the implementation of adaptation and mitigation measures are essential to address the complex interactions between climate change and infectious diseases.

Gender inequity can hinder access to healthcare and education, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Empowering women through education, economic opportunities, and equitable healthcare access is vital in reducing the burden of infectious diseases (Tab. I). Gender disparities affect vulnerability, exposure risk, treatment, and response to emerging infectious diseases like SARS-CoV-2, highlight the need for inclusive epidemic and pandemic plans that address all sex and gender factors [11]. Gender inequities persist in various fields, including Infectious Diseases, with barriers such as gender bias, work-life balance challenges, and differences in negotiation strategies hindering women's academic advancement in medicine. Recognizing the impact of gender inequity during infectious disease outbreaks is crucial, particularly in regions such as Africa, where women often face a disproportionate burden. To ensure effective prevention and management, it is essential to adopt interdisciplinary approaches that account for gender-based differences in disease causes and patterns, enhancing patient care and guiding meaningful healthcare reforms.

Sociocultural practices and beliefs can influence health behaviors and disease outcomes. Culturally sensitive health education campaigns and community engagement initiatives are essential in promoting preventive measures and encouraging timely healthcare seeking behavior. Sociocultural factors play a crucial role in preventing infectious diseases by influencing transmission dynamics and shaping public health interventions. Research highlights the importance of considering cultural factors, social norms, and social support in disease spread [12]. Additionally, the involvement of families and cultural approaches are vital in controlling and preventing diseases like Covid-19, emphasizing the importance of gender, education, marriage, and occupation in prevention efforts [13].

Poverty is a critical determinant of health, limiting access to nutritious food, healthcare, and clean-living environments. Comprehensive poverty alleviation strategies, including economic development, social protection programs, and improved access to healthcare services, are necessary to break the cycle of disease and poverty [14]. Infectious diseases, including COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, acute hepatitis, dengue, rabies, and Ebola, disproportionately affect needy communities due to poor living conditions and lack of access to healthcare, clean water, and sanitation [15] (Tab. I). Urban populations in low- and middle-income countries face increase exposure to vector-borne diseases due to factors like poverty, mobility, and climate change, necessitating evidence-based interventions and public health policies to address these threats effectively [16]. Through addressing poverty through improved access to resources, healthcare, and sanitation, the burden of infectious diseases can be significantly reduced, leading to better health outcomes and overall well-being for vulnerable populations.

Conclusion

Addressing the global burden of infectious diseases requires a holistic approach that tackles the socioeconomic and environmental determinants of health. Investing in water and sanitation infrastructure, improving housing conditions, addressing climate change, promoting gender equity, recognizing sociocultural factors, and alleviating poverty can make significant strides towards reducing the impact of communicable diseases on resource-constrained communities.

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Correspondence: Idris Zubairu Sadiq, Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Life Sciences, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria. E-mail: idrisubalarabe2010@gmail.com.

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