

War and public health vulnerabilities: Understanding long-term consequences

Chad M Briggs, Ph.D.

Asst Professor International Relations & Environmental Risk
Lehigh University, Pennsylvania USA

Associate Fellow, Institute for Environmental Security
The Hague/Brussels



LEHIGH UNIVERSITY.



Background to research

- Policy gaps between disaster response and long-term development
- Contradictions in International Relations definitions of *security*
- Unique nature of risks from violent conflict
- Difficulty in defining vulnerability
- Public health as metric




Why have political leaders/ academics ignored the issues?

- Influence of Cold War thinking and game theory
 - RAND, Wohlstetter
- Focus on the state as guarantor of security
- North American political science based on econometric models



Research focus

- What have been the environmental impacts of violent conflicts/war? (Direct)
- How have vulnerability patterns combined with environmental changes?
- Related to EU accession targets



Environmental consequences of conflict

- Natural resources, toxics
- Munitions (landmines, unexploded ordinance, DU)
- Demographic shifts
- Damage to infrastructure
- Built environment



Long-term considerations

- Direct morbidity and mortality
- Loss of social capital and support networks
- PTSD and mental-health related conditions
- Epigenetic influences on development- inheritable harm?

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY.



Policy focus

- Swedish SIDA reconstruction projects
- Assessment of effectiveness
- Focus on water-related infrastructure and health effects in BiH
- Additional epidemiological qualitative case studies



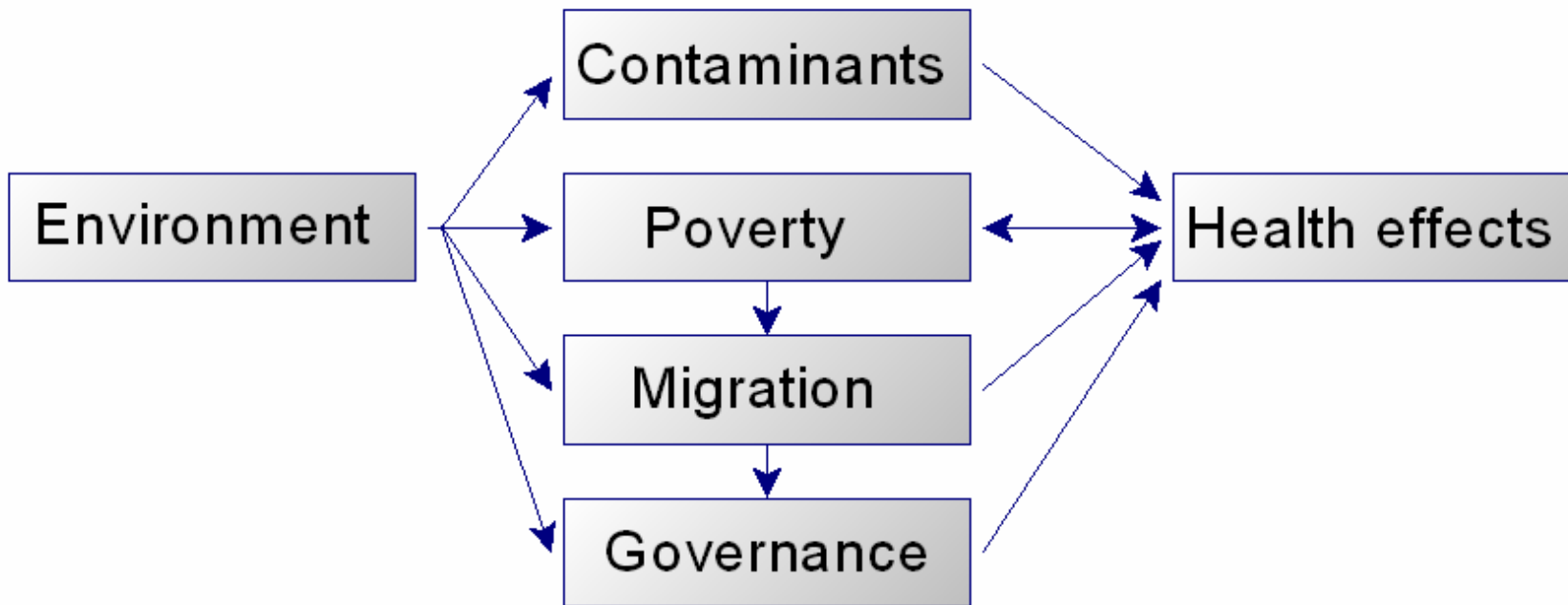
Definition of vulnerable groups

- Choice of unit of analysis
 - Ethnic groups
 - Geographical focus
 - Gender
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Age
- What does vulnerability mean?



Vulnerability definitions

- Resilience
 - Ability to return to a previous state of being or livelihood
- Sensitivity
 - Extent to which outside pressures change livelihood
- Policies should aim for high resilience and low sensitivity



Multi-causal dimensions of environment




Photo source: CNN





Vulnerability in conflict

- Identification of vulnerable groups
 - Often women, children, minorities
- Resiliency networks
 - Those practices or resources that allow resiliency
 - These are often targeted in conflicts, not merely taxed



Vulnerability as a political concept

- Constellation of factors
 - Does perception count?
- Relative measure
 - Relative to whom/what?
- Legitimizes intervention
- Requires historical analysis
 - How did this happen?



Environmental justice

- Attribution and responsibility
- Difference between procedural justice and restorative/retributive justice
- Language difficulties
- Causality
 - Lack of understanding

Dangers of studying risk

- Research ethics and neutrality in conflict zones
- Loss of agency among residents (non-attributable anxiety)
 - Trauma/stress
 - Generational
- When is it risk versus danger?
- Assumption of rationality

What would it take to reestablish 'control'?



- Definition of vulnerable group may automatically translate to attribution against the outgroup
- Risks can be controlled via this outgroup

LEHIGH UNIVERSITY.



Examples from Kosovo

- Much political control shifted from Serbs to Albanians
- Control of infrastructure (such as water) remained with Serbs
- Stories of poisoned children, riots and continued violence
- Attribution followed ingroup/outgroup patterns