



# Defining Vulnerable Populations

## VULNERABILITY IS DEFINED AS..

the degree to which a population or individual is susceptible to harm or neglect influenced by both inherent (e.g., age, sex, race) and acquired (e.g., health behaviors, environment, sociocultural behaviors) risk factors<sup>2</sup>. Risk factors contribute to the vulnerability of an individual or population<sup>2</sup>. Inherent and acquired elements dynamically interact and influence the health outcomes of a person or group<sup>2</sup>.

## VULNERABLE POPULATIONS ARE...

groups and communities at a higher **risk** for **poor physical, psychological, or social health**<sup>1-3</sup>. These **barriers** are further intensified due to **social, economic, political, and environmental components**. **Limitations** due to **illness or disability** can also influence the **vulnerability of a population**<sup>5</sup>.



### 01 THOSE WITH PHYSICAL HEALTH NEEDS<sup>1-3</sup>

include:

- mothers and infants
- the elderly
- chronically ill or groups living with physical disabilities
- populations living with HIV/AIDS



### 02 THOSE WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH NEEDS<sup>1-3</sup>

include:

- groups living with mental illness or disabilities
- substance users
- the suicide or homicide prone



### 03 THOSE WITH SOCIAL HEALTH NEEDS<sup>1-3</sup>

include:

- families experiencing domestic violence
- homeless populations
- immigrants and refugees
- populations with low literacy rates



### 04 THOSE WITH BARRIERS OR LIMITATIONS<sup>1-3,5</sup>

include:

- racial, ethnic, sexual, or gender minorities
- rural residents with limited access to healthcare services
- economically disadvantaged
- the uninsured





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## RESOURCES

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network:  
[www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/topics/PopulationsVulnerabilities.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/topics/PopulationsVulnerabilities.htm)

## REFERENCES

1. Aday, L.A. (2002). At Risk in America: The Health and Health Care Needs of Vulnerable Populations in the United States (2. Aufl., Vol. 13). Jossey-Bass.
2. Havrilla, E. (2017). Defining Vulnerability. *Madridge Journal of Nursing*, 2(1), 63–68. <https://doi.org/10.18689/mjn-1000111>
3. Vulnerable populations: who are they? (2006). *The American Journal of Managed Care*, 12(13 Suppl), S348–S352.
4. Vulnerable populations. Glossary of Essential Health Equity Terms. National Collaboration Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH): <https://nccdhd.ca/glossary/entry/vulnerable-populations>
5. Wisner, B., Adams, J. & World Health Organization. (2002). *Environmental health in emergencies and disasters: a practical guide* / edited by B. Wisner, J. Adams. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42561>

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