

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



Definition

Vulnerability refers to 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**².

Vulnerable Populations are groups and communities at a higher risk for **poor physical, psychological, or social health**¹⁻³. 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 population⁵.

Why are they Vulnerable?


Barriers and **Limitations** impact the vulnerability of a group or individual^{1,5}. Both can involve inherent or extrinsic factors².

Inherent risk factors are innate, meaning individuals are born with these characteristics². Examples include sex, race or ethnicity, age, and genetics^{1-3,5}.

Acquired risk factors are extrinsic or exposure-related². Examples include socioeconomic status, health behaviors, physical surroundings, and sociocultural settings^{1-3,5}.



Who are Vulnerable Populations?



Minority Groups

- Racial or Ethnic minorities
- Sexual or Gender minorities (LGBTQIA+)



Economically Disadvantaged

- Homeless populations
- Low-income populations
- The uninsured



Chronically Ill or Groups Living with Disabilities

- Populations living with HIV/AIDS
- Populations living with chronic mental health disorders
- Substance users



The Elderly, Children, and Mothers



Immigrants

- Migrants
- Refugees



Rural Residents

- Limited access to healthcare services due to residence⁵



Resources:

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network:
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://nccdh.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>

About the Texas Epidemic Public Health Institute (TEPHI)

TEPHI is a new state agency dedicated to preparing Texas for the next infectious disease outbreak by strengthening the capacity and resiliency of all Texas communities to respond to future epidemics. Through our work, we aim to serve as a national model of regional epidemic preparedness and lay the groundwork for a coordinated and collaborative response.

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