Global Warming, Health Disparities, and Structural Racism

How did the recent waves of anti-racism protesting emerge from a pandemic and global tsunami? Hundreds of thousands of people grappled with how the moment could be captured and turned into a long-term vision of a more equitable society. Of course, there is profound similarity here to the AIDS crisis, which also emerged out of the trauma of a new pandemic and created new public health priorities. 

Although climate change has been considered a global pandemic, few people have considered the role of structural racism and its contribution to health disparities.

One way to understand how structural racism impacts health is to focus on a few communities that have been impacted by particular environmental hazards. For example, Air pollution, for example, is particularly high in many communities of color, which may be located near factories or waste incinerators. In these communities, the air is filled with toxic fumes, and the air quality is often below national standards. In addition, the food available in these communities may be limited to fast food and processed foods, which are often high in fat and sugar.

However, it has also provided a glimpse of what collective, aggressive action can accomplish in short order. In a nod to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, where non-violent protests and marches inspired people to act, the pandemic, with its possible reflection of the future, has captured the attention of people everywhere.

By recognizing that global warming contributes to the emergence of pandemics, and that both of these challenges are interrelated. Fortunately, they also share common solutions.

The health impacts of extreme heatwaves, hurricanes and other weather related disasters, are often more severe in communities of color. This is due to a combination of factors, including economic disadvantages and the lack of access to health care.

Climate Health Links

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