

National Center for Disaster Preparedness

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

WEBINAR
PROCEEDINGS



CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

At the Crossroads of Poverty and Disaster

JULY 2020

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Acknowledgments

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

This webinar series was a collaboration between the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, The Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico, and the Puerto Rico Children & Youth Task Force. A collaboration fostered through the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative funded by GSK:

Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) & RCRC Principal Investigator: Jeff Schlegelmilch

Executive Director, Youth Development Institute (IDJ): Amanda Rivera

Webinar Planning Team: Antonia Samur, Jonathan Sury, Yesenia Delgado, Allison Stewart

Webinar Moderators: Antonia Samur, Yesenia Delgado

Webinar Translators: Juan Segarra and Melissa Rexach of RITA Translation Services

Webinar Proceedings Compilation Team: Zackery White, Allison Stewart

Webinar Proceedings Translator: Adriana Santiago

RCRC Initiative: <https://ncdp.columbia.edu/rcrc> || **RCRC Toolbox:** <https://rcrctoolbox.org>

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National Center for Disaster Preparedness

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The National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), Earth Institute, Columbia University is a national leader in efforts to include children in disaster preparedness planning with research focusing on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, with a special interest in vulnerable populations. Many of NCDP’s recovery projects have focused on the health and mental health needs of children who have been affected by large-scale disasters including longitudinal research on populations affected by Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy, and the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.



The Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico (Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud) is a non-profit institution dedicated to promoting research and public policies aimed at strengthening the economic security of families with children and youth, with the ultimate goal of drastically reducing child poverty on the island. The Youth Development Institute focuses on three areas of public policy: strengthening the economic security of families with children and youth; ensuring adequate and effective investments in children and youth; and promoting the needs of children and youth as a priority in the recovery process from Hurricane Maria. They aim for all children in Puerto Rico to have the opportunities that allow them to get out of poverty and live in homes with economic security.



The Puerto Rico Children & Youth Task Force is a working group that is currently led by the Institute for Youth Development. The group was formed in 2017 with the support of Save the Children, the federal agency Administration for Children and Families, and FEMA with the purpose of meeting the immediate needs of children and youth after Hurricane Maria. Initially, it served to share information and coordinate response efforts during the emergency period.

Executive Summary

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

On January 20, 2020, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Preparedness (CDC) confirmed the first United States case of COVID-19, the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, in Snohomish County, Washington. In only five short months, cases of COVID-19 have been reported across all fifty U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and US Virgin Islands, ballooning to over 2.2 million confirmed cases with an unprecedented one hundred and twenty thousand lives already lost.

COVID-19, first identified in 2019, was officially declared a global pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020 and, with the implementation of unprecedented travel and movement restrictions, underprepared national response systems are struggling to recognize and support the populations most dramatically affected by the pandemic. During this time of uncertainty, we here at the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) are focused on ensuring a rapid, evidence-based response to the COVID-19 outbreak while working to protect the physical and mental well-being of those that are most vulnerable.

The unprecedented challenges as a result of COVID-19 will directly and indirectly affect this generation's children for years to come. The short and long-term health and economic stressors will affect the systems which help raise, educate, and nurture children which will set back countless families who already may be struggling to make ends meet. The Resilient Children/ Resilient Communities Initiative aimed to provide actionable information through a series of webinars directed to child-serving institutions, policymakers, and other child advocates to help inform response and recovery activities in Puerto Rico. NCDP, in collaboration with the Institute for Youth Development (IDJ) and the Puerto Rico Children and Youth Task Force (CYTF), hosted a series of discussions focused on the impacts of COVID-19 as a public health emergency and how the children of Puerto Rico may be affected by the compounding effects of poverty and prior disaster exposure. While we are still faced with uncertainty on how the pandemic will progress and the extent of the aftershocks, we are aware that the pandemic will have an unprecedented impact on this generation's children.

The "Children of Puerto Rico and COVID-19: At the Crossroads of Poverty and Disaster" webinar series started on 8 April 2020 and, after seven sessions with a total of 12.5 hours of material, concluded on 20 May 2020. All sessions were translated in real time, for English and Spanish, and were well attended:

- 1,659 individuals attended at least one session
- 483 (29.11%) individuals attended 3 or more sessions

So, in order to provide an informative and effective webinar, the first three sessions grounded the conversation with specifics about COVID-19 and the expected areas of high vulnerability, an analysis of new and existing policies and their consequential effects and gaps, and the organizational response and assumed responsibilities. The subsequent sessions delved deeper into the previously identified areas of increased vulnerability: educational continuity, domestic violence and child abuse, mental health, and housing stability. Through this webinar series, experts from over 15 different participating organizations, with a variety of backgrounds, provided valuable information on individual, family, and community-levels, which inform recommendations to mitigate adverse impacts of the pandemic:

Session #1: Children & Pandemics: Response in the Context of Puerto Rico

April 8, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/405621621>

- The COVID-19 pandemic is having unprecedented effects on health and economic systems and will continue to greatly affect this generation's children in the short and long-term. Policy recommendations for addressing the pandemic's various impacts should be the product of studying the problem, making the most accurate projections, and evaluating any gaps in the existing policy. Policy making is collaborative. If there is already a satisfactory policy or policy proposal, organizations should focus on supporting the existing policy rather than drafting their own.

Executive Summary

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- Puerto Rico is particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic due to high rates of child poverty, slowed recovery from past disasters including Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and a history of interruptions to educational continuity due to these events. At the same time, the series of disasters in Puerto Rico has led to more opportunities and greater capacity for lasting collaboration among child-serving organizations.
- Listening to and acting upon the voices of child-serving institutions and the communities at-large should be actively integrated into public policy discussions at the federal, state, and local levels. For example, a community's definition of a business as "essential" or "non-essential" may vary, as some communities may rely on services that others deem "non-essential."
- Special attention should be placed on supporting community-based organizations that provide direct services for vulnerable populations or organizations that advocate for and lobby for their respective consideration in policies. All organizations are capable of, and should when possible, act as advocates for the needs of children even when they are not advocacy-focused organizations.

Session #2: Policy implications of COVID-19: Puerto Rico's Children, Youth, and Their Families

April 15, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/408244992>

- Children are the hidden victims of this crisis. At the time of this session the data was not conclusive of a severe direct impact of the coronavirus on children's health. But while there are still many unknowns with how the virus affects children, the pandemic is having extensive direct and indirect impacts on children including: greater risk of poverty, food insecurity, abuse, educational disruption, familial loss, and other disruptive events.
- The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted preexisting service gaps and disconnects in federal policies and implementation of these policies in Puerto Rico for addressing the needs of children. Specifically, the allocation of funds through the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" (H.R. 6201) and "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, Economic Security (CARES) Act" (H.R. 748) did not adequately address the needs of food access nor educational continuity for children. In order to adequately address the challenges faced by Puerto Rico's children, it is important to closely monitor how the COVID-19-specific fiscal packages are distributed.
- Puerto Rico's Medicaid block grant funding system from the federal government has an inflexible, arbitrary funding cap and does not adjust for immediate changes in need, such as demographic change, natural disasters, economic recessions, or public health crises. The revision of the Medicaid block grant funding system is critical for ensuring equitable access to healthcare by the children of Puerto Rico. Additionally, reforming the pre-existing child tax credit structure to not only include families with three or more children may decrease economic insecurity for younger families with fewer children.
- Securing access to food for households with school-age children is crucial; as a result of COVID-19 families are at increased risk for falling into poverty induced by increased food insecurity due to the closure of schools and loss of income. The delivery of food to families with school-age children has been possible through the Puerto Rico Department of Education's partnerships with non-profits and the private sector.
- Initiatives to respond to the pandemic and restart the economy should consider children, with particular emphasis on strengthening child-serving institutions and increasing job opportunities for young adults and parents. Child health in a post-disaster setting can serve as a bellwether indicator of successful recovery or as a lagging indicator of system dysfunction and failed recovery. Placing children at the forefront of recovery and ensuring the continuity of the systems that they rely upon will benefit collective community recovery.

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Session #3: Organizational Response to COVID-19: Risk Communication & Community Partnerships

April 22, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/411236937>

- The Puerto Rico Children and Youth Taskforce has been working since 2017 to enhance economic recovery of youth and children after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Through the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative it is working with cross-sector community coalitions in the Department of Family regions of Humacao and Mayagüez to strengthen the ability of communities to plan and prepare for emergencies and disasters centered on children.
- Appropriate and consistent risk communication from authorities and community-based organizations is fundamental in helping to ensure communities adopt the protective measures needed to stay safe and healthy. Effective risk communication also requires accurate data. For example, reliable sources of COVID-19 case count data and knowledge of COVID-19 testing services may improve the consistency, and thus efficacy of risk messaging.
- Disasters are not isolated events, but rather results of social processes, therefore it is important to consider the social, political, and geographic context of the disaster should be considered when responding and communicating risk.
- Community-based organizations are not shielded from the effects of the virus and thus have had difficulties providing their essential services. Since community-based organizations are often the “ears on the ground” during disasters, and are there long after others have come and gone, it is imperative to support these organizations in adapting their services to the pandemic context by creating additional channels of communication and support, such as phone support lines and virtual tools (videos, tutorials, webinars), and harnessing existing relationships and collaboration opportunities.

Session #4: Supporting Educational Continuity: (K – 12) in a Limited Resource Setting

April 29, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/414162495>

- Some students in Puerto Rico have lost access to educational systems as the pandemic has led to another major disruption of educational continuity, especially in areas most affected by the 2020 earthquakes. Lack of access to smartphones, laptops, and Internet service has created challenges for distance learning and further exacerbated educational disparities. However, at the time of release of this report, the Puerto Rico Department of Education will have started the planned distribution of devices with internet connection to public schools’ staff and students.
- The frequent disruptions in the education of the children in Puerto Rico since 2017 have resulted in significant challenges for acquiring basic, age-appropriate reading skills for those currently in Kindergarten to 3rd grade. When schools reopen, conducting reading assessments is imperative to identifying the individual needs of all students, which should be addressed throughout the next academic year (i.e. extended hours, tutoring, and academic year extension).
- Teachers need comprehensive professional development opportunities to be well-equipped and trained to offer distance learning, manage the social-emotional needs of their students, and focus instruction on fundamental reading skills and the individualized needs of students.

Executive Summary

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

- While schools remain closed, the Puerto Rico Department of Education should ensure food security for the students whom depend on school feeding programs. In the longer term, Puerto Rico should explore providing greater flexibility in direct food assistance to families, possibly through a Pandemic-EBT system.
- It is essential to consider how the pandemic itself, the premature school year closing, and automatic passing of all students to the next grade has affected each child in Puerto Rico. The downstream consequences of not landing in an age-appropriate grade could have lasting impacts that affect college applications and ultimately job market viability. Efforts should be made to remediate the education that was lost after closures and to create contingency plans for continuous, subsequent interruptions due to hurricane season and the continuation of COVID-19 closures.

Session #5: Domestic Violence & Child Abuse: Strategies & Considerations During a Pandemic

May 6, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/415693801>

- The pandemic has led to increased rates of domestic violence and child abuse through multiple pathways: exacerbation of stress during social isolation and quarantine, economic instability, reduced availability of services for victims of violence, lack of escape from abusive partners, decreased visibility of mandatory reporters, and increased violence against health workers. Specifically, in Puerto Rico the delayed and continuous recovery from previous disasters has compounded instability and economic strain.
- To protect survivors of violence during the pandemic, informal (virtual) social support networks should be encouraged, entry points and referrals of survivors of violence to health systems should be expanded, and efforts should be made to reduce stigmatization of survivors of violence. Additionally, flexible funding mechanisms should be implemented and invested in to ensure essential services to women and children can continue operating.
- Communication between children and caregivers in the household should be guided by trauma-informed models. It is important to communicate with children and youth about their thoughts and concerns, help them develop healthy coping strategies, and include them when creating family safety and health plans.
- Women and children should be integrated into health systems response and long-term disaster preparedness. Policy decisions should be inclusive of a gender perspective, for example, plans should consider the needs of survivors of violence in shelter plans during hurricane season.

Session #6: Mental Health & COVID-19: The Needs of Children, Youth, and Families

May 13, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/418204579>

- The pandemic has resulted in a significant rise in mental health concerns around the world and new efforts have risen to create more versatile and flexible mental health systems for disaster contexts. As mental health is addressed in Puerto Rico, it is important to consider the history of consecutive disasters and how the inconsistency in support mechanisms after and between disasters continues to negatively impact communities.
- A caregiver's reaction to trauma will directly affect the reaction and outcomes of the children in their care. Parents, guardians, and child service providers can buffer adverse childhood experiences by limiting access to unnecessary information about the disaster, establishing routines for sleep and physical activity, and promoting the wellbeing and mental health of caregivers.
- There is a need for more trauma-informed practices in healthcare settings, schools, and other child-serving organizations. For example, the trauma caused by the pandemic should be considered when adjusting the academic curriculum of schools and creating spaces for healing in schools and businesses.

Executive Summary

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

Session #7: Housing Stability and COVID-19: Ensuring Healthy Housing and Living Environments

May 20, 2020 – Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/421240547>

- In Puerto Rico there have been shortfalls in providing safe housing, housing reconstruction, and fair recovery to all individuals. COVID-19 has further exposed inequalities in housing and housing assistance, particularly among renters, and led to calls for better protection of the right to housing.
- Protecting the right to housing and fair recovery in Puerto Rico requires ensuring families have the municipal support to mitigate risk by re-envisioning CDBG-DR reconstruction funds for rebuilding in flood and landslide areas, which in the past has led to significant underspending of available reconstruction funds. Reducing restrictions would allow for the prioritization of mitigation instead of relocation, when feasible. Protecting these rights would also require addressing barriers in rebuilding that currently work against individuals who don't have a formal property title, including the community in reconstruction planning processes, and requiring the appearance of attorneys in eviction processes.
- Social distancing protocols will greatly limit the capacity of shelters for the upcoming hurricane season, so it is important to continue preparing for the storm season, adjusting shelter plans, and preparing households to have the resources they need to shelter-in-place, if possible, instead of evacuating to emergency shelters.
- Efforts should be made to bolster the voices of community organizations and ensure the participation of community members in reconstruction and preparedness processes. Community collaboration and participation is key for identifying community risks and needs, raising awareness of resilient housing, and building multi-sector response strategies.

Overall, the presentations emphasized the urgency of incorporating the voices of children and other vulnerable populations into pandemic response and inciting collaboration of community initiatives as we tackle the challenges of the pandemic in the short- and long-term.

Biographies

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

WEBINAR SERIES MODERATORS, SPEAKERS, & ORGANIZATIONS

MODERATORS

Antonia Samur, Project Coordinator, National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP)



Antonia Samur focuses on the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) initiative, which aims to assist disaster-stricken communities in Puerto Rico and North Carolina to implement a child-focused disaster planning model. She provides analytic support to the Resilient Children, Youth, and Communities project, which examines the physical and mental health effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on children by studying the role of social media as a source of resilience during and after the spill. She moderates sessions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7.

Yesenia Delgado Castillo, Manager of Collective Action and Partnerships, Youth Development Institute



Yesenia Delgado Castillo has a doctorate in Community Social Psychology and is the coordinator of the Puerto Rico Children & Youth Task Force and a Community Champion for the RCRC Initiative in PR. Previously, at the Addiction and Mental Health Services Administration she was the project manager of Strategic Prevention Framework - Partnership for Success. Under her leadership, the Community Prevention: Innovation and Successful Strategies Convention was held, in which more than 40 community coalitions were trained in the Strategic Prevention Model. She moderates session 5 and is a panelist in session 3 on organizational response to COVID-19.

SESSION ONE

Jeff Schlegelmilch, Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP)



Jeff Schlegelmilch's areas of expertise include public health preparedness, community resilience, and the integration of private and public sector capabilities. He has worked to develop inter-organizational processes for operational epidemiological modeling, evacuation and sheltering plans for people with medical dependencies, and business intelligence systems for disaster response and recovery operations. He has advised local, state, and federal leaders on preparedness programs and policies and has briefed congressional staff on key preparedness legislation.

Amanda Rivera, Executive Director, Youth Development Institute (IDJ)



Amanda Rivera has over nine years of professional experience in education and child welfare. Prior to joining the Youth Development Institute, she led all federal policy and government affairs for Youth Villages, a national nonprofit serving over 23,000 children, youth and their families each year, where she led efforts to reform and influence federal policy in the areas of child welfare financing, supports for transition-age youth, and behavioral health. Her experience with policy analysis also makes her a critical addition to our second session on policy implications.

SESSION TWO

Bruce Lesley, President, First Focus & First Focus Campaign for Children



Bruce Lesley has more than 30 years of public policy experience in the public and private sector: the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, the Children's Hospital Association, the Texas Office of State-Federal Relations, the Texas House of Representatives, and the Office of the County Judge in El Paso, Texas. Lesley has also worked in the healthcare sector as the Director of Congressional Relations for the Children's Hospital Association and as Director of Government Relations for University Medical Center, a public hospital in El Paso, Texas.

Biographies

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

WEBINAR SERIES MODERATORS, SPEAKERS, & ORGANIZATIONS

SESSION THREE

Jennifer Marie Santos-Hernandez, Associate Research Professor, University of Puerto Rico



Jennifer Marie Santos-Hernández studies the sociology of disasters at the Centro de Investigaciones Sociales (CIS-Center for Social Research), which is the oldest social science research center in Puerto Rico. Dr. Santos-Hernández currently serves as co-lead for the San Juan NSF Urban Resilience to Extremes Sustainability Research Network (NSF UREx), the lead of the Helping Affected Communities Engage in Resilience (HACER) initiative, and as an evaluator of the Minority Scholars from Under-Represented Groups in Engineering (SURGE) Capacity in Disasters project.

SESSION FOUR

Carlos Rodriguez, Executive Director, Flamboyán Foundation



Carlos Rodriguez shapes, implements, and oversees all aspects of the Foundation's mission-driven work and programmatic strategy in Puerto Rico and believes education is one of the most important tools we have to achieve a more just and equitable society. Before joining Flamboyán, Carlos was an engineer and business strategist focused on solving complex operations and logistics challenges faced by Fortune 500 companies. Prior to that, he supported sales, finance, operations, and federal regulatory compliance for Univision Communications, Inc.

Katherine Miranda, Managing Director of Educational Programs, Flamboyán Foundation



Katherina Miranda directs the strategic planning, development, and implementation of strategies to ensure all public school students can read at grade level by third grade. Katherine was raised in a family of educators, and understands the potential of education to transform lives. Taking on the legacy of her family, she worked as a teacher, adjunct professor, teacher coach, and educational consultant on a range of projects in public and private institutions across the island.

Enid Reyes, Executive Director, Puerto Rico Education Foundation



Enid Reyes works to provide resources for the strengthening, innovation, and transformation of Puerto Rican education. Before joining the Puerto Rico Education Foundation, she developed asset-based community models; providing education, leadership skills and tools to help low-income communities become self-sustaining. She has also formed community coalitions to improve community between citizens and the police department, government agencies, the Rockwall Independent School District, and faith-based or community organizations.

Elba Aponte, President, Puerto Rico Teacher's Association



Elba Aponte is the president of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico Teacher's Association). Before joining the Association, Elba was a special education teacher in Puerto Rico's public-school system for 14 years, specializing in autism for elementary school grades. She was a teacher's union representative and professor at Ana G. Méndez University and Edic College in special education.

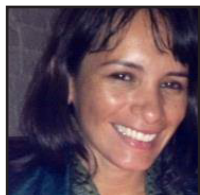
Biographies

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

WEBINAR SERIES MODERATORS, SPEAKERS, & ORGANIZATIONS

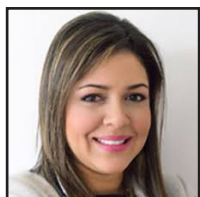
SESSION FIVE

Alina Potts, Research Scientist, Global Women's Institute, George Washington University



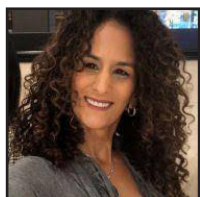
Alina Potts has led gender-based violence (GBV) programming for the International Rescue Committee in a number of humanitarian responses over the last 10+ years—including Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Lebanon, Syria, DR Congo, Kenya (Dadaab) and Sudan (Darfur). At GWI, she aims to focus on women and girls in asking and answering questions around how to better address gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. Previously, Alina coordinated violence prevention research at UNICEF and explored intersections between GBV and child protection in emergencies. Twitter: [@alina_potts](https://twitter.com/alina_potts)

Gilda F. Rodriguez Diaz, Director of Clinical Training, Carlos Albizu University - San Juan Campus



Gilda F. Rodriguez Diaz's areas of interest include: Psychotherapy (individual, family or group) with children, adolescent and families coping with trauma; Interdisciplinary Child Protection Teamwork in Community Mental Health Clinic; Child Development; Clinical Trauma Assessment; Prevention of Sexual Violence; Resilience; Psychotherapy for Adults Trauma Survivors; Women and Gender issues; Research focused on Child Abuse and Neglect and Lifelong Trauma.

Jodie Roure, Associate Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY



Jodie G. Roure is in the Latin American and Latina/o Studies Department where she has taught domestic violence/gender rights, criminal justice, international human rights, international criminal justice, race, class and ethnicity in the United States, and Latina/o Studies for over 20 years. She is the lead organizer, founder, and CEO of Hurricane Maria Assistance & Relief Institutional Alliance, Inc. (Hurricane MARIA), a 501c3 not for profit organization incorporated for the charitable purpose of aiding persons who are victims of natural disasters occurring in Puerto Rico. Twitter: [@jodieroure](https://twitter.com/jodieroure)

SESSION SIX

Helen (Lena) Verdeli, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University



Helen Verdeli is the director of the Teachers College Global Mental Health lab and has received funding to study psychotherapy for prevention and treatment of mood disorders. She has played a key role in landmark studies involving adaptation, training, and testing of psychotherapy packages used by non-specialists. Dr. Verdeli is a Scientific Advisory Council member of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and the Scientific Advisory Board of Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance.

Helga Maldonado, Regional Director, ESCAPE



Helga Maldonado holds a master's degree in Psychological Counseling from the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico - San Germán. She currently works as a Family Specialist at ESCAPE, the Family Strengthening Center, which aims to prevent child abuse and family violence in Puerto Rico and has worked there since 2006. Helga has additionally been offering and coordinating services for victims of disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, and now COVID-19) since Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

Biographies

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

WEBINAR SERIES MODERATORS, SPEAKERS, & ORGANIZATIONS

Kalitza Baerga Santini, Clinical Psychologist, Puerto Rico Psychology Association



Dr. Kalitza Baerga Santini has been on the board of directors of the Psychology Association of Puerto Rico since 2017. She has worked since 2002 offering psychoeducational workshops at the Vega Alta Industrial School for Women, through the psycho-educational services program of the Felisa Rincón de Gautier Foundation. Currently, she continues to offer workshops to women confined in the Bayamón Women's Correctional Complex. She has also offered workshops to children and youth removed from their homes by the Department of Family, through the CEDROS Program of the Vida Plena Center.

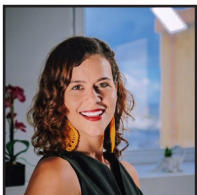
SESSION SEVEN

Laurie Shoeman, Senior Program Director for Resilience and Disaster Recovery, Enterprise Community



Laurie Shoeman is a Senior Program Director at Enterprise Community, a nonprofit organization that brings together nationwide partners and policy leadership to multiply the impact of local affordable housing development. She oversees efforts to preserve and protect affordable housing across the nation from the risks and impacts of natural hazards and is committed to building climate resilient housing across the nation by designing and promoting responsive technical assistance programs and developing partnerships with key federal and local stakeholders. Twitter: [@LaurieJNYC](#)

Ariadna Godreau-Aubert, Executive Director, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico



Ariadna is a human rights lawyer, and the coordinator of the Access to Justice Working Group. Ariadna has worked in several access to justice initiatives, which include strategic litigation at local and international levels, the use of technology to increase legal literacy and organizing movements lawyers. Ariadna is also an adjunct professor at the University of Puerto Rico, where she teaches courses on human rights, political theory and international relations. Her academic scholarship revolves around human rights, gender, austerity and the right to protest.

Yorelys Rivera, Executive Director, Iniciativa Comunitaria



Yorelys has 18 years of experience in the field of communications with an emphasis in the area of community-based organizations and is the Executive Director of Iniciativa Comunitaria, a non-profit organization that advocates for the fundamental rights of communities and its individuals and promotes inclusive, transformational, community-oriented public policy geared towards attaining quality of life and a healthy peaceful coexistence, particularly for individuals that suffer social exclusion. Her favorite phrase is Simon Sinek's "Don't complain, contribute."

SPEAKER'S AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS



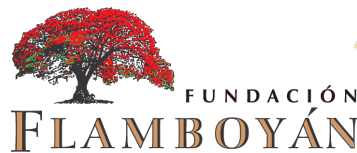
The Global
Womens Institute



ASOCIACIÓN
de MAESTROS
de PUERTO RICO



INICIATIVA
COMUNITARIA
Somos un gran abrazo.



TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

A Graduate School of Education, Health & Psychology



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Session #1 APRIL 8, 2020

CHILDREN & PANDEMICS: RESPONSE IN THE CONTEXT OF PUERTO RICO

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented challenges that will affect this generation's children long after the resolution of the crisis. In this introductory session, experts discuss what is currently known about COVID-19 and identify areas of increased vulnerability for children and their families during this time of uncertainty.

Session Speakers

- **Jeff Schlegelmilch (JS)**, Deputy Director, National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP)
- **Amanda Rivera (AR)**, Director, Institute for Youth Development (IDJ)

What We Know About COVID-19 Jeff Schlegelmilch

There is still a lot of uncertainty about COVID-19, however we know that disruptions are being experienced, with the most vulnerable at the greatest risk of negative impacts from mitigation and containment efforts. Maintaining community livelihoods and safety nets will be critical to helping the most vulnerable.

- **WHO CAN GET COVID-19?:** Despite a common misconception, children and young adults are able to contract COVID-19 and become seriously ill. Normally, symptoms may be less severe in younger populations. Younger people can also still spread the virus to more vulnerable members of their household and to others.
- **HOW IS COVID-19 SPREAD?:** Respiratory droplets are believed to be the main source of transmission. These are emitted through breathing and speaking, and in higher amounts over further distances when coughing or sneezing. Contaminated surfaces likely also play a role. When individuals touch their eyes, nose, or mouth with contaminated hands the virus is able to enter the body. Airborne transmission may also be a factor under certain circumstances, especially for healthcare workers.
- **HOW TO STAY HEALTHY?:** Regularly disinfect all surfaces, wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes, and stay home when you are feeling sick. All infected persons may not show symptoms, so it is best to practice social distancing, stand 6 feet apart and wear cloth masks when going out into public spaces.
- **IS THERE A TREATMENT?** There is currently no specific treatment and no vaccine. There are many promising treatments and vaccines in development, but there are no official treatments currently. Update: Since the time of the webinar, there have been several clinical trials of treatments showing promise, with some wider use beginning to take place. Early vaccine trials for some vaccines are also showing positive results. But there is still much work to be done before they present significant changes to COVID-19 outcomes more widely.
- **WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION?** Seek medical attention immediately if you: have trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, confusion, or bluish lips or face. This list is not comprehensive, please contact a health provider for any other severe symptoms.

Meeting the Needs of Children Jeff Schlegelmilch

At the center of this pandemic are our families and children and child-serving organizations play an important role in the health and well-being of children. These organizations are essential in assisting parents build new routines, use school-required technologies, and find ways to keep children connected with each other while being physically distant.

COVID-19 in Puerto Rico Amanda Rivera

Puerto Rico is experiencing strict quarantines with long-lasting effects on the economy and livelihoods of its citizens:

- **Curfew:** Between the hours of 7 pm and 5 am. Violators can face six-month jail term or a fine up to \$5,000.
- **Restriction of Movement:** Only travel for medicine, food, emergencies, or if you are an essential worker.
- **Business Closures:** All non-essential businesses are closed, including schools and child-care centers. Grocery stores must remain closed on Sundays.

Limited test availability and poor test management has likely resulted in an under reporting of cases for Puerto Rico, but the severity of the situation can still be gauged from the number of reported deaths.

Session #1 APRIL 8, 2020 cont'd

CHILDREN & PANDEMICS: RESPONSE IN THE CONTEXT OF PUERTO RICO

COVID-19 and Children Amanda Rivera

The COVID-19 Pandemic is the fourth disruptive event in the development and environment of the children of Puerto Rico since 2017. They have experienced a school shutdown, Hurricane Maria, and a series of earthquakes.

Identified Areas of Increased Vulnerability Amanda Rivera

Child poverty is only one aspect that makes populations more vulnerable to disruptive events and is an expensive problem to not address; IDJ's cost of child poverty for Puerto Rico in dollars and cents: <http://cuantonoscuesta.com>

- **Family Poverty:** 71% of children live in or near poverty, with 39% of children living in extreme poverty. 77% of those Puerto Rican households work paycheck-to-paycheck. 9% of low-income workers can work from home.
- **Access to Food:** During disasters, households assume a greater economic burden to feed children, as those in public school normally receive their breakfast and lunch for free at school. Secondly, businesses have imposed restrictions which may increase burden on specific populations by not allowing children in stores.
- **Access to Education:** Education in Puerto Rico has been adrift. The earthquakes in early 2020 resulted in at least a month of missed classes and, in some regions, children have not yet stepped a foot in the classroom this semester because some schools could not reopen. However, this isn't impacting all children the same as most private schools quickly had children back in the classroom and have provided modules of distance education.
- **Emotional and Mental Health:** These catastrophic events have created a lot of uncertainty. Children may not understand the reasons behind limiting social connection with their friends and community, which has an effect on their mental and emotional health. We are going to be dealing with the effects of this for an extended period of time, even after we return to "normalcy".
- **Survivors of Domestic Violence:** Given the present restrictions on movement and increased economic stress, we are concerned about the boys, girls, and all young people who are now suddenly locked up with their abuser all day, every week. Prior to these events, school may have acted as an escape.
- **Homeless Youth:** We need to think better about a response for homeless youth populations; how we are going to care for them and ensure that they are healthy during this crisis?

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

- Q Is non-antibacterial soap still effective in cleaning your hands and preventing the virus?**
JS Washing your hands well with regular soap is effective for cleaning your hands.
- Q How long should we expect the sheltering-in-place to last, and when it is over, will there a virus resurgence?**
JS Ending shelter-in-place orders too early will result in a resurgence and a timeline for ending safely is unknown, but people should be thinking of months to years having to go back and forth with these restrictions before this pandemic is over.
- Q Are there any health or economic recommendations that you would like to make?**
AR We want to very carefully study the problem, make the correct projections, and evaluate any gaps. If there is already an answer, we want to focus on ensuring financial support for families with children.
JS My recommendations would be to listen to your communities, and to not make decisions in rooms without their voice. Additionally, be very careful what services are labeled essential and non-essential. Some populations may rely on services that others deem "non-essential."
- Q What about the families that do not qualify for the Nutritional Assistance Program (PAN)?**
AR We are unsure how the eligibility criteria will be affected with the extra emergency funding from congress. However, there will inevitably be those that are left out of new programs. Community food bank response will be imperative in supporting those families that do not qualify.

Session #1 APRIL 8, 2020 cont'd

CHILDREN & PANDEMICS: RESPONSE IN THE CONTEXT OF PUERTO RICO

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

AR Although this situation is very serious, and unprecedented in terms of length of effect, we have learned from Hurricane Maria. Entities that serve families and children are more connected than ever, and with all of the work that has already been done, we have a more sophisticated understanding of how to work with the families and children of Puerto Rico.

JS We have seen such phenomenal capacity and creativity from these community-based organizations to reinvent and meet the needs of the community. There are more voices in Washington, D.C., carrying your message, advocating, and making sure that your message is being heard. But I truly believe that this story will be a triumph of community rather than external actors, and that the solutions that will have the greatest impact will come from communities

Key Session Takeaways

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is having unprecedented effects on health and economic systems and will continue to greatly affect this generation's children in the short and long-term. Policy recommendations for addressing the pandemic's various impacts should be the product of studying the problem, making the most accurate projections, and evaluating any gaps in the existing policy. Policy making is collaborative. If there is already a satisfactory policy or policy proposal, organizations should focus on supporting the existing policy rather than drafting their own.
2. Puerto Rico is particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic due to high rates of child poverty, slowed recovery from past disasters including Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and a history of interruptions to educational continuity due to these events. At the same time, the series of disasters in Puerto Rico has led to more opportunities and greater capacity for lasting collaboration among child-serving organizations.
3. Listening to and acting upon the voices of child-serving institutions and the communities at-large should be actively integrated into public policy discussions at the federal, state, and local levels. For example, a community's definition of a business as "essential" or "non-essential" may vary, as some communities may rely on services that others deem "non-essential."
4. Special attention should be placed on supporting community-based organizations that provide direct services for vulnerable populations or organizations that advocate for and lobby for their respective consideration in policies. All organizations are capable of, and should when possible, act as advocates for the needs of children even when they are not advocacy-focused organizations.

Session #2 APRIL 15, 2020

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19: PUERTO RICO'S CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The COVID-19 pandemic has invoked an unprecedented policy response in attempt to mitigate the burden of the crisis. In this session, experts in public policy critically examine the implications and short comings of these new policies, while identifying existing policies and their deficiencies that have left the children and families of Puerto Rico particularly vulnerable during this crisis. This session draws attention to the disparities created by inflexible funding policies such as the Medicaid block grant and concludes with recommendations to reduce unforeseen policy gaps.

Session Speakers

- **Bruce Lesley (BL)**, President, First Focus on Children
- **Amanda Rivera (AR)**, Director, Youth Development Institute (IDJ)

COVID-19 Relief - National Policies Bruce Lesley

Congress has passed two pieces of legislation thus far: "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" (H.R. 6201) & "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, Economic Security (CARES) Act" (H.R. 748).

- **Health:** Medicaid and CHIP will cover diagnostic testing, the Medicaid federal matching rate will increase, and community health centers will receive needed emergency funds.
- **Hunger & Nutrition:** Increase in WIC, SNAP, and funding for food assistance in PR. Congress created an Emergency Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program, but no child had received this assistance by the date this webinar aired.
- **Cash Assistance:** Additional unemployment insurance benefits. Economic stimulus checks of \$1,200 for adults and \$500 per child, however there are problems for babies, college students, & disabled dependents.
- **Education:** Additional funds for the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Act and higher education.
- **Housing:** Rental assistance and prohibiting landlords from evicting or charging penalties for non-payment for a 120-day period. Increased funding for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and homeless populations.
- **Early Childhood:** Funding for Child Care Development Block Grant and Head Start & Early Head Start.
- **Child Welfare:** Funding for Title IV-B services, which can help foster parents, kinship caregivers, and residential providers. Additional finding for violence prevention and response services.

Children | The Hidden Victims Bruce Lesley

Children are incorrectly portrayed as immune to COVID-19, however every aspect of a child's life is affected by this disease. The false perception of immunity creates a lack of concern for children's health and safety and creates the misconception that children are causing the increased spread of the disease.

- **Physical Health:** Gathering restrictions delayed developmental screenings, checkups, and routine immunizations.
- **Mental Health:** Social distancing, school closures, increased educational stress, and familial financial stress are all impacting the mental health of children.
- **Abuse:** Rates of child abuse are spiking, and with child care centers and schools closed, mandated reporters are unable to identify cases. Substance abuse is another issue on the rise during COVID-19.

Children in Confined Settings Bruce Lesley

- **Juvenile Detention:** 23-hour lock downs may have long-term or irreversible effects on mental health.
- **Immigration Detention:** Having children in immigration detention centers risks their life with the increased population density, and therefore should be released.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19: PUERTO RICO'S CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Medicaid Block Grants Bruce Lesley

The revision of the Medicaid block grant funding system is critical for the children of Puerto Rico and their healthcare. "A child is a child no matter where they are." Leads to rationing of care and inter-population disputes.

- **Arbitrary Caps on Medicare Funding:** Block grants have inflexible funding caps, so during times of crisis with increasing health needs, disparities in healthcare also increase.

Methodology for Policy Recommendations During COVID-19 Amanda Rivera

This crisis is a new frontier and lacks the normal data for policy recommendations as the situation is changing everyday, therefore, data for recommendations should come from multiple sources:

- the families (especially the mothers and children),
- disease and impact trends,
- the analysis of current and new policies,
- and information on social media.

COVID-19 Challenges, Policies, and Recommendations Amanda Rivera

Economic Insecurity: Most children in PR live in, or near, poverty and are vulnerable to the economic consequences.

Policy 1: For households with minors who have lost their jobs there will be a temporary, but significant increase in their income. \$500 incentive for the self-employed.

Example: Single mother, 2 PT children: \$2,200 (once) + \$2,772 monthly for 4 months of unemployment.

Policy 2: Temporary moratorium on payments for electricity, water, rent for public housing and loans.

Recommendation: Increase tax credits and incentives available to working families with children under 18. Congress must approve the Child Tax Credit Extension to families of 1 and 2 children in Puerto Rico. The PR Government must implement a strategy to increase visibility of Earned Income Credit in Puerto Rico, consider measures to increase income for low income workers doing high risk jobs, temporary increase minimum wage, and consider additional stipends.

Recommendation: Provide support and tools to ensure the viability and accessibility of day care centers. Provide resources and technical assistance for day care centers so they can optimize federal aid and streamline late payments to ensure they are solvent at the end of quarantine.

Food Insecurity: Families with school-age children may be experiencing food insecurity.

Policy 1: Due to the increase in demand for social support, congress has delegated an additional \$8.8 billion for "Child Nutrition Programs" nationally, as well as an additional \$200 million for the Nutrition Assistance Program, \$500 million for WIC, and increased flexibility in requirements for Puerto Rico.

Policy 2: The Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) is distributing meals through non-profit organizations that will feed around 75,000 people.

Recommendation: Ensure immediate access to food for homes with school-age children. PRDE & Department of Family Affairs must develop a plan to assist in the EBT program for the pandemic and implement a short-term strategy to deliver food to families with school-age children through partnerships with non-profits and the private sector.

Session #2 APRIL 15, 2020 cont'd

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19: PUERTO RICO'S CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Challenges, Recommendations, and Policy Impacts cont'd Amanda Rivera

Virus Prevention: Access to hygiene products that protect households from the virus:

Policy: The nutritional supplement program has reduced the cash benefit to only 5% of benefits. Before this reduction families were able to buy hygiene products with the assistance.

Recommendation: Ensure community-based and non-profit organizations have products to distribute. Community Development Block Grant funds allow for this use, just as they could use the money granted to the government to begin expenses related to COVID-19 (\$2.2 billion). ODSEC could distribute these resources to the same entities in charge of providing food.

Education Inequities: Technological inequities limit and hinder access to distance education at all levels.

Policy 1: \$349 million for public K-12 education. Includes funds allocated for special education services previously funded under IDEA.

Policy 2: \$324 million for public and private universities. 50% is mandated to be provided in emergency “grants” to the university students, which will help cover food, lodging, transportation, materials, or other expenses related to coronavirus.

Policy 3: Local government released \$250 million of federal Restart funds for tablets and technology, but it will not be received until the end of the spring semester (2020). At the time of publishing of this report, the PRDE had begun the distribution of devices to school staff and students.

Recommendation: PRDE should provide viable options for distance learning, reinforce the summer programs and provide support services and universities should focus student aid on those students who need it most.

- Form alliances with local entities for the rapid development of “mobile friendly” modules and activities.
- Work with teacher leaders to provide tools and activities to continue during the summer programs.
- Agree to provide remote socio-emotional support during quarantine and summer programs.
- Emergency funds from universities should be granted to students near or at the poverty level, that have children, or are first-generation college students.

Protection and Welfare: Quarantine increases likelihood of child abuse, while decreasing reports to the authorities.

Policy: Modest increase in funds for programs that protect vulnerable populations of children and youth:

- Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs - (\$25M)
- Family Violence Prevention and Services - (\$45M)
- Programs for Children Welfare - Title IV-B - (\$45M)

Recommendation: Support the creation a specialized Social Task Force to assist with this phenomenon.

- The Social Task Force should make recommendations on how to best serve populations, including an inventory of available services and gap analysis. Created four days ago, so we need to increase visibility.

Medium and Long-Term Public Policy and Advocacy Agenda Amanda Rivera

During economic recovery we must ensure no more children fall into poverty. We need to strengthen early childhood and day care systems, focus on growing industries and prioritize job placement, develop a business tax credit program that provides jobs for youth and parents with modifications to public policies that increase job opportunities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19: PUERTO RICO'S CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

Q What are the main gaps in federal level policy that affect children and child-serving institutions in PR?

BL A financial stimulus of \$500 only once per child is inadequate. In order to address inequities, there should be continuous funding for families with children as they are going to take the longest to recover from these crises. Also, unlike the United States, families in PR only receive a Child Tax Credit once they have their third child.

Q How much of the received aid will go towards especially vulnerable youth in PR?

AR A part of the \$349M for education is allotted to ensure the remote continuity of special needs services such as speech and physical therapy.

BL Funding aimed at addressing homelessness came through the Housing and Urban Development grants, which have bias against children, with a greater focus on chronically homeless. PRDE has some grant funds to assist students who are homeless, however this neglects younger, non-school age children.

Q What assistance is available for university students, does the moratorium on rent include university students?

AR The moratorium on rent is a bank loan and is only for public housing. Unfortunately there is a large gap and no financial stimulus is available for university students that are dependents. Universities were given money to provide students emergency financial support, however it is at the discretion of the university and will likely not be need-based.

BL Federal education loan deferment is through September; however, these loans are not forgiven and do not address the issue.

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

BL This disaster is impacting children and we need to educate people on how universally it will affect them. Governments need to be paying attention to the changing needs of children and their families.

AR With this aid, there are opportunities for resources, so we need to stay vigilant and ensure these resources are well used. We need to constantly analyze the situation, adjust the course of our programs according to current needs, and ensure that all initiatives to restart the economy include young adults and households with children.

Key Session Takeaways

1. Children are the hidden victims of this crisis. At the time of this session the data was not conclusive of a severe direct impact of the coronavirus on children's health. But while there are still many unknowns with how the virus affects children, the pandemic is having extensive direct and indirect impacts on children including: greater risk of poverty, food insecurity, abuse, educational disruption, familial loss, and other disruptive events.
2. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted preexisting service gaps and disconnects in federal policies and implementation of these policies in Puerto Rico for addressing the needs of children. Specifically, the allocation of funds through the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" (H.R. 6201) and "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, Economic Security (CARES) Act" (H.R. 748) did not adequately address the needs of food access nor educational continuity for children. In order to adequately address the challenges faced by Puerto Rico's children, it is important to closely monitor how the COVID-19-specific fiscal packages are distributed.

Session #2 APRIL 15, 2020 cont'd

POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19: PUERTO RICO'S CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND THEIR FAMILIES

Key Session Takeaways cont'd

3. Puerto Rico's Medicaid block grant funding system from the federal government has an inflexible, arbitrary funding cap and does not adjust for immediate changes in need, such as demographic change, natural disasters, economic recessions, or public health crises. The revision of the Medicaid block grant funding system is critical for ensuring equitable access to healthcare by the children of Puerto Rico. Additionally, reforming the pre-existing child tax credit structure to not only include families with three or more children may decrease economic insecurity for younger families with fewer children.
4. Securing access to food for households with school-age children is crucial; as a result of COVID-19 families are at increased risk for falling into poverty induced by increased food insecurity due to the closure of schools and loss of income. The delivery of food to families with school-age children has been possible through the Puerto Rico Department of Education's partnerships with non-profits and the private sector.
5. Initiatives to respond to the pandemic and restart the economy should consider children, with particular emphasis on strengthening child-serving institutions and increasing job opportunities for young adults and parents. Child health in a post-disaster setting can serve as a bellwether indicator of successful recovery or as a lagging indicator of system dysfunction and failed recovery. Placing children at the forefront of recovery and ensuring the continuity of the systems that they rely upon will benefit collective community recovery.

Session #3 APRIL 22, 2020

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19: RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The response to COVID-19 relies on a strong, dynamic, and communal sense of responsibility from community-based organizations. In this session, experts in disaster sociology and community resilience examine the role of community-based organizations in the areas that they serve before, during, and after crises. Specifically, the speakers will examine how these organizations prepare their communities, communicate risk, and assist in long term recovery.

Session Speakers

- **Yesenia Delgado Castillo (YDC)**, Manager of Collective Action and Alliances, Institute for Youth Development
- **Jennifer Santos-Hernández (JSH)**, Research Professor in Disaster Sociology, University of Puerto Rico

Define Disaster Jennifer Santos-Hernández

The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines it as a serious disruption of **a community or society** due to the hazardous events interacting with the conditions of exposure, vulnerability and adaptive capacity, leading to **human, material, economic, or environmental losses and impacts**.

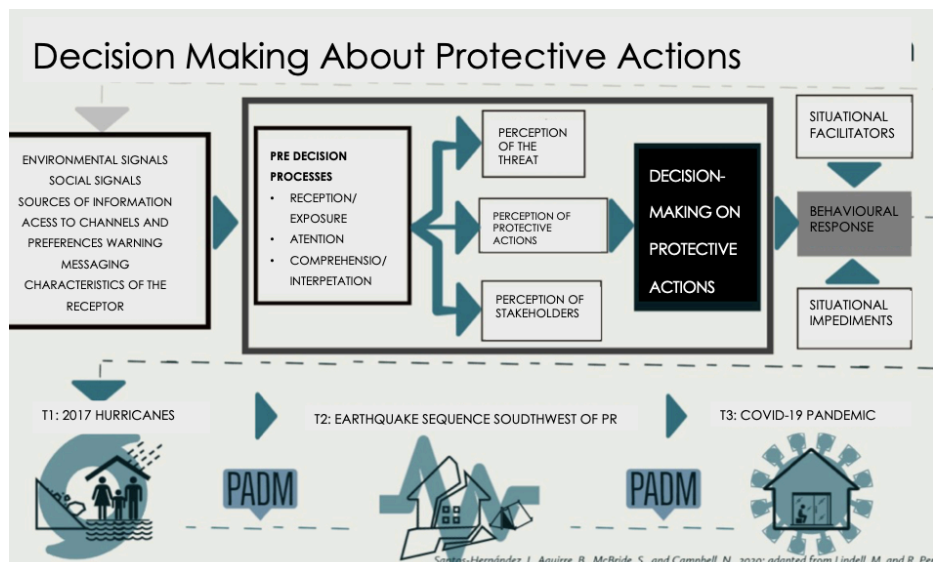
Organizations During Disasters Jennifer Santos-Hernández

One way we can study organizations during disasters is through the Disaster Research Center's typology of organizations in disaster situations. The typology divides organizations by their emerging behaviors during disaster due to the dynamic nature of needs and resources.

- **Type I – Established:** rely on an existing structure and carry out regular tasks during disasters. For example, police and fire departments.
- **Type II – Expanding:** rely on new structural arrangements and are undertaking regular tasks during disasters. For example, the Red Cross may normally staff only a few people, but during disasters they increase.
- **Type III – Extending:** rely on preexisting structures and carry out non-regular tasks. Not expected to respond to disasters. For example, a construction company may re-purpose and assist in clearing debris.
- **Type IV – Emergent:** rely on new structure, as they did not exist prior to the event and are undertaking non-regular tasks. For example, a spontaneously formed search and rescue group.

Risk Communication During Disasters Jennifer Santos-Hernández

In the context of Puerto Rico, it is very important to understand the process of risk communication. When issuing a risk communication message, we aim for a response from the public, so it is very important to understand the context in which people make decisions. If context is not carefully considered, then there may be increased uncertainty in the message's legitimacy, which may lead to reduced efficacy and public confidence in the messaging. Reliable sources of COVID-19 case count data may be the first step in improving the legitimacy of Puerto Rico's risk communication. Organizations should understand the COVID-19 testing protocol to be able to assist those who inquire about accessing testing services.



ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19: RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Puerto Rico Children and Youth Task Force Yesenia Delgado Castillo

Founded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) & Save the Children and promoted by IDJ, the Puerto Rico Children and Youth Task Force has two main objectives:

- **Economic Security and Long-term Recovery:** The goal is for young people 15-25 years old, especially those with children between the ages of 0-5, have economic security.
- **Preparedness:** The task force has an initiative with Columbia University called Resilient Children / Resilient Communities (RCRC) in the Mayaguez and Humacao regions that aims to promote disaster preparedness.

The Task Force aims to move resiliency discussions into a more dynamic and collective conversation, where all sectors commit to work separately, yet together to ensure economic security and preparedness focused on children.

Economic Security and Long-term Recovery Yesenia Delgado Castillo

At the 2019 Youth Action Summit, the Children and Youth Task Force selected base indicators around the goal of economic security. Through the collective process, it was decided that the indicators would be measured at the population level with annual review until 2024.

- **Youth Outside of Labor Participation** (neither working nor looking for employment)
 - 2017 Baseline – 67.1%
 - 2024 Target – 59%
- **Disconnected Youth** (neither at school nor working)
 - 2017 Baseline – 12.1%
 - 2024 Target – 10%
- **Youth Earning More Than Minimum Wage**
 - 2017 Baseline – 16.3%
 - 2024 Target – 19%
- **Young Mothers Who Are Not in the Workforce**
 - 2017 Baseline – 60%
 - 2024 Target – 51.9%
- **Employed Youth**
 - 2017 Baseline – 20.7%
 - 2024 Target – 25%

These can be achieved by ensuring that young mothers and fathers are able to:

- complete high school and access post-secondary education,
- receive high-quality post-secondary education,
- receive high-quality job training,
- and connect with and maintain jobs that lead them to economic mobility.

Since this is a collective conversation, consensus amongst sectors, and thus progress has been difficult to achieve, however there still have been notable achievements.

- **Grant:** For the first time, Puerto Rico received federal funds from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five proposal, which will allow expansion of the developmental services being offered at an early age and improvement in the quality of the services. Lack of access to these services are a barrier for young parents to work or study.
- **Integrate Evidence-Based Practices into Requests for Proposals:** Support Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) integrate evidence requirements in their programs to improve the economic security of young people.

Session #3 APRIL 22, 2020 cont'd

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19: RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Yesenia Delgado Castillo

The other focus of the Children & Youth Task Force is centered on preparedness and is implemented in partnership with the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), funded by GSK, and has had broad impact over multi-sector community collaborations in Arkansas, New York, North Carolina, and Puerto Rico.



In Puerto Rico, RCRC is working in two regions on the opposite sides of the island: Mayagüez and Humacao. In Mayagüez, there was a preexisting Task Force working in the region, so the initiative was able to incorporate its ideas into their work plan, while in Humacao the initiative formed a new community resilience coalition, made up of different sectors.

Community Preparedness Index (CPI) Yesenia Delgado Castillo

The CPI is a tool designed to assess how prepared the community is to serve children before, during, and after a disaster at the institutional level. It is like a snapshot of the policies and protocols in place to protect children before, during, and after a disaster. The tool evaluates the preparedness of organizations that directly impact children:

- **Who cares for children during the day/night?**
 - Child Care Centers & Homes, Public Schools, Private Schools, & Foster Care
- **Where could the children be during an emergency?**
 - Emergency Shelters & Hospitals
- **Who coordinates all sectors during a disaster?**
 - Community-wide organizations (e.g. Emergency Operations Center, Emergency Management, etc.)
- **Who determines the standards?**
 - Sector Lead Organizations (e.g. Red Cross, Department of Health, Department of the Family, etc.)

Using the CPI, a few priorities were identified to improve child-focused disaster preparedness in the two regions:

- Map the risks and vulnerabilities/needs of children, develop inventory of services for children, involve community leaders in preparing and promoting volunteering, update emergency shelter plans to include child-friendly spaces and other considerations for children and families, and promote community activities on physical and emotional preparedness for children.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19: RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community Partnerships During COVID-19 Yesenia Delgado Castillo

Organizations have been unable to provide essential services, which increases the population's vulnerability to the other impacts of the virus. The organizations that provide or coordinate services and the population that receives them are, to some extent, experiencing challenges related to:

- Risk of spreading or infecting others with the virus, loss of lives.
- Managing uncertainty and understanding what's going on, anxiety, stress, physical and emotional exhaustion.
- Limited access to services provided by the government and governmental mistrust.
- How to deal with the new routines, telework, education, coexistence at home, and housework.
- Lack of technological knowledge or equipment, adequate Internet connection.
- Loss of income.
- Discontinuation of medical or mental health treatments.
- In the case of Puerto Rico, disasters are occurring concurrently (COVID and earthquakes) and the hurricane season begins in June.
- Long-term consequences, aside from trauma, during and after the spread of the virus slows.

Local service-based organizations are often the "ears on the ground" during disasters, so it is imperative to assist these organizations in adapting their services to the pandemic context by creating phone support lines, virtual tools (videos, tutorials, webinars), and by increasing the frequency of contact with participants by phone or apps.

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

Q What are the COVID-19 specific challenges organizations face when preparing for the hurricane season?

JSH One major risk is that COVID-19 acts as a focus event, where we're so focused on response that we forget to promote a culture of preparedness for other events. We should take advantage of heightened attention to this challenge and form relationships between agencies to increase response efficacy in the future.

YDC Communication between agencies is a challenge. Agencies should always be in communication and know their roles in an emergency prior to it occurring. We need preparedness culture on all levels.

Q What are the major barriers for organizations successfully participating in coalitions?

YDG For an organization with limited staff or availability, it is difficult to commit to volunteering. It is really difficult to keep them committed to the mission and participate in the coalition when there are other priorities.

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

JSH We are currently in a dynamic, uncertain situation and we need to be more flexible in our response. Risk communication messaging needs to incorporate context and understand that uncertainty increases distrust. Organizations play a large role in communicating risk messages surrounding our current situation and they should work with confidence as they can directly affect the impact of COVID-19.

YDC Together, organizations and the community are a source for influencing actions and opinions on issues related to children and youth. So, if we work collectively and at multiple levels, the confidence to meet the needs of children and youth in the event of future disasters increases as does our capacity and resilience to face it.

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19: RISK COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Key Session Takeaways

1. The Puerto Rico Children and Youth Taskforce has been working since 2017 to enhance economic recovery of youth and children after Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Through the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative it is working with cross-sector community coalitions in the Department of Family regions of Humacao and Mayagüez to strengthen the ability of communities to plan and prepare for emergencies and disasters centered on children.
2. Appropriate and consistent risk communication from authorities and community-based organizations is fundamental in helping to ensure communities adopt the protective measures needed to stay safe and healthy. Effective risk communication also requires accurate data. For example, reliable sources of COVID-19 case count data and knowledge of COVID-19 testing services may improve the consistency, and thus efficacy of risk messaging.
3. Disasters are not isolated events, but rather results of social processes, therefore it is important to consider the social, political, and geographic context of the disaster should be considered when responding and communicating risk.
4. Community-based organizations are not shielded from the effects of the virus and thus have had difficulties providing their essential services. Since community-based organizations are often the “ears on the ground” during disasters, and are there long after other entities that have offered help and have had to leave, it is imperative to support these organizations in adapting their services to the pandemic context by creating additional channels of communication and support, such as phone support lines and virtual tools (videos, tutorials, webinars), and harnessing existing relationships and collaboration opportunities.

Session #4 APRIL 29, 2020

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The interruption in educational continuity, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent disruptive events, has the ability to increase educational disparities for generations. In this session, experts review the current challenges in adapting the education system in Puerto Rico to work for all students during the pandemic. Specifically, the speakers will examine how recent and consecutive disruptive events have exposed the underlying vulnerabilities of students and discuss the implications of losing a place of safety and stability on future generations.

Session Speakers

- **Elba L. Aponte (EA)**, President, Puerto Rico’s Teacher’s Association
- **Enid Reyes (ER)**, Director, Puerto Rico Education Foundation
- **Carlos Rodríguez (CR)**, Director, Flamboyán Foundation
- **Katherine Miranda (KM)**, Education Programs Director, Flamboyán Foundation

Education System in Puerto Rico Elba L. Aponte

- Students in the Puerto Rico (K–12) Public Education System: 294,000
 - Enrolled in the Special Education Program: 103,000

The start of the 2020 spring semester was delayed because of seismic events in January that devastated certain areas of Puerto Rico, particularly the South. Even as of March 13, there were schools that had not completely opened and, with the disruptions from earthquakes and COVID-19 and without a plan to guarantee the continuity of educational services, some students have lost access to their right to an education.

Challenges to Distance Learning Elba L. Aponte

The distance learning process has been an experimental marathon with many difficulties:

- **Technological Resources:** It is difficult to know how many students have Internet or computer access.
- **Parental Capacity to Assist:** Parents and grandparents shared how difficult this is as they were not prepared to teach, so many students may not have the support of their parents to guide them in at-home learning.
- **Loss of Motivation:** The Department of Education announcing a completion date for the semester helped to reduce uncertainty, however, the announcement that everyone passed the grade has removed the motivation for students to finish their work and do their best, which is very dangerous in the eyes of professionals.

Students with Special Educational Needs Elba L. Aponte

Students with special educational needs may require equipment that is not accessible because of school closures.

- Each student’s Individualized Educational Programs could not be met as many of these students were without therapies, which further limits academic progress. e.g. Blind students were not provided with curricular access, increasing educational disparities because of their disability.

How to Improve Education Experiences During & After COVID-19 Elba L. Aponte

1. Create modality for special education services so they can be provided in summer.
2. Create remedial courses and offer them to small groups of students.
3. Design on-line educational modules for all units and subjects.
4. When in-person instruction begins, start with at least three weeks of review from the previous grade.

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SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Opportunities for Education in Summer Enid Reyes

The summer offers an opportunity to organize, plan, and recruit for the 2020-21 academic year. Teachers can start to develop remedial modules for the beginning of the next course and plan on how to incorporate conditionally passed students. Increasing access to technology, especially over the summer, will possibly reduce significant lags for the next school year.

- 20,000 computers and tablets will be delivered in June and 25,000 in July.
- Consideration is being given to include textbook licenses on the computers.

Technological Challenges for Instruction Enid Reyes

- Teachers have not had training for distance education and there is currently no centralized or standardized on-line platform for providing education services to students.
- Technologies currently available to students have content filters, which limits the educational forums such as “YouTube” and programs installed on computers such as “Zoom.”

Emergency Response of the Puerto Rico Department of Education Enid Reyes

1. Equip 180 schools with solar panels
2. In process of equipping all schools with electric generators, potable water systems, and treating school roofs
3. Plan to strengthen the school community in the socio-emotional area using the Hawkins & Catalano model
4. Work to create remedial education modules and an EDUPR application
5. Provide an interactive forum for parents and students on the agency’s website
6. Collaborate with 7 on-line education universities for high school students
7. Increase access & training for teachers, parents and students to Microsoft services and professional licenses
8. Develop program for schools to create risk analysis and emergency protocols for continuity of on-line processes

Puerto Rico Education Foundation During COVID-19 Enid Reyes

Camino Hacia la META: A project that combines quantitative analysis with qualitative strategies to improve academic performance on standardized META tests for 5th Grade Math and 3rd Grade Spanish.

- In 2019, the Regional Educational Office of Bayamón was selected for the pilot project with seven schools.
- The project explores different methodologies and strategies, both technical and observational, to improve teaching practices. Differentiation techniques were identified to increase student learning opportunities as well as peer learning strategies for teachers.
- COVID-19 has presented a challenge for the project:
 - Digital mitigation strategies were used to promote a mobile-friendly space with real-time results to measure student participation and performance. The Virtual Notebook initiative achieved more than 65% student participation. The Virtual Notebook can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/374cfDJ>

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SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Challenges for All Educational Systems During COVID-19 Carlos Rodriguez

AREA OF CONCERN	IMMEDIATE RESPONSE	FUTURE RECOVERY
Student Health & Safety	Feed students during school closures	Create policies and practices to prevent the spread of the virus.
Ensuring Continuous Learning	Access to distance education and special education services	Provide interventions to address the student academic lag with contingency plans for continuous interruptions
Teacher Professional Development	Training and resources to provide distance learning	Training on interventions to address academic lags
Student and Teacher Mental Health	Provide remote mental health services for vulnerable students	Support addressing student and teacher trauma and other mental health needs

Literacy in Grades K-3 (2011-2015) Katherine Miranda

Students living below the poverty level and those who are chronically absent show much lower achievement levels than their counterparts.

- 85% of K-3 students live below the poverty level.
- 25% of K-3 students are chronically absent (10% of teaching time).
- 22% of first grade students earn D or F grades in the Spanish class. 12% are retained.
- 40% of third grade students do not reach proficiency levels on standardized Spanish tests.

Interruptions in Education for Puerto Rico During the Last Few Years Katherine Miranda

We know that students lose approximately 1-3 months of academic progress during the summer vacation. Recent events in Puerto Rico have widened educational disparities which compounds the projected the loss of up to 16% in reading scores on standardized tests if students cannot return to schools soon.

2017-18 HURRICANE MARIA	2018-2019 SCHOOL CLOSINGS	JANUARY 2020 EARTHQUAKES	SPRING 2020 COVID-19
<p>The reopening of schools began on October 23. By December 4, it was estimated that 97% of the schools offered classes.</p> <p>According to the Youth Development Institute (IDJ), on average, students did not attend a large number of days of school as a result of Hurricane Maria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children up to 5 years: 92 days • Children and young people between 5-17 years: 78 days 	<p>According to the Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 265 public schools were closed in 2018, adding to previous closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 1,515 in 2006 to 855 in 2018. • 66% (175) were elementary schools. • 65% were rural, while 35% were in urban areas. 	<p>Due to the earthquake on January 7, classes did not resume until the evaluation of the schools was completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School began in stages from January 28 to March 6. • In February, 55 schools in the most affected municipalities were reorganized into tents, wagons, and public and private buildings. 	<p>On March 15, schools closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>Various distance education options were offered through the DE site. However, academic work ended early on May 8, 2020 to reduce stress on students and households.</p>

Session #4 APRIL 29, 2020 cont'd

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Priorities For K-3 Education Continuity and Recovery Katherine Miranda

1. Provide continuity of educational opportunities throughout the next academic year (i.e. extended hours, tutoring, academic year extension).
2. Conduct reading assessments when schools reopen to identify the individual needs of all students.
3. Prioritize core curriculum areas and fundamental reading skills.
4. Provide comprehensive professional development for teachers so that they can offer distance learning, manage the social-emotional needs of their students, and focus instruction on fundamental reading skills and the individualized needs of students.
5. Ensure the health of students and their families, especially regarding food security.

Combating Food Insecurity for Students Carlos Rodriguez

One of the most pressing needs during the pandemic is to ensure that students have access to food while schools are closed. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed on March 18, provides significant flexibilities so that school districts can prepare and distribute meals to students during the pandemic, funded by federal funds. Different jurisdictions have taken advantage of these flexibilities and have generally followed one of the following options to provide food: “Grab and Go”, Delivery, Public-private partnerships, and Pandemic EBT.

- Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, state agencies may decide to distribute funds, instead of food, to families who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Despite calls to open, school canteens have been closed since the curfew began. PRDE has decided not to prepare meals and has addressed nutritional needs through three food donations to nonprofit organizations.

Limitations:

- Donations hold nonprofits, not the government, accountable for ensuring that food reaches students.
- Donations to date cover less than 10 days of food, and schools have been closed since March 16.
- Food is being distributed to all members of the community.
- Lack of communication with families on how to receive food.

Recommendations:

- **Immediately:** Follow-up to ensure that the food donated so far reached the students.
- **Soon:** Explore and search for an alternative that provides access to food for all students. There are many local organizations that are ready to help with the preparation and distribution of meals that already have measures to protect the health and safety of all.
- **In the Longer Term:** Look for the opportunity for Puerto Rico to participate in Pandemic-EBT, including for future emergencies and interruptions to the school year. This option could provide the greatest flexibility for direct food assistance to families.

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

- Q How can we assist children with special educational and functional needs in the immediate response, as well as when planning to reopen schools?**
- EA** For an immediate response, therapies could be conducted through video conference and educational modules can be created for occupational or speaking needs. During the summer, we should empower households to work on individual therapy, but it is a matter of will and mental capacity. We cannot allow any students to continue to fall behind and be deprived of basic services.

Session #4 APRIL 29, 2020 cont'd

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session: cont'd

- Q** What suggestions do you have for integrating emotional support for teachers and students in the response plan in the coming months?
- EA** Increase the number of support hot-lines. We have done this in collaboration with the teachers and have provided three telephone numbers that they could call at certain hours to access tools. Although there is the psychological first aid line, it is important that they have other options and resources.
- KM** There is no reason why increasing literacy has to be dissociated from the socio-emotional sphere. We can incorporate and build emotional support and connection through projects and creative writing.
- Q** Are there any proposals to offer continuity of education through the State or other channels? If yes, what is the status of the proposal or program?
- EA** The Department of Education has not reported what is going to happen. The Puerto Rico Teacher's Association will continue to promote periodically making assignment announcements and educational modules in the proposal that is presented to the Department, which may influence decision making.
- CR** I imagine that the continuity will be through short modules, but something more formal and robust is necessary to get the most out of this resource. In the terms of possible assessments, the Department of Education has a reading mechanics assessment, however it is not the only assessment that should be implemented. They were planning to implement it system-wide this coming year.

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

- ER** Let's work together. There is an open letter from the Fiscal Board to the Department of Education requesting a plan on how to deal with food for students, you should go and read them.
- CR** Collectively we are well aware of the challenges and are willing to collaborate as a team, provide expert content, resources, connections, and professional development.
- EA** The important thing is that we take care of ourselves and those affected by this emergency. We always have to look forward; there is always a way out, there is always hope, and there is always a solution.

Key Session Takeaways

1. Some students in Puerto Rico have lost access to educational systems as the pandemic has led to another major disruption of educational continuity, especially in areas most affected by the 2020 earthquakes. Lack of access to smartphones, laptops, and Internet service has created challenges for distance learning and further exacerbated educational disparities. However, at the time of release of this report, the Puerto Rico Department of Education will have started the planned distribution of devices with internet connection to public schools' staff and students.
2. The frequent disruptions in the education of the children in Puerto Rico since 2017 have resulted in significant challenges for acquiring basic, age-appropriate reading skills for those currently in Kindergarten to 3rd grade. When schools reopen, conducting reading assessments is imperative to identifying the individual needs of all students, which should be addressed throughout the next academic year (i.e. extended hours, tutoring, and academic year extension).
3. Teachers need comprehensive professional development opportunities to be well-equipped and trained to offer distance learning, manage the social-emotional needs of their students, and focus instruction on fundamental reading skills and the individualized needs of students.

Session #4 APRIL 29, 2020 cont'd

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL CONTINUITY: (K – 12) IN A LIMITED RESOURCE SETTING

Key Session Takeaways cont'd

4. While schools remain closed, the Puerto Rico Department of Education should ensure food security for the students whom depend on school feeding programs. In the longer term, Puerto Rico should explore providing greater flexibility in direct food assistance to families, possibly through a Pandemic-EBT system.
5. It is essential to consider how the pandemic itself, the premature school year closing, and automatic passing of all students to the next grade has affected each child in Puerto Rico. The downstream consequences of not landing in an age-appropriate grade could have lasting impacts that affect college applications and ultimately job market viability. Efforts should be made to remediate the education that was lost after closures and to create contingency plans for continuous, subsequent interruptions due to hurricane season and the continuation of COVID-19 closures.

Session #5 MAY 6, 2020

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

Session Introduction Yesenia Delgado Castillo

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased rates of domestic violence and child abuse around the world due to isolation, economic instability and other stressors, and limited access to services for victims of violence. In this session, specialists in gender-based violence, clinical psychology, and human rights examine how the pandemic exacerbates preexisting vulnerabilities in disaster-affected contexts and leads to increased rates of violence. The presenters look specifically at the historical trauma faced by Puerto Rico, lessons learned from the post-Hurricane Maria response, and offer practical and policy recommendations for safeguarding victims of gender-based violence and child abuse during times of crisis. Finally, they emphasize the need to incorporate the voices of women and children into disaster preparedness, response, and policy.

Session Speakers

- **Alina Potts (AP)**, Research Scientist, Global Women's Institute
- **Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz (GD)**, Clinical Supervisor, Carlos Albizu University - San Juan Campus
- **Jodi Roue (JR)**, Associate Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY

Pandemics in Disaster-Affected Settings Alina Potts

- **DIRECT IMPACTS:** Strain on health systems already suffering resource gaps and "brain drain". Social isolation and quarantine exacerbate preexisting vulnerabilities and lead to further economic strain.
- **INDIRECT IMPACTS:** Service providers and front line responders have difficulty working because of limited funding and social distancing. Migration and border closures affect those seeking asylum and refuge.

Pathways Linking Pandemics and Violence Alina Potts

1. Economic insecurity and poverty-related stress
2. Quarantines and social isolation
3. Disaster and conflict-related unrest and instability
4. Exposure to exploitative relationships due to changing demographics
5. Virus-specific sources of violence
6. Inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners
7. Exposure to violence and coercion in response efforts
8. Violence perpetrated against health care workers

Safeguarding | Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Alina Potts

- Exploitation may occur at all points of the humanitarian aid distribution process and by a range of perpetrators.
- Seeking help can be limited by lack of awareness, normalization of sexual exploitation and abuse, victim-blaming, fear of losing aid, and confusion around the role of the perpetrator in the aid structure.
- PSEA and "Safeguarding" is survivor-centered and focused on making the whole system for supporting people safer. Women and girls are experts on safeguarding. They must be included in participatory methods in identifying risk and generating solutions.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

Proposed Responses Alina Potts

- Integrate women and children into health systems response and long-term pandemic preparedness.
- Expand and reinforce economic safety nets and expand shelter and temporary housing for survivors.
- Encourage informal (virtual) social support networks.
- Clear communication and support during quarantine mandates to prevent misinformation and stigma.
- Implement flexible funding mechanisms so essential protective services for women and children can continue operating.
- Expand entry points and referrals of victims to health systems.

Historical Trauma in Puerto Rico Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz

- **HISTORICAL TRAUMA:** Collective trauma inflicted on a group of people who share an identity or affiliation (ethnicity, nationality, religion, etc.). Characterized by a trans-generational legacy of traumatic events, expressed through various psychological and social responses.
- e.g. Hurricanes Maria and Irma, Governor Ricardo Rosello breaking the social contract, earthquakes of 2020

Traumatic Stress in Children Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz

- **Elements of traumatic stress:** (1) children that have experienced one or more traumatic events during their lifetime; (2) development of reactions that persist and affect daily lives after the events have terminated; (3) variety of responses, including severe emotional distress, symptoms of depression, anxiety, changes in behavior, difficulty regulating emotions, interpersonal problems, difficulties in attention and concentration. For COVID-19, the traumatic event has not ended, and we still do not know the full impact of the pandemic on children.

Child Abuse & Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz

- Approximately 25% of all adults suffered some type of physical abuse during their childhood, likely an underestimate (World Health Organization). In Puerto Rico in 2017, 5,729 minors were victims of abuse. Approximately 9 in 1,000 minors are abused each year.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences:** Traumatic events can have negative, lasting effects on health and wellbeing. Puerto Rico has collectively experienced numerous adverse childhood experiences over the past few years.

Proposed Responses in Puerto Rico Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz

- **Public Policy:** Family First Act, proposed to change the childcare system to be more focused on family strengthening and ensuring the protection of children.
- **Advocacy:** We all have a responsibility to advocate for our children.
- **Integration of services:** To address disparities in access to health and social services. Provide domestic violence shelters a seat at the emergency management table, designate them as an “essential service” in the initial Executive Orders to ensure state protocols are provided to them during natural disasters/crises periods.

Trauma-Informed Models | Promoting Safe and Healthy Families Gilda F. Rodríguez Díaz

- Use child-friendly messages and visuals to teach and address the concerns of children about COVID-19.
- Practice self-care at home: play as a family, speak with others, maintain physical exercise and activities. Disconnect for some time from social networks and media.
- Change expectations and priorities to focus more on what creates meaning, purpose, and satisfaction.
- Help children and adolescents in developing healthy coping strategies.
- Include children in creating family safety and health plans.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

Human Rights Principles and COVID-19 Jodi Roure

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 3:** Right to Life, **Article 10:** Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, and **Article 13:** Right to freedom of movement.
- **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Article 12:** Rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order, public health or morals or the rights and freedom of others. We often neglect the fact that during these times, services for children with special needs are not available, which compounds violence families and children face under these circumstances.

Data Constraints Jodi Roure

- Difficulty in achieving overall transparency in data. Historically, it's been extremely difficult to obtain data from the local government in Puerto Rico, which has resulted in a surge of civilian-led data projects.

Lessons Learned Post-Hurricane Maria Jodi Roure

1. Lack of communication and transportation compounded the inability to report domestic violence crimes and made it impossible for victims to arrive at shelters.
2. There is a lack of police presence, police station capacity, and priority given to domestic violence crimes.
3. Courts were closed temporarily and did not re-open in full capacity.
4. Massive exodus of citizens from Puerto Rico to mainland U.S. resulted in a decrease of the population by approximately 230,000+ U.S. citizens.
5. Confinement of communication and transportation during COVID-19 gives more control the aggressor and limits the accessibility of resources for victims of violence.

Recommendations, Practices, and Key Takeaways Jodi Roure

- **Youth Matter:** Engage youth in the conversation of how to involve the public and support vulnerable groups.
- Use research-based, website and experiential learning experiences to enhance communication and share information between survivors, the community, and the state during times of crisis.
- Develop technological tools to support parents in homeschooling children and promote cyber engagement.
- Policy decisions must be inclusive of a gender perspective.
- **Institutional Recommendations:** Domestic violence shelter directors need a seat at the emergency management table and implement a coordinated protocol to evacuate domestic violence survivors from shelters.

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

Q How can we increase social support during social isolation?

AP There are practical approaches to prevent, address, and document domestic violence during this time such as Bluetooth sharing on mobile phones to share messages without Internet, using messaging apps to connect with women's groups and other networks, and using signals and codes. There is a web-based application to support survivors called My Plan. It should also be the survivors making these decisions and leading the process in order to give power back to them, which was taken away through the act of violence.

Q How can this issue of violence in Puerto Rico during quarantine be compared with other places in the U.S. or with other Latin American countries?

JR We won't be able to fully assess the outcomes of violence in Puerto Rico and other countries until after quarantine. We need to work more on having detailed comparative information on gender-based crimes.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE: STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session: cont'd

Q How can we manage trauma in children when many primary caregivers are trying to manage their own trauma, including the loss of employment?

GD The first step is to monitor yourself and recognize that you might need help. Seeking help is not a weakness. Caregivers can seek help through tele-psych, services offered free of cost, such as university projects, and many faith-based organizations that have started offering services and support through tele-psych. Communicate with others (friends, colleagues, relatives) who can support you via phone or the web. Seek temporary care for your children from relatives or community organizations if you can't manage it.

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

AP With pandemics in disaster-affected settings, there are a lot of ways in which risks for violence against women and children are exacerbated. There is a lot we can do, as service providers, advocates, and researchers, but also with the women and children who are affected. We need to work together and be very participatory to elevate others' voices, thinking about those who are most left out, in a time when there are less ways to connect with people in the ways we are used to.

GD From everything after the hurricanes and the earthquakes, we've learned that every space of support matters - from the nuclear family to governmental structures. As a Puerto Rican community, we continue to rely on community values and community solidarity.

JR Reach out to your neighbor. Gender-based violence, domestic violence and violence against children are not personal issues. They are public issues and it is our responsibility to ensure the safety of children. We have to work together to help one another. Reach out to resources to find out how to help, support community-based organizations because they know the local communities. Sometimes children can't advocate for themselves, but we as a community can help. We need to ask children their perspective and look at the issue from a child's lens.

Key Session Takeaways

1. The pandemic has led to increased rates of domestic violence and child abuse through multiple pathways: exacerbation of stress during social isolation and quarantine, economic instability, reduced availability of services for victims of violence, lack of escape from abusive partners, decreased visibility of mandatory reporters, and increased violence against health workers. Specifically, in Puerto Rico the delayed and continuous recovery from previous disasters has compounded instability and economic strain.
2. To protect survivors of violence during the pandemic, informal (virtual) social support networks should be encouraged, entry points and referrals of survivors of violence to health systems should be expanded, and efforts should be made to reduce stigmatization of survivors of violence. Additionally, flexible funding mechanisms should be implemented and invested in to ensure essential services to women and children can continue operating.
3. Communication between children and caregivers in the household should be guided by trauma-informed models. It is important to communicate with children and youth about their thoughts and concerns, help them develop healthy coping strategies, and include them when creating family safety and health plans.
4. Women and children should be integrated into health systems response and long-term disaster preparedness. Policy decisions should be inclusive of a gender perspective, for example, plans should consider the needs of survivors of violence in shelter plans during hurricane season.

Session #6 MAY 13, 2020

MENTAL HEALTH & COVID-19: THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on mental health, resulting in a significant increase in symptoms associated with mental health conditions and expanded discussions around mental health during disasters. In this session, mental health experts discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on children's mental health and considerations for the Puerto Rican population, which suffers from compounding traumas including recovery from past disasters, violence, and poverty. The panelists review evidence-based strategies to buffer adverse effects on mental health and propose recommendations at the individual, community, and public policy levels.

Session Speakers

- **Helen Verdeli (HV)**, Director of Clinical Training & Global Mental Health Lab, Columbia University
- **Kalitza Baerga (KB)**, President, Clinical Psychologist, Puerto Rico Psychology Association
- **Helga Maldonado (HM)**, Family Specialist, ESCAPE

Mental Health during COVID-19 Helen Verdeli

- Possibility of infection and control measures has caused high levels of distress.
- Entire mental health service networks transferred from in-person to on-line or mobile.
- Mental health is identified as a priority for the first time in a disaster; more discussions in families and communities around mental health.
- Movement toward flexible and versatile systems of mental health care and building capacity for remote care and monitoring; strengthening of community-based care and community gate-keepers.

Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Mental Health Helen Verdeli

- Inflammation and respiratory symptoms lower individual thresholds for panic attacks, depression, and anxiety.
- Social distancing and confinement take a tremendous toll on individuals and families.
- Increase in domestic violence, abuse, and exploitation.
- Losses of loved ones, resources, parental employment and livelihood.
- Rituals, communal support, and routines mediate the link between traumatic exposure and adaptation.
- Disturbance of schooling, daily routines, physical activities.
- Deterioration of parental mental health - can result in mental health issues among the children.

After exposure to adversity, the majority of people will be able to be resilient and adapt. With Puerto Rico, we worry about the compounding effects of other stressors. We want to not reach the point of toxic stress where people have difficulty recovering.

Evidence-Based Strategies to Buffer the Effect of Adversity in Children Helen Verdeli

- Improve caregiver mental health and identify other adults who can step in and assist.
- Increase positive reinforcement levels at home and establish daily routines and adequate sleep.
- De-escalate conflicts that can erupt out of control and reduce unnecessary information about the disaster.
- Create a frame to understand impact of stress ("fight or flight" leading to irritability).
- Increase connection and communication skills with mindfulness/relaxation or religion/spirituality.

Session #6 MAY 13, 2020 cont'd

MENTAL HEALTH & COVID-19: THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Systems-Level Strategies Helen Verdeli

- Identify and plan outreach to high-risk groups.
- Build mental health capacity using task-sharing – find the gate-keepers in the community.
- Strengthen mental health in primary care and community settings.
- Support community initiatives that strengthen families.

Mental Health of Children in Puerto Rico Kalitza Baerga

- In 2016, 18.14% of children in Puerto Rico met criteria for some mental health condition; 8% of these were between the ages of 16 and 18.
- In 2017, after Hurricane Maria, more than 45% of female students felt sad or hopeless, which represented an increase from 2015; the number of students who seriously considered committing suicide increased from 12.3% in 2015 to 17.1% in 2017.
- Studies highlight the lack of access to mental health services for children in Puerto Rico.

COVID-19 Impact on Children in Puerto Rico Kalitza Baerga

- Limited access to school and play spaces and contact with friends and extended family. Confinement and limitations in communication will have repercussions on the mental health and emotional state of adults and children. Food insecurity due to the closures of schools.
- **Crossroads between earthquakes and COVID-19:** Puerto Ricans were still dealing with the earthquakes when COVID-19 arrived.
- **Increase in violence:** In addition to natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, intra-family problems of violence put children at a great emotional disadvantage and causes prolonged stress.

When we talk about childhood trauma, we cannot separate it from the parents or the main caregivers. It is important to pay particular attention to the mental health of caregivers because we know it can impact the children.

Traumatic Reactions in Children Kalitza Baerga

- Intense and continuing emotional distress.
- Symptoms of depression or anxiety.
- Behavioral changes and difficulties with self-regulation.
- Problems relating to others or forming attachments.
- Attention and academic problems.
- Difficulty sleeping or eating.
- Physical symptoms, such as pain and discomfort.
- Use of drugs or alcohol in adolescents, or other risky behaviors like unhealthy sexual activities.

Initiatives: Puerto Rico Psychology Association Kalitza Baerga

- Increased focused on disasters and mental health response since Hurricane Maria -- psychological first aid, collection center, emotional management talks for employees, supporting Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, educational videos about loss and mourning, managing emotions, child abuse, etc.
- Psych-Educational Guide for mothers, fathers, and caregivers on managing children during the pandemic.
- COVID-19 Virtual Support Groups - various groups for health professionals and psychologists, the general public, students, social workers, and the LGBT community.
- Directory of psychologists who offer tele-psychology.

Session #6 MAY 13, 2020 cont'd

MENTAL HEALTH & COVID-19: THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria Helga Maldonado

- Exacerbated economic problems, increased lack of safe housing, increased food insecurity, and has left mental health increasingly deteriorating.
- Challenges to satisfy the basic needs such as electrical energy, drinking water, purchase of food, medicine, educational materials, among others.
- Being in constant worry ends up deteriorating an individual's physical and emotional health.

Mental Health Response | Hurricanes vs. Earthquakes Helga Maldonado

- **HURRICANES:** Late recognition of trauma, people took long time to apply for mental health services, increase in requests 6 months after Hurricane Maria and at the start of next hurricane season.
- **EARTHQUAKES:** People requested services immediately, openness to psychological first aid in communities, severe emotional distress was immediately experienced, constant insecurity and high levels of anxiety.

Trauma of COVID-19 in Puerto Rico Helga Maldonado

- The population has not yet overcome the trauma from the hurricanes and earthquakes. Puerto Ricans, especially those in the southern area of the island, do not know if it is safer to be inside or outside of the house. Psychological crises have exploded as there is a constant sense of insecurity.
- Aggravation of situations of poverty, unemployment, child abuse and other social problems.

ESCAPE Initiatives during COVID-19 Helga Maldonado

- Continuation of services remotely or virtually, including psychological therapy services and counseling.
- Distribution of food and supplies.

Recommendations Kalitza Baerga and Helga Maldonado

- **Trauma-informed practices:** Train health professionals in trauma-informed practices; educate teachers, parents, caregivers, and organizations that work with children on the manifestations of trauma and making referrals.
- **Community support:** Promotion of social support and reporting of child abuse in communities.
- **Schools:** Adjust academic curriculum and goals to minimize stress in students; create spaces for healing in schools and businesses and make available mental health professional at all schools.
- **Media:** Publish information about trauma and focus on how organizations are addressing the issue.
- **Advocacy:** Continue raising the voice in favor of the most vulnerable populations -- including children and adolescents. Fight for greater access to mental health services, particularly for children.
- **Public policy:** Denounce public policies that threaten the rights of children; develop new public policies that prioritize the well-being of children; increase education and support services for families.

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session:

- Q **How can we attend to the mental health needs of children who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19?**
HV Try to maintain rituals and social connection and to honor the memory of the dead person. It is important for the children to see that the parents/caregivers around them are managing fine, so we have to provide support to parents/caregivers. Promote connection with their peers.

Session #6 MAY 13, 2020 cont'd

MENTAL HEALTH & COVID-19: THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session: cont'd

Q How can we continue special education services for children during COVID-19?

KB There has been lobbying to continue offering special education and therapy via remote methods. However, this brings many challenges for the professional, not only in offering virtual services, but also the pay is extremely low, making the situation very complicated. A recommendation could be to work with the fathers and mothers and train those caregivers so that they can give therapies and help their children to continue to receive some type of service.

Q How can we attend to children and youth with special needs who are non-verbal?

KB The Puerto Rico Psychology Association has a broadcast with specialists in behavioral analysis on recommendations for helping children with functional diversity, for example, in the use of masks.

Q What mental health services are available for LGBTQ+ communities?

KB A center called Vida of the municipality of San Juan and the True Self Foundation both offer psychological services for the LGBT community and can be contacted on social networks.

Q What recommendations do you have for delivery services to families who don't have much access to the Internet or digital media?

HMESCAPE provides alternative guidance for parents and caregivers via telephone.

Q What mental health problem do you think we might see in the future?

HMWe are uncertain about the effects of the pandemic, since it is not something we have seen before. It is difficult to say what specific mental health disorders will result but we know it will have an effect on mental health with all the complexities it brings -- not only direct effects on health but also other stressors and related anxiety connected to work, the economy, and the family system.

Q What services does ESCAPE offer in Guaynabo? More than Early Head Start?

HMThe center in Guaynabo offers support and development services for mothers of children from birth to 4 years and for pregnant women. We also offer prevention talks and workshops for the communities, including Guaynabo. You can access more information and request services by email or social media.

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

HV The outcomes of the pandemic depend on the resources and on helping the communities use all their ability to heal each other. Survival of any organism depends on our ability to adapt. Thinking about ways to adapt, being creative, thinking outside of the box, and reimagining is so critical for this difficult time.

KB Solidarity in our communities and with our family, friends, neighbors, acquaintances is what will save us. The strength of the people around us and the support is what we need to move forward. It's also important to cultivate hope that we are going to move forward.

HMThe process of recovery has to be a collective process. We have to focus on self-management and assess how trauma affects us on a personal level, on a community level; how it affects our jobs, our schools, our children. If we understand this better, we will be able to manage what we individually feel and also manage the people around us. If you can't manage yourself or your children, seek help. Don't wait until it's too late.

Session #6 MAY 13, 2020 cont'd

MENTAL HEALTH & COVID-19: THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Key Session Takeaways

1. The pandemic has resulted in a significant rise in mental health concerns around the world and new efforts have risen to create more versatile and flexible mental health systems for disaster contexts. As mental health is addressed in Puerto Rico, it is important to consider the history of consecutive disasters and how the inconsistency in support mechanisms after and between disasters continues to negatively impact communities.
2. A caregiver's reaction to trauma will directly affect the reaction and outcomes of the children in their care. Parents, guardians, and child service providers can buffer adverse childhood experiences by limiting access to unnecessary information about the disaster, establishing routines for sleep and physical activity, and promoting the wellbeing and mental health of caregivers.
3. There is a need for more trauma-informed practices in healthcare settings, schools, and other child-serving organizations. For example, the trauma caused by the pandemic should be considered when adjusting the academic curriculum of schools and creating spaces for healing in schools and businesses.

Session #7 MAY 20, 2020

HOUSING STABILITY AND COVID-19: ENSURING HEALTHY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Session Introduction Antonia Samur

The current pandemic and resulting public health policies have highlighted that it is essential to guarantee healthy housing and living environments in order to achieve positive health outcomes. Puerto Rico is faced with the challenges of continued reconstruction post-earthquakes, the upcoming storm season, and threat of extreme climate risk. This session's speakers discuss emerging themes in recovery and rebuilding in Puerto Rico, the current state of reconstruction, and considerations for the upcoming storm season. They also examine the legal right to housing and the current public policies that intend to ensure safe and affordable housing during COVID-19. Finally, they provide an overview of the homeless population in Puerto Rico, challenges in accessing homeless shelters during the pandemic, and the importance of representing the voice of homeless people in disaster response.

Session Speakers

- **Laurie Shoeman (LS)**, Senior Program Director, Resilience, Enterprise Community
- **Ariadna Godreau (AG)**, Executive Director, Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico
- **Yorelys Rivera (YR)**, Executive Director, Iniciativa Comunitaria

Threat of Extreme Climate Events Laurie Shoeman

As many communities work to protect against floods, fires, and earthquakes, they are also working to protect existing affordable housing.

- Communities with less financial and programmatic resources take longer to build back. Priority is on low and moderate-income communities that are facing extreme climate risk. They are often located on the most vulnerable land and more exposed to threats such as flooding, fires, and earthquakes.
- We are looking at a future full of volatility and shocks.

Considerations for Storm Season During COVID-19 Laurie Shoeman

- **Housing:** Will have to be adjusted to deal with people sheltering in place. Many communities will not evacuate their homes for fear of dealing with mass shelter.
- **Shelters:** Community facilities will not have as much space to shelter individuals safely and will need to be retrofitted to allow for additional ventilation, energy, and resources.

While we wait for FEMA and other first responders to come forward, households need to develop their own stability, resilience and in-house capability to prepare for and respond to future disasters.

Emerging Themes in Recovery and Rebuilding in Puerto Rico Laurie Shoeman

- Insufficient financial and programmatic resources for many households to rebuild
- Stability of the energy and water grids.
- Rebuilding in the floodplain - exposure to extreme storm surge.
- Rise of vacant properties. Proof of ownership.

"Keep Safe": A Guide for Resilient Housing Design in Island Communities Laurie Shoeman

- **Goals:** Raise awareness about safe building of housing through practical and affordable solutions and best practices; call attention to the risks faced by the communities in Puerto Rico and other communities; to build community around resilient housing; identification of community needs to encourage multi-sector response strategies.
- Community participation and engagement is critical in creating a resilient home.
- Strategies address multiple risks: atmospheric, geologic, and water risks.

HOUSING STABILITY AND COVID-19: ENSURING HEALTHY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Community Resilience Centers Laurie Shoeman

- Used as evacuation centers, a place to convene and connect with neighbors, and to distribute benefits (WIC, food stamps, FEMA assistance).
- **Considerations for storm season:** communications with backup energy; structure is code compliant and able to withstand high wind and other impacts; energy storage capacity; rainwater collection; food production; programming to help youth deal with the trauma of disasters.

Right to Housing Post-Disaster Ariadna Godreau

The complete health of individuals and youth cannot be achieved without guaranteeing safe housing.

- Effects of disasters on housing in Puerto Rico: 70,000 homes destroyed after Hurricane Maria (September 2017); 622+ home with significant damage after the earthquakes (January 2020); 200 people still displaced in camps at the start of the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Between December 28, 2019 when the earthquakes began until the beginning of the lockdown March 13, 2020, there were 758+ new cases of foreclosures.
- 1/3 of the population rents housing with little or no local protection.

Fair Recovery Ariadna Godreau

- People have the right to recovery processes that respond to their needs, wishes, and rights.
- There have been significant gaps in requests for housing assistance and the assistance that FEMA has provided.

Demands for Fair Recovery Ariadna Godreau

- Eliminate absolute bans on rebuilding in flood and landslide areas, stop relocations to make mitigation possible, eliminate discrimination against people who don't have a formal title of their property, and guarantee effective community participation.

Tenant Rights Ariadna Godreau

- 1/3 of the Puerto Rican population rents housing, the majority living below the poverty line. Rent in Puerto Rico is not sustainable. 47% of renters invest more than 35% of their income in rent.
- **CARES Act:** moratorium on evictions for 120 days in public housing; protections for private properties that are federally subsidized.
- **CDBG-CV Funds through CARES Act:** \$45.2 million allotted to Puerto Rico, to be used in part for rental assistance, paying up to three months of rent for families that are eligible due to low or moderate income.

Profile of Homelessness 2019 Yorelys Rivera

- 2,535 people (27% are chronic wanderers)
- 79% men / 21% women
- 45% did not finish high school
- 63.5% problematic use of drugs, alcohol, and prescription drugs
- 38.8% mental health diagnostic

HOUSING STABILITY AND COVID-19: ENSURING HEALTHY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Characteristics that Define Homeless People Yorelys Rivera

- **Lack of social networks** in their usual geographic location.
- **Solitude.**
- **Lack of self-esteem.**
- **Invisibility:** Challenge for providing adequate services. Estimated to be more than 300 or 350 youth on the street every day, although they are not all counted.
- **Misunderstood by society:** Iniciativa Comunitaria seeks to gain a holistic view of situations of homelessness.

With the earthquakes, the hurricanes, and the high rates of unemployment, we are going to have more youth on the streets. It is happening now with COVID-19 with university students.

Why are Youth on the Streets? Yorelys Rivera

- Unemployment - lack of job opportunities for youth.
- Financial problems.
- Rejection from family because of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Physical abuse.
- Caregiver substance abuse.

We have to consider how our youth, once they are working age, can have access to work so they don't fall victim to working for drug points, for sex work, or are victims of labor exploitation.

Challenges for Admission to Shelters During the COVID-19 Pandemic Yorelys Rivera

- Limited capacity of spaces for emergency shelters.
- Design of shelters: shared rooms, bathrooms and kitchens do not guarantee protection from COVID-19.
- COVID-19 testing requirement for admission.
- Required to not be in active use of controlled substances; however, there is only access to treatment for 8% of people with problematic drug use in Puerto Rico.
- Required to be stabilized and with medication if they have mental health condition; lack of capacity and access to mental health treatment in Puerto Rico.

Questions (Q) Answered During This Session:

Q Has the federal government offered any recent update on an approach for homeless people during the pandemic?

YR No. The federal and local government have been slow and have not taken concrete actions to create a plan, particularly with the homeless. A draft was made but today if a homeless person tests positive, there is no structure to say where they should go. Staying in quarantine and washing hands isn't possible for homeless people. Our organization has established community sinks and given them some kits to have better hygiene within their environment, but there is no structured service right now for the homeless.

Q What do you think will be the impacts of the pandemic on homeless people?

YR For the government, homeless people are not a priority and a lot are going to die on the streets. It's also important to highlight that the profile of homeless people has changed. Today, we see families and more youth sleeping in cars. It's important to remove the idea that all homeless are drug users or chronically homeless. There are more people who lose their jobs and start to sleep on the street. Then, the chain of events continues; they start to consume drugs and alcohol to manage the difficult circumstance. We saw this a lot in the south with the earthquakes.

HOUSING STABILITY AND COVID-19: ENSURING HEALTHY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Questions (Q) Answered During this Session: cont'd

Q In the case of the FHA loans, what are the alternatives for these families?

AG Right now, there is an option to be able to stop payments for 180 days and it is assumed that after 180 days, they will revalue you and if you can demonstrate financial need you can receive the loan again. It's important to take advantage of this type of moratorium. There's no clear guide on what will happen when the moratorium ends.

Q Do you know if the rent payment for public or federal housing will be reevaluated if people remain without employment because of the pandemic?

AG The Department of Housing has said that the moratorium on payment collection will last until the end of the pandemic. We don't know how long that will be. But yes, they say that they will reevaluate case by case, because income has decreased.

Q What do you think are the challenges for thinking about mass care and for sheltering for hurricane season, given the situation of the pandemic and the social distancing guidelines that will likely have to continue throughout next year?

LS There are not enough shelters for mass sheltering that are safe and there is going to be reduced capacity at the shelters because of COVID-19. A lot of people aren't going to leave their homes, even if an evacuation order is called. There needs to be an expedited effort to make sure roofs are secured and that there's a continuous load path in place so that houses are stable. There are multiple risks and aftershocks occurring in the south; there needs to be a concerted effort to get repairs done in buildings that are still stable. Supplies have to be expedited to Puerto Rico – generators, water, personal protective equipment, oxygen tanks, fuel, so that it's on island when storms are occurring.

Q Where do you think those plans for providing those supplies stand right now?

AG There is a FEMA group that is organized every week to discuss these issues. The community organizations need to be given the resources, both financial and programmatic, to support preparation. There has to be community participation to make sure funding is spent in the right way and priorities are determined and informed by the community sector.

Q Do you think there is room for community participation in designing those plans?

AG When granted or acknowledged those spaces of participation, communities have been willing to influence the plans. When we have the space for public participation to happen, there's a lot of interest in the communities because they have been advocating for these changes for a long time now. They need the space to develop power within the topics of plotting and disaster resiliency, claims they've had since before 2017 but that are becoming more urgent.

LS When you have agencies coming in from the United States that have not worked in Puerto Rico, it's very difficult for them to make determinations on community needs. This should be done from the community perspective and there are many leaders around Puerto Rico that have been working for many generations. A participatory effort needs to be considered.

HOUSING STABILITY AND COVID-19: ENSURING HEALTHY HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENTS

Speaker 30 Second Conclusion

- LS** We need more community informed processes at the highest level, especially with the development and design of housing so that housing is safe and resilient. We have an opportunity right now with the reconstruction programs to ensure that the incorporation of resiliency is made in housing so that it stands for generations. That needs to be a priority of our communities.
- AG** I am grateful for this space, that you have been able to organize and for my colleagues to be able to bring everything that's happening together in a comprehensive way.
- YR** Although our island of Puerto Rico is once again facing difficult times, the reality is that Puerto Rico has "cuero duro" (tough skin) and the ability to reinvent itself; to look at the challenge and think of partnerships. Something good of the community sector is how we join forces to be able to overcome adversities and disasters like those we have experienced in the past three years. I believe that this pandemic teaches us that it is always important to look at and to work with and for the community. This is vital for us. The community initiative continues.

Key Session Takeaways

1. In Puerto Rico there have been shortfalls in providing safe housing, housing reconstruction, and fair recovery to all individuals. COVID-19 has further exposed inequalities in housing and housing assistance, particularly among renters, and led to calls for better protection of the right to housing.
2. Protecting the right to housing and fair recovery in Puerto Rico requires ensuring families have the municipal support to mitigate risk by re-envisioning CDBG-DR reconstruction funds for rebuilding in flood and landslide areas, which in the past has led to significant underspending of available reconstruction funds. Reducing restrictions would allow for the prioritization of mitigation instead of relocation, when feasible. Protecting these rights would also require addressing barriers in rebuilding that currently work against individuals who don't have a formal property title, including the community in reconstruction planning processes, and requiring the appearance of attorneys in eviction processes.
3. Social distancing protocols will greatly limit the capacity of shelters for the upcoming hurricane season, so it is important to continue preparing for the storm season, adjusting shelter plans, and preparing households to have the resources they need to shelter-in-place, if possible, instead of evacuating to emergency shelters.
4. Efforts should be made to bolster the voices of community organizations and ensure the participation of community members in reconstruction and preparedness processes. Community collaboration and participation is key for identifying community risks and needs, raising awareness of resilient housing, and building multi-sector response strategies.

National Center for Disaster Preparedness

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APPENDIX



CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

At the Crossroads of Poverty and Disaster

Webinar Series Resource List

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

S1: Children & Pandemics: Response in the Context of Puerto Rico

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/405621621>

1. **National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) COVID-19 Resource Center:** https://bit.ly/ncdp_covid19
2. **Resilient Children/ Resilient Communities Initiative Website:**
<https://ncdp.columbia.edu/rcrc/>
3. **Youth Development Institute (IDJ):**
 - Report “Los efectos del COVID-19 en la seguridad económica de la niñez y familias en Puerto Rico” (ES):
<https://juventudpr.org/library.html>
 - Report “Un futuro de pobreza infantil en Puerto Rico: cuánto nos cuesta y qué podemos hacer” (ES):
<https://www.cuantonoscuesta.com/>

S2: Policy implications of COVID-19: Puerto Rico’s Children, Youth, and Their Families

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/408244992>

1. **First Focus’ Fact Sheet: Aid to Children During Coronavirus Outbreak:**
<https://firstfocus.org/blog/fact-sheet-coronavirus>

S3: Organizational Response to COVID-19: Risk Communication & Community Partnerships

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/411236937>

1. **RCRC TOOLBOX:** <https://rcrctoolbox.org/>
 - RCRC Toolbox COVID-19 Resource Catalogue:
https://rcrctoolbox.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/RCRC-Toolbox_Full-Catalog_EN.pdf
 - Children and Coronavirus: A Guide for Families and Providers:
<https://bit.ly/ncdp-gd>
 - “Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) in a Time of COVID-19”:
<https://bit.ly/rc-wbr-35>

S4: Supporting Educational Continuity: (K – 12) in a Limited Resource Setting

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/414162495>

1. **Puerto Rico Education Foundation:**
 - The Virtual Notebook Initiative handbook “Camino Hacia la META”: <https://bit.ly/374cfDJ>
2. **Flamboyán Foundation**
 - K-3 Reading Site (links and several resources to support reading) (ES):
<https://flamboyanfoundation.org/es/lo-que-hacemos/fortaleciendo-la-ensenanza-de-la-lectura-k-3/>
 - YouTube Channel of serie de videos de lecturas en voz alta de libros infantiles (ES):
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnrb1Zri5tQEPV-EG5sl047z5dAmebWos>
 - “The state of learning in Reading and writing in primary grades of public Schools in Puerto Rico” (ES):
<https://bit.ly/3gxdaQO>
 - “Puerto Rico’s students deserve our best effort” by Carlos Rodríguez (ES): <https://bit.ly/3gGahxe>
3. **Puerto Rico Department of Education**
 - “Procedure for Entities to Participate by Offering Meals During Covid-19 Emergency Through the Summer Food Service Program” (ES): <https://bit.ly/2ChDAai>

Webinar Series Resource List

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19 AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

S5: Domestic Violence & Child Abuse: Strategies & Considerations During a Pandemic

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/415693801>

1. Global Women's Institute Identified Resources:

- Article: "A Gender Lens on COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women and Children": <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/gender-lens-covid-19-pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children>
- Resources Repository of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV): https://nnedv.org/latest_update/resources-response-coronavirus-covid-19/
- Article: "Preventing & Managing the Spread of COVID-19 Within Domestic Violence Programs": <https://vawnet.org/news/preventing-managing-spread-covid-19-within-domestic-violence-programs>
- Webinar: "Using Technology to Support Victims During a Public Health Crisis": <https://shelterasia.org/2020/04/01/using-technology-to-support-victims-during-a-public-health-crisis/>
- COVID-19 repository of the Gender Based Violence AoR Global Protection Center: https://gbvaor.net/thematic-areas?term_node_tid_depth_1%5B121%5D=121
- Article: "Technical note: protection of children during the Coronavirus pandemic" <https://alliancecpha.org/en/COVID19>
- Article: "Ethical Considerations for Evidence Generation Involving Children on the COVID-19 Pandemic." <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/DP%202020-01.pdf>
- Article: "A Practical Approach to Prevent, Address and Document Domestic Violence under COVID-19." [https://www.madre.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/From Global Coordination to Local Strategies.pdf](https://www.madre.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/From%20Global%20Coordination%20to%20Local%20Strategies.pdf)
- Article: "Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children." www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children/

S6: Mental Health & COVID-19: The Needs of Children, Youth, and Families

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/418204579>

1. Puerto Rico Psychology Association

- Sign-up for Virtual Support Groups: <https://cutt.ly/grupos-appr>
- Educational videos series transmitted on Facebook (ES): <https://www.asppr.net/post/serie-especial-de-videos-educativos-por-la-cuarentena-covid-19>
- Psycho-education Guide for Parents and Caregivers (ES): <https://bit.ly/2z4Hy4J>
- Directory of Psychologists Who Offer Telepsychology: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/0/d/1oILCa95dlc9knJguyzcQZD74P9vdwz1x2UkBW6XI1DM>

2. ESCAPE

- ESCAPE COVID-19 Helpline: 787-679-6322

S7: Housing Stability and COVID-19: Ensuring Healthy Housing and Living Environments

Watch Here: <https://vimeo.com/421240547>

1. Enterprise Community

- Guide: "Keep Safe – A Guide for Resilient Housing Design in Island Communities": <https://bit.ly/38FDR2Y>

2. Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico

- Legal helpline for people about loss mitigation, mediation and foreclosures: 787-957-3106

**National Center for
Disaster Preparedness**

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

475 Riverside Drive, Suite 401
New York, NY 10115

ncdp@columbia.edu

<https://ncdp.columbia.edu>

More on this webinar series at: <https://bit.ly/rcrc-c19webinars>

Participating Organization's Social Media

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICO AND COVID-19

AT THE CROSSROADS OF POVERTY AND DISASTER

National Center for Disaster Preparedness – <https://ncdp.columbia.edu/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ncdpcu/>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/columbia_ncdp or @columbia_ncdp

The Youth Development Institute – <http://juventudpr.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IDJ.PR>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/idj_pr or @IDJ_PR

Puerto Rico Children and Youth Taskforce – <https://www.prcytaskforce.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/prcytaskforce/>

First Focus on Children – <https://firstfocus.org>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/firstfocus.children/>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/First_Focus or @First_Focus

Social Research Center – University of PR Río Piedras – <http://www.uprrp.edu>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/cis.uprrp.edu/>

Flamboyán Foundation – <https://flamboyanfoundation.org>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/FundacionFlamboyan/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/FlamboyanFDN> or @FlamboyanFDN

Puerto Rico Education Foundation – <https://predfoundation.org>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/predfoundation/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/predfoundation> or @predfoundation

Teacher's Association of Puerto Rico – <http://www.asociaciondemaestros.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/amprnet/>

Global Women's Institute – <https://globalwomensinstitute.gwu.edu>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GlobalWomensInstitute/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/GWUGlobalWomen> or @GWUGlobalWomen

Carlos Albizu University San Juan – <https://www.albizu.edu>

- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/AlbizuPR>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ualbizupr> or @UAlbizuPR

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY – <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/JohnJayCollege/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/JohnJayCollege> or @JohnJayCollege

Global Mental Health Lab, CU Teacher's College – <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/gmhlab/>

- GMH Lab Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/teacherscollegecolumbia/>
- CU Teacher's College Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GMHLab.TC/>

Puerto Rico Psychology Association – <https://www.asppr.net>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ASPPR/>
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/appr_pr or @ASPPR

ESCAPE – <http://www.escapepr.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/escapeorg/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ESCAPEPR> or @ESCAPEPR

Enterprise Communities – <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EnterpriseCommunityPartners/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/enterprisenow> or @enterprisenow

Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico – <https://www.ayuda.com>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ayudalegalpuertorico/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ayudalegalpr> or @ayudalegalpr

Iniciativa Comunitaria – <http://www.iniciativacomunitaria.org/>

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/iniciativapr/>

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