

In September 2017, Puerto Rico was battered by Hurricane Irma and Hurricane María, the latter being the strongest hurricane to ever hit the island. The United States government's double standard in handling relief efforts on the mainland versus those on the island exposed Puerto Rico's status as a colony. Puerto Ricans were – and continue to be – left at the mercy of a government that lacks meaningful representation and voting power in Congress to approve the necessary aid. The aftermath of Hurricane María is emblematic of the urgent need to develop a more in-depth, specific continuity plan to prepare for proper mental health care in the wake of future storms.

In the aftermath of these disasters, Puerto Ricans will face significant infrastructure damage affecting roads, drinking water, electricity, cellular networks, and access to medical care. The 2017 storms submerged the island's 3.4 million citizens in a humanitarian crisis that accompanied an already existing economic one. María was the third costliest tropical cyclone in United States history, with estimates showing thousands displaced from their homes, seeking shelter elsewhere in Puerto Rico or in the mainland United States. Surveillance is critical to understanding the impact of deaths, injuries, and displacements on communities. However, officials lack reliable data, which distorts not only immediate responses, but also future steps for preparedness, risk-reduction, and planning. Six months after the storm, many neighborhoods still lack electricity without indications of when it will return. The winds also took away the mantle from the "commonwealth," a euphemism used to describe the island's political relationship with the United States.

The Caribbean islands face hurricanes every season and generally know how to prepare. However, this catastrophe represents much more than just an extension of past storms. The island has lost life, potable water, power, communication, infrastructure, freedom of movement, security, predictability, and above all, social and government services—the foundation of effective relief efforts. As a result, since the storm, the island has seen increased mortality rates and high rural displacement rates.

Currently, warning signs of a full-fledged mental health crisis exist, with many people exhibiting post-traumatic stress symptoms. This ongoing crisis, not visible in a wound or a downed power line, has placed significant strain on citizens' mental health.

Immediately after a natural disaster, many typically experience fear, anxiety, sadness or shock. However, if symptoms continue for weeks or months following the event, they may indicate a more serious psychological issue. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the most commonly studied mental health disorders, which can occur after frightening events that threaten one's own life or those of family and friends. Common responses to disasters also include substance abuse and domestic violence. While many survivors show resilience, studies indicate that mental and behavioral health issues can crop up weeks, months, and even years later. Length of exposure to trauma is an important variable for PTSD development, and many Puerto Ricans face months of suffering.

In May, 2018 the Harvard Study came out and faced a harsh political reaction that led to necropolitics and clear signs of coloniality of power that led to efforts of debating the death count and promoting the official number of 64. The study led to a social change movement that made the government change public policy and participate in memorial services and conduct their own mortality study.