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War and public health: Relevancies and competencies explained by 'Public Health India'

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Abstract

Figure 1 represents the graphical abstract of this article.

Keywords: war, public health, relevancies and competencies, prevention and management.

Introduction

Relevancy between public health and prevention of war

Wars and armed conflicts vastly affect numerous public health elements, and the contemporary Russia-Ukraine crisis may be a fitting example of this. Wars have disastrous consequences on the physical and mental well-being of the population. The consequences of war are not just confined to its participants. War also affects the uninvolved people, countries, and governments. Warfares impact the social life *within and surrounding* the war-affected regions (Hjertman, Nauman, Vretemark, Williams, and Kjellin, 2018) ^[10]. Additionally, war circumstances significantly affect environmental health (Leaning, 2000) ^[12].

Wars damage health infrastructure, obliterating the nation's decades of healthcare growth, which impairs the healthcare system's ability to respond to the war's direct and indirect health repercussions (Debarre, 2018) ^[8]. Due to armed conflict, millions of people have been internally displaced, relocated, or compelled to escape their nations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018) ^[21]. This has a broader public health impact, as these circumstances drive several physical and mental health-related consequences in the case of inconvenient transportation, forced encampments, and refugees' limited access to healthcare in the host nations (Daynes, 2016) ^[7].

Additionally, the link between forced migration and socioeconomic stress is well-accepted (Siriwardhana & Stewart, 2013) ^[19]. These unfavourable consequences may continue for decades, which undoubtedly implies that war can keep the public health of involved—and to a certain degree uninvolved—countries affected for several generations. In summary, war is a public health crisis and requires the public health departments' extraordinary attention to prevention.

War: A man-made public health problem?

Following the declaration by the Turkish government of a military operation in Afrin, Syria, in January 2018, the Turkish Medical Association (TMA, 2018) ^[20] released a public statement proclaiming that "*war is a man-made public health problem*" (Legge *et al.*, 2018) ^[14]. Additionally, as Sharmila Devi reports, 11 TMA members—five of whom were members of the TMA's central council—were later charged with inciting hatred and hostility and sentenced to 20 months in jail (Razum *et al.*, 2019) ^[16].

The Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) represents 119 public health schools in 43 countries (Razum *et al.*, 2019) ^[16]. With unequivocal evidence, ASPHER (n.d.) ^[2] recognizes war as a man-made public health problem, and ASPHER is committed to drawing the public's and policymakers' attention to the irreversible harm that armed conflicts wreak on population health. As a result, ASPHER (n.d.) ^[2] expressed sympathy for the convicted TMA members.

Importantly, whether war is man-made or not is likely out of the scope of this editorial. However, this editorial (so far) almost certainly suggests that the public health departments could help prevent and manage war.

Most importantly, it is essential to acknowledge that addressing war is significantly complex. Therefore, solely public health departments may not help prevent or manage war; thus, a "whole system approach" is required. The whole system approach helps establish various interlinkages (synergies) within diverse disciplines, sectors, institutions,

international organizations, and private and governmental departments (Pathare, 2021) ^[15]. Therefore, these interlinkages and synergies could effectively help prevent and manage the war. This editorial will now spotlight the competencies in public health departments suitable for preventing and managing the war.

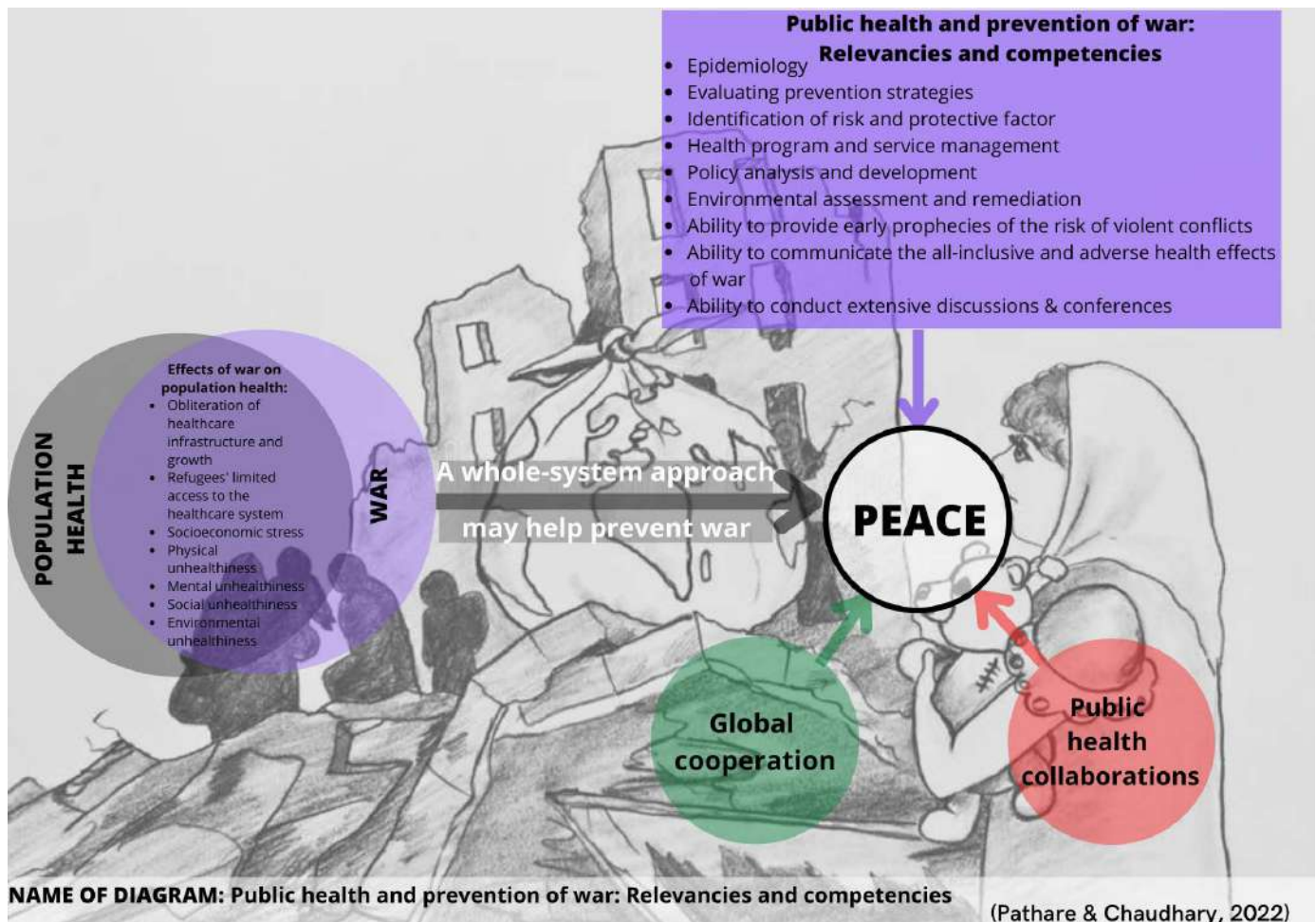


Fig 1: Public health and prevention of war: Relevancies and competencies (graphical abstract).

Competencies in public health that are relevant to preventing war

Public health professionals are uniquely qualified to participate in war prevention due to their expertise in multiple admirably relevant areas such as: epidemiology (Bartlett & Judge, 1997) ^[3]; planning, developing, monitoring, and evaluating prevention strategies (Reynolds & Sutherland, 2013) ^[18]; risk and protective factor identification (Elbogen *et al.*, 2012) ^[9]; health programme and service management (Hunter & Berman, 1997) ^[11]; policy analysis and development (Walt *et al.*, 2008) ^[22]; environmental assessment and remediation (Reis *et al.*, 2015) ^[17]; and health advocacy (Chapman, 2001) ^[6].

Some public health workers have an extensive understanding of the consequences of war, either from personal exposure to the violent conflict or from working with patients and communities/societies in armed conflict circumstances (Bou-Karroum *et al.*, 2020) ^[4]. Notably, the field of public health serves as a unifying ground around which—to form war prevention alliances—many disciplines are willing to work in synergy (Leather *et al.*, 2006) ^[13]. This offers a robust opportunity to implement a whole system approach to prevent war because the public health voice is considered chiefly as a prudent force for better population health.

Public health networks can give early prophecies of the risk of violent conflict by collecting and reviewing health indicators regularly (Bunde-Birouste *et al.*, 2004) ^[5]. Besides, Public Health experts, as performed by American Public Health Association (2009) ^[1], can convey the all-inclusive health effects of war to the relevant authorities, decision-makers, policymakers, and the wider population. Moreover, the different public health branches could formulate extensive discussions & conferences about war's extensive damage to the nation's economy and social life.

Concluding words

Public health has the potential to make a unique contribution to the prevention of war by comprehensively designing prevention-focused programs, services, training, policies, and advocacy campaigns. This article has pointed out the relevance of public health in preventing and managing the war. This article, additionally, has also discussed the competencies in public health regarding war prevention and management. Therefore, although war undoubtedly is a multi-faceted and complex issue, the role of public health—practitioners, academics, policymakers, experts, and researchers—is indisputable. In order to maintain peace and harmony, it is time to participate together to downsize the public health consequences of war.

Authors' contributions

Abhinav V Pathare contributed to the conception, design, literature search, interpretation, and manuscript writing, and Anup B Chaudhary revised the article and made an intellectual contribution. Both authors were involved in carefully proofreading the content and approved the manuscript for publication.

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