

**Preliminary Report
Post-Hurricane Mitch Needs Assessment
American Red Cross International Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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I. Background:

In late October and early November 1998, Hurricane Mitch, one of the strongest, most devastating hurricanes of this century, caused widespread destruction throughout Central America. El Salvador was battered for several days by high winds and torrential rains that caused enormous losses of life and catastrophic damage to the infrastructure of this country. The American Red Cross International Services (ARC) was requested to address relief efforts related to health in the hurricane-affected areas of Central America and requested CDC to perform a needs assessment to assist in directing its efforts.

II. Methods and Materials:

Household surveys were performed during the week of January 25, 1999 using a modified cluster-sampling method. The most heavily damaged regions were identified by the in-country ARC delegates and were subsequently divided into clusters based on the distribution of an estimated 5304 households affected by the hurricane. Using a random number generator, we selected 30 clusters with probability proportional to the number of households within a cluster. One adult family member was interviewed from each of 7 randomly selected households within each cluster. Two hundred and twenty-five interviews were completed, representing 1305 people.

A questionnaire in Spanish to utilized to address health care needs and availability, food and water availability, housing, and storm warning and preparation. The interviewers were local Red Cross personnel and volunteers guided by the principal investigator.

Data was entered and analyzed in Epi Info 6.1. Frequencies of variables were calculated for the population as a whole.

III. Results:

Demographics:

Of the households interviewed, 92% were living in their home at the time of the survey. Seventy percent of households did not sustain any damage to their home during the hurricane. Within the households that had experienced damage, 22% had damage, but were able to live in their home and 5% had damage that had been repaired. Only 3% of the households were completely destroyed. The mean household size of the population interviewed was 5.8 people (range 1-16 people) before the hurricane and remained the same after the hurricane.