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**Ebola: Societal Implications**

*Societal Implications:*

Because there has never been an outbreak of Ebola outside of Africa, the consequences of the disease are significantly different than if it was prevalent elsewhere in the world. Most of the African countries where Ebola outbreaks have been detected are under-developed, so public health infrastructure in these nations oftentimes do not have the necessary capabilities to handle outbreaks. Many hospitals and medical facilities in West Africa lack the proper equipment and supplies to protect the staff from infection (Buseh, et al.). This can often increase the spread of the disease, worsening the medical conditions and increasing the number of cases and deaths from Ebola.

Additionally, many of the people in the areas where outbreaks have occurred are unable or unwilling to access proper sanitation and clean water. For example, in Sierra Leone it is not uncommon for people to present uncleaned meat to passersby to attempt to make a sale to the potential customer (The Guardian, 2024). This is not only unhygienic from a general perspective but is especially dangerous if an Ebola outbreak has occurred in the area. Given that Ebola is spread primarily through the transmission of human or animal bodily fluids, issues like these are a major problem when it comes to attempting to prevent the spread of the disease.

As mentioned previously, cultural traditions related to burial practices play a major role in spreading Ebola, given that these practices are so firmly rooted in the countries where they exist, such as Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Guinea alone, it’s estimated that around 60% of all cases of Ebola are caused by these traditional burial practices (WHO, 2023). Because of how important these traditions are to the people in these communities, many public health officials from foreign countries (particularly from the West) have difficulties preventing the transmission of Ebola in these areas. Trying to dissuade the locals from participating in these practices during an Ebola outbreak is often seen as a disregard of their culture entirely, leading to distrust of the work that these medical professionals are doing in order to mitigate the disease’s spread (Manguvo and Mafuvadze).

Another factor that has impacted the treatment of Ebola in recent years has been the armed conflicts that have been occurring in Central and West Africa. For example, a major outbreak of Ebola occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 2018 to 2020. In total this outbreak caused about 3500 cases, including 2300 deaths by Ebola (CDC, 2020). However, due to a current conflict in the DRC, people in the country have been put at higher risk for contracting Ebola. In fact, people in conflict zones in the DRC had a roughly 1.88-times increased risk for contracting Ebola, with a similar increased risk of 1.98 for people in conflict zones in Guinea during their Ebola outbreaks (Charnley, et al.) There are a variety of reasons for this, but most of them stem from damaged infrastructure and a lack of access to the transportation and healthcare that many Ebola patients or potential patients need to get proper treatment and disease prevention assistance.

In conclusion, there are a variety of factors that influence the spread of Ebola and its resulting impact on the communities it occurs in. Issues like the relative lack of development in many African nations and the consequential lack of proper sanitation and hygiene contribute to an increased spread of the disease when outbreaks initially occur and can even lead to outbreaks themselves. Additionally, the rooting of traditional burial practices in many African communities not only compound the spread of Ebola, but are incredibly difficult for medical professionals, especially non-natives, to overcome, given these practices’ importance to the locals being affected. Lastly, the existence of political and military conflicts in various regions of Africa lead to people being unable to receive proper treatment, and thus only increase the problems faced by their populations. All of these issues lead to Ebola being a very menacing and persistent threat, even if only in Africa.

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