How can communities reduce their vulnerability to disaster? How does population behavior change during disasters and how does this behavior influence public health during and after these events? How would an integrative approach to disaster preparedness that takes into account the causes and behavioral consequences of disasters enhance population health? This book is our attempt to answer these questions.

While we may have little capacity to stop earthquakes or tsunamis, sound infrastructure and effective political organizations before a hazard strikes, and effective leadership and timely dissemination of information after the hazard all can mitigate the adverse population health consequences of these events. Understanding population behavior in the aftermath of potential disasters can also help us intervene to minimize their short- and long-term health consequences.

Informed by a systematic study of a unique representative database of 360 disasters worldwide, spanning 1950–2005, we provide in this book a framework that can help us understand the causes of disasters. We also present a model of population behavior after these events. We intend these two inextricably linked models to be useful guides for public health disaster preparedness and response efforts.

New York, NY
Sasha Rudenstine

New York, NY
Sandro Galea
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