Cheney Shreve[1] and Maureen Fordham[2]

[1]Western Washington University, Bellingham, USA
[2]University College London, London, UK

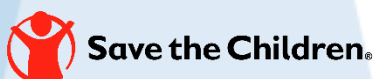# Child-Centred Risk Reduction Research-into-Action Brief:

Gender and Disasters: Considering Children

Abstract

Globally, women often suffer disproportionately higher impacts in disasters than men. In many instances where data is available, more women die than men and those that survive may also experience a decline in sexual and reproductive health, increased gender-based violence, disruption to education or are forced into harmful coping mechanisms such as child marriage or transactional sex (Van der Gaag, 2013). These impacts are more pronounced where the socio-economic gap between the sexes is wider (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007). These differences are not natural but arise because of inequitable gender norms (the ways in which different societies define what it means to be masculine and feminine, including division of labour, roles, responsibilities and customs). Many children take on adult roles and responsibilities reflective of these discriminatory gender norms, yet disaster studies infrequently examine gender holistically when it comes to children, typically equating "gender" simplistically with biological sex. Breaking the cycle of gender inequalities requires a more robust consideration of gender in the context of children's disaster vulnerability and resilience.

Glossary

Term	Definition
Child	Person 0 to 18 years of age
Youth	Person 18 to 24 years of age
Sex	The biological and physiological characteristics that identify a person as male or female. In some cases, people are intersex who possess biological and physiological characteristics of both sexes.
Gender	Socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for girls, boys, women, men, and other gender minorities
Non-binary gender	Children and youth who do not identify primarily as a woman, man, boy, or girl, but instead identify as transgender or other gender minority identifiers which may be culturally specific
LGBTI	LGBTI stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex". Different cultures use different terms to describe people who have same-sex relationships or who exhibit non-binary gender identities.
Vulnerability	The social, economic, physical and environmental conditions that increase a person's risk

Introduction

The different ways that societies define gender put men and women at different risk to disasters (disaster vulnerability). Globally, women occupy fewer positions of power and have fewer resources to prepare, respond and recover from disasters (Enarson, 2002). Men and boys also experience gender-based disaster vulnerability as they are more likely to participate in search, rescue and reconstruction efforts and be socialised to engage in risky behaviours (Jonkman and Kelman, 2005; Enarson, 2002; Hazeleger, 2013; Enarson and Pease, 2016).

The impact of gender on children experiencing disasters is poorly understood. Data is limited on disaster impacts disaggregated by age and sex. Cultural differences in how childhood is defined add complexity, since some cultures view childhood as a time free from responsibilities, whereas in other cultures children take on adult roles but not adult status (Babugura, 2008). Recent disaster studies emphasise children's participation in disaster risk reduction (DRR), yet "gender" is often equated simplistically to biological sex, overlooking the gendered roles, responsibilities and social norms that may put them at risk. This brief reviews the literature on gender and disasters, drawing on case study illustrations to emphasise key findings, trends and limitations.

Literature Review

The literature on gender and disasters comes from several disciplines, primarily development studies, sociology and psychology. Over recent decades, there has been a shift from viewing women and children as passive victims of disaster (during the late 1970s-1980s), to understanding psychological impacts of disaster (late 1990s-present), examining disaster vulnerability and resilience factors (late 1990s-mid-2000s), and finally to considering women and children as active participants and contributors to DRR (mid-2000s-present). Here, the review continues with a discussion of psychological impacts, followed by the issues of vulnerability and resilience.

Psychological impacts of disasters on children

Psychology studies of disaster impacts often differentiate impacts by age and sex, but typically do not consider how gendered norms within different cultures could be influential. Studies have shown that children's ranges of response to disasters depend on many variables, and that reported psychological stress following disasters is often higher for younger children and girls (Evans and Stinnett, 2006; Bokszczanin, 2007; Masten and Osofsky, 2010; Russell and Fish, 2016). A review of disaster mental health impacts spanning 29 countries and territories, five continents and both human-made and natural hazards, recommends that meeting the mental health needs of survivors, particularly children and women, in lower- and middle- income countries is particularly critical (Norris, Friedman, and Watson, 2002: 240). The review found that youth exhibited problems unique to their age group, such as behavioural issues, hyperactivity and delinquency. Women were more at risk than men for poor mental health outcomes, and child survivors were more at risk for poor mental health outcomes if their parents were displaying distress (Norris, Friedman and Watson, 2002: 247).

Literature is limited on disaster-related psychological impacts for youth who are sexual and gender minorities with some notable exceptions (see Wisner, Berger and Gaillard, 2014). However, in general, literature on the mental health of sexual and gender minority youth shows "clear and consistent evidence … that global mental health problems are elevated" among (LGBTQI) sexual and gender minority populations (Russell and Fish, 2016).

Gender and children's vulnerability and resilience to disasters

Recognition that the impact of disasters on men and women was not equal became more prominent in the late 1990s (Enarson and Morrow, 1998). Furthermore, research showed that factors such as age, race, class and ability can combine to influence vulnerability. There is no consensus in the literature regarding which children are most at risk during disasters or why, and it is an area requiring further attention (Anderson, 2005; Zahran, Peek and Brody, 2008). In disasters in lower- and middle- income countries and famine contexts, numerous studies have found that social discrimination leads to girls being more vulnerable and as a result increases the number of deaths of girls (Agarwal, 1990; Bairagi, 1986; Dyson, 1991; Greenough, 1982; Kidane, 1989, 1990; Mariam, 1986; Ramirez et al, 2005; Rivers, 1982; Sapir, 1993). In high income countries, disaster fatalities for children and youth are lower, but outcomes differ according to factors such as sex, age and race. For example, Zahran, Peek and Brody (2008) examined youth mortality from forces of nature in the USA, and found that across all ages examined, the death rate for men was higher than women.

A review of women's and girl's disaster vulnerabilities found evidence of the following: violence against women and girls; decline in sexual and reproductive health for young, unmarried and/or adolescent girls, as well as the health of those with non-binary gender identities; early or forced marriage; interruption to, or loss of, education; changes to social networks and family support; increased time burden placed on women and adolescent girls due to gender norms and roles being promoted; and psychosocial impacts (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013: 3). Globally, compared to men, women and girls have less control over material assets, and typically losses in women's assets such as time, sewing machines or animals go unrecorded (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013: 3).

Men and boys may be more at risk in some contexts because of their risk-taking behaviours (Zahran, Peek and Brody, 2008; Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013), or because they are more likely to participate in search and rescue activities which expose them to physical hazards, putting them at risk of illness and injury (Van der Gaag, 2013). Children with non-binary gender identities may be especially vulnerable to social discrimination and abuse, and lack of appropriate health-care resources (Gaillard, 2011; Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013; Van der Gaag, 2013).

Disaster vulnerability studies are essential for tailoring interventions to protect different groups of children faced with different risks. Some questions for practitioners to address are:

- Do gendered roles and responsibilities and cultural norms make it:
  - less likely that girls or boys or LGBTI children will be taught knowledge, skills and competencies for DRR?
  - more likely that girls or boys or LGBTI children and youth will be more exposed to physical dangers?
  - more likely that girls or boys will be kept out of school to support the family with domestic or paid labour?
  - less likely that girls, boys or LGBTI children and youth will be included in participatory risk identification, and risk reduction activities at home, school and in the community?
  - difficult for girls, boys or LGBTI children and youth to access services and support?

- What measures can be taken to counteract these vulnerabilities?

In the past decade, research has begun addressing some of these questions. The following section provides examples.

Examples of gender roles and vulnerability

Gender-specific roles and responsibilities can influence disaster vulnerability. Babugura (2008) highlights that in Botswana boys' had greater access to food from their responsibilities, hunting and fishing, and could more easily access aid. Girls' mobility was restricted by social norms, some reported having to rely on transactional sex or sexual favours to get money for food. While some children benefited slightly during the drought due to free food handouts provided by the government, girls were typically more vulnerable because of gender norms. Differing roles and responsibilities led to gendered experiences with food security during droughts.

Adolescents of both sexes may be "invisible" during disasters because they do not easily fit into the recognised categories of child or adult, and adolescent girls are often especially vulnerable (Van der Gaag, 2013: 16). Plan International commissioned research to understand the disaster experiences and/or perceptions of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) and young women (up to 24) in Australian bushfires, food crises in Burkina Faso and Niger, floods and storms in El Salvador, Vietnam, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and USA, and drought in Ethiopia and Kenya. The key findings showed that girls experience a lack of control over their bodies; inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health care and family planning resources; early or forced marriage, rape and unwanted pregnancies; removal from school; and malnutrition during disasters (Van der Gaag, 2013). Adolescent girls in different contexts reported navigating motherhood as child brides, taking care of orphaned children, engaging in wage labour, working in reconstruction, fetching water and food, among many other roles and responsibilities. Some of these activities made adolescent girls more visible, increasing their likelihood of receiving aid or support, but also contributed to their risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Gender can also influence how children are affected by interventions and aid after disasters. For example, following the 2004 tsunami and earthquake in Aceh, Indonesia, the Indonesian government initially estimated tens of thousands of children were orphaned (Beazley, 2015).

Adolescents may be "invisible" during disasters… adolescent girls are often especially vulnerable…

Seventeen new children's homes were established, and global humanitarian aid was channelled to them.

Research conducted with the children in these care homes revealed a range of effects (Beazley and Alhadad, 2008). Gendered differences in children's experiences emerged, as girls had worse sleeping and recreational facilities, and their mobility was severely restricted in comparison to boys (Beazley, 2015). Boys reported leaving the homes to visit friends' houses in the local community, going to the sea to swim and playing sports such as soccer and volleyball (Beazley, 2015). In contrast, girls rarely left the homes and they were not given the same, if any, recreational opportunities (Beazley, 2015: 41).

> *"CCDRR activities can address harmful gender norms, but they must include the wider adult community…"*

There is less information about the impact of disasters on children and youth who are sexual and gender minorities. Research with young *baklas* (gay or transgender women [identify as women but were classified as men when they were born]) in the Philippines shows that they are often expected to perform difficult and unpleasant tasks (Gaillard, 2011). Young *baklas* in Irosin reported being asked by their parents to do the dirty chores, such as cleaning the house after recurrent flash floods (Gaillard et al, 2017: 434). *Bakla* teenagers in Masantol reported using their household skills to look after young children and do laundry, while also completing demanding tasks such as fetching firewood and water in the deep floodwaters following the cyclone in 2011 (ibid: 434). *Bakla* youth in Manila reported that many *bakla* were left to eat last when their households were struck by two powerful cyclones in late 2009 (ibid: 434). In all cases, *bakla* youth reported that their specific needs were not recognised in evacuation centers, where they lacked privacy and faced regular gender discrimination and sexual harassment (ibid: p 435). *Bakla* youth also made unique contributions to emergency response, such as collecting relief goods following flash floods and caring for babies and young children in relief centers (ibid).

To summarise, disaster studies considering children's gendered roles and responsibilities show:

- Some children take on adult gender roles and responsibilities which may contribute to or reduce their disaster risk.
- Adolescent girls and young women may be especially vulnerable during disasters, as they navigate caring for siblings, becoming parents themselves and coping with a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health, family planning and menstrual hygiene resources.
- Boys' greater mobility and participation in search and rescue activities may have benefits, but also expose them to additional risks. Social expectations for boys to be self-sufficient and stoic can also negatively impact boys' mental health.
- LGBTI children may be at greater risk from social discrimination, abuse and sufficient shelter and health care options during disasters.
- Children can be active participants and agents of change in DRR through a variety of mechanisms, from supporting risk mapping and planning activities, as educators and trainers and as advocates for risk reduction (Back, Cameron and Tanner, 2009).

Practical applications

If we want to understand children's disaster risk, it is essential to recognise that children are a diverse group of people with gendered attitudes, identities, roles and responsibilities. Child-Centred Risk Reduction (CCRR) activities can be a mechanism for addressing harmful gender norms, but they cannot be done in a vacuum and must include the wider adult community. Otherwise, the risk is that the responsibility for changing harmful gender norms will fall upon the shoulders of children.

The following guidelines can be used when considering the gendered aspects of CCRR activities and programs:

- Place an explicit focus on gender in programs and projects to help improve gender equality. Simply including women or girls in activities or programs will not guarantee improved gender equality.
- Recognise the abilities of women, girls, and LGBTI children, not just their vulnerabilities.
- Frame activities with young men and boys within an agenda that promotes human rights, including girls, LGBTI children and children of differing abilities.
- Encourage men and young men to engage equally in caring for children.
- Prioritise protection of women, girls, and LGBTI youth after disaster events because increased violence is a known 'disaster risk.'
- Ensure that the sexual and reproductive health needs of women, adolescent girls and LGBTI youth are considered in disaster preparedness activities and after disaster events.
- Be aware of, and actively respond to, factors that increase the vulnerability of women and girls, such as violence and access to education.
- Be aware of gendered roles and responsibilities and how these may affect the vulnerability of boys, girls, LGBTI youth and women.
- Ensure that programs improve the safety and wellbeing of women, and do not just add to the workload of women.

Resources to support practitioners with including gender and diversity gender planning in DRR include:

- Plan International 2016 Counting the Invisible: Using Data to Transform the Lives of Girls and Women by 2030 (Woking, UK: Plan International) https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/counting-invisible-girls
- The Gender and Disaster Network's "Gender and Disaster Sourcebook" provides free online training and education, case studies and analyses, good practices and many other resources for practitioners to address gender inequality in DRR (https://www.gdnonline.org/sourcebook/)
- CARE International's Technical Resources on Engaging Men and Boys: http://www.care.org/our-work/womens-empowerment/what-about-men-boys/technical-resources-engaging-men-and-boys

Practitioners can:

- *Explicitly focus on gender*

- *Recognise the abilities of women, children and non-binary youth*

- *Frame activities with male youth and boys within an agenda that promotes human rights*

- *Be aware of gendered roles and responsibilities and how these may affect the vulnerability of boys, girls, non-binary youth and women.*

- *Ensure that programs improve the safety and wellbeing of women, and do not just add to the workload of women.*

Conclusions

Many useful insights on gender have emerged as thinking has shifted from viewing women and children as passive victims of disaster, to better understanding children's disaster vulnerabilities and resilience and emphasising children's participation in DRR. However, the lack of data disaggregated by factors that are known to influence children's disaster vulnerability, and the tendency of disaster studies to de-emphasise children's gendered roles and responsibilities, leave gaps in understanding the gendered dimensions of children's vulnerability and resilience to disasters. Furthermore, gender and disaster studies have focused largely on adult women and approached gender from a binary male-female perspective (Gaillard et al, 2017).

Adopting a more holistic gender focus in CCRR has the potential to proactively address gender inequalities if done properly. "The focus should not be on highlighting equality of losses but how loss is experienced differently by women and men, and women and girls. This is an equity, or equality with fairness, argument" (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013: 15). While many initiatives aim for gender balance in groups of child participants, there needs to be a dedicated focus to understand and address inequitable gender norms within and beyond the CCRR activities by engaging the wider community.

Follow-up questions

1. Gender refers to:
    a. Biological sex
    b. Social norms, attitudes, and beliefs that a society attaches to being a man and being a woman
    c. Laws and customary practice that may treat males and females differently
    d. All of the above
2. Traditional gender roles and responsibilities do not apply to children
    a. True
    b. False
3. Adolescent girls in lower- and middle- income countries may be more vulnerable to disasters compared to boys because:
    a. They don't fit into visible categories of child or adult
    b. Parents may use early or forced marriage as a coping mechanism during disasters
    c. Girls may be at greater risk to gender-based violence during disasters
    d. Social customs might restrict girl's mobility
    e. Girls may not learn swimming or other skills that could save their lives
    f. Protecting boys is prioritised above protecting girls
    g. All of the above
4. How could different ideas about childhood influence the way we respond to children in disasters?
5. How could you apply a gender lens to children in the work that you do?

Readings

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