



Summary: Research-into- Action Brief

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Research-into-Action Brief series

The series provides concise summaries of academic and grey literature on a range of topics for practitioners working in the fields of child-centred risk reduction (CCRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), and school safety. This summary highlights the main messages in the full Research-into-Action Brief on gender and disasters.

Find the full Research-into-Action Brief series at:

www.gadrrres.net/resources

Gender and Disasters: Considering Children

Globally, women often suffer disproportionately higher impacts in disasters than men. In many instances where data is available, more women are shown to die compared to 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 differences are not natural; they result from inequitable gender norms. These norms reflect the ways that 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. However, disaster studies rarely examine gender holistically when it comes to children, and often equate “gender” with biological sex, rather than considering gender norms and roles. Breaking the cycle of gender inequalities requires a more robust consideration of gender in the context of children’s disaster vulnerability and resilience.


Gender roles and vulnerability

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 such factors as age, race, class and ability can combine to influence vulnerability. 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 promoted by aid agencies; and psychosocial impacts (Bradshaw and Fordham, 2013: 3). Globally, women and girls have less control over material assets compared to men, 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 LGBTI 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).

There is no consensus in the literature regarding which children are most at risk during disasters or why; however, disaster studies considering children’s gendered roles and responsibilities show:

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- Some children take on adult gender roles and responsibilities that 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.
- Children with LGBTI gender identity may be at greater risk from social discrimination, abuse and insufficient shelter and health care options during disasters.

Children can be active participants and agents of change in disaster risk reduction (DRR) through a variety of mechanisms, from supporting risk mapping and planning activities, as educators, trainers and advocates for risk reduction (Back, Cameron and Tanner, 2009).

Practical applications

Child-Centered 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 be equally engaged 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.

More information

All the references in this *Research into Practice Brief*, and many more, can be found in the *Child-Centred Risk Reduction and Comprehensive School Safety Bibliography* at:

https://www.zotero.org/groups/1857446/ccdr_css

Find all the references on this topic by using the tag "Gender."

Readings

Ashraf, M.A. and Azad, M.A.K., 2015, 'Gender Issues in Disaster: Understanding the Relationships of Vulnerability, Preparedness and Capacity', *Environment and Ecology Research*, vol. 3 no. 5, pp.136-142.

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Forbes-Genade, K. and van Niekerk, D., 2017 (In Press), 'The GIRRL program: A human rights based approach to disaster risk reduction intervention in Southern Africa', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, vol. 24, pp. 507-514, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.04.001>.

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