How Do We Construct a Child-Friendly Emergency Management Framework? 
A Policy Commentary

Monica Sanders, Georgetown University Law Center, USA & Tulane University Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy, USA*

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8970-7405

ABSTRACT

When considering vulnerable populations, or those with the most cascading obstacles that cause them to be susceptible to certain hazards and events, children are among the most vulnerable. Those living in poverty or in marginalized communities are among the most vulnerable to disasters. They make up a quarter of the United States’ and a third of the global population, yet there is not an emergency management framework that meets their needs. While there are principles and a number of tools and programs directed at children- and more generally, youth- they suffer a lack of widespread socialization. This article offers a framework as an option to create that socialization as well as a child-centered approach that can be operationalized.

KEYWORDS

Children, Climate Change, Community Resilience, Disasters, Mitigation, Poverty, Risk Reduction, Youth Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

In an age when climate-driven disasters become more frequent and impactful, so will the consequences for communities. As the hazard mitigation community deepens its analysis of natural hazards and the cyclical events that comprise disasters to include vulnerability and disparate impacts, it will need to look at poorer communities and the people who live in them. Among those in most need of particular attention is children, especially children living in poverty.

Children’s rights in disasters are broadly touched upon in a variety of documents. This includes international guidelines and U.S. government policy. They are considered in programming at FEMA and the Red Cross. However general principles, values, law, and policy in this area have not been solidified across the fields of emergency and disaster management, nor are they deeply studied in disaster and climate science. This makes it difficult to socialize child-related emergency management resources and knowledge so that they may be leveraged consistently. It is a challenge across elements of the larger emergency and disaster management practice and research. This is particularly true concerning sustained outreach and planning across themes and organizations that are focused on children. Confusing youth agency and contributions in crises and disasters with working to better serve children in these events is also a factor.
The author acknowledges the breadth of research about children and disasters. In this policy review and commentary, there will be a review of some previous research and the policy background upon which the paper is based. The insights come from this, the author’s ongoing research, and practical experience on the topics presented. In this paper and associated recommendations suggested in it, the aim is to offer ideas for new policies, guidelines, and areas for further research. These ideas are centered on two questions: First, what has already been done and where has the impact been noted? Second, are planning frameworks rooted in the communities where children need it most and are they centered on service to children’s needs?

POLICY BACKGROUND

Emergency Managers and Humanitarian Actors need to reconsider their resourcing policies and operational frameworks to take children and child poverty into consideration. In 2015, Daoud, Halleröd & Guha Sapir studied the nexus between severe child poverty and vulnerability to disasters in 67 middle to low-income countries. They narrowed their focus to hone in on governance, hypothesizing that in countries with poor governance and poor emergency response mechanisms, resources would be quickly exhausted without meeting the needs of children in the short term. The recovery deficit would disproportionately impact children. The study had some aberrant results because of the size and availability of micro-data. In some cases, higher rates of governance seemed to make child poverty worse after a disaster. Other cases suggested access to sanitation increased after a geological event. What was not covered was the impact of international organizations’ involvement in disaster management (Guha Sapir et al., 2015). However, subsequent qualitative research showed some nexus between the two.

For nearly two decades the right to health, shelter, and nutrition has been considered part of the highest attainable standard for human dignity. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services”. Further, numerous United Nations documents state that additional measures are needed to protect the health and development of children (UNHCR | Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 2000).

In 2010, President George W. Bush created the bipartisan National Commission on Children in Disasters. It focused on the United States’ ability to meet the needs of children, which is considered to be people between the ages of 0-18 (consistent with United Nations definitions), during emergencies and natural disasters (“OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the child,” n.d.). This commission and its subsequent report came on the heels of Hurricane Katrina, the H1N1 Pandemic, and the Haiti Earthquake. The report noted that children make up 25 percent of the country’s population. However, only 25 percent of emergency medical services and six percent of hospital emergency departments have supplies to meet their needs. It also found that the Strategic National Stockpile, meant to provide the public with medicine and medical supplies in a national emergency, was found to be “woefully” understocked with children’s supplies. The Commission handed back more than 81 recommendations across eleven categories aimed at filling gaps in children’s services and protection in disasters (National Commission on Children and Disasters, 2010).

The report went on to make recommendations to improve our ability to include children in our emergency planning across eleven indicators: disaster management and recovery, mental health, child physical health and trauma, emergency medical services and pediatric support, disaster case management, child care, and early education, elementary and secondary education, child welfare and juvenile justice, sheltering standards, services, and supplies, evacuate procedures and of course, housing (National Commission on Children and Disasters, 2010).

The core recommendation was that a national strategy should be developed to meet the needs of children. Specifically, the members of the commission wrote, “the unique needs of children must be more thoroughly integrated into planning and made a clear and distinct priority in all disaster...
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