Child-friendly spaces for adolescent girls in emergency settings

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Question

What is the evidence that child-friendly spaces in emergency settings address the specific needs of adolescent girls (particularly with regards to preventing violence)?

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1. Overview

There is a significant lack of evidence on the nexus between safe spaces, adolescent girls, and emergency contexts (expert comments), although plenty of evidence exists on each of these areas separately. This annotated bibliography focuses on the literature that concerns all three elements. A list of suggested further reading is included which provides related information on the three areas separately.

Much of the literature consists of guidelines and handbooks for programming, but there are very few existing programmes and fewer evaluations. This indicates that this is a topical area in which there is developing interest.

The concept of safe spaces for either children or women is quite well established, but assumes that these spaces serve the needs of adolescent girls. There are few programmes that provide safe spaces exclusively for girls, although many child-friendly spaces (CFS) run sessions by age and gender. Programmes that target adolescent girls focus on either their sexual and reproductive health needs, including issues of violence, or their social development needs. Within emergency contexts, the
provision of safe spaces tends to focus more on psycho-social care and on developing social skills and social networks, rather than on reproductive health. These social development programmes usually do not explicitly mention reducing violence as an aim or result of their activities. There appears to be an oblique assumption that improved confidence, leadership and social networks may prevent some forms of violence, but this is not usually a significant component of humanitarian programmes, which tend to focus more on trauma counselling and developing social skills. Although some data has been collected, it is not always disaggregated by gender, and hardly ever by age.

The most frequently cited barriers to girls’ access to safe spaces programmes were their domestic duties keeping them at home and not allowing enough time to participate, and fear of (or caregiver fear of) being outside. Many girls in this literature were sent to collect firewood, which both made them feel unsafe due to the long distances and threat of violence, and did not allow them time to participate in any development programmes. Papers which made recommendations specifically for girls stated that girls need to be explicitly targeted and staff members need to perform door-to-door outreach to ensure girls’ participation by persuading parents to let them join in, as simply making a programme available to girls is not enough. Some successful programmes have actively pursued gendered strategies which included changing the times of girls’ sessions, allowing them to bring younger siblings along, or providing an escorting service so fathers could accompany their daughters. This indicates that structural barriers need to be addressed to ensure girls’ participation. Some of the key points identified in the literature include:

- The small evidence base on this particular nexus requires drawing together evidence from different contexts.
- The literature covers refugee camps and post-disaster contexts equally; there is much less on conflict and post-conflict contexts.
- Programmes focusing on girls tend to emphasise empowerment, social connections and livelihoods opportunities rather than issues of violence.
- A focus in CFS on play and psycho-social activities may be appropriate for younger children, but older children in CFS tend to express more interest in formal learning and vocational training. CFS do not always respond to this need, as they are often focused more on younger children.
- Married girls and adolescent mothers are particularly under-served, as they tend to be categorised into women’s programmes rather than girls’ programmes. Their needs are different from adult women’s and they should be included in girls’ programmes (expert comments).
2. Overview documents

*Rapid Response: Programming for Education Needs in Emergencies*


This comprehensive report provides evidence-based guidance on using CFS for education and social support in emergency situations. It draws on case studies from Darfur, Lebanon, northern Uganda and Timor-Leste. The general message throughout this paper is that CFS provision is not gender- or age-sensitive; but there is slightly more focus on age-related needs than gender-related needs. Respondents from NGO and CBO CFS providers were not particularly aware of gendered needs, but within the education requirements there was some awareness that materials needed to be age-specific in order to be useful. In Darfur and northern Uganda, the need for age-appropriate materials for adolescents is recognised, but currently under-served. In both these places, the CFS have a focus on psycho-social activities rather than learning, which tend to take the form of creative play, which is inappropriate and of less interest to the older children. Older children tend to express a desire for learning rather than play, perhaps because of the perceived market value of learning. In Darfur, the CFS offer only play or vocational training, with a significant gap where education should be. Young respondents in this research stressed that they needed education more than recreational activities. The CFS appear to be mainly focused towards younger children, and do not serve the needs of adolescents. The only gender-specific comments refer to girls’ domestic duties and mobility restrictions preventing them from coming to attend sessions at the CFS.

*Missing the Emergency: Shifting the Paradigm for Relief to Adolescent Girls*


This paper outlines the need for considering adolescent girls as a separate population category in emergencies. It brought together key thinkers in a consultation in 2011 to identify what actions are needed to change the emergency response paradigm to one which is responsive to girls’ needs. Although there are few programmes targeting girls, and therefore little evidence, there are programmes which suggest that girl-focused programming has highly positive impacts and potential for scale. Adolescent girls are at the greatest risk of all demographic groups of personal and bodily safety in an emergency; they face an increased domestic burden; greater malnourishment; possible exploitation; lack of schooling and reproductive health services; unsafe livelihoods; and their bride price may be seen as a means of survival for their families. Establishing an evidence base is a key priority of the consortium, as is encouraging sex- and age-disaggregated data collection throughout emergency programming. This paper calls for a paradigm shift which places girls at the centre of emergency response. It is useful for reviewing the specific needs of adolescent girls and how these are not currently being met.

*Adolescent Programming Experiences During Conflict and Post-Conflict*


This paper reviews a variety of UNICEF’s programmes on adolescents in emergencies, all of which may be of some interest. The ‘Return to Happiness’ programme in Colombia (p.29; also used in Mozambique, El Salvador and Timor-Leste, among others) trains adolescents to be mentors and ‘play therapists’ for
younger children. All the children have witnessed violence and civil conflict. Using adolescents as teachers and therapists is an interesting way to involve them in the CFS, as it both helped the younger children return to normalcy, but also built the adolescents’ self-esteem, trust, and decision-making abilities, as well as giving them a community role which built a sense of belonging. In Colombia, this has helped prevent their recruitment into armed groups, and many have gone on to become leaders in the community and the peace movement. The teens also have a daily session among themselves to discuss their own problems. A second programme in Somalia (p.65) has developed youth leadership through training out-of-school 14-18 year olds in community development. In the middle phases of the project, they intend to further develop youth centres and community spaces as these have proved important hubs. There is a section on how girls are included in activities, for example providing culturally appropriate sports attire, holding sessions in the evenings when girls can attend after completing domestic chores, and providing an ‘escort’ service where brothers and fathers can walk girls to and from sessions. This paper is not rigorously evidenced but the description of programmes is useful for identifying specific needs and approaches which have proven to work in practice.

3. Case studies

Haiti Adolescent Girls Network

Co-founded by AmeriCares and the Population Council, this programme launched in 2010, and provides a safe girls-only physical space for girls aged 10-19 in Haiti. A total of 1,200 girls and 80 peer mentors are involved at 20 sites. The service provides a social platform to connect girls with appropriate skills training, psycho-social support, financial literacy and reproductive health care. Different NGOs and CBOs run the sessions. They aim to empower girls, break the cycle of poverty and protect them from violence. Girls most at risk are the primary targeted beneficiaries. Peer mentors are paid rather than volunteers. The impact on violence is mostly in the area of rights awareness and empowerment. See:

- Selection of short articles about HAGN:
  - http://www.rescue.org/blog/a-safe-space-teenage-girls-haiti
**Kosti Child Friendly Space: Evaluation Report**  

Kosti Child Friendly Space is run by War Child Holland in the Kosti Way Station in Sudan, a transition point for people moving to/from South Sudan. The population is vulnerable migrants and displaced people. The programme primarily provides education, but also psycho-social support, information for parents and advocacy. This independent evaluation contains scattered information on girls specifically. **Girls’ specific needs in this report mainly focus on the need for separate latrines from boys and staff.** This is a problem acknowledged by WCH staff, who have repeatedly applied for permission to build new latrines but have been rejected by the authorities. **The second need cited is girls’ requirement to stay at home to look after younger siblings, which acts as a barrier to attending the programme.** This was identified and addressed early on by WCH, which developed a kindergarten class so girls could bring their younger siblings with them to the programme. The final need identified is that both beneficiaries and teachers would prefer to have more age-disaggregated groups and age-specific teaching materials, as the age ranges at the programme are broad. This is currently difficult because of a lack of materials. The evaluation asked if girls experienced harassment by boys, but this was not reported. This programme is positively evaluated by beneficiaries, teachers and parents, providing children with friendship, knowledge, rights awareness, better behaviour and risk awareness, and better tolerance of others. There is no explicit comment on impacts on violence.

**The Path to Hope Congolese Refugee Adolescent Girls in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp, Tanzania**  

This paper finds that current programming does not meet the specific needs of adolescent girls. Girls are described as particularly at risk of: violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, discrimination, early or forced marriage, and family breakdown. **Due to their domestic duties and feelings of non-safety outside their homes, girls rarely spend much time outside.** This means they have few opportunities to make friends or to develop leadership or livelihoods skills. They often drop out of school, here described as due to early pregnancies but also shame from having no soap to wash their uniforms. Most girls support the livelihoods of their families with petty trade and small-scale income generating activities. Although existing programmes are aimed at girls, they do not participate. This is attributed to a number of reasons: it is too far to travel (this camp is 52 square km); they do not have enough time to participate; and they feel that they wouldn’t fit in with the other participants (boys and older youth). The paper concludes with recommendations for programming, which include taking into account the specific needs of girls. In particular, **programmes need to actively break down the barriers to their inclusion**, for example by reducing the dependency on firewood, which it is girls’ responsibility to collect, thus giving them more time to attend programmes. They also include a recommendation to create girls-only safe spaces.
Scattered Dreams, Broken Promises. An Assessment of the Links between Girls’ Empowerment and Gender-based Violence in the Kyaka II Refugee Settlement, Uganda


The Kyaka II camp has 1,500 adolescent girl refugees (between the ages of 10 and 16), mostly from DRC but also Burundi and Rwanda. Sexual harassment and assault are the key forms of violence experienced by girls here. Many describe violence as happening when they travel to and from school, the borehole and the market, and that they feel particularly vulnerable alone, at night, and in poor lighting. Some girls engage in transactional sex due to poverty, and are at risk of STIs, and usually have poorer social networks due to stigma. Girls feel that they lack life skills to negotiate sex safely. There is a very small police presence and low rate of reporting incidents. Channels of reporting are not adolescent-friendly, nor are they socially supported. Many girls also do not seek health services, partly because they feel the treatment is ineffective, and partly due to fear of public scrutiny.

Girls say that their basic hygiene needs are not being met; they do not have enough underwear, sanitary pads and soap. Their social needs are better met, with 88 per cent saying they had a close female friend, but only 37 per cent naming a second close female friend. Few are accessing the youth-targeted programmes, often due to a heavy care and domestic burden. This is physically exhausting as well as time-consuming. Married girls are particularly isolated from peers. Parents are seen as sources of support, but these relationships are often uneasy. The report recognises that programmes aiming to improve the wellbeing of girls should also engage with parents and support their development of parenting skills. Speaking English is seen as a source of protection for girls, as they may be uncomfortable seeking services from English-speaking providers if they do not speak it well, and/or reading the information signs in English about where to seek help. Thus respondents emphasised the need to teach English from a very early age. As above, the specific needs of adolescent girls must be taken into account in programming, as current services do not meet their needs.

In Search of Safety and Solutions: Somali Refugee Adolescent Girls at Sheder and Aw Barre Camps, Ethiopia


Girls in this camp are at extreme risk of sexual violence, exploitation and harmful traditional practices. Few programmes reach them and they are isolated and vulnerable. Education enrolment rates for girls are only 50% at primary and 15% at secondary levels. There are very few female teachers. Girls are particularly unable to move around freely, build social networks, develop economic assets and livelihoods skills, and are lacking basic needs. In a safety mapping exercise, boys said they feel safe mostly everywhere, but girls said they felt safe almost nowhere, especially at night and at gathering points such as boreholes. More secure housing, less distance to travel, single latrines and lighting would all help. Girls with heavy domestic burdens are isolated and lack peer networks, and are less likely to attend school. Girls trade sex for basic needs, but do not access health services due to fear of discrimination and stigma. Social stigma can also prevent girls from registering the birth of their babies, denying them access to the increased food rations a newborn would receive. The justice system is highly inadequate and offers
little protection for girls against GBV. Safe spaces and mentoring are recommended as an approach to build social and leadership skills.

**Evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces. Ethiopia Field Study Summary Report**

This study is part of a three-year research collaboration. Another report on DRC refugees in Uganda will follow in 2013. This paper reviews the CFS in Buramino refugee camp in Ethiopia, hosting Somali refugees, and focuses on providing evidence of impact. The paper shows that CFS generally produces good outcomes for literacy, numeracy and psycho-social wellbeing. The paper’s results are all disaggregated by age and gender.

World Vision set up two Child Learning Sites in 2012, providing literacy and numeracy classes, recreation and psycho-social services. Morning sessions were for children aged 6-11 and afternoon sessions for adolescents aged 12-17. The older group showed great increases in literacy and numeracy, for example 69 per cent had no reading skills at baseline, dropping to 30 per cent at follow-up. **Girls’ achievements were lower than boys, and boys had higher skills levels to start with.** This is probably because of the previous lack of educational opportunity for girls in Somalia, but also possibly because the CFS’ teaching methods were less effective for girls than boys. Various psycho-social measures show that adolescents attending the CFS improved to ‘normal’ levels over time, more than adolescents not attending CFS. The major finding on gender was that girls with more developmental assets at baseline were more likely to attend CFS. Assets include positive values, sources of support, and commitment to learning. Girls with fewer of these assets were probably discouraged from enrolling, through lack of motivation and/or means. Access to the CFS was therefore more difficult for girls lacking assets, and **active outreach and gender-sensitive enrolment practices should be encouraged to enable girls to attend CFS**. Teaching methods which are clearly accessible to girls should be adopted. A major concern reported by most participants was that a shortage of firewood puts girls and women at risk of rape by the host community if they have to venture outside the camp to collect it.

**Youth Development: A Contribution to the Establishment of a Civil Society and Peacebuilding: Lessons Learned in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

This paper describes eight interventions for young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are mainly based in youth centres and provide a variety of vocational training and leisure activities, all aimed at peacebuilding and inter-ethnic cooperation. A summary of the gendered aspects of the programmes highlights that the different needs of boys and girls are quite well considered in this context (p. 22). The changing gender roles brought about by conflict mean that some girls are less likely to want to return to traditional roles, and it is a challenge to ensure that training and educational opportunities respond to this. In this report, there is an aim to empower girls and change their position in society rather than reinforce traditional roles. In this context, there is limited understanding from staff that ‘gender’ applies to more than ‘including girls and women’ and thus gender is regarded as an additional burden in programming. As in other places, girls felt the male-dominated sports and music events were not...
appealing for them, and they have domestic duties at home which prevent them from attending youth clubs. Concerted outreach efforts by NGO staff have countered this somewhat by persuading parents to allow girls to attend.

**Youth Clubs: Psychosocial Intervention with Young Refugees**

Youth Clubs were established in Belgrade, Serbia in 1992 to provide psycho-social support to young refugees from the surrounding Yugoslavian region. Eight boarding schools and youth hostels house 2400 students, including 400 refugees. The schools hosted evening clubs open to all youth including local non-students, which consisted of a recreational activity chosen by the attendees, and a ‘talk-shop’ guided by young mental health practitioners. The talk-shop provided debate on issues of concern around their experiences of war, and was gradually guided to become more positive and to help process some of the trauma. The results were generally positive for all attendees. The gender-disaggregated results are as follows:

- Traumatic experiences were more common in girls (67%) than in boys (56%) and even bigger in refugees where 88% of girls and 74% of boys had traumatic experiences
- Refugees, especially the girls, expressed a significantly higher level of trauma
- Girls had higher results than boys on all scales except on the scale of Social problems and delinquency.
- Self-respect was lower in refugees, more so in girls than in boys
- Improvements in Withdrawal and Anxiety-Depression were much higher for male refugees than female; and improvements in Withdrawal and Social Problems were much higher for female refugees than male.

**4. Forthcoming research**

**Women’s Refugee Commission: Refugees in Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia**

The WRC is conducting a three-year global advocacy research project to enhance the safety and resilience of adolescent girls. They conducted three research trips in 2012 to Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia to assess the needs of refugee adolescent girls. A combined guidance paper drawing from all three sites should be available in 2014.
5. Further reading

The papers below are relevant in two of the three key areas, i.e. girls’ needs in emergency contexts but not safe space programmes; CFS in emergencies which do not explicitly respond to girls’ needs; and girls’ safe spaces but not in emergency contexts.

Girls’ needs in emergencies


Child-friendly spaces in emergencies

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/picking_up_the_pieces_1.pdf

http://www.psych.utah.edu/people/people/fogel/jdp/journals/5/journal05-03.pdf


**Girls’ safe spaces programmes**


http://www.popcouncil.org/publications/serialsbriefs/TABriefs.asp

**Key websites**

- UNICEF – Evaluation database:  
  http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase
- Save the Children – Resource Centre on Child Protection and Child Rights Governance:  
  http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/about-resource-centre
- Save the Children – Online library – Child protection:  
  http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/search?f[0]=field_publication_topic%3A25
- Plan International – Resource Centre:  
  http://plan-international.org/about-plan/resources/publications
  http://www.popcouncil.org/publications/serialsbriefs/TABriefs.asp

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**About this report**

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