



# CHILDREN IN DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES: UNDERSTANDING VULNERABILITY, DEVELOPING CAPACITIES, PROMOTING RESILIENCE, POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

A WEBINAR REPORT

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FEBRUARY 4TH , 17TH 2021  
NIDM, SCDR (JNU) AND AIF



**ANTHROPOS INDIA FOUNDATION (AIF),  
SPECIAL CENTER FOR DISASTER RESEARCH (SCDR), JNU  
CHILD CENTRIC DISASTER RISK REDUCTION CENTRE (CCDRR),  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT (NIDM),  
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
(4TH AND 17TH FEB. 2021)**

The webinar was organized under the patronage of Major General Santosh Kumar Bindal, Executive Director, NIDM, Guided by Prof Santosh Kumar, Professor and Head, CCDRR, NIDM and Prof P.K. Joshi, Chairperson, Special Centre for Disaster Research (SCDR) and Prof. School of Environmental Sciences, JNU and Dr Sunita Reddy, Associate Professor, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health (CSMCH) and Adjunct Faculty, SCDR, JNU. The webinars were well Coordinator by Dr Kumar Raka, Programme Officer, Dr Balu from CCDRR, NIDM and Dr Gunjan Arora, Post Doctoral Fellow, CSMCH, JNU.

## **SPEAKERS**

- Dr Sunita Reddy, JNU
- Prof. P K Joshi, JNU
- Prof. Santosh Kumar, NIDM
- Ms Pooja Priyamvada, Mental Health and Gender Empowerment Advocate.
- Mr Anant Kumar Asthana, Advocate, Child Rights Activist
- Dr Javaid Rashid, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Kashmir
- Ms Rosy Taba, Member, NCPCR



## KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

**Dr Kumar Raka initiated the Seminar** and briefly pointed that children are vulnerable to disaster both psychologically and physically, but there is a need to discuss certain pertinent points where children are to be thought of as a special category who often are not able to voice their concerns, more so if they are children with special needs. Also, children in different age groups have different concerns during a disaster / natural calamity/pandemic.

CCDRR division of NIDM had collaborated with Anthropos India Foundation (AIF), a registered Trust in Delhi working for the cause of child rights and women empowerment. Dr Gunjan Arora, Researcher at AIF briefly introduced the Foundation and its activities.

### **Dr Sunita Reddy, anthropologist and public health scholar spoke on the issues of child abuse and child protection in disasters.**

- Dr Reddy, Founder chairperson of Anthropos India Foundation while highlighting the broad categories of child abuse that have been classified in literature, called for a child-centric view of abuse focussing on the contextual framework in which the abuse happens.
- The focus is to be on the child-centric view to capture the lived experiences of children. The safety net is to be provided to children which requires a comprehensive child protection system in place. This is more important in adverse situations like disaster, famine and pandemic.
- There is also a need to create awareness generation material where children, teachers and parents are aware of laws like POCSO.
- Also, the present Judiciary systems struggle to deliver justice to children which discourages the families to report abuse to the authorities. A culture of silence prevails and there is underreporting of cases.
- It is seen that in most cases the perpetrators are known to the child and the neighbourhood and home are the most unsafe places for children.
- Thereby just having stringent laws will not suffice, the information and awareness about child rights are necessary.
- Children matters. There should be proactive efforts by all people to keep children safe.
- The state has an important role to play and all the child-related institutions need to be more sensitive, active and approachable to make sure all children should be safe irrespective of class, caste and creed.

Prof P K Joshi, an environmentalist pointed that the age group factor has been overlooked in disaster studies majorly because of the following.

- Lack of knowledge on vulnerability from social science perspective;
- The disadvantaged group are unable to articulate their troubles, face short term and long term consequences – physical, psychological and educational. These vulnerabilities need to be dissected further.
- There is a need to do research in these unexplored areas for better preparedness and synergies between stakeholders required.
- The outcome of this seminar would be/ should be operationalised for tangible outcomes.

Prof Santosh Kumar while giving examples from his field visits after the Nepal earthquake and Orissa Cyclone in the past, pointed that though we have big organisations working in disaster relief projects, the ground situation is quite different and still grim.

- For disaster-induced orphans, there is a need for social security Plan.
- The school curriculum does not discuss disasters of the past and children should be taught about past natural calamities/ disasters so that they can cope (especially in zones that are more prone to disasters).
- The different age group of children have different needs.
- Various ministries, especially health, education, women and child development should have CCDRR plans.
- It is important to see whether the health workers and Anganwadi workers working among the community are well equipped to cope with disaster situations.
- The data on suicide during the COVID 19 is yet to come and mental health studies among children during pandemic situations would be required.
- There is a need to redesign and redefine our policies and a comprehensive policy has to be put in place.



- After disasters, we generally capture the direct damages and loss and often fail to capture the mental health issues, especially among children. There is a need to develop public policy in this area. Families face poverty after disasters, and children face the trauma that is not quantified (children drop out from school, work in fields, child trafficking).
- Need to create a legitimate platform to which children can approach especially during /after disasters. No track of children after disasters.
- There is a need to capture local stories before and after disasters. For instance, longitudinal studies would help policymakers and influence state-level policies.
- The monitoring system has to be strengthened and the role of caregivers is to be questioned.
- Revisit our programs to see their utility in pre and post-disaster situations.
- Corporate Social Responsibility to be linked with child safety.

**Ms Pooja Priyamvada- In her presentation focussing on the mental health of children during COVID 19 has opened altogether different issues to the forefront.**

- It is important to study how children process or register disaster/pandemic situations. The social disruption caused during pandemic has led to suicide deaths among children.
- Children feel to have less control of the situation as often decisions taken for their well-being are taken by adults.
- Children often are not able to comprehend the pandemic/ disaster situation and feel fear, anger, frustration and guilt.
- Children's lack of access to resources like educational material to explain disaster situation often leaves them confused. Lack of authentic information.



- Long term impacts of pandemic/ disaster have to be studied. Social isolation and loneliness lead to an increased risk of depression and anxiety disorders.
- Children with special needs who undergo therapy sessions – in a disaster situation, there is a suspension of therapies.
- Psycho-social aspects of disasters are completely missed. Emotional wellness often takes a backseat and even sexual wellness is ignored.
- Children emotionally respond to their environment.
- Focussing on suicides – the Psychological First Aid (PFA) screening or training missing. Children to be provided initial support through PFA especially during disasters so that they do not fall in the spectrum of long term mental health disorder. PFA to be included in the Policy.
- Incorporating Psycho-social distress in the school curriculum is very important.
- National Suicide Prevention Policy is missing in India. In India, suicides occur mostly because of social factors. People/ families do not report suicide cases.
- We have Mental Health Policy in India but needs to be made more child-centric.
- Mental health Policy does not define Neurodevelopmental disorders (mostly found in children). The neuro-diversity has to be taken into account.
- Mental Health Care facilities dealing with mental health issues do not have specific instructions for children. Categories of mental health professionals are not clearly defined which can be detrimental to the child who is seeking help. Consent to treatment is not properly defined while helping children.
- Corporal punishment and bullying still not covered under abuse/mental health.
- Adolescent health clinics (as found in Meghalaya) can be replicated all over India.
- POCSO and JJ Act does not mention mental health.



**Mr Anant Kumar Asthana-In his presentation deliberated that various policy documents decipher/do not decipher disaster consciousness.**

- The study of the Juvenile Justice Act does not mention 'Disaster' in the document. Only children affected by armed conflict, natural calamity or civil unrest are covered under this Act and disaster orientation is missing.
- There is a gap in the convergence between different Ministries and NIDM. Inputs to be given from a Disaster management point of view into the ongoing review of ICPS by MWCD, UOI.
- Framing of Disaster Management Protocol for child care institutions as per Rule 67(10) of the Model JJ Rules 2016 be developed by Disaster Management Authorities of States/UTs. Model Rule prepared in 2016 in JJ Act mentions- person in charge of child care institutions is given the license only if he/she is prepared for disaster situations and takes enough preventive measures. But the Model Rules do not mention what preventive measure to be taken and Protocol yet to be developed by the State Disaster Management Authority.
- District Child Protection Unit needs to do a Risk assessment of families/ children living in disaster-prone zones.
- Integrated Child Protection Scheme is presently under review and we can advocate for more children friendly policies. Study of various Laws on Children for finding out their linkages with laws on Disaster Management.
- Review and Analysis of co-relations between National Policy on Children and National Policy on Disaster Management. There is a need to converge between the two policies so that they can work in tandem during a disaster situation.
- NCPDR and NIDM have to be linked and brought together on a common platform.



- In the Juvenile Justice Act, there are references to mental health and child care institutions. But a lot of action required on the ground. The implementation of the Act has to be made by State governments but many states are still in the process of making the rules. There is an opportunity to make rules and incorporate the subject of disaster in the rules.
- ICPS / Vatsalya Scheme – specifications about convergence are given and different departments like education, health judiciary and police have been mentioned but disaster authorities are missing. MWCD to be approached and encouraged to link the Child protection mechanism with disaster.
- Apart from statutory bodies looking into child rights and protection, post-2013 we have a unique system called JJ justice Committees which are set up in High courts with a mandate to oversee laws concerning children like JJ Act and POCSO act. They look at the Implementation of law and these committees can be approached to mention disaster too under child protection.
- NIPCCD has to be approached for collaboration.
- Within the disaster sector, the multi-agency coordinated response has been encouraged and we must merge the child protection system within it. Post-disaster drug and substance abuse have to be seriously looked at.

### **Ms Rosy Taba, Member NCPCR suggested,**

- India is geographically and ethnically diverse and uniform law/ policy would not work.
- Children are dependent on adult and are most affected during disasters. The policy has to be based on data and research done.
- Convergence of ministries is required and different departments have to come together.
- The community has to be involved because their understanding can generate practical solutions in post-disaster case. Lack of awareness on the ground on how to handle rehabilitation post-disaster.
- We just focus on rehabilitating and not focus on trauma. The safety and protection of the children in the camps in the post-disaster situation are often overlooked and JJ rules are implemented. There is an increase in child trafficking post-disaster.
- There is a lack of preparedness, safety and protection in the school curriculum.



- Need to understand the complicated childhood of children in conflict zones. The child care institutions are not sensitive and not registered under JJ Act. Standards of care and safety are very low in these institutions.
- Children are lured to participate in protests and engage in unlawful activities, but the JJ Act and policies are silent on this. State agencies find it difficult to control this when children are engaged in protests. The radicalisation of children happens at a very young age in the conflict zone.
- The grassroots approach is needed. The uniqueness of the Kashmir situation demands an altogether different approach.
- The role of the Police and Judiciary becomes more important and they need to be more sensitive.
- NCPCR does not have disaster subject, only MHA has. All the ministries should have disaster as their subject. An expert panel required with people from different backgrounds and to make a single policy for children.
- Agencies working for children often do not know how to work with children. Training for caregivers to be more sensitive towards children.
- Collaboration of ministries and organisations with the panchayats at the local level to create awareness.



**Summing up the sessions Dr Sunita Reddy, pointed that** the webinar's aim was to move ahead and locate the gaps in different children related policies and also make suggestions to the government. Children are not to be seen as a homogenous category and the policy papers are to be thoroughly studied and dissected to provide more tangible solutions. Since studies and research in Disasters need an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach, people from academia, law, activists should be consulted and collaborate to prepare a comprehensive child policy document especially in the context of disasters. Dr Reddy concluded the session by summarizing the key points given by all the speakers. Dr Reddy stressed for Child Centres in various Universities to be formed which would encourage cross-disciplinary dialogue. Different policies and Acts are to be linked to build a comprehensive DM Act.

**Dr. Gunjan Arora ended the session** with a brief introduction about the Anthropos India Foundation and the child-related activities being carried out. She gave the vote of thanks to all those who helped in organizing this webinar and ended the session.

