



Women's Protection and Empowerment Advancing the Field: Caring for Child Survivors in Humanitarian Settings

Gender-based Violence (GBV) is a widespread and serious global health and human rights issue that affects women and girls disproportionately across all classes and cultures. Child sexual abuse is a particularly insidious form of GBV that can have devastating and life-long consequences if left unaddressed. The threat of sexual abuse during and after emergencies is particularly acute, with children



comprising an extremely vulnerable group. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), an estimated 20 million children have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violations and live as refugees in neighboring countries or internally displaced within their own national borders.

Although the humanitarian community has made significant strides in developing global guidance for responding to and preventing GBV, the specific needs of child survivors of sexual abuse have received less targeted attention. Child survivors have a profound need for care and treatment that is appropriate to their age, cultural context, psychological symptoms, and type of abuse. Child survivors require a response that promotes and protects their physical and emotional safety in both the short and long terms. Yet, psychosocial and health interventions are typically designed for adult survivors of sexual violence, leaving child survivors to endure the consequences of violence without receiving the specialized life-saving support they need.

Field staff responding to cases of child sexual abuse in conflict settings require specialized training and consistent supervision and support for responding to and coordinating these complex cases. Specific guidance on how to optimize programmatic coordination across the health, GBV and child protection sectors is needed, including: how to share sensitive case information appropriately across sectors and service providers; how to jointly provide individual and family-based case management for families affected by sexual abuse; and general best practice guidelines for coordinating child sexual abuse case response. Service providers also need specific training in responding to the mental health needs of children who suffer from traumatic stress symptoms after experiencing abuse.

Caring for Child Survivors Initiative

Meeting the care and treatment needs of child survivors in humanitarian settings requires technical expertise and coordination across all relevant sectors. In an effort to help advance the field, the IRC, in partnership with UNICEF, the U.S. State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, developed the **Caring for Child Survivors Initiative** (CCS), which dedicates resources to developing new knowledge, tools and resources to support field staff working with child survivors in conflict and post-conflict settings. The main goal of the CCS initiative is to develop and pilot a CCS Resource Package to guide field staff on how to:

- conduct case management specific to child sexual abuse cases;
- implement targeted psychosocial interventions for child survivors of sexual abuse;
- provide evidence-based mental health treatment proven effective in other populations;
- involve non perpetrator family members in the child's healing and recovery;;
- meet the specific health needs of child survivors; and
- monitor the quality of service provision.

Fast Facts

- WHO reports that, globally, 20% of women and 5–10% of men report being sexually abused as children.
- In the Central African Republic, almost half of GBV survivors receiving support from the IRC are girls under the age of 18.
- In Sierra Leone, up to 80% of survivors receiving services from the IRC are girls under 18, of which 30% are 0-11 years old.

CCS tools and resources will be piloted in four refugee camps in Ethiopia and Thailand with sister organizations. Based on the outcome of the pilot testing, the CCS Resource Package will be further adapted with the aim of providing the humanitarian community with tested, innovative resources to improve care and treatment for child survivors of sexual abuse. This includes results from the rigorous impact evaluation of the mental health intervention conducted in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University. Results will show the impact of the intervention on the well-being of children and will add to the growing body of literature in global mental health on the most effective ways to treat mental health problems across international contexts.

The CCS Resource Package, as well as lessons learned, will be distributed to the wider humanitarian community to ensure that the learning is shared and used to inspire action to improve our collective response to child survivors.

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