Teenage girls discriminated against during disasters, says new report

October 10, 2013

Toronto, ON (RPRN) 10/10/13 — Adolescent girls in disasters around the world are discriminated against when they are at their most vulnerable,according to a major new report by international children's organization Plan International.

The prevalence of disasters across the world is growing, with nine out of 10 disasters and 95 per cent of deaths caused by disasters taking place in the developing world. Adolescent girls have particular needs for protection, healthcare and education in emergencies that are not beingmet or even recognized by governments and humanitarian organizations, the report finds.

The report, *In Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters* , found that girls are given less food when it is scarce and are less likely to be rescued than boys. Research quoted in the report also shows that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a disaster, and that boys generally received preferential treatment over girls in rescue efforts.

"Each year increasing numbers of people are affected by disasters, with adolescent girls being the most at risk"says Rosemary McCarney, President and CEO of Plan Canada. "They are doubly disadvantaged in that they are young and they are female. Their rights and needs are ignored and they remain largely invisible."

Double Jeopardy: Adolescent Girls and Disasters is the latest installment of Plan's annual **Because I am a Girl** The State of the World's Girls report series. Each year using original research, reviews of secondary materials and the voices of girls themselves, a critical issue affecting the lives and development of girls around the world is explored. Past reports have covered education, conflict, economic empowerment, cities and technology, and how boys and men can support gender equality.

The 2013 report says girls are more likely to be pulled out of schools during emergencies – and least likely to return afterwards.In Pakistan, after the 2010 floods, one quarter of the girls and just six per cent of the boys in Grade Six dropped out of school. In Zimbabwe, two in three heads of households said boys would be more likely than girls to return to school after a disaster.

Report findings also indicate that disasters and emergencies further increase the likelihood of girls being forced into childhood marriage, domestic work or transactional sex as "coping strategies." Original research in Niger after itsmost recent food crisis found that out of 135 adolescent girls, nearly two-thirds were already married and more than one-third had children, with the average age of marriage being 14. Primary research found that since the Haitian earthquake, there has been an alarming rise in women and girls involved in selling sex, including adolescent girls who are exploited in the streets and establishments of Jimani, on the Dominican border.

"Emergencies have a lasting effect on adolescent girls that shapes the rest of their lives – bringing an abrupt end to their education and forcing them into poor and ill-informeddecisions like early marriage and dangerous work, including sex work," adds McCarney.

The report says donors, governments, decision-makers and the humanitarian community must start listening to what girls have to say and empower them to play a role in disaster reduction planning if they are to begin understanding the differing needs of girls in emergencies.

It recommends:

Engaging adolescent girls in all stages of disaster preparedness and response.
Training and mobilizing more women to work in emergency response teams.
Providing targeted services for adolescent girls in the core areas of education, protection and sexual andreproductive health.
Funding for protection against gender-basedviolence in the first phase of emergency response.
Collecting sex and age disaggregated data to show the needs of adolescentgirls and to inform better program planning.

“There is very little research on adolescent boys or girls in disasters, which is why we commissioned this report,” says McCarney. “We’ve learned that what’s happening to adolescent girls in disasters is both predictable and preventable. But we know that girls are both uniquely vulnerable and uniquely powerful. We need to capitalize on both the learnings in this report and on girls’ unique strengths in emergencies to ensure disaster response agencies, Plan included, empower girls to attain their basic rights and successfully recover after disasters.”

Along with the launch of Plan’s new report, a host of events will take place as part of Canada-wide celebrations and events to markthe second annual International Day of the Girl on October 11, 2013 from the pink illumination of famous Canadian landmarks to a unique art installation in Ottawa, as well as screenings of the *Girl Rising* documentary across the country. For more information visit **becauseiamagirl.ca**

About Plan

Founded in 1937, Plan is one of the world’s oldest and largest international development agencies, working in partnership with millions of people around the world to end global poverty. Not for profit, independent and inclusive of all faiths and cultures, Plan has only one agenda: to improve the lives of children. **Because I am a Girl** is Plan’s global initiative to end gender inequality, promote girls’ rights and lift millions of girls – and everyone around them – out of poverty. Visit plancanada.ca and becauseiamagirl.ca for more information.

From the report

“I think the worst challenges were that we were not able to speak. The community would not recognize that we had something important to say because we were young and female.” – Xiomara, 19, El Salvador

“We need help knowing where we can get help. Girls are different from boys, we have different health problems.” – Sheila, 16, Philippines

“It’s hard, others have nothing to eat, and they embrace being involved in bad acts just to have something to eat, you don’t know what to do or who to talk to when that happens.” – Anna, 13, Philippines

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Main image credits: Plan Canada

Filed Under: BREAKING NEWS, CANADIAN NEWS, Lifestyle, Personal development, PRESS RELEASE

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