

Education's Role in Protection of Afghan Women from Disasters (English Presentation)

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Introduction:

The number of natural disasters is growing in the world, inflicting serious consequences on people, property and the environment (Cvetkovic & Ivanov, 2014).

Furthermore, women have been found to be more vulnerable than men at the time of disasters (Enarson, 2009). The main factors which make women more vulnerable in disasters may differ between societies because of their culture, resources and opportunities, particularly access to education (Nuemayer & Plumper, 2008). Women are often marginalized from disaster education increasing their vulnerability. In fact, women and children are found to be 14 times more likely to die in disasters, especially in developing countries (Plan International, 2013).

In Afghanistan, that is witness to four decades of civil war and conflict, the number of natural disasters is increasing, and women and young girls are affected disproportionately.

Based on a study conducted by the authors in 2017, disaster education was recognized as a key vulnerability factor for Afghan women in disasters (Hamidzada and Cruz 2017). These results correlate with previous studies (UNESCO 2012, UNISDR 2015, Shaw 2008).

This paper analyses the impact of an education program about community risk assessment and disaster management carried out by the International Office of Migration (IOM) in rural and urban communities in Afghanistan.

The author carried out focus group discussions (FGDs) concerning disaster impacts and preparedness in these two communities prior to the disaster program interventions

by the IOM. A second set of FGDs were carried out in November 2017 after the IOM disaster education program had been completed.

IMO Intervention

The IMO intervention consisted in the development of Hazard, Vulnerability, Capacity and Risk Assessments (HVCRA) and mapping of hazards by both women and men in rural and urban communities in September 2017. During the risk assessment, participants, with guidance of IOM, prepared plans for community disaster management. These plans reflect the needs, concerns and issues affecting all of these groups. The disaster training was conducted in the case study areas by IOM in October 2017.

Methodology:

This study was based on a literature review, and primary data collected by FGDs and a series of interviews in the case study areas. In total 24 women and 38 men participated in two male and two female FGDs in both case study areas (rural and urban). Participants were chosen from the IOM study and comprised members of Emergency Preparedness Committees established by the IOM. In addition, 6 interviews were conducted in both rural and urban communities.

Results

Female FGDs in rural area:

Female participants in the FGDs were the same as those who participated in the first set of FGDs in January 2017, prior to the IOM intervention.

A substantial change was observed in participants' behavior, knowledge and ability to respond, especially in the rural area. Participants could elaborate many details

about their training and had expressed their willingness to learn more. Furthermore, they now knew what they should do at the time of a disaster, including how to help themselves and others in a proper and secure manner. Based on the training, they had learned how to use first aid kits, and other equipment. They had learned how find people who were unaccounted for, and how treat them.

Since most of the elderly women of the community are illiterate, very few females (only young school girls) are ready to conduct training for other female members of their village.

Male FGDs in rural area:

An even larger positive change was found among men FGD participants regarding their knowledge. We found that men had mapped the risk, vulnerability and capacity of village people. From this they gained lots of information and knowledge which encouraged them to take some initiatives to solve two main issues: access to safe drinking water and access to a health clinic. They could now use first aid and emergency kits, and other equipment such as shovels, picks, etc. In addition, the men had established committees, defined roles and responsibilities, and were ready to train more people.

FGDs in urban area

In urban community, men and women groups actively participated in the disaster training and risk assessment of their community, but the results of the FGDs showed that change was slow, and they felt less empowered to act. For example, neither the women or men they had initiated any action. They said that the training was useful, but they did not know how they could apply them to address some of their community issues. Urban men and women said they gained more knowledge and information, and like rural community, they also established emergency committees, but they have not planned any new action in their community up to the time of our visit.

Conclusion:

In this study we had an investigation in two communities in rural and urban areas. We learned that in rural area

men's and women's attitude and behavior after participating in disaster trainings greatly improved. Community members could gain more knowledge and information on disasters and could apply them to reduce the effect of disaster in their community. They could solve up to 50% of the essential problems for their community and thus reduce the level of hazard in their community. Our results also showed that the results of the intervention in the urban community was less effective, and failed to empower them to take action.

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