



Research article

Estimating child separation in emergencies: Results from North Kivu[☆]



Lindsay Stark^{a,*}, Beth L. Rubenstein^{a,b}, Hani Mansourian^a, Craig Spencer^a,
Eva Noble^a, Makini Chisolm-Straker^a

^a Program on Forced Migration and Health, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, 60 Haven Ave., New York, NY 10032, USA

^b Department of Epidemiology, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, 722 W. 168th St., New York, NY 10032, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 October 2015

Received in revised form

21 December 2015

Accepted 24 December 2015

Available online 11 January 2016

Keywords:

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Child protection

Unaccompanied and separated children

Prevalence

Household survey

ABSTRACT

Children who are separated from their families and usual caregivers in emergencies face a multitude of risks to their health and wellbeing. This study presents findings from the first known population-based estimation of separation in an emergency setting. Point prevalence and basic characteristics were measured to inform programming, policies and funding for affected populations. A household survey was carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to estimate separation subsequent to an attack by the M23 militia group. Separation was tracked in terms of children arriving into the household after the M23 attacks and children who had departed from the household after the recall event without their parent or usual caregiver. Five hundred and twenty-two households were surveyed. In the sample of 2,197 children living in the respondents' homes at the time of data collection, 8.47% ($n = 186$) were separated children who had newly arrived in the household since the M23 attack. In the sample of 2,034 children living in the respondents' homes prior to the M23 attack, 5.31% ($n = 108$) children had since departed from the household, resulting in separation from their parents or usual caregivers. Characteristics of children who arrived and children who departed diverged in terms of age, reasons for separation and frequency of unaccompaniment. The findings indicate the potential for population-based estimation of separation to be replicated in emergency settings to inform funding appeals and programmatic response.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

It is well documented that children who are separated from their families and usual caregivers in natural disasters, conflict and other emergencies face a multitude of risks, including grave threats to their health and well-being (Hepburn, 2006; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004). Compared to children who are not separated, these children suffer from higher levels of food insecurity, malnutrition and associated infection (Engle et al., 2007; International Committee of

[☆] This work was supported by the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance [AID-OFDA-G-13-00163]. In addition, the authors acknowledge the support and guidance of the Interagency Advisory Board. From Columbia University, Gary Yu, statistician, also contributed to this research. Statements made in this paper are the views of the authors alone, and do not constitute the policy of the funding bodies. CUMC IRB approval reference: AAAB7134.

* Corresponding author.

the Red Cross, 2004). They are more likely to be exploited for labor and sex than their unseparated peers, and have higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy-related complications (Bianchini, 2011; John-Legere & Lorek, 2012; Lay & Papadopoulos, 2009; Mushingeh et al., 2002; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2007). In addition, separation and lack of social support can lead to anatomical changes in brain structure and function that severely impede children's growth and cognitive development and have long-term mental health impacts, including chronic stress, anxiety and depression (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1983; Bick et al., 2015; Bronstein, Montgomery, & Ott, 2013; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Juffer, 2007; Vanderwert, Marshall, Nelson, Zeanah, & Fox, 2010).

Recognizing these risks, the humanitarian community has developed a myriad of policies and programs aimed at mitigating the vulnerabilities facing unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). This work dates back to shortly after World War II, when the United Nations (UN) created a Central Tracing Bureau (Shields & Bryan, 2002). Minimum standards exist to guide organizations in establishing family tracing and reunification programming (Child Protection Working Group (CPWG), 2012).

Yet, despite progress on policies and programming, the measurement of unaccompanied and separated children has not achieved the same advances. The construct of separation encompasses many cultural and contextual nuances. Even concepts like 'child' and 'family' are understood differently across contexts, and shape the way in which separation is conceptualized (Boyden, 1997; Desai, 1992; LeVine et al., 1994; Selin, 2014; Stark, Boothby, & Ager, 2009). Existing inter-agency measurement tools, such as the Child Protection Rapid Assessment, help practitioners measure some aspects of separation using definitions of separation agreed by the international humanitarian community (Ager, Blake, Stark, & Daniel, 2011; Global Child Protection Working Group, 2012; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004). Other methodologies have been developed to capture local definitions of the construct of customary care (Birnbaum, Muhorakeye, Gatete, & Canavera, 2015). Through structured desk review and qualitative methods of inquiry, these tools produce data to describe how separation is understood in a context, why it may be happening and how separated children are cared for by a community. The existing tools also provide an indicative sense of the scale of the problem. Yet there are currently no guidelines for producing representative data on the magnitude of separation and basic characteristics of unaccompanied and separated children in an emergency.

As a result, practitioners and policymakers are left to assess the scope of separation based on gross generalizations and/or selective data. One estimation strategy uses a "rule of thumb" which suggests that UASC typically comprise 3–5% of the displaced population during emergencies (Ressler, Boothby, & Steinbock, 1988). This approach has never been validated. Further, the idea of a one-size-fits-all rule is unrealistic given the diverse circumstances of different emergencies. Another estimation strategy calculates the rate of separated children amongst refugees and asylum seekers in camp settings (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), December 2013, November 2013). This population is not representative of the majority of the affected population who has not crossed international borders.

Ultimately, lack of rigorous data on the scale and circumstances of separation in emergencies impedes efforts to fund, design and implement effective programming and policies for affected populations. To address this gap, the Assessment and Measurement Task-Force of the Global Child Protection Working Group initiated an inter-agency project (the Measuring Separation in Emergencies project) in 2014 to devise appropriate methodologies to accompany existing approaches for measuring separation in emergencies. The scope of this project and the primary variables of interest were determined by practitioners, policy makers and donors who are members of the project's advisory panel. On behalf of this interagency initiative, researchers from Columbia University developed and piloted a survey tool intended to provide a population-based estimation of the point prevalence and basic characteristics of UASC in a defined area, affected by the same emergency. This is the first known population-based survey to estimate the prevalence of unaccompanied and separated children in an emergency context (Robinson & Branchini, 2015).

Methods

Setting

The tool was piloted in the Nyiragongo and Goma territories in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in July and August 2014. North Kivu is a region in eastern DRC that has been affected by armed conflict for more than two decades (Stearns, 2012). Children in the region are regularly separated from their families due to violence, displacement, poverty and recruitment to armed forces (Bell, 2006; UNICEF, 2015). In late 2012, a militia group known as M23 attacked the area, overtaking the city of Goma and exacerbating the conditions that lead to separation.

Sample

Sampling was achieved via a two-stage cluster design. It was estimated that the study would need 20 clusters of 25 households per cluster to detect a 5% prevalence of separation in a population of 10,000, assuming precision of 1.5%. Due to insecurity in many parts of the territories, clusters were randomly selected from those identified as accessible.

To select households within each cluster, systematic random sampling was used. Where clusters included fewer than 200 households, a sampling interval m was determined by dividing the total number of households by 25 (number of surveys).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/344555>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/344555>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)