

Global Threats to Child Safety



Sharon E. Mace, MD^{a,b,*}

KEYWORDS

- Needs of the child • Vulnerable children • Violence toward children
- Exploitation of children • Abuse of children • Child protection

KEY POINTS

- Children in a disaster or armed conflict and children outside of family care are especially vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse. Other factors include ethnic, racial, religious, or social minorities; disabled children, gender, age, and socioeconomic status.
- Global threats to child safety exist: lack of basic needs (food, clean water, sanitation, shelter), maltreatment, abandonment, child labor, child marriage, female genital mutilation, child trafficking, disasters, and armed conflicts.
- Children have rights, as enumerated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and need protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse; especially during disasters and armed conflicts/wars.
- Strategies and specific programs can be developed and implemented for eliminating threats to the safety of children.

INTRODUCTION

A recent United Nations (UN) report estimates there was a record number of refugees last year with 59.5 million people forced from their homes by armed conflicts/wars all over the world.¹ The armed conflict/war in Syria alone has resulted in nearly 3.9 million migrants, with 1.59 million of these refugees in nearby Turkey.¹ A significant portion of these individuals are children. Reports indicate that it is not unusual to see migrant children begging in the streets of Turkey. Of these 59.5 million people, 38.2 million were displaced within their own countries.²

There was a 16% increase in displaced people in one year alone from 51.2 million in 2013 to 59.5 million in 2014. Moreover, this trend seems to be escalating and it is likely that the numbers will only increase further this year. The mass refugee exodus from

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^a Department of Emergency Medicine, Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Clinic, 9500 Euclid Avenue, E-19, Cleveland, OH 44195, USA;

^b Observation Unit, Emergency Services Institute, Cleveland Clinic, 9500 Euclid Avenue, E-19, Cleveland, OH 44195, USA

* Emergency Department, Cleveland Clinic, 9500 Euclid Avenue, E-19, Cleveland, OH 44195.

E-mail address: maces@ccf.org

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armed conflicts/war all over the world represents a monumental humanitarian crisis and is the worst refugee crisis in years. According to the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) “The number of people living as refugees from war or persecution exceeded 50 million in 2013, for the first time since World War Two, the UN says.”³

In 2012, worldwide, it was estimated that more than 172 million people were directly affected by armed conflicts. This number (172 million) includes conflict affected residents (CARs) (86.6% of the total at 149 million), internally displaced people (18 million or 10.5%) and refugees (5 million or 2.9%). The actual numbers are likely much higher than this because the figures include only 24 countries for which comparable and validated data were available.⁴ Again, most of this population includes families with children and orphans or children without family support.⁴

Migrant, displaced, and orphan children or children without family support are especially vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse. These reports and other current headlines highlight the worldwide problems for child safety. This article deals with several key issues facing global child safety, discusses advocacy, and references some strategies and successful programs for combating the violence toward, exploitation of, and abuse of children worldwide (Box 1).

BACKGROUND

The human body cannot survive without meeting its physiologic needs. Obligatory physiologic needs must be met; otherwise, the human body is unable to function properly and will eventually fail, leading to the demise of the individual. The 3 metabolic requirements for survival are air, water, and food; clothing and shelter bestow protection from the elements.

After meeting the physiologic needs, which are the physical requirements for human survival, safety needs are next. Physical safety may be difficult to attain for many reasons including war, armed conflicts, disasters, family violence, and maltreatment (abuse). Once the individual’s physical needs are met, safety needs become the priority. Safety and security needs encompass personal security, financial security, health and well-being, and a safety net to prevent accidents, illnesses, or diseases, with their resultant consequences.

Box 1

Types of violence, exploitation, and abuse that children experience

- Failure to provide adequate basic needs: food, water, shelter (including clothing), health care (including immunizations), and education
- Lack of official recording of births
- Child maltreatment (abuse): physical, sexual, verbal, medical child abuse (Munchausen’s by proxy, fabricated, or induced illness)
- Child abandonment
- Child labor
- Child marriage
- Female genital mutilation/cutting
- Trafficking
- Sexual exploitation
- Child soldiers

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