

## Children and school safety studies need more comprehensive and systematic views

Children and school safety in the context of multi-hazards are an emerging concern of both practitioners and researchers. The cross-disciplinary nature of this topic has attracted scholars from various disciplines such as disaster studies, geography, education, child rights, behavioral science, psychology, public health, pediatrics, sociology, economics, risk analysis, structural engineering and water and sanitation. In general, the impact of disasters on children and youth's physical, mental and behavioral health, the efforts of disaster risk reduction education and broader school safety management are the three concentrated themes. Moreover, studies about children, youth and disasters have been developed from the early vulnerability perspective to the current resilience and capacity-building trend. The victim views of treating children and youth as a vulnerable group that needs special care and protection dominated in early studies, and thus they were mainly focused on the health aspects. In accordance, advocacies and policies were primarily about the unique needs of children and youth, such as the psychological first aid services specially tailored for them.

Children-centered and resilience perspective has emerged in the last decade, and this theme treats the children and youth as enablers and actors. Instead of perceiving them as powerless and victims, this theme of studies calls for the engagement of children and youth in all the disaster risk reduction processes, from risk assessment to risk reduction, response preparedness and post-event response and recovery. Moreover, children and youth can be the critical hub that links disaster risk reduction knowledge and skills from schools to families and communities (Peek *et al.*, 2018; Ronan *et al.*, 2016; Wisner *et al.*, 2018).

Though we can see a vast increase of studies about children, school safety and disasters recently, there is a big gap between academic research and practice (Gaillard, 2019), and the current studies exhibited the deficiency of educational theory, lack of long-term goals, needs of policy and practice evaluation, and the fail of solving real problems (Petal *et al.*, 2020). We organized this special issue, drawing lessons learned from the United States, China and Brazil, investigating the school safety and disaster education experience in the contexts of hurricane, wildfire, earthquake and flood to continue to address this gap.

In detail, Davis and her colleagues interviewed the school teachers, principals, school district superintendents and state education agencies' representatives from Texas and North Carolina in the United States after the 2016 Hurricane Matthew and 2017 Hurricane Harvey. They found that hurricanes can impact schools from three aspects: the constrained instructional time, the increased social-emotional needs and the need to support educators. Their paper provided valuable lessons for schools and relevant stakeholders to cope with disaster impact from the long-term view.

Ducy and Stough's study focused on the disaster impact and coping strategies of a particular group – adolescents with disabilities and their families. They interviewed the students and their parents' experience after the 2017 Northern California wildfires. The wildfires and the following school closures affected the students' access to schools, maintaining their acquired skills, mental and behavioral health, and adaptation to the new environment. Their study highlighted the importance of social connection for the students and families to cope with disasters.

Lu and his colleagues studied one disaster risk education program developed in Southwest China after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake and the 2014 Lushan earthquake.



Their school-based education program with a focus on the children-centered participation method. Their study demonstrated how local NGOs worked with a national foundation, the local education management agencies, the schools, the children and their families together to enrich the students' knowledge, skills and resilience to multi-risks. The program also improved the communities' resilience by linking the disaster risk reduction knowledge from students to their family members.

Trejo-Rangel demonstrated a disaster risk education method from São Luiz do Paraitinga, Brazil, using a participatory 3D mapping method, interviews, round tables, discussions and presentations. Children and school employees shared their disaster experience and knowledge of disaster risk mitigation in this education participation process. Their paper can contribute to disaster risk education methodologies for disaster risk educators worldwide.

In addition to these four papers that survived after double-blinded peer review, we received nearly 30 submissions, exploring wider topics on school safety and from a broad range of contexts, including pandemics and school safety and security issues like school violence. Interestingly, the "school safety" discourse, as it emerged in disaster studies, was dominated by the politically acceptable "natural" hazards theme and rarely tackled man-made disasters or safety issues. Yet, these human-related safety and security concerns have certainly been addressed in other areas of academic study and practices. The concern of school violence, school bullying and fear of crime has been emerged since the 1970s and is still a global concern across countries (UNESCO, 2017). The two study traditions start to overlap in the last decade with the concern of terrorist attacks and mass shooting events, particularly in the United States. Emergency management practice and research are slowly addressing the fundamental similarities as well (see, for example, [US Federal Commission on School Safety, 2018](#) report covering broad school safety topics from bullying and cyberbullying, physical security to emergency planning and recovery).

Seen through the eyes of children, and seen from the practical standpoint of the predominantly education sector duty-bearers who now understand that their responsibilities to children go beyond the 3 R's ("reading, writing and arithmetic"), it seems imperative that "school safety" should indeed be able to take a unified approach to address *all hazards* that threaten children's learning and safety – in and around schools.

Global advocacy for school safety has emerged from the work of child rights advocates who are part of several international governmental and non-governmental alliances, including the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Ending Violence Against Children and the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies. These have sought alignment with Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Paris Climate Agreement and Education for Sustainable Development.

The Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Framework ([GADRRRES, 2017](#)) was first introduced by the Asia Pacific Coalition for Schools Safety and endorsed by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education in 2012. It was updated in 2016, and GADRRRES is leading a new 2021–2030 update through global consultations in 2021. The CSS Framework indeed takes just such an *all-hazards* approach. Its goals are to protect learners and education workers from death and injury, plan for educational continuity, safeguard education sector investments and strengthen a culture of risk reduction and resilience through education.

GADRRRES embraces both a *socio-ecosystems* understanding of child-centered risk reduction and resilience, as well as the importance of a *collective impact* approach when it comes to school safety advocacy. The planned CSS Framework 2021–2030 explicitly recognizes the myriad of threats to children's learning and safety associated with natural,

technological, health hazards, climate change, displacement, conflict and violence. It intends to clearly articulate both the foundations and systems-level transformations needed and the importance of *all-hazards, all-risks*-informed approaches to strengthen the resilience of education systems, communities and individuals. Associated *CSS Targets and Indicators*, *CSS Policy Survey* and operational guidance tools are being planned to be of practical use to education sector duty-bearers. It will be necessary for researchers to support these efforts with a flow of evidence on what works to “move the needle.” Another vital framework and roadmap was proposed by Petal *et al.* to strengthen evidence-based practice in school safety and to focus on the need for practice-based evidence to guide the design, development, implementation and evaluation of effective child-centered risk reduction and school safety policies and programs (Petal *et al.*, 2020).

Beyond these theoretical efforts and empirical studies examining a specific risk’s impact on school and children, the coping strategies of children and school, much more work is needed to address the implementation science questions about what *works* to make schools safer, as well as the theoretical and systematic studies to support this endeavor.

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## References

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## Further reading

- UNISDR and GADRRRES (2017), “Comprehensive school safety-a global framework in support of the global alliance for disaster risk reduction and resilience in the education sector and the worldwide initiative for safe schools”, available at: <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/55548>.