



Women's Refugee Commission

Women's Refugee Commission calls on Philippines typhoon response to take into account the particular needs of vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons with disabilities

New York, NY, November 13, 2013--Super Typhoon Haiyan, which struck the Philippines on November 8, has affected an estimated [11.3 million people](#). More than [800,000 have been displaced](#). Among the two million people who need food aid, [nearly 300,000 are pregnant women or new mothers](#). According to the most recent [national census](#), nearly one million children under age 19 years live in the hardest-hit areas of Tacloban City and Leyte Province; of these, nearly 200,000 are adolescent girls (10-19), a sub-population that faces unique risks to their health, safety and well-being.

As humanitarian agencies act to support affected communities, ensuring the most effective and accountable response requires that equitable attention be paid to the needs and risks of the most vulnerable.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by natural disasters. As many as 80 percent of those who died in the 2004 tsunami were women and girls. The gender difference in the loss of life after natural disasters is directly linked to women's poor economic and social status before a crisis, which limits their survival skills and their ability to receive warnings and stay out of harm's way.

“For women and girls who survive natural disasters, the immediate consequences—shock, displacement, sexual violence and exploitation, disruptions in health services and the loss of financial security within a family unit—can lead to devastating short- and long-term effects,” said Sandra Krause, director of the sexual and reproductive health program at the Women's Refugee Commission. “Women and girls experience trauma and increased risks of sexual violence, which can lead to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Pregnant women lack access to safe delivery facilities; for the 15 percent of women and girls who suffer complications of pregnancy and child birth, the absence of emergency obstetric and newborn care can have devastating effects for women and their infants.”

Reproductive Health Needs

Based on government estimates, there are roughly [95,270 pregnant and 190,540 lactating women](#) in the typhoon-affected areas. An estimated 4,660 pregnant and 8,990 lactating women are currently in evacuation centers. Women and girls must have access to priority reproductive health services as outlined in the [standard of care for emergencies](#). These include safe deliveries at health facilities with skilled birth attendants; referral to emergency obstetric and newborn care for complications of pregnancy and child birth; distribution of clean delivery kits to visibly pregnant women; and access to

clinical care for survivors of sexual violence. To prevent the transmission of HIV it is important to ensure that all blood products are screened for safe blood transfusion, that free condoms are widely available and that health care providers practice standard precautions to prevent the transmission of infections. In addition, it is crucial to ensure antiretrovirals are available to continuing users; contraceptives are available to meet demand; syndromic treatment is available for people presenting with symptoms of sexually transmitted infections; and women and girls are able to access menstrual hygiene supplies.

Protection Needs

During emergencies, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to all forms of gender based violence, including physical abuse and exploitation, rape and early marriage. An estimated 49,000 women of reproductive age 15 to 49 years old are at [risk of sexual violence](#) in areas impacted by Typhoon Haiyan. There is also growing evidence that rates of violence may be 4 to 10 times greater among [persons with disabilities](#) than their non-disabled peers, which has significant implications for their physical protection in displacement settings. Agencies should take immediate measures to protect women, girls, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable people, such as single women and unaccompanied children, from sexual violence, abuse and exploitation in evacuation centers and shelters, and when accessing other basic necessities. Rapid response to sexual violence is critical; treatment within three days of an assault can prevent HIV infection and within five days can reduce the risk of pregnancy.

Livelihoods

While the immediate focus is on addressing essential needs such as shelter, food, water and medical services, it is also critical to provide economic opportunities and preserve existing economic assets to the extent possible. This provides the best chance for a sustainable income. Women and girls can be protected from sexual exploitation by providing them with safe, viable economic opportunities.

In all aspects of the relief effort, women, men, girls and boys should be consulted to determine their different needs, and also their capacities, so that their needs can be met, they can be part of program design and their capacities can be incorporated into service delivery.

The Women's Refugee Commission has developed a list of the [top ten critical needs to consider in the response to Typhoon Haiyan](#).