

Humanitarian organizations must do more for older people in emergencies

December 18 2012

Emergency aid has failed to address the needs of older people in emergency situations and so donors and humanitarian agencies must urgently ensure that this vulnerable group is included in any emergency response, according to experts from the humanitarian organizations Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) and HelpAge International writing in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

Unni Karunakara, The President of Médecins Sans Frontières, and Frances Stevenson from HelpAge International argue: "As the numbers of [older people](#) affected by [humanitarian crises](#) and disasters increase, humanitarian actors need to adapt policy and practice to ensure that the needs of older people are consistently and continually considered and that this vulnerable group is no longer neglected,"

According to the authors, older people are less likely to flee in times of conflict due to difficulties with travel and reluctance to leave home, land, and possessions. In addition, many are not able to travel to health facilities, stand in queues for food distributions, carry heavy packages of food or containers of water, or compete with younger people for relief supplies. And according to the authors, despite the common assumption, older people are often not cared for within their families.

For example, following the 2010 floods in Pakistan, around 10% of the older population was living without family support and in the camps for internally displaced people in Darfur, half of older people live alone

However, despite making up a significant and growing number of those affected by humanitarian crises, older people are often not sought out or prioritised within the humanitarian response. The authors say: "Humanitarian agencies, donors, and international bodies neglect older people's health and nutrition."

According to the authors: "Older people are not monitored in emergencies and they are not prioritised despite evidence of disproportionate mortality and morbidity in this group." Furthermore, there are considerable gaps in knowledge and research about the needs of older people in emergencies.

The authors call for change: "We call for policy changes by humanitarian agencies and donors to ensure that the needs of this vulnerable group are met."

More information: Karunakara U, Stevenson F (2012) Ending Neglect of Older People in the Response to Humanitarian Emergencies. PLoS Med 9(12): e1001357. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001357](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001357)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: Humanitarian organizations must do more for older people in emergencies (2012, December 18) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-12-humanitarian-older-people-emergencies.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.