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**Disaster impact and child protection gaps: A case study of the Haldummulla landslide, Sri Lanka**

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**Background:** Disasters, whether man-made or natural, disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, with children facing heightened risks to their lives, safety, rights, and well-being. Sri Lanka, as an island nation, is prone to various disasters including floods, landslides, and droughts. Therefore, ensuring child protection and upholding child rights during and after such events is crucial. However, very little has been examined related to children with a specific focus on the experiences and needs of children within disaster contexts in Sri Lanka, particularly through a child-centered, rights-based lens. Thus, this study investigated the impact of the Haldummulla Kalipanawela landslide in 2023, on child rights and protection, employing a child-centered, right-based approach using the Framework for Integrating Rights and Equality (FIRE).

**Method:** This study employed a mixed-method approach, including an interviewer-administered questionnaire survey, key informant interviews, focus group discussion with the displaced community, and visual data analysis of children's drawings. The total sample consisted of 25 children from 29 displaced families.

**Results:** Key findings revealed that 80% of children experienced significant disruptions to their education, with 60% reporting inadequate access to clean water and sanitation. Furthermore, 75% of children expressed feelings of insecurity due to poor housing conditions, and 50% reported witnessing or experiencing increased instances of exploitation. The study also highlighted the limited effectiveness of existing institutional interventions, with only 30% of children reporting positive experiences with support services.

**Conclusions:** The research concludes that the 2023 landslide severely compromised children's rights to education, shelter, sanitation, and protection, necessitating a more robust and participatory disaster response. It recommends the implementation of child-friendly spaces within temporary shelters, the provision of targeted educational support to mitigate learning loss, and the strengthening of community-based child protection mechanisms. Furthermore, the study suggests that future disaster response plans must prioritize the active participation of children and incorporate regular evaluations of institutional interventions to ensure their effectiveness in upholding child rights.

**Keywords:** Child protection, disaster situations, child rights, institutional intervention.