

KIDS IN THE WAR AFFECTED COUNTRIES

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We are living in a world of Wars. Wherever you see, in some part of the world, there is war between two countries, within the country among different groups, war in the name of ending terrorism in the world etc. Whatever the form of war is, there are common things that happen in all these wars. Destruction, loss of innocent people's lives, loss of property, innocent people ending up on the road, unemployment, businesses get affected, people do not want to come out to avoid getting killed but the bombs ruin their houses, take lives etc. Most importantly the kids who lose parents, siblings, there is no place to live, watch all the violence – their minds are affected emotionally, physically. Though people say the time heals the wounds slowly but the permanent damage done to the innocent kids lives is hard to heal, beyond treatment sometimes, loss of hope, depression, Post Trauma Stress Disorder is more among these kids, they keep asking only one question why do we have wars, why do they kill people, destroy houses, what do they want, why can't they get back to their normal lives with their parents, going to school, playing with friends, planning for future to become whatever they like to become?

One morning a boy in Afghanistan wakes up and goes out running to see his friends, but before he reaches his destination he steps on a landmine and guess what he lost? He lost his leg within seconds. He has seen kids who has lost their limbs or legs but never thought that it can happen to him. His life is ruined, he will live but whatever dreams he had to play sports or just play with friends' everyday has become impossible now. Everyday there are 10 to 15 mine victims in Afghanistan. Most of them are children like this boy in Kabul.

Just imagine one day you wake up and realize that there is war and the bombs start to fall, your house got blown up, your parents and siblings are dead or injured, there is no one to treat them, no medication and you just watch them die slowly, there is no roof, it's raining or its too hot, you are hungry, thirsty, no water to drink, no body to talk, you see lot of people crying, running around to search for their families, but they are in so much shock they can't talk to you, you can't go to school anymore, you can't see your teachers, friends, no books, no play, there is no hope and you are just 5 to 6 yrs old the whole life of yours ruined. You are scared, do not know where to go, you still see bombs falling on houses, buildings, offices, hospitals, soldiers shooting people and there is blood everywhere..... It goes on and on, you want me to stop, you can't take it anymore, or imagine something like that happening to you. It's so scary, frightening, it's hard to imagine – right?

Did you know that in the last decade, 2 million children have died in wars, 6 million children have been disabled, 12 million children have been left homeless, and 1 million children have been orphaned? Countless children have been psychologically scarred. Girls experience more problems than boys. Lot of girls the monsters who rape them don't even care they are just young kids of 9 to 11yr olds or 14 to 18 yr olds. They rape them and then force them into flesh trade, prostitution, who are supposed to cuddle

up with their parents, get lot of their attention and love, play with siblings, fight with them, support each other and now they regret that they ever fought with them and they just wish if they can see all of them together instead every day or night the guys come and force them to have sex with them, abuse them, use violence, they don't have any control of what's happening to them. Can you imagine that kind of life and how much they are suffering, how much they are crying, weeping, getting sick but no one cares to take them to doctor and get treatment. Within seconds the lives changed and they are in hell and there is no way to get out of that hard life, is there any chance of getting out?

In the Congo, a girl came out at night and shot the people whom she didn't even know, but she had to do it with AK-47 as the rebel group told her to do so. She lost her family, there is no one to take care, she is in trance, she is depressed, she is hungry, she is thirsty and most importantly she can't take the torture by the rebel group every day. If she does what they say they'll leave her alone, I mean she still lives with them, goes wherever they go but they won't torture as long as she kills people. Guess how old is she? She is just 11 years old.

Child Soldiers, can you imagine the fighting groups using kids as soldiers? Yes, more than 300,000 girls and boys under 18 are fighting in armed conflicts worldwide. Most are 15 to 18 yrs old. Some are as young as seven. Armed conflicts commonly target schools, clinics and hospitals, village markets, and other community structures where children gather. Many children are kidnapped. Others join because they see it as their only option for a livelihood, safety and companionship. Warring factions also often use the media to create distrust and hostility among people. Impressionable children are often confused and even swayed by messages against friends and neighbors. These children become callous and untrusting. Child soldiers are being used all over the world.

International law recognizes the use of child soldiers as a war crime. The minimum age for recruitment into armed forces was recently raised from 15 to 18. Still, the problem persists. Few peace treaties recognize the existence of child soldiers. Because of this, when war finally does end, not enough effort is made to return these children to society. (Courtesy, CIDA, Canadian International Development Agency.) The people who are the cause for wars, the politicians who are involved in the wars, the soldiers who are fighting these wars, the governments who are involved – does any of these people know what's happening to these children? How many children are losing the limbs, legs, hands stepping on the mines, bombs that are left in the fields? Do they ever try to understand how much damage both physically and mentally the wars are causing for these innocent children? How these war groups are using them drugging them to kill the people turning them into little soldiers? I don't think so. If they can think that much then why do they let the wars happen?

The website, Free The Children, which is creating awareness, let the world know how the war affected children are suffering and are trying to help the war affected kids in every possible way. According to them, "The best way to protect children from wars is to prevent them from happening in the first place." -- Free The Children. Isn't it right?

The kids who get affected in the wars suffer from depression, anxiety, Post Trauma Stress Disorder –

which haunts them throughout the life if it's not treated etc. The ways in which children may be affected by war include:

- Physical disability – due to mutilation or from landmines
- Psychological trauma – war-affected children suffer from a wide range of symptoms such as developmental delays, nightmares, lack of appetite and learning difficulties
- Sexual abuse – girls and women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape, sexual mutilation, forced prostitution and forced pregnancy. As a result, there is increased risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.

Increased workloads – especially if a child has lost parents and other family members. In some cases, war-affected children may be heading households and taking care of their siblings. Child-headed households are particularly vulnerable to exploitative labor and prostitution

- Increased threats to their survival – from exposure to disease, malnutrition, and reduced access to basic health services
- Loss of their homes – forcing them to flee, becoming either refugees or internally displaced persons. At least half of all refugees and internally displaced persons are children.

Why do we need to learn about these kids? It is very important to bring this topic for the discussion among the groups who are working for the children, either for their education, to stop child labor, make them self-sufficient, to stop their exploitation as child laborers, the groups working for the girl child, to stop her exploitation at home with superstitions, to stop them exploited as child laborers, get them education, to make them financially independent, the groups which are trying to stop the drug abuse, and make them useful for the society by getting involving them to participate in the programs to teach children about the drug abuse and the disadvantages of using it etc. should learn about these war affected kids who don't deserve this unbelievably hard life and also create awareness among people about these kids.

What else we can do to help these kids? Free The Children came up with wonderful volunteer things that communities, groups can come together and create awareness among people. They come up with some of the things that we can do to help these unfortunate, unbelievably suffering with suffocation of war.

Things you can do:

- Educate yourself – learn more about the issue of children and armed conflict. Conduct research, visit websites and gain a better understanding of the issue so that you can become an advocate for your war-affected peers.
- Create greater awareness – with your newly acquired knowledge, become a spokesperson and advocate for war-affected children. Be the voice of the countless numbers of children who have been victimized by war. Let them know that they are not alone in their struggle.
- Participate in Free The Children's "War is Not a Game" campaign.

- Set up seminars and displays on child soldiers and related issues.
- Give speeches to school groups and community organizations. You don't have to be an expert-let your passion guide you.
- Organize a march in your community- invite everyone! Write a song or poem to mark the event
- Write a newspaper article- get the word out!
- Organize petitions.....urging governments to support the International Code of Conduct on Arms Transfers, which aims to control the production and flow of small arms and light weapons to conflict zones, particularly where children are at high-risk.
...urging governments to place greater emphasis on promoting a culture of peace, through peace education programs and by challenging the popular entertainment culture that glorifies violence and gun use
...urging governments to sign on to and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict This protocol raises the minimum age from 15 to 18 for direct participation in hostilities.
- Fundraising: Help to raise funds to build schools in post-conflict zones
- Help to raise funds to buy fitted limbs (prosthesis) or wheel chairs for children who have been disabled by armed conflict.
- Work to collect school and health kits for war-affected children.

(Courtesy, Free the Children)

After a long time we got a new government which makes people to look towards it with hope, faith and gave a positive outlook even to the depressed and oppressed people that if you work hard you can become anything in this country. Even though it's not a fun for the new government to solve all the problems, as they seem to increase day by day they are preparing themselves to face them asking people's help to support them and work with them.

So, let's hope during the four yrs of this government at least some of the important problems will work out. The wars should come to an end and give us, all the volunteer organizations who are working with these war affected kids, should be able to do as much as possible to help them out.

You have seen the things to do for the war affected kids on top, if each one of us pick up one of the ideas to work for their welfare and keep repeating the cycle with all the groups I'm positive we can definitely try to heal the wounds, maybe it's hard to heal all the wounds but at least try to remove as much as possible.

I want to pick one thing from the 'Things You Can Do,' and see how it goes. If it works out I'll share my experience with you all. In case any if you or your friends decides to pick up one thing to do something about these kids, please do not forget to share your experiences with us. It might inspire other people to do something about it. I know you guys are already doing wonderful job with ASHA and you are busy students. To do one more thing may be hard but there are lot of options where you can do little bit but it will have great affect.

Remember we are living in the world where there is happiness and also lot of sadness next to it,

Let's help to change this sadness into happiness with our love, warmth, affection,

Just imagine Children of the world living without any troubles.

That day is not far away guys!