INTRODUCTION

Background
Children are particularly susceptible to trauma in a humanitarian crisis given their dependence on social structures and developing coping skills. For this reason, it is important to understand comprehensively how humanitarian crises affect children in order to provide effective therapeutic interventions. But beyond assessing the effects of disasters on children, little is known about their coping after disasters, resulting in a current lack of evidence-based therapies.

A Vulnerable Population
As a vulnerable population, children require special considerations when participating in research in the areas of obtaining informed consent, minimizing risks, and considering their best interests. Disasters often erode normal functions of every day life and thus make it difficult to navigate these conditions in children and research.

Yet over-protections for children may understate the harm and adverse consequences.

AIM

The Case for the Therapeutic Orphan
The aim of this project was to consider and compare children as therapeutic orphans in clinical research and determine, by means of a literature review, if children in humanitarian research are also therapeutic orphans. To date, no literature has considered children in humanitarian research as therapeutic orphans.

Elements of clinical therapeutic orphans was analyzed to reveal at least three key components:

- Adult-centric research
- Off-label treatment
- Neglect of childhood conditions

Though children in a humanitarian crisis do not present with unique or rare diseases, they often will express distinct psychological symptoms with a strong correlation to the disaster event. It becomes important to understand what the moral imperative is to conduct this research in children given the risks and trauma involved.

RESULTS

Exploring Evidence for Ethical Research
Designating children in humanitarian crises as therapeutic orphans propels the need for ethically justifiable conditions of research. A literature review was performed, and the following elements were studied:

- Natural disaster research, refugee research, and community emergency research
- Qualitative methodologies
- Studies in which an ethical examination occurred prior, during, or after the conduct of research
- Considerations of autonomy in children

A principilism approach was used to evaluate the literature on the principles of:
- Respect for autonomy
- Beneficence
- Nonmaleficence
- Justice

Finally, studies that were conducted for children populations following a disaster event were evaluated for perceptions of advocacy on behalf of the children and the considerations of autonomy.

METHODS

Conclusions
By failing to engage in research of children who experience traumatic events, not only do their health and social needs go unmet, but they also lose an opportunity to give voice to their own self-determination, the midst of distress and insecurity.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY