3.4 HOUSEHOLD/FAMILY FACTORS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

Introduction

Household/family factors are those related to the household/family of an individual. These factors have an impact on the individual, either increasing or decreasing their likelihood of experiencing violence, exploitation or abuse before, during or after migrating. This toolkit provides guidance on how to assess the ways in which household/family factors influence an individual's vulnerability by using the questionnaires provided.

Use of the household/family-level questionnaires can only provide a partial understanding of any individual's vulnerability: the information gathered through their use should be complemented by information gathered using the individual, community and structural level tools. This will allow for a more complete understanding of the individual's vulnerability and how the factors at various levels are interacting and operating to shape their vulnerability. Refer to Parts 2, 4 and 5 for information on conducting assessments of the individual, community and structural factors.

This toolkit contains: (a) a discussion of different household/family-level factors and how they influence vulnerability; (b) a suite of questionnaires to be used to gather the information needed to assess the impact of household/family-level factors on an individual's vulnerability; and (c) guidance on how to adapt and use the questionnaires.

Household/family factors

The list of factors described in this section are based on existing literature on vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse, as well as research conducted using the IOM determinants of migrant vulnerability framework. Many of these factors are context-specific, meaning that they might be a risk factor in one context but a protective factor in another. The household/family-level factors discussed in this section can be assessed through use of the questionnaires provided in this toolkit.

It is expected that over time, more knowledge will be gained on migrant vulnerability, which will necessitate revisions and updates to both the list of factors and the questionnaires.

Country of origin/citizenship

An individual's country of origin and citizenship could act as a protective factor or as a risk factor that would tend to expose the individual to violence, exploitation and abuse, depending on how people from the particular country/holding that citizenship are perceived/treated in that location.

Age

For individuals aged roughly between 20 and 50, age tends to be a protective factor. Younger and older people tend to be relatively more vulnerable and thus age is more of a risk factor. This is because younger and older people are often more dependent, less physically strong/mobile and can be less well informed, including about how to best advocate for themselves as compared to those roughly between 20 and 50 years of age.

Shelter

When an individual has no shelter or has a marginal shelter situation, he/she is more likely to be exposed to unhealthy, unsafe and exploitative housing circumstances and to make decisions that place him/her at greater risk. It is also important to understand who they live with, as there is typically greater interdependence between cohabitating family members and relatives than there is between unrelated cohabitants and, as such, the impact of a particular factor may vary for the different household members.

Education

Having a higher level of education is a significant protective factor since it means that a household/family member is more likely to be able to critically engage with their circumstances. It also allows household/family members to plan; to understand their rights and have the ability to advocate for those rights, including understanding channels within which to do so; to have more resources to draw upon when faced with challenging circumstances; and to be more likely to have decent work opportunities. This means that they will be relatively more independent and able to contribute to the household/family unit. By contrast, having a lower level of education is a strong risk factor and will

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tend to reduce their independence and ability to contribute to the household/family, impacting negatively on all other household/family members. Further, having young household/family members who feel unsafe at school or who are working outside the home means that they are less likely to continue to attend school, which in turn means that they are more likely to become vulnerable as a result of a lower education level. Again, this could impact negatively on other household/family members.

Financial situation

Having a more stable income at a level that can support one's own needs and one's external responsibilities to others is associated with greater resilience to violence, exploitation and abuse. Conversely, having a less stable or insufficient level of income, for example as a result of working in the agricultural sector in a community that tends to have drought or because of lacking the skill sets to find work in a weak economy, is associated with greater vulnerability and greater risk-taking behaviour to earn income. This in turn can increase the burden upon other household/family members, placing more demands on them and thus contributing to possibly risky coping strategies. Similarly, having debts is associated with vulnerability due to the challenge of repaying debts while simultaneously meeting one's own immediate financial needs, as well as due to a risk of external pressures such as demands to repay debts. Having household/family members with debts risks increasing the burden on other household/family members. as well as exposing them to risk if there are threats being made to encourage repayment.

History of migration

An individual who has household/family members who have migrated is more likely to migrate themselves as a result of a demonstration effect and as a result of having a concrete plan of how to undertake migration. This then can be associated with greater risk if the migration that they undertake is relatively dangerous or poorly thought through, or with greater protection to the extent that they learn from the experiences of others or their own previous migratory experience(s).

Physical and psychosocial situation

A household/family member who has experienced a major negative life event such as divorce, separation, death, or major illness or injury is less likely to be able to fully contribute to the household/family unit and is more likely to require some degree of support from other household/family members, thereby increasing the burden upon and thus the vulnerability of those other members.

Risky behaviours and experiences

Experiencing violence, coercion, threats, exploitation, abuse, addiction, and engaging in risky sexual behaviours are risk factors, and therefore any household/family member experiencing such situations are relatively more vulnerable. Similarly, household/family members who are or have been involved in risky behaviours such as armed conflict, gang activities, the drug trade or the sex trade are relatively more vulnerable. In turn, all of these behaviours and experiences risk impacting upon other members of the household/family and placing them at greater risk, for example by exposing them to violence or threats.

Decision-making

Not being able to participate in or to feel heard during household/family decision-making is a risk factor, since it means that the individual is relatively disempowered and thus has relatively less agency as well as a greater possibility of being coerced or controlled. This factor can also be an indicator of gender and/or age inequality within the household/family.

Networks

Having strong networks of support is an important protective factor since it means that a household/family and its members are more able to reach out to others, whether for material or other types of support. In turn, being isolated within the community is a risk factor since the household/family is not able to reach out in a similar manner, thereby increasing the risk for individual members.

Community safety

Having unsafe elements in the the community, such as the presence of human trafficking, gang activity or organized crime, is a risk factor for all household/family members. These risk factors may impact household/family members in different ways. For example, if women and children are subject to violence in the community, they themselves will be

directly affected. Other household/family members may also be affected, in that they may need to provide support to the household/family members directly affected, or they may themselves face risk as they attempt to protect their household/family members.

Race, ethnicity, religion

Members of certain races, ethnicities or religions may be targeted for violence, exploitation and abuse in some contexts, or they may be given preferential treatment in other contexts. This factor therefore focuses on the manner in which race, ethnicity and religion can increase risk or provide protection, depending on the context.

Biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation

Some biological sexes, such as being female or intersex, as well as some gender identities, such as being a woman or non-binary, and sexual orientations other than being heterosexual all tend to be associated with greater risk as a result of persecution, abuse and violence. Conversely, being male, a man and heterosexual tend to be associated with greater protection.