Children's Homes and Crisis Preparedness for Natural Hazards: Theoretical Foundations of Security as a Framework for Institutional Safety

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Abstract: *The paper examines the theoretical foundations of security and their application to the specific institutional environment of children's homes. Security is conceptualized as a fundamental human and social need, as well as an integral component of national interest and the democratic functioning of the state. The text analyzes the relationship between security theory and the practical requirements of crisis planning in children's homes, with particular regard to natural hazards such as floods, windstorms, and pandemics. The contribution highlights the necessity of interdisciplinary cooperation and the importance of crisis preparedness plans in strengthening the resilience and readiness of children's homes. Based on the proposed theoretical framework, recommendations are formulated for the development of security policies and innovative approaches to the protection of children as a particularly vulnerable group within society.*

Keywords*: SECURITY, CHILDREN'S HOME, CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, NATURAL HAZARDS, CRISIS PLANNING, INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE, VULNERABLE GROUPS*

1. Introduction

Security is a foundational concept within contemporary security studies, encompassing the protection of individuals, institutions, and societies from threats that may compromise their stability, development, and fundamental rights. Theoretical approaches to security emphasize both its multidimensional nature and its role as a basic human need, closely tied to social functioning and the resilience of states and communities. According to the widely accepted framework proposed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, security must be understood not only as a condition free from threat but also as a socially constructed category that reflects political, institutional, and societal priorities [1]. In this context, institutional environments caring for vulnerable populations—such as children's homes—require particular attention within the broader security discourse.

Children without adequate family support represent a group with increased vulnerability to external stressors and crises, including natural hazards. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the obligation of states to ensure children's survival, development, protection, and well-being in all circumstances, including emergencies [2]. As residential institutions tasked with providing stable living conditions, children's homes must therefore be embedded within national security and crisis preparedness systems. Their ability to maintain operational continuity during natural hazards is directly connected to the fulfillment of children's fundamental rights and to societal expectations of institutional responsibility.

Natural hazards such as floods, severe windstorms, heatwaves, and pandemics are increasingly recognized as significant threats within the European security environment. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction emphasizes that critical and social infrastructure must adopt comprehensive risk-reduction measures to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups, including children in institutional care [3]. Children's homes, like other residential care facilities, depend on functional crisis management processes, risk assessment, contingency planning, and inter-agency cooperation to remain operational under adverse conditions. However, evidence from disaster management practice demonstrates that social care institutions are frequently underprepared, lacking robust crisis plans, scenario-based training, and coordination mechanisms with local authorities and emergency services [4].

The theoretical foundations of security offer an analytical perspective for examining how institutional safety can be conceptualized and implemented in children's homes. Security theories addressing absolute and relative security, risk management, systemic resilience, and interdependence between social systems provide a framework for understanding the specific needs of child-care institutions. The social systems approach, in particular, links institutional security to the broader context of national security policy, governance structures, and community-level crisis management arrangements [1]. Within this framework, children's homes are not isolated facilities but integral nodes in a wider security ecosystem that includes public administration, emergency services, health care, and civil society partners.

Crisis preparedness represents a crucial component of institutional security. Effective preparedness requires the systematic identification of threats, assessment of vulnerabilities, development of crisis plans, training of staff, communication protocols, and mechanisms to protect the psychological and physical safety of children during emergencies. Existing research highlights that preparedness in social institutions directly influences response capacity and resilience, enhancing the ability to maintain essential services, reduce harm, and support recovery [5]. In this sense, crisis preparedness serves as a practical manifestation of security theory, translating abstract principles into operational measures.

Given these considerations, this paper explores crisis preparedness for natural hazards in children's homes through the lens of the theoretical foundations of security. It aims to situate institutional safety within established academic approaches to security, examine the vulnerabilities of residential child-care facilities, and propose a conceptual framework for strengthening their preparedness and resilience. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on institutional protection of vulnerable groups and offer insights relevant to national security planning, social policy, and disaster risk reduction.

2. Material and Methods

This study employs a conceptual and analytical methodological design suitable for theoretical research in the field of security studies. As the paper does not seek to generate new empirical data, the methodological approach focuses on the systematic identification, selection, and synthesis of academically verified sources to develop an integrated theoretical framework applicable to crisis preparedness in children's homes.

The analysis is grounded in a narrative and conceptual literature review, drawing upon foundational theoretical works in security studies, resilience theory, and social systems theory, as well as international normative documents and institutional guidelines relevant to the protection of children and disaster risk reduction. Peer-reviewed academic monographs, articles published in high-impact international journals, and authoritative publications by recognized institutions such as the United Nations, UNICEF, and

the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction were included as core sources [1–10]. These sources were selected based on their theoretical relevance, methodological rigor, and international recognition within the academic community.

The review process followed a structured analytical strategy consisting of three main stages. First, conceptual mapping was used to identify key themes within the theoretical foundations of security, including securitization, human security, relative and absolute security, and institutional resilience. Second, framework analysis was conducted to examine how these theoretical constructs could be applied to residential child-care settings and institutional crisis preparedness. This involved deductive reasoning, whereby established theoretical principles were systematically related to the specific characteristics, vulnerabilities, and operational requirements of children's homes. Third, a comparative assessment of international frameworks—such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction [3] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [2]—was undertaken to identify normative obligations and strategic priorities relevant to institutional safety.

Given the theoretical nature of the study, no empirical measurements or data collection were performed. Instead, the methodology focuses on the critical interpretation, integration, and synthesis of existing knowledge to construct a comprehensive conceptual model of crisis preparedness. This approach is consistent with recognized standards for developing theoretical contributions in the field of security studies and disaster resilience research.

Finally, the methodological design acknowledges its limitations. As the analysis does not evaluate preparedness in specific institutions or national contexts, the findings should be interpreted as a conceptual foundation rather than an empirical assessment. Nevertheless, the framework developed in this study provides a structured basis for future empirical research, policy development, and practical application in children's homes.

3. Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundations of security provide a conceptual and analytical framework for understanding how individuals, institutions, and societies address risks and threats. Security studies as an academic discipline have evolved substantially over the past several decades, moving from traditional state-centered approaches toward broader, multidimensional models that incorporate societal, human, environmental, and institutional dimensions. According to the Copenhagen School, security is shaped through processes of "securitization," in which actors identify and articulate threats that require extraordinary measures [1]. This theoretical lens highlights how institutions, such as children's homes, become part of a broader security environment when their stability or continuity is endangered by natural hazards.

The concept of human security, as formulated by the United Nations Development Programme, expands the understanding of security beyond territorial borders and military threats, emphasizing protection from chronic and acute risks affecting everyday life, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children [6]. Human security aligns with the recognition of children's rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges states to guarantee safety, protection, and development regardless of crisis conditions [2].

Another central theoretical approach relevant to institutional safety is the social systems theory. This perspective conceptualizes institutions as interconnected components within broader societal systems, where disruptions in one subsystem—such as emergency services, infrastructure, or governance—can directly affect the functioning of child-care facilities. As Luhmann argues, systems maintain stability through processes of adaptation, communication, and self-regulation [7]. Applied to crisis preparedness, this implies that children's homes require structured mechanisms for information exchange, coordination, and contingency planning to maintain operational continuity during emergencies.

The theoretical literature also emphasizes the distinction between absolute and relative security. While absolute security—the complete absence of threat—is unattainable, relative security reflects a manageable level of risk achieved through prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery measures. The Sendai Framework underscores the role of institutional preparedness in reducing risks and strengthening resilience, linking theory to practice through risk-based planning and capacity building [3].

Finally, principles of resilience theory have become increasingly influential. Resilience is defined as the capacity of systems to absorb shocks, adapt to adverse circumstances, and recover effectively. Tierney highlights resilience as a dynamic process that integrates structural, organizational, social, and psychological components [5]. For children's homes, resilience requires integrating crisis preparedness into everyday operations, ensuring that safety, security culture, and staff competencies evolve in response to emerging risks.

Together, these theoretical foundations clarify how security can be conceptualized at the institutional level and provide the analytical basis for examining how children's homes prepare for and respond to natural hazards.

4. Institutional Vulnerabilities and Risk Factors

Children's homes face a combination of structural, operational, social, and environmental vulnerabilities that can significantly compromise their safety during natural hazards. Understanding these vulnerabilities is essential for developing effective crisis preparedness frameworks grounded in security theory.

A primary institutional vulnerability arises from the concentration of children with increased dependency and limited capacity for autonomous decision-making or self-protection. Research consistently shows that children are among the most at-risk populations during disasters, requiring specialized planning, supervision, and communication [8]. This dependency increases the responsibility of institutions to ensure robust protective measures and continuity of care.

Structural vulnerabilities relate to the physical condition and location of facilities. Many residential care institutions are situated in older buildings not designed to withstand extreme weather events such as floods, storms, or heavy snowfall. The European Environment Agency highlights that climate change is amplifying the frequency and severity of hydrometeorological hazards across Europe, often affecting infrastructure not originally built for such conditions [9]. Facilities located near rivers, forests, or exposed hillside areas are at heightened risk.

Operational vulnerabilities stem from limited crisis preparedness, including insufficient emergency planning, inadequate staff training, or the absence of realistic drills. The Sphere Handbook notes that social care institutions often lack standardized emergency procedures, coordination mechanisms with local authorities, and resource reserves for evacuation, sheltering, or long-term disruptions [4]. Staff shortages during emergencies represent an additional critical risk, as institutional safety depends heavily on personnel availability and competency.

Another set of vulnerabilities relates to dependencies on external systems, such as electricity, water supply, heating, communication networks, and transportation. Resilience research shows that institutions with high reliance on critical infrastructure are more susceptible to cascading failures during disasters [5]. Disruptions in these systems can lead to rapid deterioration of living conditions and limit the institution's ability to meet children's essential needs.

Social and psychological vulnerabilities are also significant. Children's homes accommodate individuals who may already carry trauma or emotional instability, which can be exacerbated during crises. The United Nations stresses that psychosocial impacts of

emergencies can have long-term consequences for children and require specialized support mechanisms [10].

Finally, institutional risk is shaped by coordination deficits between children's homes and external stakeholders, including emergency services, municipal authorities, health care providers, and NGOs. Effective crisis response depends on clear communication channels, predefined responsibilities, and integration into local and regional crisis management systems.

Identifying and understanding these vulnerabilities provides a foundation for developing security-based crisis preparedness strategies that enhance institutional resilience and ensure the protection of children as a highly vulnerable population.

5. Crisis Preparedness Framework

Crisis preparedness in children's homes requires an integrated, multilayered framework that reflects both theoretical principles of security and practical requirements for institutional resilience. The Sendai Framework emphasizes that preparedness is a proactive, continuous process involving risk assessment, planning, capacity building, and coordination across sectors [3]. Within residential child-care institutions, this framework must be operationalized with regard to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of children as a protected group.

The first component of the framework is risk identification and analysis, which involves systematic assessment of natural hazards relevant to the institution's location. Tools such as hazard mapping, scenario development, and vulnerability assessment enable institutions to evaluate the likelihood and potential impacts of floods, windstorms, landslides, or public health emergencies. The European Environment Agency highlights that localized climate risk assessments are essential for adapting safety plans and infrastructure to increasing hazard frequency and severity [9].

The second component is the development of a comprehensive crisis plan. Such a plan should outline evacuation procedures, sheltering options, communication strategies, continuity-of-care requirements, and coordination mechanisms with external emergency services. Standardized crisis plans, as recommended by The Sphere Handbook, must incorporate clear roles and responsibilities, availability of essential resources, and predefined thresholds for triggering emergency actions [4]. For children's homes, crisis plans should additionally specify protocols for safeguarding children, ensuring emotional support, and managing communication with legal guardians or authorities.

A third key element is staff training and capacity building. Crisis preparedness requires that personnel are equipped with knowledge of emergency procedures, first aid, risk communication, and psychosocial first aid. Research consistently demonstrates that trained staff are a determining factor in successful institutional emergency response, as decision-making during crises heavily depends on human capacity and situational awareness [5]. Regular drills—both tabletop and full-scale—reinforce competencies and reveal gaps in planning.

Fourth, effective preparedness relies on coordination with external stakeholders, including municipal crisis management teams, fire and rescue services, health authorities, and NGOs. Social systems theory emphasizes that institutional resilience depends on linkages within broader societal systems [7]. Memoranda of cooperation, shared communication platforms, and joint training exercises strengthen interoperability and facilitate timely assistance during emergencies.

The final component of the framework is psychosocial and child-centered preparedness, ensuring emotional safety before, during, and after crises. UNICEF recommends integrating child-friendly communication, stable routines, and psychological support structures into preparedness planning to protect children's mental health and reduce long-term trauma [10].

Together, these components form a holistic crisis preparedness framework that enhances institutional security and translates theoretical concepts into practical measures for safeguarding children during natural hazards.

6. Discussion

The findings presented in this study highlight the intersection of theoretical security principles and practical crisis preparedness challenges faced by children's homes. Theoretical frameworks—including securitization theory, human security, resilience theory, and social systems theory—provide valuable insights into how institutions conceptualize and manage risks. They underscore that institutional safety is not an isolated phenomenon but is embedded within wider political, social, and infrastructural systems [1][6][7]. Children's homes must therefore be understood as part of a multi-level security ecosystem.

The analysis reveals that institutional vulnerabilities arise from both structural and systemic factors. The concentration of highly dependent children, reliance on critical infrastructure, and limited internal capacity for emergency response create complex risk environments. These vulnerabilities are consistent with broader research in disaster studies, which identifies social care facilities as particularly sensitive to disruptions and often underprepared compared to other critical institutions, such as hospitals or schools [4][8]. This underscores the necessity for targeted risk assessments and resource allocation strategies that reflect the specificities of residential child-care settings.

At the same time, the crisis preparedness framework demonstrates that effective institutional resilience is achievable when security principles are appropriately translated into operational practices. Preparedness measures—such as crisis planning, staff training, coordination with external agencies, and psychosocial support structures—align closely with resilience theory's emphasis on adaptability and systemic robustness [5]. Importantly, children's rights instruments provide a normative foundation ensuring that crisis preparedness is not only a technical requirement but also an ethical and legal obligation [2].

The discussion further suggests that the integration of children's homes into local and national crisis management systems remains a key challenge. Coordination gaps, insufficient communication channels, and lack of standardized preparedness protocols hinder effective crisis response. Strengthening cooperation across sectors and enhancing the visibility of child-care institutions within national security planning can significantly improve their resilience.

Overall, the convergence of theoretical perspectives and practical preparedness considerations highlights the need for a more cohesive, child-centered approach to institutional safety. This approach must bridge research, policy, and practice, ensuring that children's homes are equipped to cope with emerging natural hazards in an era of climatic and societal uncertainty.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined crisis preparedness in children's homes through the lens of the theoretical foundations of security, demonstrating that the protection of vulnerable children during natural hazards requires an integrated conceptual and operational approach. Theoretical perspectives—including human security, social systems theory, and resilience theory—provide essential insight into how institutional safety can be understood within broader security frameworks. These approaches highlight that children's homes depend on both internal preparedness and their embeddedness within external systems of governance and emergency response.

The analysis of vulnerabilities shows that children's homes face unique risks arising from the dependency of their residents, structural limitations, reliance on external infrastructure, and psychosocial sensitivity. Addressing these challenges requires

comprehensive preparedness processes that include risk assessment, crisis planning, staff training, coordination with external partners, and child-centered psychological support. The crisis preparedness framework presented in this study offers a structured method for strengthening institutional resilience and ensuring continuity of care during emergencies.

From a broader perspective, enhancing preparedness in children's homes contributes to the protection of fundamental rights, supports national security objectives, and aligns with international disaster risk reduction commitments. As natural hazards intensify due to climate change, investing in the safety and preparedness of institutions caring for vulnerable children becomes not only a legal and moral imperative but also a strategic priority within modern security governance.

Future research should explore empirical assessments of preparedness levels in child-care institutions, develop standardized evaluation tools, and examine the effectiveness of training and coordination mechanisms. Such evidence-based insights can further inform policy, strengthen institutional capacities, and contribute to safeguarding children in increasingly complex risk environments.

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