

# YOUTH IN CITIES

A Cross-National Perspective

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# 1 Comparative Perspectives of Urban Youth

## Challenges for Normative Development

Marta Tienda and William Julius Wilson

The share of youth residing in urban areas surpassed 50% by the turn of the 21st century and is projected to rise further because of high fertility and continued rural–urban migration (United Nations, 1993:5). Urban living can alleviate many of the hardships associated with rural poverty and underdevelopment, but in the context of rapid social transformation, it can also increase the challenges of normative youth development.

The consequences of extreme material deprivation are especially harsh for the very young, whose neurological development, physical health, and emotional capacity are permanently compromised by poor nutrition, limited emotional and intellectual stimulation, and inadequate satisfaction of basic human needs, such as safe shelter, clean drinking water, and predictability of social environment. Whether in the inner-city ghettos of the United States, the homelands of South Africa, or the favelas of Brazil, growing numbers of urban youth find themselves at the periphery of city life, facing the familiar problems of poverty: fragile families, inadequate nutrition, limited or no access to education, premature entry into the world of work, and involvement in illegal activities.

Despite bewildering differences in the social and cultural contexts experienced by urban youth worldwide, the developmental challenges confronted by those reared in materially disadvantaged circumstances are strikingly similar. A child born at the beginning of the 21st century has a 4 in 10 chance of living in extreme poverty (UN Children’s Fund, 2000:1). About 24% of the world’s population lives on less than \$1 per day, but in poor countries, the share is close to 35% – the majority of these are women and children (UN Children’s Fund, 2001: Appendix).

Among industrialized countries, the highest child poverty rate prevails in the Russian Federation, where more than one in four children was poor during the 1990s, but the United States is not far behind, as one in six young people lived below the official poverty threshold in 1999 (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2000). In Canada, Australia, Israel, and Poland, child poverty rates hover around 15–16% and are just under 10% for France and the Netherlands (Bradbury and Jantti, 1999). These averages conceal appreciable variation within countries. For example, in 1999 child poverty rates in the United States hovered around 30% for minority groups, although they were considerably higher in 1990, before the prolonged period of economic prosperity. Residential segregation further accentuates the pernicious consequences of poverty by limiting interaction between lower and middle classes, thereby perpetuating the cycle of social exclusion that stymies the life chances of even the most industrious youth.

As global economic restructuring alters the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of nation states, governments encounter formidable challenges in satisfying the social and developmental needs of their youth. This is especially difficult for income-strapped countries of the Southern Hemisphere, where the intense pace of urbanization taxes the ability of weak institutional frameworks to meet the changing needs of rapidly growing youth populations (Brockerhoff, 2000). Global economic restructuring also has contributed to the marginalization and social isolation of low-income families in the Northern Hemisphere, thereby restricting opportunities for normative youth development. Moreover, the low-fertility regimes that characterize most industrialized countries do not necessarily translate to higher resources for youth, who frequently find themselves in competition for resources in a rapidly aging population (Preston, 1984).

In both developed and developing societies, poverty takes a devastating toll on young people and rests at the core of human rights violations against them (UN Children's Fund, 2001). The intertwined fate of nations in the global economy has fostered greater awareness of their shared circumstances. The plight of youth reared in material disadvantage throughout the world was the focus of a decade-long international effort to develop guidelines for protecting the rights of children and youth around the world. The product of this effort – the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – is the first legally binding international instrument to make explicit the full range of rights to which every child is entitled. This holistic treaty, which recognizes every child's right to a standard of living conducive to physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development, stands as a unified global commitment

to redress the root causes of child poverty and to assuage its deleterious consequences within the resources available to national governments.

The Convention is predicated on the notion that tackling poverty requires a strategic and integrated approach that combines human rights and civil rights law with economic, social, political, and cultural rights. The document also identifies several strategies to promote normative development, including prevention of risky behaviors, protection from physical and emotional harm, as well as enlistment of youth participation in decisions and activities that affect their own destinies.<sup>1</sup>

Partly as a response to the Convention, in recent years policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working in highly diverse urban contexts have been making more concerted attempts to document, understand, and address the worsening condition of the world's growing youth population. However, apart from commissioned studies and annual reports prepared by international monitoring agencies, there has been relatively little exchange among scholars and practitioners – either within or among nations – regarding the status of youth growing up in cities.<sup>2</sup> This is so despite the intense urbanization processes under way in many countries classified as “least developed” by the United Nations.

Accordingly, as a response to the paucity of scholarly and practitioner exchanges, the chapters in this volume synthesize existing knowledge about the status and experiences of youth reared in precarious urban environments from an interdisciplinary and cross-national perspective. In addition to addressing a relatively ignored, rapidly growing, and highly vulnerable population throughout the world, several features of the essays that follow are noteworthy.

First, the chapters build on the experiences and insights of *both* practitioners and researchers, an unusual approach to youth. This twin strategy yields a firmer foundation for drawing practical lessons than either a research or an applied approach alone because it forces an intermediate ground between theory and application. Second, several chapters combine case studies with extensive cross-national comparisons, which are essential

<sup>1</sup> The Convention has been ratified by every country in the world except the United States and Somalia. However, by signing the Convention, the United States has signaled its intention to ratify.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are two prominent international agencies that have added to their ongoing assessment of the “State of Children” a dedicated study of the condition of youth.

to identify circumstances that are common to most settings and those unique to particular sociocultural contexts. Third, several chapters attempt to identify both successful and unsuccessful interventions to draw policy lessons with wide appeal that can be practically implemented both to improve the life circumstances of youth and to enhance their opportunities to lead productive and stable lives. Finally, although collectively the chapters cover a broad substantive terrain and many draw extensively on international comparisons, they are unified thematically by their focus on normative development and a limited range of possible mediators. These include physical and emotional well-being, exposure to risky environments and violence, and creative community-level strategies to engage youth in prosocial change.

### **Volume Overview**

Selected sociodemographic indicators of the countries included in the volume as case studies, as well as the corresponding regional development averages for these indicators, are provided in Table 1.1. By most measures, Uganda is the most impoverished setting for urban youth among the countries considered. However, as the regional indicators for the least developed nations reveal, some youth reside in even more precarious environments. More than one in three Ugandan residents lives on less than \$1 per day, compared to only 2% of Jordanians, 11% of South Africans, and 26% of Brazilians.

Youth in developing countries are 15 times more likely to die before age 5 when compared to their counterparts in industrialized countries, and those in the least developed countries 27 times more likely to do so. However, there is considerable variation in child life expectancy among developing countries. South Africa's child mortality rate is twice that of Jordan's. In part these differentials can be traced directly to the varying contours of societal underdevelopment, but national differences in income inequality are also responsible. Moreover, boys and girls do not experience similar opportunities to become productive citizens, as is evident in the differentials in school enrollment rates. Gender disparities in educational attainment are especially pronounced in South Africa and Uganda.

Developing nations also differ appreciably in their urban structures: Whereas more than three in four youth in Jordan and Brazil reside in urban areas, only about half of South African youth do so. Fewer than one in five of Uganda's youth resides in an urban area, compared to about half of youth in other developing nations. By contrast, about 80% of youth in industrialized



**Table 1.1** Selected Sociodemographic Indicators of Child and Adolescent Well-Being for Regions and Selected Countries Circa 2000

| Countries and Regions            | Under-5 Mortality Rate 1999 | Primary School Enrollment Ratio 1995–99 <sup>a</sup> (Net) |        | Secondary School Enrollment Ratio 1995–97 <sup>a</sup> (Gross) |        | Percentage of Population Urban 1999 | Percentage of Population below \$1 a Day 1990–99 <sup>a</sup> | Percentage of Urban Population Using |                                |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------|--|--------|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                  |                             | Male   | Female | Male   | Female |                                     |   | Improved Drinking Water Sources      | Adequate Sanitation Facilities |
|                                  |                             |  |        |  |        |                                     |   |                                      |                                |
| <b>Industrialized countries</b>  | 6                           | 96   | 96     | 105  | 107    | 79                                  | – <sup>b</sup>  | 100                                  | 100                            |
| Germany                          | 5                           | 86   | 87     | 105  | 103    | 87                                  | –   | –                                    | –                              |
| United States                    | 8                           | 94   | 95     | 98   | 97     | 77                                  | –   | 100                                  | 100                            |
| United Kingdom                   | 6                           | 97   | 98     | 120  | 139    | 89                                  | –   | 100                                  | 100                            |
| <b>Developing countries</b>      | 90                          | 84   | 77     | 55   | 46     | 48                                  | 26  | 91                                   | 81                             |
| Brazil                           | 40                          | –  | –      | 31× <sup>c</sup>   | 36×    | 81                                  | 5   | 89                                   | 81                             |
| Jordan                           | 35                          | 86   | 86     | 52×  | 54×    | 74                                  | 2   | 100                                  | 100                            |
| South Africa                     | 69                          | 88   | 86     | 76   | 91     | 50                                  | 11  | 92                                   | 99                             |
| <b>Least developed countries</b> | 164                         | 63   | 54     | 23   | 14     | 28                                  | 35  | 80                                   | 73                             |
| Uganda                           | 131                         | 92   | 83     | 15   | 9      | 14                                  | 37  | 72                                   | 96                             |
| <b>World</b>                     | 82                          | 85   | 79     | 61   | 54     | 57                                  | 24  | 93                                   | 84                             |

<sup>a</sup> Data that refer to the most recent year available during the period specified in the column heading.

<sup>b</sup> – Data not available.

<sup>c</sup> Data that refer to years or periods, other than those specified in the column heading, differ from the standard definition, or refer to only part of a country.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (2001). *State of the World's Children, 2001*, tables 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6; <http://www.unicef.org/sowc01/tables/>

nations live in cities and towns. Of course, urban residence implies different opportunities and obstacles for youth residing in industrialized, developing, and least developed countries. In the industrialized world, virtually all urban dwellers have access to adequate sanitation and safe drinking water, but in Uganda, less than three quarters of city dwellers can avail themselves of these urban amenities, and in South Africa, only 92% enjoy safe water. Approximately 20% to 25% of urban Brazilian youth lack access to adequate sanitation facilities.

Against this thumbnail sketch of the social and economic conditions in which youth are reared around the world, one might expect equally diverse developmental needs. Yet, although the specific social and cultural conditions in which youth are reared do differ appreciably, one of the main themes developed in the chapters that follow is the similarity of young people's needs for healthy psychosocial development. All the chapters identify the value of harnessing the creative energy of youth, and the numerous social, community, and familial advantages to treating young people as an asset rather than a societal burden.

### **Youth as a Force for Social Change**

Throughout the world youth represent a source of cultural innovation and dynamism that is seldom acknowledged in countries around the world, much less nurtured. Although several authors stress the importance of tapping the creative potential of youth, the three chapters included in this section emphasize the myriad ways that youth are powerful agents directing the course of social change. Ramphele reminds us that youth are often the harbingers of cultural, social, or economic transitions within and across countries.

Unfortunately, once transformed, society often ignores the condition of its youth and confines them to a marginalized status that undervalues them. One reason is that much of the current literature on youth focuses on an assessment of the negative consequences of maladaptive behavior and the tremendous costs incurred by society in regulating deviant behavior, rather than on the potential of youth for creative change. As Ramphele so clearly shows in her analysis of the positive effects of the South African Black Consciousness Movement on youths, creating high self-esteem among young people increases their empowerment. Inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, young people set about helping adults in their communities overcome feelings of inferiority generated by years of racism and thereby break the cycle of fatalism.

Developmental psychologists emphasize that successful normative youth development requires intact nuclear and extended families, supportive communities, realistic perceptions of opportunities, and predictable behavior and experiences. However, in many societies, past legacies and the drastic socioeconomic changes accompanying globalization have eroded these resources. Greater numbers of children are growing up in poor, parent-absent households without the support of their extended families in areas where the growth of social capital is hindered by the lack of material resources. Moreover, in rapidly changing social and local worlds, behavior and experiences are exceedingly more random – that is, far less predictable – and therefore youth are greatly more disoriented from their developmental tasks.

Under conditions of greater uncertainty, the answer to normative development lies in risk management – on the level of both the individual and the community. In order to succeed, young people must accept the risks in their environment and develop creative ways to manage them. Ramphele argues that societal institutions not only have to build effective risk-management strategies, but must require leaders able to design appropriate interventions as well. Only confident youth who dare to imagine a better future are able to focus their energy on reaching it. Accordingly, Ramphele concludes that successful interventions in places with low human capital must include steps to raise the young people's self-esteem. Young, confident people will be better equipped to negotiate successfully the risks in the future, to become valuable members of society, and to reach their full potential.

Building on the basic idea that the creativity and energy of youth can be channeled to produce positive social change, Swart-Kruger and Chawla examine the success of participatory programs for children of South African streets and squatter camps. Like several authors in this volume (see especially Earls and Carlson, this volume), they call for a more inclusive approach to solving child-related social problems. A focus on deviance and normlessness, the authors argue, diverts us from attending to the lack of adequate programs that deal with the whole child. To develop their argument, Swart-Kruger and Chawla discuss two concrete programs funded by the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Street-Wise and Growing Up in Cities, which are inspired philosophically by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Both programs illustrate outstanding and successful approaches to help children achieve autonomy and self-esteem. Also, both programs require local governments to create social conditions that enable communities to meet the basic needs of youth.

Street-Wise is a comprehensive services intervention program for street boys, and Growing Up in Cities is a long-term community development

program for 10- to 14-year-old children living in a Johannesburg squatter camp. Street-Wise, which began as a street school, has become a national program designed to integrate boys into the mainstream society, further attesting to its acclaimed success. A drop-in shelter program, a nutrition program, and a reconciliation program to reconnect boys with their families supplement Street-Wise's basic education program, which emphasizes literacy and job-training skills.

Although different in their details, Street-Wise and Growing Up in Cities share many similarities that are crucial for understanding their success. An important feature of the programs is their strategy to give voice to the views of youth both in shaping and in operating the program. Both programs sought a compromise between the Western individualistic perspective and the collectivistic approach of South African communities in developing strategies to service youth. An important strength of both programs is their ability to provide individualized attention to each child.

Also, both programs recognize that negative perceptions of youth often preclude investments of scarce social resources for their benefit. Therefore, during the start-up phases, both programs sought to change adults' and the general public's perception of street children. Both programs share the goal of creating physically and socially safe environments that nurture children's positive identities. In short, both programs illustrate the need for multifaceted approaches that crystallize over time as program developers learn more about their clientele and consider the most effective means to promote the individual and collective well-being of youth.

Although the idea of well-being is central to the concept of normative development, measuring it poses thorny methodological challenges. After summarizing existing studies about well-being, Earls and Carlson conclude that few satisfactory operational measures exist. Drawing on the work of Sen and Habermas, Earls and Carlson argue that a deliberative process – one that involves children as major stakeholders in the framing and implementation of research initiatives that explore well-being – has both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Intrinsically, children can develop competence and confidence by involvement in the research process, and extrinsically, children's direct involvement in research can help the development of more precise measures of this multifaceted construct. These ideas, which allow children to be collaborators rather than just *subjects*, are inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which acknowledges that children are able to make deliberate decisions and exercise their rights.

After describing the epistemology of their approach, Earls and Carlson discuss a practical application of their theory of adolescent well-being, namely, a project in Chicago that investigates how young people characterize

their own well-being. As paid interns, youth took part in conversations about children's rights. In conversations about well-being, they identified their parents, teachers, and police officers as crucial ingredients. Moreover, the child-initiated discourse revealed that adults must provide structure and motivation for youth development and must maintain a presence to help channel the creative contributions of youth. The process of working with the adolescents draws into sharp focus the importance of civic engagement as a crucial factor in transition to adulthood. This, according to Earls and Carlson, is the highest form of well-being.

### **Urban Youth Experiences in Cross-Cultural Perspective**

As young people grow up, their integration into society is a prerequisite for their normative development and well-being. Imparting a sense of acceptance and belonging is crucial to accomplish integration. Using German cities as illustrations, Heitmeyer investigates how the changing conditions of cities impact on young people's behavior and need to belong. Important mechanisms to integrate youth socially include access to functional social systems (such as education and labor markets), compensatory social policies to combat economic polarization, shared values and norms, stable social memberships, and wide participation in social life. These requirements are even more important for integrating immigrant youth and the economically disadvantaged into the social mainstream.

Heitmeyer contends that conventional socialization mechanisms are failing to integrate a growing number of young people, especially immigrants and impoverished youth. Changed social and economic opportunities and higher levels of cultural pluralism foster greater uncertainty, more responsibility in decision making, more pressure to compete, and less social support – circumstances that individually and collectively undermine healthy, normative youth development.

Rising residential segregation, which often acts as a mobility trap, produces social isolation, resignation from required and optional activities, rejection of mainstream norms, unemployment, and violence. These circumstances accentuate interethnic social distances and further complicate the developmental challenges confronted by urban youth. Heitmeyer warns that unless social policies are implemented to reverse these trends, Germany will witness the creation of an "urban underclass" comparable to that characterizing American segregated cities (Wilson, 1987; Massey and Denton, 1993).

Heitmeyer recommends that municipal governments play an active role in urban migration policy to ensure social integration and to prevent ethnic divisions from expanding among urban youth. Unfortunately, just

the opposite response appears to be developing, as there is a trend toward greater domination of the market and preference for tougher measures in dealing with noncompliance (see also White, this volume).

With a better understanding of the connection between urban disintegration and maladaptive youth development, urban leaders and social architects not only can attenuate economic polarization among the young, but also enhance their development by creating safe environments conducive to prosocial behavior. Heitmeyer is pessimistic about these prospects, however, arguing that European cities will most likely experience the creation of an “urban underclass” divided by physical, social, and economic space because the incentives to broker on behalf of youth are usually lacking.

Nowhere is this need for a voice greater than among homeless children. The growth of urban poverty and in particular the marginalization of youth have fueled a public debate about the plight of children who are omnipresent on the streets of primary cities in South America. In Brazil, one of the most publicized examples of the existence of street children, the reaction by the authorities to the presence of unsupervised children roaming the streets has been to reduce their numbers by the use of harsh and punitive measures.

Recent media reports about the intolerable conditions experienced by street kids detained in state-operated reformatories and the worrisome numbers of youth who have died while under the care of authorities have led to a public demand for more humane treatment of these youth. The seemingly intractable problems require an in-depth understanding of why children are on the streets in the first place, and what kinds of interventions are best suited to their needs.

Rizzini, Barker, and Cassaniga find hope in the response of Brazil’s community-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the plight of street children. Preventive programs being created distinguish between working children, who trade their wares on the street and usually return home to parents and siblings with their day’s earnings, and homeless children, who spend their entire lives on the street and who have little or no contact whatsoever with family members. However, despite the growing success of programs that target homeless youth, the number of young people who have been fortunate enough to have contact with these interventions remains relatively low.

Rizzini and her colleagues suspect that Brazilians will be more supportive of public expenditures that promote the well-being of *all* children, and not just those on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder. Accordingly, they argue that policymakers and youth advocates will be well served by changing

their focus from the plight of the most marginalized or deviant children to the rights of *all* children, regardless of social background or disadvantaged status.

To ground their recommendations in concrete example, Rizzini, Barker, and Cassaniga describe several case studies of programs that have been successful with homeless children by using the strategy of “targeting within universalism” (Skocpol, 1991), that is, using public resources to implement inclusive programs for children from diverse socioeconomic groups. These programs aid all children in the Brazilian school system and have been especially successful in preventing low-income children from ending up on the streets and engaging in petty crimes to survive.

Persisting high rates of youth delinquency in both affluent and impoverished settings warrant better explanations than social scientists have been able to provide heretofore. Although social scientists appear to know a good deal about *who* commits certain crimes, a sound understanding of *why* the rate of youth delinquency remains high is still lacking. The answers, according to White, reside in the social ecology of poverty. Youth become delinquent not only because they are poor, but also because they live in communities that lack solidarity and social resources that cater to the needs of the disadvantaged. Poor urban youth are systematically more isolated from mainstream social institutions (such as schools and job opportunities) that inculcate social norms of responsibility. In turn, this not only leads to cultural and societal exclusion, but also encourages them to develop maladaptive strategies as they negotiate the developmental challenges of adolescence (see also Rhodes, Mihyar, and Abu El-Rous and Heitmeyer, this volume).

White discusses various approaches to youth deviance and social justice and argues that reduction in delinquent youth behavior requires a deep understanding of the broad situational and structural obstacles to normative youth development. After reviewing crime trends in several countries, White identifies striking similarities in the profiles of young offenders across all countries, who tend to be “men with low income, low educational achievement, no employment, a weak attachment to parents, and (who) move frequently.”

He notes that minority and poor youth are overrepresented in the crime statistics in all social settings and that youth criminality attracts more attention than “adult crime” because it is committed more often in public space, making it relatively more visible, and because it is often sensationalized in the media. Youth are most visible and highly regulated in public spaces, and that is precisely where they most need to feel valued and welcomed. Accordingly, White poses a challenging policy issue: how to democratize the

use of public space so that youth become primary stakeholders and have a voice in the use of that space.

White discusses three broad approaches to crime prevention – coercive, developmental, and accommodating. Deterrence involves lessening the opportunity to cause trouble by systematically limiting the presence or visibility of youth in the community; it is achieved by enforcing dress codes, limiting the number of youth who can gather together in public places, and imposing curfews. The developmental approach emphasizes the alleviation of social problems by including young people as part of the resolution process: that is, by harnessing the positive and transformative capacities of the young so that they connect to a wider process of community empowerment. This option requires that the government provide adequate services and facilitate multi-agency cooperation to intervene meaningfully in the lives of youth. Finally, an accommodating approach attempts to structure solutions that allow all sides to have their interests protected in a nonjudgmental fashion.

White concludes by highlighting several successful examples of accommodating approaches that deploy a holistic approach to intervening in the lives of youth and that include the youth themselves as valued partners in the development of crime prevention interventions. He argues that effective crime prevention depends not on harsh social control, but rather on enlightened social justice.

Prothrow-Stith documents rising rates of child violence throughout the world, but particularly in large urban centers with large pockets of concentrated poverty. For example, in the United States not only has the incidence of youth violence dramatically increased over the last decade, but the severity of these occurrences has escalated as well. Consequently, the federal government spends more than \$8 billion annually to combat youth violence and support the health and development of children through education and crime prevention (National Economic Council, 2000). She argues that violence-induced youth injuries and deaths are preventable public health problems with readily identifiable social causes. To make her case, Prothrow-Stith reviews the effectiveness of public health intervention programs in the United States since 1986, noting that program developers concerned about increased youth homicides have actively sought to design interventions aimed at curbing the growing threat to youth health and well-being.

Public health officials have responded to these trends by proposing primary, secondary, and tertiary preventive measures. Primary strategies often involve public health messages that seek to reduce the level of societal violence in general, or attempts by the criminal justice systems to limit the number of guns in circulation. Secondary measures target specific at-risk



subgroups and utilize educational interventions that emphasize behavior modification. More forceful attempts to decrease crime involve removing perpetrators from circulation entirely and constitute the most extreme or tertiary approach to violence prevention. Prothrow-Stith discusses specific programs that have had a significant impact on violent crime reduction by utilizing either primary or secondary strategies. Although incarceration is necessary in the most serious cases, the more proactive measures have been highly successful in preventing violent incidents.

Developmental psychologists also appreciate the importance of social environments for normative youth development, and they recognize five major constraints on the healthy development of youth – frustrated aspirations, changed family relations, neighborhood deterioration, truncated roles of children, and ineffective institutions. Creating prosocial, stable environments for children and youth requires elimination of these potential barriers. Rhodes, Mihyar, and Abu El-Rous describe the efforts of a program in Jordan to create “prosocial communities” in the midst of rapid local change by building on the existing institutional resource base of society and involving youth as well as parents in their neighborhood improvement. The program utilizes an action-oriented approach that involves an ongoing reorientation to meet the rapidly changing needs of the population being served – in this instance, poor urban youth from rural origins.

To illustrate the power of these principles, Rhodes and his colleagues selected two poor communities in Amman to develop and implement a program to create what they term “prosocial communities.” Both communities are characterized by poverty, social alienation, frustrated aspirations, environmental deterioration, and ineffective institutions. And although youth shouldered adult responsibilities, such as income generation, in both communities, they were not given commensurate consideration in decision making. Consequently, they became alienated and rebellious.

The intervention program Rhodes and colleagues describe sought to design an environment that could replace maladaptive behaviors with constructive activities that would benefit the whole neighborhood. For example, a computer lab, a library, and a social center were created, and a summer camp for troubled boys included counseling and opportunities for prosocial activities (such as involvement with handicapped children in hospitals). These activities resulted in a marked positive change in both the attitudes and behaviors of the youth. Although youth were the focus of the intervention, improvements in their behavior also fostered changes in the adults, who became engaged with the children and increased their voluntary activity. The net gain for the neighborhood was the emergence of community consciousness.

**Work, Life Skills, and Well-Being**

Although reliable statistics over time and place are scarce, several international organizations estimate that up to 500 million children worldwide work – not only in developing countries, but in Europe and North America as well. In addition to clarifying tragic realities and common misconceptions about child labor around the world, McKechnie and Hobbs pose and address two important questions: To what extent is poverty the main causal predictor of child employment? And how is child employment related to life skills and education?

Estimates of child labor abound, but accurate assessments of the phenomenon are lacking. Addressing these questions is difficult for three main reasons: definitions of youth work vary cross-nationally; many countries do not keep (or want to keep) reliable statistics of child labor; and there is enormous conceptual ambiguity surrounding the term *child labor*. Also, scholars disagree about whether and how youth employment is beneficial or detrimental to their development.

Given the difficult methodological problems clouding the study of youth employment, McKechnie and Hobbs challenge researchers to address the conceptual and measurement problems surrounding the economic activity of school-aged children and to develop comparable cross-national definitions of who qualifies as a youth. Further, they argue that theoretical frameworks that adequately conceptualize the number of hours youth spent at work and the nature of activity performed are needed to assess properly the impact of work on the lives of children. This undertaking requires efforts to catalogue a broad range of economic tasks performed by youth, including those that defy easy description and fall outside the standard statistical reporting systems. As important, McKechnie and Hobbs recommend developing uniform standards that classify youth jobs in terms of whether they produce any developmental benefits for incumbents or whether they only have deleterious effects on youth development, such as undermining educational attainment. Potential benefits of work include sense of autonomy, self-esteem, responsibility, and ultimately, enhanced employability during young adulthood.

The rise of armed conflict throughout the world has exposed millions of children and youth to myriad life-threatening dangers, ranging from displacement, disease, and famine, to permanent psychological distress, to death. These problems are particularly acute in countries lacking a strong institutional framework upon which to build support services for youth, such as Uganda. After years of violence and terror at the hands of an unscrupulous dictator, Uganda has only recently started to realize some improvements in the physical well-being of its citizens. However, armed conflict continues to

undermine these gains as warring factions destroy schools, hospitals, and homes, while also conscripting very young men into the armed conflict. According to Ogwal-Oyee, only 50% of Ugandan children are enrolled in elementary school, and the majority work to supplement meager family incomes. Large and growing numbers of children live in the streets because they have lost both parents to war or disease or because their parents are too poor to support them. All too often young girls become victims of rape and sexual abuse when warring factions displace entire communities.

After documenting how much Ugandan youth are rendered physically and emotionally vulnerable to war and epidemics, Ogwal-Oyee describes the Life Skills Intervention for Young People program, which the Ugandan government developed to help adolescents ages 12–20 recover from tragedies caused by the civil war and prolonged social unrest. The program targets out-of-school youth by providing them with essential skills to negotiate the challenges of orphanhood, physical risk, and the necessity to earn a living at a young age. The Life Skills program is designed to teach children and adolescents competencies ranging from coping with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)-related losses to making career choices, avoiding risky sexual behavior, developing negotiation skills, and fostering proactive health behaviors.

Baseline assessments, which showed that Ugandan children had very low life skills levels and adolescents only slightly better skills, were used to develop age-appropriate training modules. To implement the Life Skills program, schools were classified on the basis of the diagnosed life skills needs (which vary across communities) and their appropriate adaptation for rural and urban youth. Over 900 facilitators and educators, including the Scouts and members of school clubs, were trained in the life skills programs and provided instructional materials to conduct the classes. Through this network of nonformal educators, over 5,000 adolescents have benefited from the Life Skills program. The program's strategy is explicitly preventive and educational, rather than service providing, and it demonstrates that even a government with limited resources can have a positive impact on youth provided adequate commitment to such an agenda exists.

## **Conclusion**

We began this chapter by pointing out that many of the hardships associated with rural poverty and underdevelopment can be alleviated in urban areas, but that rapid social transformation in cities can enhance the problems of normative youth development. The number of urban youth experiencing extreme poverty, inadequate nutrition, lack of access to education, premature

entry into the labor market, and involvement in antisocial and illegal activities continues to grow. Despite significant variation in the social and cultural contexts of urban youth worldwide, those experiencing material disadvantage confront developmental challenges that are remarkably similar. The following chapters – representing interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives, and featuring an unusual integration of practical and theoretical knowledge – illuminate many of these challenges and discuss a number of innovative programs to address them.

In the concluding chapter we identify several themes that undergird the array of programs and topics in this volume and try to illustrate how urban environments provide numerous venues to promote normative development for economically disadvantaged youth. Our focus on the special plight of urban youth does not minimize the formidable obstacles confronted by rural youth, which warrant a separate volume.

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