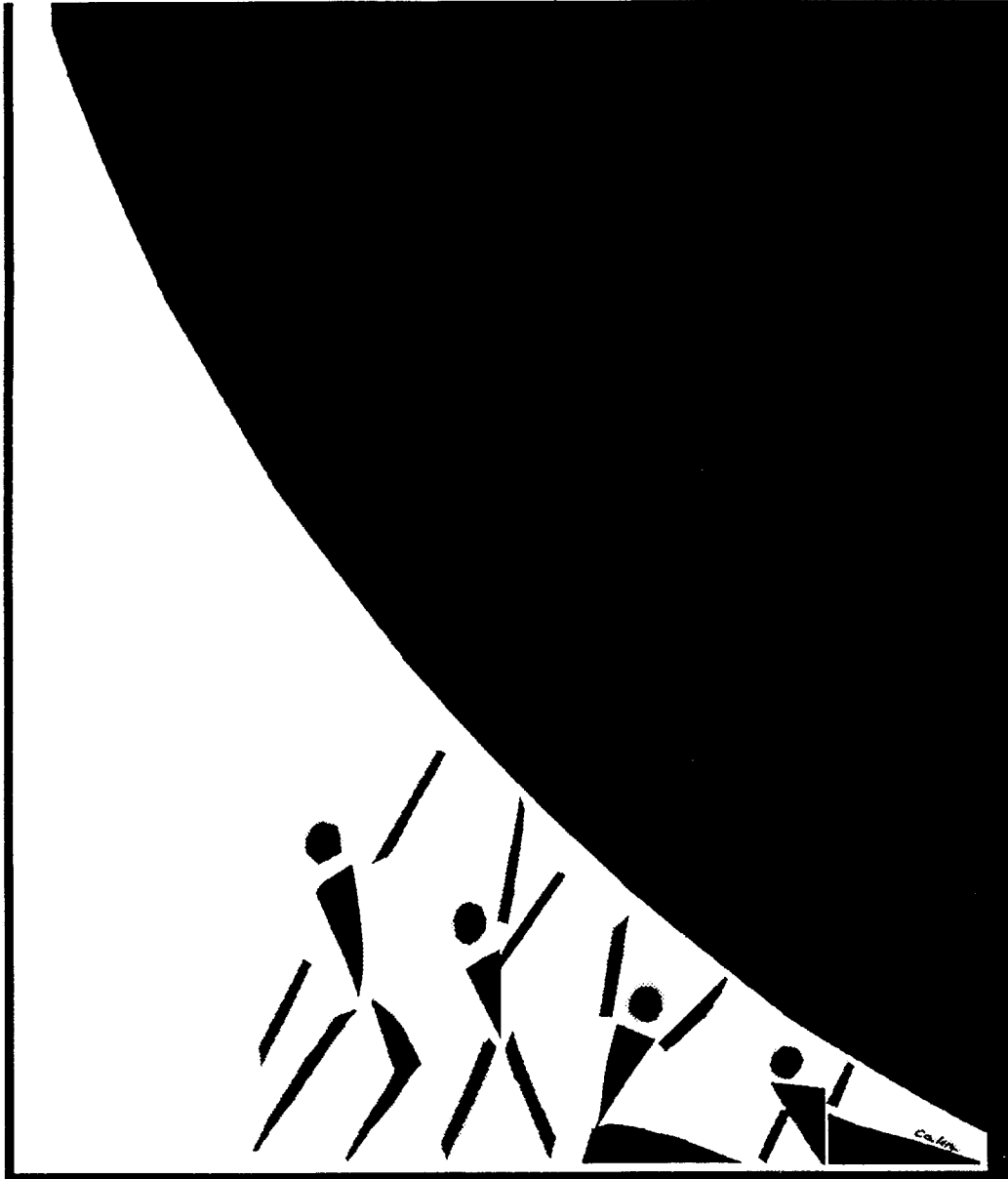


United Nations International School

Working Paper for The UNIS/UN Student Conference

Children of the World: Struggles of a Generation



7-8 March 1996

General Assembly Hall, United Nations, New York

The members of the UNIS/UN Student Conference Organizing Committee support the tenets of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Highlights of the Convention

- Every child has the inherent right to life, and States shall ensure, to the maximum, child survival and development.
- Every child has the right to a name and nationality from birth.
- When courts, welfare institutions or administrative authorities deal with children, the child's best interest shall be a primary consideration. The child's options shall be given careful consideration.
- States shall ensure that each child enjoys full rights without discrimination or distinctions of any kind.
- Children should not be separated from their parents, unless by competent authorities for their well-being.
- States should facilitate reunification of families by permitting travel into, or out of, their territories.
- Parents have the primary responsibility for a child's upbringing, but States shall provide them with appropriate assistance and develop child-care institutions.
- States shall protect children from physical and mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse or exploitation.
- States shall provide parentless children with suitable alternative care. The adoption process shall be carefully regulated and international agreements should be sought to provide safeguards and assure legal validity if and when adoptive parents intend to move the child from his or her country of birth.
- Disabled children shall have the right to special treatment, education and care.
- Children are entitled to the highest attainable standard of health. States shall ensure that health care is provided to all children, placing emphasis on preventive measures, health education and reduction of infant mortality.
- Primary education shall be free and compulsory; discipline in school should respect the child's dignity. Education should prepare the child for life in a spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance.
- Children shall have the time to rest and play and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activities.
- States shall protect the child from economic exploitation and work that may interfere with education or be harmful to health and well-being.
- States shall protect children from the illegal use of drugs and involvement in drug production or trafficking.
- All efforts shall be made to eliminate the abduction and trafficking of children.
- Capital punishment or life imprisonment shall not be imposed for crimes committed before the age of 18.
- Children in detention should be separated from adults; they must not be tortured or suffer cruel and degrading treatment.
- No child under 15 should take any part in hostilities; children exposed to armed conflict shall receive special treatment.
- Children of minority and indigenous populations shall freely enjoy their own culture, religion and language.
- Children who have suffered maltreatment, neglect or detention should receive appropriate treatment or training for recovery and rehabilitation.
- Children involved in infringement of the penal law shall be treated in a way that promotes their sense of dignity and worth and that aims at reintegrating them into society.
- States should make the rights in the Convention widely known to both adults and children.

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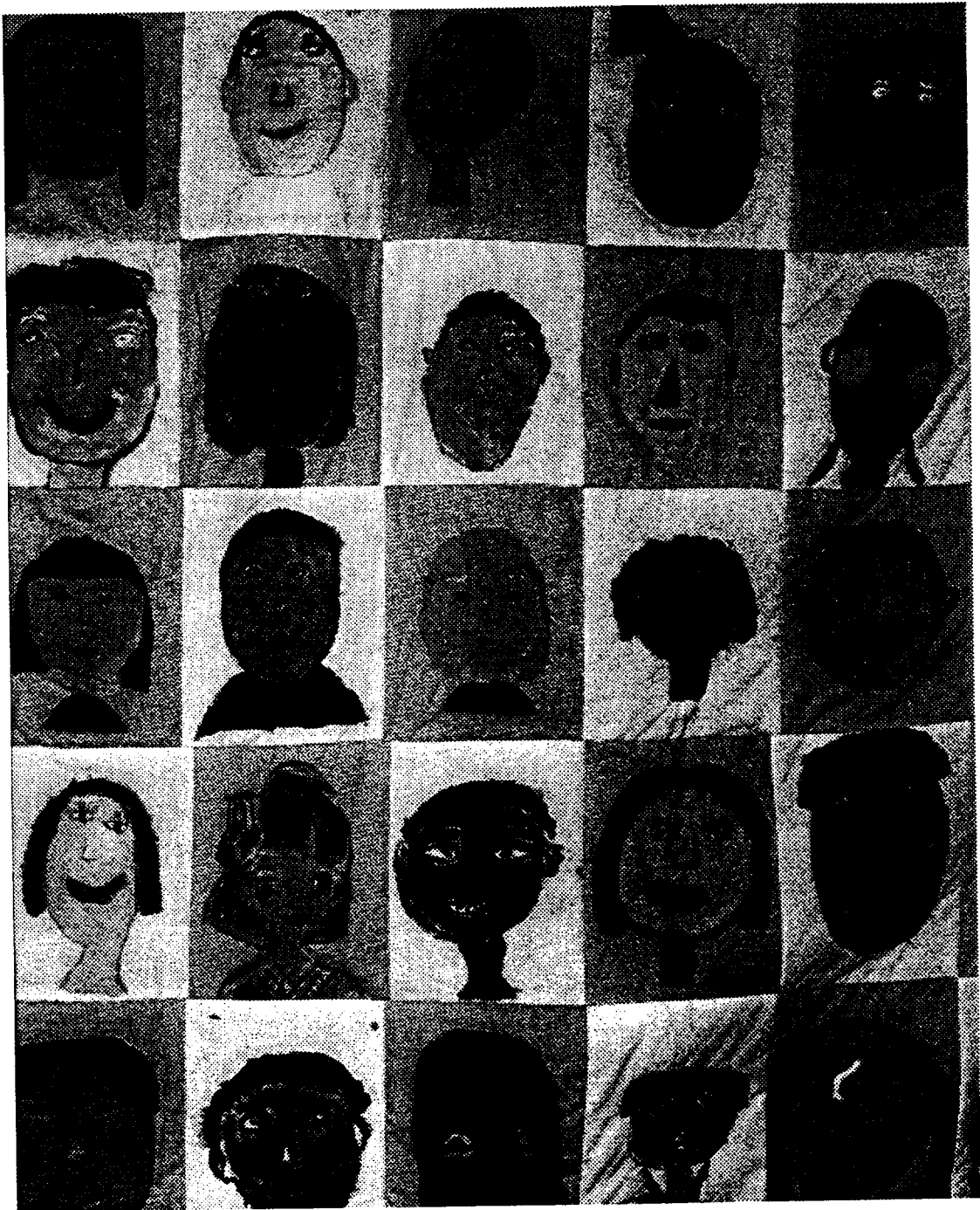
Introduction

In choosing the struggles of children worldwide as the topic of the 1996 UNIS/UN Student Conference, we are identifying this subject as a pressing issue facing each and every one of us, children and adults alike. As the oldest members of this "struggling generation," the topic affects us personally. One goal of the conference is to gain a better understanding of the position of our generation, a prerequisite for effective action. On the brink of adulthood, we are in a unique position to effect change.

This Working Paper investigates the nature of children's struggles and examines some attempted remedies. It provides an objective survey of the types of discrimination and exploitation encountered by children in different parts of the world. Although it is comprehensive in scope, much is left unresolved. We hope the background information will stimulate thought, discussion, and debate before and during the conference, and after its conclusion.

We have examined various social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of this topic, as well as their causes and implications. Because the status of children varies from nation to nation, the committee recognizes that the realities presented may not apply to all societies in the world. It also acknowledges that there exists a multitude of factors which remain as obstacles in the fight for change.

We hope that the diversity of the participants in the conference will allow us to address an equally diverse set of relevant issues. In this way, the conference is a step towards our being active agents of change throughout the world.



Background and Historical Aspects

Recent Children's Conferences

Before the nineteenth century, little attention was given to the rights of children. Governments did not assume the responsibility for ensuring their rights. In 1924, the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which dealt primarily with the issues of child prostitution, child labor and slavery. It did not recognize many other pressing issues concerning the rights of children. Since then, the international community has come a long way in acknowledging the rights of children around the world.

The United Nations was formed in 1945 and has played a primary role in the international awareness of children's rights since that time. In 1946, the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was established. Its original purpose was to provide relief to post-war children. Today it is mainly concerned with health care, nutrition and welfare services for both children and their mothers, and annually publishes The State of the World's Children Report on the current status of children around the world.

On November 20th, 1959, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was established. In 1977, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) organized the first of a series of advisory meetings on the problems of youth. These meetings were designed to address a specific and often regional aspect of the conditions of children. The theme for the 1977 meeting was: 'Youth and Work: The incidence of the economic situation on the access of young people to education, culture and work in Europe.' Other themes include 'Youth mobilization for development in Asian settings' (1978) and 'Youth, tradition and development in Africa' (1979).

In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly declared that 1985 would be the International Youth Year. Its purpose was to address the themes of participation, development and peace regarding children around the world. In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Convention addresses the civil, political, economic,

social and cultural aspects of the rights of children and takes new legal measures towards the enforcement of these rights. It calls for children to take part in the social and political affairs of their countries and in decisions relating to their own lives. The Convention, unlike the many international treaties and declarations before it, is the first to lay out measures to support its conditions.

In 1990, the World Summit for Children was held. There, the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children was agreed to. Its goal is to affirm the responsibility of national governments to safeguard children from the violation of their rights through National Programmes of Action (NPA) that will be monitored. As of June 30th, 1995, 103 countries have finalized their NPAs and 51 are in the process of doing so.

The recognition of the rights of children has come a long way both in the United Nations and in the international community, but still has a long way to go.

The Fundamental Rights of the Child

In 1989, the General Assembly hosted the thirteenth anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. In so doing, on November 20th, the international community extended a hand to its weakest member, its children. It adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the only international legal document which explicitly states the rights of children. The Charter consists of fifty-four articles, most of which have subsections. It also includes a brief introduction and highlights on the convention.

The first article gives the definition of a child: a "human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Some of the main points of the convention are: "Every child has the right to life, and States shall ensure, to the maximum, child survival and development . . . Every child has the right to a name and nationality from birth . . . When

courts, welfare institutions or administrative authorities deal with children, the child's best interests shall be a primary consideration. The child's opinion shall be given careful consideration . . . States shall insure that each child enjoys full rights without discrimination or distinction of any kind."

What makes the Charter so feasible is its simplicity. Each of the Articles is given equal importance. It covers the broad range of needs of children. Article 24 states: "The child is entitled to the highest attainable standard of health. States shall ensure that health care is provided to all children, placing emphasis on preventive measures, health education and education of infant mortality." Article 31 reads: "Children shall have time to rest and play and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activities." One might hold the first of these two articles to be of greater importance; the Charter, however, does not distinguish between them in this way.

As a result of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children can now expect a minimum standard of living. In its 54 brief and simple articles, the Declaration sums up the global perspective on the rights of children developed throughout the 20th century, and does this without imposing individual points of view.

The Child

Tutaleni Asino

I am the sun that clears up the dark

I am the flower that blossoms all year long

I am the rain that rids drought

I am the gift of life

I am who you were

I am who you are

I will be you

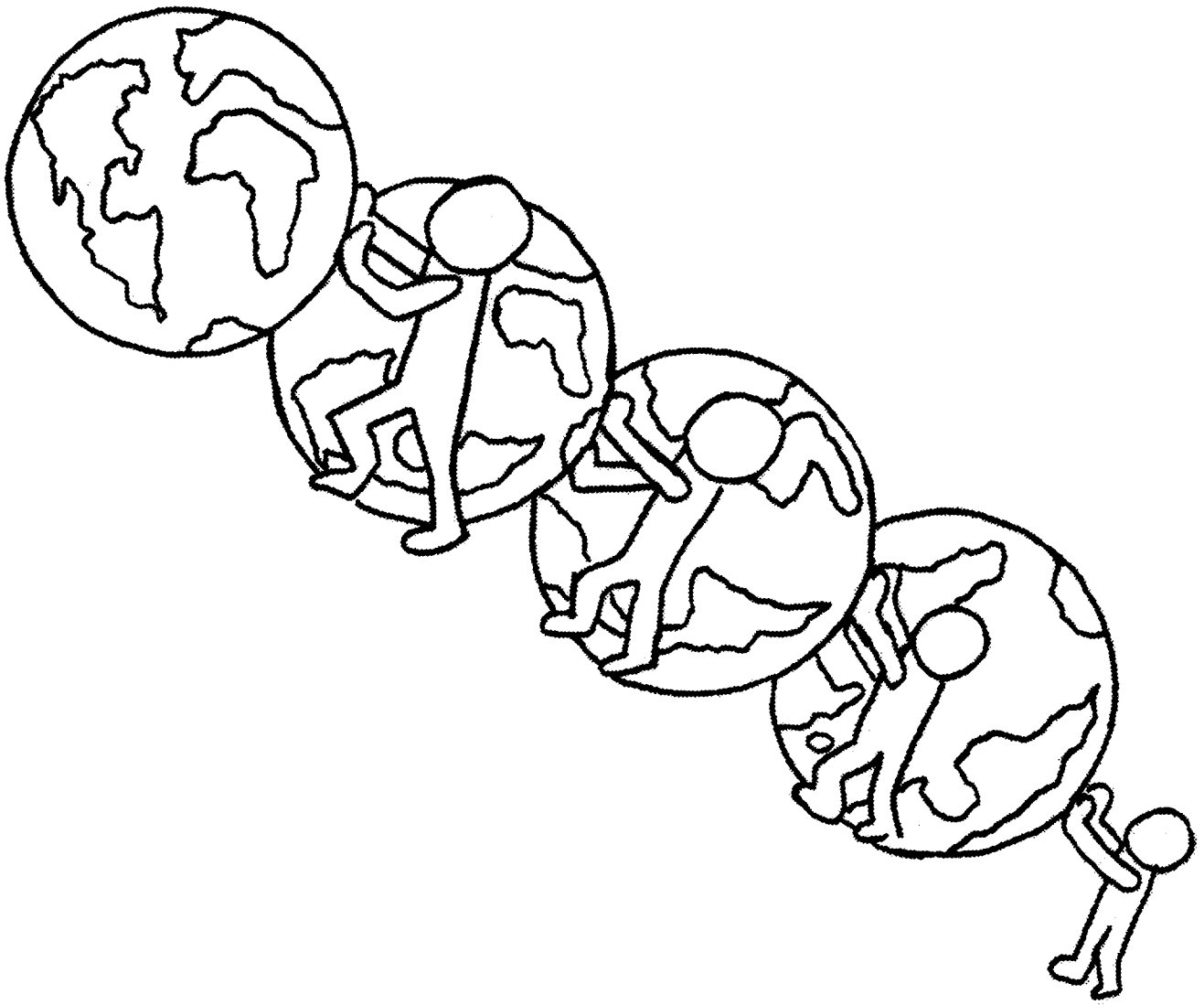
I am the joy and laughter

pain and suffering

I am the joy and the gift of life

I am the child





Social Aspects

Youth Organizations

There are thousands of youth organizations, both national and global, that are advocates for children. Some organizations primarily focus on raising money for children, while others offer direct service. Among the organizations that provide outreach programs for children are PLAN International, 4-H, YMCA, the National Movement for Street Children, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program, The Pearl S. Buck Foundation and the Latin America Movement of Working Children and Adolescents.

PLAN International, formerly called Foster Parents Plan, was founded in 1937 in England. It works to improve the lives of needy children and their families in developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The organization accomplishes this task through the sponsorship of children in countries unable to fulfill their basic needs. Children are not removed from their families, rather, the family is strengthened through economic and social support. The relationship between foster parent and child is made more personal through the exchange of such things as letters, drawings and gifts, and is reinforced with occasional visits. PLAN International has also initiated education programs in the U.S., as well, to increase awareness of children's needs.

The 4-H Program and Youth Development was founded in 1900 to aid in the education of youths primarily between the ages of nine and nineteen. Through the Cooperative Extension System and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 4-H is able to serve children in the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands and other Caribbean nations. Programs assist youths in developing knowledge and life skills, enriching their sense of self-awareness, and learning to be contributing members of society.

An organization that works both nationally and globally is the Young Men's Christian Association, commonly referred to as the YMCA. The YMCA strives to meet the needs of people of all ages, races, religions, abilities and incomes. A primary focus is on children and the importance of their healthy development. Youth sports activities, camping, physical and health education training,

parent-child programs and counseling are a sampling of what the YMCA provides. It also sponsors the International Youth Exchange Program, which provides help in managing children and young adult exchanges with Eastern Europe.

In Brazil, the National Movement for Street Children was founded with the purpose of working with children for their legal rights. In 1995, 1,000 children from twenty-four of the twenty-seven states in Brazil formed a council, which met with government officials. Issues concerning health care, education, teachers' incomes and sanitary living conditions were discussed at the four-day conference. Children described their lives and shared their goals and dreams.

The Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program works to create one-to-one relationships between adult volunteers and children who often lack the support and attention they need. Many of the children come from low-income and unstable families and are referred to the program by school and welfare department counselors. Volunteers spend a minimum of five hours a week with the children; long-term relationships are encouraged, for they are very beneficial to the child. Activities such as picnics, holiday parties, skating, zoo trips and athletic events are set up to supplement the relationships.

The Pearl S. Buck Foundation was founded in 1964 by Nobel Laureate Pearl S. Buck. It was originally established to aid children of American men and Asian women. Buck wanted to eliminate the discrimination in societies that caused harm to mixed-race children. Today, the foundation works through sponsorship to help children. A branch of this foundation, Welcome House Social Services, offers assistance and counseling to parents who wish to adopt Asian children. Children who are orphaned, abandoned or have special needs are matched with supportive and loving families.

The Latin America Movement of Working Children and Adolescents reaches out to children in Nicaragua, Guatemala and Costa Rica. The movement is primarily organized by street and working children. Through the publication of newspapers, magazines and reports across each country, they strive for gender equality, self-esteem and empowerment. Cultural, educational, athletic and theatrical events are organized for the children.

Meetings, conventions and seminars are arranged so that children, workers and officials can convene and discuss problems relating to issues such as children's rights and education.

Many people from all parts of the world join or support these organizations. Activities ranging from athletics to academics are established to provide children and young adults with the opportunity to increase not only their global awareness, but also their self-awareness.

Child-Perpetrated Crimes

Each year, more and more young children participate in crimes. The predictions for this year alone are that young children will commit more commonly perpetrated crimes than ever before. Youth crimes first became a national issue more than half a century ago. What is now more disturbing than ever is that more children are becoming violent at an earlier age. Today's youth violence is also greater than it was a few years ago. The viciousness and the casualness of the violent crimes committed by and against young children are especially troubling.

Robbery, murder, mugging, assaults, drug-dealing and car thefts are crimes commonly committed by young children in the United States. Such crimes are also common in Sweden, Australia, China, India and South Africa. The rate of street crimes, such as assaults, robbery and auto theft are clearly escalating, especially in countries such as Hungary and in such western European nations as those of Scandinavia and the United Kingdom. Mugging, assault and robbery are the main crimes that have been most commonly perpetrated worldwide by young children in recent years.

Youth crimes have spread from the inner cities to the suburbs and even to small towns and rural areas. The soaring number of youth crimes in cities is, in some ways, a uniquely American problem, but urban violence is exploding in countries around the world. While the popular perception is that school crime is primarily an urban problem, it has been found that suburban and urban areas are

about equal in the prevalence of crimes such as assault, robbery, rape, gang violence and teen drug-dealing. The similarity in crime statistics between cities and suburbs might be attributed to the fact that urban districts have dealt with the problem for some time and have devised some workable intervention strategies. Common crimes occur everywhere. Neighborhoods have become war zones; children are forced to run for cover and avoid playgrounds, front yards and neighborhood streets. Gang violence, teen drug-dealing and other offenses are common in inner cities.

The kind of crimes that young people commit are more serious today than in the past, and young criminals are becoming more and more common. They are committing more violent crimes, often repeatedly, before they even have a chance to become teenagers. The question now is, who will control this epidemic of violence by youths, and how?

Children and Drug Abuse

Drug use strikes children mostly during adolescence. It is a time of experimentation, exploration and risk-taking. Substance abuse can be due to peer influence and expectations, combined with easy drug availability. By adolescence, many children have most probably been on the street for some time--working, begging, abandoned or sick. They have most likely been exposed to several substances, especially those readily available at the workplace: glue, petrol, cannabis, tobacco and alcohol.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has a Programme on Substance Abuse (PSA) which is working on the Street Children Project. Their report, "Street Children," will be used to indicate how many males and females aged to 25 years spend the greater part of their days in the streets of urban environments. The majority of those involved in the Street Children Project of PSA are below the age of 18. In all, over 550 street children participated in focus groups or were interviewed using the PSA format in ten cities around the world.

Brazil, Egypt, Honduras, India, Mexico, the Philippines and Zambia were chosen for the report for several reasons--widespread locations being one of them. Canada was added to the project at a later date. In these countries, the following ten cities were chosen: Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Montreal, Cairo, Alexandria, Tegucigalpa, Bombay, Mexico City, Manila and Lusaka.

The following is a list of cities, their respective countries, and the kinds of drugs that are used by street children in those cities.

- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: The use of solvents, alcohol and tobacco predominate; the use of cannabis, cocaine and drug injecting is more likely to occur in the favelas, or slums.
- Toronto and Montreal, Canada: Most are poly-drug users who inject themselves frequently.
- Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt: Tobacco, glue, solvents and cannabis (Marijuana and Hashish) are the main drugs used. There is some use of cough syrup, benzodiazepines and barbiturates, with an increasing use of amphetamines. Drug-injecting was indicated in an earlier country report, though there were few young injectors. There is low rate of alcohol use, mainly due to its prohibition by the Muslim culture. 13 percent of the children who were interviewed described their parents as being drug-dependent.
- Tegucigalpa, Honduras: Glue, and to a lesser extent, cannabis, alcohol, tobacco and depressants are the main drugs used. Older youths are more likely to be poly-drug users.
- Bombay, India: Tobacco (“beedies”), glue and solvents are the main substances used, as well as pharmaceutical wastes from local laboratories. Cannabis and home-brewed alcohol are less common. Older children may use heroin (“Brown Sugar”) and methaqualone, but use is limited.
- Mexico City, Mexico: Inhalants, alcohol and cannabis are the main drugs used.
- Manila, Philippines: Use of solvents and glue (“Rugby”) is common; cannabis, alcohol, tobacco, methamphetamine (“Shabu”), diazepam, cough syrup, “X-Pinoy” (benzodiazepines and Artane), “buri” (dried palm leaves) mixed with minted candies are used less often.

•Lusaka, Zambia: Cannabis (“dagga”), glue (“Bostik”) and petrol are the main substances used in addition to alcohol (“Chibuku” [maize and malt + soy beans for thiamine], “Kachasu” [spirit from grains], and “Mosi” [a strong wine]). Few children use heroin (injected) and cocaine, due to their cost, but some use methaqualone and diazepam.

Drug use is widespread. The young age of the interviewed children obviously correlates with the use of fewer substances. Most see drug availability and use as permeating their whole community.

Each of these countries has an organization which works with PSA. The following is a list of countries followed by their organizations.

Brazil: Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Atenção ao Uso de Drogas (NEPAD) is a multipurpose, multi-disciplinary institution with university affiliations which addresses issues related to illicit and licit psychoactive substances. It has four divisions: **1) Primary Prevention and Training**, whose activities include: the development and provision of education and training courses for professionals and non-professionals in the public and private sectors; development and provision of informational resources for schools and other sectors of the community, and the provision of information on drugs to individuals and groups; **2) Clinical Services**, which covers alcohol and other drugs, including social and welfare assistance, ambulatory care service with individual, family and group therapy, using a psychotherapeutic approach; consultation service to inpatients at the university hospital, and rehabilitation/resocialization programmes; **3) Epidemiology and Applied Research**, whose activities include epidemiological research relating to the use of psychoactive substances, data collection and analysis with regard to the clinical service of NEPAD; collaborative research with other institutions, including WHO; and the provision of information relating to current research findings, both regionally and internationally; **4) Administration and Planning**.

Egypt: Caritas has five sectors of activity, each with a range of specific programmes or projects: **1) Help and Emergency**: emergencies (e.g. recent Cairo earthquake), food programme, social cases, housing, refugees (e.g. Somalia); **2) Medical**

and Social Rehabilitation: leprosy, drug control, mentally handicapped, physically handicapped; **3) Promotion and Education:** dispensaries, health, literacy, promotion of women, other and child care, kindergarten, multipurpose centers; **4) Economical Development:** Vocational training, loans, small projects, rural development; **5) Sensitization Multiplication:** support to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), awareness in Egypt and abroad, youth leadership training (i.e. Caritas Youth).

Honduras: Project Alternatives is a community-based health care/social services programme serving street children and their families in the major market areas and central city streets of Tegucigalpa. The major beneficiaries of services are: market vendors--in school and out of school street children, drug users and non-drug users, and adult and sibling relatives of the above groups. Project Alternatives offers the following services: First Aid, Primary Health Care, Health Education, Nutrition Supplementation, Recreational Activities, Non-Formal Education, Youth Clubs, Sports Clubs, Psychology Casework, Special Events, Social Casework, Individual and Group Counseling, Market-Based Schools for Parents (mothers), and a Mobile Library.

India: The Technology and Social Health (TASH) Foundation has been working on a range of projects for over two years, including the training of social workers and the undertaking of consultancies on youth health. Its aim is to study and document the impact of new technology, urbanization and development on social health. It focuses on disadvantaged groups, such as children, youth, women, the aged and the exploited. Emphasis is placed on research, community involvement and development, and the application of new technologies within the area of social health. A particular consideration for interventions designed for the street youth has been the improvement of their physical environment and earning capacity. In Bombay, the Street Children Project has been called the GUDDU (Lovely/One Who Does Good) Project.

Mexico: The Mexican National Council Against Addictions (CENADIC), the Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF), the Comision para el estudio de los niños callejeros (COESNICA), Promotion of Social Development (PSD), and

Programa Jovenes por las Salud. COESNICA was created to design research methodologies and coordinate field investigations. The first project of the PSD, in association with UNICEF and seven NGOs working with street children, targeted street children. PSD aims to establish treatment centres, including psychotherapy, drug detoxification and rehabilitation, increase public awareness of social problems related to substance use, train street educators, and develop income generating projects.

The Philippines: National Council for Social Development, Chilhope International, Dangerous Drugs Board, Families and Children for Empowerment and Development (FCED), Maryville Urban Development Foundation and Masigla (Makataong Simulain Para Sa Ikagagaling ng mga Kabataan). The first of these is an umbrella organization for over 320 NGOs. Activities for the FCED include: Community organization, income generation, health services, values clarification and alternative education, child-minding centres, effective parenting education, Educational Assistance Programme and street education. Activities for the Maryville Urban Development Foundation include: Education for children and families, health services, income generation projects, family and community non-formal education and a Street Children Programme, which includes a sponsorship scheme to allow access to education.

Zambia: Red Cross Society, Street Kids International (SKI) and Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) Africa Centre. SKI, an NGO, established a programme in Lusaka for street children. The programme is administered through a partnership between SKI and the Zambia Red Cross Society. The latter is involved in a range of youth projects, with a focus on community development, youth participation and youth training. Activities include recreation, education and vocational training. It is also actively involved in activities related to HIV and AIDS with a "youth to youth" dialogue used as a strategy for preventative education and support.

Canada: Le Programme de Portage-Portage Foundation is a drug treatment agency, operating rehabilitation centres in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario. It operates ambulatory, short-term residential and mid-term residential formats. It is

also involved in the rehabilitation of pregnant drug-dependent persons and women with small children. Internationally, it is involved in collaborative relationships with Italy, Portugal, Switzerland, Bermuda, the Philippines and other countries.

Children's Health Issues

In her recent address to the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton stated that it is not only a parent's responsibility to raise a child, but also the responsibility of a community and nation to nurture the child. We are all responsible for the well-being of children, which includes their physical development as well as the shaping of their values. The physical and mental health of children is essential for the survival and prosperity of all nations and their future generations. If the next generation of children does not improve its physical and mental health, the result may be a significant deterioration of the quality of life of the human race. If there is one thing that all cultures around the world believe in, it is the importance of the survival and well-being of children.

Some circumstances surrounding children's deaths are hard to control, as evidenced by many infant deaths in developing countries. Children die from diarrhea, pneumonia, dracunculiasis, measles, and polio. Others suffer brain damage due to iodine deficiency and lose their eyesight due to a lack of vitamin A in their diet. Organizations like UNICEF are working to put an end to these unnecessary tragedies, but the number of people that need medical attention is so large that they cannot all be helped at the same time. Most families in countries like the United States, Great Britain and France have adequate health care plans covering the whole family. Thus, the mortality rate of children and adults is lower in these countries when compared to the death rate in developing countries. There are still, however, some developing countries that do not have the adequate resources to be able to take care of their population, especially children. China, for example, would probably be in the same situation as most developing countries, were it not for the restriction that the government put on the number of children

that families can have. In this way, the government hopes it can better deal with the population.

Through its projects, UNICEF pays special attention to mothers of the world, because it realizes that the best way to insure that the health of children is good is to deal with the mothers who care for the children, both physically and mentally. Hence, they vaccinate the mothers, so that they can safely breastfeed their babies. Mothers' milk provides many nutrients and immunities that newborn babies need to survive. Another thing that UNICEF focuses on is the cleanliness of water. Clean water is not only essential for the survival of a human being, but is also vital in preventing diseases like diarrhea. UNICEF realizes that one of the keys to lowering the incidents of disease is to increase the accessibility of clean water.

Children all over the world are dying of diseases that can be easily prevented by inexpensive medicine such as vitamin A. Some terminal diseases, however, such as cancer and AIDS, are still incurable. Most of the medicine needed to treat diseases that afflict mothers and children is abundant and cheap in industrial countries. The problem is that the global community hasn't successfully mastered the network of distributing the vaccines and medicines necessary to stop the preventable deaths of mothers and children around the world.

Further Investigation of Issues that Threaten Children's Health Today

The issues threatening children's health today are far from incurable; the medical community has had the technology to prevent and cure these common ailments for the past 50 years. The health procedures commonly used to cure these ailments consist of roughly ten steps. UNICEF best outlined these in its "Ten Priority Goals," which was prepared for the World Summit in 1990. These ten crucial steps to proper child health care were designed to improve survival, development and protection of children worldwide. The ten steps are as follows: 1) to raise immunization coverage for pertussis,

mumps, rubella, H. influenza, hepatitis B and tuberculosis to at least 88 percent (these are all deadly diseases that threaten children's health and can be prevented by vaccines); 2) to eliminate neonatal tetanus, or tetanus of the newly born (The organism responsible for tetanus, clostridium tetani, is very common. Babies in developing countries are often born in unsanitary conditions. Immunization of the mother protects the newborn); 3) to reduce the number of cases of measles; 4) to eradicate poliomyelitis, which can cause fatal paralysis, in key areas (immunization has virtually eliminated this disease in the United States); 5) to increase the use of oral re-hydration therapy (ORT) to 80 percent; it is used to help control diarrhea (causes of dehydration through diarrhea include cholera, e coli, salmonella, typhoid fever, dysentery, and enteritis); 6) to make maternity hospitals "baby-friendly," by supporting breast-feeding and providing a low-cost supply of breast-milk substitutes to health care systems as defined by the International Code (In developing countries, the water used to reconstitute the formula is often contaminated. Often there is no refrigeration to protect the formula in optimum conditions. By the time mothers have realized this, it is too late because their breast milk has dried up); 7) to achieve universal iodization of salts (when pregnant mothers do not imbibe enough iodine, their newborns contract hypothyroidism and cretinism, which slow physical and mental development.); 8) to eliminate vitamin A deficiency (Vitamin A is essential for normal health and survival, and for normal vision and ocular function. Deficiency results in night blindness and corneal destruction. Deficiency also increases mortality among children. Sources of vitamin A are carotene-containing vegetables, animal products and fat); 9) to eradicate guinea-worm disease; and 10) to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child in every country.

Not included in the ten steps is the attempt to stop the scourge of AIDS in developing countries. HIV-infected mothers pass the virus to their children through the placenta or their breast milk. Attempts to minimize the detrimental effects of pollution on children have also been neglected in the ten steps. Sources of pollution that can affect children's health include air pollution and lead in oil paint and fuel emissions, dust, soil and water. The significance of

each differs among nations.

It is important to realize the significance of immunization. In 1994, two million children died of three vaccine-preventable diseases: over one million died of measles, 500,000 died of neo-natal tetanus, and the rest died of pertussis. The World Health Organization declared a global emergency in light of the resurgence of tuberculosis. This declaration was the first of its kind in the World Health Organization's history.

These health problems must not be seen as separate issues. For example, increasing vitamin A in one's diet during pregnancy may lower transmission rates of HIV. This is another example of the relationships that exist among health problems. The acceleration of the global resurgence of tuberculosis is due to the increasingly high rate of HIV. Tuberculosis and HIV form a deadly combination, each multiplying the effects of the other.

The solutions to these issues are far from simple. With the help of modern medicine and the dissemination of information, however, much can be done to eradicate these diseases. Above all, education is essential.

Children and Domestic Violence

In researching child abuse one is tempted to think that it is disproportionately more common in the United States than in any other country, because it receives a great deal more attention here. However, this is misleading. Child abuse can be broken down into five categories. The most common is neglect, which occurs when a child is not provided with appropriate care by their parent or guardian. The second is physical abuse, when a child is physically injured or harmed. The third category includes abandonment, educational neglect, dependency and other such situations. Sexual abuse, followed by emotional abuse, which is defined as "a pattern of behavior that can seriously interfere with a child's positive emotional development" (American Humane Association). Only recently have other countries taken surveys and released information on child abuse. Unfortunately, only information on

twenty-one countries is available. In addition, many such studies are not available in English, and the surveys are limited to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse may vary from sexual intercourse to child pornography to the fondling of a child. There is no one definition of sexual abuse, but it can usually be defined as “an act of a person which forces or threatens a child to have any form of sexual contact or to engage in any type of sexual activity at his or her discretion” (Smith, 1989).

Of the countries surveyed, including the U.S., Austria had the highest rate of sexual abuse towards girls, with 36 out of 100 girls reporting having been abused. South Africa has the second highest rate of sexual abuse against girls at 34 percent, and the highest rate of sexual abuse, 29 out of 100, against boys. Other countries with relatively high sexual abuse rates are Spain, the Netherlands, the United States and Costa Rica. Intra-family abuse, meaning an abuse committed by a blood relative or a parent figure such as a stepparent or adoptive parent, varied from 0 percent to 25 percent for boys to 14 percent to 56 percent for girls.

It is difficult to compare statistics between countries because the mode of questioning differed from country to country. In the Dutch study, the high rate might be a result of numerous detailed questions and sensitive interviewing. The low rates in the British study are most likely related to its much cruder, market-survey methods, using a single vague screening question. Some of the high rates, like those in South Africa, may be due to extremely broad definition, for example one under which two-thirds of experience did not involve any physical contact. Other low rates, such as the ones in the Irish or Greek study, could be due to the social environment where public disclosures of sexual behavior are still regarded as unacceptable.

International studies tend to be consistent with North American data on sexual abuse. For example, the ratio of female to male victims, shows rates for females to be 1.5 to 3 times that of males. They also show that intra-family abuse is more common for girls than for boys, constituting about one-third to one-half of girls' experiences. All the studies reporting such information showed that offenders of girls were usually male (over 90 percent), while boys were abused by males in

proportions that varied from study to study. Only about half the victims across all studies disclosed their experiences to anyone. All the studies that looked at long-term effects also found a history of sexual abuse associated with adult mental impairments.

No official surveys have been taken in African, Middle Eastern, and Far Eastern countries that have cultures and family structures that are very different from the predominantly Caucasian, western and Christian countries represented in these studies. However, some informal surveys have been conducted in these regions. A student survey in Japan suggests possibly very high rates of stranger molestation. Other observers have asserted the existence of extensive sexual abuse in other non-Western settings—for example, in Western and Southern Africa, and in China—not to mention the well-documented presence of child prostitution in countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Although they prove that child abuse is indeed an international dilemma, these reports need to be supported with more thorough and scientifically reliable and credible research.

While it is true that some of the highest rates come from the United States, they could be due to more sophisticated and sensitive methods of surveying. Even if the comparative studies find that North American rates are truly higher, the current figures suggest that the difference would be modest, unlike the differences in homicide, for example, where the U.S.'s rate is six times higher than the average developed country, and three times higher than the next highest country.

Corporal Punishment as a Teacher's Tool

In many countries corporal punishment is still used as a form of discipline in schools. To some that idea might sound like a story from a far off land, but, to those who experience it, there is nothing story-like about it.

What is corporal punishment? Corporal

punishment in schools includes whipping, beating, torture, and pain imposed upon an individual for committing an act which is considered inappropriate.

Corporal punishment is used worldwide in schools and in other institutions. In Namibia, during the colonial era, teachers used rods and "sjamboks" to hit students as their punishment for coming late to class or school, talking in class, failing tests, or doing anything that the teachers did not like and considered inappropriate. Although this form of treatment has been outlawed in Namibia, some other countries still practice it.

In the U.S.A., where many people consider corporal punishment uncivilized, 23 states permit it in public schools. Physical injuries from corporal punishment are usually relatively mild, but in some instances students have required treatment for broken bones, nerve or muscle damage, and even cerebral hemorrhage. In some rare instances, children have died as a result of corporal punishment. "Corporal punishment may have detrimental psychological or counter productive behavior effects," wrote Dr. David Orentlicher. "By sending a message that physical aggressiveness is an acceptable means of dealing with anger, corporal punishment may promote aggressive and destructive behavior by students." Ellen Key (1849-1926), Swedish feminist and author of The Century of the Child describes corporal punishment as something that is as "humiliating for him who gives it as for him who receives it. It is ineffective, besides, neither shame nor physical pain have any other effect than a hardening one."

Although many people are appalled by corporal punishment, some countries not only practice it, but also enforce it. On March 16, 1994, the High Court in London upheld the right of child minders to spank children. Only a year earlier, the Zimbabwe government passed legislation that permits the caning of juveniles. Corporal punishment gets mixed reactions from people world-wide, even from countries which practice it.

Corporal punishment is practiced around the world, in developing as well as industrialized countries; practiced on adults as well as children.

Corporal punishment of children in school is considered by some people to be an outdated concept, but to the children who experience it, it is

both immediate and all too real. Many states and countries have abolished it from schools and perhaps, with time, we shall all come to that agreement. "The elimination of corporal punishment from all schools would not only enhance the educational process," said Dr. Orentlicher, "it would also send a powerful message to society about the necessity of ending violence against children." Whether or not what Dr. Orentlicher hopes for will actually come about or not, no one knows. Time will be the only determinant of the future of corporal punishment.

The Rise of International Juvenile Violence

Violence perpetrated by children is on the rise. As the rate and severity of juvenile crime increases, the problem continues to expand and become more formidable. Though the causes are evident--poverty, lack of education, and most of all, lack of hope--it is difficult to reverse the social and economic trends which breed this wide-scattered hopelessness.

In the past ten years, the juvenile crime rate has grown so rapidly that it has become one of the leading health issues concerning children. Violence has now been labeled an epidemic. The second leading cause of death among people in the U.S. between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four is homicide. Over the next ten years, the population of children is calculated to increase by twenty-one percent, estimated to push the juvenile crime rate to an even higher level. On the average day in the United States, there are about one hundred thousand children in jail. In addition to the increase in frequency of child-perpetrated crimes, the degree of brutality of child crimes has also worsened. The rapidly growing crime rate can be blamed on increased drug use, availability of guns and weapons, and above all, poverty in the inner-city.

Children raised in a violent environment are more prone to perpetrating violence than other children. Studies have shown a strong connection

between poverty and crime. A recent survey shows that more than twenty percent of Americans live in conditions of poverty. The connection between violence and poverty is clear--the epidemic stems partly from increasing hopelessness among the young. More kids than ever are involved in gangs and drug trafficking.

As a result of this growing despair, new arguments arise in the legal system as to how to deal with the growing frequency of children convicted of severe crimes (such as intended murder and rape). Accused rapist Andre Green, 13, was the first minor to be tried under adult rape laws in the state of North Carolina. Some argue that any thirteen-year-old able to beat his twenty-two-year-old neighbor with a mop and then proceed to rape her should be punished under adult laws for his 'adult crime.' Others conclude that a thirteen-year-old convicted of rape and then sentenced accordingly would only become worse if he was 'raised in a prison.'

The actual horror of juvenile crime is astonishing. When children as young as seven have been convicted of rape and ten-year old children have been accomplices to armed robbery and murder, there seems to be no conceivable solution. The story of Yummy Sandifer, an eleven-year-old who accidentally killed a fourteen-year-old girl during a rival gang shootout, has recently emerged and shocked people. After killing the girl, Yummy was a fugitive for several days, protected by older gang members. It is then assumed that he was murdered by these same gang members in their effort to ensure their own security. Yummy's funeral was attended by many. Most attendees remembered the notorious Yummy who, as a young boy, terrorized the neighborhood, but a few were actually mildly complimentary of him. The despair which consumed Yummy's life was demonstrated in his family's unsuccessful attempts to find photos to remember him. Only one photo was found, Yummy's mug shot.

In non-western countries, juvenile violence has taken a different form. In the Republic of Mozambique, the average age of military recruits is eleven. The commanders of the Renamo (capital of Mozambique) army terrorizes their young recruits by hanging them upside down from trees. As part of their orientation into the horrors of battle, young boys are required to slit their parents throats or shoot

them. By taking in boys this young, it is easier to train them to be brutal soldiers because they are so impressionable. According to Esther Guluma of UNICEF, "kids make more brutal fighters because they haven't developed a sense of judgment." Besides the physical damage that Novela, a former boy soldier, has, the emotional trauma of the murders he committed also lingers, "I killed and I robbed and I feel ashamed."

In Liberia, former boy soldiers now face hopelessness after spending their adolescent years fighting the Liberian Civil War. They were uprooted from their childhood and are left with nothing now that the fighting has ceased. Besides robbing them of a childhood, the long years of brutal fighting left them with a callous psyche. As one former boy soldier has described, "We were losing a lot of men, but we killed a lot of them, too, plenty. One night, one of my friends died right in front of me. I felt very bad, but I never stopped fighting. I said to myself, this is war."

Although differing in form, the derivations and consequences of violence appear remarkably similar in U.S. inner cities and in parts of the military establishment in Africa. The glorification of violence through the media and society entices children to become involved in war and gang activities. Children nurtured in such brutal environments are familiar only with violent surroundings and will most likely be deprived of the tools necessary to upgrade the standard of living for future generations. In addition to continuing the cycle of violence, it also yields a constant increase in the rate of youth-perpetrated violence. This creates a vicious cycle between the causes and effects of violence in that victims are more prone to perpetrate of violence.

A Remedy for the Baby Bandits

Statistics show that the rate of violence is on the decline. Surprisingly, however, violence perpetrated by children is steadily rising. As we face the year 2000 and look toward the future, it seems as though the world must brace itself for a new wave of baby-felons.

A breeding ground of poverty, broken families, drugs, guns and violence has brought forth a violent generation. As stated in Newsweek, "Youngsters used to shoot each other in the body. Then in the head. Now they shoot each other in the face." Trends show that as the teenage population grows, so does the number of crimes committed by this age group. However the new surge in such crimes cannot be blamed solely on an increase in population, for the youth crime rate is soaring even faster than the youth population. While the world's total population is expected to increase about twelve percent by the year 2005, the numbers of teenagers between fifteen and nineteen are predicted to increase by an alarming twenty-one percent. Given these and other alarming trends, criminologists fear a new epidemic of juvenile violence.

The irony is that this same violent teenage generation is also the most ignored of all age groups, as a recent report by the Carnegie Institute confirmed. A recent Newsweek article stated, "... neglected, hopeless and about to mature into adults, they are often forgotten about by society." It seems only natural for children entering adolescence to seek more independence and experiment more boldly. But the problem is that it is precisely during this time that parental involvement drops off.

Perhaps this epidemic of violence stems partly from neglect, but also from the increasing hopelessness among youth. Declining social and economic factors and widespread poverty, combined with a rising population and a worldwide trend of isolationism, add to the problem - not to mention the increasing use of drugs and the availability of firearms.

The cases of violence are shocking; they encompass crimes from murder and rape committed by children as young as seven, to involvement in Nazi skinhead uprisings, and children fighting wars. Two seven-year old boys from Indianapolis dragged a first-grade girl into a restroom and raped her. Two years ago, two-eleven-year old boys from Liverpool kidnapped a young toddler in a supermarket and then proceeded to torture and kill the child. International Law forbids the use of children as combatants- but throughout the world, the young are turned into willing, ruthless warriors. The front ranks, hospital beds and battlefield graves of the armies of poor

nations around the world are increasingly filled with boys well below the age of fifteen (the minimum age for combatants according to the international war conventions). From fifty to two-hundred thousand children have been recruited to fight in more than twenty-four conflict situations. Child battalions have been used to fight wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mozambique, Burma, Angola, Liberia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, Iran, Mexico, and the list goes on. Five boys from Brooklyn, ages fourteen through eighteen, were charged with the brutal rape and assault of a forty-three-year-old jogger.

Obviously something has to be done about this violence, and quickly. However, it is difficult to identify exactly what needs to be done. The criminal codes of most countries do not include children. And the question of what punishments should be given to these juvenile criminals gets mixed reactions worldwide. Do we send them to be rehabilitated? Put them in maximum security prisons? Do we punish them as adults and come down hard on them? Or do we let them off with minimum sentences? And what preventive measures do we take to keep them from getting involved in violence?

In the U.S., the response of lawmakers has been largely to siphon the worst of the juvenile criminals out by lowering the age at which juveniles may be charged with serious crimes. Rape, murder, armed assault can all be tried in adult courts. However, as one young offender said, "Prison doesn't usually last forever, and life on the outside is an open invitation to go bad again. They send you straight back into the same situation. The house is dirty when you left it, and it's dirty when you get back."

New York State passed its Juvenile Offender law in 1978 to deal specifically with juvenile criminals. The law stated that those ages thirteen through fifteen accused of heinous felonies were moved from the jurisdiction of Family Court, where the maximum penalty was eighteen months regardless of the crime, to the State Supreme Court. But the law allows only for lighter sentences than would be given to adults who are convicted of equivalent crimes, meaning that children are often back on the streets in a few years, jobless, with a

felony conviction that makes employment even more difficult.

Overall there hasn't been a major revolution in children's law as yet. It seems as though most countries are still in the process of realizing the magnitude of this new trend of youth violence. Most constitutions don't have specific laws pertaining to children. This lack of definite action on the part of governments, combined with the steadily rising population and increasing poverty worldwide, increases the probability of a disastrous youth-crime wave sometime in the near future. However, some small scale solutions have been launched by individuals, and experts in universities worldwide are conducting and finalizing studies on this new wave, preparing to propose permanent solutions.

Examples of a few effective programs that have been put into effect are as follows: Communities That Care is a program that the preaches anti-violence messages within the home, school, peer groups, church and media. They believe that youth violence can only be curbed by "changing community norms, values, and policies." In the Choice Program, initiated by the University of Maryland, case workers visit 650 troubled children three to five times daily. The children must follow a strict set of rules set by their families and social worker, The Midnight Basketball leagues around the United States help keep children out of trouble and off the streets. Getting schools more involved would probably help as well. Traditionally schools have shunned crime-prone youths; however, educators have begun to acknowledge that they must work with students in elementary school to teach conflict-resolution skills at an early age. Experts agree that the key to violence prevention are long-term solutions that must be instilled from preschool through young adult life.

Although little in the way of juvenile violence prevention is being carried out by governments, a new light is being shed on the issue. The issue of "baby-felons" is being brought to the attention of governments worldwide, and demonstrates that something must be done. "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning."

The Media, Violence, and Children

It is estimated that children in America watch 22 to 28 hours of television per week. The quantity itself, however, merely skims the surface of the problem. The hours of television that these children watch are filled with images of violence and brutality. Is this good? What should we do about it?

Children admire television and film actors; often, however, they do not look up to the actor himself, but to the character the actor is portraying. It is often difficult for children to make the distinction between fact and fiction. One outgrowth of this problem is that of children repeating what they have seen in the theaters and on television. For example, two twelve-year-old boys were killed in Harlem as they were climbing down and around a sewer pipe. Their friend later explained they were trying to imitate the characters they had viewed in a cartoon. Animated characters are frequently characterized by violence and conflict. Compared to most television programs, cartoons are generally thought to be benign. This commonly held belief, however, is of questionable validity. Children look up to fictional characters, and these characters themselves are not necessarily benign. The combination of the quantity of television that children are absorbing, as well as the quality exacerbates the issue of children using violence as a means to resolve conflicts. Violence is the most accessible and prominent solution.

In many of today's action films, violence is trivialized. The heroes get shot and keep on fighting. The sight of a gun no longer evokes great fear. Children have become accustomed to the large-scale brutality they see on the big screens, and a one-shot wound pales in comparison. As a result, violence and death are marginalized. It is difficult for children to understand when they see their hero brushing off something which, in reality, could hospitalize them. They are oblivious to the fact that violence can result in death; they feel they are invincible. This is an attitude which may often lead to violent acts, when these children cannot distinguish between movies and real life.

Violence on television in the form of news, documentaries and movies depicts the most realistic images of violence. When these programs and films

show, for example, the life of a gang member accurately, they can instill a fear of violence in children. As a result, even if a television program is non-partisan in its reporting of the violence issue, the news program will undoubtedly give some sort of subjective account of the situation.

When it is said that violence does not affect the way that people react and act, we disagree. Television and movies are detrimental to children because when children are developing morally and intellectually, they are also being influenced by violent acts. At the young age that most children watch cartoons, they are developing a set of values; what they watch influences these values. Television is a medium for education and teaching. It is vehicle for fostering healthy attitudes and experiences about conflicts and violence. It is an opportunity to assist children in developing morally and intellectually to their greatest potential. Perhaps, the need to seriously consider the importance of TV programming for young children, and the implications of not responsibly addressing the developmental needs of children of the world, will result in serious consideration of this issue.





Cultural Aspects

Cultural Practices in Relation to Children

Just as cultures throughout the world vary greatly, so do cultural practices in relation to children. With this marked diversity come differences in the way children are raised and valued. This is particularly true in comparing Eastern and Western societies. Largely due to socio-economic disparities between the two, there is a striking contrast in terms of the way children are looked upon and treated. Often, this clash in values can be problematic, as practices that may be a norm or indeed a necessity in some cultures may seem violent, unacceptable and abusive to others.

Female infanticide is a striking example. Infanticide is defined as the killing of a child soon after its birth. Indirect infanticide involves depriving a child of proper health care and nutrition, ultimately resulting in death.

Systematic indirect female infanticide exists today in regions of Northern India. Culturally-sanctioned infanticide may seem incomprehensible to most people unless the internal and external constraints that produce such a practice are understood. In relation to female infanticide, the first step is to understand why a strong preference for sons exists.

In rural Northern India, sons are economic assets; they are invaluable because they are needed to help on the farms. In contrast, female tasks are generally confined to the home and child-rearing. In addition, males can help the family if ever a local power-struggle over land and water rights arises. Another key factor that contributes to this practice of infanticide is that the birth of a daughter automatically places an economic burden on the family, as females are traditionally required to produce dowries before marriage. That is, the family of the bride must provide property or a considerable amount of money to the husband. Upon marriage, females leave the family. On the other hand, males, as recipients of dowries, bring wealth to the family and will stay with the family after marriage and look after their parents in old age. Also, among Hindus, sons are needed to perform rituals which protect the

family after the death of a father. Girls are barred from performing such rituals.

These socio-economic factors are the driving forces behind female infanticide in Northern India. As a result of this practice, seriously unbalanced sex-ratios exist among children in one-third of Northern India's 326 rural districts. The practice of sex-selective health care is disturbing to most people primarily because of an incongruity of values. Most societies stress equal life chances for all, but when female infanticide is practiced, the survival of males is favored over that of females. However, before judging this practice, it is important to bear in mind that the economic survival of a rural North Indian family largely depends upon the sex of a child.

Differences in cultural practices in relation to children are widely evident when cultures with different child-rearing practices come into contact. The potential for misconstruing certain behaviors is great and there can be misidentification of what child abuse is. This is a pertinent problem when immigrants attempt to maintain traditional cultural practices, specifically in terms of child-rearing and child medical care, in a new environment, as can be seen from the following example.

An American Samoan family migrated to Honolulu, Hawaii. Six years later, the father, a traditional Samoan healer, was charged with 'noncompliance' and 'medical neglect' of his diabetic daughter, Mary, and was threatened with her removal from family custody by the State of Hawaii's Child Protective Service. This is a complex case with many different aspects, some concerning the clash between the family's belief in traditional Samoan healing as opposed to modern medicine. One particular aspect of this case brings to light the way in which children are looked upon in Samoan culture and how this can trigger conflict.

Mary's twelve-year-old sister was responsible for her insulin shots. Her ability to be responsible for such a task was questioned and resulted in a petition for protective support for Mary by health officials that stated that she had been "neglected as to the proper and necessary medical care for her well-being . . . [and] subjected to physical deprivation as a result of the failure of her parents to exercise that degree of care . . . for which they are legally responsible."

However, from a Samoan perspective, a

twelve-year-old is looked upon as independent and responsible enough to look after her siblings. Therefore, it was not unusual for Mary to be looked after by her younger sibling and so, from the point of view of the family, the charge of 'neglect' was simply incomprehensible.

Though Mary's case represents an extreme situation, it sheds light on the different ways in which children are regarded in various cultures, and how attitudes and practices reflect this. It is easy to judge whether a cultural practice is "good" or "bad" based upon appearances alone. However, each practice in question must be looked upon from that culture's perspective, and the driving forces behind each practice must be examined and understood. Only then can warranted judgments be made.

Rites of Passage

For many generations, dating back over thousands of years, both religion and society have celebrated the changes of life, from birth to marriage to death. The most important change is often that which occurs during adolescence. In some societies, adolescence signifies a time in which young individuals are expected to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. This transition can be observed through ceremonies and rituals known as "rites of passage." Each culture has different "rites of passage." The three that will be examined concern the Judaic, Islamic and Christian religions.

JUDAIC RITES OF PASSAGE

When a Jewish boy reaches the age of thirteen, he becomes responsible for his role in the Jewish community. The ceremony which recognizes and initiates him into the congregation as an adult member is called a Bar Mitzvah. The word Bar Mitzvah means "son of the commandment." This "rite of passage" is also relevant to girls in the Jewish community who have reached the age of thirteen. In this case, the ceremony is called a Bat Mitzvah, meaning "daughter of the commandment." Once the participants have been formally initiated

into the community, according to tradition, their parents no longer have to support them, for it is now time for these young men and women to be responsible for their actions and support themselves for the rest of their lives.

CHRISTIAN RITES OF PASSAGE

In most Christian sects, boys and girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen receive the second sacrament, which follows the first of the seven sacraments, or Baptism. This sacrament is called Confirmation. The sacrament of Confirmation is a ceremony that initiates individuals as full members of the Christian community. Confirmation is described as the time in a Christian's life when the Holy Spirit comes and enters the souls of the confirmed. It serves as a constant reminder of who they are as Christians and their history as a people. In the Roman Catholic church, the Sacrament of Confirmation is carried out by the Bishop, who blesses the individual with holy oil. This is done after the participant has stated their Confirmation name; that is, the name of a saint. In the Orthodox church, this rite is called Chrismation. Unlike Roman Catholicism, this rite is carried out by the priest. In the Episcopalian, Lutheran and most other Protestant churches, Confirmation is strictly a time at which the young adult members are expected to take active part in the mission of the church, as well as to begin to practice their faith more seriously and in depth.

ISLAMIC RITES OF PASSAGE

Islamic boys and girls are regarded in very different ways from the time they are young children. The "traditional" Muslim girl remains at home helping with housework and babysitting, while the boys are given the privilege of attending school. When girls in some Islamic societies reach puberty, they are occasionally made to undergo a very painful operation. This procedure, incorporated into Muslim tradition in some communities, is derived from the Jewish practice of circumcision, where the foreskin of the penis is removed. It is called female circumcision and involves the surgical removal of part of a girl's clitoris. In some communities, the practice of cliteroidectomy, or the complete removal of the clitoris, is performed. Some Muslims consider

it sinful for a girl to experience lustful and sexual feelings during any part of her growing up, and even more so as a married adult. Hence, circumcision is performed in order for there to be no sexual arousal or feeling in the reproductive area, particularly during sexual intercourse. This procedure is not in accordance with the Koran, but rather a regional tradition. Among some groups, female circumcision is done to infant girls. Sometimes, it is just a ritual “nick.”

All “rites of passage” serve certain universal functions; they serve to stress the importance of new responsibilities, opportunities, dangers and joys that come with each living day. They are also meant to represent a people’s beliefs, morals and values. In addition, they prepare the participants for what lies ahead and are meant to represent all that one’s ancestors encountered on the way to fully understanding the meaning of life.

Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Most of us take for granted the fact that girls and boys have equal rights, but in many developing countries, women are deemed to be of low value, sometimes resulting in the loss of precious lives. In cultures and societies around the world, gender roles have vastly different implications; hence male and female children are raised to fit these roles.

Thirty years ago, in the United States, the issue of gender was a topic not worth examining. It was simply assumed that males should learn to become the providers and that females should learn to raise the children and tend to the needs of her husband and home. But due to the women’s movement and other factors, gender roles have since been redefined.

However, traditional gender roles, continue to be imposed upon children in many other cultures. Male children are brought up to be supporters, to earn the money and make the decisions for the family. Female children are brought up helping around the house from an early age, learning from their mothers how to cook, clean and take care of the younger children so that they may do the same in

their own home. Along with these roles come the notions that males are stronger, smarter and more rational, while females are more emotional, nurturing, and delicate.

In India, it is almost unheard of for women to take on the traditional work roles allotted to men. Their place for many years has been in the home, taking care of the children, while the Indian man works. In a country where salaries are low and jobs are few, one would suppose that both parents would attempt to work; however, the country’s strong belief in tradition precludes this from occurring. The girl helps her mother with house chores and taking care of the children, while the boy helps his father earn money for the house by finding an after-school job. Sometimes the child is forced to make the job his first priority and go to school part-time. In many families, this cycle starts at a very young age.

There are, however, some exceptions. Although the Yanomamo people of Central America have been characterized as having one of the world’s fiercest and most male-centered cultures, elder women are still given as much respect as the elder men, and are consulted when collective decisions are made. There are also conflicting statements made about women and their roles in most African societies. One may read of the “traditional ideal of male dominance” or of the monarchical systems of traditional Africa, in which one or two women of the highest rank hold significant power and occupy a position equal to that of the king. Women’s and men’s positions are complementary throughout the various social ranks of African societies.

The problem with the differences in gender roles begins with tradition. For decades, culture has conditioned parents, media, even government, to impose traditional roles on children, starting from a very young age. Children are brought up with preconceptions of what place they must take in their society. In most cases, these concepts limit the child and close off his or her hopes and dreams. When bound by such rigid traditions, a little girl may never be able to fulfill her dreams of being a fireman. A little boy may never be able to cook dinner for his family.

The Rights of Girls to Equal Educational Opportunities

This article investigates and examines the presence and impact of gender inequalities in education. It also examines how sexism in schools cheats girls out of their academic birthright. Basic education is the first step towards empowering people and is fundamental to development. It builds self-esteem and the skills needed to improve oneself, one's family and one's country. In many cultures throughout the world, girls are not given the same opportunities as boys.

Professors Myra and David Sadker's 1994 best seller, Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls, examines how sexism in America's schools deprives girls and may be shortchanging our hope for the future.

A new study claims that girls get secondhand treatment from first grade on. The 1992 American Association of University Women's report, "How Schools Shortchange Girls," argues that American schools provide girls with a secondhand education that leads to disastrous results for both the young women and the society at large. Myra and David Sadker contend that in American schools, girls are taught differently from boys. They are given less attention in the classroom, offered less feedback and encouragement, provided with fewer role models in examples and textbooks, and are even actively discouraged from academic success, particularly in the fields of math and science. The Sadkers and their researchers observed that boys received disproportionate amounts of attention compared with girls. Teachers called on male students four or five times more than females.

The Sadkers' research also indicates that girls and young women are often discouraged from trying to excel in academics and are taught that success in this area is somehow "unladylike." At home and in school, many girls discover that their parents and teachers have lower expectations of their academic performances because they are females, and find that they are more likely to be prized for being neat and well-mannered than for being smart and hardworking.

The book Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School, by Barrie Thorne, examines how the two genders appear to "naturally" fall into same-sex groups, both in the classroom and on the playground, and how male dominance appears to be the norm. Boys control more physical space in schools. Thorne also cites research showing that boys typically control ten times more playground territory than girls.

What are the results of this pervasive sexism in education? According to the Sadkers, the girls and young women who go through American schools are affected in a number of critical ways; the educational process renders them progressively more silent and invisible, and their academic test scores fall further and further behind those of their male classmates. They also suffer a significant loss of self-esteem and are shunted away from many of the most academically challenging fields of study. In addition, they are faced with the threat of sexual harassment from peers and instructors.

Myra and David Sadker examine how storybooks and texts describe a world in which boys and men are bright, curious, brave, inventive and powerful, while girls and women are silent, passive and invisible. The Sadkers point out the need to be vigilant in retrieving women's stories, because when they deprive girls and young women of their own stories, adventures and dreams, they impoverish their imaginations and rob them of their futures. Studies indicate that, as boys and girls enter adolescence, a significantly larger number of females experience a drop in their self-esteem.

In most developing countries, citizens are educated informally, usually within the family unit. In a country where the population is scattered and the resources limited, the educational needs of those in remote areas are often neglected. In many societies, children are trained to follow their parents' occupations, and education is concentrated solely on males.

There are more illiterate women than men. In 1990, there were 223 million more illiterate women than men. In some countries, female illiteracy is over 90 percent. In 1993, 130 million school-age children were not in school. Approximately 60 percent of them were girls. About a third of the children of the developing world fail to complete even four years of education, either because they drop out of school

early or because they never enroll in school at all. For many societies, the most basic building block of development is not yet in place. Girls traditionally have been excluded from secondary schooling in many countries. For example, in Jordan, every year at the secondary level, about 80 percent of male children attend school, whereas 68 percent of female children attend school. Such educational inequality justifies the ideology of female inferiority.

In developing countries, while 80 percent of children enroll in primary schools, only 68 percent of them complete four years of primary education. Millions of pupils cannot attend classes because they are needed to work at home. Hunger and poverty are still everyday concerns of millions of people. Along with poverty, there are limited resources which are burdened by growing foreign debt. Many developing countries are cutting back on public spending for such social services as education.

In the south Indian town of Sivakasi, girls are not given an opportunity for education. Early in the morning, hundreds of buses disgorge children from villages as far as 100 kilometers away. They come not to attend school but to work in thousands of tiny factories producing hand-made matches. They handle toxic chemicals and work about 60 hours per week.

More than 80 percent of the children in the match factories are girls. Most of the boys in the industry get a little education. That is, 70 percent of them attend school and work only part-time, whereas 80 percent of the girls work full-time. Incredibly, this is in Tamil Nadu, a state often commended for its high rate of female literacy.

The government taxes machine-made matches heavily in order to promote jobs in the hand-made industry. The result has been the employment of about 80,000 children. There are some critics who blame capitalism, and others who blame children's parents. However, a recent study by Tamil Nadu's government and UNICEF suggests that the problem is as much about gender inequality as it is about poverty.

Past attempts to ban child labor in various industries have not worked. Poor families need the income of children, whatever the law says. The latest study shows that half the Sivakasi match-industry families would fall below the poverty line if children

were stopped from working.

In many parts of the world, like in the south Indian town of Sivakasi, better schools and faster economic development will help reduce child labor, thus expanding educational opportunities for poor children. The boys, however, will benefit first, and girls will continue to bear the brunt of their families' poverty. Schools should be trying to locate resources to overcome female bias in education, to prevent young women from losing their self-confidence and their sense of self-worth thus creating a more positive future for them.

The United Nations is particularly concerned with the education of women. Educating a woman is more likely to improve the education of her own children. As a mother she would be more aware of family planning methods as well as matters of health and hygiene.

Children and Recreation: Imaginations Run Wild

Children participate in a variety of recreational activities all over the world. In many instances, recreation for a child simply means a given amount of time when he may do anything he finds enjoyable. This could mean running around, painting, using one's imagination and playing pretend, reading or writing stories, participating in any sport, drawing, day-dreaming, playing in a playground. . . anything that circumstances allow. Children have ways of entertaining themselves whether in groups or alone.

Where a child lives, the country or the actual neighborhood, plays a great part in what the child does for recreation. In any large city, there are more recreational activities than in more rural areas. Of course, the availability of recreational choices doesn't mean that everyone and anyone has access to them. The socio-economic position of the family plays an important role in determining to what the child may and may not have access. Depending on background, children may either have easy access to recreational facilities, or may be forced to use their

Child Labor

Children in both developed and developing countries are often key contributors to their families incomes. Though child labor is common worldwide, the reasons why children work in developed and developing countries are very different. In countries such as the United States, Canada, France, England or Spain, children generally work to fulfill their material wants and needs by having part-time jobs. In contrast, child labor in developing countries is characterized by severe working conditions and, most significantly, by necessity.

Children as young as ten are employed by large multi-national corporations whose factories are in developing countries such as El Salvador, Honduras and Bangladesh. Many governments consider child labor to be an “unavoidable byproduct of general poverty.” Little action is taken to improve the working conditions of children. They are extremely underpaid, overworked, physically abused and are often treated like slaves. The young children, who work all day to support their families, grow up in environments of unhappiness. In the process they miss out on having an education and enjoying their youth.

According to estimates by the International Labor Organization, child workers constitute over 18 percent of all children aged between 10 and fourteen in developing countries; at least 7 percent in Latin America, 18 percent in Asia and 25 percent in Africa. These statistics, however, can nowhere nearly show the true horrors of child slavery in developing countries. More than 200 million children in the world, particularly in Africa, Asia and Central America, are living in poor conditions very close to those of slavery.

Child labor in developing countries was traditionally concentrated in the agricultural sector. Children usually helped their families on the farm or with small family businesses such as tree-cutting and beam-making. Currently, child labor is prominent in various types of industry and services. Children are often employed in small-scale enterprises as varied as brick-making, food processing and carpet manufacturing. Some of these jobs can be hazardous, particularly glass manufacturing, construction,

mining and quarrying.

Many children struggle to get through the work day. This can be attributed to the long hours, low pay, heavy physical loads and inadequate working conditions. On average, these children are paid between 5 and 10 cents an hour for making clothing for large businesses. When the quota is increased (due to increased demand), the children are kept late until they finish and are often deprived of their overtime earnings.

These children spend their long days working in hot, damp, dusty, and unsanitary conditions conducive to the transmission of contagious diseases. As a result of their work overload, the children are prone to fatigue and stress, which in turn lead to injury and impaired growth as well as numerous other health difficulties. Often, child laborers are not permitted to leave until the day’s production quota is met, which sometimes takes until midnight.

Around the world, children are the most frequent victims of on-the-job physical abuse. In some Asian developing countries, there are no laws prohibiting the physical punishment of children. Supervisors on duty in these factories “discipline” the children by striking them, threatening them, or even burning them with hot irons or boiling water when they make mistakes (such as miscounts in packing or not working fast enough). Conversation between workers is strictly prohibited, trips to the bathroom are limited, meals are served sparingly, and breaks are very short or nonexistent.

Child labor ultimately causes a vicious cycle. In developing countries, where there are very few available public schools, children are more likely to be dragged into the labor market, as a way to help augment their family’s income. In the long run, they grow up uneducated and impede the economic progress of their countries. Also, many parents are illiterate themselves and don’t take into account the need for attending school. Child labor is economically ineffective, but, since it is the product of poverty, it cannot be solved until socio-economic conditions, the key element of child labor, are improved.

The main objectives in alleviating the problem should be to prohibit child labor in hazardous conditions, and to prevent unacceptable employment for the young. The most important and

immediate task is to increase access to free public education. Lack of schooling leads to child employment, while irrelevant schooling leads to massive dropout rates and eventually to child employment. A true education can be the first line of defense against child servitude.

Children in developing countries work to survive, and in the process are deprived of the education and social life most children in the United States are 'entitled' to. They are left with no time in their lives to play, explore, have relationships, or in other words, enjoy childhood.

Children Working the Streets

Child prostitution is an industry. Girls and boys as young as eight are being kidnapped by brothel agents. In some cases, their parents even sell them into sexual slavery. "Selling a 14-year-old girl has become so commonplace, it is banal," says Wassyla Tamzali, director of UNESCO's women's rights department. In Bogota, Colombia, the number of prostitutes has quintupled in the past eight years. Brazil now has more than 250,000 child prostitutes and Moscow more than 1,000.

In Asia, the situation has reached epidemic extremes. Five percent of Thailand's 56 million population, or 2.8 million are now estimated to be prostitutes, 800,000 of whom are under the age of 16. Studies also suggest that there are at least 300,000 child prostitutes in India. In the Philippines, the Institute for the Protection of Children reported that nine percent of all prostitutes are less than 10 years old when they are sold to a pimp. In Sri Lanka, research indicates there are at least 10,000 boy prostitutes, each of whom are receives as little as \$1 a day for satisfying the demands of pedophiles.

Even the increasing number of AIDS victims in Asia isn't stopping the 420,000 Thai men that visit a prostitute every day. Two-thirds of Thailand's five million tourists per year are men on organized sex tours from Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia, Europe and the United States. These customers, fearful of AIDS, are turning to younger and younger prostitutes, hence causing a rise in the demand for

virgins. As a result, child prostitution in Asian countries is booming!

These package holidays to the red-light districts were first introduced in the 1980's, and now are an established part of the child-sex industry. They originated in Germany and Japan, where they are heavily promoted by locals. This business has reached the extent that whole floors in the five-star hotels of the Philippines are actually blocked off for the use of Japanese sex tourists. There are over 20 prostitution hotels in Manila that cater to these Japanese tourists.

The punishment for such actions varies greatly geographically. In April 1993, a man who had kidnapped a girl for sex in California was sentenced to 106 years in prison. In Florida, the same man could have been sentenced to death. In Asia, though, these crimes may be forgiven for a few hundred dollars.

As a result, pedophiles have opened up small hotels and houses in the remote parts of Asia where visits from the police are rare. These "safe places" serve the needs of their fellow pedophiles from America and Europe, who are not able to satisfy their sexual fantasies in their own countries.

Where do all these children come from? Brothel agents search the countryside to find children who can be bought or kidnapped. Most of the time, they are from poor families. The parents are so desperate for money that they fall into the traps of these agents who tell them that their children will "work" for them so they can send money home. Around 40 percent of all child prostitutes in Taiwan are from the two percent of aboriginal people living in the mountain provinces on the east coast. In Thailand, the majority of these children come from the peasant families of the north and northeast. In fact, it is now so hard to find any children in these parts of Thailand that it is believed that soon entire tribes will be wiped out.

The demand for children is increasing so rapidly that girls are being reserved as babies. They are raised to be sold to brothels. Parents are paid an advance when the girl is still a baby as collateral. Pregnant women are selling their children before they are even born.

Virgins are especially in great demand. Brothel keepers in Thailand, Taiwan, and the

Philippines pay large amounts for an attractive virgin. But once the girl loses her virginity, her price declines. They are then traded among brothels as their value constantly decreases, until they end up with local workers and fishermen.

It was found that 30 percent of the girls in Bangkok teahouses are on-call 24 hours a day. They are given only one night off a month during menstruation. Many girls receive no pay at all- the money goes solely to the pimp.

Girls admit that even if they are given a chance to escape, they wouldn't know where to go or what to do. The main reason they are even part of the business is due to their fathers' decisions. They are working to help support their families.

Child prostitution is one of the worst forms of child labor. Millions of children are abducted or lured away from their families to perform horrible tasks. They receive minimal or no pay and have no control over their lives. They are often beaten, starved, and overworked. They are deprived of the right to lead a normal childhood, of education, and of a bright future. And they are exposed to a host of diseases, including AIDS. The eradication of such events should no longer be seen as a responsibility of the country in which it occurs, but as an international responsibility.

The Rise of Children's Economic Status

As many as 200 million of the world's children under 15 years of age spend their waking hours at work. They sometimes work at risk of injury, very often at the expense of their physical and mental development. Children in many developing countries are forced to work in sweatshops, mines, factories and brick yards. Increasing awareness of the dimensions of child labor has enabled political forces in a number of developing and industrialized countries to impose strong protective legislation for children in the work force.

Child exploitation was defined as such, by the UNICEF Executive Board, in 1986 : "children

were being exploited if : (1) they were working full time at too early an age (2) they were working too many hours (3) their work exerted undue physical, social or psychological stress (4) they were working or living in the streets under bad conditions, 5) they were working for inadequate pay (6) they were working at jobs with too much responsibility (7) their work hampered access to education and was detrimental to their full social and psychological development (8) they were performing work that could undermine a child's dignity and self-esteem."

Asia has some of the highest numbers of child laborers, accounting for up to 11 percent of the total labor force in some Asian countries. Even though child labor may be concentrated in developing countries, it is not confined to them. Italy has some of the highest numbers in Western Europe. There have been reports of tens of thousands in the Naples region only, in connection with the leather industry. In the United States the majority of child labor is concentrated in agricultural sectors.

Most children work in agriculture. This is especially true in rural areas and in developing countries. They may start with light tasks such as feeding the animals twice a day, but eventually, they are forced to work in the fields growing crops. In cities, however, children are involved in a broader range of labor--from factory work to domestic service, working in mines, working in small handicraft enterprises, and in large factories.

The carpet-weaving industry in India, for example, employs around 300,000 people, one-third of whom are children. Employers say that children have nimble fingers and keen eyesight and will sit in the same posture for hours. Small size is also an advantage for the 28,000 Indian children who work in the mines at Meghalaya. They can crawl inside the tunnels of mines easily. Indeed, when they become older they lose their jobs. Most of these jobs can also be done by adults, but children are more attractive because they can be exploited by working long hours for low pay without much trouble.

Another horrifying case of exploited child labor is in El Salvador, in Central America. The well known company The Gap engaged itself in producing clothing popular in the States in offshore sweatshops sprawling across 47 countries. The Gap did not believe in owning factories; it contracted its

work, freeing itself to jump from country to country in search of the lowest wages, the lowest government opposition and consequently the lowest levels of human rights regulation. In the Maquilla D'Ora factories of El Salvador, most workers are young women and teenagers who work from 7:00 am until 4:00 am in the next morning. They are then allowed to lie down in the deplorable conditions of the factory until 7:00 am when they are required to return to work. The workers are paid 56 cents per hour and are required to fill a certain quota. Everyone is forced to work overtime as well. Children are also denied the right to attend night school, are not allowed bring any sorts of candies to the factory, are only permitted to use the bathroom twice a day and are deprived of clean drinking water. There are many other poor and inhuman conditions involved. When a few of the workers protested, the people in charge brought in armed thugs and beat up many of the protesters. Finally, when people from around the world realized what was happening and tried to take action, The Gap decided to cut and run.

As a result, children were left without a job, which made it difficult for them to meet the minimum requirements of life. Recently, however, the Gap took a major step forward in accepting direct responsibility for how and under what conditions the products it sells are made. In agreeing to independent monitoring, the Gap has set a new benchmark that other companies must now follow. This is a watershed moment in the defense of young women's and worker's rights.

Many nations worldwide are trying to lessen the burden of young workers by imposing stricter legislation. In addition, many countries' products produced by child labor are banned. In its 1992 Report to the International Labor Conference, the ILO's Committee of Experts identified the use of children labor as one of the worst forms of exploitation that exists. Be it in prostitution, pornography, or sweatshops, child labor is a form of child abuse, one that should be energetically fought and severely punished.

The Economics of Education

One might be startled to discover how little funding is allotted towards education in various nations around the world. One might infer that a large portion of a nation's Gross National Product (GNP) would be invested in education and the faces of tomorrow, our children. The 38th edition of the Annual Review Text, published by the United Nations, illustrates clearly what percentage of a nation's GNP goes towards education. The percentages vary from a high of 9.4 to a low of 2.3.

At the low end of the scale are El Salvador, Haiti, Argentina, and Turkey. These nations dedicate less than two percent of their GNP to education. On the opposite end of the scale are Algeria, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, and Suriname. These nations dedicate between eight and ten percent of their nations GNP to education. However, the majority of the fifty-six nations examined in 1989 had an average of 4.8 percent of their GNP dedicated towards education. These are startling figures considering that the education of children today reflects the status of our world tomorrow.

The United States was recorded as allotting 6.8 percent of its GNP towards education in 1988, while Japan only dedicated 4.8 percent to education. This may or may not be directly related to the present economic structures of the two nations. However, it is perceived that the amount of funding dedicated to a nation's educational system is directly related to the nation's economic success in the future. Both Japan and the United States currently have strong economic structures, but if cutbacks continue in American education, the status of our economy, in the hands of the next generation, may falter, while other nations (such as Japan) may prosper.

Few are satisfied with an American education system that has yielded statistically increasingly poor test scores, and deficiencies in graduates entering the workplace. These are among the complaints from the American public, but are they justified in saying so? The system replies, the years are too short, due to lack of funding. However, the allocation of funding for education in United States has increased from 50 billion dollars to one-hundred and ninety billion dollars between 1960-1990. Yet, despite this

significant increase in funding, little has changed.

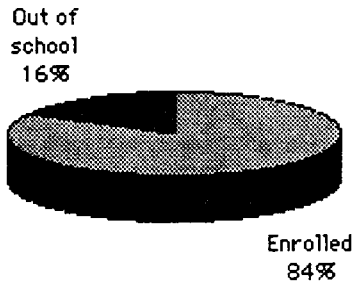
The United States ranks as one of the top economies in the world, and regardless of the criticisms of the educational system, the United States continues to prosper. However, will this prosperity continue if today's youth is not prepared with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead this generation into the next millennium. The education of today's generation will determine the future social, political, and economic status of the United States.

The government of the United States claims that cutbacks on education are not going to harm the children. Rather, these cutbacks in education will decrease the United States' national debt. Although these cuts may immediately reduce the national debt, the result of these reductions in expenditure for education are likely to limit this generation's ability to perform at the standard recognized in the professional world of today and tomorrow.

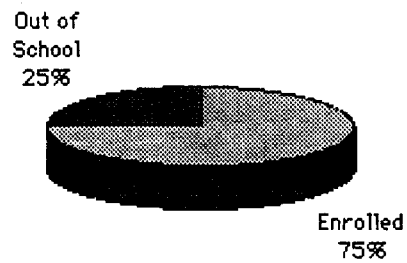
This is not an isolated situation in the United States, but rather is a world-wide phenomenon. In some European countries, governments are contributing less towards tertiary education, leaving students and their families responsible for paying an increasing proportion of tuition. However, compared to the United States, where a majority of universities depend on the wealth of individuals, often leaving the less wealthy to obtain a lower quality of education, European nations do presently provide more for their children and their future.

Various government attempts to provide funding for education, and at the same time attempting to reduce the nation's debt, has impacted the education and the future of this generation. If we are truly attempting to meet the educational needs of the children of the world, then governmental support and funding is crucial. Nations must strongly commit to education as the core of our children's future. Without this commitment, the struggles of a generation will continue.

Estimated male population aged 6-11 enrolled in formal education and out of school, 1995



Estimated female population aged 6-11 enrolled in formal education and out of school, 1995



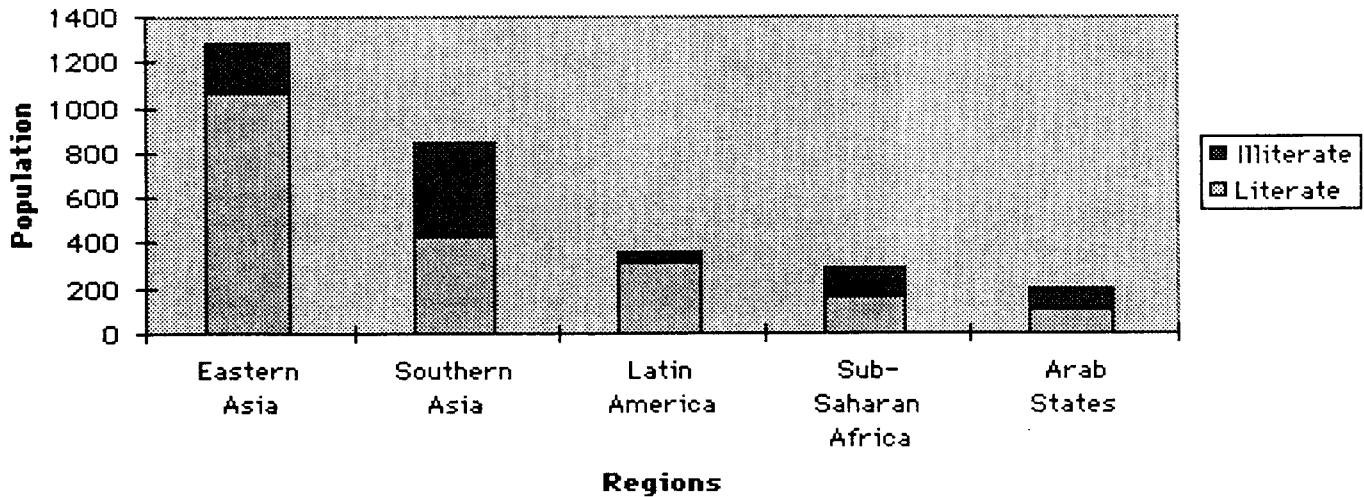
Estimated male population aged 12-17 enrolled in formal education and out of school, 1995



Estimated female population aged 12-17 enrolled in formal education and out of school, 1995



Estimated Number (millions) of literate and illiterate persons aged 15 and over





Political Aspects

Children of War

During times of war, every member of society is affected in one way or another. Recently, however, more and more children, especially boys under the age of eighteen and, more alarmingly, under the age of fifteen, have become involved in the waging of war. Although one of the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the traditional rules of war prohibit the use of soldiers under the age of fifteen, there is still a question of whether this age limit should be moved up to eighteen, where adolescents tend to be mature and have already entered adulthood, both physically and mentally. Despite international law, there is still an alarming number of cases in which children under the age of fifteen, even as young as nine or ten, are used to fight and kill in armed conflicts. Between 1994 and 1995, over thirty-five countries and regions involved children under the age of eighteen in either government or opposition forces in armed conflict. These areas ranged from Northern Ireland to Angola.

In certain African nations, the use of soldiers under the age of eighteen has increased greatly. One example is the civil war in Liberia. In this civil war, several rebel and government forces have used children as young as nine or ten to wage war against one another. Children under the age of fifteen, besides being injured, killed or exposed to countless atrocities in fighting, are also to blame for some of the worst atrocities committed. These acts, according to the Human Rights Watch, include the killing, maiming or rape of civilians and the looting of civilian homes. Most of these children command military check points, where they have used their posts to harass and even kill civilians.

One of the reasons why the use of children as soldiers has become so prevalent is that they have been found to be good killers. The younger children are, the more easily they can be manipulated. Because they are often either separated from their parents or orphaned because of the fighting, their only hope of survival is to join armies, sometimes the same armies that are responsible for the murder of their families.

Most young children look to adults for leadership. They willingly follow adult soldiers

because they are at a dependent age and seek the guidance and attention of their elders. They cannot take much blame because, at such a young age, these children lack good judgement. They do not follow any political agenda, but rather only seek the attention of their fellow adult soldiers. Another explanation for the alarming rise in the number of child soldiers is the availability and mass production of lighter and more lethal arms.

There are other armed conflicts similar to the one in Liberia, such as the civil war in Sudan. According to the Human Rights Watch organization, from the mid-1980's to 1991, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) maintained large camps of boys in Ethiopia from which they took fresh recruits when needed, regardless of the age of the children. In the beginning, the SPLA encouraged many children, most of which were boys, to leave their families and go to refugee camps in Ethiopia for "educational" purposes. Others fled to the camps to escape abuse from the government armies in their villages. When it was necessary, the boys were put into battalions known as the "Red Army," which an adult rebel commander said consisted of "young people, ages fourteen to sixteen." He also said that "when the Red Army fought . . . it was always massacred . . . They were not good soldiers because they were too young." Most of the 17,000 boys in the Ethiopian camps were escorted by the SPLA back to Sudan in 1991; some of these boys were sent to the front lines, while others were held back in camp as reserves. This clearly shows that the use of child soldiers was not an isolated incident, but, rather, was widely practiced.

However, the greatest damage done to such children of war is that, in most cases, they reach adulthood having spent their lives committing atrocities which may have psychologically affected them. According to case workers interviewed by Human Rights Watch, former child soldiers suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as insomnia, nightmares, flashbacks, bed-wetting, anxiety and depression. They grow up without a clear sense of judgement, morals and rules. Most importantly, children are withheld from their basic rights, the right to education. By the time these conflicts end, these child soldiers have grown up and find themselves without the skills and education

needed to work in post-war economies. This reintegration into society is very difficult, especially if the children are still young, for these former soldiers are often either orphans or have been rejected by their families because of the violent acts they are believed to have committed. It seems that a change is needed. The international law must be altered so that the minimum age requirement to join an army is higher.

Amnesty International: The Children's Action Network

Amnesty International is an international, world-wide, independent human rights organization working for the release of Prisoners of Conscience. Prisoners of Conscience are men, women and children who are imprisoned because of their beliefs, color, gender, ethnic origin, language, religion, or sexual orientation, provided that they have not used nor advocated violence. Amnesty also works for fair and prompt trials and an end to all torture and execution.

Children are vulnerable members of the world's population, and are therefore frequent targets of human-rights violations. In many countries, children have been subjected to countless forms of humiliation, degrading and life-threatening treatment. They are uniquely subjected to many forms of torture due to their defenseless position. Governments often take advantage of a child's position, and use child abuse as a weapon against others. Children are frequently tortured in front of family members in order to scare them into confessing to crimes which they have not committed. The children of alleged state enemies have been abducted, interrogated and abused.

A large part of the work which Amnesty International does concentrates on the well-being of children. Amnesty works on behalf of children who are unjustly detained, tortured or denied their fundamental human rights. An entire branch of Amnesty, the Children's Action Network, has dedicated all its work to the human rights of children. In an "Amnesty International USA"

Newsletter, it is stated that "The Children's Action Network (CAN) works to remove the word 'fear' from a child's vocabulary. Children are our future; they deserve to inherit a world in which they can grow and develop in freedom and safety. In accordance with Amnesty International's mandate. . . we strive to prevent torture and abuse."

It is crucial to understand that according to Amnesty International's definition, human rights violations against children do not only occur outside of the United States but within it as well.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases. Although this is a sensitive issue to which people show varying opinions, it seems surprising that the United States is one of very few countries which has instituted judicial executions for minors.

"The Supreme Court has ruled that the execution of offenders as young as 16 is permissible under the Constitution. More than 90 juveniles, all between the ages of 15 and 17 at the time of their offenses, have been sentenced to death in the U.S. since the death penalty was reinstated in the 1970's. There are more juvenile offenders on death row in the U.S. than in any other country that Amnesty International works on" (Jordan Lucoff, SAC for San Fernando Valley).

A promising step for children's rights in America was the United States ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The focus of this convention has been one of Amnesty International's major long term projects concentrating on children's rights. The Convention recognizes that children are individuals with needs that evolve with maturity. The Convention guarantees the right of children to special protection if deprived from a family environment; adequate health care, freedom from violence, exploitation or sale; equal treatment regardless of gender, race or cultural background; and freedom of thought, information, and expression. The Convention was designed as a treaty. As such, its goals are directed toward the establishment of national legislation to protect the rights of the child in relation to actions by the government, and not to regulate the relationship between parents and children.

It is crucial to understand that children's rights violations do not only occur outside of the

United States, but in it as well. Surprisingly, one hundred sixty-eight other nations signed the Convention in support of its ratification before the United States. Amnesty International made it a great priority in their work to urge President Clinton to sign the Convention for U.S. ratification. After a campaign which lasted for many months, the President did, in fact, sign the treaty.

Although the U.S. ratification demonstrates, to some extent, the nation's support of international human rights for children, the process is not over. There are many steps to be taken until government legislation is in full accordance with the Convention. The Senate will be given the responsibility to ensure that federal laws meet the standards of the treaty.

Members of Amnesty International take action against human rights violations by writing letters to the government officials of countries where the violations occur. Since the commencement of Amnesty International's letter-writing campaigns, hundreds of cases have been "adopted" by the organization specifically pertaining to children. By drawing international attention to specific instances of human rights abuses, the organization is often successful in relieving conditions for those who are suffering.

Every year, the members of the UNIS chapter of Amnesty International participate in rigorous letter writing campaigns in response to human rights abuses all around the world. Thousands of letters have been written by UNIS students, many of which concentrate on abuses against children. Some of these cases have happy endings; juvenile Prisoners of Conscience are often released; governmental torture of children is often ceased; the cases of minors facing judicial executions are often commuted. Yet, in other cases, children continuously suffer from these abuses.

Amnesty International urges its members and supporters to assume responsibility for all human rights violations, including those which involve children.

"The way a society treats children reflects not only its quality of compassion and protective caring, but also its sense of justice, its commitment to the future and its surge to enhance the human condition for coming generations" (Javier Perez de Cuellar, former Secretary General of the United Nations).



Perceptions

(These perceptions are not necessarily the views of the
UNIS/UN Student Conference Organizing Committee)

Children in Crisis: A World at Risk

by Solon Barocas

The success of a society depends upon its ability to nourish its children, promote their physical and emotional well being, provide for their safety, facilitate their education and help them to maximize their potential. Unfortunately, too many children worldwide are being deprived of these opportunities. The quality of life for millions of children continues to deteriorate and reflect a world at risk.

Alarming statistics suggest that the severity of children in crisis has reached epidemic proportions, and even threatens the stability of many communities. During the last decade, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of children living in poverty. In the United States alone, one out of four preschool children lives below the poverty line, and suffers the terrible assaults that poverty brings. Poor nutrition, inadequate medical care and growing numbers of homeless children all add to the cycle of despair. These problems are greatly magnified in minority communities across the United States, as well as in many developing countries. Before they even start school, many children of poverty have had their potential for success diminished, and their dreams and aspirations shattered.

The staggering divorce rate, having quadrupled in the past twenty years, has created millions of single-parent households, fueling the growing ranks of children who grow up in poverty. Furthermore, the growing reports of child abuse around the globe point to a world at risk. As economic conditions continue to deteriorate, unemployment increases and job opportunities diminish. Families struggle with feelings of anger, resentment and despair. With a loss of hope for the future, it is frequently the children who become convenient family scapegoats. During hard times, the most vulnerable of family members become targets of hostility and frustration. Tragic cases of child abuse, maltreatment and neglect continue to make the front pages of our daily newspapers, and politicians point fingers and scream for reform. Unfortunately, for many of the children who are victims of abuse, it is much too late.

On the educational front, reports indicate that close to twenty-five percent of American children drop out of high school before graduation. In some parts of the country, this rate exceeds fifty percent. Given the harsh economic realities we face today, these children are especially at risk. Crime, violence, drugs and alcohol will take their toll, preventing these children from ever fulfilling their potential. The arrest rate for juvenile offenders has more than tripled over the past twenty-five years. In addition, the number of teenage pregnancies has increased almost one hundred percent in the past twenty years, and the number of sexually-transmitted diseases is increasing at a frightening rate among teenagers.

The growing problem of children in crisis has become a global issue, threatening the strength and stability of nations throughout the world. Unless we begin to address this threat, our children, families and communities will suffer terrible consequences and lasting damage. Families, schools and communities must get involved in confronting the problems of children in crisis. We must save the children who are our future.

Cultural Relativism in Relation to Children

by Tamer El-Ghobashy

The rights of children is a pressing issue in the 1990's. Although we have come a long way from the late 19th century and the early 20th century, child abuse is still a prevalent problem. In many parts of the world, children are often beaten and starved nearly to death. It is reported by the National Labor Committee that there are cases in which children are forced to work under conditions not fit for farm animals. It has been said that the value people put on the rights of children is relative to each culture's moral code. This statement is true to a certain extent. When we hear that infanticide is practiced by some Chinese, for example, we often shake our heads in disapproval. When we consider the circumstances of the individuals who participate in the act, however, we find that it was done mainly for economic purposes. We then learn, through television or by reading newspapers and magazines, about a young single mother who killed her three-year-old daughter because she thought the girl was possessed by the devil. We look at this woman and call her a murderer. Why is it murder and not infanticide? Why is this woman arrested and subjected to the scrutiny of society, while others who engage in infanticide are left free?

Female infanticide is especially common in developing countries, where a boy in the family can have much more economic promise than a girl. It could be argued that infanticide is justified under these dire circumstances. Consider an example in which a household, consisting of two grandparents, two parents and three children, is expecting another child. The family lives on the low wages earned by the father and his son. The grandparents are old and ill and the mother must look after her younger son and daughter. When the fourth child is finally born, it turns out to be a girl. The parents must then bear the burden of supporting a family with two young girls, a son too young to work, a son old enough to work but too young to support himself, two aging grandparents, and themselves. The birth of a son would at least insure another worker in the family. With the birth of the new daughter, however, the family is burdened with another mouth to feed, one with no economic promise. Their options are to either keep the child and possibly die of starvation and poverty, or kill the child and try again. If they kill the child; most privileged people would probably point fingers and accuse them of putting minimal value on human life. If they keep the child, they risk death. It can be argued that this family does in fact place great value on human life because by sacrificing one life, they save seven lives.

If we take the case of the mother who murdered her young daughter by mentally and physically abusing her, we see that we are left with a similar situation. This mother was single and relied on welfare to support her three children and herself. Her defense was the claim that the child was possessed by the devil. How did this woman's economic and emotional status impact her behavior? Why is this woman arrested and called a murderer, while the previously-mentioned family is not? The answer to this is a cultural-relativist one. Our culture says that infanticide is wrong, but other cultures don't.

In the case of the poor family, the parents see the killing of their daughter as a justified action, while through the eyes of most people in the world, their act is seen as atrocious. Cultural relativism prevents us from criticizing other cultures' practices that we may find improper or even appalling. But if we cannot criticize other cultures, then how are we to stop obvious crimes such as infanticide? Anthropology is the study of people and their culture. Thus, from an anthropological perspective, the cultural relativist's approach is appropriate. I feel, however, that there is a need to bring attention to and stop child abuse. Thus, in my opinion, cultural relativism is counter-productive. I feel that we should not point fingers at others or criticize them, but, rather, that we must share the responsibility of eliminating infanticide and other crimes against children around the world.

Saturday Morning Cartoons: A Lesson in Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll

by Andee Browne

I've watched Saturday morning cartoons since I was very young. If, while watching them, I happen to see one of the many animated characters get injured, my first response, then and now, is to giggle. Now, about ten years later, if I happen to be near a television at around eleven p.m., I'll laugh at the stunts of two famous, animated, prepubescent boys. But now, as I laugh at their wacky new insults, my mind drifts to recent news reports of kids burning their houses down because they were mimicking these fictional characters. Television shows often incorporate violent situations and actions in their story lines that young children are not ready to evaluate and negotiate.

I am not just citing cartoons, or talking about children ages five to eight. I'm talking about an entire generation that is preoccupied with violence, sex, drugs and (as the cliché goes) rock 'n' roll. I'm talking about anyone who has ever gone to see an action movie and breathed "awesome" as they watched someone get blown away, or who has listened to a song by Nine Inch Nails or Snoop Doggy Dogg, two popular music groups, and has never once thought about what the lyrics mean.

This is an age in which kids are forced to grow up quickly, with advertisements all around us using sex to sell products. Violence is so rampant that even very young children are found carrying guns, either for protection or to illicit fear in others around them. Children are forced to act and think like adults at an early age. For example, I was five years old when I first heard profanity and about ten years old when I finally learned its meaning(s). Today, it really bothers me when I see five and six-year-old children using such words with fluency.

There is not one single cause that can be used as a scapegoat for the so-called 90's "pop culture problem." We can attack the television networks and record companies all we want. However, I do not think they started the problem. The twentieth century has been one of the most violent ages in history, encompassing wars that have involved many countries and the development of weapons that can destroy entire nations. It is an age of fear, a sort of "kill or be killed" mentality where people are afraid to trust one another.

I continue to watch cartoons and occasionally listen to profane and aggressive music, but I believe I am capable of understanding and negotiating what I see and hear. I think this is because my parents and teachers have taken the time to teach me right from wrong. Education and social experiences have provided me with the tools to evaluate experiences and make appropriate judgements and to decide for myself what is right and what is wrong. In an age of violence, I feel that there are many children in the world who have trouble making the right decisions, a skill that is vital in a society full of wrong roads.

The Government's Role in the Lives of Children

by Alexander Hom

The pattern of government action on behalf of children determines their status as citizens. Governments fund education and welfare programs for the public. The quality of education depends on such factors as public and political will, and the educational budget.

Governments need both necessary funding and public support. Japan and the United States, for example, both spend a lot of money on education. In Japan, however, public and political will are both high. The government is able to spend much of its budget on education. Hence, the educational system in Japan is effective, not only in quality, but also in cost. In the U.S., on the other hand, the current educational system has been eroded and desperately needs to be revised. The budget for education is occasionally cut and critical funding sometimes delayed, due to the national deficit. This can result in an ineffective educational system. Mexico, like Japan, has a fairly high political and public will, but, unlike Japan, it lacks funding to further its educational system. Wealthier, developed nations often fall into the cycle of diverting too much money away from education and putting it towards things like military defense. It is then hard to repair their education systems, for they have deteriorated so much.

Developing nations sometimes fall into a detrimental cycle of attracting foreign companies to invest in their country. Often the only resource these countries have is cheap manual labor. This cheap labor attracts many western companies, who produce their products at a much lower cost. Unfortunately, many times the best manual laborers are children (since children have greater dexterity than adults). This frequently leads to child labor, which is not necessarily a problem in itself. The problem lies in the lack of enforcement of existing labor laws in these developing nations. It seems to be in the interest of governments not to enforce labor laws which prohibit children from working and which set a minimum wage. Without labor laws, countries become much more attractive to foreign companies. This solves short-term problems, such as unemployment and starvation. As the factory hours do not allow the children to go to school, however, long-term problems are caused, such as a generation of uneducated and poor people. This stunts countries' economic growth.

Another common loophole is the re-ordering of priorities. Parents in developing countries often deem it more effective for their children to work and earn a salary than for them to be educated. Similarly, in war, when there is a lack of adult forces, children--young boys in particular--are called upon to fight. They are sometimes as young as nine years old and barely out of elementary school. These impressionable youths are torn apart psychologically and often turned into vicious killing machines, damaging their psyche forever and leading to a destroyed generation.

Other times education is not even an option. Some families must choose between educating their children and living in poverty, and maintaining family stability. The cycle becomes very hard to break as the state needs funding from taxation. However, with the infiltration of foreign companies, all investment goes back to the home countries. Developing nations are left with nothing but a population being paid less than minimum wage, who must struggle to feed themselves, let alone pay taxes. Hence, they become even more dependent on these companies.

Although New York City is a rather different scenario, such problems do exist, especially child poverty. Since I live there, I have seen firsthand evidence of this. Some studies have indicated that 1 in 5 children live in poverty. Although the majority of these children's parents work, they work for minimum wage and lack skills needed in higher-paying jobs.

There is a large concentration of poor families in New York City. The city tries to deal with the problem through welfare and other city services, but these services are not very efficient. They only act as bandages. This, combined with a lack of money due to recent budget cuts, makes it increasingly difficult to remedy this pressing problem. The results are teenage gangs, troubled, uneducated and uncultured youths, a lack of basic family values and a host of other problems as these children grow older.

I believe that, in the end, people must speak out for their children. Children are an important part of society. They are the future. The only way we can ensure that they will lead long, happy lives is to educate them well while they are young.

Abortion and the Rights of the Child

by Uttam Krishan Tambar

Abortion is often viewed only as an issue of a woman's right to determine her own fate, but it is also an issue concerning the nature of the fetus. The main question that has created a global debate about abortion is whether human personhood begins at conception. People against abortion often argue that a fetus is a person.

It is difficult to argue about abortion objectively, because the words used by people in the debate are often biased. For example, opponents of abortion refer to abortion as the killing of a fetus, whereas proponents of abortion refer to it as the termination of a pregnancy.

It is obvious that the central issue of abortion is the personhood of the fetus. If the fetus is a person, abortion can't be justified, for it is the deliberate murder of an innocent person. Many aspects of the abortion debate relate to this issue. People against abortion, who are said to be "pro-life," claim that a fetus is a person, and like all other persons, should have the right to life. People in favor of abortion, who are "pro-choice," believe a woman should have the right to choose whether she wants an abortion or not.

It is important to realize that there is a difference between being pro-choice and being pro-abortion. Someone who is pro-choice isn't necessarily in favor of abortion. To be pro-choice simply means to believe that a woman should be able to choose to have an abortion.

The argument that opponents of abortion use to show that abortion is wrong is simple. The first premise states that all deliberate killing of persons is wrong. The second premise states that an abortion is the deliberate killing of a person. Therefore, it follows that abortion is wrong. Most proponents of abortion disagree with the second premise. They believe that a fetus isn't a person, and that, therefore, it is not wrong to have an abortion.

To explain why some people believe that a fetus isn't a person, it is important to distinguish between a person and a human being. A human is a biological entity, anyone who is a member of our species. A person, on the other hand, is a philosophical concept. Most people will agree that a fetus is part of the human species. Therefore, in biological terms, the fetus is a human. Some advocates of abortion claim that a fetus isn't a person because it cannot perform certain acts that are performed by all persons. For example, all persons are expected to be rational and self-aware, and they are expected to think, love, and view all behavior from a moral point of view. It is obvious that a fetus isn't rational and cannot view its behavior from a moral point of view. Therefore, some people believe that although a fetus is human, it cannot be considered a person. Since only the lives of persons are sacred, advocates of abortion feel that the life of a fetus isn't sacred.

Many opponents of abortion define a person as someone with a genetic identity. Since a fetus possesses a genetic identity that will eventually define all of its characteristics, they claim that it can be considered a person from conception.

Proponents of abortion have a problem with this biological definition of a person. They believe that it isn't the biology of a person that makes killing one wrong. They believe that opponents of abortion confuse a *potential* person with an *actual* person. A fetus has the potential to be a person, but they believe that it still has to grow into a person. People who are pro-choice also believe that a fetus can't be considered a person, because it is part of another person, its mother. Persons are whole entities; they can't be part of another person.

Although the abortion debate may never be resolved, it is obvious that it is more than just an issue of women's rights. In fact, the debate is also concerned with the rights of a fetus. One way the debate can be resolved is if everyone comes to a consensus on whether or not a fetus is actually a person.

Public Secondary School Education in New York City

by Joslyn Meier

While government officials often state that providing our children with a sound education is one of the most important things we can do for them, when it comes down to taking action, education budgets are among the first to be cut. Moreover, teaching as a profession is often looked down upon rather than being highly regarded. As a result, within the United States, a system of education has developed in which two types of schools exist: public and private. Our country offers a free education through public schools which are funded by taxes: federal, state, and local. Private schools are founded and conducted by private groups, rather than the government, and are funded through tuition fees that students' parents pay. Except for special cases (such as scholarships), only those who can afford to pay tuition can attend private schools.

The public education system was founded to give every child an equal opportunity to learn. Unfortunately, this does not work on a practical basis because wealthier communities pay higher taxes resulting in increased funding for the public schools in their area. Higher-income families can also afford to put a lot more time and money into their child's school than a single parent who tries to hold two or three low-paying jobs at once. Wealthy families have a choice of schools, they can send their children to private schools, where they don't have to worry about the quality of education. Even middle-class families who cannot easily pay tuition are making sacrifices in order to send their children to private schools. On the other hand, a family that is not well off and doesn't have the resources to spend on educating their children does not have that choice, and ends up sending their child to a public school. Thus, the cycle continues; the public schools get worse since they do not have funding or influential advocates, and increased numbers of middle-class and wealthy families put their children in private schools. Unfortunately, these conditions are not discriminatory and exist everywhere, including New York City, which is known for its great disparities in wealth.

Public School (P.S.) 261 is an elementary school located in District 10 which encompasses a large part of the Bronx, one of the five boroughs of New York City. The school's official capacity is 900 students; however, 1,300 students currently attend. There is one full-time and one part-time guidance counselor, forming a ratio of 930 children per counselor. While the library holds 700 books, it does not contain any reference materials. There are 26 computers for 1300 children. Classrooms reach temperatures as high as 90 degrees and as low as 56 degrees.

P.S. 79, another elementary school in District 10, has 1,550 students, but only has an official capacity of 1,000. The nurse comes to school three days a week. Her office window is broken, and a plastic garbage bag covers a part of the ceiling to cover its holes. One girl complains of a toothache. The principal tells her that the nurse is out and asks her to call her mother. She responds, "My mother doesn't have a phone." The principal sends her back to class.

Morris High School is located in the South Bronx. It is the oldest school in the borough of the Bronx. According to The New York Times, blackboards are "so badly cracked that teachers are afraid to let students write on them for fear they'll cut themselves. Some mornings fallen chips of paint cover classrooms like snow . . . Teachers and students have come to see the humor in the waterfall that cascades down six flights of stairs after a heavy rain." One of the classrooms is sealed off because of a large hole in the floor. When asked about the condition of the building, one student replied, "You're getting it for free. You have no power to complain." Other schools are in need of repair as well, but the Board of Education's budget is not large enough to include repairing all of them.

Not all the public schools in New York City are characterized by these conditions. There are several effective alternative high schools in the city, as well as selective schools known as "magnet schools." In order to attend one of the selective institutions, a student must score above a certain cut-off point on an entrance examination. These schools are excellent and comparable to many private schools.

The New York City Public School System has a broad spectrum of educational milieus ranging from inadequate facilities and resources to challenging and effective academic programs. Clearly, there is a significant discrepancy in the educational opportunities for children depending on their economic status. Children of high income families have a better chance of receiving a high quality education than children of low income families. This discrepancy negates the equal opportunity for all children to learn.

New York City Public School Students' Perceptions and Comments:

- One student had 45 children in her fifth-grade class. "The teacher sometimes didn't know you. She would ask you, 'What's your name?'"
- A sixteen-year-old student from the South Bronx went to English class for two months before he was given a textbook. He wants to go to college, and he knows he must have good math and English skills. He asked his math teacher if she could give him some extra help. She said she didn't have time. He asked her if she would come an hour early, but security precautions made it impossible. He finds the problem " $2x-2=14$. What is x ?" baffling. He can't identify the verb in the sentence, "Jack walks to the store." There are 42 students in his science class, 40 in his English class, and 45 in his homeroom. When all the students show up, five of them have to stand in the back.
- The student of an English teacher showed up in class for the first time. She told the student to wait to see if somebody was absent before he could sit down. The student responded by saying, "I'm leaving." Others advised the teacher that the problem would resolve itself. Half of the students would be gone by Christmas-time.
- A class of third-graders had four different teachers within five months.
- At a school in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, due to lack of space, bathrooms, gyms, hallways, and closets have been converted into classrooms.

Conclusion

This Working Paper has identified prevalent issues affecting children worldwide, from social, cultural, political, and economic perspectives.

The state of children, however, is in constant flux. Thus, it is difficult to determine what specific measures need to be taken to overcome the struggles they face. Education is perhaps our most powerful ally. Its absence can result in the wasting of young, bright minds, and render children incapable of improving present, and future conditions. Such children often reach adulthood without the basic skills they need to survive. It is all very well to recognize the value of being culturally relative. Frequently, different practices are the result of differences in circumstances, not differences in values. Education, however, should not be a relative issue, but must play a major role in the lives of all children. Through education, children can have their voices heard; they can gain power. This is important, both because they are in an especially vulnerable position, and because they are rarely listened to.

We, the youth of today, must strive for empowerment, no matter what drastic changes it may entail. There is nothing that is etched in stone; nothing that must remain sacrosanct; nothing that cannot be changed. With new ideals and goals for the future, the children of today can overcome the obstacles that lie ahead.

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