

Preface

The most dangerous period of life for every living thing is the earliest phase of its life span. This is true also for human beings, but with a difference. Unlike other animals and plants, this fundamental reality of life is neither necessary nor inevitable for human beings. For the human child early death, injury, harm, and abuse of all kinds can be prevented, and, in many cases, virtually eliminated. However, in societies across the globe all too often the reality is quite otherwise. Millions of young people throughout the world face early death, violence, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and exploitation. This need not be the case. The worldwide victimization of young people does not have to occur, or, at least, its incidence can be greatly reduced if purposive action is taken to do so.

In seeking to help achieve this end, this volume documents some of the numerous ways in which young people throughout the world are victimized by others of their species – particularly adults – and what, if anything, is or can be done to curb the harm inflicted on them. Eight distinct forms of victimization are addressed at length in this analysis. Specifically we describe sexual, physical, and economic harm inflicted by others on young people throughout the world. Included are discussions of child prostitution and pornography, economic exploitation, physical and other abuse inflicted on young people in schools and other institutions, the use of children as armed combatants, and the denial of the basic needs and rights of children to such things as a home and education.

The victimizations addressed do not, of course, exhaust the list of possibilities. In choosing which victimizations to investigate our first consideration was to address forms of harm impacting young people in all or most of the world's societies, victimization that are, in effect, global in scope. Second, we sought to include victimizations that are purposive-harms committed by people against young people. Third, of necessity, our choice of topics was limited by the available research and information.

We make no pretense at being experts in youth victimization as such, any of its diverse forms, or the localities in which many of these activities take place. But we do bring together examples and information regarding the numerous ways in which young people are manipulated and exploited against their own wellbeing and interests, and, therefore, the long term interests of us all. In discussing the eight forms

of victimizations addressed, this book attempts to draw together the global literature on child and youth victimization in order to better understand both why such activity exists and its pervasiveness throughout the world. But we also seek to illuminate how the victimization of young people is, or may be, combated. The citations throughout this volume reference information from individuals or organizations, experts in specific topics, that offer readers numerous resources to consult should they care to explore specific issues more fully.

We also do not claim to be exhaustive in our analysis of important forms of youth victimization. In some parts of the world, for example, children are “married off” to others without their fully realizing what has transpired. In some parts of the world, millions of girls and young women suffer greatly from religious or culturally mandated genital mutilation. Each year, millions of children die each year before reaching age five from preventable diseases or the consequences of malnutrition. And everywhere young people can be the targets of psychological and emotional attack from parents or others. Such victimizations have been left out of our analysis. This is not because they are unimportant or do not inflict harm on many young people. In some cases published information on a particular topic may be quite limited. Or, on the other hand, even if a vast reservoir of research has been published, it largely concerns children in a single country, such as the United States. Our goal in this inquiry is to provide a global overview of a number of pervasive forms of youth victimization that appear to be persistent, impact large numbers of young people, are not culturally specific, and have been of concern to human rights organizations for many years.

We have drawn freely from a very large and diverse reservoir of information in our discussions of each form of victimization addressed. Either in general, or specifically, the examples of victimizations addressed here have received considerable attention and much research from child rights activists, the mass media, international organizations, and scholars in varied scientific disciplines, with some fields of inquiry represented more than others. For instance, criminology and criminal justice have focused attention on investigating and understanding the criminal behavior of young people, and what is done and should be done to combat it. Consequently, the sciences of crime have devoted tremendous energy to understanding the illegal behavior of young people. Although victimization clearly falls within their purview, they have largely ignored the other side of the coin, the victimization of children and young people. On the other hand, other scientific disciplines, especially social work and psychology, and to a lesser extent sociology, have produced a sizable literature on the general topic of victimization, and a hefty portion of that work is devoted to the study of child victims and victimization. Specialized journals also focus on research and theories on why such behavior may occur. But most of this inquiry is limited in geographic scope with an occasional reference to research carried out in different societies across the globe. But there is no systematic compilation of what is known about the victimization of children and young people in its diverse forms across the globe in this literature.

Thus, illuminating as it may be, the information provided by scientific disciplines on youth victimization is of limited value in drawing a comprehensive picture of the extent and nature of youth victimization on a global scale. Consequently,

we have relied upon other sources of information to understand its worldwide nature and patterns. Specifically, the vast literature provided by the United Nations, UNICEF, UNESCO, and other international agencies is invaluable for anyone seeking to learn about this subject. In addition, organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Childwatch International are rich authoritative sources of information and insights. Publications offered by numerous NGOs working in specific countries, or on specific issues, were also heavily relied upon in our research. And much can be gleaned from media stories, especially reports produced by the BBC and other internationally reputable publications.

In conducting our research, the internet proved to be an essential means of locating and accessing all manner of information. Wherever possible, internet sources are cited in the reference section to allow readers the widest possible access to the resources we employed in compiling our narratives. Readers with access to the internet should easily be able to locate almost all the material referenced throughout this volume should they care to explore specific topics or cases more fully.

The analysis presented in this volume is based on two major premises. First, and foremost, is the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. This international agreement provides the foundation that children are to be protected and that in doing so they have certain rights by virtue of their status as "children." The Convention and later protocols have been accepted by almost all nations as legally binding standards for the treatment of young people and recognition of their rights as human beings worthy of respect and nurturance. While some may take issue with some specific aspects of this agreement, it is the single most widely ratified United Nations agreement attesting to its global acceptance as a standard for conduct pertaining to children everywhere in the world. As such, the provisions of this agreement served to guide our assessment of forms of behavior deemed to be victimizing of young people.

Since the international declarations have been agreed to by almost all the world's governments, the second premise concerns the role of governments in the victimization of young people. We fully accept the idea that governments legitimately exist only to serve and protect the governed. As stated so elegantly in the United States Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.....

This sentiment that governments are created to secure the wellbeing of the governed is also articulated, in one fashion or another, in essentially all constitutions enacted in various countries since the United States government was established. Although not specifically mentioned in such documents, young people are among those included in the words "people," "governed," or "nation." As such, governments are created to secure and protect their rights and wellbeing as much as those of any other segment of the population. Therefore, if children are victimized and governments fail to take adequate steps to prevent or redress that victimization, such

victimization is not only a function of the individuals engaged in the victimizing behavior, it is also a reflection of the failure of governments to exercise their duty to protect a country's children. To the extent that this failure-to-protect is within the power of government officials, the victimization of children and young people in any society is ultimately a form of government crime. In this regard, a central argument of this volume is that the worldwide, and pervasive, victimization of young people is to be understood as and ultimately addressed as a form of "government crime" against the young.

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Problems and Solutions

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