

Preface

Over one billion children are growing up throughout the world in contexts of political violence and armed conflict. A burgeoning literature attests to the significant and many risks and challenges these environments pose to the development of children. The well-being and mental health of these children are a matter of great international concern and an issue of rapidly growing interest to scholars, students, and practitioners who may wish to contribute to both understanding of the risks and challenges and the development of more effective prevention and intervention strategies to help the children cope with these environments.

However, gaining access to the contributions of this fast-growing literature involving many regions of the world presents many obstacles to those who may want to comprehend the status of what we know at this point. For example, the pertinent literature is published across multiple disciplines and in many different publication outlets, involving diverse regions of the world, so that the process of locating and evaluating this work poses daunting, even overwhelming, roadblocks for potentially interested readers. In addition, the quality of this literature is highly variable, ranging from well-intentioned but relatively weakly designed works that may not be amenable to confident interpretation to other studies that meet relatively high, even laudable, standards of methodological rigor, analysis, and interpretation.

The goal of this volume is to accomplish an accessible, up-to-date presentation and analysis of this diverse, important literature on the risks, well-being, and adjustment of children growing up throughout the world in contexts of political violence and armed conflict, including basic and applied research on these questions. Another goal is to provide an organizational framework that fosters a systematic analysis of the quality of the research. This is broadly accomplished by the application of a developmental psychopathology perspective that provides a cutting-edge basis for evaluating and fostering the study of normal development and the development of psychopathology in children.

Specifically, a four-tiered framework informed by the tenets of developmental psychopathology is employed for integrating and evaluating the current empirical literature on this topic. Although we inevitably exclude many studies from further consideration for not meeting our minimal standards of scientific rigor, beyond that,

we endeavor to represent at least in the frequency counts for research, all studies that meet threshold for making contributions to the field at each tier. Notably, research on this topic poses great methodological, practical, financial, and statistical challenges. Our perspective is much work makes important contributions, even if not meeting all the criteria ideal in laboratory studies or in less challenging social-ecological contexts, so we endeavor in this book to be inclusive.

In terms of the organization of this volume, the urgency of the study of youth in contexts of political violence and armed conflict from a worldwide perspective is discussed in Chap. 1. Next, the guiding model for review in terms of a developmental psychopathology perspective is succinctly described in Chap. 2. More specifically, a framework for review of research from a developmental psychopathology perspective in terms of a four-tiered framework is presented in Chap. 3. This four-tiered “pyramid” model, which is shown in Fig. 3.1, reflects the assumption that research progresses up the pyramid in the following stages (1) the documentation of the developmental outcomes of exposure to violence, including level of exposure to traumatic violence and exploration of variations as a function of demographic differences; (2) studies additionally providing initial exploration of the role of mediators, moderators, and social-ecological contexts based on cross-sectional studies; (3) longitudinal, process-oriented work; and (4) prevention and intervention research.

For each tier, in the chapters that follow, the count of studies in the literature meeting criteria for each tier is indicated, and bottom-line messages of the research are reviewed. Given the extensive numbers of studies meeting criteria for each tier (especially Tiers 1 and 2), and the aim to accomplish a worldwide review across multiple contexts of conflict and violence that is our goal, the presentation of all studies meeting criteria, along with details on research design and social-ecological contexts, was not feasible. Accordingly, rich detail on the state of the art for each tier of research is accomplished through detailed presentations (e.g., region sampled, assessment timing, participants sampled, measures, and major findings) for a selected, substantial number of the best studies by our assessment for each tier (typically about 20 studies for each tier). The aim is to provide an extensive overview of the specific characteristics and contributions of many of the best studies at each level of analysis, all of which we judged as highly important in multiple respects. This approach is intended to provide interested students and scholars with a handy, conceptually organized reference or handbook of the characteristics, contents, and contributions of many of the specific, state-of-the-art studies that have been conducted throughout the world pertinent to each region of the world and tier of approach. We realize that we inevitably were not able to include all of the relevant studies. However, we feel confident we have accomplished an extensive representation of the state of the art in this volume that can serve as a ready and accessible handbook and reference for students and scholars interested in a review and critical analysis of this highly important, burgeoning area of study.

In addition, through the mechanism of this framework, the state of knowledge in this area is evaluated and critical assessments are made of the strengths and

weaknesses of current research. We recognize that there are many practical, methodological, and statistical challenges associated with studying children's development in contexts of political violence and armed conflict. Aims of this book also include providing specific bases for advancing the state of basic, process-oriented research that examines youth adjustment at multiple social-ecological levels, including advanced concepts for stronger research design and analysis, as well as more effective, theory-guided translational prevention and intervention efforts.

Accordingly, Chap. 8 provides a vision for future research from a developmental psychopathology perspective. Recommendations are made for research at each specific tier of the "pyramid" for research on political violence, armed conflict, and youth adjustment from a developmental psychopathology perspective on research and intervention. Numerous issues and questions unresolved by current research are identified, and future directions for more integrated process-oriented basic and applied research are outlined. A central theme for future research is that translational efforts for the development of more effective and scientifically rigorous prevention and intervention research must include a closer interplay between basic and applied research that elevates the state of knowledge, increasing the likelihood that applied programs make a positive impact in the lives of children and families.

Chapter 9 concludes the book by reiterating the key messages of the road map provided by this volume for future research in this area. In particular, the road map indicates the need to expand the range of analyzed outcomes and levels of the social ecology that are examined, as well as new and more rigorous approaches toward evaluating explanatory processes accounting for the developmental outcomes in children growing up in the contexts of political violence and armed conflict. In conclusion, this volume is intended to encourage researchers to advance programs of research that are informed by developmental theory, basic and applied research, and that employ adequately sophisticated research designs and statistical methods to address the core challenges, stresses, concerns and possible sources of protection and resilience related to the normal development and development of psychopathology in children growing up in contexts fraught by political violence and armed conflict.

Notre Dame, USA
Geneseo, USA
Belfast, UK
Minneapolis, USA

E. Mark Cummings
Christine E. Merrilees
Laura K. Taylor
Christina F. Mondì

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Cummings, E.M.; Merrilees, C.E.; Taylor, L.K.; Mondi, C.F.

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