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Tragically, civilians are increasingly affected by war, with many of them being children and youth. Although experiences of war and other severe political conflict often produce long-lasting trauma, it is important to ask what can be done to minimize the effects of war exposure. Research typically focuses on mental health and on how exposure to war generates symptoms of posttraumatic stress or other pathological outcomes of exposure to war; however, the chapters in this volume all concern children and youth who demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of war experiences. According to Masten (2011), several kinds of phenomena have been studied under the umbrella term of resilience: (1) *beating the odds* in situations of high cumulative risk for developmental problems, (2) *coping well* under difficult circumstances, (3) *bouncing back* after some catastrophe or severe deprivation and (4) *posttraumatic growth* following adversity, through transformational reorganization of developing systems. All contributors to this volume endorse one or more of these views of resilience, with a special focus on the unique physical and psychosocial

risks war presents for children and their families. We consider these issues in four sections.

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## Section 1: Social-Ecological Approaches to Promoting Resilience in Children of War

Section 1 of the book explores social-ecological models of resilience and their application to promote resilience and psychosocial well-being. The first two chapters present a model of social-ecological resilience, along with evidence in support of this approach. The third chapter discusses social-ecological guidelines developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to help maximize the effectiveness of interventions to help children and communities affected by war. The final chapter in this section provides a richly detailed application of these IASC guidelines in Afghanistan.

In their chapter, *Promoting Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being in Children Affected by Political Violence; Current Evidence for an Ecological Resilience Approach*, Tol, Jordans, Kohrt, Betancourt and Komproe review findings on resilience in children affected by political violence from a social-ecological perspective and develop a model of social-ecological resilience. They present evidence suggesting that it may be beneficial to strengthen protective processes within families. Furthermore, they cite research demonstrating that sociocultural processes such as ideological commitment and religious beliefs can promote better mental health. However,

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Tol et al. recommend that those interested in building on resilience processes develop programmes through context-sensitive participative assessments and closely monitor preventive interventions, since this prevention may exact a large societal cost, for example, when promoting traditional practices that inadvertently reinforce stigma or marginalization.

In their second chapter, *Promoting Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being in Children Affected by Political Violence; Part II: Expanding the Evidence Base*, Tol et al. examine several limitations in the literature on resilience of children affected by armed conflict, namely, (a) a lack of longitudinal research, (b) limited knowledge of transactional processes, (c) few findings that span different sociocultural settings and (d) the need for greater theoretical development. They describe four recent research projects that were aimed at overcoming some of these limitations. First, the authors report on a longitudinal study of the risk and protective processes that help promote the psychosocial adjustment and social reintegration of former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. Next, they describe how variables at different ecological levels (developed in collaboration with former child soldiers in Nepal) contributed to outcomes on a measure of positive psychosocial well-being. Third, in a study with children affected by armed conflict in Burundi and Sudan, they show the value of single-case studies in developing theory about effective treatment processes. Finally, their fourth study of a school-based intervention with children in Indonesia examined mediators and moderators of intervention effects within a cluster randomized trial. These examples show how advances in longitudinal and multi-level statistics—along with theory development and a participatory context-sensitive approach—can help us better understand the complexity of resilience of children in areas of armed conflict.

In *Promoting Resilience in Children of War*, Magid and Boothby also endorse a social-ecological approach to promoting resilience in children affected by war. Protective factors available to children immediately before, during and after an event, along with risk reduction, can be crucial in improving developmental outcomes. In particular, they explain how the IASC *Guidelines on*

*Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings* (2007) use a social-ecological model to promote resilience. Because most psychosocial support is provided from within a community and not by outside interveners, the IASC guidelines propose programmes that form a four-level pyramid. From the base of the pyramid to the top, these four levels are (1) basic services and security; (2) community and family supports; (3) focused, non-specialized supports; and (4) specialized services. Each layer of the pyramid is essential and must be implemented simultaneously; however, the supports near the base of the pyramid tend to benefit the most people; and the mental health style interventions at the top tend to be needed for only a few individuals experiencing emergency situations.

In their chapter, *Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being of Children in Afghanistan*, Ventevogel, Jordans, Eggerman, van Mierlo and Panter-Brick provide a detailed case study of efforts to promote resilience in Afghanistan. They begin by reviewing previous literature on child-focused research and interventions designed to promote mental health and psychosocial well-being in Afghanistan. The authors adopt a broad perspective that not only looks at children's mental health (including epidemiological and clinical data on disorders and psychological distress) but also situates it contextually in terms of the economic, cultural and social structures that affect children's daily suffering, vulnerability or resilience. Although this review shows the importance of promoting community-based, culturally grounded and carefully evaluated approaches to resilience, the authors note that studies reviewed often fail to adhere to such principles explicitly or are lacking in depth. The authors then present a number of recommendations, set within the framework outlined in the IASC guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support in emergency situations. Furthermore, they stress the importance of ongoing non-war-related adversity (e.g. poverty) as generating moderate to severe levels of psychosocial distress suggests the need for broader-based psychosocial interventions. Indeed, the authors note that structural injustices (e.g. gender and ethnic discrimination, lack of stable employment opportunities and exposure to violence) deserve specific attention in Afghanistan.

## Section 2: Child Soldiers

The second section of this volume considers the particularly troubling issue of child soldiers. The first two chapters in this section explore reasons why children become soldiers, while the third considers ways to reintegrate child soldiers into communities after conflicts have ended.

In *When Children Become Killers: Child Soldiers in the Civil War in Sierra Leone*, Zack-Williams explores the growing phenomenon of child soldier as a growing feature of modern warfare. In particular, his chapter is a case study of the civil war in Sierra Leone, which saw the use of child combatants by both sides: the government and its allies (the Civil Defense Force) versus the rebel and their allies (the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council). Zack-Williams considers the role children played in the civil war, which children were targeted, and how they were recruited to become child soldiers. He notes that many children who joined the national army seized the chance for employment in the army to escape from their life as “street children,” which was often precarious and dangerous. A significant number of the young fighters who joined the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were drawn to its ideological appeal of the RUF and its charismatic leader. Zack-Williams points to another factor that drew children in Sierra Leone into armed groups challenging existing political authorities: loss of the bond of trust and reciprocity between generations. Within this context, he presents four key aspects of resilience: (1) critical-mindedness that shields children from discrimination and forms the basis of a critique of existing social conditions; (2) agency or active engagement at home, in school and among peers that results in a positive impact on their environment; (3) flexibility that promotes adaptation to cognitive, social, emotional and physical demands, in a bicultural setting; and (4) communalism, or the celebration of social bonds, social duties and collective well-being. These issues important to promoting the resilience of child soldiers are further considered in the next chapter.

Stark and Wessells in their chapter, *The Fallacy of the Ticking Time Bomb: Resilience of*

*Children Formerly Recruited into Armed Forces and Groups*, cite increasing evidence that most children formerly recruited into armed forces or groups can be rehabilitated to become functional members of their families and communities. In other words, despite claims to the contrary, these children are not a “ticking time bomb of angry, alienated and traumatized youth whose only skills ... are those they learned at war” (Child soldiers, 2008). Indeed, Stark and Wessells propose a paradigm shift from a deficits- to a strength-based approach that strives to understand and support these children as they attempt to shed their wartime identities and rejoin civilian life. The authors explore the resilience of formerly recruited children and analyse how their reintegration into civilian life is supported by five key elements: (1) psychosocial interventions, (2) cultural and spiritual practices, (3) education, (4) livelihoods and (5) family and community mobilization and reconciliation. Recognizing the enormity of the ethical challenges associated with any attempt to reintegrate formerly recruited children into their communities, the chapter concludes with a reflection on the humanitarian principle “Do No Harm.”

Buchanan, Al-Mashat, Cortes, Djukic, Jaghori and Thompson present two studies in their chapter, *Children of War in Columbia and Iraq*. Using narrative methods, the authors examine the effects of war on children and processes that promote resilience, along with recommendations to help children who have experienced war. The first study considers factors that promote resilience in former child soldiers in Colombia in one of the government’s rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The other study examined the impacts of war experiences on Iraqi children who survived the US military’s so-called Operation Iraqi Freedom. Protective factors for these two studies are shown to vary due to significant contextual differences between countries, communities, families and individual children. The authors conclude their chapter with a review of protective factors that aim to ameliorate the condition of children suffering from the trauma of war. Important among these protective factors are effective coping strategies, belief systems (such as religious beliefs and ideologies) and

social relations—especially family relationships. Finally, it is important to assess and address locally salient daily stressors like poverty, family violence, unsafe housing and social isolation that often accompany acute war trauma.

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### **Section 3: Institutional Support for Children Affected by War**

The two chapters in this section explore institutional supports for children who have been affected by war. The first examines efforts to create Child Friendly Spaces in areas of conflict; the second considers orphanages as important sites for promoting resilience using culturally important beliefs and practices such as Buddhism.

Kostelny and Wessells in their chapter, *Child Friendly Spaces: Promoting Children's Resiliency Amidst War*, note that although exposure to war threatens children's development and well-being, protective practices present in families and communities can help buffer negative developmental outcomes. In this regard, it is critical to minimize risk and enhance protective support for children's well-being at multiple levels of their sociocultural ecology. They focus their chapter on efforts to establish Child Friendly Spaces after armed conflict—a widely used intervention that integrates protection, psychosocial support and educational opportunities for children. The authors discuss the purpose and function of Child Friendly Spaces, and their intended benefits for children who participate in them. Using case studies from Afghanistan and Uganda, they illustrate some of these benefits as well as some of the challenges of this intervention method. Kostelny and Wessells conclude by suggesting ways to more systematically manage these challenges so as to strengthen this approach.

In their chapter, *Promoting Resilience Through Faith Development in Orphans of War in Sri Lanka*, Fernando and Ferrari assess the role of orphanages in promoting resilience in war-orphan and non-war-orphan children in Sri Lanka. The authors use a social-ecological model of resilience that explores the relationships between

children's psychosocial well-being and institutions like family and orphanage. They also consider how cultural contexts incorporate local idioms of risk and resilience and culturally appropriate meaning-making as part of a dynamic system that promotes well-being even in the face of terrible tragedies children in war orphanages have experienced. Particular attention is paid to Buddhism as a critical ideology in the lives of people in Sri Lanka, including for children living in these orphanages.

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### **Section 4: Resilience Among Refugees**

Much of our knowledge about the effects of war on children and adolescents comes from research on refugees. The fourth section concerns resilience among refugees and contains five chapters. The first three chapters in this section use narrative methods to document the experience of immigration to North America. The first chapter involves refugees from the former Yugoslavia, while the next two chapters involve immigrants from Africa. The final two chapters discuss successful programmes to help immigrants become more resilient. While the fourth chapter of the section describes a programme designed to help immigrants just arriving in Australia, the last chapter explores how public school education can be adapted to help young immigrants become more resilient.

In her chapter, *Relational Resilience*, Daiute argues that, like human development itself, resilience is a social-relational process. The chapter focuses on how children's cognitive and emotional responses emerge in language and other symbolic interactions with family, community and nation. This development occurs as they make sense of the world around them and their place within it. Daiute illustrates this process through examples from her studies of youth growing up during and after the wars in the former Yugoslavia that occurred in the 1990s (Daiute, 2010). She discusses issues of study design and analyses needed to advance theory, research and practice that address conflict-related

displacement. Daiute concludes by noting that research from many theoretical perspectives encourages the examination of resilience as a relational process, situated in specific circumstances and not simply an essential aspect of individual character.

In her chapter, *Coping and Adaptation: A Narrative Analysis of Children and Youth from Zones of Conflict in Africa*, McAdam uses narrative inquiry to research the coping and adaptation of nine youth who survived situations of political conflict in Africa as children. Her research highlights the role of culture in framing individual coping and adaptation under conditions of extreme adversity. She also proposes the need to design culturally appropriate policies and practices for refugee children of war, in which understanding resilience involves understanding not only universal human characteristics but culturally specific behaviours important to people's personal experience of psychosocial well-being.

The chapter by Bates, Johnson and Rana, *Pathways of Success Experiences Among the "Lost Boys" of Sudan*, continues the exploration of resilience among African refugees. It reviews findings from 8 years of research on the adaptation of Sudanese refugee youth who resettled in the United States, and explores the developmental pathways of four successful young men 10 years after resettlement. Although separated from parents as children and exposed to trauma and chronic adversity related to civil war, these youth were found to demonstrate notable resilience. Moreover, the authors found common pathways to successful adaptation in Africa and the United States. Personal characteristics such as sociability, flexibility and a strong sense of purpose were common to successful youth, as were supportive relationships with adult mentors and peers. Cultural beliefs and values were also important in helping youth to adapt while maintaining a sense of "where they came from." In general, these key personal characteristics, supportive relationships and the availability of community resources were essential in coping with adversity.

*No Place Like Home: Resilience Among Adolescent Refugees Resettled in Australia*, by

Robinson, first summarizes past research on the many ways in which war influences the mental health of child and adolescent refugees, both in their homelands, in countries of asylum and after repatriation or resettlement. She then considers the methodological issues inherent in research that examines the effects of war through the study of refugees. Robinson also presents an empirical study that compares the adaptation of two groups of mid-adolescent refugees who were new arrivals to Australia: The first group were exposed to effects of war, while the second were voluntary migrants, not exposed to war. Robinson found both resilience and vulnerability among the adolescent war refugees. In terms of resilience, most adolescent refugees had average or above average academic progress and peer acceptance, and emotional and behavioural problems that were within the normal range for Western samples. Nevertheless, adolescent refugees showed lower academic progress and peer acceptance, and more emotional and behavioural problems, than did their voluntary migrant peers.

In their chapter, *Pathways to Resilience: The Role of Education in War-Zone Immigrant and Refugee Student Success*, Stermac, Clarke and Brown note that, despite decades of migration from global conflict zones, it is difficult to develop guidelines and "best practices" to help immigrant and refugee students learn in educational settings. The main challenge is due to our limited knowledge of how traumatic stress has affected these students. Accumulating international research suggests, however, that multiple contextual factors play a critical role in academic achievement among students from war zones, including language acquisition opportunities, institutional supports, instructional practices and strategies of teacher-student engagement. Stermac's previous research suggests that these contextual factors likely enhance student confidence and resiliency, and provide an optimal path to educational and academic achievement and success. Thus, the authors propose that engaging these factors may establish "best practices" for supporting academic success among students with histories of war-trauma exposure.



## Section 5: Extending Our Understanding of the Effects of War on Children

### Theory and Practice

In section five, we consider efforts to extend and challenge the very notion of resilience. The first chapter of this section considers youth who have grown up in communities in which political violence is an accepted response to historical grievances, and therefore integral to the psychosocial identity of some youth. The second chapter cites similar cases to show that we cannot consider wartime experiences to have a similar meaning for all participants: How youth experience war will depend on how they interpret the meaning of those experiences. This may help explain why most youth interviewed seem remarkably resilient, a finding that challenges the very notion of resilience. The following chapter takes a lifespan perspective, demonstrating that the effects of war on children differ according to an individual's degree of developmental maturity as well as to the specific contexts of war experience; sadly, in some cases, the effects of war trauma emerge only years later. The final chapter for this section presents an integrative summary of effective resilience-enhancing interventions to help children of war at different social-ecological levels, offering a toolkit of possible interventions to promote resilience among war-affected youth.

According to Muldoon in her chapter, *Political Violence, Identity, and Psychological Adjustment in Children*, concern for youth growing up in situations of political violence has led to two distinct strands of research: (1) studies of the mental health consequences of political violence and (2) how attitudes are shaped by the social divisions that accompany political violence. While these two literatures are often considered separately, Muldoon considers them together: More specifically, she considers how the social identification processes that underlie political attitudes affect both children's experiences and how they interpret and adapt to those experiences.

Muldoon notes that boys, in particular, are more likely to adapt by acting out, especially when they grow up in poverty, in violence-prone areas. Political, national or gender identities are also an important factor in political conflict. Social identities in groups that condone violence increase the likelihood of youth participating in political violence, because such identities normalize and rationalize the use of violence to resolve conflict. Such identities can also buffer the mental health impact of any stressors. More generally, any efforts to reduce violence must target the social, economic and political causes of conflict, creating a society that promotes general well-being while supporting individual efforts to become resilient.

In their chapter, *How Can a Majority Be Resilient? Critiquing the Utility of the Construct of Resilience Through a Focus on Youth in Contexts of Political Conflict*, Barber and Doty challenge these presumptions even further. They begin by synthesizing paradoxical findings from the literature on political conflict, showing that most children are not adversely affected by war because their understanding of their war experiences depends on their specific experiences and how they are interpreted. For example, the authors claim that Palestinian youth see political conflict as a continuation of a historical struggle for basic rights and self-determination. Barber and Doty then discuss reasons why the expectation of widespread dysfunction in youth experiencing political conflict is misguided. More generally, they propose that research should examine (1) specific types of conflict exposure experienced, (2) the effect of conflict on specific domains of youth functioning and (3) the long-term effects of different types of exposure to situations of war. Their overall conclusion is that resilience—as commonly construed in the research literature—is not a useful way to identify a set of individuals who are uniquely adaptive in contexts of severe political conflict. The authors propose that their approach allows for a more focused effort to determine who is not resilient, and under what circumstances.

In *Resilience in the Lives of Children of War*, Garbarino and Bruyere extend the previous

discussion of resilience, and bring it full circle by adopting a lifespan developmental and ecological perspective advocated in the first section of the book. In their chapter, they note that a core insight of an ecological perspective is that child development takes place in the very specific contexts of a child's life: it is not universal. In this regard, child development does not work exactly the same way for everyone in every situation; rather, it involves a complex interaction between a child's biology and psychology and the influences of family, community, culture and society. All of these elements combine to produce an "ecological niche" for individual development. As a result, the authors note that when one asks the developmental question "Does X cause resilience?" the best scientific answer is "it depends": It depends upon who the child is and where they develop. However, Garbarino and Bruyere argue that to understand and promote children's well-being requires adopting the developmental and philosophical insights of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child within each particular context, as a way of asserting universal values.

In their chapter, *Evidence-Based Resilience-Enhancing Intervention Methods for Children Affected by Armed Conflict*, Peltonen and Palosaari provide a literature review of factors protecting the mental health of children in war zones and related resilience-enhancing intervention methods. In their chapter, their aim is to provide a "toolbox" for intervention planners. Among the resilience-based methods identified as techniques are those related to children's cognitive, emotional and social skills; their social support systems; and community attitudes. The methodological quality of the intervention studies reviewed ranged from poor (pre- to post-evaluations with no comparison group) to good (randomized controlled trials). Further studies among younger children and families as

a whole as well as among children living in institutions are recommended.

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## Conclusion

The concluding chapter by Ferrari and Fernando explores themes that integrate the various chapters in the volume, while pointing out important differences in how resilience is conceptualized. Contributors to this volume all agree that a multi-pronged strategy is needed to help children caught up in political violence, one that both reduces risk factors and strengthens protective factors that support children's psychosocial well-being. While it is difficult to study the effects of war on children and youth, and even the success of interventions, in a rigorous scientific way, important efforts have been made to do so as seen in the chapters in this handbook. A more comprehensive developmental theory and iterative methodological approaches such as design experiments—as well as case studies and more rigorously controlled trials and more developmentally and context-sensitive interventions—can improve the psychosocial well-being of children and their families affected by war.

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