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STRESSORS, SUPPORTS AND THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF
DISPLACEMENT: PSYCHOSOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF AN EMERGENCY
EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR CHECHEN ADOLESCENTS
DISPLACED IN INGUSHETIA, RUSSIA

ABSTRACT. This study explored the psychosocial benefits of an emergency education intervention serving adolescents displaced by the war in Chechnya. It set out to describe key stressors and sources of social support available to youth served by the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) emergency education program. Interviews were conducted with 57 Chechen adolescents living in spontaneous settlements in Ingushetia, Russia in the fall of 2000. Of particular interest was the degree to which the education program addressed specified psychosocial goals. Findings indicated that young people and their families faced a number of physical and emotional stressors. The data indicated that the emergency education program provided benefits by enriching sources of social support, providing meaningful activity and a sense of hope for the future, and creating a space for young people to spend time and connect to others. However, the contrast between the desire of adolescents "to live like other kids" and the options available to them presented a dilemma for the emergency education program: adolescents craved normalcy, but for any intervention to be delivered, it had to first begin with creative and adaptive strategies that were by no means a complete replacement for formal, mainstream education. The programmatic and policy implications of these findings are presented here.

KEY WORDS: Chechnya, adolescents, emergency education, mental health, war

INTRODUCTION

*The Challenge of Addressing Children's Mental Health
in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies*

During complex humanitarian emergencies, settlements formed by refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) often involve the re-creation of both physical living spaces and social structures. However, it is not clear what forces, if any, shape the social support structures available to children and youth. When large populations are displaced due to war, emotional resources are limited by the fact that nearly everyone has been touched deeply by personal loss, exposure to violence, and economic hardship.

In humanitarian emergencies, aid workers and local professionals, working with members of the displaced community, are faced with the challenge of creating a safe, nourishing, and supportive environment for large populations under conditions of extreme duress. In recent years, a great deal of attention has been focused

Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry **29**: 309–340, 2005.

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DOI: 10.1007/s11013-005-9170-9

on attending to subpopulations usually designated as “vulnerable” (particularly women and children).

A number of clinical mental health interventions to assist children and families in refugee camps and conflict zones have been attempted. Some models transport mental health professionals to the scene and use interventions such as “debriefing” (Kenardy 2000) or traditional forms of mental health counseling. Although helpful to certain individuals if conducted in a targeted manner, such models have limited ability to deal with the enormity of demand. Furthermore, the appropriateness of interventions such as debriefing for certain populations, including people affected by war, has recently come under considerable criticism (Raphael et al. 1995; Kenardy 2000; Summerfield 2000). United Nations Agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) often struggle with the dilemma of having enormous numbers of children and families exposed to potentially distressing circumstances yet very few professional and financial resources to provide culturally and context-appropriate mental health services.

Emergency Education and Children's Adjustment

Although not studied explicitly in the literature on the mental health of war-affected children, the provision of educational activities early on in a crisis has been argued as an important means of restoring predictability and social supports central to children's social and emotional adjustment (Aguilar and Retamal 1998). Generally, emergency education programming aims to reach children and adolescents from the outset of conflict throughout the period of displacement. Emergency education is comprised of a range of programmatic interventions, from nonformal education activities that can be quickly established with few resources to more formal schooling activities that require extended investment in training, community involvement, and coordination with local authorities.

There are a number of theorized psychosocial mechanisms by which emergency education responses might improve social and mental health outcomes in young people in complex humanitarian emergencies. First, the restoration of opportunities to study or develop vocational skills can provide children and youth with a sense of predictability and security amidst the chaos of displacement, traumatic events, and loss. In displacement situations, education programs can serve a protective function as children are monitored in a more centralized manner, and systematic mechanisms for screening their mental and physical health may be established. Second, education and the development of vocational skills can instill children and adolescents with a sense of hope and the tools necessary to be successful in the future. In industrialized countries in particular, education serves as the primary means of securing the abilities and qualifications necessary for good jobs and salaries. Third, participatory education programs may foster enriched

social networks and social support between children, staff, and other adults in the community by engaging participants in common action on behalf of children. An exploration of these mechanisms was at the root of the present study.

STUDY AIMS

This study had two aims. First, to examine the mental health stressors faced by this population of adolescent Chechen IDPs; and second, to explore the hypothesis that, in addition to learning, the emergency education program conferred psychosocial benefits in response to stressors. The theorized psychosocial benefits of this emergency education program included: 1) providing young people with a “place” of their own within the displacement camps characterized by safety, predictability, and structure; 2) providing engagement in meaningful activity (studies and recreation) as an antidote to idleness, a diversion from more negative involvements, and a means of sustaining a hope for the future; and 3) increasing social supports available to young people from peers, teachers, and other significant adults. In order to move into the details of the study, some background is necessary. The following sections will discuss the application of ecological theory to the mental health and adjustment of war-affected youth. Next, the historical context of the Chechen conflicts and specific details on the International Rescue Committee’s emergency education program in Ingushetia will be presented prior to moving into the specific methods and findings of the research.

BACKGROUND

The Social Ecology of War and Displacement

The work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides a foundation for the study of the many embedded contexts of children’s social and emotional development in wartime. Since war disrupts the social ecology of child development, Bronfenbrenner’s theory of the ecology of human development provides a valuable framework for analyzing the interrelated contexts that shape the social and emotional adjustment of children affected by war. Bronfenbrenner’s theory extended attention beyond individual factors in child development to the multiple, interrelated settings of child development and the interactions that occur between them. In his theory, key developmental contexts are defined in terms of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. These systems are all comprised of *settings*, or places where face-to-face interactions between people occur, such as homes, schools, or neighborhoods. In Bronfenbrenner’s view, settings for human development are defined in terms of time, place, physical aspects, activities, participants, and roles. Later ecological theorists adapted Bronfenbrenner’s theory

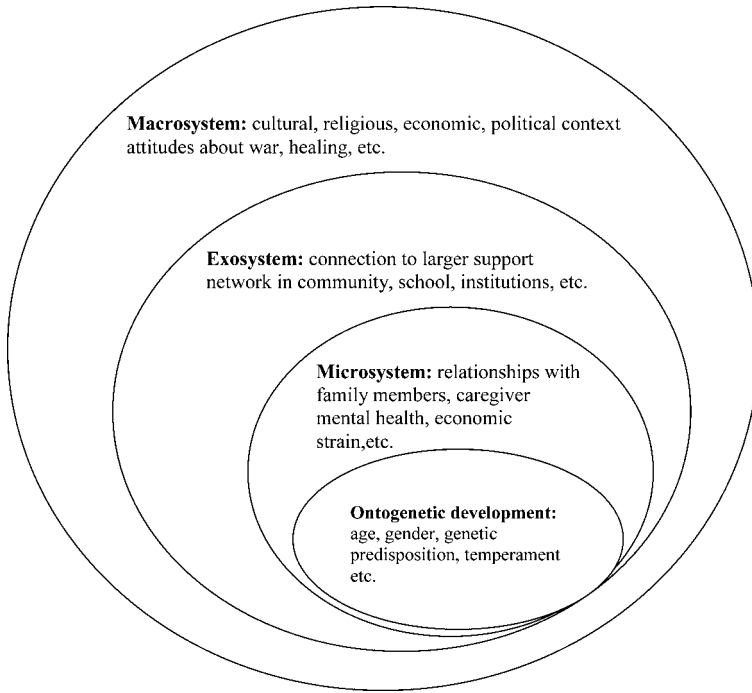


Figure 1. The Social Ecology of Mental Health and Social Support for War-Affected Children (adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elbedour 1993).

to children and war by giving further consideration to both individual-level child characteristics and the nature of violence exposure (Elbedour et al. 1993).

Drawing from Bronfenbrenner, the situation of Chechen IDP youth may be recast within an ecological lens. For youth displaced by the war in Chechnya, the social ecology refers to the nurturing physical and emotional environment that includes and extends beyond the immediate family to peer, school, and community settings as well as cultural and political belief systems (see Figure 1). To conceptualize mental health in this population, individual characteristics such as age, gender, and temperament of the child must be considered. However, microsystem interactions pertaining to the interaction between the individual and the family must also be given weight. For example, family stressors such as economic hardship, loss, and subsequent parental mental health and the ability of family members to provide support and nurturing for the child have important implications for children's mental health and adjustment. In turn, the functioning of the family is influenced in its interactions within the larger community exosystems and mesosystems which encompass extended family and broad social support networks operating within the setting, in this case, the IDP camp and

the surrounding community. Schools in particular may take on a special role in the community exosystem. Finally, at the macrosystem level, societal attitudes towards war and violence as well as mental health and healing are important for understanding mental health in this population. Furthermore, macrosystem interactions influence the broader cultural and political context, which has shaped policies regarding access to education for Chechen youth and will continue to influence longer-term economic and political prospects for Chechnya overall.

An Ecological Perspective on Protective Processes in Children's Mental Health

The psychosocial aspects of the emergency education intervention program explored in this study are rooted in the literature on protective factors in the mental health of children facing adversity. Cross-cultural research has begun to identify protective processes in the mental health of children exposed to adversity. For instance, at the microsystem and exosystem level, attachment relationships to others (Bowlby 1951) have been identified as playing a highly influential role in how children cope with stress and trauma (Rutter 1985). Research on child development and mental health in Western populations has indicated that peer and family support serve a protective function in the face of stressful life events (Sandler et al. 1989; Hoffmann, Cerbone and Su 2000; Peterson and Zill 1986). In several studies of children exposed to violence, social support and family cohesion have been demonstrated to provide a moderating or "buffering" effect on the risk of subsequent psychopathology or distress (Kliewer et al. 1998; Overstreet et al. 1999; Gorman-Smith and Tolan 1998). In longitudinal studies of disadvantaged children, the existence of a supportive relationship with at least one important adult, even outside of a troubled home, has been associated with resilient outcomes in disadvantaged children (Werner and Smith 1992).

Similar results have been observed in international studies of war-affected children. In a study of Colombian children coping with violence against family members, Kliewer et al. (2001) found that higher levels of social support in children exposed to severe family violence were associated with reduced risk of internalizing problems. In a study of family stress and coping in the face of war and non-war stressors, Farhood (1999) observed that social support was a significant predictor of psychological health and a main contributor to family adaptation. Kuterovac-Jagodic (2003) found that while higher levels of social support were observed in girls and younger children, social support was a main predictor of posttraumatic stress symptoms in Croatian youth, particularly for symptoms that persisted months and years after the wartime exposure to trauma.

The role of social support in children exposed to war-related trauma may differ according to gender. Llabre and Hadi (1997) observed interactions between social support and gender in a study of 151 Kuwaiti girls and boys exposed to high and

low levels of trauma during the Gulf War crisis. They also found that overall, girls reported higher social support compared to boys and social support moderated the impact of trauma exposure on distress in girls, but not in boys. Preliminary survey data collected by this author in a sample of 184 Chechen displaced adolescents found that although girls reported higher average levels of family support, perceived connectedness to family members was associated with lower average levels of internalizing emotional and behavioral problems for both boys and girls (Betancourt et al. 2002).

Of the sources of social support important in the emotional adjustment of children, there is evidence to support the primacy of social supports in the extended family and community networks of children affected by war (Freud and Burlingham 1944; Stichick 2001). However, as children enter adolescence and early adulthood, the importance and complexity of supportive relationships from friends and peers must also be given priority (Hartup and Stevens 1997). Even as the importance of peer relations grows in adolescence, research with Western youth indicates that parents continue to exert significant influence on peer group affiliations via mechanisms such as monitoring, encouragement of achievement and joint decision-making (Brown et al. 1993).

The available research on protective factors such as social support in war-affected children indicates the need to further explore mechanisms of how more distal community “supportive contexts,” such as those found in schools or communities, may affect the mental health of children in emergencies. In Western populations, research on school and community factors has indicated that neighborhood social cohesion and even attending caring or “connected” schools have all been associated with positive health and behavioral outcomes in young people (Resnick et al. 1997; Sampson et al. 1997; Roberts and Bengston 1993). In research on war-affected children, there is evidence to suggest that child care facilities characterized by caring relationships between staff and children are associated with positive mental health outcomes (Wolff and Fesseha 1998).

In conflict situations, schools can provide a “supportive context” for children within the larger social ecology. For many children, schools may operate as an additional “security base” outside of the home (Elbedour et al. 1993). The relationship between children and teachers can have great impact on the child, particularly when teachers are able to provide social supports and model “positive qualities” such as forgiveness and caring which may be atypical within war zones (Elbedour et al. 1993).

The IRC's Nonformal Education Program in Ingushetia, Russia

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) launched nonformal education and recreation activities for Chechen IDP children and their families in Ingushetia,

Russia in January of 2000. The program goals included the implementation of normalizing, structured activities for children and adolescents to address both psychosocial and learning needs. By design, the program encouraged parental and community involvement and positive leadership roles for young people. A final goal of the program was to build collaborations with local Ministries, UN Agencies, and other NGOs and increase opportunities for IDP children to participate in formal systems of education.

As described in the participatory aspects of the program goals, a main strategy driving the IRC model is one of facilitating local capacity to care for children. In this model, funding was provided to secure the supplies and space for schools to meet. Schools were set up in large tents with shift systems allowing children of various ages to attend classes at different periods of the school day. Teachers and school administrators were recruited from within the IDP population. Training was provided to prepare teachers for the challenge of working with few supplies and blended classrooms composed of students with differing skill levels. In order to start programs as quickly as possible, the IRC emergency education program in Ingushetia began with very rudimentary activities at first, including programs of basic numeracy and literacy along with recreation. Over time, the program was developed in alignment with the formal education system. In coordination with the local Ministry of Education, the national curriculum and standardized textbooks and testing procedures were implemented to allow children to receive official diplomas and grade completion certificates.

The IRC's emergency education program in Ingushetia prioritized the involvement of youth beneficiaries, their families, and the larger community in developing the intervention. "Empowered collaboration" of this kind is thought both to foster a sense of ownership of the program among beneficiaries and to recreate a sense of belonging (Fullilove 1996). As an example, the IRC program in Ingushetia involved young people from the beneficiary population as "youth leaders." Youth leaders worked closely with the teaching staff to engage other youth and develop activities to be responsive to the priorities and needs of the young people being served.

The Current Chechen Displacement

The impact and functioning of the emergency education program in Ingushetia must be analyzed within the context of the social and political situation in Chechnya. Historical factors at the macrosystem level have shaped the present Chechen displacement. The Chechen people are not strangers to struggle and forced displacement. The Northern Caucasus region has been the site of conflict for thousands of years, dating back to the battles between the Ottomans and Persians, who fought for the region until the 16th century. Although Chechnya is

officially part of the Russian Federation by the Russian Constitution, Chechens have always been known for their independent nature. In modern times, several factions within Chechnya have pushed for independence from Russia. In the early 1990s a secessionist movement gained steady support, culminating in Chechnya's declared independence from Russia in 1991. A particularly unsteady period followed, which culminated in the invasion of Chechnya by Russian forces in 1994. After a protracted war resulting in heavy casualties, Russian troops withdrew from Chechnya in August 1996. By that time, approximately 50,000 people had died, thousands were homeless, and much of Chechnya had been destroyed.

Just three years later, a fresh conflict erupted when Chechen militants launched invasions into the Republic of Dagestan in August of 1999. In October of that same year, Russian forces once again invaded Chechnya. Following the 1999 invasion, thousands of people fled the intense fighting. The majority of those sought refuge in the neighboring Republic of Ingushetia. At the height of the IDP emergency in January of 2000, the United Nations estimated that there were between 150,000 and 185,000 Chechen IDPs living in Ingushetia (OCHA January 2000). Approximately 78 percent of the displaced were women and children, and 45 percent were under 18 years of age (OCHA January 2000). The displaced were spread out among large camps and settlements as well as in private homes in towns and villages of the northern half of Ingushetia.

It is important to note that the IDP settlements served by the IRC's education program at the time of this data collection were "spontaneous settlements" formed in abandoned farms, empty train cars, factories, or other buildings where groups of IDPs set up makeshift living quarters. These settlements were independent of the official camps for IDPs run by the Russian Ministry of the Interior. Oftentimes, spontaneous settlements were situated on private property with the permission of a sympathetic landowner; in other instances, squatter settlements were established on abandoned or undesirable property. For example, one large site represented in the interviews was once a local café (Café Tanzila), another was the site of a factory that once produced canned food (the Canning Factory), and another was an oil drilling site (*Burploshchadka*, or "bore hole site"). Because the spontaneous settlements grew out of a process whereby whole groups of villagers and/or extended families traveled en masse and established living quarters together, they are particularly characterized by social networks and social ties built on family and community connections transplanted from home villages.

A shared language, religious identity, and history of ethnic persecution link the Chechen and Ingush people. Of Chechnya's population of 1.2 million, most are Sufi Muslim (Nivat 2001). The population of Ingushetia is also a Muslim majority. While Sufi is the dominant branch of Islam in the Caucasus region, following the 1994–1996 Chechen conflict, the general lawlessness allowed more extremist branches of Islam, such as Wahhabism, to flourish. In many of Chechnya's larger

villages and cities, local systems of governance were established based on extreme varieties of traditional Sha'ria law which emphasized conservative behaviors and beliefs on behalf of its followers, with particular restrictions on the roles of women.

Despite the close ethnic relationships and familial ties that made Ingushetia a welcome refuge for many Chechens displaced by the current conflict, a number of problematic issues remain for the IDPs. Most relevant to the well-being of children is the fact that since the early days of the current displacement, the Ingush Ministry of Education has allowed only a small number, and mainly primary school-aged Chechen IDPs, to attend local schools. The reasons given for this policy pertain to the current limitations in funding and staffing that already face the Ingush educational system. Ingush schools are currently overcrowded and in disrepair, while significant budget shortfalls have created difficulty in paying teachers' salaries. Despite the efforts of several NGOs, including the IRC, to address some of these limitations by offering assistance with school supplies or school renovations to accommodate the Chechen children, the Ingush Ministry of Education has not made significant changes in this policy to date.

STUDY METHODS

Data Collection

Data were collected via interviews conducted by a team of Chechen evaluation assistants who, during the summer of 2000, received a week-long training in basic research design, ethics, and interviewing skills. Throughout the data collection process, the research staff received close supervision in the field from the IRC's education program officer who was in contact with this author via routine phone and email contact.

A semi-structured interview protocol was followed for the interview. Responses were open-ended and probe questions were used to clarify information and obtain further detail as necessary. The interview protocol was developed in collaboration with Chechen staff from the IRC education program. It was translated and then back-translated from English to Russian to ensure cultural appropriateness and clarity for use with a Chechen adolescent population. Because few people read Chechen, the written protocol was in Russian. However, research assistants could administer interviews in either the Chechen or Russian language depending on the preferences of the participant. An oral, Chechen translation of the protocol was decided upon by the Chechen research staff during training.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in Russian and then translated into English. To guard against errors in the translation of the original transcripts from Russian to English, quotes used in this analysis were reviewed by a

second native Russian speaker upon completion of the data analysis. Any sections of data that remained unclear or potentially misleading were dropped from the analysis.

Study Sample

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select the individual adolescents and groups who participated in these interviews. The researcher and the Chechen IRC staff devised criteria to represent a range of ages, living situation, urban/rural origins, level of education and attendance in the IRC education program. These factors were chosen in order to address the variability in experiences among youth in the camp most likely to influence their assessment of the psychosocial aspects of the education intervention. At least one interview was conducted at each of the IRC's 11 sites in operation as of the fall of 2000. All youth leaders in the program ($N = 15$) were also interviewed.

A total of 57 Chechen adolescents (25 males and 32 females) participated in either individual or group interviews. Twenty-six individual interviews and six group interviews were conducted. The six group interviews involved: a) a group of four females from the SMU-4 settlement; b) a group of four males from the FinOtdel Settlement; c) three mixed-gender group interviews with boys (9 total) and girls (8 total) from the largest spontaneous settlement at Logovaz; and d) a mixed-gender group interview of 3 boys and 3 girls from the 000 Bagatir settlement. All participants were aged between 11 and 18 years of age. Mean age of participants was 14.5 years (15.2 for girls and 14.1 for boys). The slightly higher average age of girls interviewed was due to the fact that the majority of youth leaders in the program, all of whom were interviewed, tended to be older adolescent girls. Like many of the IDPs, the largest proportion of adolescents (52 percent, $N = 29$) were from Chechnya's capital, Grozny and its surrounding regions. Other participants were from villages such as Urus-Martan ($N = 5$) and Samashki ($N = 5$). Participants were interviewed in sites where the IRC program had just begun as well as at sites where education programs had been in operation for up to seven or eight months.

All research protocols and procedures received the review and approval of the Human Subjects Committee of the Harvard School of Public Health. Both signed parental consent and adolescent assent were secured in advance of data collection. All interviews were conducted in private areas, most commonly in education program tents when school was not in session.

Data Analysis

In the first stages of data analysis, translations of the raw interview transcripts were read and coded for key themes and categories using the N5 (Nu*Dist) Software.

Data in the form of direct quotes from adolescent participants were sorted to substantiate categories and themes. Quotes from multiple informants were used to triangulate findings. Analytic memos were created to document emerging themes among related categories. Key categories and themes that emerged in the data analysis are described below.

FINDINGS

Stressors in the IDP Settlements

Overall, the stressors described by IDP youth living in the spontaneous settlements were both physical and emotional. Chechen youth described the “living conditions” in the spontaneous settlements as the most difficult thing they faced on a daily basis. Physical and economic stressors described included poor or crowded living conditions, infrequent supplies of food, medicines, and educational materials and concern about family members being able to find work. The emotional stressors described pertained to worries about family and friends back in Chechnya, concerns about lack of dignity or being treated as “inhuman” or “not normal,” concerns about “wasting time,” parents having “no time,” and tense relationships with the Ingush host community. Many participants also expressed worries about being able to become educated in a legitimate way in order to be successful, get a “good job” and help support a family. Taking the individual interviews as an example, the proportion of males and females spontaneously mentioning key themes are summarized in Table 1. A detailed analysis of the data from both the group and individual interviews is presented below.

TABLE 1
Themes Related to Psychosocial Dimensions of the Emergency Education Themes Arising in Individual Interviews ($N = 26$) by Gender

Theme	Theme Present	
	% Male	% Female
Difficult living conditions	56	88
Importance of education	100	100
Importance of getting a job, working in future	56	59
Life as IDPs as “abnormal,” “inhuman”	56	47
Connection to others, “keep together”	22	53
Idleness/lost year	56	53
Parents have “no time”	22	41
Difficult relationships with Ingush host community	22	12
Hopes that the war will end soon	67	59

Note. Indicates behavior or belief was brought forward repeatedly or was discussed at length by participants.

Physical and Social Stressors

Living conditions in the spontaneous settlements were particularly grim due to overcrowding and the difficulty of living in dilapidated spaces never intended for human habitation. For the adolescents interviewed, the deprivation experienced in the settlements was described in terms of living in an abnormal or “inhuman” way:

Well, there are eight people in my family. At the moment, five [other] people live with us . . . in conditions that are not suitable for living . . . we live [coughing] together with our relatives, 16 people in two rooms . . . when rain starts everything leaks. Such . . . abnormal conditions. [Female, 18 years, FinOtdel]

We live in inhuman conditions: wet rooms where it is impossible to sleep at all, there are cockroaches on the floor, so it is impossible to sleep there too . . . it is quite disgusting. [Male youth leader, 16 years, Canning Factory]

As the data on living conditions indicate, deprivation was closely associated with a sense of humiliation that pervaded the displacement experience of these Chechen youth. In the individual interviews alone, references to life in the camp as “abnormal” arose in half of the interviews. One young woman drew a parallel between living as an IDP in the spontaneous settlements and living “like animals.”

It's hard when they force you to live here. . . this is very difficult. We are deprived of the most basic right . . . to live. We just exist here, because our children cannot get education and they cannot live as normal kids do. We are morally deprived, both morally and physically. We live like animals. Frankly speaking we may become equal to animals. [Female, 18 years, Café Tanzila]

The themes of deprivation and humiliation have important implications for the stressors young people face, the type of social support they need, and how the emergency education program might better respond to psychosocial needs. Repeatedly, the Chechen adolescents interviewed expressed a simple desire to “live like other kids” and to participate in mainstream experiences and expectations.

Like other children on Earth we want to live, to play in peace . . . to go to school. [Female youth leader, 12 years, IngAvto]

Interviewer: What are your hopes for the future?

Teen: That the situation in Grozny will become peaceful again, to get a good education in the future and, well as normal people, to live as all teenagers do. [Female, 16 years, SMU-4]

The everyday sense of humiliation and feeling “abnormal” pervading the experience of these youth was reinforced by tense relations between the Ingush host community and the Chechen IDPs. Although some families had been the recipients of great generosity while living in Ingushetia, gratitude towards the Ingush was tempered by frequent experiences of stigmatization or harassment by local youth and authorities.

Teens from Logovaz settlement in particular reported several instances of conflict with the host population. According to local staff, there had been a series of clashes between Chechen and Ingush teens, including several instances where Ingush teens had entered the settlement by force to fight with Chechen boys over misunderstandings. The tension between the hosts and IDPs in Logovaz seemed fueled by the fact that the settlement is located in the center of the Ingush capital, Nazran. The IDP settlement is on the property of a car garage parking lot, fenced off and guarded at its entrance. The physical separateness of the settlement paralleled the social barriers many Chechen youth sensed in their relations with locals.

It's bad here . . . When you go out on the street, as soon as they learn you're Chechen they start picking on you. It's bad here. Not like in our place. [Male, 14 years, Logovaz]

When you go outdoors, you cannot play normally: Ingush 'cops' are picking on [us] . . . Well, what should I say? They come up and start pick on [us] for nothing . . . "Who are you? Are you Chechen?" Just like that. [Male, 17 years, Logovaz]

As some young people described, a constant sense of being out of place would erupt to the surface in daily transactions with the local population.

You live among strange people here . . . It is possible to feel that you are among [strangers] . . . It happens sometimes that you forget about it, then they remind you [at random] [Female youth leader, 17 years, Financial Department]

It is important to consider that for many adolescents, these experiences of being out of place and struggling with humiliation or harassment present important challenges to their developing sense of self and identity. Just at the time when these adolescents are struggling with their own differentiation as individuals, they are facing an environment that reminds them constantly that they are outsiders. In fact, many teens, particularly young men, spoke of abject harassment. It is troubling to consider how such stressors might fuel a sense of despair and possibly even vengeance given the frequency with which the teens reported such direct instances of stigma and humiliation.

In the face of frequent experiences of humiliation, several youths discussed the opportunity for young Chechens to become educated as a means of proving their decency to others. One young man linked the potential for Chechen children to become "educated" and "cultured" as an antidote to what he described as the "label" or stigma imposed upon Chechens by most of Russia:

I want the Chechen youth to be educated, cultured, I want them to enter any university in Russia, and to wash off the spot or label which Russia has fixed on us. [Male youth leader, 16 years, Canning Factory]

An evident benefit of the IRC intervention in this population was its responsiveness to concerns expressed by adolescents about continuing their studies and its role in overcoming stigma. When asked about their hopes for the future, many

youth expressed a desire for the war to end and the chance to return to a “normal” life. Although many youth spoke of their current circumstances as “abnormal,” their descriptions of their vision for a “normal” life in the future involved the chance to pursue an education, earn a decent living, support a family and live in a more secure environment. In this vision, education was often portrayed as a critical pathway to the success of both individuals and society as a whole.

Hopes? [Pause] I hope that all this will end soon . . . I'd like that we live like everybody, that our people have good jobs, that Chechen people become intelligent and educated . . . That we have a good republic, without armed robbers, a normal president, a good government, a code . . . In general, I want everything to be good, that there is a constitution and a law, that we don't have war. [Male youth leader, 16 years, Gazi-Yurt]

That I could live normal life . . . without troubles in life . . . Actually that the war is over, this is first. That I return home . . . I think that a big school is necessary here, that all who want may go to school. I mean not only those who live in our camp, but also Chechens who live in other places. [Male, 13 years, Canning Factory]

I think they [the young people] expect that they will grow up and change what's happening to Chechnya now. Maybe they would grow up and become good people. They hope that they would become good scientists, because, in fact, we do not have either professors or scientists here, because our professors were killed all like pigeons. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

We must rebuild our Chechnya. If we get education, we'll be able to do it. [Female, 12 years, IngAvto]

War had dramatically altered the lives of all young people in the settlements. Interviewees expressed an awareness of the ways in which their lives had been interrupted compared to youth who had not experienced war. Themes related to time both “lost” and “wasted” were prominent stressors elucidated in the interviews. In terms of education, many described the months since the most recent fighting began as a “*lost years*.”

Since we came here, a whole year has passed. We have lost it. And now we are losing another year. I should have been able to graduate from school . . . All children have lagged behind now. [Male, 11 years, FinOtdel]

I also need good education, because I have already missed one year, and if I miss one more I will not be able to sit with kids to [pass the exams]. [Male, 13 years, Canning Factory]

This terrible awareness of being “behind” was all the more striking in light of the fact that for many adolescents, this is a second instance of dramatic life disruption. Hundreds of thousands of Chechen families and children were displaced during the prior 1994–1996 Chechen war. In fact, survey data from adolescents participating in the IRC education program indicated that 64 percent had experienced prior displacement (Betancourt et al. 2002).

In addition to creating “lost time,” the war was also portrayed as causing young people to “grow up fast.” Some adolescents described this phenomenon

in terms of the adult-like coping style that many Chechen children display in response to war-related stressors such as exposure to bombings and shellings:

Now the war makes them adults right from the age of six, now even kids understand that if there is a whistle, it is necessary to hide in a shelter. All our kids know that it is necessary to hide. If there is noise it means that they bomb us. They made us all adults - we don't have kids here, in fact. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

Well, I think, it depends also on psychology. Some children get grown-up too early, what else can I say? Certainly, because of this war many children have grown up fast. And though they look like children, if you talk to them, their ideas are very much adult-like, and sometimes you are simply lost and cannot understand who is standing before you: the child or adult? [Female youth leader, 17 years, Financial Department]

Time was distributed unevenly amongst adults and children in the settlements. Unlike their harried parents, most adolescents spoke of concerns about being “idle” or “wasting” time while in the settlements. Themes of idleness or “wasted time” appeared in 54 percent of the individual interviews. Idleness was related to young peoples’ concerns about continuing their schooling and preparing themselves for the future.

Most important for youth? There is nothing for them to do, they sleep all day . . . If they had something to do . . . to study . . . Here, in Sleptsovsk, for me there is nothing useful. If I were at home, it would be better, I would be engaged in something. But here there is nothing to do. [Female youth leader, 18 years, Detsky Sad]

Well, here we stay at home all day long, in those garages we're living in, in the rooms. Before, when mum sold things at the market, we went to see her, walked a bit. We went to help her, returned home. And then they put up this school. Now we're going to attend this school. [Female, 16 years, SMU-4]

When there was no school, children went, collected bottles . . . We are glad, that there is a school, that there is studying. [Male youth leader, 17 years, Detsky Sad]

One young man spoke of the chance to study as an antidote to getting involved in negative behaviors:

It is important for them [the children] to study, not to just walk around. So that they would not have time to smoke or do something bad. [Male youth leader, 16 years, Canning Factory]

To help out their families and cope with idleness, many teen boys in particular expressed a strong interest in “working” or “getting a job.”

Teen: Well, for me, the most important is to have an opportunity to work.

Interviewer: You'd have time enough for both working and studying . . . You wouldn't get tired?

Teen: Well, even if I get tired, one still has to be busy with something . . . It's not a problem [laughs]. [Male, 13 years, SMU-4]

As this young man later explained: “Two or three days ago I found a job in a gas-filling station.” When asked if he was paid for this work, he answered: “Sometimes they do, sometimes they don’t . . . The money that they give, it’s so little.” For this young man, what seemed to matter most was the fact of being “busy with something.”

By providing an alternative to idleness, the education program responded to an immediate need central to the identity and future hopes of these Chechen youth. Given the importance placed on being “busy with something,” the opportunity to return to one’s studies carried the potential to counteract idleness, “wasted time,” and even “lost years.” The indication that reducing idleness could also reduce risk of negative involvements from smoking to fighting and even despair is critical to consider in terms of furthering security. The argument can be made that by increasing access to positive opportunities such as learning and other skills-building, educational interventions such as the IRC program have relevance for security strategies in the region as well.

Disruption of Family and Social Relationships

The Chechen wars have torn families and communities apart. As described by many of the teens, worries about family members who had remained behind in Chechnya were a frequent stressor and source of distraction for those in the IDP settlements. Family separations were common in the settlements. In several cases, certain relatives, usually men and the elderly, had stayed behind to look after the family home and belongings. Families had made great efforts to keep their young men out of Chechnya in order to protect them from *zachistki*, or mopping-up operations, in which Russian soldiers often target males of fighting age for questioning and detainment. Young men may be separated from their families, beaten, and in some cases, may disappear forever.

The IDP youth interviewed were very cognizant of the dangerous conditions back home. Some described relatives who had been in Ingushetia for a time, but had been forced to return to their homes in the war zone due to financial hardship. The awareness that family members who stayed behind are navigating constant perils in Chechnya seemed to leave the adolescents in Ingushetia feeling helpless.

My father did not go with us, he stayed home . . . to keep at least what’s left somehow, because the Federals have taken away everything we know. Only our father is at home . . . others left to live here, because it was impossible to live there . . . he has stayed home for the whole war, he is 60 years old, but he is being harassed anyway. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

My granny rented two small rooms [in Ingushetia] for 6000 rubles. Now they don’t have money, they could do nothing but go home, so they left. At home, everything’s destroyed. They could hardly restore one room, and 10 or 11 persons live in that room . . . In Chernorechye (suburb of Grozny), every day, one can hear shells exploding there,

every two hours they have to run to the cellar. It's very dangerous to stay there. We don't know what to do. [Female, 13 years, SMU-4]

Young people were aware that the insecurity and widespread destruction back in Chechnya meant that separation from loved ones could last for some time.

We brought the necessary things here. All the rest burnt down. Our neighbors' house exploded, ours is covered with cracks, walls cracked . . . renovation is needed, we cannot return there. The roof is broken. It will be even worse because of the rain. There are no conditions for living either . . . Now it's dangerous there. If it was peaceful, just a little, just a bit more quiet, we could return there. [Female, 16 years, SMU-4]

Not only were family separations and loss a source of constant worry and grief, but not having relatives in the extended family network nearby limited the family's coping resources while in Ingushetia.

I've got no father. If I had, it would be easier for me. We're alone with mum. We haven't even got relatives. [Female, 13 years, Burploshchadka]

Disruption of family networks also characterized relationships within the camp. The limited time parents had to spend with their children was a frequently mentioned stressor facing the Chechen IDP youth and a significant obstacle to securing social support from family relationships. In contrast to the many young people worried about idleness and "wasting time," parents were described as having "no time." In order to meet the survival needs of the family, many IDP Chechen parents have been forced to spend time away from their children in search of work or humanitarian distributions. As described by the adolescent participants, parents in the settlements were constantly balancing exhaustion, attempts to find work, the humiliation of not being able to make ends meet and efforts to spend time with their children. In this manner, the economic, social, and emotional conditions of living in the settlements are entangled.

Interviewer: Can parents or other residents of the camp spend time with their children?

Teen: No, they can't. My parents, for example, cannot do that because they go to collect humanitarian aid . . . but it's rare that they succeed in it. My parents go there, they come back tired . . . they have no time. [Female, 16 years, SMU-4]

It's hard to think that mum's always going to the station, well, she doesn't work, and yet, she's always on the run. Dad's at home, he hasn't got a job . . . There's no job at all for the Chechens in Ingushetia. [Female, 14 years, Bogatyr]

Everybody's busy with something. Almost everybody's at the market, trying to earn a living to provide one's family and children with food. [Pause] Besides, there're the sick, who also need to be looked after. [Female, 12 years, SMU-4]

In general, many youths and families were enthusiastic about the opening of an IRC education program in their settlement. Given the many demands on parents' time, the education program was viewed as providing some relief.

[Parents] have no time to help us. Because they should stay in line for humanitarian aid, you see there [are] no jobs here. They have work to do . . . There is no time. But they are

glad that they have opened this school, that there are the teachers, leaders. They are very glad. [Male youth leader, 16 years, Gazi-Yurt]

The education program showed some promise in responding to the stressor of limited parental time. Relationships with teachers, youth leaders, and peers in the education program were all discussed as a potential source of assistance and support when parental time was unavailable. The provision of enriched opportunities for social support was a central mechanism by which the IRC education program aimed to address the psychosocial needs of beneficiaries. Indeed, the education program was seen as providing a mechanism for children to meet new people and develop friendships.

Interviewer: what would you like to have in the school that is opening now?

Teen: To study well, to meet new people, to have more friends. [Female, 11 years, Bogatyr]

As usual, studies are first . . . To study, to create such clubs for youth, so that it will become more cheerful . . . Anyway, in the company of friends it is possible to speak from your heart. [Female youth leader, 19 years, FinOtdel]

The education program was also described as a place where children could be themselves and develop new friendships. For many young people, finding a means to enjoy the company of fellow teenagers had been challenging in the emotionally-charged context of some settlements. In some sites, before the program started, young people had tried to organize their own activities, but encountered resistance from adults. Some had been offended by the sight of young people having “fun” amidst the hardship of displacement. The following exchange from an interview with four teenage girls in the SMU-4 Settlement describes one such instance:

Interviewer: Have you tried? Have you had an opportunity to organize a club, a project or any other activity [since being in the IDP settlement]?

Teen 1: No, we haven't.

Interviewer: What is the reason? You didn't want to? Or something hampered you?

Teen 2: They don't permit us, well . . .

Teen 3: We wanted . . . We tried . . . to entertain [ourselves] somehow but they didn't permit us. We wanted to make a party with dancing but they didn't permit that either. A man came, he's from Samashki. It was so good, we gathered, there were no drunken among us, we just wanted to entertain ourselves a little, but then he came . . . He kicked our tape-recorder with his foot, it was so unpleasant. Then they went to the superintendent [camp leader] to make complaints . . . He didn't let us have a party. We explained that we wanted a kind of distraction, that nothing bad had happened so far, no matter, they forbade us to, they said it's not good to have fun during the wartime. [Females aged 18, 16, and 13 years, SMU-4]

The creation of a safe place to go and an emotional space for young people to be themselves was an important aspect of the emergency education program. The potential for the program to provide additional sources of social support is central to the research question of how the emergency education program might enrich

the emotional and social environment for young people in the settlements. By the time of their arrival in the settlements, many young people had lost their homes and any sense of a “place” to return to.

Some people have no place to go. Our house was burned, the apartment was burned . . . I do not know where we should go now. [Male, 11 years, Financial Department]

To obtain a place where it is possible to live. I think, many people lost their homes and now wander from place to place living in other peoples’ flats, no place to live. I want to find such place for them. Probably they also need education, to improve their life. [Male, 13 years, Canning Factory]

Teens explained that during this time of displacement, young people needed a place to “forget about the war.” They also needed a place to find “understanding” and be treated with “tenderness.”

For young people . . . at my camp more communication and understanding is necessary, you know . . . kids especially need understanding, because now they are . . . harassed. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

I think that one must treat our children—I mean children from Chechnya, who have seen the war and have got through it all—with more tenderness. So, the attitude of our teachers and parents to our children is the most important thing. [Female youth leader, 12 years, IngAvto]

The data indicated that, in addition to learning, the Chechen youth saw the education program as “helping” by giving children a place to go and an emotional space to turn their thoughts towards age-appropriate concerns.

I like that children are taken away from the war. They study . . . they play and they enjoy themselves. [Female youth leader, 13 years, IngAvto]

We go to this school which has been organized here for us. Perhaps this school helps us [pause] not to [lose what we once knew] and what is more this school occupies our minds, the children’s minds . . . We don’t forget of course that there is war there in Chechnya, at home, but at the same time it gives us a chance to divert our thoughts from it. This school helps us. [Female youth leader, 12 years, IngAvto]

Adaptive Education Strategies vs. the Desire to be “Normal”

The most striking instance of incongruity between the hope and expectations of Chechen youth in the settlements and the potential psychosocial benefits provided by the emergency education program related to the nature of the program model itself. As has been discussed, humiliation and the desire to be “normal” were important forces shaping the experience of Chechen IDP adolescents in these settlements. But while the education program offered opportunities for improving both supports and learning, it also created strain due to its nonformal nature in a macrosystem context highly regulated by documentation and credentialing.

As is common in emergency education programs, the schools in the camp had begun learning and recreation activities for children as quickly as possible as a first line of defense given the massive numbers of out-of-school children. The IRC schools employed certain strategies in order to provide structure while making the education program less threatening to children who had missed a great deal of schooling. At first, education programming was “nonformal,” meaning that it was not obligatory or structured like formal grade-level classrooms. Instead, learning goals addressed basic aspects of numeracy and literacy. Due to a shortage of teachers trained in multiple subjects, the schools encouraged Chechen teachers to teach whatever they could at first as a means of immediately restoring learning activities. As a result, not all subjects could be taught and many classrooms were of mixed ages and grade levels. Furthermore, very little grading or testing was implemented at first.

Some of these strategies worked. In order to be non-threatening and supportive to children who were potentially traumatized and behind in their studies, the school was purposefully less rigid than a traditional Russian classroom. As one participant explained, because the school was allowing children to attend by choice and not “force,” it had appealed to more children in the settlements.

Perhaps the most attractive thing for our children is that our school is a free one. It doesn't force you to go to classes and learn. Our children . . . they can't be forced now, they are not well fed now. And a hungry child can't be forced to learn a poem or something else. But our children like studying . . . At first the children didn't want to go to school. They thought that was the same school as at home, the obligatory one. But they came once, twice and saw that it wasn't like that and they began to go to school on their own. [Female youth leader, 12 years, IngAvto]

Although placing little emphasis on grades spared teens and their parents initial “embarrassment,” it also seemed to lessen the value of grades once they were given:

Earlier, we didn't receive [grades] . . . because, if someone received “2” [unsatisfactory, failed grade], and the one who studies well received “5” [excellent mark], there were disputes, discontent . . . Now we receive them. And, even if someone performs the homework badly, they try to give him a good mark all the same . . . This school is not like at home. They do not want to insult them. When they [the children] receive “5,” it is like a holiday for the parents . . . This school is not a usual school. The marks can be given, even if one knows or does not know the material . . . performs or does not perform a task..so that the children can study better. [So that] they should not forget what they knew earlier. [Male youth leader, 17 years, Bore Hole Site]

Although these strategies were intended to make children feel comfortable and respond to limited human and material resources, they reinforced the view of the school as “not normal.” In this way, the structure of the education program clashed with many adolescents' desire for legitimacy and normalcy. As a result,

the adaptive program model was viewed by some adolescents as emblematic of Chechen IDPs living a parallel, yet “abnormal” or unnatural existence.

With the school? I would like to receive knowledge so that I can grow up normally, work. Here in the tent, what kind of knowledge can we get? No knowledge may be obtained there . . . I would like to study normally. [Male, 11 years, Financial Department]

I'd like that we have more classrooms in our school. I think it isn't correct that all children study together. I think they have to be separated by classes. [Female youth leader, 16 years, Gazi-Yurt]

If we study in such tents and live in such rooms then we can be equal to animals. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

Thus, to many teens interviewed, despite the good things that the school offered, it was not a “normal school.” Some children had left the IRC school if their parents could afford fees, or in many cases a bribe, to enroll them in local Ingush schools. One young man described how he had been attending an Ingush school once a week.

Teen: On Sundays . . . we go to school. To school #4, and then we go to this school.

Interviewer: You've left this school here [the IRC emergency education school]?

Teen: No, not yet.

Interviewer: Why are you leaving? You're not happy with this school?

Teen: I'm happy here, [but] they don't have all the lessons. That school is not normal. [Male, 13 years, Logovaz]

With the emphasis placed on high-quality education, receiving graduation certificates for grade completion was not a trivial issue to many Chechen families. These documents are critical for moving ahead in the Russian education system both in Ingushetia and upon return to Chechnya. Thus, the need for documents, credentialing and completion certificates weighed heavily on many students and families.

Interviewer: What do you expect to get from the educational program that is starting in your camp?

Teen: I'd like to get an appropriate document, so that I could continue studies in the future. [Female, 13 years, Bogatyr]

We have the IRC schools here, but this is not an official school, and that's why kids do not visit it very often: one day in school two days at home . . . if it were a compulsory program, they could have attended it, we would have known that some certificates would be issued or some papers . . . they do not accept you anywhere without official papers. Well, knowledge . . . this is good. But it would have been great, if it was officially formalized. If some document was issued on graduation. I would like to get any official document very much, and I would surely attend the school. [Female, 18 years, Canning Factory]

This desire for school documents as a means of gaining legitimacy left many youth and families in a bind because opportunities for Chechen adolescents to participate in local Ingush mainstream schools were all but nonexistent. Although

in some villages Ingush schools were open to Chechen children of primary school age, this policy did not extend to secondary school children. In order to educate an adolescent in the formal schools, families would normally have to pay a bribe, something that few could afford. The contrast between the hopes and expectations adolescents held and the nature of the options available to them at the time of this data collection presented a dilemma for the emergency education program: adolescents were craving normalcy, but for any intervention to be delivered, it had first to begin with creative and adaptive strategies that were by no means a complete replacement for formal, mainstream education.

Despite its shortcomings, the creative structure of the IRC emergency education program did offer one of the only opportunities for many youth to return to their studies, to find a place to return to age-appropriate activities, and to enrich their social networks. Some of the most compelling evidence for the psychosocial benefits of the emergency education program on young people's lives was embodied in the experiences of youth leaders in the program. For these teens, the chance to participate in leadership roles in the emergency education program was described as improving self-confidence as well as their abilities to help others. Several youth leaders explained that the experience had changed how they interacted with other young people as well as how they thought about their own futures.

I have to have much patience here [laughs]. What can I say? Children . . . to do what they ask me, to help . . . When I return home [to Chechnya] . . . I do not want to have any quarrels . . . This is the benefit for me . . . patience. [Male youth leader, 17 years, Burploshchadka]

Interviewer: Did you get anything out of your participation in the nonformal education program?

Youth Leader: A lot. In particular, from the communication with children . . . I learned not to be shy, I can communicate with children. I could be a good teacher. Before I was too shy, I didn't answer in class, only listened. Now I can do social work . . . I learned a lot of good things. [Female youth leader, 16 years, Gazi-Yurt]

As one youth leader described, her involvement in the IRC program has meant that her time during displacement had not been entirely "lost." Her experiences had offered her important self-knowledge to consider what she wants to do in her future.

I don't think that I've lost this year. I studied at school, helped children and I think that it will help me in the future . . . I think that I found a common language with children. I could work as a kindergarten teacher. [Female youth leader, 15 years, Canning Factory]

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study must be considered in light of several study limitations. First of all, given that all interviews were collected by third party local research

assistants, issues of bias in the interview relationship must be considered. Given that Chechen research assistants carried out all the interviews presented in this analysis, it is important to note that their individual styles and the fact that they were from the same culture and experience of displacement may have influenced responses given by those interviewed. The research staff received close supervision in the field from the Education Program Officer, who held routine “debriefing” sessions with the research team to allow discussion of issues such as recognizing bias and thus containing its influence. Nonetheless, interpersonal interviewer biases cannot be totally controlled and must be taken into consideration in the findings.

In some cases, such biases can actually be seen as providing an additional source of data. For instance, in review of the transcripts, it became evident that one of the research assistants had a great propensity to ask leading questions despite the training he had received and our ongoing efforts to provide debriefing and guidance to all the RAs while they were actively collecting data. However, the nature of the questions that he emphasized highlighted a concern many young men had about feeling harassed or persecuted as Chechens while living among the Ingush people. Upon review of data from several interviewers, it became evident that this was an issue that caused a great deal of subjective distress for the Chechen IDP youth, particularly young men. By taking a cue from the strong reactions of the research staff to the issue, the study was better able to reveal a stressor of importance to the research questions at hand.

Another potential source of bias in this work was the degree of error introduced both in the transcription process and in the translation of the original transcripts from Russian to English. In order to address this concern, all quotes used in this analysis were reviewed by a second native Russian speaker. Any sections of data that remained unclear or potentially misleading were dropped from the analysis. A final limitation of the findings concerns the fact that all the data presented in this analysis were collected in single interviews. It is quite plausible that, had follow-up interviews been possible, the nature of the data would have allowed further depth in our understanding of the experiences of these adolescents.

It is also important to note that in 2000 when the present data was collected, a series of key informant and group interviews with teachers, parents and other community members were also collected, but these were beyond the scope of the present study. However, preliminary analysis of these interviews triangulates many of the themes presented in the present study. The IRC is planning follow-up data collection within the spontaneous settlements in the future. The results of this data collection will certainly further our understanding of the dynamics of persistent concerns and sources of support available to young people throughout the ongoing displacement.

DISCUSSION

Data from these interviews indicated that Chechen IDP adolescents were grappling with a variety of stressors that characterized the social ecology of displacement. These took both physical and emotional forms: poor living conditions, young people “wasting time” while parents had “no time,” worries about family members back home, and struggles with a constant sense of humiliation or being out of place. Themes of humiliation and the desire for normalcy were especially noteworthy. In the face of multiple stressors, young people identified that several things were important in helping them cope with their current situation. For the young people interviewed, education was of great concern and seen as a critical means of achieving future success and even communal peace. The IRC education program played an important role in the social ecology of the settlements by offering children a place to go and engage in age-appropriate activities, to develop new friendships and gain social support, to reduce idleness and invigorate a renewed sense of hope for the future. Although no direct links can be made between these mechanisms and children’s mental health, these elements are all theoretically important to the social and emotional development of adolescents.

Nonetheless, the IRC education program must overcome some obstacles also relevant to the ongoing development of its young beneficiaries. First of all, creative strategies taken to get the program running immediately clashed with adolescent concerns about living “like other kids” and attending “normal” schools. Second, the initial inability of the IRC’s nonformal education program to provide grades, national exams and formal grade completion certificates authorized by the Russian Ministry of Education clashed with the expectations of teens and parents to secure documentation to move ahead in the educational system, and thus ensure a better future.

Responding to concerns expressed by adolescents in the process of this research and ongoing program monitoring, the IRC schools worked vigorously with the Ministry of Education to arrive at standards for equivalency. As of the summer of 2002, the IRC schools had improved their deployment of teachers so that more appropriate grade levels and better-designed blended classrooms were in place. Children in the IRC emergency education program now sit regularly for national exams and also earn grade completion certificates recognized by the Russian Ministry of Education. In light of the importance placed on education, concerns about missed years of schooling and the low literacy observed in teens during this research were identified as serious threats to youth well-being and psychosocial adjustment. As a result, the IRC is currently providing catch-up programs for adolescents whose learning has been interrupted throughout Chechnya’s protracted conflict. In this manner, policy initiatives at the macrosystem level as well as in

the community exosystem are making a difference in the lives of these young people.

Given the nature of working in humanitarian emergencies, emergency education programs will always be faced with balancing the necessity of beginning nonformal education in some settings to meet the immediate needs and educational rights of children, while recognizing their hunger for legitimacy. Part of the important work of the IRC education program will be to collaborate with local authorities and engage in advocacy at the political level to influence policies that may allow the Chechen IDPs to participate in formal education more rapidly.

Other particularly striking findings of the research were descriptions of Chechen stigma, frequent humiliation and the ongoing tensions between the IDPs and the Ingush host community. This presents an important example of identity issues at the individual microsystem being influenced by community exosystem and historical macrosystem dynamics. Humiliation and marginalization have been documented as common to the experience of displacement in populations from the homeless to refugees (Fullilove 1996). In many cases, hatred is at the root of the conflict or persecution that has led to displacement. Fullilove has observed that it is not uncommon for displaced persons to internalize the hatred or humiliation they have experienced. Fullilove argues that internalized humiliation and hatred contribute to other negative feelings and behaviors that can destabilize relations between host and displaced communities. The themes of deprivation and humiliation elucidated in this research have serious implications for identity development and emotional coping in these Chechen IDP youth. Research with Palestinian adolescents has indicated lower levels of emotional distress in youth holding more rigid political ideologies (Punamaki 1996). Although this manner of coping may have short-term benefits for war-affected young people, it carries with it significant long-term dangers associated with the perpetuation of conflict. Further research is needed on coping, political ideologies and the identity formation of youth affected by armed conflict given its important implications for the participation of youth in fomenting violence and instability.

Despair and humiliation certainly have implications for regional security. Playing on the hopelessness and vengeful feelings of war-affected youth might provide leverage for groups recruiting young people to participate in terrorist acts or to join fighting forces. In the Chechen conflict, news coverage has pointed to vengeance and despair as possible motivations for the recent wave of terrorist acts, including suicide bombings carried out by young members of rebel groups. Most notably, news coverage of a series of attacks over the summer of 2003 carried out by young Chechen women, dubbed Chechnya's "black widows" (Walsh 2005) pointed to loss, despair, and revenge as potential motivating factors.

The response of the international community to the plight of Chechen civilians caught between warring factions has been limited. Early on in the 1999 conflict, the human rights abuses suffered by Chechen civilians at the hands of Russian troops had received worldwide attention. Following to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the US-lead “War on Terror,” the international community fell silent on the topic of Chechnya. It has been easy for the Russian government to escape criticism by justifying its treatment of the present Chechen conflict as a fight against internal terrorism. The IRC’s Chechnya/Ingushetia former Country Director summarized this sentiment well:

Until September 11th, the generalization for Chechens was that they were all “*banditi*” (bandits). By September 12th, all Chechens had become “*terroristi*” (terrorists). That epithet will stick for a long time to come. [Dunn, 2003]

The failure to attend to the human rights abuses suffered by the civilian population and the perilous futures of Chechnya’s war-affected youth misses a critical opportunity to address factors that contribute to instability. As evidenced in this research, the desires of many Chechen youth are simple ones. Like other young people around the world, they dream of growing up in a secure environment, where they can pursue their education, work, and raise a family. Being able to pursue these basic dreams was described as a pathway to basic dignity and self-worth for many of the youth interviewed. These most simple desires have been withheld from this generation, however, and a sense of humiliation has pervaded their experiences. Without attending to the needs of disenfranchised Chechen youth who have been stripped of dignity and the most basic of life opportunities, strategies for preserving security will continue to fall short.

This study lends support to previous data suggesting that participatory programs hold great promise for improving interventions serving displaced populations (Fullilove 1996; Summerfield 1999). Imposing interventions on displaced populations, particularly mental health interventions that were originally designed for other cultures and settings without participatory development, may result in negative outcomes (Summerfield 1999). Programs designed without the input of beneficiaries may neglect important capacities or social resources already at work within the IDP community to care for the emotional needs of others. As Watters (2001) has articulated, when refugees or IDPs are unable to give voice to their priorities in the process of service provision, programming may take the form of “institutional responses” shaped by “stereotypes and the homogenizing of refugees into a single pathological identity” (p. 1710). A focus on trauma and pathology has certainly characterized much of the research and intervention directed at war-affected children (Stichick 2001).

The findings of this study provide preliminary evidence for the importance of education and meaningful engagement of young people and communities as tools

for promoting the emotional well-being of displaced youth. Participatory rebuilding of physical spaces and enrichment of the emotional environment whereby people within the community can better care for one another is a powerful tool to counterbalance the negative influence of humiliation inherent in displacement. As Fullilove (1996) has written, "empowered collaboration" is critical for "reestablishing familiarity, repairing attachment to place, and stabilizing place identity." In this light, collaborative activity and participatory interventions, such as this locally-run education program, may be seen as a tool for addressing intergroup hatred by creating a sense of belonging and offering a place where more positive relationships may be nurtured. In the present study, the value of harnessing the capacities of beneficiaries was evident in how youth leaders described the influence of their participation on their own personal development.

The limitations of participatory approaches must also be recognized and weighed in the development of programs such as the one examined in this study. For instance, in this Chechen IDP population, it is apparent that there will continue to be economic and family responsibilities that restrict parents in these settlements from spending time with their children, let alone becoming involved in participatory activities. Steps might be taken to ensure that opportunities for parent involvement in the education program (parent association meetings, participatory cultural or sporting events) are scheduled to not conflict with major mealtimes, holidays or working hours when the local market is in operation. Furthermore, the program might explore options for involving parents while remaining sensitive to not overburdening them. For instance, leadership in parent-teacher associations might be established on a rotating basis and communication strategies from the school might involve a newsletter, evening open-houses, or other means of reaching parents who are unable to participate on a routine basis.

Just as in the past the education program provided a safe place for children to pursue their learning and gain additional social supports, in the future it may also offer a forum for building bridges with the Ingush host community. Through collaborative events, the education program might act as a catalyst for community-wide sporting or cultural events where Chechen IDPs and Ingush locals have the opportunity to develop more positive relationships. In this spirit, the IRC launched a cultural center in 2001 where exchange between the IDPs and host community is fostered. Such creative approaches to addressing marginalization and social stressors in the lives of the IDP youth have the potential to go a long way in improving inter-group relations and addressing some of the humiliation and stigma that Chechen youth have faced during displacement.

Overall, the data presented here indicate the importance of rethinking how mental health or psychosocial interventions are defined in emergency settings. As Summerfield (1999) has noted, when asked what interventions would help the most in their situation, refugees are more likely to cite social and economic

problems rather than psychological ones. A similar finding was also observed in these data. Infrequent reference to mental health interventions might be the result of stigma or lack of knowledge about mental health problems and their treatment. It may also be the consequence of narrow definitions about what are considered truly “psychosocial” or mental health interventions in emergency environments. Few people could dispute the psychosocial importance of restoring hope for the future, enriching social support networks, providing positive roles for youth and increasing opportunities for meaningful, collective activity. These aspects of emergency education interventions, however, are not routinely discussed in terms of “mental health.” Perhaps they should be.

This study provides evidence for the need to broaden our definitions of mental health interventions in terms of program planning, funding and policy development. Such thinking might encourage innovation in how mental health issues are addressed in emergency settings. For instance, adapting flexible schedules to address multiple demands facing families might allow more young people both to participate in education and to reestablish a sense of control within an uncertain environment (Flores 1999). Other creative interventions might aim to address the strains of family responsibilities that fall disproportionately on female adolescents. One such response might include the development of collective childcare programs where families can combine and reciprocate child care, thus freeing up more time for other activities, including the opportunity for adolescents charged with watching younger siblings to attend school.

Mental health interventions may also be introduced in schools. Within the social ecology of these displacement camps, the school program may become the venue for offering targeted individual and family (microsystem) mental health interventions as well as school environment (exosystem) initiatives addressing mental health issues. Because children are monitored in a more centralized manner when they attend school, regular screenings for mental and physical health problems can be made routine to identify children needing a higher level of professional medical or psychiatric care. Emergency education programs could provide venues where problems and feelings could be discussed openly and confidentially via peer support groups. Establishing such responses would further address the concerns expressed by adolescents in these interviews about having a “place” to be themselves and be “understood” by others.

In summary, the research presented here provides evidence that a locally run emergency education program had important psychosocial dimensions for promoting mental health and enriching the support networks that care for children in the IDP settlements. As Summerfield (2000) has asserted, participatory programs that aim to strengthen the “social fabric” can go a long way in bolstering the “psychological resilience” of populations affected by humanitarian emergencies. Such resilience is evident in the voices of the young people interviewed. However,

education programs are not a panacea for the needs and rights of children in emergencies (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). Further efforts to develop the program's capacity for credentialing and recognition by the formal educational system will remain critical to ensuring educational opportunities for the young Chechen IDPs. The program's capacity to adopt innovative approaches and balance psychosocial, advocacy, and educational goals is critical to brightening the future for this population of war-affected youth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research on which this paper was based was supported by a grant from the Mellon-MIT Program on NGOs and Forced Migration as well as additional support from the Children Affected by Armed Conflict Unit at the International Rescue Committee. My deepest thanks go to Marie de la Soudiere and Gillian Dunn of the International Rescue Committee for giving me the permission and support to carry out this research in the field. I am also very grateful to Felton Earls, Jennifer Leaning, Colleen Meaney, Joseph Betancourt, and Myron Belfer, who read earlier drafts of this paper. Ashraf Attalla and Nastya Podunavich provided enormous help in reviewing the Russian translations. I am particularly indebted to the members of the IRC Ingushetia/Chechnya staff, particularly Tamara Imaeva, Svetlana Tukaeva, and Elina Amaeva and the members of our research assistant team, Asya Eskirkhanova, Amina Iskhakova, Elina Muzaevz, Luisa Dikaeva, Deny Visaev, and Yusup Bogatuirev who conducted the field interviews in Ingushetia. Finally, I am deeply touched and indebted to the beneficiaries of the IRC education program who shared their experiences with us.

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