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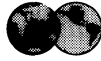
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LIFE PATHS OF URBAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The life paths of young boys and girls and their families in cities in the Philippines, India, Brazil, Kenya and Italy provide a first analysis, often in the children's own words, of the multiple overlapping crises that lead them to situations of distress. Such situations include running away to live in the streets and/or progressively falling into high risk behavior, such as dropping out of school, abusing different kinds of substances, engaging in sex for money or protection, and peddling drugs. Their life histories illustrate their resilience. But they also illustrate how the quality of their relationships to meaningful adults is being increasingly threatened and how painful and disruptive that is for these developing young people, who need the caring presence and reassuring validation of key adults, both within and outside their families, as they enter into an adult world.

In the 1990s, new economic trends are emerging, spatially distributed, as well as new political and social configurations, each with their own local manifestations (Harvey, 1989; Pred and Watts, 1992). In this new context, which includes new politics of representation, it is particularly important to understand what is happening to young people.

Life histories of children and their families, combined with participant observation, are an important tool for people interested in the experience and everyday lives of children. In our study they were extremely helpful in providing information about process, i.e. about the succession of events that led children and their families into deeper and deeper crises and into a variety of high risk behavior. They also showed the resilience and resourcefulness of the children in the face of controversy.¹

What has strongly emerged from the life histories and from the overall study has been the severe encroachment on the quality of relationships with adults available to these young people. (This concern was recurrently expressed by the children themselves.) External circumstances, including increasing economic poverty and loss of access to resources, related to these broader economic and political trends, are diminishing the capability of

adults to attend to their young generations and the quality of the care they can give them. Stress, tension and personal problems exacerbate the level of interpersonal violence that surrounds the children. Shortage of resources augments the level of structural violence they are exposed to. And at the institutional level, the bureaucratic search for appropriate development models is increasingly focusing on efficiency rather than people (whose responses are inherently complicated and less predictable).

Despite quite different ultimate and intermediate causalities in each of the countries and cities analyzed, the end results for children and adolescents were often similar. This article, by analyzing their life paths, calls attention to the urgency of the situation, while providing suggestions about specific interventions at neighborhood level that could help redirect the attention of planners to people and especially to children – our next generation.

Life paths: examples from the Philippines

Multiple overlapping crises leading to the street

Many factors overlap and interact in the lives of urban poor children to form unique life paths to distress. The life histories show that children on the street often come from families that have suffered multiple crises: situations involving a parent's chronic illness, periodic unemployment, separation, death, murder or imprisonment that have led to increased disadvantage for those children. The stressful environment of their households is frequently a breeding ground for alcoholism, violence and neglect and a negative event in one area often creates negative outcomes in other areas of children's lives. It is obviously inappropriate to think of single interventions for such families.

A number of life histories from the Philippines exemplify events and processes found in all countries. The following extended account is of one boy, though his five brothers and sisters and one step-sister are also involved. It illustrates how a combination of crises over the course of years can lead a child from the family to the street. In subsequent sections of this article, extracts from full life histories will be used to focus on single crises. It should, of course, be understood that these crises are part of systemic and complex situations.

Noel, a 12-year-old scavenger in Cebu, son of a rural migrant: Carlito and Linda met in Sawang Calero and were married there in 1975. She was 18, an only daughter, and worked as a manicurist. He was 20, had migrated there from Leyte, and had managed to find work as a utility man in a furniture shop.

In 1976, their first child, Emilio, was born. Linda's father, Noy Asyong, paid all the expenses since Carlito was earning so little. Despite their precarious financial situation, Linda gave birth to

children in rapid succession. Annalee was born a year later and Noel, the following year.

As a young child Noel spent most of his time with Noy Asyong and his cousins Ruben and Ramil. His grandfather sold dried fish for a living. The three boys helped him to prepare bamboo mats for drying the fish and to make deliveries to stall owners at the market. In the years that followed, two other siblings – Ronald, now 8 years old, and Maritess, 6 – were added to the household.

Parental job loss and illness. In May 1986, Carlito lost his job when the furniture shop closed and, at the suggestion of Noy Asyong, started working as a *cargador* (loader) at the market. He only earned P30–40 (US\$1.12–1.50) per day, which didn't even begin to cover food expenses for the household of seven. Linda's average daily earnings of P50–75 (US\$1.87–2.81) would have been a great help, but she had had to stop working due to a heart condition.

Domestic instability. Despite his family situation, Noel went to primary school in June 1986 when he was 8. Carlito thought that sending Noel to school was a waste of money, so Noy Asyong paid all the school expenses, a situation that infuriated his other sons. Carlito started coming home very late, angry and drunk.

Insensitive school environment. At first Noel liked school, even though he had frequent fistfights with classmates who teased him about his lisp. He began to say very little, even at home, for fear of being ridiculed. With Noy Asyong as his second teacher, he learned to read and write, and looked forward to their nightly lessons in the kitchen. His attitude changed in grade two. His teacher was very strict and sometimes made fun of his speech impediment: once Noel was ordered to stand in front of his classmates for an hour because he had mispronounced the word 'school'. The teacher often left the classroom for hours at a time and spanked the children when their clothes and fingernails didn't pass inspection.

Negative peer group influence. Eventually Noel took refuge in his friends' company. In the morning, he and his friends would roam the streets, loitering by the sea wall near the fishing port, or near snack bars hoping to get some leftovers from customers. Later, the children would play cards and *hantak* (a coin game). Noel placed bets with the 50 centavos that Noy Asyong gave him every morning to buy food. It didn't really matter to the children who won since the winner was expected to treat the losers.

One afternoon a friend of Noel's who had lost money gambling suggested that they all go scavenging. The day was such a success that Noel and his friends spent most afternoons from then on scavenging among piles of garbage on the streets. A widow lent them pushcarts and bought the glass, plastic or metal objects they collected.

Partial loss of adult support. The family soon found out that Noel was skipping classes to scavenge. Noy Asyong was so furious that he made Noel kneel on salt and whipped him with a leather belt. Linda was angry too. Only Carlito thought differently about the issue, remarking, 'At least he's learning to earn a living!' Because of Carlito's attitude, Noy Asyong vowed never to spend another 'centavo' for the boy's education: if Carlito wanted Noel to continue his schooling, he would have to pay for it himself. Noel was very upset. His grandfather began to treat him differently, no longer giving him 50 centavos every morning or supervising his studies at night. His cousins were forbidden to have anything to do with him. Even his older sister Annalee treated him with condescension.

About this time, Linda was bedridden after the birth of her sixth child. She had frequent strokes and felt very weak. Annalee had to stop studying to take care of her. Emilio, the oldest son, took over Linda's job at the beauty parlour. Noy Asyong paid for all the medication.

Carlito was seldom seen at home; his absences angered everybody, especially Linda's brother Andres, who blamed Carlito for his sister's illness. In addition to his job as a *cargador*, Carlito worked at the fishing port in Barangay Suba, earning an average of P75 per day (US\$2.81). But he was often carried home drunk, or slept at a friend's. While Noel's mother became increasingly sick, the children were left to fend for themselves, caught in the middle of fights between their father, mother and in-laws.

Sometime in 1986, Carlito established a secret liaison with another woman, Esotera Mendoza. She operated a small snack bar near the port. Their child, a baby girl, was born in November 1987, without Linda or Noy Asyong finding out about it.

Mother's death. A month later, Linda died of a hemorrhage; she was only 30 years old. Carlito was with Esotera the night Linda died. When he came home early the following morning, he was confronted by Andres, who was furious about his absence the night before. They had a heated argument which led to an almost fatal fistfight.

Noel spent the next months scavenging with his best friend Pidong, whose family could no longer afford to send him to school. They played in the morning and worked together in the afternoon. Nobody seemed to care what Noel did, except for his father, who threatened to kill him if he caught him taking drugs or sniffing 'rugby', a type of solvent. Pidong's brother Intoy was known to be a drug pusher, which was why, Noel realized, his father was so suspicious about their friendship.

Migration and forming of second family. In July 1988, Carlito informed Noy Asyong that he planned to move to Barangay Suba to be nearer his job and that he was going to buy a house with a loan from

the porter's cooperative he had recently joined (actually, as Noel soon learned, it was Esotera's money). His older brother, Emilio, went to live with his aunt. Noel really wanted to stay with his grandfather, even if he had to spend the whole day in the market selling dried fish. But Noy Asyong would not agree to it, although he promised to take his grandchildren back if Carlito mistreated them. Noel and his sister had no choice but to leave. They consoled themselves with the thought that neither their grandfather nor their friends would be too far away.

They moved to Barangay Suba in October. Noel, who was then 10 years old, met Esotera for the first time; Carlito introduced her to the children as their new mother. Noel and Annalee were so shocked that they ran away to their grandfather's the following day. Carlito soon came after them. Noy Asyong tried to persuade Carlito to leave the children with him, but Carlito told him that the bonds between them had ended with Linda's death. When they returned to Barangay Suba, Carlito beat both of the children and forbade them ever to go to their grandfather's house again. That was the first time Noel felt real hatred toward his father.

Negligence and overwork. Noel refuses to call Esotera 'Mamma'. He only goes to her when she summons him for something, and obeys her without a word. He spends as much time as he can with his friends and scavenges every day with Pidong, who has become his partner. Esotera knows about it, but doesn't care, saying, 'Well, I think it's a good thing that he learns the value of work. In that way, he can help his father feed his brother and sisters.'

Carlito's earnings are now used to finance Esotera's small stall, leaving Noel to cover the family's daily food expenses. Annalee is now in grade five. Two months ago, she started helping Esotera in the snack bar, leaving Noel to look after the younger children and to prepare supper. Having these tasks makes life more difficult for Noel. He has to be home every evening by seven o'clock to start cooking.

Violent home environment. Early in 1988, Carlito came home reeking of alcohol and found that Noel hadn't cooked the rice. Noel explained that he had had to wait in line for water. Carlito beat him.

That same night Noel ran away from home. He stayed at Pidong's house, hanging out on the streets during the day. Carlito found him on the third day, brought him home and beat him again. This did not keep Noel from going back to his friends.

Two months ago, Carlito let one of the two rooms in their house, the one that Noel and his two brothers and two sisters used to sleep in, to a spinster for P75 a month (US\$2.81). Now the whole family, including Noel's 1-year-old step-sister, is cramped into one room. Carlito has started staying out all night. Noel heard his father and Esotera quarrel two nights ago. She accused him of having a mistress,

and his father denied it. She became hysterical. Carlito knocked her to the floor and then walked out.

Noel says he doesn't want to go on scavenging forever. He dreams of becoming a policeman someday. 'A policeman earns money the easy way. And he doesn't pay for food but just asks for it and people give it to him because he has a gun. Ah, I wish I had a gun!' The last comment was said jokingly. Noel would like to go back to school, but his father won't hear of it. He says that it's better for Noel to keep on working so that they can all eat, adding, 'No one ever got rich from schooling!'

In less than 2 years, a succession of crises led Noel to the street. Each crisis had multiple negative outcomes leading to new crises with a compounding effect upon the child. The father's loss of steady earnings, for example, was one reason the family had to rely on the grandfather's financial support, causing family squabbles and leading Carlito to distance himself progressively from his wife's family and then his wife. Noel's grandfather is central to this story and shows how great a difference the role models provided by caring relatives can make for children in situations of family stress. Noel's desire to go back to school is indicative of the positive, enduring influence his grandfather has had upon him. Noel now feels that no one really cares about what happens to him. Without positive intervention he will grow up illiterate, with few job options and may even slide deeper into serious problems.

Intergenerational poverty and behavior patterns

Lida, a 17-year-old mother and scavenger in Cebu: Lida's mother Antonia migrated to the city in 1958 after the death of her mother. After 2 years she married Thelmo who was soon afterwards sentenced to 6 years' jail for killing his gambling partner during a card game. Antonia took up with Warlito in the hope of finding a father for her 'orphaned' children. He was killed in an accident on the construction site where he worked. Antonia and her four children, later evicted from their rented house, started to live on the streets.

When Antonia decided to live with Roberto, he seemed to be the 'father' that her orphaned children needed. He built them a 'home' but soon began to abuse the children and Antonia, eventually bringing disaster to the family with his drinking and drug pushing. While Antonia gave birth to Roberto's children, Francisca and Vicente (children of the first union) helped her with their earnings, and Lida and Lita (children of the second union) scrounged for their food in restaurant garbage cans, or begged.

In 1983 Lida and Lita were picked up and placed in centers set up by local non-governmental organizations. By 1987 Lida was helping her mother sell snacks on the sidewalks and started 'going with' Lando, a street child whom she had known since childhood. Lando, a scavenger who had spent some time in prison, began helping Antonia and Lida. When Antonia left for Manila in March 1989, Lida and Lando decided to live together as husband and wife.

Their first home as a couple was the sidewalk outside the International Travel Agency in Legaspi Street. They put up a tent made of cartons and jute sacking, which they usually folded in the daytime. To support his wife, Lando resorted to scavenging, the only occupation he knew, although it couldn't be depended upon for their daily needs.

Although Lando is illiterate (Lida is teaching him a bit), he can draw well. In 1988, he was asked to participate in a drawing contest sponsored by the municipality. But he was frightened of competing with well-educated college students, so he backed out.

The street life is not the kind of life the couple wants for their baby boy, born in February 1990. They want to be able to send their son to school. Lando, now 18 years old, wants to own a cart so that he can earn more but it costs about P400 (US\$15). At night they sleep with the baby between them inside their 'tent' on the sidewalk. They describe tomorrow as just another day of struggling to survive.

The story of Lida's family illustrates the intergenerational nature not only of poverty but also of certain behavioral patterns. Low levels of education, early marriage and/or pregnancy, a succession of partners (each resulting in children) are characteristics that are often repeated across generations.

Lida's story has several points in common with Noel's. Both touch upon the difficult relationship between children and their step-parents and the neglect of the natural parent once he or she has taken up a subsequent union. Both show how: (1) migration can be precipitated by crisis situations and at the same time generate additional crises; (2) the illness or loss of a parent through death, separation or imprisonment can radically alter children's life courses, forcing them not only to cope with their grief, but often also to fend for themselves or to assume breadwinning roles for the entire family; (3) in conditions of poverty and marginalization, certain patterns tend to repeat themselves. Research data tell us, for example, that in poor households in which the mother married at a young age, their daughters will also most likely marry young.

These two examples from the Philippines include elements that reappear in the life histories collected by country teams in each of the four developing countries and echo comparable problems in Italy, with somewhat different manifestations resulting from local gender systems and socioeconomic/political circumstances.

Events and processes affecting children: Brazil, India, Kenya and the Philippines

Migration, accompanying loss of community and extended family support

Mohammed Mujahir, a 14-year-old trainee in Delhi: When Mujahir was 8 years old, his grandparents divided the property among the five sons and their families. All of them continued to live under the same roof, but in different sections of the house and maintained separate households. Shortly afterwards, Mujahir's father Idris became ill. Mujahir gave up school to help look after his father, since his mother had four other sons and an infant girl to care for. His uncles started avoiding them for fear that they'd ask for money. Eventually Idris had to sell his land to a brother in order to pay for his medicine, special food and transportation to the doctors. The devastating effect of illness was felt again a year later when his mother became ill and had to be taken care of by her grandparents who lived in another village. Idris was only well enough to work a few hours a day and had to borrow money for the family's survival. It soon became clear that the family had no choice but to move to Delhi where they could live with an uncle and where Idris had a greater probability of finding remunerative work.

Once in Delhi, Idris had no trouble finding a job as a tailor in one of the garment factories. He earned about Rs40–50 (US\$1.28–1.61) per day which enabled all five members of the family to live fairly well. Mujahir didn't adapt well to his new life in the slums. He became a loner, hardly ever leaving the house and saying very little to anyone. According to his mother he would just stare into space and do nothing. Concerned that this behavior was becoming more and more ingrained, Idris enrolled Mujahir and Chand (Mujahir's brother) in a nearby *madarsa*. Mujahir, however, felt out of place in the new school and continually compared it with the old one in the village where he had many friends. He dropped out before the end of the school year.

Idris then decided that since Mujahir was not going to school he had best learn a trade. He found an apprenticeship for him at a tailoring shop where Mujahir worked 9 hours a day without pay. After 3 years Mujahir decided that he didn't want to be a tailor like his father and grandfather and left his job. It was around this time that his father started complaining of a chronic backache. Their income drastically declined. His father then found him another apprenticeship and Mujahir began learning machine embroidery in the huge workshop of an export firm. He practices on a machine, whenever it is free, usually about 2 hours a day and cuts thread and winds it on bobbins

the rest of the time. He works 6 days a week and in a month makes about Rs400 (US\$12.85). Mujahir finds the work boring and monotonous. 'At times I think my hands work faster than the machine and even in my sleep I think I am cutting and winding thread. But I have no choice – I have to do this because I want to earn and learn.'

His brother is learning the same trade and Mujahir thinks they will probably open a shop together one day. Meanwhile Mujahir secretly dreams of becoming a teacher. He wants to study and go to a real school, not a *madarsa*. Last year he started learning Hindi from a relative who lives in the same slum. Every night after work he spends about 2 hours studying and can now read elementary Hindi. He was not able to convince his brother Chand to study, but he did get two of his other brothers, Mubarak and Muhammad Ali, to enrol in a non-formal education center which they attend for 3 hours in the morning. Mujahir pays their fees, Rs2 (US\$0.06) each and extra for books. He also got his young sister and his other brother enrolled in the preschool in their slum. In his free time, Mujahir reads and spends what he can on books and magazines even though they are almost beyond his means.

His present life is a dull contrast to these bright dreams. 'It's a bore. When I think of myself I want to cry. I think of all those good and enjoyable days in the village and feel even sadder.'

Debt and diminished family support, in part tied to partible inheritance, illness, the high cost and inaccessibility of health care and scarce land availability caused the family to move to Delhi. Comparable compounding processes were at play in the other countries. In general, investment and support to rural households might be more cost effective than dealing with the social dislocation of families in cities. Low cost medicines and adequate health care would have helped Mujahir's family, perhaps making migration unnecessary. In general, when sudden and temporary illness strikes a family, the support from an extended family or from friends is often critical to getting over the crisis both financially and emotionally. Because the strength of family networks is diminishing in rural areas and is commonly weaker in the city, especially for new immigrants, there is a need to strengthen community support systems. Complete lack of concern for the social consequences for household members when they move to or within cities characterizes urban policies in all of the countries' studies. Recurrent threats of eviction and actual relocation represent a constant threat in urban poor neighborhoods and for squatters in all countries. In such cases this often leads to the overburdening of children both physically and emotionally. The complete absence of reception mechanisms for new or relocated migrants to cities was an important factor in many of the life histories. Such reception would, of course, need to be handled at the neighborhood level, not only because of

the greater opportunities there for providing integrated family advice and support, but also because it is only at this level that newcomers can be identified and the best forms of help can be developed.

Parental illness or death

Ben, a 12-year-old scavenger in Cebu: At 6 years of age Ben left school to join his elder brother, Cesar, on his scavenging trips. When Cesar left at 16, Ben, 9 years old, became the family's main scavenger and breadwinner, as his father had to spend most of his time looking after Ben's mother, who was chronically ill and mentally deranged. Ben became shy and irritable with other children because of his mother's 'sickness'; they teased him continuously. Recently, Ben's father has complained that Ben is stubborn and uncontrollable. The fact is that Ben has started sniffing inhalants. Ben defends himself by saying, 'What does my family want from me? I give them half of my earnings! I am just trying this thing. It is really nothing. I just buy it for a few pesos, but it gives me a feeling of lightness, which I do not normally feel! I feel heavy and sad just thinking of my situation!'

Jaime, a 7-year-old child in Davao: Jaime's parents were active in the peasant organization in their village, until his father was stabbed to death by some members of the local 'anti-Communist' group. His mother fled for her life, leaving Jaime and his two sisters with their grandmother. Two weeks later their grandmother decided to take the children to the next village where their mother was in hiding. Jaime wishes he could become like Rambo, the freedom-fighter played by Sylvester Stallone. He imagines 'ambushing' and killing the people responsible for his father's death. He hardly says anything, except when asked about his toy gun and his hero, Rambo.

Margaret, an 11-year-old student in Nairobi: The pain and trauma manifested by this young girl during a brief interview were unforgettable. She was obviously reluctant to speak about her family. But when her teacher insisted, she finally burst into silent tears, her face expressed intense hurt and she told us how her mother suffers from severe bouts of mental illness and disappears for days at a time, leaving her and her younger brothers and sisters alone with no money.

A parent, even when present, may actually be absent because of chronic mental or physical illness, or may lose the ability to care because of over-stress. This can create much hidden pain and deep trauma in children.

Parental abandonment

Vicky, a 12-year-old student in Nairobi: As is the Luyha custom, Vicky was left by her mother with her father after their divorce. The father soon remarried, but his new wife didn't want to live with another woman's child. Vicky went to live with her paternal grandmother who was quite old and died soon afterwards. None of the maternal relatives wanted to take Vicky in, claiming her father was primarily responsible for her care. With nowhere else to go, Vicky stayed on alone in her grandmother's house. A man heard about Vicky's plight from his neighbor's wife and sought permission from the area chief to bring the girl to Nairobi and foster her. Vicky's father was consulted and said he did not care what happened to the girl. No one, not even Vicky, knew where her mother was.

Michael, a 9-year-old grain-sweeper in Manila: Michael was 4 when his father was murdered on a pier. His mother, suffering severe depression, started to neglect the children. Eventually, she went to live in Manila, leaving the children with her mother but never sent any money to them. Their grandmother, who earned less than P20 a day picking up grains and scraps on the pier brought Michael to work to help her. A year later her mother came back pregnant with her new husband in tow. Michael did not like his step-father and quarreled with him, prompting his mother to sell their house and leave for Manila again. This time Michael really felt as if the world had closed in on him: 'My mother should not have sold the house my father left us; and she should not have taken all of the money she got for it for herself. Now we don't have anything. I doubt that she ever thinks about me and my brothers. I hate her child and her husband!'

In the case of Vicky, abandonment does not seem to have been as traumatic because it was justified in part by custom. However, in the Kenyan surveys, the country team found recurrent examples of difficult relationships with step-mothers in polygamous households. The custom of fosterage, common in Africa, helped Vicky. For Michael, however, his expectations of what a family should be reinforced the traumatic effects of abandonment.

Institutional shortcomings: insensitive schools

Schools are commonly irrelevant, too expensive or insensitive to the special needs of working children. They do not provide needed support.

Rawena, a 12-year-old scavenger in Cebu: Rawena learned how to scavenge with her grandmother. She is now earning more than her parents. Nonetheless, her teacher disapproved of her because her

clothes were not always in order and her hands were sometimes dirty and scarred because of her daily scavenging. She was teased and shamed and dropped out of school in grade five.

Ben had a bad stomach one day in grade one. He did not have the courage to tell the teacher that he needed to go to the toilet and ended up defecating in his pants. The teacher reprimanded him for the accident in front of the whole class. Since then he has never wanted to go near the school again.

Noel Espina was so severely teased about his speech defect that he too dropped out of school.

Schools, a major socialization ground for 6- to 18-year-olds, often fail to provide children in distress with what they actually need. Too focused on internal bureaucratic requirements and quite removed from community concerns, school teachers and administrators narrowly define their task as one of delivering a specific curriculum rather than as educators in a broad sense. The examples above illustrate some of the barriers to schooling for working children. For the Filipino children in the examples, these barriers are particularly strong because their culture places greater emphasis on shame than on guilt. This is a feature common to many developing countries.

Impoverished children are often ridiculed and marginalized because of their appearance, especially when they attend a school located outside their slum areas. If teachers, though often well meaning, realized the harmful effects of such behavior and were encouraged to understand the children's problems better and help them overcome them, half of the battle would be won. Misunderstandings at school greatly contribute to the distress of disadvantaged children, making them particularly aware of their marginalization from the larger society. At the same time, these children are denied a potentially valuable source of support. There are, of course, many other barriers to schooling for working children: inflexible hours, money needed for uniforms, books, transport and supplies, inadequate transportation; but the traumatic effects of marginalization and shame are perhaps the most difficult to overcome. A change of perspective has been achieved by those schools that closely collaborate with families and communities through home visits and out-of-school activities. If these extracurricular activities were mandated and internally rewarded, they could become widespread and effective.

The unbroken cycle of distress: Maria and her children

Maria, an emotionally damaged mother in Goiânia: 'I had a wonderful life. My family wasn't rich, but we never had trouble with the law. My mother's family is rich; they all have ranches. The poorest

is my mother. I spent my childhood in the country, hoeing and planting. My mother separated from my father when I was young.'

'I was 8 years old when I lost my virginity. He was over 40 years old. I didn't even have breasts After it was over, he took a revolver from a drawer, saying, "I'll unload this on your family if you open your mouth!" I kept my mouth shut. When my mother found out, I was almost 14 years old. After I told my secret, my life was over – that childhood of joy, trust, respect in the house.'

When he discovered she was no longer a virgin, her step-father forced her to live with someone who was already a grandfather. Maria had her first child when she was 14 years old. Her first husband abandoned his wife and children and Maria returned to her mother. But this was no haven: 'My third step-father used to say, "Since you're no longer worth anything, you stay here with me. When your mother is sick, you can be my wife." I told him if he didn't straighten up I would tell my mother. When I couldn't take it any longer, I said to my mother, "Mother, let's go to Goiânia. It's a good capital. We will have all the assistance we need. This husband of yours is no man for us." Mother didn't believe it and told him everything I had said. He was so furious, he beat me, screaming, "A bitch like you has to live on the street!" He took my things and threw them out the door.'

Maria went on to have three more partners, each bringing painful experiences, before settling with her current fifth partner. Six of her ten children live with her. She wanted them all to live together believing that 'to have a house and a job was a richness for my children'. One is already a mother and lives with the grandmother, two others live on the street and Paulo (whose story is described below) has recently chosen to leave the streets to live in an 'open institution'. Maria complains that her children 'only want to be on the street. They disappear during the day and only return at night.'

Early sexual abuse and emotional trauma have transformed Maria into a well-meaning but often erratic parent, as the story of Paulo, her son, further illustrates.

Running away or dropping out from the family

Paulo, a 13-year-old street beggar in Goiânia: When Maria started working with the Urban Cleaning Service, Paulo was 3 years old, and nobody was available to take care of him. One of his older brothers started taking Paulo to Goiânia every day. Maria left for work early in the morning and arrived home late at night to an empty house. She'd then go out looking for the children and eventually would find them on the street. Maria relates, 'Where we lived there were many children,

but it takes only one to lead all the others astray One says, "Let's go to Goiânia! There we can get some money ... we can buy candy ... we can do this ... we can do that ..." Then you get used to living that way and you don't want another sort of life.'

Paulo has difficulty communicating and seems constantly agitated. The street workers explained that one day he decided to follow his eldest brother who was going downtown. He managed to get on the bus without paying. Once at the terminal he begged for some money and bought something to eat. It was then that he realized that he liked the street. When he arrived home that night his mother beat him with a stick. Afterwards, he went to the street almost everyday, managing to make 100–200 cruzeiros (US\$2.50–5.00) a day. Then Paulo and his companions were picked up by the police for stealing a bicycle, which, Paulo told his mother, he only took because the older boys threatened to beat him up if he didn't.

Maria says, 'Everybody is sorry that my children are stealing. My heart aches. Some days I lie down and keep wondering whether my son is sleeping on a bed. I cry. Once I was working downtown and I found Paulo inside some cardboard boxes ... together with ... a gang of street urchins ...so dirty I have already thought about quitting my job and going to the countryside to see if I can recuperate the boys.'

The street educators explain that Paulo usually begs until he gets enough to buy what he wants. He also is occasionally involved in small thefts and sniffs glue and nail polish to get high. He is currently in an open institution for 7- to 14-year-old 'handicapped, abandoned and street children'. Some times Paulo gets bored and goes into the street. Maria rarely shows up to visit him and, according to some staff members, the child says he misses her and his present step-father.

Raju, a 13-year-old street coolie in Delhi: Before coming to Delhi, Raju lived with his family. Raju's father used to get work regularly, earning good daily wages, but since drought conditions set in 3 years ago, he only works seasonally. He had to take out a large loan to get his first daughter married, using his labor as his only asset. The tension created by his already large debt and the need to marry off his second daughter changed him completely. He started getting drunk and would abuse, kick and hit Raju and his mother. Whatever he earned was spent on alcohol and when he had no earnings, he drank on credit.

The family often went hungry and whenever his mother asked her husband for money to buy food he would beat her. His father became more and more violent. Raju was so petrified of his father that he wouldn't return home until he was sure he had gone to sleep. Raju now says, 'I don't understand why he beat me so mercilessly. I don't

think I ever did anything wrong.’ The sight of Raju somehow infuriated his father who would scream abuse at the boy: ‘Why don’t you do something? Why don’t you fend for yourself? Why do I have sons who don’t help and support me?’

Raju had overheard people saying that Delhi was a golden city where everybody was rich. He desperately wanted to go there. One day his mother gave him money to buy wheat flour, and as Raju was going to the ration shop he saw the bus leaving for Bareilly, a city close to his village. He now says, ‘I don’t know what happened to me but I ran and caught the bus.’

In Bareilly, he went to the railway station where he saw a train for the first time in his life. He finally mustered the courage to ask a boy in a tea shop about the train, and managed to get free passage to Delhi. Once there, however, he couldn’t figure out how to leave the railway station without a ticket.

For 2 days he felt completely lost and ‘very scared’. He didn’t eat anything because he had no money and he couldn’t sleep. Gradually, he became friends with some other boys in the station who made their living there by begging, carrying luggage or working in stalls, depending upon what was available. Raju followed them around for a few days and finally sneaked out of the station along with three other boys.

His first reaction was that Delhi was too big and too crowded. They immediately went to Sarojini Nagar market – which Raju liked better than the railway station because it was in the open — to meet Joginder, a ‘coolie’. Joginder told Raju he earned around Rs10 (US\$0.32) a day, and, when Raju decided to stay, lent him Rs5 to buy a basket. For nearly 2 days Raju made no money at all because other coolies were faster in cornering clients. But gradually he learnt the tricks and earned the same as the others.

Raju uses the public toilet facilities available in the market and has no belongings except for his basket. He sleeps with Joginder in secluded corners. Joginder explained that the police just harassed young boys so it was better not to be conspicuous. Sometimes the police did get strict. One day the boys were rounded up and told to leave immediately, so he and Joginder went to the INA market.

Every day Raju tries one or two new items, choosing from the great variety of snacks and food available at the market. ‘Except for the first 2 days, I have never gone hungry in Delhi. I eat every day and more than I ever ate in the village’, he claims. Raju has been in Delhi for only 6 months. He misses his mother and elder sister, but is afraid to go back home.

The city ‘pulls’ most children running away from their families, but only

when there are also strong elements 'pushing' them to leave home. Running away from home into the city appears as an opportunity only to an already troubled child. Physical or sexual abuse, family violence, death or other major crises in the family, and in all cases economic deprivation, are more significant than the glittering image of the city. The country team encountered runaways in night shelters in Hyderabad and Vijayawada. Many sold tea in street stalls or scavenged. Others had much more dangerous occupations. In the railroad stations of Indian cities, for instance, coolies jump on to moving trains to catch clients before other coolies do. Numerous cases of children being killed or losing limbs have been reported.

Clearly the best time to intervene to help runaway children is when they are in the process of running away, or when they arrive in the city, experience their first disillusionment and begin searching for alternatives. It may be possible to reunite them with their families in some cases, or at least to provide them with immediate protection from the excesses of the street. Had an NGO intercepted Raju at the Bareilly or Delhi station during his moments of fear, presented him with some advice and alternatives and helped to find some support for him in his home village or temporarily in the city, he might have eventually made the transition back to his village. One such program in the Bombay railway station makes contact with children as they leave the train. Street workers wander the platforms looking for bewildered, newly arriving children to offer them support and advice before they are found by someone else who might be far less supportive. Unfortunately, attempts to reunite these children with existing support back in their villages are most often frustrated by the difficulties of communication and by limited finances. More often, the street educators at the railway station try to provide for the child's transition to urban living through a range of alternative supports.

Socialization into prostitution and substance abuse

Marifel, a 9-year-old vendor and student in Cebu: Marifel, her mother, Lida Garcia, her mother's common-law husband, Boy, and her 6-year-old sister, Bernice, have practically lived on the sidewalk of Fuente Osmena since 1987. They rent a room in the hills, 6 km from the center, but only go there once or twice a week to do their laundry or to bathe. Otherwise, there is nothing to do there; furthermore, the bus fare is expensive.

The family usually wakes up at around six in the morning and moves to the park where they eat their breakfast. Boy is a car-watcher; Lida and her daughter Marifel take turns vending cigarettes and watching over Bernice. Lida begins selling cigarettes at about ten in the morning while Marifel watches and plays with her sister; sometimes she reads and studies her lessons. In the afternoon, Lida

takes care of Bernice while Marifel goes to school. She is enrolled in the first grade at the City Central School. Although she is almost 10 years old, she is quite small and looks much younger. Her classes start at half past twelve and end at five in the afternoon. After school, Marifel hawks cigarettes until about ten at night.

Marifel had just turned 9 when she had 'relations' with the 'American'. She recalled how the arrangement began: 'We were standing there by the park and the American was walking by. My step-father, Boy, pushed me and told me to tell the American, "Joe, give me money, I am hungry!" After that, the American took us (Boy and my friend Arlene) to his hotel room. He told me and Arlene to take a bath in front of him. He didn't really do anything. He just wanted me to sit on his lap and let him touch my buttocks.'

Afterwards, the 'American' gave her money, clothes, a new pair of shoes and took her to a picnic at the Talisay beach. When the foreigner left, he promised to send money so that Marifel could go to school. He sent a letter, a camera and a wristwatch, but Boy sold them. Marifel hated him for that and for the other things he always did to her, especially when he went through the pockets of her dress, while she was asleep, to get the money she had made hawking. He would do this every time he wanted to buy a drink.

Marifel has started hanging around with the 'hostesses' and their customers at night. The vendors around the park fear that she will 'grow' into that job. Marifel speaks jokingly of her 'Number One' ambition: 'I want to marry an American so I can buy a car and run over my step-father!'

Negro, Lida's younger half-brother, learned to sniff 'rugby' at the age of 4. His father sold the solvent and used to watch the children get 'high'. Whenever he wanted 'rugby', his father would give it to him, claiming there was nothing wrong with it if taken once in a while. Negro also discovered that the 'high' from sniffing the inhalant would soothe his hunger and take his mind off food.

Unemployed father, overburdened mother and child resiliency

Vijay, a 15-year-old surrogate mother in Delhi: Vijay lives with her parents, paternal grandmother, two brothers (19 and 9 years of age) and her 5-year-old sister Lata. Vijay loved going to school, liked her teachers and was a good student, but had to leave school when she was 10 years old. Everything changed that year. Her father lost his job as a worker in a private company and was unable to find another. Her mother was pregnant and couldn't work. The family soon had to manage with very little food and Vijay often went hungry. Her father in his frustration used to beat her if she complained. Around this time

the youngest child in the family got sick and died at 2 years of age. Lata was born while the family was going through this crisis. About a month before the birth, Vijay was forced to leave school to look after the home and her pregnant mother.

Vijay's mother started working as a domestic helper when Lata was about 2 months old, returning home every 2–3 hours to nurse the baby. By the time Lata was 6 months old, her mother had started to work in two more houses. She used to take Lata with her and leave her in a park while she worked. However this didn't work out because the baby was attacked by crows and troubled by stray dogs. She stopped nursing the baby and had Vijay bottle-feed her at home so she could take on more work. Vijay spent all her time at home doing the housework and grew increasingly fond of her baby sister. But despite Vijay's love and care, Lata failed to thrive and still could not sit or speak at the age of 2. Vijay's parents were too immersed in their own problems to pay much attention to the children.

When Vijay was 12 years old, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences started a project for the early detection of mentally handicapped children. They came across Lata in a house-to-house survey. The special educator felt that Lata could show marked improvement in her gross motor skills. The parents were 'counseled' and asked to bring her to the center for further medical evaluation. However, the mother had no time, and the father felt that looking after the children was women's work. On subsequent home visits the project staff met Vijay. She was enthusiastic about a program that might benefit her beloved sister and willingly took on the responsibility of Lata's training.

Vijay and Lata were among the most regular children at the clinic. Vijay had to work extra hard to make time for this activity. She also had to carry the crying, protesting Lata to and fro and keep encouraging her to cooperate with the staff. Instead of receiving thanks and encouragement, Vijay was initially scolded by her parents for wasting time and being taken in by mere talk. They felt that if God willed, Lata would learn to sit, walk and talk, and reminded Vijay that some children take longer and some never learn. However, Vijay was determined to do something to improve her sister's life. Moreover, she enjoyed her interaction with the project staff, who gave her the same sort of feeling that school had. She worked hard, following instructions meticulously, in letter and in spirit. At home she tried to do everything the 'doctor' said.

Vijay has a heavy workload: she has to cook; clean the house; fetch water for the family's daily needs; take clothes and utensils to the community tap and wash them; supervise her brothers; wash, clean and feed Lata; and serve the family meals at different times throughout

the day. She has no time to meet her friends or even to chat at the water tap. Vijay accepts all this and explains that they are going through a bad time. She has no regrets. Lata has been improving steadily and now not only walks independently, but also gives Vijay a hand with the household chores, such as cleaning vegetables or fetching things. This progress gives Vijay a tremendous sense of achievement, which, along with the appreciation she receives from the project staff, gives her the strength to strive even harder.

Against all odds: from street child to street educator

Filippo, a 17-year-old street educator in Olongapo: Filippo never knew his father, and his mother left him when he was a baby. Deserted by her husband, she had decided to look for a job in Manila. When Filippo was a young boy his uncle took him to Manila to see her. Filippo stayed and found work as a babysitter. At 9 years of age he went to work in Baton, cooking and babysitting for the family of a female security guard. He moved back to Manila after 3 months.

Shortly after his return he saw a large bus with the words 'Victory Lines' and 'Olongapo' written on the side. He did not know what Olongapo meant but he had P50 and that was all it took to take him there. That night, he found himself sleeping by the church in the center of Olongapo: 'I was alone and very scared of the other kids but I believed in God', he says. He managed to find a job selling plastic bags, which he bought for P1 for four bags and sold for 50 centavos each.

At about age 10, he found a job washing *jeepneys* (large taxis) in the market. One day a female *jeepney* driver found him sick and put him up in her house for 2 weeks while he got better. She then gave him P5 (US\$0.18) for each *jeepney* he washed. Subsequently, he met an American man in the neighborhood who hired him as 'house boy', initially for P150 (US\$6.75) per month plus board, which was increased after 2 weeks to US\$15 per month. His responsibilities included cleaning, babysitting and other household tasks. After 7 months, the American returned to the United States and Filippo went back to the street to sell newspapers, sleeping at the soup kitchen.

While Filippo was selling newspapers in St Jude's Hospital, a doctor offered him a job as a domestic helper for P300 (US\$11.25) per month on condition that he enrolled at a night school. He attended night school from 1986 to 1987, but then left the family because he didn't like them. He returned to selling newspapers but still attended night school, paying for it by himself. He slept at the soup kitchen again.

One day Filippo saw children playing volleyball and gave them

some hints. Kaya Bill ('Uncle Bill') observed him instructing these children and asked if he wanted to teach them for P10 per day. Uncle Bill was Bill Abigail, a coordinator of street children's programs in Olongapo. Filippo agreed to teach the children volleyball; he also received training in leadership, street theater, health and other topics meant to improve his work with children. Filippo was able to attend regular school and graduated from high school in March 1991.

At the time of the interview, he was looking for a job as a social worker in a college town and hoped to have a scholarship and salary as a street educator while continuing his education. Ultimately, wishing to become a teacher, Filippo dreams of bringing his mother and sisters to Olongapo, after getting a house for them. His mother came to Olongapo and found a job as a laundry worker 4 months ago, and he is helping her with the rent. He sleeps in a house he manages with seven other street children, all aged from 15 to 18 years. The rent for the house is paid by TATAG ('The Voice and the Guide'), an ad hoc organization of all the street children's organizations in Olongapo. Filippo serves as vice-president of TATAG as well as treasurer of the vendor's association.

The loss of employment by the father, the family's primary wage-earner, and the heavy overburdening of the mother can have serious consequences for a child, as also seen in the life histories of Noel, Chris, Raju and Filippo. Vijay's case provides a valuable illustration of how distressful circumstances need not be deterministic, but can sometimes be modified by the resiliency and tenacity of a child when he or she encounters and utilizes an appropriate opportunity. The importance for Vijay of her relationship with Lata bears witness to her need for self-realization and her otherwise inadequate emotional support. Vijay also has a great gift for and interest in learning, which emerged when she was given the chance to exercise it. This is another reason why one needs to view families, like communities, as interactive systems. Negative circumstances can sometimes be partially overcome – at least emotionally – by taking up and building on the many opportunities which may be present.

A 'resilient child' can initiate a course of action that activates people and processes which, in turn, function as a support to the child. Vijay was able to translate her positive experience at school into a constructive relationship with medical staff and her sister. She successfully pursues and carves out a realm of experience that enables her to receive the emotional support she needs and provides her with alternative role models. Carried to the negative extreme, a father's unemployment or underemployment can create such a violent home environment that the child runs away, as in the case of Raju, who, without actually planning it, left home one day to buy flour and never went back.

Italian cases

Ernesto, a 9-year-old student in Palermo: When Ernesto speaks, an unexpectedly strong-willed personality emerges. His situation at home is difficult, but he doesn't show it. The crumbling building that houses his third-floor 'apartment' in Naples' crowded Spanish quarter – where he lives with his parents, grandfather, two brothers and a sister in one room and a kitchen – is still wrapped in a web of scaffolding that was put up after a massive earthquake shook the area in 1980. Although Ernesto was not yet born when the quake struck, he is constantly reminded of the trembler's devastating effects. Whenever something goes wrong at home it is blamed on the earthquake, which in Ernesto's mind has now become a long and immanent catastrophe.

Unlike many of the children in his neighborhood, Ernesto still goes to school, attending the fourth grade. He doesn't particularly enjoy it, but he knows it's the only way for him to rise out of the squalor in which he and his family live. Ernesto's parents and siblings all sleep in one room, while he sleeps in the kitchen with his grandfather. Indeed, it is this nightly contact with his grandfather that has helped him to become more mature. Usually, before they go to sleep, they talk. The grandfather talks about a life of poverty, memories of hunger, of growing up and playing in those same alleyways, of living through two wars and of his many dreams that have never come true. Ernesto talks of school, friends and of his future dreams too. His grandfather is the only adult who takes the time to listen to Ernesto and he has heard all of his grandson's plans: 'I want to make lots of money somehow so I can get out of this lousy place. I want to show those people who were lucky enough to be born rich by making enough money to buy a Ferrari. Then I'll drive up and down via Roma like a big shot, with my mother at my side.'

Ernesto adores his mother, who just manages to make the household survive with her job as a housemaid. With her 900,000 lire (US\$611.40) per month, she pays the rent (200,000 lire) and feeds seven people. Ernesto's older brother, 13-year-old Giorgio, dropped out of school 2 years ago and has a job helping out an auto mechanic. But his small weekly salary (80,000 lire or US\$54.35) is barely enough to put petrol in his motorbike and buy cigarettes.

It's almost impossible to get Ernesto to talk about his father and he tries to skirt any topic which might force him to talk about him. But when he can no longer avoid the subject, Ernesto says, 'He's never worked. He says it's because they've never given him a job, but the truth is he doesn't want to work. He spends his days with his friends, talking, playing cards, getting drunk. He's a good-for-nothing who takes advantage of mother because she's too nice.'

Actually, his father spends much of his time at the local headquarters of a committee for jobless people in the Spanish quarter (he's been a member for 12 years!), which often organizes protests.

Ernesto's 6-year-old brother is in first grade, although Ernesto says 'it's still too early to tell' if he'll continue with his studies. Instead, his 14-year-old sister Teresa stays at home to do the housework and look after their grandfather. Like many girls in the neighborhood, she had no choice but to drop out of school after only a few years.

Despite Ernesto's faith in education as the only hope of making a better life for himself, the situation in school is not easy for him. He has very few friends since most of his fellow students are, as he puts it, 'sons of *cammoristi* [members of Naples' organized crime racket] and they all smoke joints. Sometimes they give me one but I never take it. I don't want to ruin my life with drugs.'

An exception is his best friend, Gaetano, who shares Ernesto's same determination to study and make money. But while Gaetano wants to open a grocery store, Ernesto hopes to become like the personalities he sees on television. Above all, however, Ernesto wants to make enough money so that his mother can stop working and stay at home to watch soap operas, as other mothers do. In fact, he vows to hand over all his earnings to his mother, 'except 100,000 lire per month that I've promised to grandfather'.

What Ernesto can't bear, on the other hand, is the thought that some day, 'I could end up like my father!'

'Girls stay at home'

Enzuccia, a 10-year-old girl in Naples: Enzuccia lives with her family in two small rooms in a ground-floor apartment in the crowded inner-city neighborhood of Cavone. Her three brothers, aged 7, 15 and 17, share a sofa while Enzuccia sleeps in her own small bed in her parents' room.

Enzuccia's father is officially jobless and receives some unemployment money from the municipality; however, every day he goes to the town hall where, for a small fee, he waits in long lines to process official documents and forms for people who haven't the time or the wits to brave the vast bureaucratic jumble of offices. In the afternoon he plays cards with friends. Enzuccia's mother is also paid under the table – and poorly – for her job in a nearby shoe factory. Together, when they are both healthy and working, they earn around 2.2 million lire (US\$1495) per month.

A typical day in Enzuccia's home begins early in the morning. Her father rouses the boys from their sofa, making sure the eldest two get

to work on time and the youngest to school. He is very strict, Enzuccia claims, but 'he only hits my brothers; I get mine from my mother'. Enzuccia went to primary school for 2 years and then dropped out. According to her mother, 'it was a waste of time and she didn't learn anything'. Now, after her mother and father and three brothers have left the house each morning, Enzuccia, still in her bathrobe, switches on the soap operas and begins scrubbing the tiny apartment.

At lunchtime, her mother returns home and Enzuccia is finally free to go out with her girlfriends. After looking at objects they'll never be able to afford in the shop windows, they end up at Pignasecca, where Enzuccia's eldest brother, Ferdinando, sells copied music cassettes from an outdoor stand. Ostensibly they go there to keep Ferdinando company; however, Enzuccia says that she likes several of her brother's friends, who she claims are courting her. Often the girls travel around the city by bus without paying and tease the boys and girls who go to school, sometimes squirting them with a water pistol. Enzuccia's girlfriends have all left school and spend their time in front of the television or out on the streets.

Enzuccia's future ambition is to get married and continue living in Cavone, though in a nicer apartment with a balcony and a view of the bay. But she still has no boyfriend and anyway, 'my father would kill me because I'm still too young'.

Present situations

In terms of the key crisis events and the most significant circumstances of their lives, both Ernesto's and Enzuccia's stories present significant similarities with those of children from the four developing countries. Both, as is not uncommon in southern Italy, come from large families. Ernesto, much as Noel, Filippo, Raju and Vijay, has a seldom present, often frustrated, and chronically unemployed father, whom he characteristically strongly dislikes, and a hard-working, overburdened mother whom he adores. His major relationship is with a caring, attentive grandfather, who provides an important role model. Ernesto still studies but he has few friends in school and dislikes his school peers, who are tied to the urban culture of drugs and violence. Enzuccia, who left school with her mother's approval, has a jobless father who, however, vents his frustrations mostly on her brothers. She is a surrogate mother at home. She does the housework by herself in the morning, while her overtaxed mother works outside the home. She then roams the city and dreams with her other out-of-school girlfriends about possible futures and enticing consumer goods.

The solitude of Ernesto (as a child) and of his grandfather (as a senior citizen) and the marginalized existence of the out-of-school girls are particularly Italian. Absence of organized after-school activities and dangerous neighborhoods discourage peer interaction.²

Future prospects

Both Ernesto and Enzuccia are still quite young. Their lives manifest serious difficulties (solitude, poor schooling and overworked earning parents) but they have both so far found coping strategies that keep them away from trouble. With the help of his grandfather, Ernesto developed a strong notion of the kind of future life he wants. Enzuccia, to offset her solitude at home, entertains dreams with her friends. A constellation of dangers however surrounds them.

If Ernesto were to lose his grandfather, his moral anchor, as Noel did, or if any number of potentially negative events were to strike him and his family, as has happened to the somewhat older Neapolitan children interviewed, ages 10–13, his life might change radically. Relocation away from long-time neighbors and friends could increase the parents', especially the father's frustrations and thus augment domestic violence and children's emotional responses.

Such fathers, often absent and violent, are frequently despised by their sons: 'When I was 6 he broke a bottle over my mother's head', says Raffaele, 11 years old, who takes drugs, hates school, steals and dreams of robbing a bank. He has also spent a few years in an institution. 'It's better when he's in prison', says 11-year-old Vincenzo, who works hard as a vegetable vendor to help support his family and has no time or place to play with his friends. 'At least there's some peace.' Family relationships then deteriorate, 'We are never all at home together any more to eat or sleep', says Antonio, age 12.

Mothers, often loved, represent the main family socialization agents. But they are overstressed and often unable to protect their children. Within the family, moral judgments often focus – interestingly – on their respective sense of responsibility and ways of relating to each other rather than on objective grounds (do not steal, do not kill, etc.).

As family relations dissolve, peer group relations increase in significance. Owning a motorbike or other consumer goods becomes very important. Children, in order to obtain them, may start using and/or dealing drugs, or be attracted into the *camorra* (organized crime ring).

For Enzuccia, without schooling and approaching adolescence, the dangers are consumerism – a wish to be and have what she sees in the soap operas while doing the housework – and early pregnancy – a means of offsetting her emotional loneliness. She might start selling drugs like Anna (13 years old and 3 months pregnant) and Franca, 12, both early school drop-outs, who started out selling contraband cigarettes with the encouragement of their parents and relatives and now carry out odd jobs within the neighborhood. Anna says she is 'glad to be pregnant. It was time for me, since I helped raise my brothers and sisters, to have a baby of my own.' She is looking forward to it and has the money to buy clothes and food for the baby, 'even if my mother doesn't agree'. Anna and Franca were recently appre-

hended for drug dealing, but they were only reprimanded and sent home to their parents since they are too young to be formally charged. Nevertheless, their names are now on file with the police. Escaping unpunished and feeling immune, the two girls see it all as an innocent game; it is, however, a game that will one day most likely result in a very rude awakening.

Will the coping strategies of Ernesto and Enzuccia keep them out of trouble? Or will they get involved in drugs, gangs and organized crime, as has happened to many of the older children in the same Neapolitan neighborhoods.

Lessons from the life histories

A number of important lessons may be drawn from the life histories:

1. *No single causes, no single solutions.* No single crisis event along the route to spiraling disadvantage should be construed as the sole reason for a child's precipitation into difficult circumstances. Each crisis represents, however, a critical moment for intervention, which, if timely, can prevent the onset of other events that would compound and complicate the child's hardship irremediably. More importantly, given the multiple sources of disadvantage, interventions must take place at different levels. The security of tenure in housing and jobs and the adequacy of urban basic services are, for example, issues that need to be addressed at the same time as assistance is provided at the child and family levels. Moreover, the urban poor have to be encouraged to take charge of their own destinies by developing their capacity to manage resource bases, including incomes or livelihood opportunities.

2. *Families need support, within the context of their community.* The life histories illustrate that events that put children at a disadvantage are less likely to depend upon them than upon their family or community. The histories also illustrate how impoverished urban families may run into serious trouble because of certain crisis events, which can lead to dangerous stress, deterioration or even a state of permanent crisis. In this case, family members may become increasingly quarrelsome and violent, to the point of abusing or mistreating children; they have less time for their children who, if not otherwise supported, suffer personal isolation, even though not necessarily alone, as happens increasingly in Italy; children may also be forced to take on a heavy burden of work at an early age, especially in cases of parental separation, illness or death; and children may end up being emotionally scarred, harboring feelings of indignation and rage. All of this clearly points to the need to expand programs focused on the child to programs focused on the child, the family and the community.

Domestic violence may occur in all social classes, but the consequences of domestic squabbles, or drinking and womanizing on the part of the husband are felt more among the urban poor because these families are so marginalized and their economic resources so precarious that when a crisis arises the basic needs of children suffer.

3. *The problem is often intergenerational.* The pattern is very clear in both the survey data and the life histories of children and their families: poverty is passed on from one generation to the next because of the reproduction of characteristics, including no or limited education, early pregnancy, unemployment or low skilled jobs yielding low incomes.

4. *Especially in third world countries, the origins of problems are often in the rural areas of provenance.* The strategies to revert migration flows by improving conditions in rural areas should remain an important priority at the national and international level.

5. *Children of the streets become trapped by labeling, stigmatization and victimization.* Being an ex-prisoner puts one on the suspect list much faster than people with clean records, according to Dindo. He is still struggling to escape this image, which makes the owners of establishments in his scavenging area wary of him. Because of this label, Dindo wants to own a cart for scavenging rather than continue using a sack. He explains: 'I am more likely to be suspected of theft if I carry a sack whose contents cannot be seen than if I place my scavenged scraps in an open cart!' Similarly, the label 'child of the streets' conjures up pejorative meanings and images in people's minds, influencing patterns of social relations with these children. Impoverished children are often unjustly attributed with negative characteristics. Lida had worked for 6 months as a housekeeper when her employer's son accused her of stealing a diamond ring. Actually he had lost the ring gambling, but because he was afraid of his mother, he blamed the theft on Lida. According to the neighbors, Lida's street background made it easy for the employers to believe these false accusations.

As scavengers, Noel and Pidong were victimized by a number of people: by older scavengers who often ran away with the bottles and scraps the young boys had so tediously collected; by garbage collectors who destroyed their cart because 'they wanted children to stop scattering the garbage'; and by jeering bystanders who threw small stones at them. Children who are not in the company of adults are perceived as being vulnerable and defenseless; they easily fall prey to the pranks, and sometimes mean and brutal ways, of bystanders.

As the life histories show, the threats to children are rooted in social, occupational and family characteristics. Job loss, migration, eviction, parental

illness or death, domestic instability and insensitive providers are major contributors to the problems children face, leading to excessive work, running away, substance abuse, mental stress, domestic violence and abuse. Community and societal forces intensify risks to children: their experiences and potential as adults are shaped by the broad pattern of urbanization and by the marginal and impoverished positions of their families and communities.

The analysis undertaken in this study points to the possibility that interventions during the initial critical events in children's lives might prevent the spiral of subsequent negative outcomes, which create further and increasingly dangerous difficulties and disadvantages to the child and his or her family. The analysis also underscores the need to develop the means for early intervention through community- or neighborhood-based monitoring systems capable of identifying at-risk and vulnerable children as critical events occur involving the children themselves and/or their family, school, peer group or community. Neighbors and other significant persons in a child's life possess knowledge that should become the basis of community-based monitoring systems. Not only would this provide the most effective means – both in terms of results and costs – of linking detection to early intervention programs, it would also encourage greater community involvement in preventing and/or coping with situations leading children into deepening distress.

Notes

This article is a shortened version of a chapter on the life histories of poor urban children that was prepared for inclusion in *Urban Children in Distress. Global Predicaments and Innovative Strategies* (Blanc et al., 1994). It represents a first attempt to illustrate how national, international and local events and conditions have deep repercussions all the way into the lives of children.

Emma Porio, Pratibha Mehta and Wilson Moura have greatly contributed to this article by collecting many of the life histories presented here and helping to interpret them. Emma Porio and Roger Hart helped in the selection. Richard Dunbar translated the two Italian life histories, and Diana Saltarelli carefully edited the initial text. All participants in the urban child action-research project repeatedly discussed, across country boundaries, the significance of the information provided by children and youth.

1. Life histories can serve other purposes as well. In particular they can be analyzed from the point of view of the individuality and subjectivity of lives in cultural context. They are personal documents that can be used to throw light on an individual's view of themselves, their life situation, or the state of the world as they understand it. Somewhat different from autobiographies or diaries because usually prompted by another person, they are ultimately forms of self-representation, inherently selective but also very illuminating.

2. See Chapter 6 in Blanc et al. (1994).

References

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