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CHAPTER 10

CHILDREN AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

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The reduction of direct violence requires not only interventions aimed at individuals, but also structural changes aimed at how societies operate, as Kostelny and Garbarino have outlined in their chapter. In this chapter, we examine the effects of structural violence on children. *Structural violence* is the unequal distribution of power and wealth within and between societies, and it has insidious effects on the health, intellectual development, education, and general welfare of millions of children. The cruelties of structural violence on children are often subtle, unspoken, unrecognized, and even *normalized*, regarded by many people as natural or “just the way things are.” This chapter focuses on how children suffer the cruel effects of structural violence, and why it has long-lasting consequences on their intellectual, social, and emotional development.

THE GLOBAL PICTURE

We can gauge the extent to which children are victims of structural violence by comparing the conditions that would be ideal for optimal growth and development against those children actually experience. Albee (1992) concluded that an ideal environment or prevention program would

ensure that every baby born anywhere in the world would be a healthy, full-term infant weighing at least eight pounds and welcomed into the world by economically secure parents who wanted the child and had planned jointly for her or his conception and birth....The baby would be breast-fed by an adequately nourished mother who was not on drugs [and there would be] good health care for expectant mother and child (p. 313).

Although other experts might add to these criteria for an ideal environment, few would dispute the significance of the features Albee identified. We do not have to look far to realize that we are a long way from providing optimal conditions for the world's children. More than a quarter of the world's population, about 1.5 billion people, are considered poor (Renner, 1998) and most of the poor live in so-called "developing countries" in the southern hemisphere. These countries, which are sometimes referred to as Third World countries, contain more than two-thirds of the world's population but possess only 16 percent of global income (Renner, 1998; UNDP, 1997). The gap between the rich and the poor countries is staggering: the richest one-fifth of the world's population has 82.7 percent of the global income while the poorest one-fifth has only 1.4 percent (UNDP, 1992). Small wonder that there are tensions between the global South and the global North.

Throughout the world, children suffer from structural violence. About twelve million children under five years old die each year in developing countries, most often from preventable causes. The deaths of over six million children, or 55 percent, are caused by malnutrition, not because there is a shortage of food in the world but because food is unequally distributed. Gandhi's terse comment is relevant here: "There is enough in the world for man's [sic] need but not for his

greed” (as quoted by Ostergaard, 1990, p. 206). Other preventable causes of malnutrition include poor health services, unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, harmful child-rearing practices, and a lack of maternal support. More than 2.2 million children under the age of five die each year from infectious diseases, including childhood diarrhea. We know these diseases are primarily caused by unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation and are thus preventable (UNICEF, 1998).

Besides the twelve million children who die from preventable diseases each year, even more disturbing is the fact that each year 160 million children survive the dire conditions of crushing poverty, but end up chronically malnourished and suffer from severe developmental disabilities both physically and mentally. Given the poor health status of so many children, it is not surprising that over 100 million children of school age fail to attend school (UNDP, 1997), and most of them are girls (Kagitcibasi, 1998). These children pay a great price because education is the most certain way to increase human potential, as measured by intelligence tests, and to raise human capital, measured by lifetime earnings. In countries where studies have been conducted, the more schooling children receive, the higher their IQ and earnings (Brody, 1997).

While it has long been recognized that the education of men is important, it is becoming increasingly clear that when women are deprived of education, everyone pays an enormous price. Recent research has linked well-being of children to well-being of women (Buvinic & Yodelman, 1989; UNDP, 1997). In comparison to men, women have a more profound and direct impact on children’s survival, health, and quality of life (El-Mouelhy, 1992). Despite the important link between women and children, there is no society in the world where women enjoy the same opportunities as men, whether measured by enrollment in school, literacy, preparation for careers, political participation, earned income, or any other measure that reflects *quality of life* (see Ma-

zurana & McKay, this volume; UNDP, 1995). Worldwide, women receive only 54 percent of the years of schooling as men, even though more education for women translates into multiple benefits to societies, such as lower rates of fertility and child mortality (UNDP, 1996). Women with more education tend to marry later in life, begin childbearing later in life, and have fewer children (Belsey & Royston, 1987). Literacy also matters because, like education, higher levels of maternal literacy are associated with lower infant mortality and fertility rates; maternal literacy levels are also associated with better family nutrition and lower overall population growth (Bunch & Carillo, 1998). Clearly, the well-being of women, particularly their educational attainment, serves the interests of children and society as a whole. More broadly, all countries ought to invest generously in education, especially because those societies that invest the most in education also demonstrate the most rapid growth in economic development (McGranahan, 1995).

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN DEVELOPED NATIONS

The structural violence of poverty is not limited to developing countries. There is a Third World inside many First World countries. Countries with high average incomes do not necessarily provide a high quality of life for all of their citizens. In industrial and information-based societies, more than five million people are homeless, more than 37 million people are unemployed, and more than a third of the adult population fail to complete secondary education (UNDP, 1997).

In the United States, the gap between the rich and poor is larger than in 17 other industrialized countries. Children living in wealthy U.S. families are among the most affluent children in the world, but children living in poor U.S. families are among the poorest of all the industrialized countries (Gottschalk & Smeeding, 2000).

The Psychosocial Costs of Structural Violence

Poverty has huge negative impacts, but especially on those who are most vulnerable: women and children. Compared to families that are not in poverty, families in poverty have higher levels of infant mortality, child abuse, children in out-of-home placements, school truancy, and child homelessness (Brown, 1983; Edelman, 1983). Poverty puts both the expectant mother and the developing fetus at risk in a variety of ways. Mothers in poverty are less likely to receive medical care during pregnancy, are more likely to have complications during delivery, and are more likely to have a premature newborn or a full-term baby who has a lower than normal birth weight. Both premature birth and pregnancy complications affect children because these problems are associated with developmental disabilities, which include a host of physical, emotional, and learning problems. Low birth weight is a particularly important consideration because it puts the infant at risk for a wide range of disabilities including cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, visual-motor coordination problems, learning disabilities, and mental retardation (Bradley et al., 1994; Crooks, 1995).

Like poverty, the problem of *unemployment* is also rooted in the economic structures and policies of a society. Unemployment directly affects parents' well-being, which, in turn, affects children's well-being. At the time of this writing, unemployment in the United States was low in comparison to typical levels, affecting fewer than 5 percent of the labor force but still a large number of people, in total about six million. The effects of unemployment on families are enormous. Brenner (1976) found that in the United States, an increase of only one percentage point in unemployment was associated with increases of 5.7 percent in homicides, 4.1 percent in suicides, 4.3 percent in mental hospital admissions for men, 2.3 percent for women, and nearly 2 percent

in deaths from stress-related disorders. Communities affected by major lay-offs show significant increases in marital conflict, parent-child conflict, and child abuse, because unemployment affects the whole family. Marital satisfaction also tends to be low when employment is unstable (Cherlin, 1979).

Underemployment is a related problem. People who are underemployed tend to feel like victims of fate (Burris, 1983). As Schwebel (1997) has noted: “The rapid increase (over 200% between 1992–1994) in the U.S. in the use of temporary workers is likely to exacerbate feelings of insecurity, undermine self-esteem, and increase stress in spousal and parental relationships” (pp. 339–340).

The Impact of Structural Violence on Parenting

Some of the impacts of poverty and other forms of structural violence affect children directly, but many of the effects are mediated by the way parents interact with their children (Toomey & Christie, 1990). Structural violence jeopardizes both mediated learning and parenting styles.

Mediation in Learning and Development. To appreciate how structural violence impedes intellectual development, we draw from Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of mediated learning and the work of others who have extended and applied his thinking, including Feuerstein (1980) and Wertsch (1998). In Vygotsky’s view, maturation is secondary in the development of the mind. He compared maturation, which is passive, to what he called the practical activity of children—playing, exploring, eating, observing, smiling, and much of the time, in all of this activity, *interacting with others*. Children, he pointed out, make enormous advances in their abilities when they can understand and use speech, which gives them greater power and control over their activities.

To illustrate the point, picture four scenes, each separated in time. In the first, we see mother and her two-year-old daughter who, with mother's guidance (or mediation), has just succeeded in completing a jigsaw puzzle. Mother says, "Good girl." In the second scene, a few months later, the little girl, playing with her doll, helps the doll place the jigsaw pieces in their appropriate places, and then the girl says to the doll, "Good girl." In the third scene, six months later, playing alone, after solving a child's puzzle, she says *aloud* to herself, "Good girl." She has learned to cue herself about various aspects of how to fit puzzle pieces together, just as her mother had done earlier as a mediator (e.g., "look for a place for a small piece" or "this piece looks like a ball"). In the final scene a year later, after she has successfully read a picture book story, she *thinks* to herself, "Good girl."

In this manner, thought is a sequence of learned verbalizations. The words of the adult become the child's egocentric speech, i.e., the words spoken aloud in play or spoken aloud to oneself. Later, those words become the child's inner thoughts. What starts as an interpersonal process ends as an intrapersonal one. In Vygotsky's terms: "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people or *interpsychological*, and then *inside* the child or *intrapsychological*. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between individuals" (1978, p. 57). Hence, the child's intellectual development is in part a result of the skilled mediation of adults.

Vygotsky (1978) further refined his theory of mental development with the concept of the "zone of proximal development." The zone is the difference between two developmental levels: the *actual* level at a given time, which can be established by assessing the child's independent problem-solving ability, and the *potential* level, which can be assessed by observing the child's

problem-solving performance when guided by an adult. To illustrate, if a child who is looking at a picture and working independently cannot differentiate “up” and “down,” “left” and “right,” but with the mediation of an adult learns them readily, then these concepts are within the child’s zone of proximal development. We can expect that with instruction, i.e., the mediation of an adult, the child could master the concepts. All through infancy and childhood, the individual has zones of proximal development. Children in poverty are at a disadvantage because of the lack of mediated learning experiences and cultural tools that support success in school.

Parenting Styles. In addition to underscoring the importance of mediated learning experiences, research in developmental psychology has identified parenting styles that are conducive to children’s growth and development. During the early years of life, the quality of parenting has an effect on the kind of attachment an infant will form with the primary caregiver (Ainsworth, Bleher, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bee, 1997). Securely attached infants behave differently from insecurely attached infants. *Securely attached* infants prefer the primary caregiver to other adult figures, use the primary caregiver as a secure base from which to explore strange or unfamiliar settings, seek regular and frequent contact with the primary caregiver, and can be soothed by the caregiver when the infant experiences distress. *Insecurely attached infants* demonstrate an array of negative emotional responses to the caregiver: anger, detachment, ambivalence, apprehension, etc. Studies that have examined parent-child interactions suggest that secure attachments are causally linked with a parental characteristic called *contingent responsiveness* (Isabella, 1993). Parents who are contingently responsive towards their children are sensitive to the cues their children use to signal various needs. Not only are the parents sensitive to the child’s needs but they respond to needs promptly and appropriately. Very often a dance ensues in which the baby’s

smile elicits a smile from the parent; then, the child's vocalization invites an oral response from the parent, and so on. The multiple stressors of poverty make it difficult for parents to behave in a responsive way to their children's needs (Toomey & Christie, 1990). Not surprisingly, insecurely attached infants are much more likely to be found in conditions of poverty than in non-poverty situations (Bee, 1997).

The degree to which parents provide warmth and guidance has been associated with positive developmental outcomes (Baumrind, 1972; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). *Warmth* consists of parental affection, empathy, and contingent responsiveness. Parents who provide *guidance* set high but reasonable goals, use rules consistently, and monitor their children's behavior. When parental warmth is combined with high levels of guidance, *authoritative parenting* (not authoritarian) takes place. Children raised in authoritative families tend to have high levels of self-esteem, self-reliance, achievement, and, at the same time, tend to comply with parental requests.

Poverty makes it difficult for parents to provide guidance, warmth, and responsiveness. Parents in poverty lack resources, struggle to meet their children's needs, and are left with a narrow range of choices when they have to make decisions that affect the well-being of their children. For instance, poor parents have fewer choices than middle-class parents about day care, housing, health care services, and education (see Webster and Perkins in this volume). In addition, parents in poverty environments often experience multiple stressors and chaos (McLoyd & Wilson, 1991), as crises arise unpredictably and repeatedly. Stress also takes its toll on parents' emotional well-being. Poverty and unemployment often leave parents depressed, emotionally unavailable, and, therefore, unresponsive to their children's needs (Leana & Ivancevich, 1987). Problems are compounded because children of parents in poverty are more likely to have learning difficulties

and physical disabilities, which place additional stress on the parent-child relationship.

Bee (1997) summarized some of the contrasting features of parents in poverty and parents who are not. Parents in poverty tend to talk to their children less often, give explanations less often, spend less time doing intellectually stimulating activities with their children, are less warm, and more punitive in their discipline. The consequences of parenting styles that lack warmth and structure are particularly problematic, because they often lead to negative outcomes in children, including aggressive behavior, lack of self-reliance, and low levels of self-esteem and achievement.

The Impact of Structural Violence on School Achievement

McLoyd (1998) has reviewed a number of studies that demonstrate the impact of poverty and socio-economic status (SES) on children's school performance and related variables. Children's SES is related to their performance on IQ tests and other measures that predict school performance. Once in school, poor children perform lower than non-poor children on achievement test scores, number of years of schooling completed, and high school graduation rates. Poor children are higher on course failure, grade retention, placement in special education, and dropout rate. In addition to problems related to school performance, McLoyd cites studies suggesting that poor children exhibit more emotional and behavioral problems than middle-class children.

Once again, *parenting styles* are important. As reported by Frisby (1998), Kellaghan (1994) identified family processes associated with high achievement in school. These included "opportunities provided to children for thinking and imagination in daily activities . . .availability and quality of help provided by the family on matters related to school work...opportunities for lan-

guage development and the use of complex levels of language” (p. 68). In addition, low-SES children tend to lose ground in their academic skills during the summer. Entwistle, Alexander, and Olson (1997) have provided a detailed analysis of the problem. During the school year, comparable gains in reading and math were demonstrated by low-and high-SES children. However, during the summer, low-SES children showed a decline in their academic skills while high-SES children posted gains.

The *quality of schools* also impacts children’s performance. Some schools achieve good outcomes consistently, year after year, when compared to other schools, even when both sets of schools are operating under similar levels of neighborhood affluence. A variety of measurable variables have been used as indices of “good outcomes,” including attendance rates, standardized test scores, levels of delinquency, and proportion of college-bound graduates. Bee (1997) has reviewed the findings of a large number of studies and concludes that the characteristics of the most effective schools bear a striking resemblance to the authoritative parenting style. Among other features, these schools are characterized by “clear goals and rules, good control, good communication, and high nurturance” (p. 406).

CONFRONTING STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: A CALL FOR MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Reducing structural violence is no easier than confronting the structures that propagate direct violence, war, and the nuclear threat. One place to begin, however, is for scholars to recognize that the mere existence of structural inequalities is a form of violence. Galtung’s (1996) pioneering work in the 1960s was a beginning, and more recently we have seen a reemphasis on structural violence by Galtung (1998) and others (Christie, 1997; Pilisuk, 1998; Schwebel, 1997).

Most psychologists are not trained in macro-level interventions, but failing to engage with structural problems and focusing only on the individual unit of analysis and change places peace psychologists in the role of helping people maintain the status quo. To the extent that we help people adjust to the stresses of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate health care and education, we unwittingly contribute to the inertia of structural violence. Dryfoos (1997) makes a similar point when suggesting we ought to de-emphasize the individual attributes of children and adolescents and move the locus of our attention “toward the settings that so profoundly influence [child] outcomes—families, neighborhoods, schools, health and welfare systems, employment and training, and the justice system” (p. 41).

Accordingly, we recommend five policies for mitigating structural violence. From a psychological perspective, we are comfortable with these policy recommendations because research indicates that each of these recommendations would have desirable psychosocial outcomes. However, the policies should be rigorously evaluated in a multidisciplinary context, giving attention to both individual and structural variables. In addition, we are aware that the recommendations are based on research conducted in the United States, so caution should be exercised when generalizing to other contexts.

Guaranteed Employment

We have discussed the detrimental effects of unemployment on parents and children. The meaning, value, and importance of work has been elucidated by psychologists and others. Reviewing research on happiness, Myers and Diener (1995) argued that work provides personal identity and helps us define who we are. It gives us a “sense of pride and belonging to a group [that] helps people construct their social identity. And work can add focus and purpose—a sense that one’s

life matters” (p. 15). Wilson (1996), refers to the effects of disappearing work from urban ghettos this way:

Work is not simply a way to make a living and support one’s family. It also constitutes a framework for daily behavior, it imposes discipline...In the absence of regular employment, life, including family life, becomes less coherent. Persistent unemployment and irregular employment hinder rational planning in daily life. (p. 30)

In the United States today, unemployment is relatively low, but from a psychological point of view, it is clear that every increment in unemployment reverberates through society and has a toll on human well-being. We are quite aware that there are many questions associated with a full-employment strategy. For example, who should be counted among the unemployed (i.e., only those seeking work; only those able to work, etc.)? Does income have to be above the poverty level to be counted as employed? Does merely having an income based on a 40-hour work week qualify as employment? Should temporary or part-time workers who want full-time jobs be counted among the unemployed? Would full employment impact adversely on investments and job creation? Clearly, many of these questions go beyond the scope of psychology and require multidisciplinary teams working at various units of analysis (for a more detailed analysis, see Schwebel, 1997). The point we make here is that the harmful effects of unemployment and underemployment of parents on children is well documented from a psychological perspective. A concerted effort on the part of psychologists to mitigate this form of structural violence is needed.

A Minimum Wage above Poverty Level

As we noted earlier, unemployment and poverty leave a family with a narrow range of choices in matters of vital importance to the child's well-being. But guaranteed employment is not a panacea if the compensation for work is so minimal that there is no appreciable effect on one's quality of life. In many ways, underemployment poses threats to individuals, many of whom feel as if they are victims of fate (Burris, 1983). The exponential increase in the hiring of temporary workers in the United States can produce a variety of harmful psychological effects and can damage relationships. As Schwebel (1997) asserts:

For the "temps," as for all the others in disadvantaged positions in the labor market (or for those who have given up and are no longer in that market), the consequences due to insecurity about the future, not only about a job but also about health insurance and other supports, can undermine a sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997), affect coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and induce learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). (pp. 339–340)

When wages do not have a palpable effect on well-being, it makes little rational sense to work. Indeed, some of our most vexing problems in the United States are inextricably woven into the fabric of an economic system that is highly punitive to those who lack the technical skills required for a high quality of life in an information-based society. Underemployment can be harmful not only to the individual but also to society. For instance, it is not surprising that from a global perspective, a symbiotic relationship has developed between the supply of illegal drugs by the global South and the demand for drugs by the global North. While poor farmers in the global South cultivate the coca plant to generate income and feed their families, drug traffickers in the global North find it far more advantageous to move drugs that can quickly yield

high monetary returns instead of struggling at minimum-wage jobs that fail to satisfy basic human needs (Crosby & Van Soest, 1997).

High-quality Child Care for All Children

Kostelny and Garbarino (in this volume) underscored the importance of high-quality child care as a means of reducing the impact of violence on children. Here, we emphasize research suggesting that high-quality child care could benefit children's cognitive development, particularly for children who come from families in poverty (Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993). Even middle-class children show significant cognitive gains if experience is sufficiently enriching (Clarke-Stewart, Gruber, & Fitzgerald, 1994). Moreover, intensive enrichment during the preschool years can produce enduring effects on children's school performance. As McLoyd (1998) notes, such a finding "argues for making Head Start a full-day rather than a half-day program, five days per week, year-round" (p. 198).

Certain activities seem particularly worthwhile for the developing child. For instance, it is especially important that children hear others read stories because, as reading experts such as Gerald Coles (1998) have argued, storybook reading contributes to eventual reading success, expands oral vocabulary, and strengthens the child's eagerness to read.

Prenatal Medical Care and Parent Training for All

Although the United States is by some measures the wealthiest nation in the world, the wealth is spread unevenly, which is one reason why the United States has a high infant mortality rate, ranking twenty-first when compared to other developed countries (UNDP, 1997). Infant mortality is one indication of how well people take care of one another.

Lack of support for prenatal care not only contributes to high mortality rates but is associated with a host of developmental problems, many of which cannot be remediated and eventually become a burden on health care and public education systems in the long term. Support for preventive efforts during the fetal period would be highly cost effective, as Kostelny and Garbarino have argued (earlier in this volume). But paying up front for long-term solutions does not neatly coincide with two-, four-, and six-year political cycles. Moreover, we do not yet have political consensus that all children have the “right” to the best start they can get in life.

Again, social sciences have illuminated the policies and programs that are likely to be effective. One widely cited program, for instance, is the University of Rochester Nurse-Home Visitation Program (Olds, Henderson, Tatelbaum, & Chamberlin, 1986). The program provides home visits by nurses that begin when the mother conceives and continue until the child is two years old. During the prenatal period, nurses discuss nutrition and health matters with expectant mothers. After birth, greater emphasis is placed on infant development, how to build support networks, and the use of community services. When compared to partial implementations of the program, the full program showed higher levels of maternal employment and a reduction in the incidence of direct violence as reflected in the reports of child abuse and neglect. We concur with Kostelny and Garbarino that the first line of defense in preventing youth violence is a healthy baby combined with a positive parent-infant relationship.

The importance of effective parenting from conception through childhood cannot be overemphasized. Authoritative parenting styles not only produce desirable developmental outcomes, as we have pointed out, but can serve a protective function, helping poor, inner-city children resist peer pressure and other influences that are detrimental to healthy development and school per-

formance (McLoyd, 1998).

Equity in Public Education

Hawkins (1997) has argued that it is feasible to provide a “high-quality public education that guarantees success for all children, regardless of race or socioeconomic status” (p. 300). Yet enormous inequalities exist in the quality of schools and instruction in public education across the United States, a condition that reinforces and exacerbates inequalities in school achievement and, in the long term, inequalities in society as a whole.

Earlier, we emphasized the importance of students staying in school. We cited research indicating that years of schooling is associated with the economic well-being of individuals. In light of research suggesting that one of the best predictors of dropout rates is a low level of academic success (Cairns & Cairns, 1994), the problem of school quality becomes paramount. Clearly, improving the quality of education can have a significant impact on students’ success (Mortimore, 1995) and, as a result, remove an important risk factor related to many problems, including dropping out of school. Mortimore (1995) has identified specific features of schools that promote positive student outcomes, including high expectations of the student, the use of joint planning and consistent approaches toward students (i.e., consistent expectations), an academic emphasis and a focus on learning, a high level of student involvement in schooling and school life, parental involvement in the life of the school, monitoring of students’ progress, the use of rewards for desirable behavior, and strong positive leadership of the school.

CONCLUSIONS

Enough social science research has accumulated for us to offer some specific, empirically sup-

ported policy recommendations that can have a wide range of positive effects. What is needed is the political will, a commitment to implement policies that we know produce positive developmental outcomes.

We are only at the beginning stages of a social science revolution that can mount a serious challenge to structural violence against our children. While the task might seem formidable, we are reminded that a wide range of large-scale social changes have taken place in the recent past. Just over a century ago, it seemed unlikely that dueling would ever be delegitimized as a means of settling disputes. Nor did it seem likely that slavery would be abolished; that women would have the right to vote; or that compulsory education would become law in most countries of the world. Remarkable changes have also occurred recently: Forty years ago there was no ecology movement and now large-scale recycling efforts are commonplace. Within the past ten years, laws have been enacted that rule out cigarette smoking in many public areas. In fact, a number of stunning changes that bear on human security have occurred very recently: the fall of the Berlin Wall, which signaled the end of the Cold War; the establishment of war tribunals that hold rogue leaders accountable for war crimes; the movement to ban landmines; the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. These profound societal changes give us reason to hope that the problems of structural violence against children will not always be normalized. Even though poverty, and all forms of structural violence, are fueled by powerful vested interests, we have seen that major social change is not only possible, but inevitable.