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Challenges facing child protection

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Abstract

The challenges facing children in the 21st century are immense and will need to be faced if we are to achieve the goal of child protection for all. Three specific constraints on child protection are examined in this article, namely poverty, HIV/AIDS infection, and war. The authors use their experience in Africa to raise issues of resilience and adaptation, dangers to child protection programs, and possible solutions.

Poverty can be both financial and psychological, and this affects the effect of prevention programs. In many African and Asian countries, the AIDS pandemic has changed the social structure of society with AIDS orphans and children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS becoming more common. The impact has devastating effects on the way we view child protection and in particular child sexual abuse. The consequences of post-traumatic stress resulting from war needs to be addressed, and the development of programs that place children in the center of relief programs to foster a culture of child protection is essential.

Finally, the article notes that the picture is not overly pessimistic and the examines the achievements in the field of children's rights which underpin all programs aimed at protecting children and the future need to consolidate successes achieved. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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I. Overview-lessons from the “South”

The evolution of sophisticated child abuse services is a relatively recent phenomenon, and the development of research into the field is as young. The major focus for child protection has taken place in the developed world with the emergence of legal and social measures in response to the epidemiologic studies that were the early characteristic of research. Yet despite this, the phenomenon of child abuse remains a challenging issue for all those in the field and for society as a whole. One cannot be sure that there is conclusive evidence to confirm that the child protection services in countries such as the US or those of Western Europe have changed the outcome of children in the long-term. The clarity of the service guidelines and the “perfection” of processes have not helped to reduce the inequalities in children's outcomes, when comparing children in different social classes. It is true that millions of children do not die in the western world, but the quality of their lives requires careful review to understand issues such as childhood prostitution. This raises some specific issues when compared to the commercial sexual exploitation of children abroad and children's violence.

While progress may have been made in North America, Australasia, and Western Europe, the position of children in the countries of Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, and Africa remains tenuous. The concept of child protection is often a distant dream, and the very structures of society negate the attempts to alleviate the position children find themselves in. This set of articles is a compilation of a number of contributions on the challenges facing child protection in those societies where children are the most vulnerable.

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