

Reflections on the definition and categorization of “Children Born of War”

Ingvill C. Mochmann

GESIS-Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences
Cologne Business School, Harvard Humanitarian
Initiative

Correspondence:

ingvill.mochmann@gesis.org

Tel.: + 49 221 47694570 ; Fax.: + 49 221 47694199

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In their “letter to the editor” in issue 46 (1) Amra Delić, Philipp Kuwert, and Heide Glaesmer (1) address whether the term “Children Born of War” should be broadened to include also other groups of children. As examples they address various groups of children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such as children whose mothers were victims of international trafficking, children whose parents belong to opposing sides in the fratricidal war that took place in 1993-1995 in the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia, and finally children of inter-ethnic marriages. They argue that these children also have severe psycho-social issues and should also be included in the definition of “Children Born of War”.

The challenges of defining new research fields include the establishment of defini-

tions and concepts, categories, measurement instruments etc. which can be applied across all research disciplines, where the research field is of relevance. Furthermore, when the topic has a comparative and longitudinal aspect this needs to be taken into account as well. The research field of “Children Born of War” has evolved over a time period of more than ten years (2) and some of the basic questions have been:

- Which concept can be used to describe this particular group of children born to local mothers and foreign soldiers in conflict and post-conflict situations? The concept “Children Born of War” was considered to be the most appropriate one.
- Which categories of “Children Born of War” can be identified? Based on the empirical evidence available, four categories of children were suggested by Mochmann (3), i.e. children fathered by enemy soldiers, by occupation soldiers, by peacekeeping soldiers and children of female child soldiers whose fathers were members of e.g. rebel groups.

These categories may not be exhaustive and many of the groups of children, that may fall into one and the same category, can seem quite different. Furthermore, concepts and categories need to be adjusted to the changing patterns of warfare. This process

is under constant revision and has recently been adjusted to cover the consequences of modern warfare. Along these lines, Delić, Kuwert, and Glaesmer suggest broadening the definition by referring to specific groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the basis of the rather limited presentation of these groups of children, it is difficult to provide a clear answer to their question whether an extension of the definition may be useful. Before attempting to do so, I would nevertheless like to point out two aspects which have guided our research on “Children Born of War” so far (2):

- “Children Born of War” is a group at risk because its rights are challenged in multiple dimensions, such as the medical, political/juridical, socio-economic and psychological aspects of life. Many groups of children are exposed to risks in one or several of these dimensions, but empirical evidence on “Children Born of War” indicates that this group is exposed to most of the risks simultaneously and over a longer period of time, sometimes even their whole lives.
- This exposure to risk is closely related to the (former) military position of their biological father, and the (enemy) perception of him in the family, community and society.

The focus of Delić, Kuwert, and Glaesmer (1) was mostly on psychosocial issues. From the disciplinary focus of psychiatry and psychology, it may seem beneficial to broaden the definition to include several other groups of children that have similar “*psychosocial issues*”. However, this ignores the fact that the original definition of “Children Born of War” addresses very complex and multifaceted dimensions. It is the combination of all those issues that impacts the

lives of these children in very specific ways. Having said this, it seems as if some of the groups addressed by the authors fit into the already existing definition and categories applied in the research field of “Children Born of War”.

Conclusion

From a methodological perspective, concepts, definitions and categories always face the challenge of being *too narrow* or *too broad*. This is also the case with “Children Born of War” and it is important to continuously probe its validity and reliability, keeping in mind the aim it is intended to serve. As we move on with expanding the evidence on “Children Born of War” the use of control groups to test discipline specific hypotheses is becoming increasingly necessary and relevant. At present my suggestion to the authors Delić, Kuwert, and Glaesmer (1) is to analyze more thoroughly whether the suggested groups may already fit into the existing definition and categories, or whether they may serve as control groups in an analysis of the impact of psycho-social issues.

Conflict of interest: The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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