Children Born of War: A Cross National Study of Trajectories of Violence in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina and St. Louis, Missouri

By

Dr. Stephanie DiPietro

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
University of Missouri—St. Louis

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As the number of children exposed to war and political violence continues to grow worldwide, so too does public concern over the implications of this exposure for their health and well-being over the life course. Whereas research on the effects of war on children has proliferated in recent years, much of this work is couched within a psychological framework, focusing on proximate mental health outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. Substantially less attention has been paid to the ways in which childhood experiences with war impact interdependent networks of family, peers, and community, or how they condition long-term patterns of socialization and behavior. Drawing from qualitative in-depth interviews with 54 male Bosnian refugees and nationals who experienced the Bosnian war (1992-1995) in early childhood, this study examines sources of risk and resilience in their behavioral trajectories over the life course. Findings suggest that exposure to war—and its attendant traumas and family disruption—are not directly related to negative life outcomes in adulthood, including crime and violence. Rather, these pathways appear to be mediated by the framing of traumatic events, fragmentation of family systems, loss of father figures, and reliance on deviant role models.

Stephanie DiPietro received her Ph.D. in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of Maryland in 2010. Her research focuses primarily on the adaptation outcomes of immigrant youth, with a particular emphasis on violence and delinquency. Dr. DiPietro is currently using data from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) to examine the role of family and peer processes in explanations of immigrant criminality. She is also interested in race-ethnicity, ecological theories of crime, and the intersection of individual and neighborhood characteristics.