YOUTH

Risk

at

GLOBAL TRENDS

Most young people manage the transition from ***protected childhood to independent adulthood quite well. With family, school and peer support, the majority of youth eventually find a meaningful place in society as young adults. A minority of young people deviate from this path; some engage in risky behaviour that can damage their social position or undermine their health. Many young people are beginning to explore their sexuality, and for some there are attendant risks. Some youth experiment with drugs or venture into delinquency, though such phases are generally temporary.***

These transitional risks have not changed much over the past several generations, and for most young people today they remain areas of primary concern. Since the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond in 1995, the threat posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic has received widespread attention. Almost 50 per cent of all new HIV infections are among young people (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004). During the past several years, there has also been increased attention directed towards the situation of youth in armed conflict. A disproportionate number of young people, particularly adolescents, are involved in armed conflicts; they kill the most and are the most often killed. The attention of the international community has long been focused on the plight of child soldiers. A more recent concern is the emergence of "youth bulges"[1] and high unemployment levels among youth in various regions of the world, which could increase the risk of social strife and conflict.

Major developments relating to young people's health, vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, drug use and delinquent behaviour, as well as some issues of special relevance to young women and girls, will be reviewed below. In the context of examining health and gender issues in the cluster "youth at risk", it should be emphasized that gender equality and access to medical care and social services are basic human rights, and policies and programmes should be developed based on that assumption. Chapter 8 presents an in-depth analysis of the roles and situations of young people before, during and after periods of armed conflict, seen through a gender lens.

HEALTH

Health may be defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Because youth are a relatively healthy segment of the population, their health (with the exception of reproductive issues) has typically been given little attention. When they do suffer poor health, it is often a result of the effects of accidents, injuries caused by armed conflict, violence, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Extreme poverty and undernutrition make some youth vulnerable to disease. Accidents and injuries are major causes of youth morbidity, mortality and disability.

Tobacco use is one of the chief preventable causes of death. There are an estimated 1 billion smokers in the world today, and by 2030, another 1 billion young adults will have started to smoke (Peto and Lopez, 2001). The highest rates of smoking among youth are in developing countries. Smokers are predominantly male, but the number of

young women taking up cigarettes is growing. The higher level of tobacco use among girls suggests that there is a need for specific policies and programmes to counteract marketing strategies that target young women by associating tobacco use with independence, glamour and romance.

Despite efforts to restrict the advertising and marketing of alcohol and tobacco in industrialized countries, the youth market remains a major focus of the alcohol and tobacco industries. Some recent curbs on such marketing in developed countries have led these industries to concentrate increasingly on young people in developing and transition countries, where similar protective measures have not yet been implemented, and where, unfortunately, young people do not have access to the same levels of health and safety protection.

Young people worldwide are reaching puberty earlier and marrying later. Premarital sex is becoming more widespread. Despite a trend towards later marriage in much of the world, millions of girls are still expected to marry and begin childbearing in their teens, often before they are emotionally or physically ready. Data for the late 1990s show that among young women who were sexually active by the age of 20, 51 per cent in Africa and 45 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean engaged in sexual activity prior to marriage; the corresponding proportions for males were 90 and 95 per cent respectively (United Nations Population Fund, 2004). In many developed countries, sexual activity is most often initiated prior to marriage for both men and women.

Many who become sexually active at an early age do not know how to protect themselves during sexual activity. Young women are often unable to negotiate condom use with male partners and may fear violence if they try to do so. One third—or more than 100 million—of the curable sexually transmitted infections (STIs) contracted each year are among women and men younger than 25 years of age. Having an untreated STI significantly increases the risk of HIV infection (United Nations Population Fund, 2004).

Although early pregnancy has declined in many countries, it remains a major concern, primarily because of the health risks for both mother and child, but also because of its impact on girls' education and life prospects. Births among women and girls under the age of 20 account for 17 per cent of all births in the least developed countries, which translates into 14 million births worldwide each year. In developing countries, one woman in three gives birth before the age of 20; in West Africa, 55 per cent of women do so. Pregnancy-related problems constitute a leading cause of death for young women aged 15 to 19 years, with complications from childbirth and unsafe abortion representing the major contributing factors (United Nations Population Fund, 2004).

During the past ten years, countries have made significant progress in addressing adolescent reproductive health issues, including the need for information, education and services that enable young people to prevent unwanted pregnancies and infection. Increasingly, these efforts are being undertaken as part of a wider, holistic approach aimed at reaching young people in diverse situations and equipping them with the skills they need to shape their own futures.

Drawing on the experience of the past ten years, a comprehensive approach to youth health programming has emerged as part of a global consensus on the need to link reproductive health interventions to efforts to provide adolescents with choices and options through investments in education, job training and citizenship development. It is imperative that health education, including the teaching of life skills, is introduced into both school curricula and programmes designed for out-of-school youth. Investing in young people's health, education and skill development, and empowering girls to stay in school, marry later and delay pregnancy are essential interventions that can substantially improve their chances of becoming well-informed, productive citizens. Youth health programmes and policies should be interdisciplinary in nature, extending beyond the health sector. Efforts need to be scaled up if the enormous health challenges facing the world's youth are to be adequately addressed.

Ensuring the full participation of youth in the development and promotion of health-related programmes and policies would enable them to become agents of change in their communities, improving their own lives and the lives of their peers. Youth who do not have a nurturing family environment, or who suffer abuse or neglect within the family setting, should be specially targeted.

Easy access to health information, general health services, and sexual and reproductive health services is a necessity for young people. It is important to ensure that health workers receive the training they need to provide youth-friendly services; they must be able to communicate effectively with young people and have the competence to handle their specific health concerns. Particular attention should be given to dealing with substance abuse among young people, immunization and nutrition, chronic conditions, trauma, and other health problems that may begin in youth but have implications for well-being in adulthood.

HIV/AIDS

The present generation of young people has not known a world without AIDS. As a group, they are especially vulnerable to HIV infection. Among the 10 million young people currently living with HIV/AIDS, 6.2 million are in sub-Saharan Africa and 2.2 million are in Asia. Nearly half of all new infections occur among individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004). Youth who are empowered to make informed choices have the potential and opportunity to drastically reduce the risk of infection.

Young people may be more likely than their elders to engage in risky behaviour, making them more susceptible to infection. A number of factors contribute to these circumstances, including a lack of information, peer pressure, an inability to calculate risk, impaired judgement because of intoxication, an inability to refuse unprotected sex, and the limited availability of, or access to, condoms.

The HIV incidence rate is higher among young women than among young men. One third of women infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Young People, 2004). The higher rates among women can be attributed to factors such as greater biological susceptibility, gender inequalities, sociocultural norms, financial insecurity, forced and early marriage, sexual abuse and the trafficking of

young women. In some countries, between 20 and 48 per cent of young women aged 10-25 years have experienced forced sex (Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, 2004). In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, young women are two to three times more likely than men to be infected with HIV. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia and in much of Latin America, however, young men are more likely to be infected than young women. In many regions, injecting drug users and men who have sex with men are particularly at risk.

The vulnerability of young people to HIV infection is highlighted by the fact that they constitute a significant percentage of high-risk groups in high-risk settings. For example, in several Asian countries, young people comprise over 60 per cent of sex workers, and in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, it is estimated that up to 25 per cent of those who inject drugs are below the age of 20 (UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Young People, 2004). In some regions, especially those with a high prevalence of injecting drug use, the age of initial drug use is declining. Young refugees and migrants constitute another group at high risk of HIV infection. The 120 million children who are not in school worldwide are also at a disadvantage, as they do not have the opportunity to learn about HIV and other reproductive health issues in a stable, credible classroom environment (Burns and others, 2004).

There are currently an estimated 15 million children below the age of 18 who have been orphaned as a result of AIDS, having lost one or both parents to the epidemic (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004). Around 12 million of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa, and the number could rise to 18 million by 2010. With inadequate support systems and insufficient resources, they are at substantially higher risk of undernutrition, abuse, illness and HIV infection.

Intervention policies and programmes at the local and national levels should include life-skills-based HIV/AIDS education that empowers young people to make informed choices and decisions about their health. Young people will not benefit from the information, skills and services offered unless they are provided with a supportive environment within their families and communities and are safe from harm.

In order to reduce the vulnerability of young people to infection, steps must be taken to ensure the provision of high-quality primary health care (including sexual and reproductive health care) that is accessible, available and affordable. Ideally, health education programmes should be provided in this context, with particular attention given to HIV and other STIs. Community-based interventions have proven highly effective when specifically targeted at marginalized young people such as sex workers and injecting drug users, who have poor access to information and services and are at high risk of HIV/AIDS exposure. National policy should support these programmes and, at a broader level, ensure that an appropriate environment exists for reducing young people's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and for implementing targeted interventions. Policies must be based on evidence of what is effective, and programmes should be scaled up in acknowledgement of the true scope of the problem. Continued international cooperation and collective global efforts are necessary for the containment of HIV/AIDS. Young people should be made aware of the full range of prevention options, with emphasis given not only to developing healthy lifestyles, but also to sexual health and behaviour issues. A behavioural change approach includes abstinence, delayed sexual debut, a reduction in the number of sexual partners, and correct and consistent condom use.

DRUG ABUSE

Adolescence is a period characterized by efforts to achieve independence from parents and other adults, by the formation of close friendships with peers, and by experimentation with a range of ideas, products and lifestyles. During this very fluid and sometimes volatile stage of their lives, young people often find themselves taking increased risks, making choices that may involve trade-offs, and taking advantage of opportunities that may lead to uncertain outcomes. The use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol may become a means of escaping from situations that youth feel powerless to change.

Evidence suggests that young people in many countries are beginning to drink at earlier ages. Research in developed countries has found the early initiation of alcohol use to be associated with a greater likelihood of both alcohol dependence and alcohol-related injury later in life. Boys are more likely than girls to drink alcohol and tend to drink more heavily. However, in several European countries, levels of drinking among young women have started to match or even surpass those of young men. Data on alcohol use among young people in developing countries are relatively scarce, though some studies point to an increase in drinking in Latin American countries, especially among young women.

Growing alcohol and drug abuse in many countries has contributed to increases in both mortality and HIV infection rates among children and young people. In some Central Asian countries, the proportion of the population engaged in injecting drug use is estimated to be up to ten times that in many Western European countries. As mentioned previously, it is believed that up to a quarter of those who inject drugs in Central Asia and Eastern Europe are below the age of 20; further, the use of all types of drugs has increased significantly among young people across the region since the early 1990s (UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Young People, 2004).

Of all the illicit substances listed in international drug control treaties, cannabis is by far the most widely and most frequently used, especially among young people. However, what had long been a steady upward trend in cannabis use has levelled off in many countries in Europe over the past few years; in 2003, for the first time in a decade, there was actually a net decline in some of these countries. Data show that in a number of Asian countries, growing numbers of young women are using illicit drugs. Female injecting drug users are increasingly involved in sex work. In some Asian countries, the age of first drug use is declining.

A major development in the past decade has been the emergence of synthetic drugs. Despite efforts by many countries to limit the availability of amphetamine-type stimulants, a number of newer synthetic drugs in this category have become increasingly available. In most countries, stimulants such as methylenedioxymethamphetamine (Ecstasy) are consumed by young people in recreational settings such as rave parties or dance clubs. In developing countries, consumption is mainly associated with higher-income youth, while in developed countries consumption is spread across all socio-economic classes. There are indications that Ecstasy use is on the rise among young adults.

For programmes and policies to be credible and effective in preventing drug abuse, particularly long-term and high-risk consumption, attention must be given to the underlying factors that cause young people to abuse drugs.

A more comprehensive approach to drug policy would include tighter restrictions on the marketing of tobacco and alcohol and greater emphasis on demand reduction efforts that appeal to youth. Demand reduction is a critical component in any drug control strategy, and national efforts should involve collaboration with young people and their communities in promoting healthy lifestyles and education.

Special strategies are needed for young people who are using or at high risk of using drugs, including youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, refugees and displaced persons, injecting drug users and sex workers. Initiatives undertaken to address drug use must constitute part of a country's overall strategy to reduce poverty, facilitate social inclusion, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are accessible to all. Prevention and treatment interventions at the community level, combined with policies such as minimum drinking age laws and alcohol taxation, have proven effective in some countries.

Taxation may be an effective option, as young drinkers tend to have limited budgets, and their level of alcohol consumption is affected by price changes. In some developed countries, imposing higher alcohol taxes and instituting other preventive measures have been effective in reducing drinking and the potential harmful consequences of excessive alcohol consumption, including traffic casualties and violence.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Juvenile delinquency covers a range of different violations of legal and social norms, ranging from minor offences to serious crimes. Quite often, youth take advantage of illegal opportunities and engage in crime, substance abuse and violent acts against others, especially their peers. Young people constitute one of the most criminally active segments of the population. Eventually, however, most youth desist from such activity, with few going on to develop criminal careers. Strong links have been found between youth victimization and the commission of crime. An overwhelming majority of those who participate in violence against young people are about the same age and sex as their victims; often the victims know their assailants (United Nations, 2005).

Young people who live in difficult circumstances are often at risk of delinquency. Poverty, family dysfunction, substance abuse and the death of family members are proven risk factors for becoming delinquent. Insecurity deriving from an unstable social environment increases vulnerability, and young people with poorly developed social skills are less able to protect themselves against the negative influences of a peer group.

Delinquency rates have risen dramatically in the transition countries; in many cases, juvenile crime levels have increased by more than 30 per cent since 1995. Juvenile delinquency is often highly correlated with alcohol and drug abuse. In Africa, delinquency appears to be linked primarily to hunger, poverty, undernutrition and unemployment.

Crime rates tend to be higher in urban areas than in rural areas, which may be attributable to differences in social control and social cohesion. Many of the urban poor live in slum and squatter settlements with overcrowded, unhealthy housing and a lack of basic services.

Delinquency is largely a group phenomenon; the majority of juvenile offences are committed by members of various types of delinquent groups. Even those juveniles who commit offences on their own are likely to be associated with groups. In some countries, youth gang activity rose in the 1990s as gang cultures were popularized through the media and as economic factors and a decline in economic opportunities led to an increase in poverty in urban areas. Involvement in delinquent groups works to determine the behaviour of members and cuts individuals off from conventional pursuits. The likelihood of experiencing violent victimization is much higher for gang members than for members of other peer groups. In one study, involvement in gang fights increased the likelihood of violent victimization more than threefold (Loeber, Kalb and Huizinga, 2001).

United Nations instruments largely reflect a preference for social rather than judicial approaches to dealing with young offenders. The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines) assert that the prevention of juvenile delinquency is an essential part of overall crime prevention in society, and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) recommend instituting positive measures to strengthen the overall well-being of juveniles and reduce the need for State intervention. It is widely believed that early-phase intervention represents the best approach to preventing juvenile delinquency, and that the prevention of recurring crime is best achieved through restorative justice.

The policy options available to address juvenile delinquency and crime cover a wide spectrum but generally reflect one of two opposing perspectives that have emerged from the long-standing debate on whether it is better to "deter and incapacitate" or to "engage and rehabilitate" young offenders. The Beijing Rules state that "wherever possible, detention pending trial shall be replaced by alternative measures, such as close supervision, intensive care or placement within a family or in an educational setting or home" (United Nations, 1985). There is a danger of further criminal contamination when juveniles remain in detention pending trial, which argues for the development of new and innovative alternatives to pre-trial detention. Law enforcement is not the only answer to antisocial behaviour by young people, just as purely preventive or suppressive efforts are not very effective for youth already in contact with law enforcement. There is some evidence that community-based programmes are valuable alternatives to the locked detention of youth. It should be noted, however, that the detention of small groups of repeat offenders known to have committed the majority of registered offences does appear to have had a positive impact on crime rates.

Young delinquents often suffer social and economic exclusion. There is a strong reinforcing and reciprocal link between low crime rates and social inclusion and control. Over the past ten years, there has been a growing trend towards the adoption of effective practices that promote community safety and reduce crime in urban settings. Many of the relevant programmes are effectively targeted at the young people most at risk, or at those living in areas of high risk, and range from early childhood interventions, educational programmes, youth leadership initiatives, mediation efforts, and job and skills training to rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. To discourage violent behaviour and address delinquency, communities have to adopt strategies that combine prevention, intervention and other such options with suppression.

Though many changes have taken place in the composition and structure of families all over the world, the family remains the primary institution of socialization for youth and therefore continues to play an important role in the prevention of juvenile delinquency and youth crime. The most effective prevention efforts focus on the families of troubled youth, including young people with serious behaviour problems.

THE SITUATION OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Gender discrimination and stereotyping continue to interfere with the full development of girls and young women and their access to services. Education promotes gender equality in both the social and economic contexts, yet 65 million girls and young women remain out of school worldwide (United Nations Children's Fund, 2003). Five million women between the ages of 15 and 19 have abortions every year, and 40 per cent of them are performed under unsafe conditions (United Nations Population Fund, 1999). Studies researching young people's understanding of AIDS-related issues found that while both sexes were vastly uninformed, the level of unawareness was particularly high among girls aged 15 to 19 years. In almost all regions, young women fare worse than young men in indicators of labour market status.

Without gender parity in such key areas as education, health and employment, the goals of the World Programme of Action for Youth and the Millennium Declaration will not be achieved or sustained. Gender analysis and awareness must be incorporated into all strategies undertaken to address the priorities of the World Programme of Action for Youth.

Violence continues to be perpetrated against girls and young women worldwide. Physical and sexual abuse affect millions of girls and women but are seriously under-reported. In some African countries, well over half of all women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation; despite international efforts to halt this practice, its prevalence has not declined significantly. Women and girls comprise half of the world's refugees and in such circumstances are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence (United Nations, 2000).

Legislation is needed to protect girls and young women from all forms of violence. Particular attention should be given to measures aimed at preventing female infanticide and prenatal sex selection, genital mutilation, incest, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and child pornography. There is a strong need for safe and confidential age-appropriate programmes as well as medical, social and psychological support services to assist girls who are subjected to violence.

Stereotyping and discrimination prevent girls and young women from participating fully in society, including civil society. Both traditional and web-based media continue to propagate stereotypes that often objectify young women and encourage restrictive ideas about their roles in society. Young people themselves must continue to be made aware of the harmful impact of gender barriers imposed by cultural beliefs, role perceptions and traditional practices so that they can practice equality. It is important that girls and young women have access to training, information and media material on social, cultural, economic and political issues and the means with which to articulate their views.

YOUTH AND ARMED CONFLICT

In 2003, more than 72 countries were identified as unstable (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004), and 50 million people were living outside their communities or countries, displaced by conflict (United Nations, 2004a). A disproportionate number of young people are affected by armed conflict. They are most likely to be recruited as soldiers and constitute the majority in most armed forces, they are the primary targets of sexual violence and thus run a high risk of contracting STIs, and they are the most likely to miss out on education. In the past decade, an estimated two million children and youth have died in armed conflict, and five million have been disabled (United Nations, 2004b). Unfortunately, these individuals are the least likely to receive assistance (United Nations Children's Fund, 2005).

In environments that provide few viable options for employment, armed conflicts frequently offer young people a way of generating income. Providing youth with opportunities for meaningful work decreases the risk of their being recruited into or voluntarily joining hostile forces. In post-conflict situations, policies that emphasize strategies for youth employment not only help to provide a decent living for young people, but also discourage young soldiers from being re-recruited into armed conflicts. Special attention may be directed towards tailoring education, vocational training and skill development to the actual labour market needs of the areas to which young ex-soldiers will return. In this context, training has to go hand in hand with job creation in the formal and informal local labour markets. The success of such policies and programmes will depend on the wider economic and social environment of a country, including the trade situation, the availability of drugs and small arms, the extent of illicit weapons trafficking, and various gender-related factors.

The impact of armed conflict on the lives of young people and on society as a whole is enormous. Conflict seriously endangers the socialization process, affecting young people's chances of becoming economically and socially independent adults. Conflict often destroys the safe environment provided by a house, a family, adequate nutrition, schooling and employment. During conflict, youth health risks increase, especially for young women. Anxiety and depression, extreme stress, high-risk drug use and suicide are disturbing aspects of youth health that are particularly prevalent in countries experiencing war, occupation or sanctions. In the face of war and instability, adolescent engagement in risky sexual behaviour tends to increase. In countries in which HIV prevalence is high in peacetime, rates of HIV infection among both soldiers and civilians can jump dramatically during periods of conflict, spurred by an increase in sexual violence and prostitution, massive population displacements, and the breakdown of health systems (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004). Trauma and the lack of social support and services seriously affect young people and cause lasting harm to their physical and mental health.

Over the past decade, a comprehensive legal framework has been developed for the protection of children. It is debatable whether this has contributed to a greater willingness among warring parties to look out for the needs of children. Experience from some countries in conflict does not indicate that achievements at the international political, legal and normative levels have translated into progress on the ground. Further, this legal framework is confined to children and young people under the age of 18 and does not apply to

older youth.[2] In order to address the challenges faced by vulnerable young people during and after periods of armed conflict, international frameworks for action, including humanitarian and human rights laws and related guidelines, should be analysed and perhaps revised to ensure their specific application to youth in such circumstances. The rights and responsibilities of young people in and after armed conflict must be explicitly articulated in efforts to monitor, report on, and enforce international, national and regional commitments to youth. Work on behalf of children and adults must be more effectively linked in order to address the distinct concerns of young people.

In the context of young people and armed violence, the attention of policymakers and researchers is often focused on the involvement of large numbers of child soldiers in armed conflict and on the established link between youth bulges, youth unemployment and conflict eruption. While these issues are of great importance to young people and society as a whole, the excessive attention they receive means that the needs of the vast majority of young people who demonstrate constructive coping skills and do not become involved in the hostilities are often ignored. The diverse roles and experiences of youth during and after war, which go well beyond youth as perpetrators or victims of violence, must be further explored and addressed through diverse policy and programming approaches. It is essential to accumulate and exchange information on effective ways of responding to the special needs of youth both during armed conflict and after the hostilities have ended (during disarmament, demobilization and reintegration).

Youth should be engaged as central actors in identifying issues that concern them and in formulating solutions. The many initiatives of young peacebuilders around the world are evidence that youth are also agents of peace; with the right educational tools for crisis prevention and peacebuilding, they can develop the skills needed to help prevent violent and armed conflicts (United Nations, 2004a).

The *World Youth Report, 2003* provided an overview of the social, economic, political, health, psychological and cultural dimensions of conflict and their impact on the lives of young people, and mention was made of the frequent failure of preventive measures. The coming chapter builds on that overview, exploring the effects of armed violence on the lives of young people with the onset of conflict, during armed conflict, and in post-conflict situations, with a close look at gender norms and divides within this context. It also describes the gender gaps and achievements in humanitarian and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The information and observations presented may contribute to future debates, as well as to policy formulation and programme design. ●

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[1] Youth bulges occur when young people constitute at least 40 per cent of a country's population.

[2] The term "child", in connection with United Nations conventions relating to their legal protection, is generally used to describe all persons under the age of 18. The term "young adult soldiers" is used to describe individuals between the ages of 18 and 21.

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Chapter 8

Gender dimensions
of youth
affected

by armed conflict

International interest in the situation of youth[1] affected
by armed conflict has increased in recent years alongside growing atten-
tion to the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The almost
universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional
protocols, as well as the reports on children and armed conflict prepared
by Graça Machel for the United Nations, have focused global attention on
children and war.[2] There have been a number of promising developments
in working with youth in conflict and post-conflict settings, ranging from
initiatives supporting youth civic participation and leadership to pro-
grammes addressing youth health, education and economic development.
Young people and those working on their behalf have urgently called for
more systematic and integrated support of youth rights and capacities,
including efforts to bridge major gender divides (including economic,
legal and social divides).[3]

While there is a vast array of child and youth experiences associated with armed conflict,
the direct involvement of children and adolescents in fighting forces as soldiers is the
issue that has captured world attention.[4] Global interest in understanding and curbing acts
of terrorism has also surged, and new research and policy developments relating to con-
flict prevention and youth reflect an increased focus on young males and their potential
for violence (United States Agency for International Development, 2004; Urdal, 2004;
Huntington, 1996). With attention primarily concentrated on these areas, the experiences
and capacities of the majority of other male and female youth who do not participate
in armed violence are marginalized, as are those of female youth who do participate in
armed conflict.

In international efforts to ensure that women's rights are recognized as human
rights, a significant amount of attention has been focused on the situation of women
affected by armed conflict. As emphasized at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held
in Beijing in 1995, armed conflict affects women and girls in particular "because of their
status and their sex" (United Nations, 1995). Systematic gender-based violence against
females in wars, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, is increasingly being
recognized as a weapon of war and a crime against humanity.[5] However, steps taken to
address these and other critical gender issues in conflict and post-conflict settings have
tended to enforce a hierarchy of gender action. Strong humanitarian programmes have
been implemented to assist girls and young women, but there remains a significant divide
between this work and work with women overall. Action in support of women often focuses
on those who have passed the stage of youth, not fully integrating the concerns of young
women and adolescent girls (Parker, Lozano and Messner, 1995).[6] In addition, limited
attention has been given to gender issues associated with males, including how they influ-
ence the critical gender concerns of females in and after armed conflict.[7]

As shown by the examples in box 8.1, youth and gender are both biological and
social factors that dramatically influence the lives of individuals and communities in situa-
tions of armed conflict. Youth have distinctive experiences of armed conflict because of
their age and their stage in life. These experiences are also strongly determined by gender,
or more precisely, by how the rights, roles, responsibilities and capabilities of females and
males are defined within a particular social context.[8]

Box 8.1

THE INFLUENCE OF YOUTH AND GENDER ON THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Some of us were traveling on donkeys [to the market]. … Suddenly, the Janjaweed attacked us; they took our money and our donkeys. … I was taken with my younger cousin to the wood. … One of them forced me on the ground. … They started raping me. I was bleeding heavily. … It was so painful, but fear was even more than pain. Four of them raped me.[a]

— Nyala, a 16-year-old female internally displaced in South Darfur, Sudan, recounted February 2005

I went out with my mother to the market at Virunga to get some things. … While we were shopping we saw a group of soldiers coming towards us. They told me to go with them. We knew they wanted to take me to go and train to fight. They took five of us-all young men-from the market. I didn't know the others.[b]

— Joseph, an 18-year-old male, in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, December 2000

All day long, I move around in the city and collect paper-about 15 to 20 kilos per day. … My father is disabled. … Collecting garbage is a dangerous activity. We can get diseases. … I was able to attend school for one year, but I had to stop for economic reasons.[c]

— Ahmad, a 15-year-old Afghan refugee in Peshawar, Pakistan, on his life as a "garbage picker", January 2002

"We have so many problems. … We have no good shelter, no money; we are compelled to work. … We will be beaten if we say no."[d]

— Fatima, a young Afghan refugee in Peshawar, Pakistan, describing her life as a carpet weaver, January 2002

Nyala and her cousin were targeted for sexual violence because of their age, ethnic background, and gender role as females; it was their responsibility to travel in and out of town to the market for their families, which made them especially vulnerable to attack. Rebels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo targeted Joseph and other young men for recruitment because they were male and of a certain age and physical maturity; they were believed to be able-bodied and, as males, presumably fit for taking on roles as fighters. Both Ahmad and Fatima are forced to work under hazardous conditions because of their ages and because their families must live clandestinely. As Afghan refugees living outside refugee camps in Pakistan, these young people are not officially recognized as refugees. Their parents have difficulty finding work, and both male and female Afghan youth in urban areas face major barriers to obtaining an education. As a result, an exploitative child and youth labour market flourishes. The types of work they do and the specific dangers they face are influenced by gender and cultural norms.

[a] Human Rights Watch, "Sexual violence and its consequences among displaced persons in Darfur and Chad", Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper (12 April 2005). A pseudonym is used for the purposes of this chapter only.

[b] Human Rights Watch, "Reluctant recruits: children and adults forcibly recruited for military service in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo", *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 13, No. 3A (May 2001). A pseudonym is used for the purposes of this chapter only.

[c] Jane Lowicki, *Fending for Themselves, Afghan Refugee Children and Adolescents Working in Urban Pakistan*, Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, Mission to Pakistan, January 2002 (New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, May 2002), p. 11.

[d] Ibid., p. 9.

In spite of their combined relevance, youth and gender are rarely considered together in efforts to understand and address the dynamics of armed conflict. When these factors are assessed individually, attention is often narrowly focused on limited or stereotypical experiences of male and female youth. The consequent failure to recognize the

complexity of issues facing youth affected by armed conflict results in the loss of opportunities to more effectively support the protection and development of young people and the overall well-being of their societies. As figure 8.1 shows, the simultaneous consideration of youth and gender requires attention to the age- and gender-specific experiences of both females and males in a given context.

Figure 8.1
Combined gender and youth analysis

		Youth analysis		
		Children	Youth	Adults
Gender analysis	Females			
	Males			

A combined and expanded gender and youth analysis requires looking at armed conflict from different perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of its complexity and the diversity of youth experiences in conflict situations. Among other things, applying a gender analysis should stimulate discussion and action in response to the many questions that are certain to emerge, particularly with regard to underlying factors and motivations. What drives young males to pick up weapons? What are the gender norms and values that enforce the roles of youth in this context and block access to social discourse and decision-making for females and males who seek non-violent paths to survival, conflict resolution and well-being? Gender analysis can better define the roles of both male and female youth in perpetuating armed conflict, and can reveal the ways in which armed conflict not only exacerbates gender inequalities, discrimination and abuse, but also challenges gender roles and presents opportunities for positive social change, with youth at the helm. Applying a youth analysis exposes the need to systematically support the rights of youth so that their distinct roles and capacities for survival, community recovery and conflict prevention are not sidestepped or subsumed under programmes for children or adults.

This chapter highlights some of the dynamics associated with youth and gender in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. Gender and youth as social constructs are defined in greater detail. A description of the key issues facing youth before, in and after conflict is provided, revealing tremendous abuses, social upheaval and other challenges experienced by young people as a consequence of their gender or stage in the life cycle. An analysis of achievements and gaps in addressing the gender- and age-related problems of young people affected by armed conflict is also provided, followed by a number of recommendations on ways to move forward, including suggestions on support for youth-informed and youth-driven solutions that take into account both youth- and gender-based concerns.

WHAT DOES "GENDER" MEAN? WHO ARE "YOUTH AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT"?

What is gender, and why is it important to consider in relation to armed conflicts? What is unique about youth? What makes them different from older adults or younger children? Why do they require distinct attention in armed conflict and post-conflict situations?

Gender

Gender refers not only to the physiological or sex differences between females and males, but also to those that are socially constructed. Males and females are biologically different in many ways, primarily in terms of their reproductive functions, but they may also be differentiated by socially constructed beliefs about what it means to be male or female. The concept of gender applies to the relationships between females and males individually and within their societies and communities as they are socially defined. These relationships are characterized by differences in gender roles, the division of labour, power relations, and access to resources, information, decision-making processes, and other assets or benefits. While the biology, or sex, of females and males does not change across cultures, time or space, gender beliefs and relationships are constantly changing and may vary greatly between cultures and locales and over time. As indicated here, the term gender refers to much more than the physical differences between males and females.[9]

Gender norms and divides

Gender norms are created and perpetuated in every society based on a range of political, social, cultural, economic and other circumstances. These norms are not biologically mandated but instead represent social perceptions of masculinity and femininity and beliefs about the ways males and females should think, feel, act and interact. For example, though females may give birth, child-rearing does not inherently need to be carried out exclusively or predominantly by females or males. Some common gender-role stereotypes include females as caregivers, homemakers, nurturers, wives, mothers and victims; and males as protectors, providers, decision makers, heads of household and aggressors. Beliefs about the roles and capacities of females and males also shape the division of labour, defining "women's work" and "men's work". In societies with traditional gender-role expectations, females may be the water gatherers, market sellers, food preparers, nurses and teachers, while males may be the hunters, politicians, drivers, carpenters, doctors, soldiers, and members of the clergy.

While many males and females do take on these more stereotypical gender roles, in reality, males and females around the world do all of these things and play multiple and varied roles in their families, communities and societies depending on the specific context. Many females are soldiers, heads of household, and the sole income earners for their families. Many males are teachers, cooks and nurturers, and they may also be victimized, contrary to the stereotypical view of males as "aggressors". The inability to see beyond gender stereotypes and recognize the diversity of roles males and females play reinforces erroneous assumptions about their capacities and needs. This gender blindness directly affects how youth are supported in diverse and dynamic social and gender environments, including armed conflict and post-conflict settings (El-Jack, 2003).

Most characterizations of gender norms reflect those of adult women and men rather than those of children, adolescents or youth. Young people's gender roles are often defined in relation to adult roles. Vis-à-vis children and youth, adults typically perform the roles of parents, providers, protectors, teachers, authority figures and disciplinarians. Young people are often considered subordinate dependants, learners and helpers, carrying out or assisting with the gendered tasks expected of their sex as adults. For example, girls' roles may include gathering water, caring for younger children, cooking and serving food, and doing the washing up, either alongside or in place of their mothers or other elder females. Boys may be expected to join armies, defend their villages, or earn wages along with or in place of their fathers or other older men. In their own right, many youth also take on roles as parents, wives, husbands, students, workers, providers and more. As with adults, both male and female children and youth may do all of these things in a range of contexts.

For many, the behaviour of youth represents a strong indicator of the current and future well-being of families and entire communities. If some participate in violence or otherwise deviate from accepted social norms, it may cast all roles youth play in their society into a negative light.

Despite the diversity of female and male gender roles around the world, there are major gender divides at both the interpersonal and structural levels that are disproportionately devastating to females. As a result of gender inequalities involving unequal power relations between males and females, women and girls are often discriminated against and do not enjoy equal access to the means of securing or safeguarding their human rights. Relegated to a subordinate status, females are often denied basic rights to life, equality, security of the person, equal protection under the law, and freedom from torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

In societies controlled principally by men, females may not be allowed to inherit or own property; to make decisions freely, including those relating to marriage, divorce and their fertility; to secure employment, receive equal pay for equal work, and become self-sufficient; or to ensure that they are protected against sexual abuse and exploitation and other violence. As explained in greater detail below, females are the principal targets of gender-based violence, including rape and sexual assault. National laws and enforcement authorities may reinforce or even perpetuate gender-based violence and gender discrimination against females instead of providing them with protection.

Women and girls are, on the whole, far less likely than males to command resources, and they comprise the majority of the world's economically poor (United Nations, 1997; United Nations Development Programme, 2003; Coleman, 2005). As such, they are more vulnerable to contracting HIV as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse and poor health care, all of which are exacerbated by economic deprivation. Many females and males are uninformed about the rights of women and girls, and about human rights in general. Even when they are informed, legal support for challenging customary practices such as a "husband's right" to beat his wife is often not available. Females do not always have the resources to secure legal representation, let alone support systems that will help them deal with the wider social recriminations that accompany efforts to ensure the enforcement of their legal rights. Local cultural norms may also be held to supersede international norms, including by aid groups concerned about imposing culture.

Young women often face a double barrier to gender equality owing to their age and status in society. Not only are they abused and disadvantaged in the ways described, but they may have even less access to resources and support and be less able to assert their rights than older women. Although women's and children's rights have been articulated internationally, there has been a failure to ensure the explicit expression of youth rights on the same scale, as a result of which they may not receive the same level of recognition and support.

Gender divides may greatly affect males as well. As described later, males also experience gender-based violence, as they may be targets for murder, sexual violence and forced soldiering. Their overall well-being and that of their societies are affected by the lower economic and social status of their mothers and sisters, who play major caregiving and protective roles, often with little access to health care and other resources.

As noted later in the chapter, gender divides often worsen during and after armed conflicts, though such situations may also present opportunities for social transformation and improvements in gender equality.

Youth

Youth represents the transition from childhood to adulthood and is therefore a dynamic stage in an individual's development. It is an important period of physical, mental and social maturation, during which young people are actively forming their identities and determining acceptable roles for themselves within their communities and societies. They are increasingly capable of abstract thought and independent decision-making. As their bodies continue to change, their sexuality begins to emerge, and they are presented with new physical and emotional feelings as well as new social expectations and challenges.

Youth is often a period of risk-taking, when young people push boundaries and at times engage in conflict with adults and others as they seek to confirm or disprove what they feel they know about themselves, their world, and the limits of acceptable behaviour. Some youth may be extremely politically minded, concerned about social conditions, ideals-driven and action-oriented. Others, often especially female youth, are socialized to be silent and compliant as the greatest proof of their maturity and adulthood. Youth, ultimately, are seeking connection, care, the ability to care for themselves and others effectively, and a role and identity in society.

Most countries have a legally defined age of majority at which an individual assumes the full rights and responsibilities of an adult under the law. In most countries, the legal age of majority is 18, which is compatible with the definition of children as those between the ages of 0 and 18 in the almost universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations agencies also employ various working definitions that apply to the period between childhood and adulthood: adolescents are defined as those aged 10 to 19 years; youth as those between the ages of 15 and 24; young people as those aged 10 to 24 years; and adults as those aged 18 years and above.[10] How young people view themselves and are viewed by their societies in day-to-day life is often very different, however.

Concepts surrounding the period and definition of youth vary greatly across societies and cultural contexts, including along gender lines. At times, youth over the age of 18 are not considered to be adults by their societies because they have not met other social
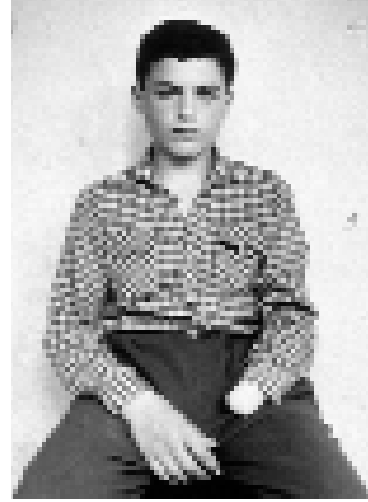
criteria. For many girls in Sierra Leone, for example, the way to be accepted as a woman in society is to be inducted into a Secret Society and to have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), making the woman eligible for marriage. By contrast, there are many young people under the age of 18 who are already seen as adults. In many parts of the world, 12- and 13-year-old girls are considered to be adult women when they marry, and this shift in status requires them to leave school and assume household responsibilities full-time. In the Xhosa tradition in South Africa, boys become men through circumcision. They participate in a lengthy and elaborate ritual in preparation for manhood, after which they are allowed to inherit, marry and officiate in tribal rituals (Mandela, 1994). These types of sociocultural transformations, or rites of passage, often involve the transfer of cultural and other learning, as well as resources, from adults to young people to ease their transition into parenting, earning a livelihood, or other aspects of adult functioning.

As these examples indicate, formal definitions of youth may be based on age, but the concept of youth is ultimately culturally and contextually bound by the customs and belief systems of societies and even individual families. In armed conflict, the social support systems and roles of children, youth and adults undergo tremendous, deliberate upheaval. Young people affected by armed conflict are often forced to take on new roles without full preparation, support or community sanction, at times modifying or transforming the adult and gender roles they have assumed. Those attempting to identify and work with youth affected by armed conflict must take into account the dynamic social changes under way and not simply rely on old norms in anticipating and devising solutions to address youth concerns (Lowicki-Zucca, 2004a; 2004b).

Youth affected by armed conflict

International and civil wars, civil strife, and other forms of political violence carried out by government and rebel forces, militias and paramilitary groups all involve armed conflict.[11] Before, during and after armed conflict, the proliferation of weapons and breakdowns in social controls, authority structures, and social support and other systems also contribute to violence within families and communities, as well as a range of deprivations that cause harm to civilian populations. Youth affected by armed conflict include those young people who are in the vicinity of, perpetrate, are victims of, and/or are otherwise directly affected by any of these forms of violence and their consequences and not just by open warfare.

Youth affected by armed conflict may be refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP) or returnees, or may never have fled their homes.[12] They may or may not themselves have been victims or perpetrators of physical violence. However, each has been affected in myriad ways by the instability and social, economic, political and psychological upheaval brought on or exacerbated by armed conflict, both during the hostilities and after the war has officially ended. Some of the effects of armed conflict on youth are visible, some are not; some are immediate, while others may only become apparent over time.

Not all young people in countries that have experienced armed conflict are necessarily "youth affected by armed conflict". In some cases, armed conflict is highly localized, leaving many of the country's inhabitants living outside these areas largely unaffected. Wars do have far-reaching social, economic and other effects outside of the areas in which their

consequences are most directly felt, and many refugees and IDP flee conflict zones to areas otherwise untouched by war. However, a distinction is being made in the present context to zero in on youth who are most directly affected by armed conflict.

Demographics

Global data are not systematically collected on youth affected by armed conflict as a specific cohort, nor is there reliable information on their sex composition. Their numbers may be estimated, however, based on general population statistics and refugee and IDP statistics, which fluctuate.[13] If their share mirrors that of the average global youth population, young people between the ages of 15 and 24 comprise approximately 18 per cent of war-affected populations, and the number of females and males among them is almost equal.[14] However, because many countries affected by armed conflict and displacement have extremely youthful populations, the actual numbers of affected youth are likely higher than the global average would suggest.[15] In Pakistan, for example, which is still host to a million or more Afghan refugees, 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25.[16]

The number of youth affected by armed conflict may not, by itself, provide a compelling rationale for focusing on youth and gender. After all, children under the age of 18 and adults aged 25 years and over each exceed youth in number globally. However, within war-affected societies, many of which are overwhelmingly young, youth are uniquely challenged to take on decision-making, caregiving and protective roles to ensure their own well-being and that of younger and older people. They are also looked to as defenders and maintainers of their culture, tasked with perpetuating traditional customs, values and practices. Further, the convergence of "large youth cohorts", high unemployment and other factors is believed to be associated with the onset of armed conflict, with the focus largely on young males in this context, raising important questions about the gender dynamics involved (Urdal, 2004).

THE ROLES OF YOUTH IN THE ONSET OF ARMED CONFLICT, SEEN THROUGH A GENDER LENS

Are youth prone to instigating and participating in armed conflict? What role does gender play?

Youth bulges

Much research on the involvement of youth in the onset of armed conflict focuses on the correlation between armed conflict and the existence of demographic "youth bulges", which occur when young people constitute an unusually large share of the overall population. This research is increasingly influencing how youth and conflict is framed as a global issue. It is argued that the mere existence of a youth bulge does not guarantee armed conflict, but that when other key factors are also present, the possibility of such conflict increases. Some of these additional factors include a high level of unemployment among youth, which fuels grievances among them; economic stagnation, which worsens periods of unemployment for youth; rapidly increased access to education, which can lead to stronger youth expectations for jobs and political and social influence that do not correspond to the actual opportunities available; and limited possibilities for migration, which

means there is no safety valve through which countries might relieve unemployment-related pressures and defuse youth discontent. One study finds that the "combination of youth bulges and poor economic performance can be explosive" (Urdal, 2004).

Although all young people are presumably included in analysis of the significance of youth bulges, findings focus mainly on the lives and behaviour of male youth. One researcher categorically states the following: "Generally speaking, the people who go out and kill other people are males between the ages of 16 and 30" (Steinberger, 2001).[17] While males seemingly play a central role in comparison with females, a gender analysis of why male youth are the predominant actors in fomenting and carrying out armed conflict is strikingly absent from the youth bulge research. One important fact is that only limited numbers of males within the overall population of male youth participate in fighting forces. What explains the absence of most male and female youth from fighting forces despite their comprising the bulk of the youth bulge? Are they supportive of the onset of armed conflict in other ways? If not, what are they doing, and what happens to the voices of those who wish to be heard? These and many other important questions arise when a gender analysis is applied to research on youth cohorts and youth involvement in the onset of armed conflict.

If unemployment or the lack of access to resources generally affects females more than males, why are females not more apt than males to pick up weapons during economic downturns?[18] If, as some researchers believe, a higher level of educational attainment, when met with better job opportunities, tends to reduce the risk of armed conflict, why do large cohorts of uneducated female youth, who in general have had more limited access to educational opportunities, not pose a greater risk to stability than do males? Among highly educated young people, why do more males foment armed conflict? Why do the majority of males resist the temptation to engage in such conflict?

It should be noted that the onset of armed conflict also occurs during post-conflict periods. By the time a conflict is officially declared over, some young people may have achieved high levels of solidarity with one another and may have even greater access to weapons. Post-conflict societies are also usually economically devastated and face major challenges in rebuilding infrastructure. Do youth roles in the onset of armed conflict change in post-conflict situations? Is it easier or more difficult for males and females seeking to address their concerns to establish forums for effective, peaceful action in the post-conflict period?

These questions are raised to suggest a wider diversity of youth experiences in the onset of armed conflict than are accounted for in youth bulge analysis and to warn against the pitfalls of gender and youth stereotyping. The limitations associated with youth bulge analysis argue strongly for the adoption of holistic approaches to youth protection and development that take into account gender roles and dynamics, along with a host of other relevant factors. Youth bulge analysis does conclude, very plausibly, that when there are large numbers of young people placed under pressure to ensure their individual and/or collective survival and identity at a pivotal time in their lives involving the assumption of responsibility and status, they will seek diverse ways to cope, with some choosing armed conflict.

Gender and other dynamics associated with cycles of conflict are not fully considered in the youth bulge research. In failing to incorporate these dynamics, such research risks are stigmatizing all male youth as potential violent actors and female youth as passive victims; placing male experiences of deprivation and political and social marginalization at the centre of analysis and action surrounding youth and armed conflict and positing them as representative of female experiences; focusing on armed soldiering as the chief concern of youth affected by armed conflict, to the exclusion of the majority of other youth experiences; bypassing important opportunities to recognize and support constructive youth coping and activism; and finally, neglecting to address the root causes of conflict (including gender inequality) at the structural, cultural and other levels. Female and male involvement in violence, as well as in peaceful civil organizing and activism, is explored further in the next section.

YOUTH EXPERIENCES IN ARMED CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS

What happens to male and female youth when armed conflict is under way and after it is officially over? What does this mean for these young people and their societies?

Moving beyond gender and youth stereotypes

Armed conflict rips apart the fabric of societies. People are killed, families are torn apart, communities are displaced and divided, infrastructure is destroyed, and support systems crumble. Under intense and often deliberate pressure from warring parties, social roles and norms undergo rapid change. In the process, youth are shown to be both vulnerable and capable because of their stage of development and the important gender and other roles they play in society. Youth are at once targets, perpetrators and survivors of violence and other rights violations in the upheaval of war.

Overall, youth are more likely than young children to be forcibly recruited into fighting forces; to suffer sexual violence; to miss out on educational opportunities; to head households and/or be forced to generate a livelihood for themselves and others with little support or training; to become pregnant (if female) and have little access to reproductive health-care information or services; to become teen parents; and to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, without access to prevention information or support for recovery (Lowicki, 2000). These experiences occur in a variety of settings, including refugee and IDP camps, urban areas, and rural villages and towns—and within fighting forces.

Apart from becoming pregnant and having specific reproductive health needs, both female and male youth may endure any or all of the experiences listed above to varying degrees depending on gender norms and the specific context of the conflict. The nature and dynamics of their experiences are similar in many ways but very different in others. For example, though males and females participate in fighting forces as combatants, females are more likely than males to also be used as sex slaves by commanders. By contrast, males may be forced to commit acts of sexual violence against females or males. Both sexes miss out on education in huge numbers. However, as described below, females are

worse off, on average, and the consequences for them are often different. Females may be forced into early marriage and/or sexually exploited as a result of lost education. Males may also be forced into exploitative labour, but are less likely than females to be forced into sexual labour.

In these and many other ways, armed conflict often feeds on and worsens pre-existing gender divides. Amid the breakdown of social supports and controls, and with the advent of lawlessness, gender inequalities are often exploited, and impunity for gender-based violence is likely to prevail. Many males take advantage of the gender roles and secondary status of females and intensify discriminatory and abusive practices. From the increased sexual violence against them to the even deeper denial of access to resources and opportunities, females are often more brutally oppressed and abused during wartime, especially when they are refugees or IDP. At the same time, expectations of males as fighters and aggressors (and in other capacities) are also exploited. As conflict and power struggles among males progress, many are killed or find their options, resources and freedoms diminished or taken away. This fuels domestic abuse against females as males attempt to reassert their power, authority and perceived rights in other areas of their lives.

As indicated above, the violence associated with armed conflict is not confined to the battlefield. It also occurs within homes and communities, in part as a result of social upheaval and widening gender divides. Many abuses against children, young people and adults also occur, and even increase (especially for females), after conflicts have been officially declared over. The post-conflict period is often characterized by widespread lawlessness, corruption, attempts to seize power and control, and continued social upheaval. It is a time when old and new norms that subjugate females and stratify hierarchies among males may be reinforced. As roles, structures and systems are redefined, injustice may prevail, with marked increases in domestic and other violence against females and the harassment and intimidation of males.

At the same time, as bad as it is, armed conflict sometimes provides females and males with new opportunities to reshape their lives and relationships amid rapid social change. Gender roles are challenged and transformed by conflict, and some gender divides may be mitigated. For example, girls who were previously unable to go to school may be given the opportunity to do so in refugee camps. Females may become key family and community decision makers in the absence of males. Some males may have become activists for gender equality. These new opportunities may sometimes lead to additional gender divides, however, both during and after conflict, as females and males assume new roles and engage in new practices, only to encounter enormous resistance. For example, many Afghan refugees fled Taliban rule in order to secure education for girls. They and others have worked to expand this progress in post-conflict Afghanistan but often face setbacks. Recently, the Godah girls' school was set on fire in an attempt to intimidate students and organizers.[19]

Similarly, age divides may grow during armed conflict and in the post-conflict period as adults fail young people and the latter must act to fill gaps in support. Youth often lose respect for adults and adult-run institutions and systems that betray and abuse them instead of protecting and supporting them. Young people are forced to take on enormous responsibilities, caring for themselves and others with little support to ensure their survival

and recovery. Some develop strong leadership skills within fighting forces and attain high levels of authority that they are not always prepared to relinquish upon the cessation of fighting. Others, forced to provide for themselves in other ways, cannot afford to be sidelined in community action aimed at recovery, as their livelihoods are often at stake. Tension frequently exists between adults and youth as a result of role reversals, and as youth are stigmatized as uneducated, disrespectful or potentially violent. Young people continue to be marginalized from decision-making processes that affect their lives.

New opportunities emerge to support the rights and roles of young people as they actively cope with their circumstances in conflict and post-conflict situations. Some of their coping strategies are ultimately destructive to themselves and others, but with the right support can be transformed into critical life skills essential to individual and community recovery. Most, however, seek constructive ways of coping. Youth affected by armed conflict increasingly rely on peer support, and some form organizations, groups and associations that address a range of youth and community concerns. Some do so with help from supportive adults, bridging the gap between generations. Females participate in this organizing but are usually disadvantaged in terms of the range of leadership roles they may assume. In this context and many others, young people perpetuate gender and age-based inequalities. However, both male and female youth play important roles as mentors and activists, helping to improve the lives of younger children, members of their own age group, and others. Good practice acknowledging the value of supporting youth capacities, participation and leadership in and after armed conflict is also emerging.

The subsection below explores some of the ways in which youth and gender norms undergo dynamic change in armed conflict, revealing patterns and diversity that challenge purely stereotypical interpretations of gender, youth and armed conflict. Young people's experiences of violence, including murder and wounding, youth participation in fighting forces, and sexual violence, are described from a gender perspective. The impact of family upheaval on youth, the limited support for their education and health, and youth coping strategies are also viewed through a gender lens. Youth emerge as central agents in their own protection and care and as pivotal social actors, essential to social cohesion, conflict prevention and community recovery, who must be actively supported in ways that focus on their specific gender roles.

Young people's experiences of violence

All of the youth experiences of violence illustrated below involve gender differentials and reflect various forms of gender-based violence. Many forms of gender-based violence that young people suffer are brought on or exacerbated by armed conflict. While women and girls are not the only victims, they are the ones principally affected across all cultures because of their subordinate status in most societies (Ward, 2002).[20] Males are also strongly affected by gender-based violence, both as victims and as perpetrators, in ways that are often overlooked.

Gender-based violence is not experienced exclusively by male or female children, youth or adults. It exists along a continuum of violence and affects both sexes and all age groups, varying according to the circumstances. Although comprehensive statistics do not

exist, it is believed that the number of women over the age of 24 who experience gender-based violence as a result of war is higher than the corresponding numbers of younger females (aged 15-24 years), males, or young children. Numbers, however, are not the principal concern, as the lives and experiences of all individuals in such situations are intertwined. The focus on youth as a cohort reveals important similarities and differences along age and gender lines that require distinct attention.

Murder and wounding

Both male and female youth are targeted by fighting forces for wounding and murder, but because of gender norms, males are often particularly affected. For example, in Kosovo in 1999, Yugoslav forces randomly abducted and killed ethnic Albanian adolescent boys and young and older men, fearing they might take up arms with the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Similarly, the KLA targeted ethnic Serbian and Roma males. Each group sought to undermine the cohesion and survival of the other's ethnic society (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1999). In a number of conflicts, fathers have been targeted for murder or disappearance, leaving male youth behind to care for themselves and their families. These young men are at times denied access to schooling and are harassed and beaten by police, who suspect them of being part of opposition groups (Amnesty International, 2000).

Adolescent boys and young men are principal targets for murder and wounding because they are central to the functioning of patriarchal communities. Power and wealth are negotiated and passed on to the next generation through them. Eliminating or incapacitating them interrupts these processes and leaves male-dominated groups and societies vulnerable to collapse. Males may also be targeted based on the belief that wars are traditionally fought between males.

Girls and young women are targets for murder and wounding as well, not only in connection with sexual and other violence, but also for political and other reasons. Females have been targeted for murder and disappearance by fighting forces for stepping out of traditional gender roles, challenging the authority of armed groups, and taking action in support of human rights (Amnesty International, 2004a).

Women and children also make up a significant proportion of civilian deaths occurring as a result of the deprivation caused or exacerbated by armed conflict. The perpetration of violence against female youth affects their entire societies in the ways described below and symbolizes the failure of males to protect their families and communities. Rationales for murder and wounding in conflict situations are not solely gender-based but involve many other factors such as ethnicity, political affiliation, displacement circumstances, and socio-economic status.

Youth participation in fighting forces

Despite the intense international focus on young people as armed actors, those who actually engage in armed violence in or after armed conflict comprise a relatively small share of the overall youth population.[21] Statistics have not been compiled on the numbers of young people aged 15-24 years who are members of fighting forces. However, it is known that members of this age group make up a significant proportion of such forces. Most studies on young people's involvement in fighting forces concentrate on children under the

age of 18 in an effort to address the contravention of prohibitions against their use as soldiers.[22] Although some are very young, most of the world's estimated 300,000 child soldiers (both males and females) are actually adolescents and youth. Some of the young people in fighting forces, who are over the age of 18 and considered legal participants, entered as children and were unable to leave.

Although international attention is often focused on male participation in fighting forces, females are widely involved as well. Recent research on girl soldiers shows that between 1990 and 2003, girls under the age of 18 were part of fighting forces in 55 countries. In 38 of these countries they were involved in armed conflicts, most of which were internal wars (fought among forces within national borders). Girls from a number of these 38 countries also participated in international armed conflicts (fighting between countries) (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). The research indicates that the motivations, causes and specifics of their experiences are widely diverse, and explores how they are similar to and different from the experiences of males. Extreme misogyny in armed conflict often makes female experiences in fighting forces more difficult than those of males (McKay and Mazurana, 2004).

Many male and female youth join fighting groups because they believe in a cause and/or because they feel they have no other options to sustain themselves, as education and job opportunities decline in times of conflict. Many young people indicate that the lack of access to formal or informal education is one of the primary reasons they join armed groups (United Nations, 2004a). In fighting groups, they may be given food, protection, an identity and recognized responsibilities. Many others are forced to join these groups; they may be abducted or drafted and subsequently indoctrinated. Youth may be viewed as easy targets, as they are not fully mature and are easily manipulated by their captors. Males are often recruited because they are believed to be strong and/or because fighting is seen as a male endeavour. Youth involvement in war is supported and strengthened by the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons to both State and non-State actors (*see box 8.2*), and by the abuse of drugs to enhance risk-taking and control.

While males are stereotypically assumed to be stronger and better fighters than females, members of both sexes perform many of the same duties within fighting forces. Like males, females take on roles as combatants, spies, messengers, lookouts, medics and supply carriers. Often, however, females are also recruited to play other roles compatible with traditional gender expectations, serving as captive "wives" or sex slaves, mothers, cooks and domestic servants. They are not simply camp followers but instead perform a range of critical functions in sustaining the activities of the fighting group. Forced or not, both males and females contribute to the violence of armed groups, including the acts of gender-based violence that are committed against young people and others. These individuals face, and will eventually be placed in the position of having to overcome, the enormous stigma attached to their involvement in violence and their association with fighting forces, as their activities in this context are seen to be responsible for the destruction of cultural and societal norms.

Box 8.2

THE IMPACT OF SMALL ARMS AVAILABILITY ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The proliferation of small arms has a devastating impact on the lives of youth, contributing greatly to their involvement in conflict, to social upheaval, and to acts of gender-based violence and discrimination. Their destructive potential is reflected in the following:[a]

- In the majority of conflicts, small arms are the main instruments of war causing death, injury and destruction.

- Young people are recruited to join armed forces and suffer severe physiological trauma from being forced to kill and maim using small arms.

- Because small arms cause casualties on all sides of a conflict, their proliferation weakens traditional family and support structures for young people.

- Small arms proliferation leads to population displacement, taking young people away from their homes and communities.

- Small arms endanger public life and safety and can therefore interfere with the provision of basic necessities such as food, education and health care.

- Small arms can seriously undermine the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

- Small arms contribute to "a culture of violence in the affected area, where [they] are used to cultivate influence, reinforce authority, and symbolize value".[b]

- Small arms are used for violent and criminal activities during and after conflicts, contributing to added or continuing insecurity.

- Small arms are portable and simple to use and are therefore relatively easy for young people to carry and operate.[c] In various conflicts they have been used to force children and youth to commit acts that effectively sever their ties with their families and communities and leave them no option but to join the armed forces.[d]

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[a] Rachel J. Stohl, "Under the gun: children and small arms", *African Security Review,* vol. 11, No. 3 (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2002) (available from http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/11No3/Stohl.html).

[b] Ibid.

[c] Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, "Problems and solutions identified by adolescent researchers in northern Uganda" (Gulu Research Team report, 2001), in *Against All Odds: Surviving the War on Adolescents*, Participatory Research Study with Adolescents in Northern Uganda (May-July 2001), p. 23.

[d] Stohl, loc. cit.

Challenges for male and female soldiers in post-conflict reintegration are similar in some ways and very different in others. Former child and youth soldiers need assistance reconnecting with their families and communities, medical care, a new and accepted identity (including as students in school or vocational training), and a means to sustain themselves. They are often extremely frustrated and at risk of experiencing ongoing protection problems when they do not find opportunities to fulfil their potential and use the skills and strengths they developed while members of fighting forces, and when they no longer command authority or resources.

As described later in the chapter, girls and women in fighting forces are often left out of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes, with important consequences for their protection and well-being. Overlooked and without support, they may be forced to remain with their captors, ostracized from their societies, or pushed into

early marriage or prostitution, at times to support children born in captivity. They are also often left without psychosocial and medical care critical to their recovery. Demobilizing male youth are at risk of psychosocial distress, community stigmatization, re-recruitment and involvement in illicit activities if their needs are inadequately met.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence encompasses acts ranging from unwanted touching to wounding and mutilation, rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, and trafficking for sexual purposes. Rape victims may also be beaten and/or murdered. Rape is frequently used as a weapon of war by fighting forces not only to torture the individuals targeted but also to terrorize and destabilize their communities. Revelations of abuse can lead to stigmatization, blame of the victim, further physical harm, family rejection, the destruction of marriage prospects, health problems, and other serious consequences. Fearing such repercussions, survivors often remain silent and continue to suffer without the support they need for their psychosocial and physical recovery. Gender-based violence prevention and response systems are also often weak owing to social, cultural, legal and other constraints, and to the upheaval caused by war.

Stereotypically, females are perceived as victims and males as perpetrators of sexual violence. Although this is the general pattern, there are important exceptions.

Female youth and sexual violence

Generally speaking, though very young children and even babies may be affected, adolescent girls and young women are more likely than younger children and males to be sexually abused and exploited in armed conflict and post-conflict situations as gender roles are polarized. Such violence is frequently an intensification or continuation of violence experienced by girls and women and tolerated by their societies in peacetime. As they physically mature, girls and young women are often viewed as sexual objects and represent the wealth, cultural identity and future of their families and communities. Sexual violence against females may be random and capricious. It may also be systematic. Taking a woman's virginity or honour (and thus her value for marriage) and forcibly impregnating females are forms of "ethnic cleansing" affecting multiple generations. They undermine social identity and bonds, as well as family and community wealth and cohesion.

A number of recent examples provide a better understanding of the situation on the ground. During the conflict in Rwanda, the mass rape and sexual mutilation of Tutsi women and girls, and the deliberate transmission of HIV to them, were encouraged by Hutu extremists. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women and girls were publicly raped prior to the expulsion of Muslim populations, and some were forcibly impregnated (Ward, 2002). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that between October 2002 and February 2003, approximately 5,000 women and girls were raped by fighting forces in South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Some were also deliberately injured in other ways, or even killed. It is believed that thousands of women and girls have been abducted or forced by desperate poverty to become sex slaves or front-line fighters. The victims in situations such as those described above, many of whom fear they have contracted HIV, have little or no support for their physical and psychosocial recovery and lack access to the mechanisms through which they might seek justice (Amnesty International, 2004b).

Refugee and internally displaced women and children, especially heads of household and young people who have lost or been separated from their families, are at particular risk of sexual violence. This violence occurs during their flight from or return to their homes, and in refugee camps and urban settings. Perpetrators may be bandits, members of government or other fighting forces, border guards, humanitarian aid workers, security personnel, members of host communities, or fellow refugees or IDP, including youth, teachers, neighbours or religious leaders.

Because refugee women and children often have limited means to sustain themselves and lack legal and physical protection, they are less able to assert their rights and therefore face a greater risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Many resort to trading sex for food, protection or other services. Adolescent girls and young women are often placed in jeopardy by camp life and the roles they play in such settings. For example, they may suffer sexual violence as they collect wood or water to prepare food or as they carry out household chores or care for others (World Health Organization, 2000; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1999).

While all females may face gender-based violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, the specific threats and consequences are differentiated by age and by social and other circumstances. Older women may already be married and risk losing their families, shelter and community standing should the sexual violence they have suffered be revealed. They may even be labelled adulterers and murdered. Young female victims of sexual violence run the risk of never marrying, losing schooling opportunities, or being forced to marry their assailants. They may have fewer means than older women to help themselves. Younger females are more likely to contract STIs and experience maternal mortality. All survivors of sexual violence face lifelong psychosocial damage, and some may commit suicide.

Government, customary and other authority structures may no longer be functioning and therefore be unresponsive to, or even complicit in, sexual abuse and exploitation. In northern Uganda, child and youth "night commuters" walk miles every evening to town centres to sleep, fearing rebel attacks in their inadequately protected villages and IDP camps. Along the way and in sleeping spaces, females are especially at risk of sexual violence (Lowicki and Emry, 2004). In Afghanistan, under the rule of the mujahideen, rape and sexual harassment of women in Kabul were commonplace (Ward, 2002).

At times, international humanitarian personnel sexually abuse and exploit members of the local population, compounding the misery of the women and girls they are meant to protect. Experiences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo show that when faced with deprivation, both females and males often cope by engaging in prostitution. In 2004, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigated 72 allegations of sexual misconduct by United Nations military personnel and civilian staff stationed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (68 and 4 cases respectively). An OIOS report released on 5 January 2005 noted that "sexual contact with peacekeepers occurred with regularity, usually in exchange for food or small sums of money" (United Nations, 2005). The allegations involved women both under and over the age of 18, and in the cases that could be substantiated, most of the victims identified were between the ages of 12 and 16. Most of the encounters were facilitated by Congolese children and youth 8 to 18 years of age, and a few by young men aged 20-25 years (United Nations, 2005; Fleshman, 2005).

OIOS clearly identified youth, poverty, displacement and family loss or separation as key vulnerability factors for sexual abuse and exploitation or its facilitation. Investigators observed the following: "Most of the victims and witnesses are extremely vulnerable, not only because of their youth, but also because they are living alone, with other children or with older relatives in extended families who are unable to provide for them. The victims and a significant number of the boys are not in school because they cannot afford the fees" (United Nations, 2005, para. 31). The OIOS report also named job scarcity, an inadequate food supply, and a paucity of programmes to assist women and children as other key environmental factors in the abuse of young people. In this example, male and female youth facing similar circumstances found ways to cope within the limitations imposed by gender norms. Gaps in the monitoring and enforcement of restrictions on abuses by peace-keepers and others are further examined in a later section of this chapter.

Female genital mutilation

Many young females are exposed to a harmful traditional practice known as female genital mutilation (FGM), a social convention that involves the ritual cutting of female genitalia. The physical and psychosocial effects of FGM vary greatly depending on the nature and extent of the procedure and the cultural context (Yount and Balk, forth-coming).[23] Comprehensive information on how armed conflict affects FGM is not available. However, the upheaval caused by armed conflict certainly has an impact, given that FGM is a socially determined practice. Evidence from at least two regions suggests different scenarios: in the case of Sierra Leone, war may have led to a temporary decline in the practice; in Kenya, it may have contributed to an increase. In both places, new opportunities to end FGM or improve its safety emerged through education and community action.

During the hostilities, many girls and young women in Sierra Leone did not undergo FGM as part of the ceremonies associated with entry into women's Secret Societies because of massive displacement and devastated livelihoods.[24] In post-war Sierra Leone, there has been a resurgence in the practice, in part owing to the efforts of women who profit from it. Some young females have been abducted and held by Secret Society members until their families pay for the elaborate ceremonies. The issue is very politicized, and few within the Government or other authority structures will intervene. In other cases, young women and their families seek out the ritual to ensure their full participation in the social life of the community and as a way to gain reacceptance into society and establish the young woman's marriageability following a return from fighting forces. At the same time, many females are now interested in ending the practice or making it safer, having received information on its risks from reproductive health and gender-based violence programmes (Lowicki-Zucca, 2004a; Lowicki and Pillsbury, 2002; Yount and Balk, forthcoming).[25]

In the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya, efforts to end FGM among Somali refugees backfired. When the first case against FGM was prosecuted in the camps in August 2002 under Kenyan law, refugee and local community members held demonstrations to protest what they saw as suppression of their cultural and religious rights. Not long after, Somali Bantus took further action to skirt the law when those in line for resettlement to third countries performed the procedure on girls as young as one and two in order to avoid further

legal prohibitions. Refugee families that have banded together to ensure their girls do not undergo FGM have faced major reprisals. Some girls are barred from attending school, harassed, and risk never marrying (Munala, 2003).[26]

The United Nations and many Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have consistently and repeatedly condemned the practice of FGM. The issue is explicitly addressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, adopted in 1993.[27] Successfully challenging the practice of FGM requires a holistic approach that includes implementing and enforcing legislation, raising awareness about the harmful effects of FGM, and involving the various stakeholders at levels ranging from the community to the State (Amnesty International, 1998).

Male youth and sexual violence

Males may also be victims of rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and social taboos governing their ability to seek help are often more restrictive than those facing females. As is the case with females, sexual violence against males has the power not only to devastate the victim but also to destabilize society as a whole, given the prevailing gender norms. Perpetrators exert personal power over their male victims, often abusing positions of authority. When perpetrated by an opposition group, the abuse and humiliation inflicted serves to undermine the power and authority of all males in the family, community or society targeted. Although sexual abuse principally represents an expression of power and control rather than an effort to achieve sexual gratification per se, stigmas against homosexuality and the loss of power to another male are so strong that males may be much less inclined than females to come forward and seek justice, reparations, or help with recovery. The few services that exist for survivors of gender-based violence rarely address the needs of males (World Health Organization, 2000).

Rape and other forms of sexual coercion to which males may be subjected take place in the home, within the workplace, at school, on the street, in the military, during war, and in prisons and police custody. However, little reliable information is available on the extent of sexual violence against males. Although it is known to be less prevalent than that perpetrated against females, it remains largely unacknowledged and is believed to be vastly underrepresented. Some evidence suggests that males are particularly vulnerable in certain settings and contexts, including all-male institutions such as prisons or schools, and in armed conflict (World Health Organization, 2002). In settings in which male access to females is highly controlled or absent, risks of sexual violence increase for males (Lowicki, 2002). Often, males are forced by fighting groups to commit criminal acts against which there are extreme social taboos, including raping their mothers or sisters (Lowicki and Pillsbury, 2002).

Little has been done to identify or address the sexual abuse of males in conflict and post-conflict situations, and little action has been taken to further understand and better address the root causes of the perpetration of gender-based violence by males. In northern Uganda, when male youth began increasingly to harass and rape female night commuters in their communities, no one asked them why they were doing it. Subsequent interviews with some of the young men revealed a series of specific breakdowns in social support for and supervision of males that had led to the abuses. While some appeared simply opportunistic,

other males revealed frustration with elders who no longer provided guidance and with the breakdown of traditional systems for meeting females and finding a bride. The males indicated that in the absence of opportunities to participate in traditional rites of passage, they had sought out alternative means of marking their transition to manhood, with little thought of the consequences for females (Lowicki and Emry, 2004). Additional attention to the social dynamics surrounding male sexuality and the roles of males as victims and perpetrators would reveal new avenues for prevention and care.

Impact on marriage patterns

Girls, in particular, are often subjected to early or forced marriages owing to the increased pressure armed conflict places on many families to make ends meet. When societies experience intense economic pressure, cultural practices become distorted. The time for marriage is often brought forward so that the bride's dowry may be acquired sooner rather than later, and some families effectively sell off their daughters for additional income. The vulnerability of girls is increased by their lack of economic, political and social independence. Girls and young women heading households are particularly at risk of early marriage, as they often have insufficient resources to care for themselves and any dependants, given the limited options available to them. Early marriage tends to be associated with dropping out of school, a range of health problems linked to early pregnancy and sexual activity, and ongoing dependence on males. Problems may also arise within the girl's new family when she is unable or unwilling to perform tasks as well as expected, having lost key years of preparation. This may lead to disputes and further physical abuse of the girl.[28]

Poverty and a lack of income may place males at a disadvantage within the family, seriously affecting their marriage prospects. For example, in some cultures, marriage requires the transfer of cattle to the family of the bride. Cattle represent the wealth and history of the family. Young refugee males may not be able to obtain cattle, and may therefore be unable to marry. Some are compelled to steal cattle, to make dangerous journeys in and out of conflict-affected areas to procure them, or to satisfy their desire for a wife through other, potentially forcible, means.[29]

Generating a livelihood

As family and other support systems break down in armed conflict, young people face major pressures to generate resources to ensure their own (and often others') survival and well-being. In the process, they face gender-specific protection problems and barriers to achieving self-sufficiency. When interviewed, young people in conflicts all over the world indicate that one of their main hopes is for self-sufficiency and to be able to provide for others. Insufficient livelihood is linked directly to exploitation and abuse, including sexual violence, early marriage, trafficking for sexual and other purposes, recruitment into fighting forces, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Youth-headed households, which are most often run by females, are particularly at risk.

Armed conflict breaks down the structures and systems that normally prepare youth for economic roles and provide them with livelihood opportunities such as farming family lands or engaging in trade. Without these opportunities, many youth remain idle for extended periods and risk becoming involved in the types of destructive activities

described above. Young people may also be forced into non-traditional roles. In many post-war societies, females have no choice but to take on traditional male livelihood roles, often becoming farmers or traders. Some youth may obtain a formal education while living as refugees, and upon returning home may no longer be interested in assuming traditional labour roles or observing established gender norms.

Youth who have managed to acquire a formal education or vocational skills are often challenged to find a market for their talents. In some cases, too many young people are provided with the same skills and cannot be accommodated in existing local labour markets. Markets are often weak in post-conflict environments, and poor infrastructure curtails trade and other opportunities. Youth may lack the tools, start-up capital, and basic business and entrepreneurship skills needed to set themselves up in a trade. Informal and semi-formal livelihood opportunities for young people are often neglected as possible starting points for economic development support. Further, advantage is rarely taken of new opportunities to break down gender barriers in employment, and it may be particularly difficult for females to gain full access to a range of employment options. The livelihood support programmes that are in place for women do not always address the particular capacity-building needs of adolescent girls and young women.

DDR programmes arguably represent the largest systematic attempts to address youth livelihood challenges in immediate post-conflict situations, but they answer only a small portion of the need and are often incomplete. Females, in particular, are often neglected. In development planning, too little attention is given to gender divides in employment, and inadequate account is taken of youth employment needs as they relate to education. Without economic support or opportunities, youth are placed in the position of being unable to provide for themselves or the next generation. These circumstances are particularly debilitating for females, many of whom are responsible for the care of younger children and others, as they become even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Gaps in economic and social development support for young people also contribute to urbanization, emigration, and the increased exploitation of youth and their labour. Further, as stated previously, the existence of large numbers of unemployed youth constitutes a risk factor for further armed conflict.

Obtaining an education

Youth view education as essential to peace and economic development and to their own protection and personal development. However, in spite of the critical roles they play in their communities in and after armed conflict, they are more likely than young children to miss out on education opportunities essential to their well-being. Opportunities for education may be scarce even under normal circumstances but frequently become even more elusive for youth a result of armed conflict. Many young people are forced to forgo formal education because they have taken on new livelihood and caregiving responsibilities or are considered too old to make up the missed education. For financial and other reasons, few young people are able to complete secondary school in situations of armed conflict, and education interventions do not always adequately target the specific education needs of youth. In the absence of formal education, youth have few opportunities to obtain vocational skills training or other education when they need it most (Sinclair, 2004).[30]

Girls and young women without adequate educational opportunities face serious threats to their safety and security. Those who are in school are often required to drop out if they are forced into early marriage, become pregnant, or are heading households. They do not receive health education that would improve their care of themselves and others. Without skills training, their opportunities for earning an adequate living are generally more limited than those for males. As heads of household, they are likely to initiate or perpetuate a cycle of economic poverty and poor health that will affect the next generation. Out-of-school girls and boys typically have fewer opportunities to learn life-saving information about HIV/AIDS, landmines and other issues that may be critical to their survival.

Education provided within the framework of DDR programmes is largely targeted at males and represents an essential security tool, as it offers an immediate alternative to participation in fighting forces and a means through which young people can secure community acceptance and establish new roles and identities. Although there are many successes, those programmes that are poorly resourced leave demobilizing youth disappointed, disillusioned, and with few additional opportunities.

Overall, in comparison with males, females are consistently at a greater disadvantage in obtaining access to education and are often bypassed in DDR programmes. Girls face multiple barriers to education. When resources are scarce and families must choose which of their children to send to school, boys are given priority over girls. Available data show that gender-based differentials must be understood in the larger context of widespread educational deprivation affecting all youth in and after armed conflict.

A global survey on education in emergencies reveals that among refugees, enrolment generally begins to decline for both males and females after the first grade (*see figure 8.2*). Average differences between male and female enrolment remain fairly steady as both groups become less and less represented. Although the gap between female and male enrolment widens in later grades, these figures represent a very small number of refugee youth overall. The survey results for Pakistan indicate that in 2002, only around 4 per cent of the 194,000 refugee children and adolescents enrolled in school were in secondary education; 30 per cent (or around 2,300) of these older students were female, and 70 per cent (5,400 students) were male. At the time of the survey, Pakistan was host to more than 1 million refugees, at least half of whom were children and youth (Bethke, 2004).[31]

The most reliable statistics available on education in emergencies are compiled for refugees. Education opportunities for IDP are known to be much worse. Clearly, access to education remains extremely poor for both males and females affected by armed conflict. In post-conflict settings, reconstruction efforts tend to be focused on the rehabilitation of formal primary education systems serving mainly younger children in the eligible age group. Young people require a range of educational opportunities including formal primary, secondary and tertiary schooling; accelerated learning or "catch-up" classes; vocational training; entrepreneurship and business skills development; instruction to achieve functional literacy; and various types of non-formal and informal education ranging from sports and recreation to peace, health, conflict transformation and leadership education. Life skills, or values for living, cannot be overlooked in any educational context.

While young people view education as central to their protection and well-being, learning environments are not always safe, and an education does not always guarantee better life prospects or a sustaining livelihood. Corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and exploitative labour conditions are only a few of the challenges that may be faced in a variety of formal and non-formal educational settings. As mentioned previously, youth in refugee situations are sometimes provided with a quality education that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. If they are given the opportunity to return home, young people also require guidance and opportunities to put their education to good use. Even with their new skills, many are unable to find employment in their home communities and must explore other alternatives, including migrating from rural to urban areas in search of wider opportunities. Girls also face barriers to putting their education to use during post-conflict reintegration, as they are often expected to return to their traditional gender roles and may not be considered for traditionally "male" jobs.

Figure 8.2
Refugee enrolment by grade and gender, 2002
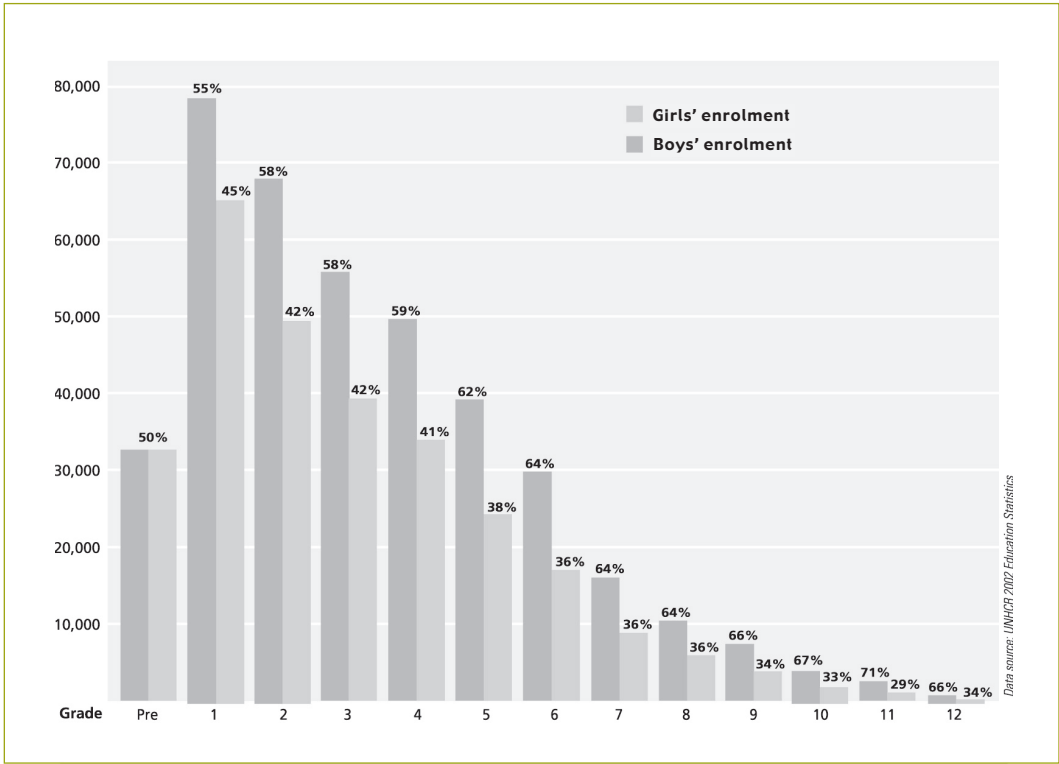
Source: Reprinted from L. Bethke, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* (New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2004).

Reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS

The different forms of violence and deprivation youth experience in armed conflict have a dramatic effect on their health. The increased levels of poverty and violence and the lack of basic services in conflict settings exacerbate a wide range of youth reproductive health problems. Females are especially vulnerable because of their biological make-up and their exposure to targeted sexual violence and extreme deprivation.[32] Despite strong international commitments regarding the right to health care among women and girls, their reproductive health in and after armed conflict has been inadequately addressed. Even less attention has been given to the reproductive health of males, though they, too, face certain risks and can play an important role in improving the reproductive health of females.

The risks of sexual violence and exploitation, forced early marriage, and recruitment into fighting forces are especially high for the thousands of refugee youth who have lost or become separated from their parents or families as a result of war, HIV/AIDS or other causes.[33] Many young people also choose to have unprotected sex, increasing their risk of contracting STIs, including HIV. Females are particularly at risk of HIV infection owing to biological factors and the gender abuse and discrimination they face. Globally, the highest incidence of HIV infection among 15- to 24-year olds occurs in sub-Saharan Africa; three quarters of the young people in this age group who are living with HIV/AIDS in the region are female (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2004).

No direct causal relationship has been definitively established between a rise in armed conflict and increased HIV transmission. However, there are a number of recognized risk factors that apply to female youth in particular. Conflict exacerbates poverty, generally leading to an increase in sexual exploitation and young people's exposure to the virus. Women and girls are the least likely to command resources and must often rely on males for protection and services; with few options available, many exchange sex for food, shelter or other basic necessities. Girls and young women may even be sent by their parents to "receive gifts" from military personnel or others to support their families. Poverty also contributes to diminished access to both education (including information on HIV/AIDS prevention) and health care (including treatment for STIs), which increases the risk of HIV transmission. Social stigma and the lack of treatment options discourage youth from being tested, which would support further prevention. The increased use of drugs and alcohol by many young people in armed conflict impairs judgement and may contribute to sexual violence, also expanding the risk of HIV transmission to youth.[34]

The reproductive health problems faced by males include STIs, wounds affecting sexual and reproductive organs, and sexual dysfunction associated with sexual violence. The social stigma surrounding experiences of violence and sexuality in general often keep those who have been victimized from seeking assistance. Enhanced programme outreach efforts are needed to help boys and young men recover from sexual violence, to address any concerns they may have about reproductive health, and to strengthen their partnership role in ensuring that the reproductive health rights of girls and young women are respected.

Both male and female youth often have few sources of accurate information about sexual health owing to the breakdown of social, education and health systems and strong social taboos against discussing sex. Parents are often as ill informed as their children about reproductive health and sexuality issues, and most young people rely on the uninformed advice of peers when making decisions that affect their reproductive health. At the same time, they often lack the communication and negotiation skills to ensure safer sex with partners or to refuse sex. In some cultures, sex is not necessarily consensual, and females, especially, do not feel they have the right to refuse. In many cases, young people are unaware of and lack access to existing health services in emergencies and post-conflict situations, pointing to major gaps in youth outreach efforts among health providers.

Although young people have consistently expressed a strong interest in knowing their reproductive health rights and doing more to protect themselves, their participation in the design, monitoring and evaluation of reproductive health programmes remains limited. Further, little effort has been made by young people or reproductive health practitioners to determine the extent to which awareness-raising, life-skills and peer approaches induce behavioural change among youth and what factors are most important in different contexts. Many girls without education or economic alternatives say that even with information on reproductive health, they are still forced to marry early or to exchange sex for money, goods or services. Gender-based-violence programmes addressing the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination are not yet widespread, nor are youth-focused reproductive health programmes in emergency and post-conflict settings, though such initiatives are increasingly being developed and implemented.[35]

Youth coping and activism

In the face of myriad assaults on their well-being, youth affected by armed conflict actively cope with their circumstances. In taking on traditional "adult" roles and serving as soldiers, parents, heads of household, and labourers, young people push the boundaries of gender and youth norms and create new social roles for themselves that sometimes challenge existing gender and youth norms and inequalities. In many cases, however, they perpetuate established norms and inequalities, and opportunities to mitigate the latter are frequently lost. Too often, youth remain marginalized from family, community, national and international institutions and systems that do not recognize or support their critical contributions and roles.

Peer relationships become especially important to youth in areas affected by conflict. Young people turn to one another for comfort, companionship and support to fill gaps in their protection and care. They develop friendships and romantic attachments, and they organize formal and informal associations and groups. Internally displaced girls in Uganda find spaces to talk and relax by water pumps or when doing laundry or marketing. In refugee camps and towns in Albania, Kosovar refugee youth formed groups with Albanian youth and organized activities ranging from sports to protection monitoring (Bainvel, 1999). In Liberia, youth lead peer education campaigns, sharing health and other information. In Burundi, youth who have been orphaned or separated from family members band together to raise goats for income-generation and offer one another moral support. At times, international and local adult-run organizations facilitate youth activism. More often, though, youth come together on their own.

Some youth groups organize more formally and become focal points for youth activism, conveying their concerns to adults and other decision makers, as well as to their peers. Youth NGOs channel youth energy, voices and ideas into action to address a range of issues, including HIV/AIDS prevention and care, tolerance and peacebuilding, conflict prevention, gender sensitization, socio-economic development, good governance and more. In post-conflict Sierra Leone, for instance, hundreds of civil society youth organizations have been established. Many of them worked together with a receptive minister of youth to pass a national youth policy. Youth also form student and religious groups. Through these activities, youth build their capacities and assert new roles as key actors in humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.[36]

All of these peer activities help youth survive, secure psychosocial support, and feel more connected to their communities. Youth also care about the things they are achieving and have a vested interest in them. Their actions open doors to deeper discussion and collaboration with supportive adults. These new "peer ecologies", emerging out of the upheaval of conflict, are important starting points for working with youth and are indicative of the strengths and skills youth have developed to survive and recover from conflict.

In the process of taking on new and different roles, young people often transform gender and youth stereotypes, but they may also recreate them. Groups may be made up of all females, all males, or males and females together. Although females may attain some leadership positions, most mixed youth organizations are not headed by females. Because of their secondary status, females are not taken seriously in some patriarchal societies, and male leaders are seen as necessary to compete. However, females acting as advocates sometimes have greater access to decision makers than do males because they are viewed as less of a threat to male authority. Youth organizations may need to make stronger and more successful efforts to involve females, as recommended by international NGOs and other donors. In other cases, cultural norms may not permit females and males to interact. Females may lead all-female groups but not mixed groups.[37]

In spite of these and other gaps, girls and young women do at times play strong leadership roles, even if not as heads of organizations. In a number of settings, males and females have built strong working relationships, creating a new consciousness among themselves to work for gender equality. In one instance, the female co-founder of a youth organization has observed that just creating spaces for girls to sit together and talk about their concerns is an enormous achievement. The male co-founder agrees and says that one of the greatest challenges to addressing the concerns of all youth is addressing the root causes of gender inequality.[38] Over time, this group has been able to win the ear of government decision makers, but little follow-up action is taken.

Women's groups tend not to interact with youth groups or to actively support the roles of adolescent girls and young women within them. In part, this may be because women's groups take a narrower approach to gender activism and may not immediately see common ground with male-led youth NGOs. Women's groups often do not consciously address age-specific concerns of females or work to develop female youth leadership. Youth are sometimes able to find support through spiritual activities or from religious organizations administering educational, relief or other assistance programmes. Some of

these organizations may help young people empower themselves through means such as girls' education and spiritual support. Often, however, such groups stratify structural and interpersonal gender divisions according to religious beliefs that legitimize male dominance.

In other instances, youth consolidate the power they have gained by establishing or participating in political parties. In Sierra Leone, some of the youth involved in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group threatened to return to fighting if their concerns were not addressed. In post-war Kosovo, male leaders of various fighting groups formed political parties, simply transferring their power and influence to another arena in which they could exercise control. In these scenarios, male youth perpetuate existing political agendas. Some youth organizations are elitist and engage only the least marginalized young people, such as those in school.

Opportunities to bridge gender divides and reinforce the common ground between females and males are often lost, despite the strong consensus among youth about the key issues they are facing. In comparative research designed and conducted by youth in three countries affected by armed conflict, more than 2,000 young people were interviewed by their peers, and the findings indicated that males and females shared the same top concerns and offered many of the same solutions (Lowicki, 2004).[39]

The youth-led research revealed that complex sets of factors were working together to influence young people's overall protection and development, ranging from the prevalence of armed conflict and the availability of education, jobs and health care to love, gender equality, and respect and mentoring from parents, peers and others. The actions youth believed were necessary to support their protection and development varied greatly along gender, displacement, family status and other lines, according to the context. Beyond peace and the absence of armed conflict, youth named education, especially as it related to livelihood prospects, as key to their present and future well-being. Barriers to education and livelihood are often quite different for males and females and require different strategies to overcome. In efforts to address the root causes of problems facing youth and their communities, integrated approaches are needed that are informed and driven by both male and female youth so that a better understanding may be obtained of the unique challenges faced by each group (Lowicki, 2005; Newman, 2004).

Although there is growing international interest in youth as peacebuilders in the context of conflict prevention and recovery, most young people are not engaged in peacebuilding per se but are involved in activities that help to advance peace. They share an interest in political peace processes and targeted conflict transformation and resolution, but their attention and efforts are largely focused on ensuring their overall well-being and averting the root causes of war and human misery-including their own misery.

Despite young people's achievements and the key roles they play, youth rights and capacities are not adequately recognized in armed conflict or post-conflict situations. For instance, youth employment needs are not prioritized in development activities. Youth

opinions are rarely sought, and young people are not integrated into leadership structures. More work is needed at the community and national levels to help youth find ways to bridge gender and age divides. Children, youth and adults of both sexes need spaces and processes that may be used to resolve tensions and achieve a better understanding of the realities of gender and youth dynamics, and why it may be impractical or impossible to revert to old norms. Adolescent girls and young women need targeted support to build their leadership capacities, including, when possible, in partnership with women's organizations and males. Many children, youth and adults are already working together to identify and apply creative ways to address gender and youth divides. Good practice should be developed and expanded.

Box 8.3 provides an excellent example of how children and youth in Colombia worked together and with others to draw international attention to the situation of children in armed conflict and to promote peace. The Children's Movement for Peace has been credited with helping to ensure that peace talks between the Government and leaders of a 35-year-long guerrilla insurgency were restarted (United Nations Children's Fund, 2005).

Box 8.3

YOUNG PEOPLE VOTE FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA

In 1996, more than 2.7 million children and youth in different provinces all over Colombia, comprising the recently formed Children's Movement for Peace, participated in a special election known as the Children's Mandate for Peace and Rights. Their ballot incorporated 12 basic rights taken from the Colombian Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Through their votes, the children communicated their three highest priorities: the right to enjoy life and good health, the right to peace and protection in war, and the right to love and family. One year later, inspired by the success of this initiative, 10 million adults (twice the usual voter turnout) held a national referendum known as the Citizen's Mandate for Peace, Life and Liberty, the results of which helped determine the outcome of the next presidential election (the winner, Andres Pastrana, ran on a platform for peace).[a]

Over 100,000 children have become active participants in the Children's Movement for Peace in Colombia, supported by UNICEF, the Red Cross and other human rights groups. In both 1998 and 1999, the Children's Movement was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, drawing worldwide attention to the situation of young people in armed conflict. The members of the Movement, many of whom come from deprived areas in conflict, have been actively promoting peace throughout Colombia. They have lost friends and family in the violence and have witnessed kidnappings and random killings, and they are determined to build a better future for themselves and the young people to come. Some members have faced death threats because of their work for the Peace Movement.[b]

Unfortunately, the impact of the Movement has deteriorated in recent years, and reports from Colombia indicate that adolescents are becoming increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised.[c]

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[a] United Nations Children's Fund, "Promoting a culture of peace", a photo essay (available from http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/23929_14675.html; accessed on 18 July 2005).

[b] Cable News Network, "The world's children: soldiers of peace" (available from http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/1999/children/stories/child.soldiers/#teens; accessed on 18 July 2005).

[c] Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, *Colombia's War on Children* (New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, February 2004), p. 10.

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE CONCERNS AND MOVING FORWARD

How are gender, youth and armed conflict issues currently approached at the policy and programme levels? What are some of the ways forward?

This section highlights some of the more noteworthy achievements and gaps in efforts to ensure youth rights and gender equality in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. The examples are not fully representative of the wealth and breadth of experience and work relating to these issues, but are sufficient to strengthen arguments for improving holistic youth and gender approaches while also expanding youth and "women and girls" approaches.

Women's and children's rights agendas shape gender and youth approaches

Young people affected by armed conflict theoretically enjoy the full range of protections guaranteed under international, national and regional law and related policies and guidelines, including protection from violence and gender discrimination. Efforts to address youth and gender issues have largely straddled two somewhat parallel streams of policy and practice, one devoted to child protection and development, and the other to the protection and advancement of women. Each of these approaches is urgently needed to ensure ongoing support and protection of the rights of children and women, and there is a certain degree of overlap between them. However, as noted above, they often fail to adequately address the diverse age and gender concerns that arise or intensify during and after armed conflict. Gender approaches have tended to focus primarily on females, with limited age differentiation. Youth-related initiatives have not fit squarely into child- or adult-related programming, as the needs of young children and older adults are given priority. When youth or gender issues are addressed within these contexts, a stereotypical approach is often taken; for example, priority attention might be directed towards males as soldiers.

"Youth" bridges legal and customary interpretations of childhood and adulthood. As the legal age of majority is 18 in most contexts, individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 may qualify for international legal protection as children or adults. Young people under 18 years of age are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains provisions supporting the rights of war-affected children, including refugees (United Nations, 1989). Youth above and below the age of 18 are covered by similar provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and other instruments. Because they are not explicitly mentioned, however, youth are often "invisible" in both the interpretation and enforcement of these standards.

Most international legal instruments dealing with gender either explicitly address or are interpreted as addressing the situation of women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women includes specific provisions relating to the situation of women in war and as refugees and implicitly covers adolescent girls and young women. Non-discrimination is also invoked in other treaties providing for the protection of adults and children affected by conflict, including the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In the implementation and enforcement of these and other commitments, the

age- and gender-specific concerns and experiences of youth are not fully addressed together. Guidelines for the protection of refugee women and children provide limited information on the age-specific needs of youth and approaches for dealing with this group. In another example, while international commitments to achieving education for all have been made and include an emphasis on gender equality, efforts have largely been focused on achieving universal primary education, with little attention given to the educational needs of youth affected by armed conflict.

Efforts to identify and address specific youth and gender concerns are further complicated by the use of the terms "women and girls" and "women and children". In treaties and follow-up efforts relating to women's rights, reference is sometimes made to "women and girls", implying a continuum of female experiences. "Girls and young women" are often tacked on to discussions of women's rights, or assumed to be included, with little attention given to their distinct gender- and age-related experiences. Similarly, "women and children" are linked together in references to particularly vulnerable groups. There is a strong connotation here of children as women's dependants, invoking images of small children. Many certainly are, but the breadth of young people's experiences from early childhood through adolescence is not reflected in the terminology or, ultimately, in comprehensive action. Within the children's rights framework, references to "girls and boys" do not sufficiently differentiate adolescent/youth experiences. Programmes for children that serve only those under the age of 18 often create arbitrary distinctions between the experiences of youth under the age of 18 and those of young people over the age of 18.

Young people would benefit from more explicit declarations of their rights, and in efforts to advance the rights of women and youth, girls and young women would benefit from attention to their age- and gender-specific concerns.

Beijing and beyond

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, set the stage for concerted global action aimed at the achievement of women's rights. Young people involved in the Conference's vibrant youth programme produced the Youth Platform for Action. Among other things, the youth participants stated that the full impact of conflict situations on females of all ages should be acknowledged and researched.[40] Many elements of the Youth Platform have been pursued further. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls for initiatives in support of the rights of "women and girls", including those affected by armed conflict, and strong efforts have been made to increase support for girls' education in a variety of settings. However, follow-up has not intensively focused on or involved adolescents and youth.

Building on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the efforts of the United Nations General Assembly and others, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on women and peace and security in 2000. The resolution calls for the equal participation of women in all efforts to maintain peace and security and reaffirms the need to protect women and girls from human rights abuses, including gender-based violence. It also identifies a need to mainstream gender perspectives in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, post-conflict reconstruction and DDR initiatives (United Nations, 2000b).

Although women and girls are mentioned explicitly in Security Council resolution 1325, policy developments relating to gender, peace and security indicate that there have been only superficial attempts made to understand the specific implications of conflict for girls and young women and to involve them in peacebuilding. There has been a general failure to convey the meaning of Security Council resolution 1325 to girls and young women in conflict-affected countries and to work together not only with women's organizations but also with youth organizations on implementation and monitoring. Humanitarian action focused on women does not regularly incorporate differentiated approaches to adolescents and youth. In a recent study on gender, peace and security, the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee calls for more careful use of the terms "women" and "girls" to ensure that the similarities and differences in their experiences are adequately conveyed. The Committee also recommends capacity-building efforts to ensure that girls and young women are able to participate more actively and effectively in peacebuilding and in policy and programme development and implementation (Kirk and Taylor, 2005).[41]

Women's groups, Governments and others working to implement Security Council resolution 1325 should take the necessary steps to ensure that the resolution has a visible impact on girls and young women affected by armed conflict (United Nations, 2000b). Gender, peace and security issues should be viewed from the perspectives of women and girls, as well as through a broader "gender lens", and what is learned through this process should guide policy decisions. Male and female youth (and not only older adult women) should have a place at the table in peace negotiations to address gender and other concerns. Increased coordination and commitment is also needed to ensure the implementation and enforcement of Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, with particular attention given to the complex gender dynamics characterizing the experiences of children and youth in and after armed conflict. Mentoring relationships between adult women and young women and girls should be strengthened, as should collaboration between women's groups and youth groups. Youth groups provide important opportunities for female empowerment as well as opportunities to engage males in action for gender equality. Existing youth groups represent a multiplicity of youth concerns and areas of interest and action, indicating that narrow conceptions of youth in conflict as victims or perpetrators of violence, or even as peacebuilders, are unfairly limiting.

Winnipeg and beyond

The actions described below, which have been undertaken both with and on behalf of children affected by armed conflict, have opened the door to increased action with and for youth. The momentum generated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Graça Machel's report on the impact of armed conflict on children, and the creation of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSGCAC) ushered in an era of increased global action focused on children affected by armed conflict. In 2000, the Government of Canada hosted the International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg. The Conference broke new ground by involving adolescents as central participants in the event and had a vibrant youth forum.[42] Young people from many different countries, including those affected by conflict, were also deeply involved in the United Nations Special Session on Children in 2002.

Governments, United Nations agencies, and others participating in the Winnipeg Conference made a number of commitments covering a comprehensive range of issues facing children affected by war. In the outcome document, adolescents are explicitly identified as a group requiring further attention and resources, and girls and women are singled out for targeted approaches. There is also a call for a sustained commitment to child participation in decision-making that affects their lives (Canada, no date). Although the meeting focused on the rights of children, youth participants were given the opportunity to prepare and present a youth statement in which they specifically identified themselves as "youth" and spoke of their concerns as children and young adults.

In principle, all the provisions of the outcome document of the United Nations Special Session on Children pertain to all children, including those affected by war; however, the needs of the latter group are more specifically addressed in a section on protection from armed conflict. Among other things, there is a call for the involvement of children in peace processes and for special attention to the vulnerabilities of girls (United Nations, 2002b). At both of the meetings just mentioned, the international community convened to address the needs of children, and while the young people present raised a number of critical youth issues, youth-focused initiatives were not explicitly recommended. In both cases, discussions and recommendations remained focused on "children", and gender was mainly interpreted as "girls".

The OSRSGCAC and other children's advocates working with the United Nations Security Council have been instrumental in ensuring the adoption of a series of important Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.[43] These unprecedented resolutions address a wide array of child protection and care issues ranging from ensuring humanitarian access to children in war zones to ending the forced recruitment of children into fighting forces. Girls constitute the major focus in references to gender concerns; various provisions address the needs of girls in DDR programmes and in actions to end gender-based violence and emphasize the need to ensure their access to humanitarian aid. The resolutions also call for young people's involvement in peacebuilding activities. Follow-up advocacy efforts have been strongest in the area of child soldiering. While this issue is extremely important, advocacy efforts must be broadened to address a range of other issues facing young people; in particular, action is needed to strengthen the capacity and reinforce the constructive roles of young people in humanitarian action. In efforts by the OSRSGCAC and others to develop effective monitoring, reporting and compliance mechanisms that will ensure the protection of children, attention should also be given to supporting youth roles and investigating the age- and gender-specific issues facing young people.

Field action supporting child participation in humanitarian programming has grown in the context of these achievements and has mainly involved adolescents and young adults. However, this work remains limited in terms of the extent to which it helps young people build their capacity as key actors informing and implementing a range of interventions affecting their lives over time. Youth organizations are still not regularly supported in ways that help them build the capacity they need to become key partners, using what they learn through engagement with their peers both inside and outside organized groups to inform, implement and evaluate humanitarian policies and actions that affect them. As a result, youth issues are still often poorly understood, and the potential of youth to become central actors in constructive social change, recovery and security is squandered.

At times, support for youth leadership has been divisive, serving to pit young people against one another in pursuit of limited resources, as opposed to helping them improve cooperation. International agencies working in post-conflict Kosovo vied for access to existing youth organizations and created competition among them. As a result, collective youth voices were muffled in the early stages of reconstruction planning and action, with long-term effects on the actions taken to address their rights and roles through the transition to development. In other scenarios, the emphasis on youth as either peacebuilders or former or potential violent actors allows no room for recognition and support of the coping skills, strengths and interests youth have that constitute the key building blocks for their survival and societal recovery. Opportunities to build on transformations in gender norms among youth are also often lost.

Owing largely to the Organization-wide commitment to improving action for child protection, and more specifically to the efforts of dedicated staff at the various headquarters and country offices, United Nations agencies have made important strides in identifying and addressing adolescent and youth issues in their work. The UNICEF Adolescent Development and Participation Unit supports, from its headquarters in New York, various adolescent protection, education, health and other programmes. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has similarly demonstrated its commitment to addressing the particular needs and risks faced by youth and has, among other things, sponsored youth-led research and advocacy. Recently, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted a review of its work with youth in conflict (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). However, there is no focal point for leadership on issues affecting youth in and after emergencies and no concerted effort to address the specific problems of young people in conflict situations as informed by a comprehensive framework for action.

Mainstreaming youth and gender

Arguments can be made both for mainstreaming youth and gender concerns and for engaging in targeted work with youth, women, girls, or other groups. Approaches that focus specifically on women, girls, or female youth are needed to ensure that the urgent gender issues affecting each of these groups are not diluted. However, the adoption of a broader gender approach makes it possible to address the full range of gender divides and to develop holistic approaches to prevention and response deriving from a better overall understanding of underlying causes. In either case, it is important to avoid simplistic approaches to female issues and to improve attention to male gender concerns and action with males on gender equality. Work to ensure that youth concerns are mainstreamed into broader national and international programmes can and should be matched with targeted action in support of age-specific programmes and policies that prioritize youth rights and capacities. Where possible and appropriate, youth and gender should be more closely linked in addressing issues of concern to young people, and these issues should be seen as extending across children's, women's and other agendas.

Mainstreaming processes involve transformations at many levels; it is not enough to simply incorporate girls, women or youth in existing activities. United Nations agencies and Member States have worked to develop gender mainstreaming plans and expand women's participation in humanitarian response. However, similar efforts have not been

made to promote the involvement of children and youth affected by armed conflict (the stated approach of UNHCR represents one of the few notable exceptions). Policies and guidelines already in place would benefit from age-specific analysis, and from the establishment of implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Greater attention should also be given to prevention, enforcement and response.

Sufficient resources, a sustained commitment to coordinated action at the highest levels, and a broader understanding of youth and conflict issues are all required to ensure effective implementation, monitoring and follow-up. Assessments of gender mainstreaming in the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) reveal a need for improved gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data; however, age-disaggregated data are also needed to address the specific gender concerns of females and males at different stages of their lives (United Nations, 2004b). Support for programming targeted at women and children is consistently more forthcoming in CAP responses than that targeted at youth. Improved articulation of the rights of young people and promising practices indicating how best to work with them across women's, children's and other programmes would help change the situation.

Overall, little progress has been made in mainstreaming youth and gender perspectives in efforts to address the needs of war-affected populations. The Youth Employment Network (YEN),[44] an outcome of the Millennium Summit and Millennium Declaration, is an encouraging example of an attempt to mainstream youth in the area of employment at the international level. The YEN is receiving increasing support from national Governments; however, there has not yet been any real attempt to focus on youth employment and gender issues within conflict and post-conflict environments.

Youth and gender mainstreaming is particularly important in efforts to address sexual and other gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, given the relative vulnerability of both female and male youth. Some progress has been made in dealing with the sexual abuse and exploitation involving United Nations and other humanitarian assistance personnel, but major gaps remain. Many organizations have taken action to adopt the Core Principles of a Code of Conduct for Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, developed for humanitarian agencies by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.[45] However, enforcement of the Code of Conduct remains difficult.

The OIOS, in its report on sexual abuse and other misconduct in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, noted that the "zero tolerance" policy of the United Nations had been undermined by "zero compliance", as the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) had failed to put enforcement mechanisms in place (United Nations, 2005; Fleshman, 2005). New restrictions were imposed on MONUC and other peacekeeping staff, monitoring and evaluation efforts were strengthened, and in coordination with those countries contributing peacekeeping troops, changes were made in training, command and disciplinary approaches. Although Member States have expressed some concerns regarding disciplinary measures, they have not given the United Nations the authority to enforce rules or punish perpetrators; this remains the responsibility of the individual contributing countries (Fleshman, 2005).

Steps must be taken to improve coordination between women's and youth groups, international NGOs, the United Nations, and national Governments to curb sexual abuse and exploitation and to promote gender and age mainstreaming in other areas. Reference points must be created to more clearly define areas of priority and facilitate concerted action; in particular, there is a need for a comprehensive youth and armed conflict framework that reflects gender considerations, and an institutional focal point must be identified for coordinated action within the United Nations system. This focal point would work closely with NGOs and United Nations staff, as well as with women and youth, to more effectively assist those young people who are actively coping with a multitude of challenges on a daily basis with minimal support. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is currently putting together a gender mainstreaming handbook that not only identifies specific actions that may be taken in different sectors, but also provides sets of impact indicators. These guidelines may be used to address some youth concerns.

Humanitarian and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives

Without strengthened support along the various tracks mentioned thus far, young people's concerns will not be adequately addressed in humanitarian response and policy and prevention efforts. Support for youth protection and development before, during and after armed conflict is not regularized and does not sufficiently address gender divides. When interventions are undertaken, they are not integrated in ways that engage all sectors effectively, and they often fuel competition between youth rather than building constructive solidarity among them. Some good practice addressing youth and gender equality issues in conflict situations is emerging and should be expanded (Lowicki, 2000; 2004). No comprehensive framework for action exists, nor is there a strong international consensus in this regard, making it difficult to address the multiple challenges youth face in diverse conflict and post-conflict environments.[46] Divisions between humanitarian and development agendas present further challenges.

The subsections below provide some additional examples of achievements and gaps, as well as various recommendations, relating to youth- and gender-focused humanitarian response, building on the previous examples relating to reproductive health, education, livelihoods and youth activism.

Lessons from gender-blind disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts

Significant strides have been made in improving DDR efforts with children and adults and along gender lines. However, promising practices are not adequately expanded and implemented in other regions. DDR in Sierra Leone is often touted as good practice; however, lessons from the experience, including the need for increased efforts to overcome major gender gaps, are still not fully applied. The Lomé Peace Accord, which ushered in opportunities for peace in Sierra Leone, specifically addressed child and gender concerns. UNICEF and child protection agencies made valiant efforts and ultimately reintegrated thousands of children and adolescents formerly with fighting forces. However, DDR in Sierra Leone was largely gender blind, and many demobilizing female children and youth did not receive the support they needed.

In Sierra Leone, a distinction was made in DDR efforts between "ex-combatants" and those recruited to serve a range of other purposes, making it particularly hard for females to gain access to formal reintegration support. An initial "cash for weapons" approach also placed females at a disadvantage, as males in fighting forces pulled weapons from females and others to consolidate access to forthcoming support during disarmament. Commanders were asked to attest to who had participated in the forces, barring many more females from inclusion. UNICEF made additional assistance available to girls, as it included "camp followers" among the child programme beneficiaries. This and other support came late, however, and with few alternatives, many girls ended up in sex work or remained with their captors. In an effort to address such gaps, NGOs, United Nations agencies and others are developing new expertise on the specific gender needs of demobilizing young people; some, for example, are working with females with children born in captivity and their families to address their special needs (Lowicki and Pillsbury, 2002).[47]

In connection with these and other efforts, new terms have sprung up in acknowledgement of the full range of roles children and adults play in fighting forces; CAFF and WAFF, referring to children/women associated (or formerly associated) with fighting forces, are two examples. A donor request for proposals for former-soldier reintegration support in Liberia included these terms, making explicit an intention to fully include females and males who were not necessarily armed fighters. However, cash for weapons and other approaches perpetuate barriers. In advance planning there is often a failure to fully incorporate lessons from other experiences. Strong efforts are needed to creatively engage demobilizing males in gender discussions and actions, including those aimed at promoting their recovery and addressing their former, present or potential role as perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Reintegration approaches have become increasingly holistic; even young people not formerly with fighting forces are supported through DDR efforts. For example, support may be provided for schools that serve all young people rather than for individual child soldiers. Similarly, directing attention to particularly vulnerable girls while also acknowledging and addressing the needs of others, including at-risk boys, goes a long way towards answering the concerns of each while also minimizing the risk of creating additional gender divides.

Minimum standards for education in emergencies

Adolescent- and youth-focused education in emergencies has received little attention in the context of humanitarian efforts; however, action to address the educational rights of young people in conflict and post-conflict situations is gaining international momentum with the emergence of the new Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction (MSEE). The MSEE were developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, in which UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, and various NGOs and individuals participate and seek to fulfil commitments to achieve education for all, with an emphasis on child and youth education.[48] Action to bridge gender divides and ensure equal access to education is central to the MSEE framework. MSEE implementation and monitoring present important opportunities to address youth- and gender-related education issues. Vigilance on the part of the MSEE Working

Group, which includes NGOs and United Nations agencies, is required to ensure that increased attention is given to the creation of appropriate educational opportunities for youth. Among other things, the Working Group should support the development of youth education field tools and pilot projects.

Global support is needed both to create opportunities for youth to complete primary and secondary education and to expand much-needed non-formal and vocational education. Some youth-focused education initiatives addressing the diverse learning needs of females and males, including demobilizing soldiers, offer examples of good practice and the opportunity to move forward. A major challenge is to expand life skills approaches in all programme action with youth so that young people can develop and employ values for living that help sustain peace and ensure the overall well-being of society.

Youth health and gender-based violence

The health sector continues to make progress in addressing issues of concern to youth, including those affected by armed conflict. Among many other initiatives, the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium (RHRC), consisting of research institutes and NGOs, has expanded its reproductive health programmes for young people.[49] A Minimum Initial Services Package has been developed along with other field tools to care for survivors of sexual violence, prevent the transmission of HIV, and reduce the incidence of maternal illness and death.

Despite these and other achievements, there are few mechanisms in place to ensure the consistent provision of available services to youth. Reproductive health programmes serving young people are often treated as subcomponents of health services for adults, and outreach to youth is limited. Data on participation in reproductive health programmes that serve a wide range of age groups are not regularly disaggregated, nor are good programme practices that have been shown to benefit youth routinely recorded or disseminated. Information about the different experiences of younger adolescents and older youth has not been fully assessed. Young people should be more fully involved in reproductive health programme planning, implementation and evaluation, with particular attention focused on access to services and the impact of initiatives on behavioural change.

Within the reproductive health context, advances have been made with regard to the prevention of HIV transmission and the care of people living with AIDS, with efforts extending to youth in many cases. Awareness-raising campaigns involving peer approaches, cultural events and media messages have been undertaken. Links with formal and non-formal education programmes have also been established to provide information about HIV/AIDS to in-school and out-of-school youth; such exposure represents an important component of life skills education. Some youth benefit from programmes focusing on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and voluntary counselling and testing. Revised Guidelines for HIV/AIDS Interventions in Emergency Settings have been developed by the IASC[50] and are being disseminated and promoted. Efforts to address HIV/AIDS in emergency situations are still limited overall, however. Programmes that do exist should be more closely linked with gender-based violence services and increase their focus on youth. Youth-friendly approaches must be further developed and employed to ensure access for both younger and older youth.

Although achievements have not yet come close to meeting the enormous need, much substantive work has been done to expand innovative gender-based-violence programmes in humanitarian settings. Interventions range from education and awareness raising to psychosocial support and the provision of shelter, counselling, legal services, and medical and other care; again, youth are receiving a considerable amount of attention in many cases. A range of gender-based-violence training and other tools have been developed by the RHRC, and the IASC is in the process of finalizing its Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, including action sheets for wide distribution and coordinated use. Generally speaking, however, gender-based-violence programmes require additional resources and expansion and should be linked more closely with youth-focused responses, including children's, psychosocial, and education programmes. Stronger links with reproductive health programmes, including HIV/AIDS prevention and services, should also be established. Additional work with boys and men is needed to increase their awareness about gender-based violence, address their gender-based-violence needs, and strengthen their sense of responsibility for ending gender-based violence and fostering gender equality.

Youth and the Millennium Development Goals

Young people are involved with, and have a major stake in, the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Indicators for their well-being are explicitly mentioned in relation to the Goals on achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and developing a global partnership for development.[51] The Ad Hoc Working Group for Youth and the MDGs, consisting of representatives from youth organizations, recommends targeted support for girls and young women in the implementation of Goal 3 (relating to gender equality and women's empowerment), with particular attention given to improving their access to education. It emphasizes that building the capacity of, and creating sustained partnerships with, young people are crucial strategies for achieving the MDGs that have not been fully recognized by the international community. The Working Group calls for explicit attention to the situation of youth affected by armed conflict. However, suggestions for action are limited to the reintegration of former "combatants", support for post-conflict youth livelihoods, and a call for increased resources to facilitate open dialogue between youth and women (Ad Hoc Working Group for Youth and the MDGs, 2004).

The situation of youth affected by armed conflict should constitute a core issue in plans, policies and actions aimed at achieving the MDGs, given the numbers of countries and young people affected by armed violence. Within this context, a holistic approach is needed to address the explicit gender dimensions of conflict, with a conscious move away from the limited focus on "combatants", who are often perceived as exclusively male. Efforts should not be restricted to post-conflict environments; urgent action is also needed during emergency and protracted conflict situations, when critical assistance may be provided to refugee and IDP populations. Education initiatives must go beyond universal primary education for eligible younger children; appropriate and relevant education opportunities must also be made available to youth. The ten-year review of the World Programme

of Action for Youth in 2005 represents an important opportunity to explicitly recognize the importance of gender, youth and armed conflict to the achievement of the MDGs, and to identify youth and conflict as a priority area in international action aimed at addressing the needs of young people.

CONCLUSION

Both gender and youth analyses are needed to ensure that the root causes and outcomes of armed conflict are better understood and more effectively addressed. Together, such analyses reveal the complex age and gender dynamics that are too often overlooked or misinterpreted in policy and programme approaches to war-affected populations. They challenge stereotypical interpretations of male youth as perpetrators and female youth as victims of violence, and of adults as protectors and young people as protected. They expose the inadequacies of narrow approaches to the protection and care of women and children, in particular the failure to take into account the age-specific experiences and contributions of youth, and offer new, more holistic options for conflict prevention, survival and recovery that may be coupled with more targeted approaches.

Adolescent girls and young women are more likely than male youth and young children to suffer gender-based violence. Male youth are the main perpetrators of gender-based violence and participate in armed violence. While these general patterns indicate how armed conflict worsens gender and age divides, they do not tell the whole story. In the upheaval of war, both groups play multiple roles that frequently extend beyond traditional gender, age and other social norms. The roles of females as armed fighters and of males as victims of sexual and other violence and deprivation are often misunderstood or ignored. Failure to recognize the diverse gender and youth realities in conflict and post-conflict settings results in missed opportunities to address gender inequalities and youth divides at their source and to create new, durable solutions for young people and their societies.

Too often, groups leading humanitarian aid, conflict prevention, reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts perpetuate gender and age divisions by employing short-term and/or narrowly defined approaches to women's and children's protection and care. Targeted "women and girls" approaches are greatly needed but should be adapted to better reflect age and broader gender realities. Youth-focused approaches should be expanded, but gender perspectives and considerations must be more effectively and consistently incorporated. Otherwise, females will continue to be left out of programmes for former soldiers, and few health and counselling services will address the needs of males or their roles in promoting gender equality. If education initiatives remain exclusively focused on young children, many adolescents and youth will be unable to acquire the skills they need to earn a sustaining livelihood or ensure their protection and security, with distinct negative consequences for males and females. If women's groups and youth groups continue to work separately, there will be little opportunity to develop integrated approaches for overcoming gender and youth inequalities at structural and other levels.

Both gender- and age-specific approaches must be incorporated into policy and programme planning, implementation and evaluation in ways that generate systemic change and transform social institutions and practices that reinforce male and adult

dominance. Solutions must be youth-informed and, whenever possible, youth-driven, building on opportunities for social change that emerge out of conflict. These efforts require sufficient funding and a strong commitment at international, regional, national and local levels and must integrated, involving all sectors and phases of conflict prevention, response, recovery and development.

In support of the many specific recommendations included in the chapter, the following overarching recommendations for global action are proposed:

- Meeting in October 2005, the United Nations General Assembly may wish to identify youth and armed conflict as a priority within the World Programme of Action for Youth. The need for a combined age and gender approach to addressing the situation of youth affected by armed conflict should be made explicit in recognition of the diverse roles and contributions of male and female youth in survival and recovery from armed conflict. International action with and for youth should not be predicated solely on stereotypical interpretations of young people as violent actors or peacebuilders. It is highly desirable to initiate a coordinated United Nations effort to develop action, implementation and reporting plans. Among other things, this initiative might coordinate the development of a comprehensive action framework to address the needs of youth affected by armed conflict, engaging Member States, donors, other policymakers, practitioners and local community members, including youth, in this process. The framework should encompass a strong gender component and draw from emerging good practices, and should aim to expand understanding of the diverse rationales for working with youth affected by armed conflict.

- United Nations agencies, Governments, research institutes and other humanitarian and development actors should ensure that data collected on communities affected by armed conflict are disaggregated by age and sex, and that dynamic changes in age and gender norms are taken into account in programme implementation and evaluation. Policy and programme initiatives should respond to the diversity of youth experiences revealed through these efforts and should facilitate youth involvement in planning, implementation and evaluation efforts.

- The international community should provide expanded resources to build the capacities and support the rights of both male and female youth affected by armed conflict, with efforts focused on action-oriented youth leadership development, appropriate and relevant education initiatives that extend from armed conflict through post-conflict and into development, reproductive health programmes that incorporate HIV/AIDS awareness-raising and service provision, and sustained social and economic development that builds on informal and semi-formal youth livelihoods. Improved coordination between humanitarian and development actors is required.

- Reports on progress in meeting international commitments to human development and the protection of human rights should be age- and gender-specific and should address the particular circumstances of conflict-affected regions. Work to achieve the MDGs, Education for All, and a World Fit for Children should include attention to young refugees, IDP and other youth affected by conflict. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the UNDP *Human Development Report* should explicitly address conflict and post-conflict situations and age- and gender-specific circumstances within these contexts. Young people should be involved in these and other processes, including efforts to monitor and report on the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict; the protection of civilians; and women and peace and security.

- Youth- and gender-focused action plans should be developed for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all guidelines adopted for the protection and care of war-affected populations, including the MSEE, the IASC Revised Guidelines for HIV Interventions in Emergency Settings, and the IASC Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings. Programming tools should be developed and pilot projects implemented that are focused on youth protection and development in these and other areas.

- Youth capacities and leadership should be supported at all levels of decision-making and action across programming sectors to ensure that youth-informed and youth-driven solutions are developed and that young people's potential as critical actors in contributing to individual and community survival and recovery is maximized. Particular attention should be given to ensuring the provision of opportunities for girls and young women, to promoting cooperation between males and females to achieve gender equality, and to strengthening relationships between adults and young people. Youth, women's, and other organizations at the local, national and international levels should establish and strengthen partnerships with one another to advance youth rights, gender equality, and efforts to ensure peace, conflict-prevention and recovery. ●

[1] Throughout this chapter, the term "youth" is used to refer to both females and males who may be identified as children or adults according to legal or cultural norms. "Young people" is used synonymously with "youth". "Adolescent boys and young men" and "adolescent girls and young women" are also used interchangeably with "male youth" and "female youth", respectively, to explicitly identify a gender and age group.

[2] The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) is the most widely ratified international treaty in history, having been endorsed by all countries except Somalia and the United States. Added more recently were the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (United Nations, 2002a). *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, a report commissioned by the United Nations and compiled by Graça Machel, was presented to the General Assembly in 1996; a follow-up review entitled *The Impact of War on Children* was released in 2001.

[3] Adolescents and youth affected by armed conflict have led a number of studies in which they articulate their concerns and offer recommendations for action, including with regard to gender (Cooper, 2004; Lowicki, 2005).

[4] This is due, in part, to the success of the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (United Nations, 2002a).

[5] According to the Rome Statute, adopted by the International Criminal Court in 1998, crimes against humanity include torture, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other comparably grave acts of sexual violence that are committed as part of a systematic attack on civilian populations (United Nations, 1998).

[6] The same could be said about the gender-based concerns of elderly women. In many contexts, youth and older persons affected by armed conflict face similar forms of marginalization owing to their age and socially defined status and roles, which may have undergone tremendous upheaval in armed conflict.

[7] A report published by the Institute of Development Studies emphasizes that consideration of gender issues in armed conflict must extend beyond stereotypical perceptions of males as aggressors and females as victims, with recognition given to the fact that both males and females play diverse roles in conflict situations (El-Jack, 2003).

[8] The focus in this chapter is on youth and gender, though it is recognized that many other factors also influence the experiences of youth affected by armed conflict, including socio-economic status, area of residence, religious beliefs, and membership in a particular ethnic or religious group.

[9] Some gender specialists strongly advise against using the word "gender" to denote the biological "sex" of an individual, arguing that gender has more complex connotations involving socially constructed norms and practices. However, "gender" continues to be used by most people in both contexts. In this chapter, the term sex is used only in reference to biological differentiations between males and females.

[10] These characterizations are employed by the United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund, World Health Organization, and a number of other United Nations entities. National youth policies often reflect very different definitions of youth; in some cases the period of youth is interpreted as extending well into the 30s, while in other cases the bridge with childhood is eliminated with the exclusion of all young people below the age of 18.

[11] Many definitions and interpretations of armed conflict exist and may be obtained from a number of different sources, a few of which include the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (available from www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/index.htm); Project Ploughshares, which published the *Armed Conflicts Report, 2004* (available from www.ploughshares.ca/); and the International Crisis Group (ICG), which publishes *CrisisWatch*. *CrisisWatch* identifies countries affected by conflict and crisis, indicates the status of these conflicts, and provides alerts regarding potential outbreaks of conflict. In March 2005, the ICG identified nearly 70 countries or territories as conflict-affected (International Crisis Group, 2005). For young people, especially females, violence associated with armed conflict may continue during lulls in the fighting or even long after the official cessation of hostilities; gender-based violence (including domestic violence), various forms of social deprivation and/or discrimination, and inequalities and injustice take a very heavy toll on young women's lives.

[12] Refugees are those who have fled their homes or habitual residences and in so doing have crossed an international border; internally displaced persons (IDP) are displaced within the borders of their own countries or places of habitual residence. Returnees are those returning to their homes, villages and/or countries following a period of displacement as refugees or IDP. (See the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.)

[13] According to the Global IDP Project, there were approximately 25.3 million IDP in the world as at December 2004 (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2004). Other statistics indicate that at the start of 2004, the number of people of concern to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was 17.1 million, broken down as follows: 9.7 million refugees (comprising 57 per cent of the total); 985,500 asylum-seekers (6 per cent); 1.1 million returned refugees (6 per cent); 4.4 million IDP (26 per cent); and 912,200 others (5 per cent) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004).

[14] It is estimated that approximately 17.9 per cent (or a total of 1.157 billion) of the world's 6.464 billion people are between the ages of 15 and 24. In the least developed countries, however, this group comprises an average of 20.4 per cent of the population. Globally, females represent 49.74 per cent and males 50.26 per cent of the population (United Nations, 2004d; 2004e).

[15] Globally, 46.1 per cent of the population is under the age of 25, and in the least developed countries, many of which are affected by armed conflict, the percentage jumps to 62.2 per cent (United Nations, 2004d; 2004e).

[16] As at 30 September 2004, there were 966,266 Afghan refugees in Pakistan (see Pagonis, 2005). For statistics on Pakistan's under-25 population, see *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision* and *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2003 Revision* (United Nations, 2004d; 2004e).

[17] Samuel Huntington (1996) is the author of *The Clash of Civilizations* and the *Remaking of World Order*.

[18] It should be noted that poverty, by itself, does not necessarily lead to the eruption of violence. Urdal (2004) argues that two additional factors—strong collective identity and the failure of political and economic structures to give groups opportunities to voice their demands peacefully-are needed to spur the expression of grievances over relative deprivation to the level of violence.

[19] Interview by the author with the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York, July 2005.

[20] As aptly defined by Jeanne Ward in her book *If Not Now, When?*, "gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will, that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person; and that is the result of gendered power inequalities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males and among females. Although not exclusive to women and girls, (gender-based violence) principally affects them across all cultures. Violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or sociocultural." Many other forms of gender-based violence that may be worsened by armed conflict, including female infanticide, enforced sterilization and honour killings, are not considered within the scope of this chapter. Trafficking for sexual purposes is addressed in the present context, as it relates to refugee movements and participation in fighting forces.

[21] Even the involvement of a relatively small portion of the youth population in fighting forces has devastating consequences, as societies are plunged into wars from which it can take years to recover. It may also create an overall societal perception of youth (especially males) as violent and disruptive. This can create more barriers to opportunities for all youth. With their loss of education opportunities, youth may also be perceived as ignorant and not deserving of respect or opportunities to participate in community processes.

[22] See the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (United Nations, 2002a). Article 1 prohibits children under the age of 18 from participating directly in hostilities, and article 2 bans the compulsory recruitment of children in this age group. Article 3 permits the voluntary recruitment of children under 18 years of age, with conditions.

[23] Yount and Balk (forthcoming) note that the World Health Organization (WHO) uses the term female genital mutilation, or FGM, to refer to all female genital practices, which it classifies into four groups. FGM is linked to female social identity and economic security in patriarchal societies, as those who undergo the procedure are allowed to marry and attain other privileges as adult women. The forms of FGM are diverse, and the practice is most prevalent in parts of Africa, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Arab Peninsula, and immigration countries. An estimated 130 million females have been affected, mainly in Africa, and 2 million females are at risk of FGM annually, according to WHO. The effects of FGM range from pain and incontinence to vaginal fistulae, infertility and even death. It also has wide-ranging psychosocial effects.

[24] The full privileges of womanhood, including eligibility for marriage, are achieved by undergoing FGM and entering a Secret Society.

[25] Yount and Balk (forthcoming) point out that according to some data, mean and median ages for FGM may be as low as 4 to 6 in some areas. If social and economic systems that support the practice are disrupted by war, FGM may be halted or delayed until adolescence. Refugee communities may have access to information on the dangers of FGM, including the transmission of HIV through the use of unclean instruments. In addition, women may have more access to information about women's experiences in other areas that are working to eliminate or develop safer alternatives to FGM while also ensuring the needed social outcomes.

[26] The case referred to was prosecuted under Kenya's 2002 Children's Act, as Kenya has jurisdiction over the refugee camps. The Act bans FGM.

[27] Other activities in this area have been undertaken by various United Nations agencies. In 1997, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) appointed Ms. Waris Dirie as Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, and the same year, the World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and UNFPA published a joint statement on FGM, issuing an unqualified call for the elimination of this practice in all its forms (World Health Organization, 1997).

[28] Comparative adolescent-led research revealed that the early or forced marriage of adolescents was common in three diverse conflict and post-conflict settings, though the dynamics and thus the potential solutions were different (see Lowicki, 2004). Hundreds of thousands of adolescents and youth have become solely responsible for themselves and their siblings in communities affected by armed conflict, as their parents and other adult caretakers have died as a result of war or disease (including HIV/AIDS) or have gone missing.

[29] Telephone interview by the author with Carl Triplehorn, an education specialist with Save the Children in the United States, 18 July 2005.

[30] The Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees basic education to children under the age of 18 and treats secondary education as a progressive right. Although international commitments to education for all have been made, humanitarian programmes focus mainly on the provision of formal primary education to primary-school-aged children. Older adolescents and youth have few opportunities to make up missed years or to find other appropriate and relevant education options. Support for the development of life skills is critical to all interventions with and for youth (see Sinclair, 2004; relevant information is also available at www.ineesite.org).

[31] See pages 15-17 for an analysis of gender and access to education in emergencies. Wider differences between male and female enrolment occur in specific countries and based on diverse refugee and cultural circumstances; see page 22 for details.

[32] Key reproductive health issues for youth in armed conflict include the following: early and unplanned pregnancy; complications in pregnancy and delivery; maternal mortality; STIs, including HIV/AIDS; unsafe abortions; gender-based violence, including rape, forced marriage, sexual enslavement and sexual exploitation; and genital mutilation. Girls under the age of 18 also face a high risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery. As the list indicates, females are more seriously affected than males in this context.

[33] Over 12 million young people have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Africa, leading to the creation of hundreds of thousands of youth-headed households, and many more such households have been created by armed conflict (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2004).

[34] Elements of this paragraph are taken from two unpublished documents: "Towards an IRC youth strategy" (Lowicki-Zucca, 2004b); and the "Draft integrated youth protection and development strategy" (Lowicki, 2005).

[35] When HIV/AIDS is prevalent in certain areas or among particular segments of society (including high-risk groups such as prostitutes, peacekeepers and injecting drug users) in the context of either generalized or concentrated epidemics, the risks are high that it will be transferred to vulnerable populations and communities in times of upheaval. Thus, communities newly exposed to people with the virus are newly at risk in armed conflict and post-conflict situations; the arrival of international peacekeepers is one example of such circumstances. At times, however, communities become increasingly isolated in armed conflict, which protects some youth from transmission. In addition, refugee youth may have more access to HIV/AIDS prevention information and care in armed conflict situations than previously (including access to voluntary counselling and testing, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, post-exposure prophylaxis, and information-education-communication materials and services), and may also find new opportunities to participate in community activities relating to the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Another protective factor at times includes the cessation of FGM among female children and youth, as individuals in refugee situations often lack the resources or cultural support systems that ensure the continuation of this practice.

[36] Such participation has a number of benefits, both personal and societal. It helps youth develop communication and social skills, self-confidence, a sense of belonging and much more. As young people take the enthusiasm and ideas they develop further, it has exponential effects on their communities and societies (Lowicki, 2004).

[37] Interview with Mr. Amir Haxhikadrija, co-founder of the Kosovar Youth Council, London, May 2005 (unpublished).

[38] Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children interviews with Ms. Akello Betty Openy and Mr. Ochora Emmanuel, co-founders of Gulu Youth for Action, Gulu, northern Uganda, December 2004 (unpublished).

[39] Areas covered in the adolescent-designed and adolescent-led research included Kosovo (2000), northern Uganda (2001) and Sierra Leone (2002).

[40] See the recommendations from the youth consultations under the section on armed conflict in the Youth Platform for Action (available from http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/pim/youth/youthpl.txt).

[41] The authors of this brochure are part of the Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group of the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee, which undertook a study on the particular issues relating to girls and young women within the women and peace and security agendas; the study is slated for release in 2005.

[42] See the outcome document (Canada, no date). That same year, West African Ministers adopted the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action on War-Affected Children (Economic Community of West African States, 2000).

[43] See United Nations Security Council resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460 and 1539 (United Nations, 1999; 2000a; 2001b; 2003b; 2004c) (also available from http://www.un.org/docs/sc/index.html).

[44] The Youth Employment Network, established in accordance with relevant provisions in the Millennium Declaration, is a consortium of actors representing all sectors in support of youth employment. Heads of State at the Millennium Summit resolved to develop and implement strategies to support young people everywhere in finding decent and productive work (United Nations, 2003a).

[45] The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is comprised of both members (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization) and standing invitees (International Committee of the Red Cross, International Council of Voluntary Agencies, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, InterAction, International Organization for Migration, Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and World Bank) (see Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2002).

[46] Frameworks for action with youth in crisis do exist in a variety of settings and may be applied to youth affected by armed conflict. However, a fundamental challenge exists in asserting key rationales for working with youth as a specific cohort, and more importantly, developing practical approaches that address their diverse realities.

[47] See note 245 in "Precious resources: participatory research study with adolescents and youth in Sierra Leone, April-July 2002" for analysis of the use of the term "combatant" to identify parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone and elsewhere and its relevance in planning and undertaking gender-aware disarmament, demobilization and reintegration efforts (Lowicki and Pillsbury, 2002).

[48] The Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction were developed by the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies through an extensive multi-year global consultative process (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2004).

[49] The Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium consists of seven members. Four members-the American Refugee Committee, CARE, the International Rescue Committee, and Marie Stopes International-focus specifically on the provision of reproductive health services to refugees. Two members — Columbia University (Heilbrunn Center for Population and Family Health) and the JSI Research and Training Institute — are primarily involved in project research, staff training and technical assistance. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (the seventh member) plays a coordinating role for the Consortium and also lends technical assistance to NGOs providing health services. (See http://www.rhrc.org.)

[50] The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was established in 1992 in response to General Assembly resolution 46/182 calling for strengthened coordination of humanitarian assistance. The Committee brings together United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian partners. The primary role of the IASC is to formulate humanitarian policy to ensure coordinated and effective humanitarian response to complex emergency and natural disasters.

[51] The Millennium Development Goals and targets are incorporated in the Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries, including 147 heads of State and Government, in September 2000 (available from http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm).

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