

WHEN A CHILD IS NO LONGER A CHILD: NEPALI ETHNOPSCHOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND VIOLENCE

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Introduction

Innocents lost, childhood lost, stolen childhood, damaged lives: these and other phrases are often invoked when describing child soldiers and other children exposed to war. The stereotyped image of a child soldier is a young, innocent, and peaceful boy stolen away by force into a life of violence, drug abuse, and moral disrepute. This is the portrayal of child soldiers seen in the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond*, on the Fox television series *24*, and in the fiction film *Ezra* from Nigerian director Newton Aduaka. In communities affected by political violence, adults also often view child soldiers as deprived of the fundamental development experiences to mature into fully responsible and morally mature adults (Boyden 2003). The perception of child soldiers is thus one of persons deprived of childhood and not able to be properly developed adults. In actuality, descriptions of child soldiers from those who have worked closely with them present an incredibly heterogeneous group with different backgrounds, soldiering experiences, current social positions, and emotional wellbeing (Betancourt 2008; Betancourt et al. 2008; Boyden et al. 2006; Wessells 2006), and this complexity has also been illustrated in Nepal (Kohrt et al. 2010; Zharkevich 2009).

The stereotyped views of child soldiers may speak more to different models and conceptions of childhood than to observable impacts of the soldiering experience upon children. While there are increasing resources dedicated to aid the plight of child soldiers, the ability to help and make a lasting contribution to the wellbeing of children associated with armed groups relies upon moving beyond preconceptions of child soldiers and childhood in general (Boyden 2003; Hart 2006). Interventions typically are based upon preconceived notions of childhood borne out of a subset of psychological models from middle-class European and American children rather than a broader global understanding of childhood.

Furthermore, the proliferation of a legalistic approach to defining categories of persons also restricts broader consideration of human roles and development. United Nations' documents exemplify this limited

perspective. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) refers to children as persons less than eighteen years of age. Article 1 of the CRC defines children:

For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (United Nations 1989).

Similarly, the most recent definition of child soldiers, referred to as children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG), refers exclusively to persons under eighteen. The 2007 *Paris Principles* refer to CAAFAG as

any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to...fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities (UNICEF 2007: 7).

This brings us to the question of why is there an article on children in a special issue on youth in Nepal. This is at the heart of the challenge of considering interventions for so-called child soldiers. In the Nepal context, the majority of child soldiers are teenagers (Kohrt et al. 2008). However, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) do not use the terminology “youth soldier.” Instead, these individuals are referred to as “child soldiers.” Thus, one of the goals of this paper is to address what constitutes a “child” in the Nepali context and whether the groups targeted for NGO support locally are referred to as children versus youth or some other label. Throughout this paper, we attempt to maintain continuity by using the term “children” whenever appropriate. When citing others’ studies, we use the term “youth” if the original authors did. Below, when statistics and mortality are discussed, we use the term “minor” as this is the term in United States census data. In the conclusion, we further discuss the challenge of terminology.

This age-based approach does not take into account other aspects of development, maturity, or social functioning. By these definitions, “children” are merely a chronologically distinct subset of human beings. The CRC and other documents imply that individuals under eighteen have specific differences from those above eighteen years of age. Codifications of children employed by child-focused humanitarian organizations, which operate with these specific cut-offs and assumptions regarding the functioning of children dominate not only global but also local discourses on childhood (Hart 2006, 2008).

We argue that psychosocial interventionists and other humanitarian workers aiding child soldiers and other children affected by conflict too often have ignored local cultural understandings of childhood. Having a culturally-grounded understanding of childhood is crucial if one wants to develop psychosocial programming for child soldiers because psychosocial care relies upon working with local communities and existing support systems (Psychosocial Working Group 2003), all of which are rooted in local cultural patterns of being. If humanitarian organizations do not consider local categories, there may be conflicts regarding inclusion in programming. While an NGO may refer to a 17-year-old ex-combatant as a child soldier, persons in the community may view that person as an adult. Consequently, the community may be reluctant to have that individual participate in a child reintegration program. He or she may rather participate in adult reintegration programs.

Second, child soldier reintegration programs may threaten their legitimacy if the community stakeholders perceive the program as helping individuals locally considered to be adults who can take care of themselves, even though they may be only fifteen or sixteen years old. There are also converse issues to consider. As Snellinger (2009) has written, youth and student groups in Nepal often extend membership to persons in their forties. An NGO reintegration support program may thus encounter local resistance when it fails to include people who are in their twenties and viewed locally still as youth.

Child soldier reintegration programs may infantilize and disempower individuals by referring to these individuals as children. This can be problematic when individuals joined an armed movement specifically for the goal of empowerment. Bracken et al. (1996) and Summerfield (1998) have criticized the humanitarian approach to mental health, trauma, and psychosocial problems among war-affected children; they refer to the movement as pathologizing and infantilizing by viewing survivors of political violence, especially children, as helpless rather than recognizing and promoting resilience. In support of those claims, epidemiological research has led to conclusions that severe psychological problems may be limited to a small subset of child soldiers (Blattman 2006). In addition, local cultural groups may have certain expectations and assumptions within their cultural models of childhood. These assumptions dictate how children are taught, encouraged, disciplined, and included or excluded in activities. The model of childhood under which an NGO operates may not follow the same assumptions. This often is seen in the issue of corporeal punishment, which may be accepted or disparaged differently between

stakeholders and interventionists. In psychosocial context, models may come into conflict when a Western perspective focuses on a child repeatedly retelling a traumatic experience while locally the constant retelling of a trauma may be perceived as damaging to a child's normal development. In order to address this, we wish to take up Hart's call for cross-cultural research; "Amongst anthropologists, there is a need to question the assumption of distinctiveness and separability between children/childhood and adults/adulthood" (Hart 2006: 8).

In an examination of child workers in carpet factories in Nepal, Baker and Hinton (2001), echoing Hart's concerns, argue that child's rights' initiatives are based on paradigms imported by development agencies rooted in Western concepts. They suggest that rights' programming often fails to take local context into account and does not incorporate the voices of children and families in the process. They argue that "decisions about children's lives continue to be based on a set of norms surrounding children's competencies and vulnerabilities, without adequate questioning of the appropriateness of these norms to children's realities" (Baker and Hinton 2001: 179). Moreover, Baker and Hinton add that, "program managers are often more concerned, or have more experience, with supporting work that follows standards laid out in the U.N. agreements than with exploring the fit between these standards and those of children and parents in the program area" (2001: 191).

The goal of our paper is to heed the concerns of Hart, Baker, Hinton, and others by examining the local context of child development in order to inform NGOs supporting child soldiers in Nepal. We are exploring how childhood is conceptualized with special attention to the markers of transition from childhood to adulthood. We do this from anthropological and psychological perspectives in attempt to develop an ethnopsychology of child development in Nepal. Moreover, we specifically examine how experiences and acts of violence affect child development according to this ethnopsychology. The main research questions addressed are: (i) How are children distinguished from adults? (ii) When do children transition to adulthood? and, (iii) What is the relationship between children and violence? Although we conducted this research within a broader study of child soldiers, we do not focus on child soldiers specifically in this article. Instead, we present the perspectives on child development and violence from primarily adults in communities where NGOs will be providing service to child soldiers. This information is intended provide a model for understanding childhood in these settings from both a theoretical perspective and to improve the ability of NGOs to

act in a culturally-appropriate and efficacious manner. Thus, our goal is to discuss childhood broadly in the Nepal context.¹

Child and Violence in the People's War

It is important to consider the context of children and violence in Nepal with regard to their differences from children in other conflicts. For example, child soldiers in Nepal include a large proportion of girl soldiers. In our work, 53 percent of child soldiers we interviewed were girls (Kohrt et al. 2008). For comparison, only 16 percent of soldiers were female in a study of Uganda and Congo (Bayer et al. 2007).

The intensity of the conflict also warrants consideration. The People's War between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), herein referred to as CPN (M), and government security forces lasted from 1996 through 2006, with an estimated mortality of 13,347 people of which government security forces committed 63 percent of the killings (INSEC 2008b). Killings of persons under eighteen totaled 447; the government security forces killed 55 percent of the children who died in the conflict (INSEC 2008a). Torture use was widespread throughout the People's War (Stevenson 2001; Tol et al. 2007). People under 18 years of age were also victims of torture, often perpetrated by government security forces (Kohrt 2009). In the 2006 peace accords, both the CPN (M) and the Government of Nepal recognized that person's less than 18 years of age should not be included in militaries. Both parties agreed to transition former combatants less than 18 years of age into civilian life and not involve them in military activities. Estimates of the proportion of combatants under 18 at the time of the conflict are difficult to ascertain. The number of Maoist combatants who were under 18 years of age at the end of the People's War is likely greater than 9,000 and may be as high as 20,000 (Human Rights Watch 2007). An estimated 10 percent of the government army was under 18 years of age (Singh 2004).

¹ Before moving forward, it is important to establish the caveat that just as conceptions of childhood vary across regions and nations, there is considerable heterogeneity in models of childhood throughout Nepal. There is not a single Nepali ethnopsychology of childhood, development, and psychological trauma. Thus, this paper is intended only to issue some challenges to broad cross-cultural generalizations of childhood. We ask the reader to look further into the rich breadth of ethnographies about groups in Nepal for specific cultures of childhood within ethnic, caste, religious, and economic groups.

However, as Hart (2006) has pointed out, the issue of child soldiers is often used to demonize a culture or a nation. If one examines the involvement of people less than 18 years of age involved in violence in the People's War, it is actually less than the amount of violence among persons under 18 years of age in the United States. The average conflict-related death rate of all age groups during the People's War was 4.29 people killed per 100,000 per year of conflict (INSEC 2008b). During the same period of 1996 through 2006 in the United States, the number of homicides was 5.97 per 100,000 per year (US Department of Justice 2007), which is 39 percent greater than the rate in Nepal. If one examines the American city of Baltimore, the death rate is 7.21 per 100,000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007), almost twice the conflict death rate in Nepal. However, in comparison to countries such as India, where the homicide rate is 3.44 per 100,000, and the United Kingdom, where the death rate is 1.41 per 100,000 (United Nations 2002), one can observe that the violence in Nepal during the conflict was significantly greater than some other world regions.

Pettigrew's (2007) ethnographic work among the Tamu-mai has examined how children experienced the violence of the People's War. She explores the "culture of terror" existent in Kwei Nasa (a pseudonym village) and adults' concerns about keeping children safe. She identifies two impacts on children: the influence of the Maoist movement on schools (teachers pay part of their salary to Maoists, teachers not paying are publicly punished, and Maoist routinely incite strikes closing schools) and fear of conscription by Maoists. Parents have a set of strategies they employ to keep children safe. This includes forbidding them to go near Maoists. Children are expected to hide possessions from Maoists and security forces searching one's house. Children are forbidden to go to places like road heads, tea shops, and houses in certain hamlets where they may encounter Maoists. Within the family, children take on different roles. Young boys take on the roles of teenagers and young adults who have been conscripted. Also, Pettigrew speculates that lack of a father figure may have a stronger impact on boys' lives than the insurgency itself.² Similarly, Pettigrew (2001) also discusses how the conflict led to

² Part of this impact may be through the loss of fathers. Bista (1991: 68–69) emphasizes the importance of father's in the construction of identity and promotion of self-esteem. Bista writes, "family background rather than personal achievement has been emphasized in the process of the socialization for the children. When children attempt to show off in such adventures as tree

changed expectations of social relations that were previously highly stratified according to age, gender, and other hierarchies. Preexisting hierarchies and constricted social behavior changed not only through the necessity of war but also through Maoist ideologies of egalitarianism. Thus, Pettigrew argues, the war was an opportunity for youth to pursue aspects of modernity.

Another question is the involvement of children in violence. During the People's War, persons under 18 accounted for 3 percent of the conflict mortality (INSEC 2008a). In the United States, persons under eighteen accounted for 11 percent of the homicide victims from 1996–2006, three times the rate in Nepal (US Department of Justice 2007). We lack estimates of the number of killings committed by minors during the People's War. However, even if they accounted for the majority of deaths it would not be very different from the number of minors in the United States involved in killings. In the US, persons 18–24 years old commit 41 percent of the homicides and persons under 18 commit 11 percent of homicides (US Department of Justice 2007); this does not include the number of persons killed by young American adults in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without keeping these figures in mind, one risks pathologizing and demonizing the Nepal conflict for involvement of minors in violence when, in reality, even during a civil war, the number of minors involved in violence is still less than the number of non-military minor-perpetrated violence in the United States. Thus, the issue of minors and violence, rather than being a culture-specific phenomenon, is more likely a threat to the well-being of societies that transcends any single culture or region.

Legal Definitions of Childhood in Nepal

In Chapter 1 of the Children's Act of 2048 v.s. (1992 A.D.), "child" means a minor not having reached the age of sixteen (His Majesty's Government 1992). Under the Children's Act, parents are obliged to provide persons under sixteen years of age with education, healthcare,

climbing, jumping over chasms, or wading across rivers, if their feat becomes difficult or impossible, they start bragging about their fathers being the only people in the world who could perform the action. They believe their fathers can do everything. Very few children are taught to compete or to try and achieve better than their fathers. Fathers symbolize the ultimate in achievement."

and “maintenance and upbringing” (Chapter 2, Article 4). Chapter 2, Article 11 deals with children and criminal liability. The article states,

- (1) If a Child below the age of 10 years commits an act which is an offence under a law, he shall not be liable to any type of punishment.
- (2) If the age of the Child committing an offence which is punishable with fine under law, is 10 years or above and below 14 years, he shall be admonished and convinced and if the offence committed is punishable with imprisonment, he shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months depending on the offence.
- (3) If a Child committing an offence is 14 years or above and below 16 years, he shall be punished with half of the penalty to be imposed under law on a person who has attained the age of majority.
- (4) If a Child commits an offence under advice or influence of any person, the person doing such act shall be liable for full punishment as per the law as if he/she has committed such offence. (His Majesty’s Government 1992)

While these age-defined cut-offs may have meaning in courts, local models of child development and recognition of adulthood may play a more salient role in day-to-day life in most of Nepal. For example, despite the legal definitions regarding age of marriage, the involvement of persons in their early teens in arranged marriages is not uncommon in many rural areas (Kohrt et al. 2008).

However, Bista (1991) has argued against historical dichotomization of society into children and adults:

There is no concept of children as a separate section of Nepali society. In fact, in a large part of the country and in a majority of cases, there is no point at which children cease to be children and become adults. The only exception to this are Bahuns, Chhetris, ethnic group like Newars and the twice born castes among the terai Hindus who have a practice of initiation, the *Vratibandha*, or the sacred thread-wearing ceremonies which mark the transition from childhood into adulthood. Life is a single continuum with no apparent disjuncture between childhood, youth, and adulthood. For example, there is no idea what is inappropriate for children. Most children grow up learning about sex at an early age through observation or play and few grow up without knowing the sexual activities of the adults. Many children play mock sexual intercourse at a very early age. As small or immature adults, children are more likely to have the rights and the responsibilities of adulthood, particularly the responsibilities of contributing to the economic sustenance of the family.

As such they are expected to work early and, in many cases, are needed as workers for the survival of the family (Bista 1991: 69–70).

Methods

Ethnopsychology

The framework for this study is ethnopsychology. Ethnopsychology is the study of cultural concepts of self, mind–body divisions, emotions, human nature, motivation, and personality (Holland 1992; LeVine 2005; Shweder and Sullivan 1993; White 1992). Benedict (1989) and Hallowell (1941) originally employed Freudian anxiety theories, which are now considered forms of Western ethnopsychiatry, to describe how anxiety motivates behaviors differently across cultures. The field of study has advanced considerably and is no longer restricted to Freudian perspectives of analysis (Bock 1999).

There is a significant body of literature on ethnopsychology in South Asia. However, the ethnographic literature contrasts significantly from the psychiatric literature. Psychiatric studies have suggested that South Asian ethnopsychology is characterized by mind–body holism and that mind–body divisions are not important (Wig 1999). “Traditional medicine in many parts of Asia does not distinguish between mind and body, making distinctions in symptom type irrelevant and increasing the likelihood that individuals will manifest psychological distress with somatic symptomatology” others have suggested (Hoge et al. 2006: 964). Other researchers follow, “[In Nepal] psychiatrists report high levels of conversion disorders and hysteria, reflecting the absence of a cultural distinction between mind and body” (Tausig and Subedi 1997).

However, any review of the ethnographic literature in Nepal strongly challenges these conclusions. For example, McHugh’s work (1989, 2001) among Nepali Gurungs challenges the notion that Western conceptions of self are more individualistic while non-Western conceptions are more social. McHugh describes how notions of self are comprised of *plah* (souls) and *sae* (heart-mind) as well as the physical body. The *sae* is the seat of consciousness, memory, and desire. Similarly, amongst the Yolmo, another Tibeto-Burman group, the concept of *sem* has many parallels to *sae* and other concepts of heart-mind (Desjarlais 2003). Among the Lohorung Rai, individual behavior issues from desires and actions by ancestral spirits, the *saya* (soul), and the *niwa* (mind), among other forces (Hardman 2000). The *niwa* is in part responsible for keeping the *saya* high. When the *niwa* hurts, the *saya* falls (Desjarlais 2003: 258). If the *saya* falls, an individual has fatigue and depression. Nicoletti

(2006) deals with the whole complex of mind–body amongst the Kulunge Rai of East Nepal. Among the Kulunge Rai, there is the “vital force” of family members. As Nicoletti states, this vital force represents a complex reality, involving body and health, relations with tradition and invisible forces, inter-personal relations, and personal dignity. For Newars, the *nuga* is the seat of morality, desire, emotion, and thinking (Parish 1994). Divinity and god dwell in the *nuga*. The *bibek* filters the processing of the *nuga* before behavior is manifest. *Bibek* is an abstract entity encompassing the cognitive power to assure that one acts wisely and responsibly, which is a matter of one’s reputation (*ijjat*) in society.

The ethnopsychological model presented in this paper is based on the model we have put forth elsewhere (Kohrt and Harper 2008). This model takes the above studies into account and examines the division of the self using Nepali terms rather than Tibeto-Burman languages. Therefore, it provides a model of the lingua franca and dominant social group; however, it is limited because it cannot account for all of the variation between ethnic and linguistic groups.

In a generalized Nepali ethnopsychology, the components of the self include the physical body (*sarir* or *jīu*), the spirit (*sāto*), social status/face (*ijjat*), the brain-mind (*dimāg*), and the heart-mind (*man*). However, there is considerable variation across cultures, regions, and education levels with regard to interpretation of the ethnopsychological framework. Figure 1 presents a highly simplified representation of these components. The brain-mind is the organ of reason, decision-making, and compliance with social norms. The heart-mind is the organ of memory and emotion. Behaviors labeled as brain-mind dysfunctions tend to be stigmatized. Mental illness is considered a brain-mind dysfunction. In contrast, symptoms of heart-mind distress include sadness, worries, bad memories, and nightmares. Extreme distress in the heart-mind leads to brain-mind dysfunction (see Table 1). In this article, we place some of the findings with regard to child development and the impact of violence into this ethnopsychological framework.

Figure 1: Generalized Nepali Ethnopsychological Framework

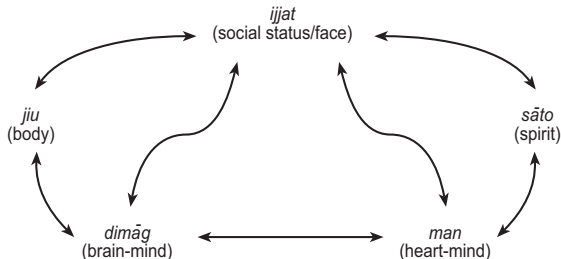


Table 1: Explanatory Models of Brain-Mind and Heart-Mind

Explanatory Model	Brain-Mind Dysfunction	Heart-Mind Distress
Patterns of distress (disorders and symptoms)	Epilepsy, severe intellectual disabilities, psychosis, violence, aggression, “mental shock”	Sadness, worries, bad memories, nightmares, loneliness
Perceived causes	Physical trauma to the head, alcohol use, bad karma, excessive heart-mind activity	Social stress, poverty, lack of education, accidents and personal loss
Help seeking and social response	Often considered incurable (treatment not sought), isolation from family, occasionally call upon traditional healers or psychiatrists, strongly stigmatized	Sharing feelings with others, social engagement, traditional healers, relaxation, meditation, not stigmatized

Participants and Research Approach

In our research, we employed a mixed-methods study with qualitative and quantitative tools to understand the mental health and psychosocial consequences of children’s participation in armed groups. The Nepali NGO Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) Nepal conducted a study in 2007 of mental health and psychosocial needs among former child soldiers reintegrating into civilian communities. The qualitative component of the larger study included narrative focus group discussions (N=25 groups) with children and community members, key informant interviews (N=152) with children and community members, and case studies (N=8) of child soldiers. Participants in all research sections were Nepali and living in Nepal at the time of the study. We identified study participants through local NGOs involved in child protection.³

Data were gathered by a Nepali research team employed by TPO Nepal with a background in field research. They received a month-long training on qualitative and quantitative data collection and on ethics of research with vulnerable children. All interviews were analyzed using Atlas.ti with a codebook developed by three independent coders (intercoder agreement: percent agreement 0.90, Cohen’s κ 0.82). The quantitative psychosocial epidemiological study was an assessment of 142 child soldiers and 142 matched children who were never conscripted

³ For a full description of the study selection process, see Kohrt et al. (2008).

by armed groups (Kohrt et al. 2008). We employed instruments developed in Nepal—some developed by former child soldiers—or adapted for use in Nepal using a standardized transcultural translation process.⁴

The analyses presented here are based on a subset of 21 key informant interviews randomly selected from the 152 key informant interviews. The original 152 key informant interviews were conducted in ten districts across Nepal. Key informants were selected based on those who would significantly impact the reintegration of child soldiers. We sampled teachers, parents, NGO workers, health workers, political party leaders including Maoist commanders, religious leaders, and traditional healers. Because of this sampling strategy, the sample is biased toward individuals in positions of power. These positions are often dominated by upper caste, educated men. Thus, our sample, as is shown in Table 2, is biased toward this group. Because of this, one cannot extrapolate the findings to the population at large. However, the sample is useful in considering the viewpoint of individuals in positions of power to influence child soldier reintegration.

These interviews were coded for themes related to child development, transitions to adulthood, and the impact of exposure to adulthood. Coding for these analyses also was conducted in Atlas.ti. Additional qualitative findings from other interviews are included to supplement the codes and subthemes presented.

The term chosen for “child” in this study was *bālbālikā*. This term is the combined referral to boys (*bālak*) and girls (*bālikā*) and based on the root for child (*bāl*). It was chosen because this is the term used by NGOs in conducting programming for children affected by armed conflict. And, when referring to children associated with armed forces and armed groups the term *bālbālikā* was employed by major agencies. The term *baccā* was not selected because this more commonly used to refer to babies. The term for youth (*yubak/yubā*) was not employed because of its prominence in politics in which it can refer to individuals in their twenties and thirties. Therefore, we focused on asking questions pertaining to *bālbālikāharū*. In the presentation of quotes from Nepali respondents, we translate *bālbālikā* as child. If the respondent employed a different term, we include this in addition to our English gloss/translation.

⁴ For a full description of instruments and psychometrics, see Kohrt et al. (2008).

Table 2: Demographics of Key Informants

No.	Sex	Age	Caste	Occupation	Education	Development Region
1.	Male	29	Newar	Businessman	Diploma	Eastern
2.	Female	44	Bahun	NGO Worker	Bachelors	Eastern
3.	Male	38	Bahun	Sub Health Post In Charge	Intermediate	Eastern
4.	Male	35	Newar	Farmer	Class 9	Eastern
5.	Male	40	Limbu	Maoist Leader	Literate	Eastern
6.	Male	28	Bahun	Journalist	Bachelors	Eastern
7.	Male	33	Bahun	District Portfolio Officer-NGO	Masters	Eastern
8.	Male	50	Bahun	Teacher	Masters	Eastern
9.	Male	53	Bahun	Social Worker	Bachelors	Eastern
10.	Male	40	Bahun	Businessman	SLC	Eastern
11.	Female	33	Tharu	Community Leader	Non-formal education	Far-Western
12.	Female	17	Bahun	Former Child Soldier	Class 7	Far-Western
13.	Male	63	Dalit	Traditional Healer	No education	Far-Western
14.	Female	21	Tharu	NGO Worker	Bachelors	Far-Western
15.	Male	28	Bahun	Hotel Owner	Class 10	Far-Western
16.	Female	39	Bahun	Maoist Leader	Non-formal education	Far-Western
17.	Male	56	Newar	Farmer	SLC	Far-Western
18.	Male	50	Bahun	VDC Secretary	Class 9	Far-Western
19.	Male	31	Chhetri	Teacher	Intermediate	Mid-Western
20.	Female	17	Dalit	Former Child Soldier	Class 6	Mid-Western
21.	Female	39	Bahun	Teacher	Bachelors	Mid-Western

Findings

Activities of Children

Participants were asked about activities that were appropriate for children. Within this category, we identified three subthemes: school activities, home activities, and community activities (see Table 3). School activities comprised studying, playing, and engaging in extra-curricular programs such as sports, singing, and dancing. Home activities comprised domestic chores and farm work, as well as helping family members. Adults expected children to care for younger siblings. Community activities included working; however, this was often qualified as working within a child's capacity, e.g. doing physical labor appropriate for one's size and strength. Child labor was viewed positively if it was perceived as

appropriate given the child's physical and cognitive development such that it did not exceed their capabilities. There was also an emphasis on context such that respondents felt that child labor was necessary in situations where families had no other alternative for income. Community activities included participation in clubs and other social engagements. Key informants provided a number of descriptions of the appropriate activities for children:

Children can be engaged in activities such as making a children's network. They can work to advocate for child rights and raise the issues related to children. These are their social activities. At home, children can be involved in studying, but they should not be given physical work until they are at least 13–14 years old. (Key Informant #7: 33-year-old male Bahun NGO worker in eastern Nepal)

Children have different activities depending on whether they live in a poor or rich household. Children in poor households must work in the morning and evening. They can only study in the afternoon. If the economic condition of the household is strong, they can just study and play. (Key Informant #15: 28-year-old male Bahun hotel owner in southwestern Nepal)

Even after a child reaches 14–15 years old, they still do not understand many things. But once they reach 16–17 years old, they start thinking about the country and they start reading the newspaper. At this age, they can even differentiate what is wrong and what is right. So, at this age they get involved in and support the community. (Key Informant #16: 39-year-old female Bahun Maoist leader in southwestern Nepal)

When I was younger, I did not do any work. When I got a little older, I would take care of my younger brother and sister. When I was in Class 4, my younger sister was in Class 2. I then started preparing food and feeding her breakfast. Then I would take her to school. (Key Informant #20: 17-year-old female former child soldier in midwestern Nepal)

Children are a common source of labor throughout Nepal. Respondents suggested that the burden of work in the home was borne more by girls than by boys. Girls often carry heavy loads of firewood gathered in the forest back to the house in the early morning hours. A female Chhetri journalist speaking in English explained,

I do not think childhood exists in rural areas, especially in extreme poverty conditions. Childhood basically does not exist because starting between the age of six and nine, a girl must help her household seven hours a day. And for the girl child between ten and fifteen, she must spend

Table 3: Activities Appropriate for Children

Subthemes	Codes	Percentage
<i>School activities</i>		
	Studying	43%
	Playing	19%
	Extra-curricular activities (sports, singing, and dancing)	10%
<i>Home activities</i>		
	Doing household work (cooking, bringing water, cutting grass)	67%
	Helping other family members	24%
	Looking after other children	19%
	Doing field work/ farming	14%
<i>Community activities</i>		
	Doing work that is within their capacity	29%
	Child clubs (doing child rights advocacy)	10%
	Engagement in social/community activities	10%
	Roaming with friends	10%
	Doing creative activities	5%

nine hours a day helping in her house, so you can imagine what the situation is like in Nepal. And, you could feel that in these circumstances, working nine hours a day is not a childhood. I don't say it's a childhood (Koenig and Kohrt 2009).

Transitions from Childhood to Adulthood

We evaluated semi-structured interviews to identify parameters in relation to what differentiates children and adults and how one can recognize that a child has become an adult (see Table 4). Analysis of the key informants' discussions revealed that people identify this transition through psychological, behavioral, social, and physical factors. Based on the emphasis on physical labor in rural Nepal, we had hypothesized that respondents would highlight physical work capacity as a primary differentiating factor. Some participants did mention this. The following is an excerpt from a conversation with a female Chhetri psychosocial counselor working for an NGO in a midwestern district:

Counselor: Age does not determine if someone is an adult. If someone is physically big, then we will say that he or she has grown up. So usually, it is when they are tall like an adult. That is the concept.

BK [interviewer]: Why does being physically big matter?

Counselor: In people's opinion, first they look to see if the child is big enough to help in household work and to help with farming.

However, respondents described cognitive and behavioral factors more frequently than physical factors. Respondents explained that children were typically more open-minded, less judgmental, more curious, more mischievous, more stubborn, and more selfish than adults were. Children also lacked the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, to make proper decisions, and to understand political topics.

Children may look [physically] older but they are children within their hearts. They hesitate in front of people older than they are. Children have fear. They only understand a little, and they are loveable as well. (Key Informant #14: 21-year-old female Tharu NGO worker in southwestern Nepal)

Children cannot say what is right and what is wrong, and that is one of the major reasons they are different from adults. Their intellect is not developed. (Key Informant #10: 40-year-old Bahun businessman in eastern Nepal)

If the things do not go as the children wish, they become stubborn and sometimes violent. But, children are usually of a playful nature; they are not mature. They have tender minds and free thoughts. It is their time to learn new things; they are very much curious. Due to lack of political, social, and cultural awareness, they are different from the adults. (Key Informant #4: 35-year-old male Newar farmer in eastern Nepal)

First of all, to know how children are different from adults, we should consider age. If we look from a psychological perspective, their sentiments, feelings, and knowledge is very different from that of adults. (Key Informant #7: 33-year-old male Bahun NGO worker in eastern Nepal)

They are dependent upon parents. They have different thinking and ways of understanding. They are not judgmental as adults are. (Key Informant #9: 53-year-old male Bahun social worker in eastern Nepal)

Children are different from adults in age and in their *dimāg* (brain-mind). Children have an immature *dimāg*. They speak without thinking, but

adults work and have responsibilities. (Key Informant #13: 63-year-old male Dalit traditional healer in southwestern Nepal)

Children become adults when their cognitive and socio-behavioral functioning changes. One of the key terms heard in most interviews was “responsibility.” When individuals demonstrate that they are responsible, then they can be considered adults. Furthermore, proper social behavior is a key factor in identifying the transition from children to adults. After children can control their emotions, differentiate between right and wrong, and act respectfully toward others, they are more likely to be considered adults. However, those who continue to cry, act stubbornly and selfishly, and do not understand family problems are more likely to be referred to as children. Of importance is the issue of caste; being able to understand the caste hierarchy and one’s proper behavior within the caste system is a marker of adulthood. While children may break caste rules, adults must follow caste restrictions in all activities. The female psychosocial counselor in midwestern Nepal offered these thoughts on differentiating children and adults:

BK [interviewer]: Is there a difference between children’s *manko kurā* (feelings; thoughts in the heart-mind) and adults’ *manko kurā*?

Counselor: Yes, there is a big difference. Adults think when children become big, they should not think about playing outside, they should follow and respect others, and they should study hard. This is what adults think about.

Because the issue of responsibility was raised frequently in the interviews, we also did coding to identify the defining features of responsibility (see Table 4). The only marker of responsibility that we could identify consistently was getting a job. Participants also connected responsibility with age. There was not a clear consensus about the most critical age range. Some persons thought that 14–15 years old was the beginning of adulthood. For others, adulthood began even earlier, at 12–13 years old. Older than 16 and older than 25 also were mentioned as the age-defining period for adulthood.

When children are mentally mature, after the age of 16 years, they can actively distinguish what is right and what is wrong with the things they do. Then children can be responsible and accountable for their actions. (Key Informant #4: 35-year-old male Newar farmer in eastern Nepal)

Table 4: Defining Childhood

Subthemes	Codes	Percentage
<i>Differences between adults and children</i>	Children are not mentally, intellectually, educationally, or physically developed/mature compared with adults	62%
	Children have innocent minds; they think freely without bias	29%
	Children have more dreams and less responsibility than adults	24%
	Children are more curious than adults	19%
	Children cannot discriminate between right and wrong	14%
	Children are of mischievous by nature	10%
	Children are stubborn and selfish; they want their wishes fulfilled	5%
	Children lack political, social and cultural awareness	5%
	Children are dependent upon their parents	5%
	Children do not have decision making abilities	5%
	<i>Criteria to determine when a child has become an adult</i>	When they become responsible
When they are mentally, intellectually, educationally, and physically developed and mature		33%
When they become practical		14%
When their behavior improves; when they stop crying, shouting, and being stubborn		10%
When they can make important decisions about their life		5%
When they are able to understand family problems		5%
When they are aware of politics		5%
When they can differentiate among castes and follow caste rules		5%
When they are aware of rights		5%
When they can behave respectfully towards others		5%
When they begin trying to gain social recognition		5%

	When they can consider facts to differentiate between right and wrong	5%
<i>Criteria to determine that children have become responsible</i>	When they become practical	10%
	When they are mature	10%
	When they get a job	5%
	When their family teaches them to be responsible	5%
	Age: after 12–13 years old	5%
	Age: after 16 years old	5%
	Age: after 25 years old	5%
<i>Rituals for the transition from childhood to adulthood</i>	<i>Vratibandha</i> (sacred thread ceremony for Parbatiya and Newar Tagadhari boys)	57%
	<i>Belbiwāha</i> (ritual fruit marriage for Newar girls)	38%
	Girls menarche seclusion	24%
	<i>Chewor</i> and <i>Canḍi Nāc</i> (among Rai boys)	10%
	<i>Dhān Nāc</i> in <i>Māghe Saṅkrānti</i> (among Limbus)	5%
	<i>Atuyāri Barta</i> (yearly river <i>pūjā</i>)	5%

Children become responsible when they have an occupation and derive job-satisfaction from it. When children becoming responsible and accountable for their actions might differ from child to child depending upon the socialization process in which he has been raised. Anyway, I think people become responsible after the age of 25 years. (Key Informant #7: 33-year-old male Bahun NGO worker in eastern Nepal)

It is relative when children become responsible and accountable for their actions; you cannot just generalize that it must be like this or that for all the kids. Some are responsible from a very young age. It basically depends upon the situation and the family environment. I think children should be mainly responsible towards their studies. If they do not have parents, then they will be able to handle responsibilities earlier than other children will. (Key Informant #9: 53-year-old male Bahun social worker in eastern Nepal)

When children realize their mistakes and feel guilty about them, then they start becoming more responsible for their behavior. (Key Informant #14: 21-year-old female Tharu NGO worker in southwesten Nepal)

At the age of 17–18 years, children start becoming responsible. Girls (*ketiharū*) are fully responsible around 20–22 years, whereas boys are responsible at 25–30 years old. (Key Informant #16: 39-year-old female Bahun Maoist leader in southwesten Nepal)

Gender differences in maturation also were mentioned. Whenever a gender difference was pointed out, it was always that girls matured earlier than boys did. Respondents thought girls were responsible and accountable for their actions at an earlier age. This was explained in reference to marriage practices as well. The arranged marriage of boys to girls a few years younger was thought to be appropriate to match developmental levels – if a girl married a boy of the same age, the girl would be too mature for that boy. Thus, marrying younger girls and older boys brings balance to their levels of emotional maturity. However, one also needs to keep in mind the issue of virginity and gender-differences in the value of virginity. A girl’s virginity is often more prioritized than a boy’s virginity at the time of marriage in South Asia (Mahalingam et al. 2007; Mahalingam and Jackson 2007) and in many cultures throughout the world.

There was also cultural-religious significance to adulthood. A *gurūwā* (Tharu religious healer) in the Tarai described the importance of being able to understand the concepts of *pāp* (sin) and *dharma* (good deed; role or purpose within a religious context).

BK [interviewer]: At what age can children understand *pāp* and *dharma*?

Gurūwā [healer]: One person in our village could understand at the age of five years old, but there were also people who did not understand until they were fifty years old.

BK: In general, can children understand *pāp* and *dharma*?

Gurūwā: At the age of 30, they usually have a good understanding of *pāp*.

BK: Why at that age?

Gurūwā: Because, at a young age, everyone is energetic. When you are young, you are so busy doing things that you cannot take the time to ponder *pāp* and *dharma*.

BK: So, if someone below the age of 30 years old does things like lying or committing a crime, is that considered *pāp*?

Gurūwā: That is not considered *pāp*. They would be forgiven by god if they did these things at a young age.

Rituals influenced determination of adult status. Participants described a number of rituals that signified transition into adulthood. The

most frequently mentioned ritual was the *vratabandha*, sacred thread ceremony for twice-born males in upper caste Parbatiya and Newar families. One of the significant factors of *vratabandha* is that it heralds the responsibility of the twice-born male to act in accordance with his caste status, which was described as a demonstration of one's social maturity and aspect of adulthood. Rai and Limbu respondents also reported rituals for males in their ethnic groups to become adults (see Table 4). Participants mentioned two rituals for girls. For Newar girls, the marriage to a Bilva fruit was a symbolic transitional ritual along with *bārāha* in which Newar girls seclude themselves for approximately twelve days then emerge married to the sun god. These must be performed before menarche. Some participants described this as occurring in place of child marriage, which is becoming less frequent among Newar families. Other rituals occur at first menstruation when girls are secluded. In rural areas, this may involve staying alone in the woods or sleeping in livestock sheds. The practice is known as *Chāupaḍī Prathā*. In more urban areas, people reported that it could occur within the house in a room where the girl was separated from the rest of the family. In more conservative areas, girls at menarche cannot see anyone for a period of days. In less conservative areas, girls most only avoid men during this time. The female counselor again explains,

Counselor: For the first three days of menstruation, girls (*keṭiharū*) are supposed to stay in a *goṭh* [livestock shed]. Some families allow the girl to be in the house, but they cannot go into the kitchen for five days. In other areas, the girl cannot come in the house for seven days.

BK [interviewer]: Is this for first menstruation only or for every menstruation after menarche?

Counselor: Girls must do this every month. For the first menstruation, it is the longest. Some girls are kept in the *goṭh* for eight, nine, or even ten days depending upon the family. They are not allowed to see any men. Some families may allow the girl to see others. Friends may come and stay with her. On the final day, the parents put a *tikā* on her and do a small *pūjā* (worship). We call this *lukāune* (to hide something/someone). This is when they have first menstruation, but even every month after that they are not allowed to touch water in the kitchen for four or five days depending on the family. In the bazaar, girls are expected to stay in

their rooms. But in villages, they are still kept in *goth* for the entire time. But things are changing slowly.

Rights of Children

We also inquired about the rights of children. Respondents described a number of rights, which we coded into four subthemes: rights to activities, rights for provision, freedoms, and protections (see Table 5). Respondents were most likely to describe rights for provisions such as education, love and affection, medical treatment, safety and security, and basic needs: *gās*, *bās*, *kapās* (food, shelter, clothes). Protections were the least frequently reported.

A male Bahun politician from a central district in Nepal suggests,

Whether the children (*ketākeṭi*) are used for manual labor in any harmful conditions, be it in any wars or any domestic work, even if they are paid, children should not be used and should be protected by the government. But because of the instability, lack of elected government, and the inability to hold the constitutional assembly elections, the government has not been able to do its basic duties. (Koenig and Kohrt 2009)

Children and Violence

We asked participants about children's predisposition to violence. The majority of the participants (76 percent) reported that children were naturally non-violent; only two persons reported that children were violent by nature. There was a range of reasons provided for why children may be violent (see Table 6). Frustration and the inability to fulfill one's desires were the most commonly reported. Interestingly, this was also the most common reason given for psychological trauma in children (see below) and in adults (Kohrt and Hruschka forthcoming). Many of the other causes for children's violence related to socialization, e.g. type of family upbringing, watching others being violent, and having an overly-strict family or a neglectful family. Thus, based on this sample of individuals, the general perception was that children are naturally non-violent, but through bad upbringing, exposure to violence, and the inability to fulfill their needs, children become violent.

Participants also cited differences in socialization as reasons for gender disparities in aggression.

Boys (*ketā*) are more aggressive than girls (*keṭi*) in our culture. Boys are praised—not always with outward praise, but with other types of praise—for their aggression. Girls are scolded for being aggressive and they are

Table 5: Rights of Children

Subthemes	Codes	Percentage
<i>Rights to activities</i>		
	Right to play	29%
	Right to learn	19%
	Right to recreation	14%
<i>Rights for providing</i>		
	Providing education	38%
	Providing love and affection	38%
	Providing medical treatment	24%
	Providing safety and security	24%
	Providing for basic needs (good nutritious food, shelter, and clothes: <i>gās, bās, kapās</i>)	24%
<i>Freedoms</i>		
	Freedom to live as one chooses	29%
	Freedom to pursue one's dreams	14%
	Freedom to express feelings and emotions	10%
	Freedom to practice the religion of one's choosing	5%
<i>Protections</i>		
	Protection from child labor	14%
	Protection from torture	10%
	Protection from oppression	10%

forced to suppress their anger and aggression. Girls have to suppress their anger within them, whereas boys are encouraged to show their anger. (Key Informant #21: 39-year-old female Bahun teacher in midwestern Nepal)

Similarly, one of the causes mentioned by a former child soldier for aggression was, “the inability to control or hide one's anger.”

Participants were asked about the type of violent acts committed by children. We specifically inquired about non-conflict related forms of childhood violence. Participants explained that children beat one another, steal, use foul language, and run away from home. Some respondents described childhood violence attributed to accidental causes. For example, one girl hanged her sister and accidentally killed her. An accidental death occurred when a boy was imitating the Dashain ritual animal sacrifice while playing with his brother. The boy's younger brother was pretending to be the goat. Unfortunately, during the

Table 6: Children and Violence

Subthemes	Codes	Percentage	
<i>Children as naturally violent or non-violent</i>	Non-violent	76%	
	Violent	10%	
<i>Causes of aggression</i>	Being unable to fulfill one's desires; frustration from not meeting one's personal expectations	33%	
	Family upbringing	14%	
	Social learning and watching others being violent	14%	
	Overly strict family (excessive scolding by parents; child not allowed to what he/she wants; too many rules and regulations in the home)	10%	
	No care or support from family or community	10%	
	Effect of religion	5%	
	Heredity (inherited aggressive trait from parents)	5%	
	Not properly socialized into society/lack of social problem-solving skills	5%	
	Boys are more aggressive than girls because of socialization	5%	
	Being unable to control or hide one's anger	5%	
	<i>Types of violent acts committed by children</i>	Beating one another/ beating other children	29%
		Stealing	14%
		Using foul language	10%
Running away from home		10%	
Attacking others with any type of implement (sticks, rocks, dishes)		10%	
Accidental happenings		10%	
Drug abuse		10%	
Attempting or committing suicide		5%	
Destroying objects (non-living things)		5%	
Taking revenge on others		5%	
Killing birds		5%	
<i>Impact of violence</i>		Affects the heart-mind (<i>man</i>)	14%
		Affects the brain-mind (<i>dimāg</i>)	38%
		Affects both the heart-mind and brain-mind	57%

imitation, the boy killed his younger brother. Participants described children's engagement in drug abuse and suicide attempts. Often these were connected. In one community, there were a series of three suicides in succession when teenage boys drank alcohol and then killed themselves.

We also asked participants to describe how violence fits into the ethnopsychological framework of emotions and cognition. Thirty-eight percent of respondents reported that violence affects the *dimāg* (brain-mind) while only fourteen percent reported that violence affects the *man* (heart-mind). The majority of respondents said that violence affects both the *man* and the *dimāg*. This is in keeping with other research findings suggesting that the *dimāg* regulates aggression and socially acceptable behavior, and that anger, aggression, and violence, are socially unacceptable and signs of being *pāgal* (mad, crazy, psychotic) (Kohrt and Harper 2008).

Children and Psychological Trauma

The next objective was to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of psychological trauma among children. From the interviews we identified three subthemes within this domain: events that cause trauma, expression of trauma, and the impact of trauma on wellbeing (see Table 7). Being blocked in one's desires and goals was the most frequently endorsed cause of trauma, as was lack of freedom. Frustration in achieving one's goals was also seen in a study among adults (Kohrt and Hruschka forthcoming). Experiencing unforgettable events (*birsana nasakne durghaṭanā*) was also reported. In our work with adults and among persons seeking clinical care for psychological trauma, we found that this phrase "*birsana nasakne durghaṭanā*" was the most salient marker of traumatic exposure. Exposure to violent events was also reported: bombings, domestic violence, seeing blood, and parental abduction.

The behavioral manifestations of trauma included sharing feelings with others and crying. A number of introverted behaviors, occasionally identified as signs of *dimāg* (brain-mind) dysfunction were reported: staying alone, not talking to others, and refusing to eat. Externalizing manifestations were mentioned: getting angry easily, screaming, being disobedient, and breaking objects such as toys. Two participants reported

Table 7: Children and Psychological Trauma

Subthemes	Codes	Percentage
<i>Events that cause suffering and trauma</i>		
	Preventing fulfillment of a desire	24%
	Violence at home (domestic violence)	19%
	Lack of freedom	19%
	Experience of unforgettable events (e.g. bombings at school)	14%
	Being reprimanded by elders in front of peers	10%
	Parents having a serious illness	10%
	Physical abuse; being beaten	10%
	Death of a parent	10%
	Being neglected	5%
	Seeing blood	5%
	Fainting	5%
	Parents being abducted	5%
<i>Children's expression of suffering and trauma</i>		
	Sharing feelings with parents, other relatives, friends, and neighbors	43%
	Crying	38%
	Getting angry easily	19%
	Staying alone	14%
	Not talking to others	10%
	Screaming	10%
	Creative expression (keeping a diary, writing and reciting stories and poems, singing)	10%
	Refusing to eat	5%
	Being disobedient	5%
	Breaking toys and other objects	5%
<i>Impact of trauma on child well-being</i>		
	Feeling frustration and anxiety	24%
	Hampers their physical and mental development	19%
	Leads to suicide	10%
	Negative impact on the heart-mind	10%
	Becomes unnecessarily fearful	10%
	Juvenile delinquency	10%
	<i>Hinatā bodh</i> (inferiority complex)	5%
	Learning difficulties	5%
	Feeling of insecurity/unsafe	5%

that children also express their traumatic experiences through creative outlets: writing in diaries, telling stories and poems, and singing songs.⁵

Participants also described their perceptions of trauma's impact on child wellbeing. Trauma leads to feelings of frustration and anxiety. Trauma hampers physical and mental development, has a negative impact on the *man* (heart-mind), and leads to feelings of inferiority and insecurity. It may also contribute to juvenile delinquency and even suicide. One former child soldier explained, "Nowadays, I don't do anything. I don't have interest in doing anything because *man piroli rahancha* (I have unceasing anguish/anxiety in my heart-mind)."

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to explore conceptualizations of childhood, child development, and the impact of violence on children with the hopes of developing more locally appropriate understandings to guide psychosocial interventions for child soldiers and other children affected by conflict rather than operating with Western-derived putatively universalistic models based on childhood ending at 18 years of age. Our study suggests that the main difference between the 18-year cut-off and the models in Nepal is an external person-independent model of adulthood versus of person-dependent model in Nepal. The person-dependent model is one in which the transition from childhood to adulthood is dependent upon a person achieving certain characteristics such as emotional maturity, cognitive and decision-making maturity, physical maturity, and/or other forms of responsibility. Thus, adulthood is not an intrinsic quality of all persons above 18 years of age.⁶ Rather, adulthood is something that one achieves through meeting certain markers of maturity. Thus, an individual may be considered an adult at 14 years of age while another may be in their late twenties when they demonstrate these characteristics. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a single marker of adulthood. This series of behaviors and practices may be judged in isolation or more often as a constellation of features.

⁵ Desjarlais (1991) has written about the practice among the Yolmo of Helambu wherein distress is expressed through "songs of sadness" which need to be considered within the local context of appropriate social displays of emotion and experience.

⁶ It is likely that if one interrogates lay concepts of childhood in Western countries one would find that quotidian social interactions do not directly map onto 18-year cut-offs for treating individuals as children versus adults.

While rituals play a part in this transition, they are not hard and fast markers of adulthood.

The findings from our study add to prior studies of aggression in Nepal and elsewhere. In a study of childhood and aggression in four cultures, the authors found that Newar boys had the highest levels of aggression (Munroe et al. 2000). They found a significant gender difference between boys and girls, with Newar girls showing relatively low levels of aggression. Moreover, the authors found that aggression among Newar boys was most common when adults were not present. Bista (1991) also suggests that socialization against violence does not occur in some Nepali groups:

As a rule there are no prohibitions upon violent behavior among children. Yet, violent behavior is not common. When it does happen the child is not specially warned, but instead parents usually defend their own children regardless of what they have done. Quarrelling is usually verbal. Children are notoriously mischievous, and such mischievousness is actively encouraged by adults other than parents, who see such behavior as being particularly “cute” or appealing. Such inconsistency eliminates any sense of the real appropriateness of behavior, and undermines any genuine sense of authority. There is no moral pressure or guilt feeling regarding immoral acts, because there is little sense of morality instilled in children: a sense of social responsibility is simply not internalized and social sanctions are only effective in an external form (Bista 1991: 67).

In contrast, for girls, there is significant socialization against aggression. The finding in our study of girls learning to mask anger has been described in a number of psychological studies among different ethnic and caste groups in Nepal. Cole and colleagues (1998, 2002, 2006) have shown that as Nepali children (especially girls) age, they increasingly mask their anger. In contrast, American children in Cole’s studies increasingly display their anger with age. Cole and her colleagues hypothesize that this may be related to the emphasis on social cohesion in many Nepali groups. In contrast, in American culture, there is emphasis on independence with age and the value of social harmony and cooperation is often neglected.⁷ This raises questions about interventions to help reduce violence related to children. The cultural conceptions of

⁷ In both the United States and Nepal there is tremendous ethnic heterogeneity, regional variation, and socioeconomic disparity. While some cultures in the US value independence over social collaboration, the converse is also present. In Nepal, there is also likely significant variation within these socio-psychological developmental niches.

the origin of violence among children as discussed here may provide some starting points.

These findings reflect other issues raised by prior studies of child development in Nepal. The socially-dependent markers of adulthood in part may be associated with the finding that self-esteem among Nepali children is more associated with interdependent and collectivist conceptions rather than being an isolated aspect of the individual (Watkins and Regmi 1999). The importance of cognitive development and time of maturation may show regional variation. Although we did not assess conceptions of childhood and adulthood by ecological zone, a prior study has suggested that plains versus hills ecological zones may contribute to different types of cognitive styles (Sinha and Shrestha 1992). The manner in which this impacts child development will need to be explored in future studies.

The study has a number of limitations. Of the 21 participants whose responses were coded, 66 percent were male and 57 percent were Bahun. Thus the findings are biased toward the perspectives of upper-caste men. The conclusions therefore give a general sense of the hegemonic ideology of the dominant group. However, the findings do not give a representative picture of how other groups perceive childhood and the effect of violence. Further analyses and studies are necessary to explore how other groups perceive childhood and the effects of violence. Pettigrew's (2007) ethnographic work on the experience of Tamu-mai children in the People's War provides a rich description of changing childhood behavioral patterns in a different ethnic population. In our other studies with child soldiers, we found that child soldiers living in communities that are homogeneously Hindu have much poorer mental health and psychosocial outcomes compared with child soldiers returning communities that are more religiously heterogeneous mixing Hindu, Buddhist and other groups. Therefore, one may expect that models in these communities deviate from the models present by Bahun males here.

One of the areas unexamined in this study is the relationship of categories of youth, teenagers, and adolescents. This study focused on the category of child because that is the target group and language employed by international and local NGOs. However, increasingly terms for youth are employed in different domains – very often political domains.⁸

⁸ See other articles in this special issue by Snellinger, Evans, and Zharkevich for in-depth discussion of these linguistic categories and social roles, which play an increasingly prominent role in political actions and organizations.

Liechty (1995) examined the issue of modernity in relation to youth and specifically the construction of “teenagers”/“teens” in Nepal in the early 1990s. Liechty followed the development of this new social classification. However, Liechty convincingly argues that usage of the term did not develop as a specific marker of adolescence or even an age marker. Rather, the term “teen” came into dominant use to demarcate a specific social identity that occurred in relation to capitalism and consumerism marketed to a group with new purchasing power—the teenage children of middle class urban families in Nepal. A second use of the term was to refer to a new deviant group: urban boys who engaged in traditionally taboo behavior for their age including doing drugs and having sex. Liechty’s work, as well as that by Pettigrew, Snellinger, Evans, Zharkevich and others raise questions about what new application of terminology will occur to describe former child soldiers in post-war Nepal. Interestingly, many personnel at the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) began to adopt this age-based terminology by using the phrase “under eighteens” for “child soldiers” rather than employing the term “children” (Koenig and Kohrt 2009). Ultimately, one of the shortcomings on the humanitarian movement is the failure to investigate implications of services for youth soldiers versus child soldiers.

The findings presented in this paper have implications for child soldier reintegration and psychosocial support. While child support programs currently are restricted to individuals under eighteen years of age, local models of childhood are not fixed to one specific age group. However, the goals of child-focused humanitarian groups and local frameworks do not need to be mutually exclusive. A more culturally-grounded approach to understanding childhood may improve the quality of child-focused humanitarian support. We propose that common ground can be found at the intersection of humanitarian psychosocial frameworks and local models of childhood.

Local models identify individuals as children who are unable to take on responsibility, who display inability to regulate emotions, and who are unable to function well in the social milieu. Similarly, the goals of psychosocial programming are to assist former child soldiers who have psychological and social impairments in functioning – impairments that overlap quite well with the local definitions of childhood with regard to poor emotional and social behavior. Thus, we would advocate that programming should not be administered on the arbitrary cut-off age of eighteen years. Instead, we would propose that programming should be based on screening individuals who are locally identified as children and

demonstrate impairment in emotional regulation, assuming responsibility, and social functioning. This would lead to some individuals who are under eighteen and have good psychosocial functioning not receiving services because they are already doing well. This would cut down on wasted resources assisting persons who are already successful in reintegration. However, the programming would be expanded to include individuals who may be older than eighteen years old but still display poor psychosocial functioning. Currently, those individuals do not receive any services. Further justification for supporting these individuals is that many of them were associated with armed groups in Nepal in their early teens, but because they were over eighteen years of age in 2006, they did not receive any reintegration support.

A screening approach to services rather than one defined solely according to the category of childhood is crucial in the multi-ethnic, multi-local, multi-linguistic, and highly migratory behavioral context of Nepal. Programs based solely of the categorization of childhood, even if it is adapted to local definitions, would run into difficulty when individuals move between communities or in multi-ethnic communities that may have competing models, including newer frameworks based on children's rights discourse. Therefore, screening approaches based on needs and impairment would be needed to address this heterogeneity.

Ultimately, if humanitarian and psychosocial interventionists are dedicated to supporting those most in need, the definitions of vulnerable conditions must be developed in collaboration with local stakeholders based on local ethnopsychologies. Then, inclusion in support programs should be based on screening for these vulnerability criteria rather than using chronological age as the penultimate determinate of status. A strong foundation in human development and cross-cultural ethnopsychology reveals that age is only one proxy—and a poor one at that—for understanding well-being.

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