

Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research 20

Marc Grimm
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Children and Adolescents in Times of Crises in Europe

 Springer

Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research

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Editors

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Introduction: Children and Adolescents in Times of Crisis in Europe

Keywords Children; Youth; Crises; Socialisation

It remains to be seen whether the concept of crisis is currently experiencing a boom or if it will become permanent and generalised. The fact that *crisis* does not appear to be so much an anomaly but increasingly a description of conditions that are less and less frequently considered as not crisis-ridden speaks for the generalisation and perpetuation of the term. Crisis, the deviation from the norm, has become the new norm.

It is hard to deny that the media attention economy of our information society has contributed to this development. This interpretation alone, however, falls short, for the term has become generalised – almost universal – even in academia: euro and financial crisis, migration and refugee crises, European crisis and crisis of democracy, gender crisis, ecology crisis, the list goes on. The allusion to a generalisation of crisis rhetoric points to a problem: Even subject areas such as child poverty, which are considered to be highly relevant to all parties, are in fierce competition for attention.

The anthology uses this description as a starting point to gather perspectives on crisis-related childhood and adolescent research in all its complexity. There has been a limited amount of research on this subject which has not, however, been institutionalised in terms of research contexts, journals, and/or other forums. The contributions collected here demonstrate the high social relevance of a crisis research aimed at the effects of crises on the living conditions of children and adolescents. At the same time, however, inconsistencies and open questions are identified which, from our perspective, make it necessary to address the design conditions of crisis diagnoses and make a proposal for a structured analysis of crises (effects).

Current State of Research

Purely impact-oriented research, such as that presented by UNICEF (2014) and similar work on political attitudes, economic embedding and health inequalities of children and adolescents, are among the few works which address the subject area of childhood and adolescent crisis research.¹ In the context of crises, children and adolescents unfortunately occupy a position on the periphery of academic research. Nonetheless, the existing approaches indicate that there is an empirically based need to address crises in educational science.

That this subject is still rarely found in childhood- and youth-related social research is, so to speak, not purely coincidental. Two interwoven, metatheoretical developments are at play here. On the one hand, there is a forced trend in the perspective on children and adolescents which sets out to understand the social world through the eyes of children and their micrologic environment (Qvortrup et al. 1994; Alanen 1988, 1997). This important shift in perspective, which began in the 1980s and came into force in the 1990s, heralded a necessary epistemological expansion of the prevailing class-specific or structural-deterministic research. However, there are still doubts as to whether the resulting paradigms can fulfil the promise of an integrated observational research, because the inclusion of self-activity unfortunately led to the overemphasis of subjectivity, which left social structural contexts underemphasised or not emphasised at all. The complex objects in the world that reach beyond the immediate environment, even though society itself extends into this environment, cannot be fully accessed or revealed from the perspective of the subjects. Thus, hypostasised phenomena are limited to microprocesses, in which social developments, dynamics and aggregations remain hidden.

The two discursive tendencies, the *epistemological self-limitation* and the associated *subject-related limitation*, form a double, mutually dependent suppression which embraces perspective and subject matter and threatens to suspend the penetration of complex social phenomena. When the perspective is limited, the subject is not completely understood; if the subject is not covered in its entirety, the perspective remains incomplete. Against this background, it seems no accident that polymorphic, ubiquitous and complex social crises have so far failed to achieve an educational approach.

The adoption of the socialisation paradigm was symptomatic for the tendencies to one-sidedness. However, the outlined research of the last three decades has developed against (!) the key word ‘socialisation’ (Bühler-Niederberger 2018). In a categorically sociological version of around 1900, this concept proclaimed socialisation (‘making social’) in a downright political way, removed self-activity from the anthropological equation and was interested in social order and the reproduction of society.

Nevertheless, this sub-complex definition does not do justice to the term socialisation. The socialisation paradigm has undergone many enhancements and amend-

¹ See Grimm et al. 2018 for a comprehensive overview.

ments and been assigned many theoretical foundations which barely retain the basic features of the early years (Hurrelmann 1983; Zinnecker 2000). Socialization research has long not simply been observing processes of “becoming social” or “socializing,” but focuses mainly on the dispositions formed by social conditions, which then structure society (Bauer 2004; Ertugrul, Chap. 1 in this volume). In this respect, the socialisation paradigm announces a necessary corrective which promises to examine the social formation and development of individual dispositions – and at the same time is open to larger structural contexts, such as crisis phenomena. This does not speak for a concluded metatheory but rather insists on the depiction and inclusion of a social reality, discursively formed and materially manifested, which inscribes itself into the dispositions of the social actors.

As a result, current research still needs to catch up in terms of content as well as in terms of the clarification of theory and methodology with regard to childhood- and youth-related crisis research. Due to their generational position, children and adolescents are directly and indirectly confronted with crises via adults in a multitude of ways. The productive and latent processing of crises forms thought, actions and perception patterns which are socially structured and directed towards the world as know-how.

Complex Crises

Crises are neither purely material nor purely discursive phenomena; rather they unite both material and discursive aspects, which must be analysed separately and in their interaction with one another. We therefore propose an analytical breakdown, because the literature shows that hardly any distinction is ever made between the discursive and material aspects of crises (cf. Grimm et al. 2018).

The four-level analytical breakdown proposed by us allows for a structured subject area and a systematic investigation of crises. This proposed reference framework establishes possibilities and boundaries of the thinkable. The concept was designed in such a way that it allows a broad, complex and, as it were, precise discussion of the phenomenon of *crisis*. The level model enables the naming of material crisis phenomena. We separate the immediate effects of crises from the state reactions to crises which can, as such, be separated neither from the effects of crisis nor from the discursive level. Crises in particular can be thought of as both discursive and material events. Finally, the question arises as to how crises are processed by the subjects and how this is connected with the material and discursive level.

Of course, these levels are not unrelated to each other. Social reality is spatially and temporally concrete. The levels we have separated for analytical purposes represent the separate parts of *one* reality. Therefore, the levels can be separated analytically, but reality obscures this artificial division. Segmentation differentiates and allows access to levels whose relationships establish a complete understanding. The importance of the individual components for the whole is more than just a summary equation. It requires relational work, which makes interdependencies,

repulsion or recuperation apparent. The complexity of the phenomenon crisis is reflected in the diversity of the contributions which are systemised on the basis of the proposed level model. This model shows the multilayered, complex facets of the phenomenon and the possibilities of a crisis research aimed at children and adolescents.

The Contributions

The first thematic block brings together contributions which provide research-practical and theoretical answers to the (epistemological) challenges of childhood- and youth-oriented crisis research.

The contributions in this section first pursue this topic from a theoretical, methodological or epistemological perspective. **Baris Ertugrul** questions and compares the sociological theories of Emile Durkheim, Harold Garfinkel and Pierre Bourdieu according to their ability to provide information on crises in connection with children and adolescents. It is shown that the theories diverge epistemologically and in their focal points of observation, although the power to visualise social or dispositional order relationships is inherent to the concept of crisis in all three theories. Bourdieu's theory of habitus dissolves the oscillation between objectivism and subjectivism, for which Durkheim and Garfinkel emblematically stand, and takes into account not only social structures but also the perspectives of the actors. With this metatheoretical course of action, a childhood- and youth-related crisis research is outlined which should gain validity as habitus research. Crises are understood analytically as changing material conditions of existence and environmental conditions to which habitus is exposed and within which they are structured and structurally directed towards the world.

Ullrich Bauer explains in his contribution how a follow-up on childhood- and youth-oriented crisis research can take place in a methodologically complex way. He attempts to harness Bourdieu's late research perspective on the 'misery of the world' and considers the possibilities of replication for childhood and adolescent research. The result is a suggestion to take the important content of Bourdieu's discourse seriously and to attempt to understand crisis structures from the subjective perspective as a product of relationality. This approach, which is aligned with Bourdieu's thought praxeology, is oriented on the modes of perception of children and adolescents. At the same time, it attempts to capture the dominant structures which imprint the individual dispositions. As a result, an invitation is presented for the childhood- and youth-related replication of perhaps Bourdieu's most important empirical work, which allows a childhood and adolescent perspective to include, with crises, a subject of the current diagnosis of the time and thus take on a critical self-positioning.

Baris Ertugrul and **Marc Grimm** address epistemological questions of qualitative child-oriented crisis research in their contribution. The authors discuss the relation between subjectivity and society and explain this understanding based on

interviews with children and adolescents in Germany which revolve around the topics of migration and (distributive) justice. At times, the interviews show that distributive justice today is thought of in quite contradictory terms. At the same time, there are positions which speak in favour of meritocratic concepts of justice, which are also consequently used to argue harshly and demandingly in relation to refugees. In the same interview, the same adolescent expresses a disengaged empathy with refugees. The authors' interpretation is that this 'on the one hand describes national problems as crisis-ridden and acute, and on the other hand relativises those problems in the global context almost to insignificance, and grants pity and unconditional help to refugees'.

The contributions in the second thematic block focus on the effects of crisis.

Christina Lübke analyses whether and how parental self-perceived job insecurity induced by economic crisis influences the vocational development of their adolescent children. The analyses, based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, revealed that adolescents whose parents were worried about their job stability are more pessimistic when asked to estimate their likelihood of being unemployed, their likelihood of being professionally successful and of getting ahead later in life. After controlling for socio-demographic factors of the parents and for the children's previous success in school, which represents their objective opportunities on the labour market, the intergenerational effects of parental job loss worries remained significant in multivariate analyses.

Almudena Moreno Mínguez reviews relevant studies on family change and child well-being and how they problematise the effects of economic crisis on the material deprivation of children. The results point to a clear influence on the material and subjective well-being of children based on the type of family in which they live and parenting styles. Mínguez also points out the moderate effects of economic crisis on child well-being and children's perceptions of material deprivation.

Brigitte Schels, Hans Dietrich, Anette Haas, Angelis Vasilis and Annie Tubadji investigate changes in the poverty risks of 18- to 29-year-olds in Greece and Germany after the Great Recession. The authors discuss the two countries as examples for different welfare state regimes, Germany as an example for a conservative welfare state and Greece for a sub-protective welfare state. After 2008, Greece was one of the European countries to experience a particularly hard economic recession. In contrast, the consequences of the recession in Germany were weak and only of short duration. Given these different contexts, the authors investigate the differences in young people's poverty risks and similarities across place and time. The authors draw on results from descriptive analyses, multivariate regression and decomposition analyses which show that the level of severe material deprivation was much lower in Germany than in Greece over the total period. Among other things, their studies show that the employment intensity of the household is the major influencing factor in both countries. In both countries, the associations between the employment intensity of the household and income poverty seem to be stronger than between employment intensity and severe material deprivation.

In the following contributions, the perspective shifts from the effects of crisis to policy responses and public discourses on crisis.

Roland Atzmüller, Fabienne Décieux and Alban Knecht analyse the expansion of educational and social policy activities for preschool children and adolescents and the orientation of these activities on future employability and human capital formation as a moment of the polarisation of welfare systems. It does so by focusing on recent changes in (early) childcare and the transition phase from education to vocational education and training (VET) and employment in Austria. They argue that these changes are linked to wider trends of capitalist social formations which have been experiencing a period of crisis-ridden transformation since the 1970s and which culminated in the financial crisis of 2008/2009 and the subsequent sovereign debt crisis. Drawing on Claus Offe's conceptualisation of welfare states and social policies as a form of crisis management, through which societies cope with the dysfunctional and destructive effects of accumulation and market-driven change, the question of whether the expansion and contentual reorientation of educational activities and social policies amount to a new form of crisis management is raised.

Maksim Hübenenthal focuses on the child poverty discourse in Germany and how it is framed by crisis rhetoric. Hübenenthal concludes that child poverty can be described as a discourse that consists of four different social constructions: virtue, educational, monetary and rights poverty. Whereas the virtue poverty construction refers to crisis as economic crisis, the educational poverty construction focuses on a structural crisis. In the monetary poverty construction, crisis is seen as a capitalism crisis, and the rights poverty construction, through its critics, is linked to the refugee crisis. The diversity of the child poverty discourse in the political field is seen as an indicator for its 'double political character'. On the one hand, different social constructions compete with each other in the struggle to define what child poverty is and how it can be solved. On the other hand, the child poverty discourse functions also as an arena, where other discourses try to gain influence in order to expand their power. Hence, there is a need to strengthen childhood and child poverty-related questions within welfare state research and to expand the analysis of political processes within child poverty research.

Alexandra Kaasch explores the question of the way in which attention is given to the social situation and needs of children in the context of the global economic crisis. She asks about the key actors (i.e. international organisations) that engage with the needs and rights of children. This includes the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The organisations are compared as to the different roles children are given, and to what degree, in global social policy discourses in the context of the global economic crisis.

Andreas Heinen, Jean Philippe Décieux and Helmut Willems investigate the political discourse on youth in the aftermath of the economic crisis. Based on the EU Youth Strategy, the article analyses how the concept of youth is shaped by political discourse and agenda setting. The authors show that the EU Youth Strategy is highly focused on activating young people as entrepreneurs who are supposed to

become active and productive members of the society. They argue that the Strategy represents specific meanings about young people and thus reframes the concept of youth as a ‘entrepreneurial-self’.

The anthology is rounded off with two contributions which address the question of how social crises are perceived by children and adolescents and interpreted in their own environment. **Eva Mey, Miryam Eser, Milena Gehrig, Garabet Gül and Isabelle Steiner** focus on a cohort of working-class immigrant children born in Switzerland between 1990 and 1991 and their transition to adulthood, based on empirical data derived from a qualitative longitudinal study. They elaborate on how the economic crisis of 2008/2009 and its economic, political and social consequences are reflected in and have distinctively shaped the biographies of the so-called second generation in Switzerland – thus of adolescents who grew up in ‘rich’ Switzerland as children of parents from the ‘poor’ south. They create a picture of a contradictory basic constellation between meritocratic promise and unequal opportunities and experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination. In this situation, the intensification of policies and discourses on immigration have *strengthened the insecurities* experienced as a politically, symbolically and/or economically marginalised person in Switzerland. At the same time, the prosperity and security gap between the country of origin and the host country – further strengthened by the latest economic and political developments – presents a *binational comparative perspective* that suggests and makes possible the positive evaluation of life in Switzerland.

Triggered by the Syrian civil war, the number of people seeking refuge in Europe due to war or poverty has increased and peaked in 2015 with 1,090,000 applications for asylum (2016, 320,000).² The question of whether the Federal Government’s policy was correct has polarised German society and in 2018 led for the first time to the entry of a right-wing populist party, the AfD (12.8%), in German parliament. In this context, public discourse in Germany has shifted to the right, and racist, anti-Semitic and historical revisionist positions are now being discussed as if they were legitimate opinions. Against this background, **Marc Grimm** explores the question of how children and adolescents regard the issues of migration and xenophobia, which political developments they fear and how they see their personal future affected by these developments. For this purpose, Grimm analyses quantitative studies: the current 17th Shell Youth Study (Albert et al. 2015), the Calmbach (2016) as well as two recent studies, the TUI Foundation Youth Study (TUI Foundation 2018) and *Generation What?* (BR et al. 2017) coordinated by the European Broadcasting Union. The author combines the results of the study into a picture which allows statements about the attitudes of adolescents in Germany on issues that are central to right-wing populism.

The Children and Adolescents in Times of Crisis anthology offers perspectives and orientation in various social fields where diverse crises have had a devastating impact on children’s and adolescents’ well-being, their future (perspectives) and

²Numbers of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, cf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/663735/umfrage/jaehrlich-neu-registrierte-fluechtlinge-in-deutschland/>

society in general. In light of this, we would like to structure the debate and offer perspectives and orientation in a complex field of research. With this anthology, we plead for the establishment of a childhood- and youth-related crisis research.

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Contents

Part I Methodological Challenges of a Child-Oriented Crises Research

- 1 **Theories for a Childhood and Youth-Related Crisis Research** 3
Baris Ertugrul
- 2 **Crises and Future Expectations from the Perspective
of Children and Adolescents** 17
Ullrich Bauer
- 3 **Epistemological Questions of Qualitative Crisis Research.
Exploring the Attitudes of Children and Adolescents
on Migration and Meritocratic Ideas of Society** 29
Baris Ertugrul and Marc Grimm

Part II Impacts of Crises

- 4 **Insecure Right from the Start? Socialization Effects
of Parental Self-Perceived Job Insecurity** 45
Christiane Lübke
- 5 **Child Wellbeing: From Crisis in Families to Crisis of Welfare** 63
Almudena Moreno Mínguez
- 6 **On the Extremes: Poverty of Young Adults in Greece
and Germany (2008–2012)** 81
Brigitte Schels, Hans Dietrich, Anette Haas, Vasilis Angelis,
and Annie Tubadji

Part III Policy Responses and Public Discourses on Crises

- 7 **Transforming Children and Adolescents in Human Capital.
Changes of Youth Policies in Post-Crisis Austria** 107
Roland Atzmüller, Fabienne Décieux, and Alban Knecht

8 The German Child Poverty Discourse and its Rhetoric of Crisis. . . . 125
 Maksim Huebenthal

9 Global Social Policy on Children in the Global Economic Crisis. . . . 143
 Alexandra Kaasch

**10 Policies of Crises in the European Union Youth Field:
 How a Political Agenda Shapes the Concept of Youth. 157**
 Andreas Heinen, Jean Philippe Décieux, Helmut Willems,
 and Elke Murdock

Part IV Subjective Processing of Crises

**11 The Second Generation in Switzerland in Times of Crises:
 Biographies Between Meritocratic Promise and Experiences
 of Inequality and Insecurity. 175**
 Eva Mey, Garabet Gül, Miryam Eser Davolio, Milena Gehrig,
 and Isabelle Steiner

**12 Attitudes of Children and Adolescents in Times of Crisis:
 Empirical Findings from Germany Between 2015 and 2018 193**
 Marc Grimm

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Part I
Methodological Challenges
of a Child-Oriented Crises Research

Chapter 1

Theories for a Childhood and Youth-Related Crisis Research



Or: Empiricism Seeks Theory: A Speed Date

Baris Ertugrul

Introduction

Not only Europe has been confronted with numerous crises during the past two decades. After the financial crisis of 2007, whose negative effects can still be felt today, we are faced with the refugee crisis, the political crises over a shift to the right, Brexit and Catalonia, which are burning themselves into the collective memory of Europe. The crisis narrative often used here suggests a threat or, at the very least, serves the pessimistic diagnosis of the times in everyday communication.

However, the vague use of the term must not obscure social reality. With reference to “multiple crisis” (Demirović et al. 2011), which indicates the particular culmination of grievances, one can find empirical correlates in different fields of observation with regard to children and adolescents in compiled data. Various research reports are used for this insight: The considerable data from the UNICEF study *Children of the Recession* shows significant results. Rightly considered, this is the most well-founded overview of the effects wrought by the financial crisis of 2007/2008. The UNICEF report from 2014 provides information on how children and adolescents in many countries have been embedded in work, education or school and are affected by deprivation and poverty since 2008 as a result of the European financial crisis (UNICEF 2014). Health-related studies also illustrate how children and adolescents are affected in times of economic crisis phenomena. For example, the *International Network for Research in Inequalities in Child Health* (INRICH) presents a systematic review of data (Rajmil et al. 2014) which shows that infant mortality and stillbirth rates are increasing in crisis-ridden countries, along with the costs of healthy food, unhealthy lifestyle choices (nutrition, etc.) and

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