Children and Adolescents in Times of Crises

Editors: Marc Grimm, Baris Ertugrul and Ullrich Bauer

Background and framing

The concept of crises is currently in vogue. There is a broad discussion about the impact of crisis that is often associated with effects of social disintegration but the concept of crisis is even broader. Various social areas such as ecology, economics, and migration are considered as being crisis-ridden. There is also a gender crisis. And the EU, which suffers from a lack of political trust, finds itself in a state of crisis like never before. As such, *crisis* obviously describes strongly divergent phenomena, from the collapse of the gross domestic product to the loss of political trust.

Crisis has become something like a diagnosis of an era, in which development differences and empirical differences are overlooked – despite or precisely because the crisis diagnosis has become an instrument for political purposes. A close examination of the different approaches to crisis research draws the conclusion that a differentiated perspective is rarely taken; most research treats *crisis* as a given fact without further theoretical explanation.

In fact, there is still very little data available that makes a concrete analysis of the consequences of crises-induced changes on the living conditions of children and adolescents possible, nor on their well-being, future expectations, health or educational opportunities. Empirical data indicates that increased suicidality or the reduced use of the medical care system by families from vulnerable populations is the result. For example, in a systemic review paper (Rajmil et al 2014), data provided by the International Network for Research in Child Health (INRICH) on the impact of crisis indicate that childhood mortality rates increase during crises, as does the percent of unhealthy lifestyles and family child abuse. It is striking that the living conditions and life chances of vulnerable and resource-poor population groups are disproportionately are disproportionately impacted by crises in a negative way. Also, on the basis of a systematic literature review, Karanikolos et al. (2016) elaborate that the social costs of economic scarcity have a direct impact on health status and on health care, even in high-income OECD countries. This especially applies to the increasing rate of mental illness, access to health care or the consumption of legal and illicit drugs.

Crises and upheavals are to be viewed as a complex phenomenon. The diagnosis of a general *crisis* appears to be of little analytical value. Rather, it is necessary to carefully analyze what is considered a crisis and the impact of crisis, with a focus on the interrelation of crisis and the living conditions of affected populations. This will lead to the possible identification of complex

and paradoxical developments at the macro level. These include the analysis of the increased rate of materially deprived children and young people in Europe, while in Germany (as well as in Austria and Switzerland, and to some extent in Portugal and other countries in southwestern Europe) youth poverty declined between 2008 and 2012.

Cohort studies and life history studies show a similar need for differentiation. Glen Elder, one of the pioneers of social psychology research on the impact of crises on individual biographies, measures the effects of deprivation experiences against the background of previous experience and individual dispositions. Elder (1974) demonstrates in a reconstructive cohort study that the influence and perception of crises (here the Great Depression of 1929 ff. in the USA) depends on the age and the living conditions of those affected. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is as much a pioneer of crisis and transformation research as Elder is. He developed a similar perspective from the 1960s onwards by looking at societies that undergo transition (Algeria of the 1950s). Here, for the first time, Bourdieu observed the interrelation between social structures and habitus, which characterizes his later work. In the confrontation between traditional and capitalist living conditions, Bourdieu analyzed how different habitus and dispositions respond to changing demands of life management. This perspective on the transformation of social structures and the inertia of the habitus is a ground-breaking example of Bourdieu's social theory. At the same time, it is a pillar for the analysis of humans coping under conditions of social transformation. In fact, there are few theoretical framings which deal with this complexity (e.g. do anemia and anomie diagnoses usually concentrate only on negative effects of social changes?).

In summary, today's research is heterogeneous, empirically oriented, undertheorized and demonstrates many inconsistencies. In light of this, the *Children and Adolescents in Times of Crises* anthology would like to attempt to structure the debate and offer perspectives and orientation in the many fields of society where diverse crises have had a devastating impact on people's well-being. This requires a specific approach: Social research with a clear standpoint that reaches beyond the regular audience of scientific articles and which is founded on the conviction that knowledge of mechanisms which produce material and symbolic domination may lead to a realistic program for collective action. Therefore, there is a need to discuss the causal social and political mechanism that resulted in crisis, to document the impact of crisis, and to engage in public discourse.

We want to narrow the discussion to children and adolescents. To date, there is reliable data only regarding the impact of the 2008/2009 economic crisis on the well-being of children and adolescents. Beyond that, reduced scope research on crisis-induced effects on children and adolescents is a desideratum, not only because this group is seen as especially vulnerable. Furthermore, a genuine perspective of children and adolescents is not available, neither about the changes in their living conditions or about the change in perception of public discourse on

crisis, future expectations or the cohesion in societies which children and adolescents may articulate.

Focus of contributions

It is obvious that the debate on crisis needs to consider the set of challenges crisis research is confronted with.

Firstly, crises are very material in their consequences. This is most obvious in the impact of the 2008/2009 crisis on Greece. The Greek government reacted with an austerity policy which had dramatic consequences for well-being and health, especially of the poor. The short-term impact of healthcare privatization, for example, was a decrease in mental health and an increase in the suicide rate, child mortality and still-births. What does this mean? It means that crises are material in their consequences. Yet at the same time, the term crisis is a means to force interest. It highlights topics, generates attention, and demands that the discourse on crisis be considered. Which topic is framed within crisis rhetoric and who are the addressees of the crisis diagnosis?

Here is an example of why the discourse is relevant: The inhuman conditions under which many people in Asia and Africa live *are not crisis-framed* because the crisis diagnoses always aim at a particular audience and a certain order that is perceived as threatened. Hunger in Africa could be referred to as a crisis, as a deviation of the norm on a global scale, but it is not. We are provided with material conditions that would allow us to refer to them as a crisis, but we do not. And we find a crisis discourse that frames topics in rhetoric which lack a material crisis. The obvious reason is that it requires political or social power to put certain topics on the political agenda. And that explains the lack of a perspective that takes into account those affected by misery and exclusion.

Secondly, the case of Greece tells us that there is no *immediate* impact made by crisis. What we saw in Greece was a specific political reaction to an economic crisis, namely austerity politics. Selling austerity politics as a necessary reaction to the economic crisis is itself a political strategy that needs to be challenged. For crisis analysis this means the need to *analytically separate* the *crisis, state policies as a reaction to it* and the *impact of crisis*. The analysis of crisis is therefore confronted with a series of challenging tasks. The crisis-framed social system must be considered. Then, political practice and rhetoric in response to the crisis must be analyzed in order to be able to judge the appropriateness of the political means that were applied in reaction to the crisis.

Thirdly, it seems promising to focus crisis research on the subjects: on capabilities, attitudes and dispositions of individuals. As individual dispositions are shaped by the social

circumstances in which people live, research mediates societal changes and individual characteristics. Furthermore, this will allow us to analyze how subjects process social changes.

A reflexive crisis research needs to objectify crisis and to analyze *what* is referred to as crisis by *whom*, *how*, *for what purposes* and with *which* implicit or explicit solutions. Which order is considered to be threatened? In this view, crisis is then neither material *nor* constructed, but the analysis must focus on the process of how crisis is constituted as a material fact.

Objective of the book and call for proposals

We invite scholars, practitioners and members of NGOs from different fields to contribute articles to reflect the diversity of the current discussion on crises. The articles can take up the perspectives we have sketched above and may focus on economic crises, but we explicitly invite articles which go beyond that scope and topic. We ask the contributors to link their reflection of crisis/crises to the living conditions, attitudes, life patterns etc. of children. This focus is chosen because it touches upon a sensitive aspect of the debate: the question of the concrete social impact of crises and the question of how crisis affects the social integration of this group and the attitudes it holds.

We ask for articles with a maximum length of 40.000-50.000 characters which should be submitted by 31st January 2018.

Researchers are invited to submit a 300-500 word proposal outlining the content and aims of their chapter on or before 1st October 2017. Authors will be notified of their acceptance by 20th October 2017.

Submissions and inquiries should be sent to Marc Grimm (marc.grimm@uni-bielefeld.de) and Baris Ertugrul (baris.ertugrul@uni-bielefeld.de).

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