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Book Reviews


This collection of authors will be familiar to those working in the field of refugee children's services in the United States. The mental health issues discussed do not stray far from that focus. While not written for use in other countries, it still provides a body of relevant information regarding children, mental health and refugees that could be useful in emergency settings. The title suggests a purely theoretical approach, but the book itself is divided into three fairly practical and applicable sections on Theoretical Overview, Research Studies and Services and Treatment Issues. The most informative comes at the beginning of the book with a thoughtful and well written overview of mental health issues for refugee children by the editors, Jean Athey and Frederick Ahearn.

The Theoretical Overview starts with reference to the early Freud and Burlingham studies of children in 1943, under the heading of “Stress and Coping”, then moves on to the “Refugee Family and Child Development” and then the “Larger Community and the Refugee Child”. Within these three areas such topics as trauma, loss, deprivation, coping, culture and social relations are touched on. Following the review, John Berry’s theory of acculturation is presented; while it is generally applied to the integration of refugee families into host countries, the basic premise of how minority groups are integrated and/or isolated from the mainstream culture, is certainly applicable where refugees are seeking asylum, even temporarily, within a larger, host country. Third in this presentation of theoretical approaches is a timely discussion of child abuse and maltreatment definitions within a cultural context and a view to cross-cultural examination of such events.

As stated in the chapters on Research Studies, the amount of research available on the emotional and social adjustment of refugee children is quite limited. This section focuses on three different countries, the first of which examines the many variables influencing adaptation of Indo-Chinese adults and their adolescent children. These variables are then assessed for their effects on psychological distress. This is followed by a study of Cambodian children, documented as having experienced massive trauma and the resulting effects over time. The third study looks at the correlation between levels of exposure to violence prior to arrival in a new country and how present stress adds to the difficulties of Central American
children. Subsequent chapters on stress, trauma and adaptation are useful in the repetition of recognisable behaviours of children within different cultural settings.

The final section concerning Service and Treatment is understandably focused on provision of services within the United States. However so little has been written to date on mental health services for refugee children that the chapters presented will be of interest to anyone working with refugee mental health. Joseph Westermeyer's chapter on psychopathology among refugee children is a good example of identifying emotional problems within a cultural context, emphasising the need to always work within a cultural framework. The case examples illustrate this point, and he concludes with an interesting presentation of a model treatment programme, again pointing out that "therapeutic modalities are not uniquely culture-bound". Finally the brief presentation on pharmacotherapy and adaptions of therapy for different cultures stimulates important questions concerning such methods, especially within an emergency setting.

The information of service delivery in "Recovery and Rebuilding" is difficult to translate from resettlement to emergency settings but it includes interesting points for service providers to consider in their overall approach to children, families and linkage within a community. The book closes with a reminder of the importance of continuing efforts to research, document and prepare information on the crucial role the community and family play in children's survival under extreme trauma and stress.

"Survivors are the bridge between the past and the future. Their experiences have given them a view of life to be shared in order to spur personal and social change. They are the voices that challenge complacency and the denial of reality as they know it" (Families After Trauma, Moffat and Moffat, 1984).

Reviewed by Jan Williamson, International Consultant for Refugee Children's Programmes


One might question the relevance of a book written in the United States to the developing nations of Africa. Yet the appalling reality of poverty and violence in US inner-city public housing projects portrayed by Alex Kotlowitz, a writer for the Wall Street Journal, is far closer to life in the impoverished, civil war-torn areas of some developing countries than most Americans would imagine or admit.
The book follows the lives of two brothers in a family of eight children over a period of two years, beginning from when they were nine and twelve years old. They live in a Chicago public housing project where their mother also grew up and now struggles as a single parent to feed, clothe and protect her children from the hostile environment surrounding them (an estimated 85% of households in the project are headed by single women). The project, located one mile from the city’s prosperous business district, remains, in many respects, isolated and abandoned. Stores and homes stand in physical ruin, often serving as headquarters for gangs and drug dealers; shoot-outs are such a common event that mothers constantly fear for their children’s lives.

Against this backdrop of urban poverty, chaos, cultural isolation and unpredictability, the author plays out the struggle of children exposed to almost unrelenting violence as they seek some sense of normality in daily routines of going to school, playing with friends, and finding some quiet space within themselves and their families for hopes and dreams to begin to grow. Despite the despair felt at the bleak social issues raised in this book, the author manages both an empathetic and hopeful portrayal of individual lives, focusing on the resiliency and sheer stamina of the main characters of the book, Pharaoh, Lafayette and Lajoe Rivers.

Throughout the book the author refers to statistics regarding American inner cities, particularly Chicago’s predominantly black housing project areas. One in five children in the United States lives in poverty, according to the Children’s Defence Fund (a lobbying group for children in the USA, with the numbers increasing to one in three children in cities like Chicago. Unemployment is officially reported at 19%, though unofficially, it is considered to be much higher. Lack of employment is partially due to businesses moving from inner city areas to more suburban locations, indirectly contributing to youth involvement in drug and alcohol use, gang violence and drug-related crime.

88% of the population in inner-city Chicago is black and 46% lives below the poverty level. According to the author, Mother Theresa of the Missionaries of Charity was so appalled by such conditions that she established a soup kitchen, a shelter for women and children, and a children’s after school programme, following a visit to Chicago.

The author’s discussion of the public school system is sobering. Up to 93% of students enrolled in inner-city schools in Chicago are black; most schools are extremely over-crowded, some requiring two sessions per day to accommodate enrolment. Between 50-75% of freshman students (first-year secondary school) never make it to their senior year and graduation. In 1985, senior reading test scores (of those who did make it) were in the 18th percentile nationwide. Some schools are so violence-ridden that plastic utensils are used in cafeterias, and security guards are employed to protect both students and teachers.
In reference to reasons for high school drop-out rates, the author discusses teenage pregnancy, involvement in drug-related gangs, the lack of belief in the value of formal education, and low expectations of both parents and children.

Some solutions to the problems of inner city youth are presently being explored by the Chicago Commons Association, a local social service agency that includes an expanded literacy programme, a drug rehabilitation centre for young mothers, and gang and drug prevention programme for children up age 17, called “Better Days for Youth”.

In getting to know the Rivers family through the voice of the author, one senses a remarkable quality of hope and resilience in marked contrast to the overall setting of despair. The boys’ (Lafayette and Pharaoh’s) family is unusual in that their mother, Lajoe, has remained married to the same man who has fathered all eight of her children, regardless of the fact that they have not lived together consistently. One of the boy’s cousins, Dawn supported by Lee Rivers, has graduated from high school. Although the married mother of four by age 17, Dawn is seen as a model for the rest of the family. Lajoe has placed high value on education for her children and had been a steady, caring mother, instilling a sense of responsibility and hope for the future in her children, despite the odds against them; she is counting on them to ‘make it’.

The two boys, Lafayette and Pharaoh, are described as very different in character and in response to their life situation.

Lafayette, the older of the two and eldest of the younger five children appears to be a fairly sober and serious child, turning inward in the face of violence and despair. He has chosen to limit his friends, fearful that he could easily be drawn into a gang like his older brother. He has become involved in community service projects through the Boys Club and sees himself as a strong support for his mother. (One way he copes with disappointment and fear is by cleaning the family apartment).

Pharaoh, on the other hand, is portrayed as a dreamer and an achiever. He seeks quiet places to sit, even a small square of grass outside a building, or along the railroad tracks. He has developed a stammer (stutter) that becomes pronounced in threatening situations; yet, in spite of this, has done well in school and came in second in a school-wide spelling competition, emulating his cousin Dawn. He has also won a scholarship to a summer camp.

So, in spite of the inhumane qualities of inner-city life in Chicago, the author has managed to portray a most human and compelling life story of a resilient family without romanticising or down-playing their struggle. This is a book well worth reading in regards to urban poverty, racial inequality and violence, as well as the demonstrated resilience of individuals living in high-risk environments.


Drawn from a collection of papers presented at a conference on the psychosocial needs of refugee children, and sponsored by the International Catholic Child Bureau in September 1991, this ambitious volume only partially succeeds in its attempt to address an area in pressing need of attention. Despite the volume’s weaknesses, it offers many bright spots and will prove relevant to those directly involved in refugee-related work and also for those concerned with broader emergency relief programmes and community development efforts.

The volume’s three sections are loosely organised around the following themes: (1) the context of intervention; (2) strategies of intervention; and (3) the response of the international community. Given the diversity and quality of the papers, including the conflicting points of view contained within them, an overview or preface to each section would have enhanced and strengthened the material’s presentation. For example, one paper advocates a priority in “targeting” children, first and foremost when developing intervention strategies. In sharp contrast, another paper explicitly states “there is need to support mothers first”. Missing is an attempt to articulate and synthesise such differing positions, which, at the field level, generate substantially different programme objectives and priorities.

Introductory remarks to each section would also allow for discussion of the liabilities inherent in generalising about “refugees” or “camps”, etc, which appear in some of the papers. That there can be enormous diversity between refugee camps, even within the same camp over time, is well-established. Factors such as the make-up of a particular camp’s refugee population (the degree of ethnic and cultural similarities or differences), the nature and conditions of refugee “flight” (anticipatory versus overt crisis), whether the camp is “open” or “closed”, the style and approach to camp administration (eg trained social workers in Zimbabwe as contrasted to military and police personnel in Hong Kong), the availability of material resources, and the nature of the services and programmes offered by various organisations within the camp, are examples of the factors that contribute to such diversity. These factors should temper the tendency to generalise about “the refugee experience”, etc.

The opening chapter, which is one of the strongest, provides a review of relevant information on child development, including the area of risk research. Issues such
as the impact of cumulative risk factors, the difference between being exposed to acute versus chronic danger, and the role of adaptive coping styles, as contrasted to those more maladaptive in nature, are well-presented. That the chapter draws upon general child development research and examines its implications for the refugee context is a salient point. It brings into clear view the paucity of original refugee research that has focused on the time frame prior to the stage of final, third country, resettlement. A more thorough review of the basic methodological problems in doing refugee research would also have been helpful, as such issues as sampling, language, instrumentation and the need to consider ethical problems (eg valid informed consent, confidentiality, etc) are not adequately considered.

The concerns noted above are illustrated by comparing a few findings on Mozambican children in two different papers in the volume. Specific to Mozambican children’s exposure to violence, one author reports that up to 35% of children had either witnessed, or knew someone who had been murdered. In contrast, a second paper states that 77% of children had been witness to such atrocities. Similarly, the first paper states that up to 8.4% of children had been forced to be combatants, while the second paper provides a much higher figure of 28%. A more in-depth discussion highlighting the differences in methodology, including where and how the data was collected (a refugee camp in Zambia as contrasted to deslocado communities within Mozambique), the marked contrast in the findings, and how these differences impact on programme development would have been fascinating. One senses that a rich debate must have been generated by the paper presentations during the conference, a debate not reflected in the book.

In summary, this collection of papers as a whole strongly supports the position that the psychosocial needs of refugee children, in the context of their families and communities, are intrinsic to healthy growth and development. As fundamental needs, they require both clear articulation and a genuine programme response within large relief and emergency efforts that tend to focus too narrowly on the delivery of food, shelter and medicine, etc. The book also succeeds in emphasising the importance of understanding, supporting and building upon the strengths and inherent coping capacities already existing within the refugee community. Such a perspective naturally leads to a high degree of refugee participation in establishing both the priority areas to be addressed and, of equal importance, the nature of the programme delivery developed to meet expressed needs. The volume’s flaws serve as a catalyst, helping point out the specific areas in need of applied research and more well-developed intervention strategies.

Reviewed by Kirk Felsman, sub-Regional Advisor, Children and War Program, Save the Children Federation (USA), Harare, Zimbabwe

This is not a book for the casual reader or for those allergic to sociological "inspeak". The book's message is not reassuring: Kilbride and Kilbride offer a bleak prognosis of the risks that women and children increasingly face in modern East African society, and they offer impractical and weak conclusions on how to redress the problems they so convincingly characterise. Kilbride and Kilbride are social anthropologists with more than 20 years contact with the same communities in Uganda and Kenya (thus their advocacy of fieldwork methodology of the "repeated visit" type and they have produced here a very solid, if turgid, contribution to understanding the current predicament of the African child and woman. The book has significance for anthropological theory, as well as for the development worker engaged in working with women and children in modern Africa. It is strongly recommended. This review will address itself to the development worker.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part the authors describe their theoretical orientation (Interpretive Framework) and methodology (using the phrase "Interactive Ethnography" instead of "Participant-Observation"), but reiterating their commitment to structural-functionalism. They posit their theme of delocalisation (the process whereby old village-based agrarian economies become incorporated into and dependent upon the modern national and international economies) and the particular predicament and increasing vulnerability of women and children in this process. For Kilbride and Kilbride, modernisation has produced a move from a "genuine" culture towards a "spurious" one; their intent is to show that "moral erosion" is threatening children with child abuse and neglect, in a hostile modern environment where the extended family is under siege.

In the second part of the book, unfortunately the shortest section, the authors offer a few examples of pregnancy, childrearing and childhood experiences. This section is not the standard anthropological description of rites of passage and quaint exotic customs; rather it provides a backdrop for what is to follow in the third section. Given the Kilbrides' undoubted rich ethnographic experiences, this section is disappointingly short and does not offer the smorgasbord of experiences that the preface would have the reader expect. They are especially successful in depicting the socialisation of the young and in defending the importance of mothering and affective experiences. In particular, the sixth chapter has valuable discussion of birth and infant mortality, the infant's home environment, clothing, food practices, infant care practices, and a fascinating discussion of comparative infant sensorimotor development.
The third part of the book is the “meat” of the book: in this section Kilbride and Kilbride describe the role that industrialisation, nationalism, missionary activity, formal education and a monetised economy are playing in marriage and family life, and argue that the process of cultural and moral delocalisation is now well underway. This section begins with a chapter on the increasing powerlessness of women, especially on the predicament of the bar-girl in Kampala. The second chapter in this section dwells on the alarming phenomenon of pre-marital pregnancy and the challenge it poses to the extended family. Kilbride and Kilbride include here a very pertinent discussion on the role of grandparents in relation to their grandchildren and also the increasingly precarious role of the extended family in modern marriages. This is followed by a chapter on polygamy and the economic and social tensions and threats which this presents to women and children. The Kilbrides successfully depict the increasing strain and friction within polygamous homes and the moral disorientation that now surrounds polygamous marriages in modern East Africa. This is followed by the penultimate chapter of the book which dwells expertly on the issue of child abuse and neglect. The book concludes with a summary chapter on women and children at risk.

The Kilbrides propose that a solution to the problems they have described resides in an acknowledgement of three basic principles: that power differentials between individuals, social groups and nations exist and that those with this “power” have a responsibility that comes with such influence; that all action to redress the problems should be intra- and cross-cultural; and that a universal perspective must be an integral part of any resolution. Their specific conclusion is that there must be a “convergence of interpretative frameworks” and that socioeconomics, feminist theory and child-centred ideology should be combined and harnessed to resolve the problem. For the Kilbrides the answer lies in a “locally derived child-centred Africanaity”. This tantalising idea that whets the appetite is, unfortunately, never satisfactorily explored and is only articulated through the partial reporting of newspaper editorials: the reader is left feeling disappointed that this “Africanaity” is not investigated more thoroughly.

There are, moreover, inevitably in a book of such scope, some glaring omissions. One searches in vain, for example, for a more profound insight into coping mechanisms that are presumably currently evolving in the urban context for single mothers or, even more crucially, for more than a cursory mention of the implications of AIDS on the situation of children - especially in Uganda. In particular, the rather forced conclusion serves to detract from the work as a whole. Academic anthropologists might also take issue with some of the theoretical positions inadequately described in the first section. The book’s limited conclusion and the excessive sociological jargon notwithstanding, it is highly recommended reading, especially for those interested in grappling with the difficulties and complications
that besiege the African family, and the enormous and growing threat that African children are currently confronted with. Most important, the authors give a welcome and unequivocal emphasis to a child-centred perspective that encompasses all aspects of what we normally think of as “development work”.

Reviewed by Gerry Salole, former Southern Africa sub-Regional Director, Save the Children Federation (USA).


Through the use of composite vignettes based on extensive interviews with 60 girls and boys, ages 12-22, Gillian Straker brings into clear telephoto view some of the psychological struggles of youth engaged in the fight against apartheid during the mid-1980s in Leandra, South Africa.

Straker’s analysis seeks to shed light on the diversity of trauma experienced by youth, to explore the self-perception of youth, and to examine the psychological resilience and vulnerabilities of the youth within a war context. In addition, she addresses the important question of whether violence begets violence.

The book represents scholarly, clinical research done in the real world. The method is a qualitative case-study approach involving over 300 hours of audio tapes. The vignettes themselves are masterful compilations of individual experiences. An initial reading of the appendix serves to orient readers concerned with methodological issues. The experiences of the youth, which form the basis of Straker’s analysis, are presented in six well-organised chapters. The theoretical underpinnings are wide-ranging, from the political analysis of Fanon (1963), to the mythological focus of Campbell (1956), to more psychological theories of behaviour and group process (Slater, 1966; Anthony, 1987; Bion, 1961).

Following violent confrontations with authorities in the Leandra Township, a group of youth fled to the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre seeking shelter. The author was part of a counselling team called on to provide services to the youth. The data were collected during the initial stay of the youth at the Centre and during follow-up interviews conducted with 40% of the youth three years later. Straker’s focus is on the individual and psychological, the boys and girls; nonetheless, she is careful to stress the powerful impact of war and poverty on the psychological development of these youth.
Through her eyes we come to see the force exerted by the context on their lives and behaviour (Chapter 1), their own unique individual resilience (Chapter 2), and vulnerabilities - vulnerabilities which some seem unlikely to escape (Chapter 3). We see Ricky, Isaac, Pretty, Silas, and others like them, as individuals, members of both functional and dysfunctional families, leaders, followers, freedom fighters, opportunists, casualties, victims and survivors of trauma and poverty. We come to understand the youth, some of the issues faced by the staff of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre and group process as it unfolds within the Centre.

As other researchers have pointed out, children, regardless of the roles thrust upon them by war, are still children and need nurturance, protection and guidance from the family, community and state. We are reminded that as adolescents, these youth must face developmental issues of identity formation, individuation and belonging, but they must do so in a context that simultaneously demands of them the integration of opposing peacetime and wartime identities.

Straker articulates several groupings of the youth based on multi-modal reference points: observations of the youth by staff, counsellors and other youth; self-perceptions by the youth concerning their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour; and their reflections on these at follow-up three years later. Her analysis is compelling. She has integrated relevant psychological literature without losing sight of the experiences of the youth under study. This makes the book solidly-grounded and, importantly, highly readable and accessible to a wide audience.

The groupings distilled from the data highlight the range of meaning that may be given to objectively similar acts of violence in the context of war and the complexity of understanding the psychological effects of violence on youth. While the topologies of groupings are a point of departure and will help to guide future research, it is clear that they are fluid categories; Straker rightly avoids the tendency to simplify rich experience into tightly-bound categories or topologies.

In Chapter 6 Straker focuses on the future and the need for healing. There is a tone of guarded optimism and an informed awareness of the need for multi-modal interventions that build and support the family, community as well as the youth as individuals. Deep changes will need to occur on social and political levels if the root causes of conflict and racial hatred are to be truly addressed. South Africa must educate itself in tolerance and peace.

An urgent question, and one which Straker herself briefly addresses in the final chapter, is the need to systematically examine the effects of violence and racial hatred on South Africa's white youth. These are issues that necessarily verge on the political. However, as researchers, practitioners and professionals we must be careful as we investigate the victim's responses, not to perpetuate unwittingly the acceptance of a violent system, by not being equally attentive to the destructive consequences of violence for all members of a society.
In summary, true to its purpose, the book provides a striking view of the faces in the revolution. Through the particulars, Straker provides insight into the general, which both enriches the field at a theoretical level and guides it at the level of clinical and community intervention. Her analysis inspires us to action and conveys the reality that there is plenty of work to be done as mental health workers, researchers, social service workers, policy makers, and community activists.

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Reviewed by Joan W Duncan, Professor of Psychology, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York.


This book introduces the reader to the situation of refugee women from various parts of the world and the problems that they face and on a day-to-day basis. She ‘sets the scene’ by introducing the reader to the whole question of the refugee problem and also gives statistics on refugees. The second chapter addresses the crucial issue that faces any refugee: the changing of roles that occurs when people move from their own countries or homes. The third chapter focuses on what can be done to provide safety to refugee women, including obtaining refugee status.

The fourth and fifth chapters focus on the provision of basic services such as food, water and education and the involvement of refugee women in economic activities. Chapter six looks at what the author calls “durable solutions” for those who have been forced to leave their homes, and the options that are available to them. While some refugees are lucky to be resettled in other countries within their regions, some find themselves in developed countries where they have to cope with new ways of living. The author successfully draws attention to the problems that these refugees may face. Finally she outlines what the United Nations bodies have
and are doing to assist refugee women. She also provides a list of international organisations that are involved in work with refugees.

Throughout the book the author stresses the need for refugees to participate actively in decision-making in all matters that affect their lives and she sees their participation as a tool which can empower refugee women to sustain development. She manages to capture the lives of refugee women vividly and highlights the common, but untalked about problems that refugees experience, such as sexual harassment and rape. However, because the author addresses many issues she does not go into a lot of detail on these. Her ability to suggest solutions to some of the problems makes her book very useful to anyone interested in work with refugee women. The book is written simply and her case studies enable the reader to conceptualise and appreciate the problems that women face. I view it as an eye-opener and hope that anyone involved in development work will have a chance to read the book which covers the gap that was existing in as far as literature on refugee women is concerned.

Reviewed by Perpetua Gumbo, Director of Fieldwork, School of Social Work, Harare


This book is a unique collection of eight articles about homeless children in the United States of America. The relevance of this book cannot be overstated as homelessness is a growing problem in all societies; developed, developing and underdeveloped. It is more so in the latter two where resources are usually meagre. The authors have viewed homelessness and its impact on children from several perspectives. Each author presents a professional discourse of the phenomenon of homelessness and caps this with recommendations on policy and practical intervention. Thus, this book is ideal for use by field workers and policy makers tackling the issue of homelessness and in particular homeless children.

In the first chapter Leanne G Rivlin sets the tone of the book by presenting an analysis of the impacts of various forms of homelessness on children and the meaning of personal space and personal place in the lives of children. Rivlin outlines the significance of the environment to children’s social, emotional and cognitive development. The author takes the reader into a discussion of the powerful and enduring impacts that environmental experiences have on children, considering implications of shelters, welfare hostels and street environments to children’s welfare and lives. The author offers the concept of attachment to place and underlines the direct functions of attachments, stabilising children’s lives and rationalising their stimulation and preventing alienation.
The second chapter explores the specific psychological effects of growing up in shelters and welfare hostels and discusses various coping strategies that homeless children have developed to adapt to the stress of homelessness. The authors present quantitative and qualitative data resulting from psychological measures and assessments conducted on homeless children in Massachusetts. They make an interesting conclusion that emergency sheltering facilities exacerbate the children’s existing problems and create new ones. This should provide food for thought to emergency relief agencies who provide shelters to deslocado communities in the Zimbabwean context.

In the third chapter, the reader is taken through the experiences of children on the move, a transient group of children and their families or friends who are moving across the country and are not yet living in shelters. This group of homeless children live in vehicles, buses or train stations and is highly mobile, changing location more often than the sun’s daily changes in horizontal position. The authors, Hall and Moza, conclude their article outlining intervention strategies and implications for policy, public education and short and long-term solutions that address the economic, social and psychological needs of the homeless.

In the fourth chapter, Boxxill and Beaty challenge the reader to reconsider conceptions of mother-child relationships among homeless women and their children. The authors describe how the delicate and important dyad of mother and child is affected and distorted by shelter-living, volunteer and “professional” intervention. This brings to fore the critical usefulness of the concept of popular participation in programme planning and implementation. Boxxill and Beaty conclude their article with concrete recommendations based on data obtained through participant observation and phenomenological inquiry.

The fifth chapter by Wright takes the reader away from psychosocial issues to the physical health problems of homeless children, youth and women seen in the National Health Care for the Homeless Programme (HCH) during the Programme’s first year. Homeless people stand out as being more ill and children suffer from chronic physical disorders at about twice the rate of occurrence among similar ambulatory patient populations. Wright attributes the health problems directly to the conditions of a homeless existence.

The sixth chapter by Rosenman and Stein focus the reader on concrete programme problems and public policy failures. The authors describe the great hardships and inadequacies created by under-funded, less coordinated and politically unpopular programmes for homeless children. The authors highlight the various social service needs of homeless children and they present recommendations for effective intervention. They emphasise the need for a national policy to address the problem of homelessness.
In the seventh chapter, Battle explores poverty in the context of homeless women and children and how national policy has affected the lives of families in the United States. The author takes the reader on a journey tracing social welfare policy from Elizabethan Poor Laws through the New Deal, the War on Poverty and up to Reaganomics. Battle notes that national social welfare policy has over the years either succeeded or failed to alleviate the plight of the poor because of socio-political factors in the United States at different points in history. This brings to fore how powerful interests may water down policies and programmes with noble intentions.

The eighth and final chapter by Connolly caps the volume by looking at the lifestyle of street children in two of South America’s cities. The author offers a moving discussion of a comparison of street children in Bogota, Colombia and Guatemala City. Connolly concludes the chapter by suggesting a national policy review to avoid a similar scenario in the United States. The chapter provokes serious thoughts and raises critical comparative analysis. The reader is forced to consider how Zimbabwe is different from the Latin American countries that Connolly writes about. In Zimbabwe there are already indications that street children are a growing phenomenon and the critical question is and will be: what is our response to street children?

The volume raises moral questions about societal responses to homelessness, distribution of resources and national policy formulation. It offers concrete solutions to how and why we should respond to homelessness. However we must all agree that children are not "watchers and waiters". Children are active participants in the biggest game called life. We need to appreciate the role children play in influencing the final outcome of the "game".

Reviewed by Backson Muchini, former Field Coordinator, Children and War Program, Save the Children Federation (USA), Chambuta Refugee Camp, Zimbabwe.