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ABSTRACT
        This paper presents a cultural and historical
analysis of the continuously increasing number of children and
childhoods at risk, using a population perspective framework. Two
major claims are presented. First the conditions of children and
childhoods in the West, compared to the patterns of child-care in
India, Japan and many other non-Western societies demonstrate the
relative separateness of children from the adult world of the family
and community. Second, recent global transformation edging towards
greater modernization in the developing countries and toward
post-industrial transformations in the developed countries are
introducing new risk conditions to children's well being. For
example, the recent changes in the family and society in the West may
have pushed the conditions of children to extreme forms of
psychological risks, while in the majority of the non-Western world,
the high risks children encounter are to their physical survival. In
conclusion, the paper suggests that human development must be seen as
determined by multiple contextual and endogenous factors and the
notion of developmental risks must be seen through not only a
psychological perspective, but also through cultural beliefs and
practices which tend to be socially, economically, and historically
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Culture and Childhood Risks:

A Population Perspective

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Culture and Childhood Risks: A Population Perspective

Children and Childhoods At Risk - The discourse of 'lost' or 'stolen'

childhoods is prevalent in many parts of the world today. The theme of children as

victims of exploitation, starvation, violence, and abuse is much too frequent to need

elaboration (Lerner, 1995; Stephens, 1995; Weissbourd, 1996). The more pressing

question is, what are some of the antecedents and consequences of such social and

cultural conditions? Thus, a cultural analysis of children and childhoods at risk is

highly relevant for mental health practitioners.

Sharon Stephens (1995) has observed that certainly in the Euro-American

world, there is a radical change underway in the very definition of childhood.

"The theme of lost childhoods includes not only physical assaults and threats to
children's bodies, but also the threatened spaces of an ideally safe, innocent and
carefree domain of childhood. Postman argues, for example, in The Disappearance of
Childhood (1982) that the decline of American childhood as a protected space within
the family began in 1950, as an 'age of literacy' began to give way to an 'electronic
revolution'. The inculcation of family values in the home and community values in the
school gave way to an uncontrolled invasion of children's minds by market-driven
media images and globally circulating signs. With this invasion came the loss of
childhood innocence, and especially of sexual innocence" (p. 9).

The population perspective represents an ideal framework for the analysis of

children and childhoods at risk. What is a population perspective? A population

perspective is at once cultural and historical. It is cultural in that it studies synchronic

structures and practices of a group of people and historical in that it examines

diachronic change related to demographic shifts in the human population. Child and

adult development experts concern themselves mostly with species-specific and person-

specific characteristics. Most psychological theories advance claims about the human

species in terms of individual differences on the basis of population-specific observations. However, a population level analysis is central to understanding the variation in human adaptation.

Population level differences in sociocultural organization and behavior are characteristic of most human groups. Basic adaptive patterns such as subsistence, reproduction, communication, and social hierarchy, are highly variable across human populations (LeVine, 1990). Population units themselves tend to be highly variable and not as easy to define as organisms and species. Although variable in scale, complexity, and stability of boundaries, all population units are interactional networks, consisting of mating and other communicative processes. Such networks exist in the contemporary world at the local, national and transnational level. A population generally shares an environment, a symbolic and communicative framework for encoding it, and a sociocultural organization for adapting to it. Its features are recognizable in local beliefs and practices, "reinforcing its centripetal tendencies in reproduction and communicative processes and propagating a population specific code of conduct that reduces random variation in the ways members live their lives" ⁻.19).

From a population perspective, the following lessons are evident. Sociocultural variations in children's environments, recognizably a major research interest among developmentalists, can offer valuable insights about the ontogenesis of predisposition to behavioral and social risks by highlighting the value of social groups in children's development. Furthermore, the constructivist notions about normative development modified to reflect the developmental pathways in different cultures must alter our

notions of deviance in both at risk and the general population. Finally, the changes in the demographics of the family in the West (e.g. smaller households, maternal employment, changes in reproductive technologies), are culture-specific features impacting the domestic sphere, especially when compared to families in many non-Western societies.

The central claim of this paper is as follows. First, the conditions of children and childhoods in the West, when compared to the patterns of child-care in India, Japan and many other non-Western societies demonstrate the relative separateness of children from the adult world of the family and community. This separateness is traceable to the rise of modern ideas about childhood in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe and America (Aries, 1963; DeMause, 1988). Second, recent global transformations edging towards greater modernization in the developing countries and towards post-industrial transformations in the developed countries are introducing new risk conditions to children's well being (Stephens, 1995). For example, the recent changes in the family and society in the West may have pushed the conditions of children to extreme forms of psychosocial risks (Lerner, 1995), while in the majority of the non-Western world the high risks children encounter are to their physical survival (LeVine et al., 1995). An analysis of children's lives needs to consider these population level differences in order to fully understand the social and cultural construction of childhood risks.

'Risk' as a Cultural Category - Modern and post-modern societies have an interesting notion of risk. The terms such as 'disability', 'developmentally delayed',

'maladjusted' and 'vulnerable', suggestive of at risk populations, have often been associated with the 'culture of poverty'. Thus, the usage of the term 'risk' becomes problematic when applied across cultures and ethnic groups. Categories such as 'abnormal', 'deviant' and 'at-risk' are most useful when applied reflexively. Linguistic categories organize thought, communication and social reality. Constructed in local contexts, social categories often carry specific meanings that can be misused when transferred to other domains. Historical trends make this clear. New categories or trends adhere to deep structural divisions in the socio-political order which are hard to change and are resorted to during times of social transformations. The category of the 'abnormal' is one such term which now has a slightly benign or neutral cast in what are known as populations 'at risk'. In Western cosmologies the 'abnormal' has been associated with the 'sinful', 'irrational', 'less developed', 'uncivilized', 'primitive', 'a disparaged group' or 'the other' (Foucault, 1977). Children have been the target of most of these attributes within Western societies and continue to be in many parts of the world (DeMause, 1988).

Approximately hundred years ago, children in Europe and America were defined by the absence of adulthood, seen as incomplete, in process, as minors, and as 'newcomers', worthy objects of study (Mead and Wolfenstein, 1953). "Just as most children's lives do not reflect the enormous importance we accord childhood today, the child of history stands paradoxically at the center of human priority and at its margin" (Safford and Safford, 1996, p. 1). The conditions of children's nurture continue to be determined by adult reasons, whether cultural, economic, and political, which may

explain why children would be easily marginalized and readily blamed. While historical change may have introduced new parenting, educational, socio-economic and health conditions, children's nurture is still conditional and problematic. Exogenous influences on children's bodies, selves and minds today are unprecedented in their age of onset, their rapidity and their content (Stephens, 1995). Yet, old themes persist although towards different ends, means and targets (Safford and Safford, 1996). Groups of children continue to be at 'exceptional risks', having various learning disorders, defined by cultural utilitarian paradigm specific to industrialized societies. While child-killing, especially by a parent has been seen as a horrific crime in all times and places, the abandonment of children and the murder of newborn infants is practiced even in the most advanced societies. Although rare in industrialized societies, folk or religious practices and beliefs often serve as the primary basis for attribution of childhood physical and psychological dysfunction to the natural and supernatural world, whether the causative factors are associated with past lives or evil spells in one's immediate environment.

The marked change in the perception of children as separate beings, the rise of childhood as a stage preceding adulthood, followed by movements to eradicate child abuse, neglect, and servitude crystallized in eighteenth to nineteenth century Europe and America. By the middle of the nineteenth century an ideology of childhood had become a powerful force in middle-class Europe and North America, consisting of a firm commitment to bringing up children in families, an acknowledgment of childhood determinism and an awareness of children's rights and privileges (Archad, 1993;

Cunningham, 1995). Almost a century later, the conditions of children are witnessing yet another major shift, related to an unprecedented globalization of the modern notions of the child and due to structural changes impacting the family in the West. In the industrialized and the developing societies, there is a growing concern about the 'disappearance of childhood' as the discourse of child abuse, victimization, exploitation, and abandonment proliferates (Lerner, 1995; Stephens, 1995; Weissbourd, 1996).

Contemporary concerns with 'at-risk' populations suggest that groups who are often psychologically, socially and politically depressed are most likely to be classified as predisposed to risk, weather it is ethnic children in the U.S. or children of migrant laborers in the developing countries. The term 'prevention', while borrowed from the preventative medical model, when carried over to the sociocultural domain may similarly classify groups of people as congenitally violent, permiscuous, and poor. Mary Douglas (1992) has accurately noted, "The theme well known to anthropologists is that in all places at all times the universe is moralized and politicized. Disasters that befoul the air and soil and poison the water are generally turned to political account: someone already unpopular is going to be blamed for it" (p. 5). In other words, every risk needs someone to blame. This 'forensic theory of danger' tries to explain misfortune in at least three ways: in the form of self-criticism as self-blame; in the form of in-group criticism where some already disparaged group is scapegoated; and by projecting criticism on an out-group. These three types of blame lead to different forms of justice. While communities tend to be strongly aligned along one of these

systems, most societies employ all three forms of blaming simultaneously.

Individualistic cultures unlike hierarchical cultures value a market orientation to social goods (Douglas, 1990). All ideas, practices, and people are valued in relation to what they are worth in the marketplace. Since children cost more than they produce, they often receive a lower priority. Further, whereas in hierarchical societies the differences between the high and low social strata are not masked, in individualists societies such differences are easy to do away with because theoretically they do not exist. While a hierarchical society discriminates openly, where a well organized minority consciousness is evident, in an individualist society where 'all men are created equal' and everyone ought to succeed on merit, minority consciousness is fragmented, vulnerable to collective denial and blame. For instance, the African-American infant mortality rate is emblematic of the structural impediments and risks that African-American populations confront in the U.S. These differences have been consistently shown for the last 20 years, wherein the Black infant mortality rate, maternal and neonatal deaths have been twice as high as the majority White statistics (Thomas, 1995). While no single cause can explain this trend, the differences speak to a structural impediment, which is caste-like and immutable yet rarely politicized. Similar impediments in traditionally hierarchical societies are often traceable to explicit biases in the culture against one group or another.

On the issue of risk, the term 'culture' has been appropriated by social scientists to suggest a whole range of differences related to race, ethnicity, power relations and class. Culture can be defined as a shared system of meanings, while race is directly

related to biology, geography and history of isolation of a group of people. Ethnicity is a category referring to different racial and cultural groups within the same political, economic and geographic location. Power relations, on the other hand, influence all of these variables and are differentially distributed among different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups along political and economic lines. Social class positively relates to power and has historically been nested with culture, race and ethnicity in America, where the majority of upper classes have belonged to the Caucasian populations. Currently, there is a proliferation of the culture concept. A cottage industry of theorists use the term culture interchangeably with societal, racial and ethnic differences, or, often enough with just difference. The view presented in this chapter belongs to a tradition of conceptualizing culture within psychological anthropology, which defines culture as a system of meaning, in context, in practice, and in history.

However, even within anthropology what has been missing is a discussion about the politicization of culture in relation to race, ethnicity and class and its impact on children (Stephens, 1995). While everyone agrees childhood is a social and cultural construction, social scientists seem less than eager to demonstrate how it is that childhood is socially and culturally constructed. At the center, there is confusion about 'what is a child?' The term 'child' just like 'risk' now travels the world ('the year of the child', 'the rights of the child', 'in the interest of the child'), but there is uncertainty about what the 'child' consists of. More profoundly, what does childhood risks consist of given the rise of child-labor in Asian societies and prevalence of sexual abuse in Euro-American families? The steady globalization of Western ideas about

children's development, imported with modernization, industrialization and Americanization, and immigration from non-European cultures to Western societies have diversified the demographics of childhood. If we consider the conditions of children world-wide, the concept of risk would have to be broadened to include the impact of structural forces which vary dramatically across societies. Thus, it is essential to grasp both the local as well as the global influences on children's lives in order to fully understand childhood risks.

Families in Context - The news of the decline of the American family is not greatly exaggerated. The statistics on the increase in divorce rates, single parent homes and teenage pregnancies are well documented (Melon, 1995). The basis of human development depends on 'good enough' parenting in 'an average expectable environment'. Many anthropologists and sociologists of the family claim that the nuclear family, consisting of a mother, a father and a child, is a biological universal. "The last man will spend his last hours searching for his wife and child" (Linton, 1949, p. 21). Nuclear families are present in societies even where Western type of social organization is absent. The human family is at the base of all human institutions, although the form and structure it takes in a particular culture, historical period, and institutional framework can be multiplex and diverse. In modern Western societies, the nuclear family unit itself has been under attack. "Most of the writings on the modern family takes for granted the 'isolation' of the nuclear family not only from the kinship system but from the world of work. It assumes that this isolation makes the family impervious to the outside influences. In reality, the modern world intrudes at every

point and obliterates its privacy" (Lasch, 1979).

In India, the preferred family pattern is some form of extended household unit even in the midst of rapid modernization as demonstrated by the evidence in the previous chapter. The association between modernization, urbanization and the nuclear family that is often advanced is short-sighted, specific primarily to Euro-American societies. The evidence from India on this issue is unequivocal (Madan, 1993). While the signs of change in the family due to social change are evident, they are neither uniform nor predictable by Western standards. In Japan, recent technological advancement has not been achieved at the erosion of the Japanese family and collective values, where modified stem families continue to be the alternative to Western style nuclear families (Quale, 1992). With attacks in the academy and the work-place on everything traditional, androcenteric and patriarchal, it is unpredictable which form of family organization will cohere in the post-industrial era (Goldschnieder and Waite, 1991; Lasch, 1979; Lerner, 1995). The evidence from India, Japan and many other parts of the world on extended families holds up a mirror for the Euro-American populations, highlighting the dramatic changes that have reshaped the domestic sphere in the West during the last 15-20 years.

From a population perspective the changes afflicting the modern family are correlated with the social-ills in at risk populations. Table 1 presents the diversity of family contexts in the U.S. (Lerner, 1995), where foster care has increased by 50% and infants less than 12 months are most likely to be placed in such care compared to children from another age group. Developmental contexts measured by social class

differences shift twice or more for about 54% of the children by the age of 6 years.

While at the turn of the century 40% of the American children lived in two-parent farm

families, another 40% in two parent non-farm families and only 10% in one-parent or

no-parent families, today fewer than 5% live in two-parent farm families, less than

30% in intact non-farm families and about 7C% live in either dual earner non-farm

families or in one-parent families. Indeed, more than 25% of the children live in one-

parent families where 80% of them never experience living with a grandparent.

Similarly, while in 1890, 46% of American children lived in families wherein they had

eight or more siblings, 30% in families with five to seven siblings, 16% with three to

four siblings and only 7% lived in families having one or two siblings, these figures

are totally reversed today. Only 1% of American children today live in families with

eight or more siblings, 5% in families with five to seven siblings, 38% in families with

three to four siblings and 57% in families with one or two siblings. These dramatic

changes have accompanied unprecedented decline in the structure and composition of

the American family, such that parents must now rely on professional child and daycare

workers even for the care of their young.

Indeed, if we fully apply the population perspective to the problem of childhood

risks, the profiles of risks vary according to the demographic position of a society.

The majority of children in high-income, low-fertility, low-mortality societies, such as

the U.S. confront risks not to their basic physical survival, but to their psychosocial

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Table 1: American Family Contexts for Children and Youth

Intact nuclear (and biological)

Single parent (biological)

Intact nuclear (adoptive)

Single parent (adoptive)

Intact (blended)

   Heterosexual, homosexual

Single parent (step)

Intergenerational

Extended, without parent (e.g., child-aunt)

In loco parentis families/institutions

   Foster care homes

   Group homes

   Psychiatric hospitals

   Residential treatment facilities

   Juvenile detention facilities

Runaways

Street children/youth

Homeless children

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health from such ills as drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sex, lack of preparation in

entering an industrialized society and delinquency crime and violence. All of these

factors are intervening variables in the decline of the family, interact with child

outcomes from a young age and create vulnerabilities in maternal and infant health. A

majority of children in low-income countries face other risks, primarily to the survival of the young, due to malnutrition, poor health, unsafe living conditions, and low maternal education, somewhat similar to risks conditions in low-income zones in industrialized societies.

The changes in lifestyles and reproductive technologies may change parenting, child-care and the domestic sphere in developed countries even more radically, with a potential to affect even developing societies who can afford these changes. Resulting declines in fertility will accompany changes in household composition and in the larger socio-economic patterns in the work-place. Attention to children's needs and welfare came to the forefront in Europe and America during a general economic expansion in 1860-1910, which marked a break with the welfare of the lineage to the welfare of the household (Quale, 1992). Individual centeredness came to the fore in the general economic expansion in 1945-1970 in most developed societies as large number of children became unnecessary for urban industrial economic growth (Quale, 1992). The current collapse of the Western nuclear family, along with transformations in parent-child relations is exposing large segments of the Euro-American populations to psychosocial risks. The role of developmentalists is to rethink the idea of human and child development in a comparative and historical frame. Eschewing narrow individualistic notions and taking into account the value of children's social networks and cultural developmental pathways, psychologists and mental health practitioners need to examine development in relation to the changes in the family and other social groups.

<u>Children's Cultural Worlds</u> - Survey children's worlds in different societies and it will become apparent that the influence of social groups on the lives of children is pervasive. For example, Gusii infants in Kenya are cared for by their siblings beginning in the first year of life (LeVine et al., 1995). The Efe' in Zaire rely not only on siblings but also on surrogate mothers and fathers to care for their young (Tronick et al., 1989). The Japanese approach to childcare draws on the mother as the most important caregiver but the Japanese family is a highly interdependent unit (Peak, 1994). The Javanese approach to childcare draws heavily on the practice of respect as the basis for socializing children to family and community members from a very young age (Geertz, 1959). The Kaluli mothers begin teaching their children reciprocity and exchange through child and adult talk with members of the social group beginning in the first few weeks of life (Scheifflin, 1990). Hindu children in India and much of South Asia are brought up in extended households with multiple caregivers. Even in much of the Western world, children are increasingly placed in extended networks of peer and adult caregivers from a young age (Belle, 1989; Hareven, 1989). Thus, much of what is consider 'normative' in developmental psychology is shot through myriad modernist discourses (Burman, 1994), which promote individualistic parent child practices that tend to occur in dyadic settings but may not be reflective of the everyday interactions even of Western children.

The evidence from India on childcare where multiple caregiving is prevalent reveals the modernist bias (Sharma, 1996). Mother clearly emerges as a significant caregiver, but collectively the extended family group takes care of young children 59%

of the time (see Table 2). Further, the context of early care in North India gives a vivid example of the embeddedness of social life. Children growing up in these families are constantly in the presence of adults and children other than their biological parents and siblings. The ecological conditions, conducive to the acquisition of open, permeable boundaries, offer opportunities for reciprocity with each and every village member in a direct face to face communication. Indeed, these children grow up with a sense of immediate connection with others around them. They receive physical care, affection, direction, and monitoring from a cadre of caregivers. Cultural ideas reinforce practices which foster a greater sense of interdependency, reliance on others and belongingness. The socializing agents for these children while located in individual persons are distributed among a variety caregivers. In fact, the multiplicity of social relationships in daycare settings or in residential care in the West resemble in some ways the interpersonal environments in cultures where familial and social groups are accorded greater importance than individualized relationships and where the maintenance of a network of significant and close relationships is customary practice.

Throughout history it is normative for humans to have lived in groups of various forms and sizes (Harris, 1977; Lasch, 1976; Shannon, 1989). Thus, it may be said that all cultures are group-oriented and individualistic. The task is to understand to what extent and in which manner each culture emphasizes or even demands individual commitment and group belongingness and the manner and the degree to which individual initiative and group participation are socialized through early child training in a way that leads to enduring differences in individual and cultural systems of

thoughts, emotions and practices. The population perspective provides a framework

for the analysis of cultural differences at the level of groups which are often assumed to

be an extension of species-specific individual differences.

Table 2: Time Allocation of Childcare Activities in Indian Households

Caregiver	% Time	Childcare Activities
Mother	41%	h,l,t,pc,bf,b,m,tt,cs,sp
Grandmother	16%	h,l,t,pc,f,b,m,tt,cs,sp
Aunts	13%	h,l,t,pc,f,b,m,tt,cs,sp
Siblings	10%	h,l,t,pc,sp
Father	13%	h,l,t,pc,cs,sp
Uncles	9%	h,l,t,pc,sp
Others	16%	h,l,t,pc,sp

N=35; Age Range=0-3 years; % time=proportion of observed time; each child was observed 3 times

for 50 minutes in the home setting; h=holding, l=looking, t=talking, pc=physical contact, bf=breast-

feeding, b=bathing, m=message, tt=toilet-training, cs=co-sleeping, sp=social-play.

Cultural Pathways to Human Development - If we take the ontological

certainty of the group as a given at the onset of a life span, then children's development

may be seen as proceeding along different developmental pathways. Specifically, the

assumption that development is driven by greater autonomy and separation within the

framework of a small number of individualized relationships may be overdetermined.

Instead, development may be seen as proceeding within a range of social

embeddedness, with more or less connections with different and varying range of social

experience. Development thus seen is not so much a ladder that one climbs, but a tree with multiple branches representing various individual capacities (Fischer, 1993; Fischer and Ayoub, 1994). A level of a person's development is thus judged not just by the ability to function independently, but more so by interpersonal integration and connection an individual is able to maintain with others.

The Japanese model of development gives a vivid example of an alternative pathway to human growth (Peak, 1995). Mother-child bond in Japan compounds upon naturalism in celebrating the bodily contact and communication between the infant and the caregiver. 'Skinship' consisting of cosleeping, prolonged breastfeeding and shared bathing emphasizes a harmonious and natural connection between mother and child. Flowing from this, children are taught from a young age to be empathic and responsive to the needs of others, that is "to feel what others are feeling, to vicariously experience the pleasure or pain that they are undergoing, and to help them satisfy their wishes". The Japanese form of empathy is, as Lebra (1993) puts it, at the opposite pole from egocentricity. The Japanese family can be seen as an organic unit which, although hierarchical, is based on the concept of mutual indulgence and reciprocity. Children carry these values to preschools with personal as well as role modifications and reenact them in relation to the peer group and teachers. The resultant group process compounds upon interdependency, belongingness and 'amae' (a special kind of mutuality), where children resolve their own disputes under the watchful guidance of the teachers.

Similarly, in India the group of maternal caregivers is a principal socializing

agent in the lives of children during the preschool years. While mother is a key figure in the lives of children, child care activities are distributed among extended family members. In terms of attachment behaviors in the first three years of life, these children seek proximity to, explore and follow directions from and are responded to when in distress by a group of caregivers. It is reasonable to suggest that this may lead to different internal working models of security, trust and attachment and to culture a specific pathway of human growth heretofore relatively unexplored by developmental psychologists.

In India, it is normative for children to seek out several maternal caregivers for proximity, warmth and to ease distress, even if the mother serves the primary caregiving functions. Caregivers other than the mother are actively involved and may have lasting impact on children's self development. Since the participation of other family members is considered essential to the smooth functioning of the household, children are encouraged to value and respect surrogate caregivers as equally important for their security and are often instructed to be physically near them. Around 8-10 months when the infant is more mobile due to the onset of crawling and begins to have targeted expectations and goals in relation to other people and things, shared meaning becomes possible in the form of memory, situational cues, and anticipated goals. The emergence of such new capacities increases the need for information and emotional availability from the caregiver, which Indian children can garner from a number of caregivers.

Around 18 months of age, due partly to their budding interpersonal capacities,

Indian children begin to spend large amounts of time in the care of extended family members. This helps children separate from their mothers, who are the primary caregivers in their lives upto this time. This is also a time when the infant needs moral orientation and discipline and is held accountable and given directions constantly. Whether extra parental caregivers serve as transitional figures, temporarily pulling the child away from the mother to further individuation and autonomy, or provide lasting attachments beyond infancy and early childhood, formatively shaping children's emerging personality, is unclear. Independent of their precise function, it is clear that extended caregivers, although present during the first year, figure prominently in the lives of children especially during the second and third year. One or many of these extended caregivers can serve as significant attachment figures for Indian children, suggesting a radically different developmental pathway than the kind seen among Euro-American children.

In conclusion, human development must be seen as determined by multiple contextual and endogenous factors. The dominant Western model of development emphasizing autonomy, separation, and dyadic interaction is only one possible framework and may in fact be further diversified when attending to within societal variation. Developmental sciences perhaps need to learn from the biological sciences, where the theories of unilinear evolution have been thoroughly discredited. Again, the population perspective here forces us to take into account the variation in the cultural, demographic and socioeconomic conditions present in different parts of the world. The clearest variation can be seen between agrarian versus urban societies because of the

underlying economic differences. Developmental goals and processes in agrarian societies with high fertility and high mortality are concerned principally with human survival. While societies that have urbanized, where a large majority of the newborn population survives past the first five years, human development consists of training for participation in a modern economy. Similarly, post-industrial societies are confronted with unprecedented challenges to the psychosocial health of children and families, which have yet to be fully documented. It is predictable that significant population level differences may be found within the U.S. across ethnic, racial, and socio-economic lines on a whole range of at-risk conditions. Thus, the notion of developmental risks must not essentially be seen through a psychological perspective, but also through cultural beliefs and practices which tend to be socially, economically and historically mediated.

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