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## **Political Economy, Perception, and Social Change as Mediators of Childhood Risk in Andhra Pradesh**

**Jo Boyden and Gina Crivello**

### **[A] Introduction**

Poverty is one of the most significant adversities confronted by children around the world today. Young Lives aims to improve understanding of the dynamics, causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support the development of effective policies for reducing it and breaking enduring poverty cycles. The study of risk and protection in the context of poverty is central to this endeavour and the focus of this chapter.

By examining statistical associations between adverse circumstances in households and outcomes for children, we capture the underlying processes that structure childhood risk. We focus on crime, economic

shocks (such as job loss), government regulations (such as forced resettlement or land redistribution); environmental hazards, housing disasters (for example, fire), the illness or death of a household member, and other family adversities (for example, separation of family members). Our survey questionnaire also addresses children's aspirations and their sense of agency, self-esteem and self-respect, all of which can help them to confront risk. Qualitative research with a sub-sample of children and adults permits deeper enquiry into children's experiences of and responses to adversity, and their ideas about risk and well-being. The longitudinal design of the study facilitates exploration of how individual life trajectories are shaped by adversity, and allows attention to be paid to differences in risk exposure levels and outcomes among different social groups. Examination of the resources that children, their families and others bring to bear on their situations, as well as the contribution of social protection and/or child protection schemes, assists understanding of protective processes.

The bulk of research on childhood risk has been conducted within psychiatry, medicine, psychology, genetics and social work studies (for reviews, see Walker et al. 2007; Barton 2005; Cowan et al. 1996; Compas et al. 1995; and Rolf et al. 1990).<sup>1</sup> This research has made a significant contribution to understanding the vulnerabilities and strengths of young people living with adversity in the industrialized world.

Nevertheless, there are limitations associated particularly with the relevance of findings to diverse contexts; the use of the individual as the unit of observation and analysis and subsequent generalization of conclusions; and the neglect of children's daily experiences of risk. In addition, very little consideration is given to how risk is produced and reproduced by social systems and structures and experienced by social groups (Hart 2008; Schoon 2006).

Within the dominant tradition, risk in childhood is taken to concern the probability of life outcomes having their origins in earlier circumstances, based on statistical associations (Schoon 2006). Thus, in the majority of definitions, 'risk' is associated with future uncertainty (Tulloch and Lupton 2003) and has negative connotations, increasing the probability of some 'undesirable outcome' (Schaffer 2006: 87). Hence, in psychology and psychiatry the investigation of risk in children has to do with the likelihood of pathology in behaviour, development or mental health arising from the experience of different kinds of physical or social hazard (Gauvain 2001; Schaffer 2006). Most studies employ an a priori definition of risk and use standardized instruments that rate levels of exposure and impacts against a sliding scale.

Research on risk generally shows that negative experiences and deficiencies in early childhood pose a severe threat to development,

well-being and adaptation, with lifelong and intergenerational implications (for example, Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). Several studies derived from Young Lives data support this broad finding (summarized in Boyden et al. 2011). Poverty is one of the environmental risks most commonly cited as undermining individual adaptation across a variety of domains of development (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007; Schoon 2006). And poverty is commonly found to lead to or be associated with other grave hardships, for example, family crises, such that the development and well-being of poor children are doubly compromised through the interaction of multiple adversities, with cumulative effect (see chapter 9 by Theodore Wachs). Evidence from this kind of research may seem to present a compelling case with regard to childhood deprivation; yet there is considerable complexity in human responses to risk and outcomes are not all knowable. For example, even though physical outcomes may be relatively easy to gauge, the psychosocial effects of stress and adversity tend to be diagnostically unspecific and therefore very difficult to determine (Rutter 2010). It is increasingly acknowledged that not all boys and girls exposed to adversity experience negative consequences and some may even grow stronger (Rutter 2001).

Many of the boys and girls in the Young Lives sample show impressive courage in the face of what is broadly defined here as risk, even while

specific detrimental effects may be clearly discerned. This kind of finding points to the enormous challenge of forecasting risk outcomes for children and the adults they become. Accordingly, in this chapter we warn against overly deterministic analyses and stress the importance of mediating and contextual forces in human experience and development. We draw on emergent evidence from Andhra Pradesh, India, focusing on survey data for the whole sample and qualitative data collected with children in two communities: ‘Polur’, a Muslim area of Hyderabad and ‘Patna’, a rural community inhabited by the Jathapa sub-tribe in Srikakulam district.<sup>2</sup> We conclude by arguing for a revised approach to research in this field.

## **[A] The political economy of risk**

Power and wealth are highly concentrated in India within an extremely complex and formalized social structure in which ethnicity, language, religion, and caste are key organizing principles. This chapter focuses on the most economically disadvantaged groups, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and on Muslims, another minority that experiences much discrimination. Believed to be the original inhabitants of India, Scheduled Tribes (many of whom prefer to be called *adivasis* – Gupta 2005: 419) comprise a minority of ethnic and tribal peoples with diverse languages, belief systems and lifestyles. Historically, these groups were concentrated in remote, forested, hilly areas, showed little allegiance to

national religions and were only marginally incorporated within the national economy and polity. However, some have now converted to Hinduism and adopted plains cultivation, with the government applying considerable pressure for their integration in many cases (Gupta 2005).

The concept of caste, on the other hand, originated in the Hindu *varna* system, which divides society into four divinely ordained, heritable categories according to duty and occupation, with Scheduled Castes outside and beneath this hierarchical order. The position of Scheduled Castes has been underpinned by a religiously sanctioned notion of pollution in which members are allocated the most defiling occupations, such as those involving blood, the dead, or human waste. Hence, Scheduled Castes are considered 'unclean' and thereby 'untouchable', this taboo being buttressed by widespread political and economic dominance by more powerful castes and an array of formalized exclusionary practices (Srinivasulu 2002).<sup>3</sup> Backward Castes, currently the largest caste category in the State of Andhra Pradesh, are so designated because they also occupy a low position within the caste hierarchy, there being five groups in this category in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>4</sup>

Formed in 1956, the State of Andhra Pradesh comprises three regions: Telangana, coastal Andhra, and Rayalaseema. The three regions have distinct histories which indelibly shape contemporary socio-political

formations, relations of production and patterns of social mobilization (Srinivasulu 2002). However, despite considerable regional diversity, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes consistently experience multiple disadvantages when compared with other social groups (Mukherji 2008; Murray 2008) and this is clearly reflected within our sample.

The distribution of ethnic and religious groups in the Young Lives sample in Andhra Pradesh is not representative of the State as a whole and richer groups are excluded altogether. Even so, inequality based on class, caste, gender, and location is very evident (Galab et al. 2008). Table 10.1 presents the wealth distribution of Young Lives households in Andhra Pradesh according to their religion, caste and ethnicity, pooling data for the Older and Younger Cohorts, which totals 2932 children.<sup>5</sup> The economic status of households is based on Round 1 survey data (2002) and risk exposure is gauged at Round 2 (2006) so as to ensure that the socioeconomic position of specific households in relation to the broader sample is not influenced by adversities experienced between rounds.

[\[Table 10.1 here\]](#)

Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children are mainly concentrated in the poorest households, a large proportion of the latter being in the

bottom quintile. Backward Caste children are generally better off than these groups, although less so than 'Other caste' Hindus and Muslims, who are, mainly, in the wealthier quintiles.

Table 10.2 explores the association between the economic status of Young Lives households and the frequency and type of adversities they reported for the period 2002 to 2006. Overall, poorer households carry a heavier burden of risk than wealthier households; environmental hazards, economic shocks and family adversity are the most prevalent across the sample as a whole. The frequency of environmental hazards is influenced by the prevalence of rural households in the sample and the 2002 to 2004 drought in Andhra Pradesh. There is a lower correlation with poverty for some risks, for example, adverse government regulations like mandatory land redistribution, than others, with family difficulties such as separation or divorce more common in wealthier households.

[Table 10.2 here]

Table 10.3 shows a clear correlation among Scheduled Castes between household economic status and risk, with those in the bottom two



quintiles the most affected. The most common risks for this group are economic shocks, environmental hazards and family illness or death.

[\[Table 10.3 here\]](#)

The relationship between risk exposure and poverty for Scheduled Tribe households (Table 10.4) is more complex and varied. Economic shocks, environmental hazards and family illness or death are more frequent among poorer tribal households, whereas crime affects those in the third quintile (middle group) more than others, possibly because wealthier groups experience higher rates of theft. Family adversity appears to have no correlation with economic status in this group.

[\[Table 10.4 here\]](#)

Although further work is needed to enhance understanding of the interaction of low household socioeconomic status, other forms of risk, and outcomes for children, we already have some evidence of the disadvantages experienced by Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children as compared to other groups. Higher levels of stunting (low height for age – an indicator of long-term malnutrition) in the Younger Cohort (Galab et al. 2008) is one example, and lower levels of school achievement, as measured by Peabody Picture Vocabulary Scores, another (Nair 2009). In addition, Older Cohort children in these groups are more likely than others to drop out of school, work long hours, miss

classes because of work and migrate for work during crises (see chapter 13 by Gina Crivello, Uma Vennam and Anuradha Komanduri).

Income shocks at the household level are associated with an increase in the amount of children's work by around two hours per day, with the greatest impacts on girls in rural areas (Krutikova 2009). Similarly, the 2002–04 drought reduced the hours children spent at school and their cognitive scores, which was partly driven by an increase in working hours among rural families (Galab and Outes-Leon 2011). Gender and birth order emerged as influential factors in this analysis, in that eldest boys were the only group to experience a reduction in demand for their labour and increased opportunities for schooling, probably because they are more likely than others to work on family smallholdings which became uncultivable during the drought.

In summary, preliminary findings on household risk from Andhra Pradesh indicate structural causes, with multiple detrimental outcomes for children in disadvantaged groups. Given that subjective perspectives of affected populations fundamentally shape the impact of adversity (Boyden 2009: 8), this evidence raises the question as to whether or not affected children are aware of the impact of such forces in their lives or concerned about household risk and whether they perceive any of this

as having a bearing on their lives (France 2000: 325). This question is the focus of the next section.

## **[A] Children's perspectives**

Our exploration of children's perceptions of risk draws on qualitative data from the tribal village of Patna and the Muslim community of Polur, respondent households in the former community being largely concentrated among the poorest in our sample and in the latter, the richest. We have shown that wealth is closely associated with religion, caste and ethnicity in Andhra Pradesh and that these structures are central to the risk biographies of Young Lives households. Nevertheless, so far we have found that even though the children in Patna and Polur are conscious of social structures, issues of religion, caste, ethnicity, and even gender are not much talked about and only came to the fore through purposeful questioning. When asked directly, the children explained that poorer castes and tribes experienced material lack, stigmatization, and other adversities, citing extreme hunger, family debt, heat exposure, domestic violence, and ridicule by others – especially other children – as examples (see chapter 13 by Gina Crivello et al.). But less directed conversations seldom revealed a systematic link between broader structural factors and daily experience. From this evidence we would like to suggest that in these communities the dynamics of political economy appear to be habituated within everyday

embodied practice and thereby taken for granted, or naturalized (Bourdieu 1977: 168; Bourdieu 2001).

Overall, illness, injury, and death were prominent in children's risk discourses in both Polur and Patna. Children indicated that frequent or chronic ailments such as headaches, fever, malaria, and jaundice were common, often associating this with poor environmental quality. In Patna, inadequate hygiene at school hostels<sup>6</sup> was cited as contributory to bad health and some young people returned home or changed hostel as a result. Wider environmental problems like deficient community sanitation, prevalence of mosquitoes, and heavy rains were also cited. Poor environment aside, boys and girls in this sub-sample did not otherwise pay much attention to the household adversities which caregivers had highlighted as most grave in terms of children's well-being.

#### *[B] Social risks*

We have seen that in Andhra Pradesh environmental phenomena such as drought and flooding can have devastating effects, as do illness and death. Yet in both Polur and Patna, social factors also came across as a fundamental feature of children's sense of well-being, with gender an important referent in these cases, especially following puberty.

Childhood social risk is expressed in many ways, including through young people's ideas about and use of public spaces. In this sense, physical space is as much a social experience as a natural phenomenon and in this context has become an arena for negotiating gendered identities, roles, and risk (see also Schildkrout 2002; van Blerk 2005).

In Polur girls' movement outside the home is heavily restricted, particularly after puberty. The social standing of households is greatly dependent on the modesty of young, unmarried, female members, whose association with unrelated males can pose a significant threat to a family's reputation. Accordingly, girls in Polur ranked befriending and riding bicycles with boys and being on the streets as the main indicators of 'ill-being' for young females of their age. Similarly, boys favoured restricting girls' mobility as a way of preventing them from being exposed to negative peer influences, picking up 'bad habits', losing respect for their parents, or seeking a 'love' marriage (rather than an arranged one). Boys also highlighted the disadvantages for girls of such limitations, including how this forces girls to depend on others and provides little opportunity for them to become practised in decision-making. However, despite restrictions on girls' use of public space in Polur, established norms are being challenged by schooling. Education is now such a compelling force in children's life aspirations that attendance by girls has become commonplace, necessitating their use

of public spaces. Multiple practices are employed in protecting a girl's reputation in these circumstances, including use of the burka (an all-enveloping cloak) to hide the face, and walking to school in groups.

Risks to young males also have spatial implications. Boys perceived regular attendance at school and the *madrassa* (place of religious learning) as central to their well-being, whereas ill-being was associated with 'never being at home', 'always roaming the streets', or 'loitering at the railway station'. Thus, it is not so much that the street is a 'masculine' space, as that boys on the street invoke a specific kind of masculinity, in which they 'roam around here and there. They play games outside – video games. Boys outside smoke cigarettes, eat *gutka* [a mild stimulant] .' Such boys are characterized as 'jungle' (uncultured), and stand in stark contrast to school pupils.

Girls from the Jathapa sub-tribe in Patna appear to experience fewer social risks than do girls in Polur and are allowed greater mobility outside the home. Nevertheless they are more constrained than boys, especially following 'maturity' (puberty), when they cease to be as free to go out unaccompanied and may be withdrawn from school. However, as in Polur, school education has brought about certain anomalies between norms and practice. Children of both sexes and from an early age commonly move into hostels outside the village to access schools.

Many of the children living in hostels described an assortment of early challenges, from homesickness and loneliness to poor nutrition. But there were also perceived to be certain benefits, and some families saw the relatively regulated environment of the hostels as protection against negative peer influences in the village. Several children highlighted potential developmental gains from managing these difficulties such as increased self-sufficiency and an expanded worldview. In addition, 'migration' for education was understood by a few to offer a developmental opportunity. Thus, 12-year-old Santhi explained that:

[I]f one remains at home all the time it may not be possible to know anything about the outside world. So I want to go out ... We will know about the views of different people ... One ought to know about the world outside. So, I want to join a hostel and know much more ... I feel I might be able to live.<sup>7</sup>

Hence, deep-rooted ideas about the gendered nature of morality are key to the notion of childhood social risk. Yet, these ideas are not fixed but respond to changes in the institution of childhood and expectations of children. This can lead to complex and conflicting notions about the safety or appropriateness of everyday childhood practices.

### **[B]** *Inter-subjectivity*

There appears to be a strong inter-subjective dimension to childhood risk in Polur and Patna, in that impacts are very often understood to affect relationships within groups more than individuals. This is evident in the case of girls who, in transgressing norms around modesty, may put whole families in moral and social jeopardy. Boys invest in their sisters' well-being and described a number of ways in which they helped their sisters, by paying their school fees and contributing to their wedding costs, for example. In contrast, girls did not communicate a similar sense of duty towards their brothers. Overall, there is an expectation that children will share, rather than be shielded from, the burden of family difficulties, as, for example, when they seek to protect parents from suffering. Kareena, aged 13, from Polur, attributed her family's deteriorating circumstances to her father's illness. Her mother could no longer afford to provide nutritious food for the family and lamented having to dilute the *dal* stew and repeat the same dishes frequently. Kareena and her sister would try to conceal their poverty from other children by sitting apart during school lunches or covering their lunch box with a book while they ate. She explained that she, her sister and their mother had agreed to try and prevent the sick father from becoming more distressed by keeping their plight from him.



Inter-subjectivity is also evident in the collective effort involved in dealing with household adversity, with children playing an active part. For example, teenage girls reported taking measures to protect themselves and their families from contagious diseases, for example, by separating the sick from the healthy. Family indebtedness was a major concern associated with deterioration in household economic circumstances and was seen to lead older children to assume greater domestic responsibilities. In Polur, 13-year-old Rahmatulla described how, when his father became paralysed after a stroke, he had to undertake a lot more tasks in the home, running errands and doing embroidery, the latter for income. By the same token, children said that the family had 'worked hard' as the main reason for any improvements in household circumstances.

Fulfilment of family obligations is perceived as central to young people's developing morality; again, these ideas are gendered. Boys articulate a stronger commitment to supporting their parents (mothers in particular) in old age than do girls. Thus, Rajesh returned to Patna and resumed working his family's fields after suffering prolonged ill health in a hostel, explaining that: 'They give me something for doing this and that [a tip] ... I will still go even if they don't pay me ... It is because I am doing it for my own household.' At the age of 12, Rajesh said he wanted to become a doctor, an aspiration he reiterated at the age of 13. But because of

household difficulties, he had become less ambitious by the age of 15 and was considering enrolling on a computer course to obtain employment more quickly. He reasoned:

Well ... my parents are taking care of me now and I depend on them and I want to take care of them when I grow up. .... Higher education may not be easily accessible to me and I don't want to be a burden on my parents.

Girls do not articulate the same sense of obligation, possibly because brides move to live with their in-laws and transfer their sense of duty to their mothers-in-law at marriage. Thus, Yaswanth said that his sister would 'forget' about her birth family when she married and moved to her in-laws' house.

So, families are heavily reliant on intergenerational and sibling mutuality to protect against both social risk and destitution. These are central organizing principles of inter-subjectivity in the context of adversity, with clear distinctions along gender lines. While boys have very specific obligations towards family, which emphasize their economic contribution, girls have more generalized moral duties.

### *[B] Well-being and the life course*

We have argued that discourses of childhood risk are not fixed but continually changing, as with the introduction of school education. But

there is also a life-course dimension. We employ the term chrono-risk to reflect the developmental aspects of risk as they evolve over time as children mature. Chrono-risk encompasses both pressing adversities that have direct impacts on children's well-being and require immediate response, and longer-term threats, which have to be seen within the broader context of the life course. Managing the different elements of risk involves multiple and sometimes competing social goals. For example, Sania, from Polur, revealed that she had been beaten by her mother because she did not wish to learn or carry out domestic chores in the home. Her mother was ambivalent about Sania's time use, for while she wants her daughter to continue with schooling, she is clear that this should not be at the expense of learning the domestic skills required to position her favourably in the marriage market. A role-play exercise performed by a group of girls in Polur highlighted similar issues. Having learnt that she had passed her school exams, the central character, Zeenath, and her parents were keen for her to continue her studies. But when the grandmother was informed of this plan, the following exchange ensued:

*Grandmother:* No, it's not necessary. Let her be in the home and learn [house]work. If you provide her with more [education] she will be spoiled.

*Father.* No, Mum. Nowadays everyone is particular about the qualifications, not about the [house]work.

The grandmother insisted, 'Otherwise, how could she survive at her in-laws' house?' Zeenath's brother agreed with the grandmother, maintaining, 'There is no need for Zeenath to study further because the boys will tease her on the streets.' But the father retorted, 'You are there to protect her as a brother in case someone does something. Every day you go along with her to school and tell us if anyone misbehaves with her.'

When boys confront risk, this is perceived as developing the self-reliance needed for them to make an effective contribution to their households. Thus, boys in Patna indicated a strong sense of their roles in relation to the family. Ranadeep stated that his 'way of thinking' had improved since he started orienting himself more towards the future and supporting his family; he saw this growing sense of responsibility as a sign of his maturity. For Akshay Khan, who lives in Polur, increased awareness of his responsibilities had motivated him to study harder.

These examples show how immediate and longer-term considerations of protection and well-being may conflict in the context of risk, insofar as pressures on girls to acquire skills for married life may undermine their

schooling and employment prospects. Similarly, boys who work to support their families may struggle to attend school, although work may also build crucial competencies and facilitate school access through funding for materials and other school-related purposes. In addition, different generational perspectives can lead to disagreements over what constitutes a risk for children and how it should be managed. Thus, for example, while education is considered an investment in the future of the family, it is but one of many social expectations that young people must negotiate, and different generations may have different views about what matters most for individual children and/or their families.

### **[A] Forces for change**

Clearly, localized ideas about and strategies for responding to risk are key to children's well-being in Andhra Pradesh, as is articulated by the children in our sample. However, our quantitative data show that in this State risk is not simply an expression of localized values and practices but also has a strong material dimension associated with deep-rooted political and social inequalities. These inequalities may have become naturalized in children's lives, but are hotly contested in some parts of the State. So, even while the localized narratives and practices of children focus on everyday matters and coping strategies, Scheduled Caste activists have been pivotal in the politicization of issues of social injustice and the pressure for reform in Andhra Pradesh (Gupta 2005).

Although they have mostly sought to challenge their lowly status within the traditional caste hierarchy rather than reject the caste system outright (Gupta 2005), these groups have spearheaded a proliferation of movements articulating diverse demands for an end to caste/class-based oppression. Together with local agrarian campaigners, they have sought land redistribution, wage increases for agricultural and other workers, the discontinuation of forced labour (Srinivasulu 2002) and 'reservations within reservations' (UNDP 2007: 19) for groups designated by government as disadvantaged.

State government has responded to this discontent by introducing a number of poverty-reduction schemes and has been one of the main advocates of the Indian reform process, making explicit its intention to embed economic restructuring within a larger development and governance project (Mooij 2005; Srinivasulu 2002; UNDP 2007). Andhra Pradesh was also the first State to negotiate an independent loan from the World Bank for economic restructuring that involved financing social sector expenditure and economic reform, including cuts in subsidies, reduction of employment in the civil service, improvement of expenditure management, strengthening revenue mobilization and public enterprise reform (Mooij 2005).

Yet moves to bring about political and economic change have benefited Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes little. Overall, land reforms

have privileged peasant farmers from the landed Shudra castes far more than poorer groups, and old feudal practices such as *vetti*, the collection of fines, and debt bondage remain widespread in many areas (Gundimeda 2009; Gupta 2005; Srinivasulu 2002). The impact of popular protest has been constrained by the sheer size and complexity of the social base, with multiple demarcations along lines of ethnicity, religion, caste, class, and gender leading to factionalism and political polarization (Banerjee and Somanathan 2001). In addition, complex relations between protest groups and political parties and co-option by the State government has undermined the effect of collective action in some cases (Banerjee and Somanathan 2001; Srinivasulu 2002; UNDP 2007). Continuing inequalities, susceptibility to risk of minority groups and polarization of political views combined with intermittent repression by the State Government have been associated with an escalation of unrest and outbreaks of violence in some cases (Mishra 2008). In the tribal regions of Telangana, confrontations between the Naxalite Maoist insurgent group and government forces have been increasing in recent years, such that armed violence (and associated decline in the economy and services) has become a risk for children in these areas. At the same time, there has been unrest among disaffected low-caste Muslims in some places. Hence, in the absence of effective reform, the politicization of inequality, poverty, and risk can be seen as an emergent source of risk for children in certain parts of Andhra Pradesh. Some Young Lives

communities fall within the area under Naxalite influence and some of the children in our sample, including those in Polur, come from the Muslim minority population. That said, these issues are highly sensitive and difficult to research, and we do not have data on the impact of political unrest on children at this stage.

## **[A] Conclusion**

Most studies of childhood risk are based solely on quantitative data and take little or no account of children's perceptions. But we have argued that subjective understandings are key to well-being in contexts of adversity and have used qualitative data to illustrate the kinds of concerns raised. At the same time, research into responses to risk generally emphasizes individual vulnerability, resilience, and coping, attending also to protective environmental processes. While we agree that these definitely are compelling factors in children's susceptibility to risk, we have suggested that risk is not simply a feature of individual interactions with the immediate environment, but an expression also of potent forces which play out at the collective level, where it is unequally distributed across space and between different groups of children depending on their social and economic power. Hence, we stress the centrality of structural features in risk exposure, the dynamics of political economy being particularly salient in circumstances of childhood poverty, with lasting effects into adulthood. In Andhra Pradesh structural



inequalities bearing down on specific socio-religious and ethnic groups are associated with a disproportionate burden of risk. While these inequalities have seemingly become naturalized within children's everyday worlds, they are the subject of vociferous contestation and collective political struggle in some quarters. Mainstream research on childhood risk seldom makes this important connection to wider processes of political engagement.

In making the case for greater attention to risk contexts, we contend that not all 'risks' can be described a priori as 'objective' external threats with predictable outcomes for all children; some are inseparable from children's social and cultural worlds and the shared meanings generated within these. Hence, children's views on risk and adversity are fundamental to outcomes, requiring research to give serious consideration to subjective understandings of populations living with adversity. The examples we have offered suggest the inter-subjective nature of risk perception and response. There is a clear social and moral dimension to childhood risk in Andhra Pradesh, gender and age being central organizing principles. The vulnerabilities, capacities, and moral ideas children develop in this context are extremely dynamic. Many children experience multiple risks that have both immediate effects as well as implications for life transitions and intergenerational relations. In these circumstances, risk mitigation may become the subject of

competing concerns and priorities and consequently, conflicting views on protection (see also chapter 9 by Theodore Wachs). Appreciation of the multiple dimensions of childhood risk in particular contexts implies careful reflection regarding what might be most appropriate in terms of intervention to support children's well-being, since policy which focuses narrowly on a single issue or group may have unintended detrimental effects on children's relationships or development, or other aspects of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> A very different tradition of scholarship around risk within sociology and anthropology has had far less influence on studies with children (see Crivello and Boyden forthcoming [or 2011 or 'forthcoming 2011 – need to check]).

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms to protect respondents' anonymity. Patna and Polur were selected for their contrasting characteristics (rural/urban location, religious and socioeconomic), which offer different settings for exploring the contextual factors shaping risk exposure and experiences among their youngest residents.

<sup>3</sup> The Government of India has documented Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes so as to secure 'reservation', or affirmative action, to counteract socioeconomic disadvantage. Untouchability has been outlawed and copious constitutional and legal measures introduced promoting employment in public administration and access to basic services, facilities, and infrastructure for these groups.

<sup>4</sup> A significant portion of Muslims and Buddhists have now been incorporated within the caste system.

<sup>5</sup> From 2944 observations, 12 were dropped because information was missing, or the child was mixed caste or in a minority that was too small for analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Areas with a high tribal population are covered by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency, which provides scholarships and boarding hostels for Scheduled Tribe children to attend school, and job training and placements.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews extracts transcribed here are from the second round of in-depth interviews conducted in 2007/08 as part of the qualitative research within Young Lives.



**Table 10.1 Wealth distribution of children by religion and ethnicity, in quintiles**

Castes	1 <sup>st</sup> (poorest)		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>		4 <sup>th</sup>		5 <sup>th</sup> (least poor)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sched. Caste	118	21.26	177	31.89	136	24.50	93	16.76	31	5.59	555	100.00
Sched. Tribe	168	48.14	70	20.06	53	15.19	39	11.17	19	5.44	349	100.00
B/ward Class	271	19.12	272	19.20	292	20.61	318	22.44	264	18.63	1,417	100.00
Other caste – Hindu	27	6.31	61	14.25	76	17.76	95	22.20	169	39.49	428	100.00
Other caste – Muslim	4	2.19	15	8.20	20	10.93	41	22.40	103	56.28	183	100.00
Total	588	20.05	595	20.29	577	19.68	586	19.99	586	19.99	2,932	100.00

**Table 10.2 Adversities by wealth quintiles**

Shocks / adversities	1 <sup>st</sup> (poorest)		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>		4 <sup>th</sup>		5 <sup>th</sup> (least poor)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Crime	34	5.78	36	6.05	33	5.72	27	4.61	27	4.61	157	5.35
Government regulation	14	2.38	18	3.03	15	2.60	15	2.56	3	0.51	65	2.22
Economic	121	20.58	152	25.55	132	22.88	111	18.94	81	13.82	597	20.36
Environmental	306	52.04	325	54.62	270	46.79	193	32.94	42	7.17	1,136	38.74
Housing	13	2.21	17	2.86	13	2.25	3	0.51	1	0.17	47	1.60
Family illness/death	204	34.69	187	31.43	162	28.08	185	31.57	131	22.35	869	29.64
Family adversity	111	18.88	84	14.12	81	14.04	135	23.04	160	27.30	571	19.47

**Table 10.3 Adversities experienced by Scheduled Caste households**

Shocks / adversities	1 <sup>st</sup> (poorest)		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>		4 <sup>th</sup>		5 <sup>th</sup> (least poor)		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No.	%
Crime	9	7.63	12	6.78	9	6.62	3	3.23	2	6.45	35	6.31
Government regulation	3	2.54	10	5.65	3	2.21	0	0.00	0	0.00	16	2.88
Economic	20	16.95	44	24.86	33	24.26	14	15.05	5	16.13	116	20.90
Environmental	56	47.46	91	51.41	58	42.65	20	21.51	2	6.45	227	40.90
Housing	5	4.24	8	4.52	2	1.47	0	0.00	0	0.00	15	2.70
Family illness/death	41	34.75	58	32.77	31	22.79	31	33.33	7	22.58	168	30.27
Family adversity	17	14.41	24	13.56	14	10.29	12	12.90	5	16.13	72	12.97

**Table 10.4 Adversities experienced by Scheduled Tribe households**

Shocks / adversities	1st (poorest)		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>		4 <sup>th</sup>		5 <sup>th</sup> (least poor)		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No.	%
Crime	9	5.36	3	4.29	6	11.32	1	2.56	1	5.26	20	5.73
Government regulation	0	0.00	1	1.43	1	1.89	1	2.56	1	5.26	4	1.15
Economic	40	23.81	18	25.71	12	22.64	9	23.08	2	10.53	81	23.21
Environmental	75	44.64	35	50.00	20	37.74	13	33.33	3	15.79	146	41.83
Housing	1	0.60	1	1.43	0	0.00	1	2.56	0	0.00	3	0.86
Family illness/death	45	26.79	24	34.29	18	33.96	11	28.21	4	21.05	102	29.23
Family adversity	47	27.98	12	17.14	15	28.30	9	23.08	5	26.32	88	25.21