

# Call for Papers

This call for papers is of interest to researchers  
in the **social and human sciences**.

Issue no. 1-2013 of the *Revue française des affaires sociales* will be dedicated to  
the theme of **Difficulties Experienced during Childhood  
and their consequences in Adulthood**

Papers must be submitted before **September 10, 2012**

## Difficulties Experienced in Childhood and their Consequences in Adulthood

The *RFAS* intends to publish a special issue focusing on difficulties experienced during childhood and their effect in adulthood. More specifically, it is hoped that this issue will provide insight into the factors likely to affect children's development<sup>1</sup>. It is also expected to highlight potential government policy measures in order to improve the "well-becoming" of children who as a result of troubled backgrounds are more vulnerable than others.

### 1- Complexity of processes involved

Significant research has already been done on this subject, specifically focusing the analysis of outcomes in adulthood resulting from difficulties experienced during childhood. For example, one aim of this type of analysis is to examine inter-generational transmission of poverty and also to understand its mechanisms<sup>2</sup>.

The processes involved are of an extraordinarily complex nature. Firstly, difficulties experienced in childhood vary widely, ranging from family issues (separation or death of parents, abuse, etc.) to difficult living conditions (poverty, handicap or health problems, etc.). Pinpointing the factors likely to have an influence later on in life is very complex. Secondly, it is probably the culmination of a series of factors, as opposed to one single factor, that has a negative impact in adulthood. The question is: how can we assess and classify the single effects and, more importantly, assess their cumulative effect?

In terms of outcomes, the negative consequences in adulthood can also take different forms. These include self-inflicted violence (addiction, self-mutilation, etc.), violence relating to the environment (physical attacks, etc.), difficulties with social integration and reduced life expectancy. The first challenge is selecting the most relevant and feasible range of consequences to be studied.

1. Motor, emotional, affective, cognitive, linguistic and social development.

2. Research carried out by J. Brooks-Gunn, G.J. Duncan, S.E. Mayer and J. Bradshaw

In addition, the outcomes themselves may vary depending on both the population category (gender<sup>3</sup>, age, social background, etc.) and the culture<sup>4</sup> involved, making the choice of outcome indicators even more difficult.

The third and final challenge is the most complex. Following identification and selection of these consequences, careful examination and cautious interpretation of the results is required to establish a clear and unambiguous relationship between childhood difficulties and their repercussions in adulthood. In fact, the impact of childhood experience on adulthood is not based on determinism: anything can happen at any age and as the phenomena of resilience so aptly demonstrates, nobody's fate is mapped out ahead of time (see *infra*).

This said, current research would suggest that difficulties experienced in childhood, more specifically in the early years, may have a many-sided and sometimes long-lasting impact on later stages of life. Clearly, in a society that aims to abolish inequality, a policy focusing on children at an early age in order to avoid problems later on would appear to be relevant. What we already know is useful but not enough to determine exactly which policies should be successfully implemented to guarantee positive results from both a social and economic point of view. Indeed, the very scale of this challenge justifies the *RFAS* dedicating an issue to this subject.

In addition to reviewing current research, the *RFAS* also wishes to set up a methodological study on how to identify relations between childhood difficulties and their possible impact in adulthood.

## **2- At the present time, what do we know about difficulties experienced during childhood and their effects on adulthood?**

First of all, the *RFAS* wishes to review existing research into the relation between difficulties experienced in childhood and their impact in adulthood. These events may date back to the death or separation of parents, to the placing of a child in care (institutions or foster families),

parents' alcoholism or other addictions, marital violence, abuse, health issues during childhood, poverty and its consequences (poor living conditions, unbalanced diets due to limited financial resources, illnesses that are poorly treated or treated too late, anxiety generated by unpredictable household revenues, feelings of shame and sadness, lack of self-confidence, etc.).

Outward signs of these effects can vary, ranging from psychological problems (self-inflicted violence or acts of violence to others or to the environment, depression, addiction, etc.) to difficulty with professional and social integration, low standard of living, health problems, reduced life expectancy and teenage pregnancy.

The *RFAS* is particularly interested in the matter of resilience<sup>5</sup>. How do resilience phenomena come about? How can we explain, for example, that certain underprivileged children do not become underprivileged adults? In the same way, why is it that abused children do not necessarily abuse their children in turn? When analysing resilience, can we make a distinction between factors relating to individual personality traits, those relating to the family environment and those from outside influences (educational institutions, etc.)? Very often, studies show that poor children are more likely to grow into poor adults. It is the intention of the *RFAS* to throw light upon another angle of this phenomenon.

The following type of analysis may be submitted:

- Literature reviews summarizing the present state of research. Publications compiling results of research carried out abroad (preferably recent research) based on panel data are particularly welcome;
- Innovative analysis of survey data, preferably recent. Content can be taken from panel surveys, population-based retrospective surveys or monographic surveys. Data used may relate to France or any other country.

3. Boys tend to adopt suicidal behaviour, whereas girls tend to suffer from eating disorders.

4. For example, alcoholism varies depending on the countries and can also vary at from one region to the other in the same country.

5. Resilience can be defined as the ability to succeed, to develop and be fulfilled in the face of adversity. In France, the ethologist Boris Cyrulnik developed this concept of resilience based on his observation of concentration camp survivors, and then various groups of individuals, including children from Romanian orphanages and Bolivian street-children.

### 3- Methodological discussion

#### *How can we gain insight into the correlation between difficulties experienced in childhood and their consequences in adulthood?*

Once observations resulting from available material and analytical tools have been reviewed, the *RFAS* intends to open a methodological discussion about complex processes. It is interested in receiving suggestions for analysing the relationships between difficulties experienced in childhood and their consequences in adulthood. What are the limits of current research? Which material, which tools, which analysis methods could be used to gain insight into these relationships? It is worth noting that the *RFAS* places as much importance on the ways of highlighting these relationships as it does on the presentation of results. The *RFAS* will also welcome articles that examine the theoretical models used for measuring the impact in adulthood of difficulties experienced in childhood, as well as articles on the empirical endorsement of these models.

#### *How can we further research using material available in France?*

For many years now, several countries<sup>6</sup> have been using panels to track cohorts from childhood up to adulthood. These make it possible to analyse the outcomes of individual cases through the lens of events experienced in childhood<sup>7</sup>. Such panels did not exist in France until March 2011 when a panel called Elfe was set up to cover 20,000 children. Current research provides a global approach to children's environments and their development. Future results collected from series of surveys (carried out over several years) should provide insight into the correlations between childhood difficulties and their impact in adulthood. However, this will depend on the way individuals are interviewed. *RFAS* wishes to gain insight into the best way of using the Elfe panel and its results to define the most effective government child policy. What are the specific questions we need to ask to obtain a full range of consequences showing the different facets of individual outcomes? How can we question

parents, their children, as well as social workers and health professionals, to learn about difficulties experienced during childhood? Should we and, if so, in what way should we attribute the hardship and/or suffering of certain adults (the homeless, the mentally ill, etc.) to childhood experience?

#### *A challenge for public policy: identifying the difficulties and suffering that children endure*

Setting up government policies that are to improve the "well-becoming" of children entails the accurate identification of individuals whose future may be adversely affected by the issues they are facing now. This leads to the question of how to monitor vulnerable children. Identifying high-risk categories and understanding the nature of the risks children are exposed to will foster preventive actions and environments that will decrease the likelihood of these risks occurring. As these preventive actions are aimed at specific categories and not at individuals, stigmatization of individuals will be avoided. This type of action does not, however, do away with the need for individual intervention in the case of children whose behaviour appears to reflect their difficulties.

This raises two further questions. How can childcare professionals be trained to identify the "telltale" signs of difficulties faced by children? And how can these professionals be trained to refer the child to the most fitting professional care? Systematic tracking of children showing signs of difficulty was introduced in France in 2007. A heated debate ensued as to the risks of social stigmatization. What kind of tracking methods for vulnerable children could be implemented to ensure early diagnosis and timely intervention, while at the same time avoiding the risk of stigmatization? In addition to panel surveys, what other tools could be used and how could they be used to provide answers about the causal effects of difficulties in childhood and results in adulthood?

Regarding these points, submissions providing insight into the following questions will be appreciated:

- Alert procedures: what are the current criteria for alert procedures? What is the background of alert procedures and how have they evolved over time? The *RFAS* would also welcome

6. More specifically the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand and Ireland.

7. C. Pirus and H. Leridon made an inventory of a group of cohorts available worldwide (Leridon H., Pirus C. (2010), "Large Child Cohort Studies across the World" *Population*, vol.65, n° 4

an in-depth examination of the procedure and criteria for placing children in care. This examination would consider this issue from both the legal and social angles and also assess the psychological impact of such decisions on children.

- To what extent does government children policy take their difficulties into account? What is the approach (prevention, compensation, effectiveness, etc.)? What insight into general government policy (general policy as opposed to programmes specifically focusing on vulnerable children, preventive policies as opposed to “stopgap” measures) can be gained as a result of analysing factors influencing “well-becoming”? Comparisons with other countries are welcome.
- To what extent and how do the school system and childcare services for young children take children’s difficulties into account? What are these difficulties?
- How can social protection systems take children’s difficulties into account? And what type of difficulties can be taken into account? One example for France could be how children of parents eligible for the RSA are incorporated into the content of “contrats d’insertion professionnelle” (work-entry contracts).
- How can national and local policies be coordinated? How can we leverage autonomy granted at local levels in favour of children in difficulty?
- How can our idea of children’s “well-becoming” challenge the respective roles public policy and families play in providing support to children in difficulty? This point questions public authorities’ efforts to act in the place of parents or even to go against their wishes. Can we examine the evolution of the children’s “well-being” concept to provide a discussion framework for childcare policy? This question opens up discussion on the concept of “well-becoming” itself.

> Further information on the contents of this call for contributions may be obtained by contacting Bénédicte Galtier, co-editor, or Pierre Boisard, member of the review board, who have been charged with drafting this issue, at: [benedicte.galtier@sante.gouv.fr](mailto:benedicte.galtier@sante.gouv.fr) and [pboisard@idhe.ens-cachan.fr](mailto:pboisard@idhe.ens-cachan.fr)

> If you wish to submit a paper on this question you are requested to send it to: [rfas-drees@sante.gouv.fr](mailto:rfas-drees@sante.gouv.fr)

> Before **September 10, 2012**

> Articles should be presented respecting the editorial standards described in « recommendations to the authors of articles » which are available at:

<http://www.sante.gouv.fr/revue-francaise-des-affaires-sociales,3716.html>