

## Moral Development in a Violent Society: Colombian Children's Judgments in the Context of Survival and Revenge

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Ninety-six Colombian children (mean age = 7.7 years) and adolescents (mean age = 14.6 years) made judgments about stealing and physical harm in the abstract and in the context of survival and revenge. All participants judged it wrong to steal or hurt others because of considerations with justice and welfare, and most also judged it wrong to engage in such actions even when they can aid in survival. Their judgments in the context of revenge were more mixed, with a sizable proportion endorsing stealing and hurting in that condition. Furthermore, the majority expected that people would steal and hurt others in most situations. Significant age differences were also found. The consequences of political violence for moral development are discussed.

As reported by the UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, children in approximately 50 countries around the world currently grow up in the midst of armed conflict and its aftermath. In the past decade, 6 million children were injured due to war and 2 million were killed. Millions of children have been uprooted as a consequence of armed conflict and human rights violations, seeking safety abroad or within their own borders; indeed, well over half of the world's displaced people are children. Currently, it is estimated that there are 10 million children refugees worldwide; an additional 13 million children are internally displaced within their own countries (United Nations, 2006). In Colombia alone, the site of the present study, almost 2 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes and towns during the past 15 years. Appalling and shocking in and of themselves, these figures also carry the disturbing implication that more and more of the world's children are being sucked into a bleak moral vacuum—a psychological space devoid of basic human rights and values. How might children's development be altered by the violence, lawlessness, and deprivation to which they are exposed?

Psychologists have long been concerned with the effects that long-term exposure to violent conditions has on children's psychological well-being. While much of this research has been conducted in violent

communities within the United States (e.g., Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Earls, 2001; Richters & Martinez, 1993), studies have also been conducted in countries at war, such as Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, and South Africa (e.g., Barber, Schluterman, Denny, & McCouch, 2006; Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Punamäki, 1996; Straker, Mendelson, Moosa, & Tudin, 1996). Most research efforts in this regard have used a trauma model and measured the consequences of chronic exposure to violence in terms of mental health outcomes. Findings concerning children's specific patterns of symptoms have varied across studies as a function of the domains of adjustment targeted and the characteristics of the samples studied. In general, however, children's reactions associated with exposure to chronic violence have included anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disturbances, and other symptoms that have come to be associated with posttraumatic stress (Richters & Martinez, 1993).

Still, children may respond in complex ways that are not necessarily captured by the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnostic criteria, and the exclusive focus on psychiatric symptoms might be mistakenly taken to imply that children who do not receive a diagnosis are unaffected. Nonetheless, in comparison to the large volume of work documenting the clinical consequences of exposure to political violence, very little is known about the nonclinical impact that growing up in such conditions may have on children. Indeed, in their commentary to the Special Issue devoted to children growing up in the midst of political violence that appeared a decade ago in *Child Development*, Cairns

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and Dawes (1996) noted the scarcity of research on the significance of war-related trauma on normative development and urged researchers to move beyond the documentation of distress symptoms and place a greater emphasis on examining the impact that war, violence, and dislocation has on children's development (see also Richters & Martinez, 1993).

Even as a number of researchers have alluded to the potential effects that war and political violence are likely to have on children's moral development (e.g., Cairns & Dawes, 1996; Dawes, 1994; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Leavitt & Fox, 1993; Macksoud & Aber, 1996; Punamäki, 1996), systematic research about these issues has been limited and its findings have been mixed, with some studies indicating that the moral development of children living in the midst of political violence is truncated, as evidenced in lower levels of moral reasoning, and others suggesting that the moral development of these youths is not negatively affected (for comprehensive and critical reviews of this research, see Cairns, 1996; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993). The mixed nature of these findings may in part be due to the fact that the existing evidence was obtained largely on the basis of global assessments of stages of moral reasoning, with the underlying question being whether children in communities characterized by political violence reason at lower, less mature, stages than children in nonviolent communities.

The limitations of global assessments of moral stages have been exposed by moral development research conducted in the past several decades (Turiel, 1998). Two reliable findings emerging from this research are potentially relevant to the present discussion. First, it has been shown that rather than developing principled moral concepts out of less mature nonmoral concerns (such as a focus on reward and punishment), children construct moral concepts on the basis of their social interactions, and thus even young children are likely to judge that it is wrong to, for example, hurt others or steal not due to fear of punishment but because of a concern with fairness and the welfare of others. The other, complementary finding was that, along with their moral understandings, children also construct understandings about other aspects of social interactions and, when facing concrete social situations, vary in how they weigh conflicting considerations (see reviews by Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998).

These issues are of particular relevance to the study of moral development among war-affected children because their social interactions may not facilitate the development of moral concepts. Rather, war-affected children, exposed to conditions of violence, poverty,

lawlessness, and displacement, are likely to face situations in which their moral principles about, for example, not hurting others or not stealing come into potential conflict with other significant considerations, such as their own needs for food and shelter or their wish to secure justice or retribution for having been wronged. Thus, questions about the overall stage of moral reasoning of children exposed to political violence, or global comparisons between children exposed and not exposed to violence in terms of their moral stages, may not be sufficient for identifying the unique features and vulnerabilities in the moral thinking of war-affected children. Rather, two main questions are of interest. The first, most basic, question is whether, in spite of the violence and lawlessness to which they are exposed, war-affected children develop prescriptive and generalizable moral concepts bearing on justice and welfare. If they do, the second question is how they might bring these moral concepts to bear on multifaceted situations—situations that feature considerations that are relevant to life in the midst of political conflict and that might represent compelling reasons for breaching moral principles, such as concerns with survival or revenge.

Our hypotheses concerning the first question, of whether war-affected children develop moral concepts, rely on evidence about the development of moral concepts in the context of sociocultural conditions that may also be seen as adverse. Research has shown that children growing up in traditional hierarchically organized societies develop concepts about rights and autonomy in spite of the fact that their culture's discourse and practices tend to discourage such conceptions (Turiel & Wainryb, 1998), and girls and women in patriarchal societies, who are subjected to practices that enforce gender inequalities, nevertheless make judgments about the unfairness of those practices (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Similarly, despite explicit socialization into Communist ideology, adolescents in Mainland China develop universalizable notions of accountability and impartiality and make judgments favoring democratic principles (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003, 2007). Together, these findings suggest that the development of moral concepts is not merely determined by cultural and societal conditions but grounded in the intrinsic features of harmful and unjust actions (Turiel, 1998). Although cultural ideologies are not the same as actual exposure to violence and injustice, our expectation was that children exposed to political violence would nevertheless develop prescriptive and generalizable conceptions of welfare and justice.

To more fully understand the second question, of how war-affected children bring their moral concepts

to bear on situations underscoring concerns with survival or revenge, it might be useful to examine not only their *moral* judgments (such as whether they think it right or wrong to, for example, steal in order to fulfill basic material needs) but also their *psychological* judgments (such as their expectations about how people are likely to act or feel when facing dire economic need). Recent research has indeed demonstrated that assessments of both psychological and moral judgments yield a more complete picture of children's actual moral experiences (Wainryb, 2004; Wainryb & Brehl, 2006; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005).

A number of psychological judgments are of interest. These children's expectations about what people are *likely* to do (as distinct from their judgments about what people *should* do) are interesting because war-affected youths function in the midst of chronic violence and lawlessness. Therefore, their moral experiences are likely to encompass a tension between their prescriptive judgments about whether, for example, stealing is right or wrong in a particular context and their knowledge and expectations about whether people (or even themselves) are likely to steal in that context. Although research in this regard is nonexistent, our hypothesis was that war-affected children would expect people to steal and perhaps even to engage in physical harm more often in situations of survival and revenge than in situations in which those concerns are not present. Children's expectations concerning the emotional consequences of engaging in behaviors such as stealing or hurting in specific contexts are also potentially interesting because affective reactions are a salient feature of children's experiences of moral transgressions (Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006). Research has shown that children's recognition of victims' sadness or anger, deemed central to their moral thinking, emerges very early on. Their understanding that transgressors may experience shame or guilt emerges relatively late, and up to about the age of 5 or 6, children tend to think that transgressors feel happy; when present in late childhood or adolescence, however, such "happy victimizer" attributions are predictive of restricted social competence or even psychopathology (Arsenio et al., 2006). Given the importance of these psychological understandings for moral functioning, it bears asking how children who have experienced widespread violence and injustice might construe the emotional experiences of those who steal or inflict harm because of concerns with survival and revenge.

In regard to their moral judgments about stealing and harm in such contextualized situations, previous research (Helwig, 1995; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998) led us

to expect that war-affected children would judge those acts to be morally wrong in unconflicted situations but would endorse stealing more frequently in situations underscoring matters of survival. It was harder to predict whether war-affected children would endorse the infliction of physical harm on others in situations underscoring concerns with revenge. While research conducted with typically developing children suggests that by middle childhood, children condemn physical retaliation and revenge (e.g., Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Yell, 2003), it has also been shown that, when provocation occurs, aggressive children and adolescents tend to view physical aggression as morally justified (Astor, 1994; Gibbs, 2003).

One additional question of interest concerns the potential age and gender differences in the judgments of war-affected children. Previous research suggests that the long-term effects of violence exposure are moderated by age and gender. Given that the maturity of physiological systems and cognitive and socio-cognitive abilities may pose both vulnerabilities and protective features at each level of development, it is not surprising that the data on age differences in children's responses to violence are inconsistent, with some studies suggesting that younger children show more disturbances and others finding that adolescents exhibit the most symptoms (e.g., Wright, Master, & Hubbard, 1998). Thus, although moral development research has shown that children develop moral concepts at a young age, it is hard to predict what differences, if any, may exist in the reasoning of children and adolescents growing up in a violent society. The potential effects of gender are similarly complicated, as research suggests that boys and girls respond differently to trauma, with externalizing problems being more prevalent among boys and internalizing problems among girls (Wright et al., 1998).

## Method

### *Setting and Participants*

Colombia has been in a state of civil war for more than 50 years, with leftist guerrilla groups and rightist paramilitary groups waging war against the government and against each other. The ongoing conflict has been characterized by widespread violence, resulting in one of the highest kidnapping and homicide rates worldwide (World Bank, 2000). As a result of this conflict, nearly 4 million people (out of a population of 44 million) have been forced to leave their homes

and towns, seeking refuge in the big cities. More than 400,000 of these internal refugees have relocated in shanty towns in the outskirts of Bogotá—a startling number given that the capital's total population is 8 million—creating peripheral rings of squatter settlements characterized by high population density, poor housing, lack of public services, and inadequate nutrition. Employment opportunities for internally displaced persons are particularly low, largely because more than 80% of them had been peasants prior to their displacement and lack knowledge about urban job opportunities. War-displaced children also face significant hurdles in continuing their education, both as a direct consequence of their status as displaced, as when they are required to produce forms of identification they no longer possess, and because they cannot meet the expenses associated with attending school. Thus, it is not surprising that only about 8% of displaced children are enrolled in school as compared to 93% of school-age children native to those communities (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

The present study was carried out in Usme, one of southern Bogotá's poorest slums (population 230,000) featuring one of the largest concentrations of displaced persons. Usme is a vast warren of concrete homes and plywood-and-aluminum shacks. Only some roads are paved, and in many places, people have to walk through mud and sewage. Sanitation is poor and access to water and electricity sporadic (e.g., during the time we conducted interviews, the water supply was cut off for days at a time). By Colombian socioeconomic status (SES) standards, individuals residing in Usme are classified in the "low" (*nivel bajo*, Strata 2) and "low-low" (*nivel bajo-bajo*, Strata 1) levels, characterized as living under extreme poverty. Usme is considered one of the most dangerous localities in Bogotá, with a rate of 3.3 violent deaths per 10,000 (Red Bogotá, 2006). Participants in the study were 96 displaced children (mean age = 7.7, range = 6.0–9.8), and adolescents (mean age = 14.6, range = 13.0–16.9), evenly divided by gender and age. About 40% of participants reported having lived in Usme for 1 year or longer, and the remaining had been in Usme for less than a year; however, because displaced persons often move from one neighborhood to another, the total time since *first* displacement is not known. Although most participants reported being enrolled in school (89%) and not working (88%), these figures may not be reliable because children are expected to attend school, and it is illegal for them to hold a job. Although reliable figures could not be obtained, many of the participants in the study lived alone, with siblings or peers, had no parents, or lacked contact with them.

### *Procedures and Assessments*

Displaced children and adolescents residing in or near Usme were invited to participate in the study by the director of Cooperemos D.P.S., a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that assists displaced persons in Bogotá. Children interested in participating were asked to drop by the community center at prearranged times. Children were not offered any form of payment for their participation, but food was made available to them before and after the interview (food was not restricted to those who participated in the interview).

Waiver of parental consent was sought, as most of the youngsters likely to participate in the study either had lost their parents during the violence preceding their displacement or were solely responsible for their own survival. This is not uncommon in developing countries in South America, where children as young as 5–6 can be seen in public places, engaging in a variety of survival activities (selling candy or newspapers, washing cars, shining shoes, entertaining passers-by, begging, and scavenging; Rafaelli & Larson, 1999). In lieu of parental consent, the NGO's director agreed to act as the children's advocate. As such, the director granted consent on behalf of the entire group of children; this procedure was deemed most desirable as it did not require generating a record of the individual children's names. In addition, the agency's director (or a person designated by him) witnessed each child's assent procedure. Verbal, rather than written, consent was obtained from participants, as many of these youngsters are unable to read and write at the level required to fully understand even a simplified written document. In addition, given the ubiquity of illegal activity (including by children), youngsters are reluctant to give their full names (typically, the only agencies that require full names are government institutions where youth may be held against their will).

Following the assent procedure, children were interviewed in Spanish by the first author. Participants were given a two-part interview modeled after previous related research (e.g., Helwig, 1995; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998); the interview was conducted in one session of approximately 45 min. In the first part (general assessments), they were asked a series of questions tapping their general conceptions concerning stealing and inflicting physical harm. The purpose of these assessments was to determine whether children judge instances of harm and injustice as moral concerns, universally applicable across social contexts and not contingent on existing laws. In the second part (contextualized assessments), participants

were asked to make psychological and moral judgments about stealing and inflicting physical harm in specific contexts featuring concerns with survival and revenge. The purpose of these assessments was to determine whether, and how, general moral concepts are applied in situations involving conflicts with considerations that may serve, in the sample studied, as reasons for breaching moral principles. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Following the interview, a measure of participants' exposure to violence was obtained. Details about each set of assessments follow.

*General assessments.* Participants were asked to make judgments about the acceptability of stealing and inflicting physical harm ("Is it okay or not okay to [take other people's things/shove, kick, or hurt others]? Why?"). Next, they were asked whether they endorse laws against stealing and inflicting harm in their own country ("Do you think that there should be a rule against [taking other people's things/shoving, kicking, or hurting others]?") and in other countries ("Do you think that there should be a rule like that in all countries?"), and whether their judgments about stealing and physical harm are contingent on laws or common practice ("If there were no rules against [taking . . . /shoving . . . ], would it be okay or not okay for someone to [take . . . /shove . . . ]?" "In a country where it is very common for people to [take . . . /shove . . . ], do you think it would be okay or not okay for someone to do that?"). All assessments were given first for stealing and next for inflicting harm.

*Contextualized assessments.* Children's psychological and moral judgments about stealing and inflicting physical harm were subsequently assessed in two contextualized conditions in which concerns with either survival or revenge were underscored; a baseline (unconflicted) condition, in which moral concerns were not pitted against other considerations, was also included for comparison. Examples of stimuli follow:

*Baseline condition:* Luis is 14 years old; he lives in northern Bogotá. One evening he was walking back home from the movies; the street was deserted. As he started crossing the street, he saw a guy about his age who was walking a bike. It was a good bike and it looked almost new; Luis thought that was a cool bike. His parents had told him that he could get a bike like that for his next birthday but that was still 8 months away, and Luis had wanted a bike for a long time.

*Survival condition:* Juan is 13 years old; he lives in Soacha. One evening he was walking back home; it was getting dark, and the street was deserted. Juan was feeling worried. A friend helped him get a job

delivering newspapers and Juan needs the job to help feed his younger brothers and sisters, but to deliver newspapers he needs a bike. Bikes are awfully expensive and Juan does not have enough money to buy one. As he's thinking about this, he sees a guy about his age across the street; the guy is walking a bike. It's a good bike and it looks almost new.

*Revenge condition:* Julio is 15 years old; he lives in Ciudad Bolívar. One evening he was walking back home from the store. There were no people in the street. Julio was thinking about his old friends and about the house where he used to live in with his family before they had to move. As he looks up to cross the street, he sees a guy not much older than him. Julio had seen that guy before, he's one of "them," the people who hurt his father and his brother and forced his family to move. The guy is walking a bike; it's a good bike, and it looks almost new.

For each condition, psychological and moral judgments were assessed. Participants were first asked to predict the protagonist's likely course of action (e.g., "What do you think Juan is going to do? Why do you think he might do that?"). Next, they were told that the protagonist engaged in stealing (e.g., "Juan followed him quietly and when the guy was distracted, Juan grabbed the bike and rode away") and were asked to predict what the protagonist and victim might have felt (e.g., "How do you think Juan felt after he grabbed the other's guy bike and rode away?" "How do you think the other guy felt when Juan grabbed his bike?") and to judge the protagonist's behavior (e.g., "Do you think it was okay or not okay for Juan to grab the guy's bike? Why?"). Finally, participants were told that the protagonist also inflicted physical harm on the other character (e.g., "Let's say that Juan followed the guy and when he had an opportunity, he shoved him down to the ground, kicked him really hard, grabbed the bike and rode away."), and the same assessments (protagonist's emotion, victim's emotion, and protagonist's behavior) were obtained.

The three conditions were presented in a fixed order (baseline, survival, and revenge). To allow for generalizability across content areas, and to sustain participants' interest, three comparable versions were designed. In addition to the scenario dealing with a bike, another scenario dealt with a jacket and a third one with a boom box. The "jacket" and "boom box" versions of the baseline and revenge conditions were identical to the "bike" version (i.e., in the baseline condition, protagonist desired the jacket/boom box; in the revenge condition, protagonist noticed a member of the group responsible for her/his displacement

wearing a jacket/carrying a boom box). For the purpose of presenting a jacket or boom box as related to survival, the "jacket" version stated that: "Juan knows that he has grown up a lot in the last six months and his clothes don't fit him anymore, they're too tight, especially his jacket. But he can't buy a new jacket now; at home they have barely enough money for food." The "boom box" version of the survival condition stated that: "Juan's grandma is so sick, she's stuck at home all alone all day. And now that the old radio broke down, there's nothing to keep her company. But he can't buy a new radio for her; at home they have barely enough money for food." Each participant heard each condition with a different scenario (e.g., baseline/bike; survival/jacket; revenge/boom box). Half of the participants in each age and gender group heard the stimuli with two male characters and the other half with two female characters. The interview was written in English, and then translated into Spanish by the first author, and back-translated by a bilingual research assistant.

*Exposure to violence assessment.* For the purpose of documenting the type and extent of violence exposure in this sample, participants were given the Spanish version of the Exposure to Violence interview (ETV; Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlond, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998). The ETV is a structured interview assessing 24 types of violence (e.g., being attacked with a weapon, hearing gunfire) experienced as witness and as victim; six items (e.g., bearing on natural catastrophes, suicide) were omitted because they were deemed irrelevant. Exposure scores as "witness" and "victim" and a total ETV score were calculated based on the number of items endorsed. The ETV has a reported test-retest reliability of .75-.94 and internal consistency indices, as measured by Cronbach's alphas, from .68 to .93.

### Scoring and Reliability

*General assessments.* Two aspects of participants' judgments were scored using categories adapted from the widely used Davidson, Turiel, and Black (1983) scoring system. Evaluations were scored on a 3-point scale. *Evaluations* that stealing and inflicting harm (a) are wrong, (b) should be illegal in their own country, (c) and in other countries, (d) regardless of existing rules, (e) and of common practice, were assigned a score of 3; evaluations that stealing and inflicting harm are not wrong, should not be illegal in their own or other countries, or that their status is contingent on existing rules or common practice were assigned a score of 1; mixed evaluations (e.g., it is both right and wrong) on any of these assessments were

assigned a score of 2. *Justifications* were scored using the following categories: welfare (e.g., "because it's wrong to punch people, it can hurt them badly"), justice (e.g., "because it isn't fair to just take something that doesn't belong to you"), and rules/punishment (e.g., "because the police will throw you in jail"). Multiple justifications were scored in terms of the proportional use of each category.

*Contextualized assessments.* Categories used for scoring the *expected course of action* were derived from scoring pilot data and 20% of this study's protocols. Responses were first scored as non violence (e.g., "she will borrow it from someone"), stealing (e.g., "he will just take it and run"), or violence against persons (e.g., "he will knock him down and hit him"). Next, *reasons* given for the expected course of action were scored using categories such as needs (e.g., "because his brothers and sisters were hungry"), retribution (e.g., "because this guy hurt his family and took away everything, so he's getting his revenge"), hate (e.g., "because she hates these people"), justice (e.g., "because it wouldn't be fair if he just stole it"), likes and desires (e.g., "because she really liked that bike"), and prudence (e.g., "because if he does something to him, then the other guy's friends will come and hurt him worse"). Multiple reasons were scored in terms of the proportional use of each category. The protagonist's and victim's *emotions* were scored using categories adapted from previous scoring systems (Arsenio et al., 2006), including guilt/shame, fear, sadness, anger, hate, and happiness. Responses combining two negative emotions (e.g., "she felt guilty and also angry") were scored in terms of the proportional use of each emotion category. Responses combining a positive emotion and a negative emotion (e.g., "he felt happy but also must've felt guilty") were scored into one of the two mixed-emotion categories, suggesting a combination of satisfaction and a moral emotion (happiness + guilt/shame) or of satisfaction and a nonmoral emotion (happiness + fear or hate). The evaluations of the *protagonist's behavior* were scored on a 3-point scale as *positive* (1), *mixed* (2), or *negative* (3). Justifications were scored using categories adapted from the Davidson et al. (1983) system, including welfare/justice (e.g., "it's not fair what Ines did, it's not her boom-box, it's not fair to just steal it"), rules/punishment (e.g., "it's not okay because the other guy could go to the police and he might get caught"), and retaliation (e.g., "I think it's okay, he deserves it, because he was the one that hurt Julio's family in the first place"). Multiple justifications were scored in terms of the proportional use of each category.

Scoring reliability was assessed through the independent rescoring of 20% of the protocols by a second Spanish-speaking scorer. Interjudge agreement was 99% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .95$ ) for general assessments, 99% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .98$ ) for expected course of action, 86% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .82$ ) for reasons, 93% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .91$ ) for emotions, 99% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .95$ ) for moral evaluations, and 88% (Cohen's  $\kappa = .86$ ) for justifications.

## Results

### *Exposure to Violence*

Findings from the assessment of violence exposure are presented first so as to better frame the main findings of the study. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants reporting having been witnesses to or victims of different types of violent events. ETV scores ranged from 1 through 17, with a mean of 7.30 ( $SD = 3.3$ ) and a mode of 9.00. As shown in Table 1, nearly all participants (92%) reported having heard gunfire. A majority also reported witnessing someone being hit or punched (83%), chased (63%), or threatened with bodily harm (61%), and hearing that someone was

killed (65%). No less important are the findings about participants who reported having witnessed the most severe types of violence, such as finding a dead body (48%), or witnessing someone being killed (30%), attacked with a weapon (39%), or being shot at (32%) or shot (34%). Indeed, the large majority (88%) of participants reported being exposed to at least one of the most severe types of violence, 70% reported being exposed to two different types of severe violence, and 52% to three or more. As would be expected, victimization rates were lower than witnessing rates. About half of the participants reported having been hit or punched (46%), and a minority also reported having been chased (29%), threatened (28%), or attacked with a weapon (8%). Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) of the mean ETV scores (also reported in Table 1) by age and gender yielded significant age effects, with adolescents reporting higher exposure rates in general,  $F(1, 92) = 11.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , as well as higher rates for witnessing,  $F(1, 92) = 11.18, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ , and victimization,  $F(1, 92) = 4.70, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . A gender effect was found only for victimization, with males ( $M = 1.44, SD = 1.3, range = 0-5$ ) reporting having been victims of more types of violent incidents than females ( $M = 0.85, SD = 1.0, range 0-3$ ),  $F(1, 92) = 6.40, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ .

Table 1

*Percentage of Participants Reporting Having Witnessed and Having Been Victims of Different Types of Violent Acts and Mean Scores of Exposure to Violence*

Type of violence	Witness	Victim
Was hit/slapped/punched	83	46
Was chased	63	29
Was threatened	61	28
Was attacked with a weapon	39	8
Was shot	34	1
Was shot at	32	4
Found a dead body	48	—
Saw someone being killed	30	—
Heard that someone was killed	65	—
Heard that someone was shot	29	—
Heard gunfire nearby	92	—
Witness ETV score, $M (SD)$		
Children	4.94 (2.2)	
Adolescents	6.50 (2.4)	
Victim ETV score, $M (SD)$		
Children	0.90 (0.9)	
Adolescents	1.40 (1.4)	
Total ETV score, $M (SD)$		
Children	6.2 (2.7)	
Adolescents	8.4 (3.6)	

*Note.* The dash indicates the areas do not exist in the Exposure to Violence interview (ETV).

### *Analytic Strategy of Interview Data*

ANOVAs were used to analyze participants' evaluations of the general assessments and of the protagonist's behavior, all scored in terms of 3-point ordinal scales. GLM procedures were adopted for analyzing participants' justifications, expected course of action, reasons, and emotions (each scored in terms of the proportional use of various categories). Although loglinear- and structural equation modeling (SEM)-based procedures are typically deemed most appropriate for analyzing categorical data, the sparseness of this study's data set poses unique challenges to these procedures because they rely on computations within cells, thus crashing when encountering zeros. Analyses made using loglinear procedures come to a halt due to the impossibility of logging zeros (see, e.g., Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, & Smith, 2001). Sparseness becomes a challenge for SEM when modeling the data by specifying relevant latent factors. Indeed, when attempts were made to model the present data, the latent factors resulted in untrustworthy solutions (e.g., negative variance) and no model converged with acceptable results. Although analyses using a one-parameter RASCH model worked in some cases (yielding findings identical to those obtained with GLM), they too failed when encountering cells with

zeros. GLM gets around this problem because it computes variability across all cells, thereby capitalizing on the fact that sparseness is cell dependent. (Note that sparseness in this case is theoretically predicted and is not a result of a coding scheme that is inappropriate or failing to capture the data.) Although, in relying on GLM, assumptions about the nature of the covariance matrix are violated, evidence indicates that this violation of assumptions is likely to produce a more conservative test of the hypotheses (Kupek, 2006). Furthermore, it should be noted that where more appropriate tests (such as RASCH analyses) can be used, the results are identical with those produced by GLM.

Preliminary analyses by "version" yielded no significant effects or interactions; "version" was thus dropped from all subsequent analyses. For all analyses, post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni *t* tests were performed to test for significant within-subjects effects. Checks for skewness and kurtosis were conducted and, where appropriate, arcsine and logarithmic transformations were used. Analyses with transformed and untransformed data yielded identical results; results are presented with the untransformed data.

#### General Assessments

All participants judged that it is wrong to steal and hurt others. Repeated measures ANOVAs by age, gender, and transgression (stealing – inflicting harm), with transgression as a repeated measure, were performed on participants' evaluations of the other moral criteria. As shown in Table 2, the large majority of participants of all ages stated that there should be laws against stealing and causing physical harm to others and that it would be wrong for people to steal or hurt others even if such laws did not exist or if those actions were common in a specific context. Although the majority also judged that laws against stealing and hurting should exist in all countries, adolescents (96%) did so more often than children (75%),  $F(1, 92) = 9.06$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . No significant effects or interactions involving gender were found. In justifying their evaluations, the large majority of participants referred to moral concerns with justice and welfare. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) conducted on the proportional use of each justification category by age, gender, and transgression yielded a significant effect for type of transgression ( $p < .001$ ). Follow-up ANOVAs indicated that concerns with fairness were raised to justify the negative evaluations of stealing (62%) more often than those of inflicting harm (22%),  $F(1, 91) = 42.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .32$ , whereas concerns with welfare justified neg-

Table 2  
Evaluations of Moral Criteria for Stealing and Inflicting Harm (Percentages and Means)

Moral criterion	Stealing	Inflicting harm
It is wrong		
%	100	100
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (0.00)
It should be illegal in our country		
%	99	100
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.98 (0.20)	3.00 (0.00)
It should be illegal in all countries		
%	86	97
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.71 (0.71)	2.94 (0.35)
It would be wrong even if legal		
%	100	100
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	3.00 (0.00)	3.00 (0.00)
It would be wrong even if commonly practiced		
%	99	100
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.98 (0.20)	3.00 (0.00)

Note. Means are based on a 3-point scale; higher numbers indicate decreasing acceptability for acts and increasing acceptability for laws.

ative evaluations of harm (55%) more often than those of stealing (13%),  $F(1, 91) = 60.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .40$ . Only a minority of participants justified their negative evaluations of stealing (24%) and harming (20%) on the basis of nonmoral reasons (i.e., rules and punishment).

#### Contextualized Assessments

*Expected course of action.* Participants were asked to predict what the protagonist might do; their responses were coded as behaviors involving no violence, stealing, or violence against persons (see Table 3). A MANOVA conducted on the proportional use of each course of action by age, gender, and condition (baseline – survival – revenge), with condition as a repeated measure, yielded significant effects for age ( $p < .05$ ) and condition ( $p < .001$ ), as well as an Age  $\times$  Condition interaction ( $p < .001$ ). No significant effects or interactions involving gender were found. In general, participants expected a nonviolent course of action (e.g., "she will ask her if she can borrow the bike") more frequently in the baseline condition (54%) than in the survival (13%) or revenge (16%) conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 38.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .30$ , and expected stealing (e.g., "he will probably snatch the boom-box and ran") more frequently in the survival condition (85%) than in the baseline (45%) or revenge (57%) conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 24.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .22$ . Notably, however, nearly half of the participants



Table 3  
*Expected Course of Action, by Condition and Age (Percentages)*

Course of action	Condition and age					
	Baseline		Survival		Revenge	
	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents
Nonviolence	69	40	15	10	17	15
Stealing	31	59	82	89	66	48
Violence against persons	0	1	3	1	18	38

*Note.* Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

(45%) expected the protagonist to steal even in the baseline condition (i.e., when no concerns with survival or revenge were underscored)—an unexpected finding that was more marked among adolescents. Indeed, as indicated by significant Age  $\times$  Condition interactions, in the baseline condition, adolescents expected stealing more often than children,  $F(2, 182) = 7.31, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , whereas children expected a nonviolent course of action more often than adolescents,  $F(2, 182) = 3.88, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . Although infrequent overall (10%), violent courses of action (e.g., “he’ll be so angry he’ll probably kick the guy”; “I bet he will want to hurt him and see him suffer”) made up nearly one third (28%) of responses in the revenge condition but only 1%–2% of responses in the other two conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 46.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$ . This was, again, more marked among adolescents (38%) than among children (18%),  $F(2, 182) = 6.80, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ .

Participants were also asked to explain why they expected such a course of action (see Table 4). A MANOVA conducted on the proportional use of each reason by condition, age, and gender yielded significant effects for age ( $p < .01$ ) and condition ( $p < .001$ ),

as well as an Age  $\times$  Condition interaction ( $p < .001$ ). As shown in Table 4, the expected course of action in the survival condition was justified largely (76%) in terms of needs (e.g., “I think it’s because she doesn’t have any money and she’s desperate to help her family”) and the expected course of action in the revenge condition was justified in terms of retribution (e.g., “because that guy hurt his family so he’s getting back at him”; 56%) and, to a lesser extent, hate (e.g., “I think because you get to hate people if they take everything away that you love”; 12%). Reasons related to need were more common in the survival condition than in the other conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 160.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .64$ , and reasons related to both retribution,  $F(2, 182) = 159.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .64$ , and hate,  $F(2, 182) = 20.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$ , were more common in the revenge condition than in the other conditions. As indicated by Condition  $\times$  Age interactions, adolescents, more often than children, referred to needs in the survival condition,  $F(2, 182) = 6.05, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , and to retribution,  $F(2, 182) = 3.10, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , and hate,  $F(2, 182) = 9.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ , in the revenge condition.

Table 4  
*Reasons for Expected Course of Action, by Condition and Age (Percentages)*

Reasons	Condition and age					
	Baseline		Survival		Revenge	
	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents
Needs	13	3	67	84	12	3
Retribution	0	0	0	0	48	65
Hate	0	0	1	1	4	20
Justice	42	31	2	6	1	3
Likes/desires	31	59	26	7	22	1
Prudence	4	0	2	0	9	8
Other/unelaborated	10	6	2	2	4	0

*Note.* Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

Findings concerning the reasons for the course of action in the baseline condition were more unexpected. Whereas participants justified nonviolent expectations in terms of justice (e.g., “because it would be just wrong for her to grab it and run, it wouldn’t be fair”), their expectations of stealing were justified, not in terms of needs, but in terms of likes and desires (e.g., “because he really wanted it and he didn’t want to wait”). Justice reasons,  $F(2, 182) = 35.95, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .28$ , and likes and desires,  $F(2, 182) = 22.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$ , were given more frequently for the baseline condition than for the other conditions. As indicated by a significant Condition  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(2, 182) = 12.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , however, adolescents provided reasons related to likes and desires more often than children in the baseline condition, but in the other two conditions children provided these reasons more frequently than adolescents.

*Protagonist’s emotions.* Subsequent to eliciting their thoughts about the protagonist’s expected course of action, participants were told that the protagonist (a) stole from or (b) incurred in physical violence against the other character and were asked to predict what the protagonist may have felt following each transgression. The distribution of emotions attributed to the protagonist is presented in Table 5. Our expectation was for participants to think that the protagonist might experience either negative moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) or a mixture of such moral emotions along with more positive emotions (especially in the survival and revenge conditions). As shown in Table 5, only about 40% in the baseline and survival conditions and less than 30% in the revenge condition expected the protagonist to feel negative moral emotions. Although participants often attributed mixed emotions to the protagonists, and did so in all

conditions (36%–38%), about one third of the mixed emotions did not include a moral emotion but rather conveyed a mixture of happiness and either fear or hate.

The MANOVA conducted on the proportional use of each emotion category by condition, transgression, age, and gender (with condition and transgression as repeated measures) yielded significant effects for condition ( $p < .001$ ) and age ( $p < .001$ ), as well as a Condition  $\times$  Age interaction ( $p < .001$ ), and a significant effect for type of transgression ( $p < .001$ ). Protagonists were said to feel guilt or shame,  $F(2, 182) = 13.07, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ , or a mixture of guilt or shame and happiness,  $F(2, 184) = 5.77, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$ , more often in the baseline and survival conditions than in the revenge condition. By contrast, hate,  $F(2, 182) = 16.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , or a mixture of hate or fear and happiness,  $F(2, 184) = 9.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ , were more commonly attributed to protagonists in the revenge than in the other two conditions. As indicated by significant Condition  $\times$  Age interactions, adolescents attributed to protagonists in the revenge condition both hate,  $F(2, 182) = 10.37, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ , and happiness,  $F(2, 182) = 6.43, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , more often than children did, whereas children, more often than adolescents, attributed to these protagonists guilt or shame,  $F(2, 182) = 8.42, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ . Both types of mixed emotions were more commonly attributed by adolescents than by children: Adolescents, more often than children, attributed to protagonists a mixture of happiness and guilt/shame in the baseline and survival conditions,  $F(2, 184) = 5.16, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , and a mixture of happiness and hate/fear in the revenge condition,  $F(2, 184) = 8.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ .

Different emotions were also attributed to protagonists depending on the type of transgression they

Table 5  
*Protagonist’s Emotion, by Condition and Age, and by Transgression Type (Percentages)*

Emotion	Condition and age						Transgression type	
	Baseline		Survival		Revenge		Stealing	Harming
	Ch	Ad	Ch	Ad	Ch	Ad		
Guilt/shame	48	34	50	35	47	8	30	44
Hate	1	5	1	2	3	21	5	6
Fear	15	10	13	11	16	2	12	10
Happiness	10	4	13	3	9	17	12	7
Guilt/shame + happiness	19	42	18	33	18	18	32	17
Hate or fear + happiness	6	5	7	12	7	32	9	14
Other	2	1	0	4	0	2	1	2

Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100. Ch = children; Ad = adolescents.

Table 6  
Victim's Emotion, by Condition and Age (Percentages)

Emotion	Baseline		Survival		Revenge	
	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents	Children	Adolescents
Sadness	80.8	46.6	80.6	50.9	85.4	42.2
Anger	6.3	36.0	5.3	30.8	6.8	41.6
Fear	6.8	15.2	10.0	17.2	6.8	13.7
Other	6.3	2.2	4.3	1.1	1.1	2.1

Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

were said to have incurred. Whereas a mixture of happiness and guilt or shame was more commonly attributed to protagonists said to have stolen from, rather than inflicted harm on, the victim,  $F(1, 92) = 18.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$ , a mixture of happiness and hate or fear was more commonly attributed to protagonist said to have inflicted harm on, rather than stolen from, the victim,  $F(1, 92) = 4.12, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ . Negative moral emotions (guilt and shame) were also more commonly attributed to protagonists who inflicted harm on, rather than to those who stole from, the victim,  $F(1, 91) = 24.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$ .

*Victim's emotions.* Participants were also asked what the victim might have felt (see Table 6). The MANOVA involving the proportional use of each emotion category by condition, transgression, age, and gender yielded a significant effect for age ( $p < .001$ ). Although sadness was the emotion most commonly attributed to victims across all conditions and transgression types, children referred to the victim's sadness more often than adolescents,  $F(1, 87) = 38.54, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$ . Adolescents, in turn, attributed anger to victims more often than children,  $F(1, 87) = 36.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ .

*Protagonist's behavior.* Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the protagonist's behavior. An ANOVA by age, gender, condition, and transgression, with condition and transgression as repeated meas-

ures, was conducted on participants' evaluations. In general, participants negatively evaluated both stealing and inflicting harm across all conditions. However, as shown in Table 7, participants made less negative evaluations of the protagonist's behavior in the revenge condition than in the other two conditions,  $F(2, 184) = 36.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ . Although children and adolescents did not differ significantly in their evaluation of the protagonists' behaviors, there was a tendency for adolescents to be more accepting of these behaviors in the revenge condition,  $F(2, 184) = 2.41, p < .09$ . It is important to underscore that there were no participants who judged that it was okay for the protagonist to steal from or inflict harm on the other character in the baseline or survival conditions, and only 1 or 2 participants in each condition gave mixed evaluations (i.e., it is okay and not okay). For the revenge condition, by contrast, 19% approved of the protagonist's stealing and 21% approved of his/her inflicting physical harm, and an additional 3%–10% gave partially positive (mixed) evaluations of those behaviors.

Participants were also asked to justify their evaluations (see Table 8). The MANOVA involving the proportional use of each justification category by age, gender, condition, and transgression yielded significant effects for age ( $p < .001$ ) and condition ( $p < .001$ ). Participants' negative judgments of

Table 7  
Mean Evaluations and Percentages of Negative, Mixed, and Positive Evaluations of the Protagonist's Behavior, by Condition and Transgression Type

	Condition and transgression type					
	Baseline		Survival		Revenge	
	Stealing	Harming	Stealing	Harming	Stealing	Harming
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	2.99 (0.10)	3.00 (0.00)	2.98 (0.14)	2.99 (0.10)	2.54 (0.79)	2.55 (0.82)
% negative evaluations	99	100	98	99	71	76
% mixed evaluations	1	0	2	1	10	3
% positive evaluations	0	0	0	0	19	21

Notes. Means are based on 1 = okay, 2 = okay and not okay, 3 = not okay.

Table 8  
Justifications for Evaluations of the Protagonist's Behavior, by Condition (Percentages)

Justification	Condition		
	Baseline	Survival	Revenge
Welfare/justice	65	64	27
Rules/punishment	23	22	39
Retribution	0	1	24
Unelaborated	12	14	11

Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100.

stealing and causing harm in the baseline and survival conditions were justified largely in moral terms. Indeed, moral concerns with welfare and justice were more common in the baseline and survival conditions than in the revenge condition,  $F(2, 182) = 49.43, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .35$ . Still, it should be noted that, somewhat unexpectedly, around 20% of participants who made negative evaluations of the protagonist's behavior in the baseline and survival conditions, did so for non-moral reasons (e.g., "it wasn't okay for him to steal the bike because he might get caught and get in trouble"). This unexpected tendency was even more marked in participants' reasoning about the revenge condition. In this case, even though between 71% and 76% of participants had evaluated the protagonist's stealing and inflicting harm negatively, only 27% did so for moral reasons (e.g., concerns with the victim's welfare or with justice); 39% relied, instead, on references to rules and punishment (e.g., fearing punishment or further retribution). Indeed, concerns with rules and punishment were more common in the revenge condition than in the other two conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 11.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ . Concerns with retribution were also more common in the revenge condition than in the other two conditions,  $F(2, 182) = 37.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ , and were used largely to justify participants' positive evaluations of the protagonist's behavior. Finally, significant age effects indicated that, in general, adolescents (62%) referred to concerns with welfare and fairness more often than children (42%),  $F(1, 91) = 13.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$ , and children (37%) referred to concerns with rules and prudence more often than adolescents (19%),  $F(1, 91) = 10.26, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .10$ .

### Discussion

Undeniably, children and adolescents in this sample have been exposed to considerable violence. Although the rates of victimization were relatively

low, all participants had witnessed some form of violence perpetrated on others, with an average of 6.2 and 8.4 different types of violence, respectively, for children and adolescents, and the majority (88%) had witnessed at least one of the most severe and disturbing events, such as finding a dead body or seeing someone being shot. The finding that the prevalence rates of victimization, as compared to witnessing, were low is consistent with findings about children's exposure to violence in the United States (e.g., Richters & Martinez, 1993)—findings that have also unequivocally established the serious mental health implications of witnessing violence. Although there are no sufficient data from other war-torn countries or displaced populations to draw comparisons, the rate of exposure of our sample seems quite high. By comparison, Macksoud and Aber (1996), using a similar method, reported that, on average, Lebanese children ( $N = 224$ ) in four demographically distinct areas had experienced six different types of violent incidents. The findings of this study thus speak about the moral realities and moral judgments of children who had grown up in the midst of severe political violence.

The first set of assessments ("general assessments") indicated that displaced children and adolescents think about matters of welfare and justice in moral terms. Indeed, participants in this study made universal and noncontingent moral judgments not unlike those of normative samples studied in the United States and other countries (Smetana, 2006; Wainryb, 2006). They thought it was wrong to steal and hurt others not because one may get punished or because it is against the law but because of considerations with justice and the welfare of others. Nearly all also judged it would be wrong to steal or inflict harm even if it were legal or common. No differences in these regards were found based on age or gender. These findings, that war-affected children and adolescents display noticeable moral knowledge in spite of having been exposed to violence, poverty, and dislocation, are incompatible with the grim picture of moral disorientation and truncated development painted by some (Fields, 1973, 1980). It appears that rather than merely taking their common experiences of violence and injustice as the sole criterion for determining what is right and wrong, war-affected children, not unlike children living in nonviolent communities across the world, make judgments in relation to what they perceive to be the intrinsic features of moral violations. Indeed, even common practice and the absence of laws do not—in their judgment—alter what is morally right and wrong. In this respect, these findings are consistent with an emerging body of data indicating that children

develop prescriptive and generalizable moral concepts even in contexts that do not seem to facilitate, explicitly or implicitly, such a development. Whereas previous research (e.g., Helwig et al., 2003, 2007; Neff, 2001; Turiel & Wainryb, 1998; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) has focused on contexts defined in terms of cultures that impede (or appear to impede) the development of certain moral concepts, the present study extends these findings to social contexts framed in terms of war and the accompanying conditions of violence, poverty, lawlessness, and displacement.

The lack of evidence of truncated development does not, however, imply that the moral development of children growing up in the midst of political violence is unaffected. Rather, the findings of this study point to the importance of examining both how war-affected children think about moral matters in general and how they bring their moral concepts to bear on specific contexts in which relevant conflicting considerations are made salient. Indeed, participants' psychological judgments about what story protagonists are likely to do and feel in specific conflict situations, and their moral judgments concerning the protagonists' moral transgressions in those situations, demonstrate that their moral concepts bear more heavily in some contexts than others.

Participants were first asked to predict what story protagonists are likely to do in the face of dire need or revenge. In spite of their negative judgments of theft and physical harm in the abstract (general assessments), 85% expected protagonists to steal in the survival condition, 85% expected them to steal or inflict harm in the revenge condition, and 45% expected protagonists to steal even in the baseline condition in which concerns with survival and revenge were not mentioned. These findings reflect, probably quite accurately, the social and interpersonal reality within which participants in our study function. People, they are telling us, steal and hurt each other even though such actions are morally wrong. Given that in responding to our queries, most participants suggested that they identified with the story protagonists (as in "If that guy were me, I'd try to take the bike and run"), these findings can also be taken to mean that participants think *they* might also steal or inflict harm on others.

In some respects, these findings are reminiscent of findings concerning girls and women in patriarchal societies, who judged that females have a right to make their own decisions and that it is wrong for fathers and husbands to curtail their daughters' and wives' freedom of choice but, at the same time, also predicted that most daughters and wives would acquiesce to the restrictions imposed on them by

males in their families (Wainryb & Turiel, 1994). Arguably, as was the case with those girls and women, displaced children's acknowledgment that there are discrepancies between what should happen and what is likely to happen is both realistic and adaptive in the context of the social world within which they function. At the same time, their construal of the world as one in which people do not follow ethical principles might also have long-term implications for their ability or motivation to trust others, and indeed, themselves, to honor commitments and control their own aggression (see Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). More research is needed to further examine these issues.

After participants stated what *they* thought the protagonists were likely to do in each condition (baseline, survival, and revenge), they were told that protagonists decided to engage in stealing and, subsequently, physical harm. Then they were asked to predict what the protagonists might feel after stealing or inflicting harm in each condition and to judge whether these actions were right or wrong. As might be expected based on research with normative samples, the large majority (86%) recognized that victims in all conditions would feel sad and, to a lesser extent, angry, and a majority also predicted that protagonists in the baseline (72%) and survival (68%) conditions would experience moral emotions (guilt or shame) or mixed emotions (a mixture of guilt or shame and happiness). These findings are important in light of the centrality attributed to children's understandings of affective reactions in the context of moral transgressions (Arsenio et al., 2006). Indeed, the fact that participants can appropriately predict the emotional states likely to ensue after stealing and hurting others—namely, that victims are negatively affected and transgressors feel remorse—bodes well for these children's capacity to bring their moral concepts to bear on at least some situations of moral transgression (Shaw & Wainryb, 2006).

Less consistent with normative data were the findings in the revenge condition. In this case, only a minority expected protagonists to experience guilt or shame (28%) or mixed emotions (18%); the remaining 54% expected protagonists to feel no moral emotions, with 33% expecting them to feel either happy or both happy and afraid or hateful. In some respects, this finding is a source for concern, as research in the United States has shown that "happy victimizer" attributions among older children and adolescents are predictive of behavioral problems and even psychopathology (Arsenio et al., 2006). It is nevertheless possible that this finding has different meanings, and thus different psychological

consequences, for children in this sample. It is hard to tell what it might mean, for children who have suffered serious injury at the hands of a certain group of people, to expect not to feel remorse—or even to feel happy—upon inflicting (or thinking about inflicting) harm on them. Furthermore, it is important to recall that, in the present study, the happy victimizer attributions were restricted to the revenge condition; the very same children expected protagonists to feel shame or guilt in other conditions. It is thus possible that the consequences of this phenomenon may not be identical to those presumed to ensue among juvenile delinquents or aggressive children in the United States, for whom such attributions are more generalized.

As was the case for their expectations about what protagonists might feel upon hurting others, participants' moral judgments of protagonists' actions also varied by condition. As hypothesized, nearly all (99%–100%) judged such actions to be morally wrong in the baseline condition, where no conflicting concerns were present. More important, and somewhat unexpectedly, nearly all (98%–99%) also judged that it was morally wrong to steal or inflict harm on others in the survival condition, in which protagonists' dire economic needs were underscored. These judgments are particularly significant given that most participants also recognized the urgency of the underlying needs and expected that, in this condition, people would actually steal. Still, their judgments were unequivocally negative and moral—that is, they thought that it would be wrong for protagonists to steal or hurt others even if these acts were to fulfill some of their basic needs, not because protagonists might be caught or punished for doing so, but because of concerns with fairness and the well-being of the victims. The fact that their expectation that most people *would* steal did not translate into their judging that doing so is right, suggests that participants do not merely adhere to a relativistic view that “anything goes.” It is furthermore unlikely that this finding—that they overwhelmingly judged stealing in the survival condition to be morally wrong—may be the result of social desirability; as seen below, their judgments of stealing and harming in the revenge condition were neither straightforwardly negative nor systematically grounded on moral terms.

Indeed, in the revenge condition, 29% and 24%, respectively, for stealing and harming, judged that it was okay, or partially okay, for protagonists to engage in such actions (e.g., “I think it's okay that he beat him up because that person had hurt his family first so he's just paying him back”), and an additional 39% stated that these actions were wrong but not for moral

reasons, but rather because protagonists might be hurt or punished for engaging in said actions (e.g., “I don't think it was okay that he hit him and kicked him, you know, because then those people can come back and hurt his family all over again and even worse”).

These findings, concerning participants' endorsement of harm in the context of revenge or their disapproval of revenge for selfish, rather than moral, reasons, are inconsistent with findings obtained among typically developing children in the United States. Although revenge is not a foreign concept among people in the United States, as attested, among others, by the broad support of capital punishment, in samples of school-aged children in the United States, only aggressive children tend to approve of revenge; nonaggressive children (aged 8 and older) consistently disapprove of revenge as a means for solving interpersonal problems and redressing wrongs, even when directly provoked (Astor, 1994; Smetana et al., 2003). Rather, these findings are reminiscent of early moral development findings concerning the potentially injurious effects of a depressed moral atmosphere, such as that of prison settings, where reasoning stabilizes around Stage 2 “tit-for-tat” morality (Kohlberg, Scharf, & Hickey, 1971; see also Gibbs, 2003). Recent research similarly suggests that, in sociopolitical contexts characterized by deprivation and neglect, children approve of the exclusion of certain people and endorse revenge (Ardila-Rey, Killen, & Brenick, in press; Brenick et al., 2007; Killen, Henning, Kelly, Crystal, & Ruck, 2007; Margie, Brenick, Killen, Crystal, & Ruck, 2006). It should be noted that, unlike what is assumed under the “moral atmosphere” hypothesis, our own findings as well as the more recent findings emerging from Killen's lab indicate that children's endorsement of retaliation and retribution is restricted to certain conditions. Even when thus limited, however, the construal of aggression against certain people as a legitimate means for redressing grievances and reinstating justice may be seen as a reason for concern as it is likely to contribute to the perpetuation of cycles of violence (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993; Opatow, 1990; Opatow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005; Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press).

The potential vulnerabilities identified in participants' thinking were more pronounced among adolescents. In fact, on nearly each dimension tested, adolescents fared more poorly than children. Adolescents predicted more stealing in the baseline condition (when considerations of need and revenge went unmentioned) and more violence against persons in the revenge condition, they referred more often to retribution and hate as reasons for expecting violence,

they attributed more hate and happiness and less guilt and shame to perpetrators in the revenge condition; and they had a slightly higher tendency to be accepting of stealing and inflicting physical harm in the revenge condition. It is important to emphasize, however, that, as would be expected from a reliable body of moral judgment findings (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998), children and adolescents did not differ in their *moral* concepts. Rather, concerns with retribution and revenge, in particular, seemed to weigh more heavily on adolescents' expectations and judgments. This finding may be thought to be due to adolescents' generalized tendency to focus on peer groups and loyalty or to their presumably more relativistic orientation that might lead them to attribute to others greater self-interest. However, developmental research conducted in a variety of communities not exposed to political violence, in the United States and other countries, has clearly demonstrated that adolescents do not endorse revenge (Smetana et al., 2003) or the exclusion of individuals or groups (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002), nor do they display a generalized relativistic orientation (Wainryb, 1993; Wainryb et al., 2001). This would suggest that the age-related findings in this study are more likely to be associated to the specific experiences of war-displaced adolescents than to broader features of adolescent thinking. As shown, repeated and prolonged exposure to violence does not protect children against negative developmental outcomes but, rather, increases their susceptibility to traumatization (e.g., Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996). Given the length of the political conflict in Colombia (over 50 years), it is reasonable to assume that adolescents had been exposed to these conditions longer than children.

In contrast to age, gender had a negligible effect. In the present sample, boys and girls did not differ in the level of violence to which they had been reportedly exposed (though boys reported a slightly higher level of victimization) or in their moral thinking. Although there are data suggesting that boys are typically exposed to more violence than girls (Wright et al., 1998), these data come largely from research conducted in inner-city neighborhoods in the United States. It may be that in situations of displacement following political violence, girls do not benefit from any significant additional protection. (There is, in fact, evidence indicating that in Colombia, girls comprise nearly half of the guerrilla units; Human Rights Watch, 2003). Although these gender-related findings cannot be taken to imply that all their experiences were necessarily identical, at least in regard to the dimensions assessed in this study, boys and girls displayed similar moral understandings and vulnerabilities.

Overall, this study's findings are not suggestive of moral disorientation or truncated development. Rather they speak about how war-affected children—children for whom violence, injustice, and displacement are normalized, a fact of life—interpret and reason about distinct morally relevant contexts. In general, these findings unveil a reservoir of moral knowledge among these children: It appears that even the impoverished environments of war and displacement present youths with opportunities for reflecting on the intrinsic features of actions that harm others. At the same time, these findings also point to potential vulnerabilities in these children's moral lives. Concerns with survival—whose gravity participants clearly acknowledged—prevailed over moral considerations in some respects: Participants expected people to steal when faced with overwhelming need but also judged that doing so would be morally wrong. Concerns with revenge colored their expectations and moral judgments more sweepingly. It seems therefore possible that contexts underscoring concerns with survival might compromise children's ability to view themselves and others as moral agents, whereas contexts underscoring revenge might give rise to cycles of violence; future research might explore further these specific vulnerabilities. The long-term developmental implications of this pattern of vulnerabilities might also hinge on how children make sense, as a whole, of the political conflict within which their moral lives, and unique moral conflicts, are embedded. Societies tend to superimpose, on the reality of violence, different kinds of meanings—more or less coherent, more or less polarized—about, for example, the roots of the conflict and the nature of the "enemy." Whether such ideological frameworks serve as a protective factor vis-a-vis children's moral development (Barber et al., 2006) or foment further vulnerability (Cairns, 1996; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993; Punamäki, 1996; Wainryb & Pasupathi, in press; Wessells, 2006) is another question that merits further investigation.

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