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Situating Risk in Young People's Social and Moral Relationships: Young Lives Research in Peru

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Abstract

In this paper we report on a long-term study of child poverty being carried out by *Young Lives* in Peru and examine how poverty mediates a multitude of other risks in children's lives. We offer three main arguments in relation to children's experiences of risk in our sample. The first is that risk is not simply a feature of 'extraordinary' childhoods and 'extraordinary' circumstances but also an integral part of everyday, 'ordinary' lives in which the young negotiate multiple, interacting challenges. The second concerns the importance for children of the social and moral dimensions of risk and how these shape their responses to adversity. The third makes the case that in situations of high levels of interdependence between generations children can play an essential part in household risk reduction. Our findings suggest that while current approaches to 'risk' tend to focus on individualised risks which are singled out according to so-called 'objective' criteria these often fail to account for children's own priorities, perceptions and subjective experiences within the context of their daily lives.

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1. Introduction

What does it mean for young people to be 'in crisis' – or 'at risk'? Definitions of crisis, risk, protection, prevention – and even (or especially) childhood - are contested, culturally and politically shaped, and morally laden. When defined in relation to children, these terms highlight generation as a central organising feature for society, for experiencing time, and for framing the moral obligations and responsibilities that bind the old and young, particularly in times of personal or collective difficulty. Popular images conjured up by the language of 'children in crisis' or 'at risk' capture a multitude of what are, it is hoped, extreme circumstances – these are children in situations of violent conflict and forcible displacement, orphans, those living outside of households, and children living in extreme poverty (these often associated with childhoods in the global south); they are victims of sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation (these often reflecting international child protection priorities emanating from the global north). That circumstances like hunger or parental death pose 'objective' risks to children is often taken as self-evident (Boyden 2009: 8). However, such assumptions of risk are rarely considered in relation to what children, including those in difficult circumstances, identify as the main threats and supports to their well-being or address how young people manage these risks in daily life (Scott et al. 1998: 700).

Poverty, especially in its chronic and extreme forms, is commonly viewed as a crisis, characterised by structural disadvantage, deprivation, uncertainty and unpredictability. This paper focuses on the way poverty mediates children's experiences of risk, both in terms of how boys and girls make sense of the world around them and the difficulties they face, as well as their strategies for dealing with these difficulties and for remaining hopeful. We report on analysis of data collected in Peru as part of the Young Lives study, an ongoing investigation into the dynamics of childhood poverty.¹

We pursue three main lines of reasoning. The first centres on the argument that risk is not simply a feature of 'extraordinary' childhoods and 'extraordinary' circumstances but also an integral part of everyday, 'ordinary' lives in which the young negotiate multiple, interacting challenges. The second concerns the importance for children of the social and moral dimensions of risk and how these shape their engagement with adversity, including through providing opportunities for learning and growth. The third makes the case that in situations of high levels of interdependence between generations, children can play an important part in household risk reduction, their contributions at the same time impacting their roles, choices and transitions to adulthood.

Owing to the centrality of the concept of risk for our investigation, in the next section we offer a summary review of dominant approaches to researching risk, especially as they relate to children (cf Boyden and Crivello 2011). The review highlights the prevailing medical and psychological focus on 'objective' risk and calls for greater attention to be given to children's own perspectives, and to the moderating and mediating factors that impact their experiences. The following section provides a brief description of the Peruvian context where the study takes place and of the research sample and design. The remainder of the paper presents our findings.

1 There are four Young Lives study countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh state), Peru and Vietnam. For more information see: www.younglives.org.uk

Literature on children at risk

Much of the literature on children in crisis draws on the concept of risk. Whilst 'adversity' is about actual experiences of hardship or misfortune, 'risk' has more to do with future uncertainty (Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 17), what 'might be happening' (Adam et al. 2000: 2), and 'probabilities and not certainties' (Schoon 2006: 6-8). Risk has negative connotations and is thought to increase the probability of some undesirable outcome or of 'maladjustment' or disorder (Cicchetti and Garmezy 1993; Masten et al. 1990; Rutter 1985).

While sociologists like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens and anthropologist Mary Douglas have fostered important traditions of risk research among social theorists (cf. Beck 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky 1982; Giddens 1991), the field has origins in social work, psychopathology and medicine and remains heavily dominated by disciplines which deploy largely quantitative methods. This applies especially to work with children.² In medicine, psychiatry, neuroscience and related disciplines, the concern is generally with the predictability of life outcomes from earlier circumstances based on statistical associations. There is strong consensus that risk can be defined according to objective criteria, risks so classified impacting humans universally in more or less similar ways. Particular attention is given to enduring detriment arising from stressors experienced in the earliest years of life: often the degree and persistence of pathology in development or behaviour is very striking (Engle et al. 1996; Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). According to these criteria, there is persuasive evidence that poverty is a major source of risk for the young. For very young children, for example, the impacts of specific material and nutritional deprivations can have physiological and neurological effects that last into adulthood (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007), whereas for older children and youth, the psychosocial impacts of poverty are especially important, as the sense of stigma and shame become more debilitating (Bartlett and Minujin 2009; Ridge 2002).

Nonetheless, despite strong evidence of the harm caused, poverty and other risks should not be regarded as the sole defining feature of childhood and youth in poor communities – boys' and girls' lives are as complex as men's and women's and require definition beyond the singularity of risk (Hart 2006: 6). At the same time, risk or crisis is not necessarily characterised by a specific event whose impact can be isolated and measured through statistical procedures, despite the predominance of this approach in the literature. Henrik Vigh (2008: 5) has argued along these lines that for many people and in many contexts crisis is 'endemic rather than episodic and cannot be delineated as an aberrant moment of chaos or a period of decisive change'. He maintains that over time crisis can become background or context, a terrain of action and meaning, rather than an aberration or a singular event to which causality can be easily ascribed (Vigh 2008).

This kind of complexity is also apparent from important bodies of research within psychology and anthropology which underscore the extraordinary diversity of human responses to risk, psychologists highlighting individual resilience and anthropologists, contextual forces. Resilience researchers point to individual traits that play out in complex gene/environment interdependencies (Curtis and Cicchetti 2003; Rutter 2002) and an array of family and

2 A database search was conducted of journal publications (03 October 2009) covering the period 2002-2009 and using ISI Web of Knowledge to search the terms 'risk and child*'. The most recent 500 articles out of a total of 100,000 were selected and sorted by discipline, with paediatrics constituting the bulk of entries and all medical sciences together making up nearly 70 per cent. A combined psychology/psychiatry/neuroscience group covered over 18 per cent of the entries, with anthropology, sociology and other social sciences making up a mere 3 per cent of the total.

community level protective factors which account for wide variation in individual reactions to risk (Rutter 1985; Werner and Smith 2001). Some call attention to possible 'steeling effects', whereby certain individuals grow stronger in adversity (Elder 1974; Rutter 1981).

Anthropologists and scholars in the social constructionist tradition, on the other hand, tend to stress emic perspectives (that is, understandings that are meaningful to the actor/cultural insider) on the grounds that social and cultural values are crucial in shaping meanings, responses to and management of risk (Ungar 2005). So, Scott et al. (1998: 700) point out that collective notions of risk have important consequences for children's everyday experiences, including the places they are allowed to go, where they feel safe or endangered, who they spend time with, and so on. They argue for situating risk 'in the context of what children actually do, their journeys to and from school, their patterns of leisure, etc'. This has major implications for the manner in which the young engage with adversity. For example, some cultures use moderate exposure to risk and deliberately create potentially dangerous situations – such as in some rites of passage - to train their young in resilience (Boyden and Mann 2005: 10), whereas others regard the best means of protection to be isolation from danger. There is a vital biographical dimension to this, and Lupton and Tulloch (2002: 332) found that people's 'reflexive responses to risk were strongly shaped via such factors as gender, age, occupation and sexual identity'. Thus, boys and girls of differing ages, locations, and social backgrounds will differ in their exposure to various risks in their communities.

We suggest that there is a strong moral dimension to all of this, in that ideas about what is dangerous and what is good for boys and girls reflect broader values concerning appropriate behaviour in particular political and sociocultural contexts. These values are important for the effective social integration of the young and are inculcated by elders and peers from a very early age. For example, research by Barbara Rogoff (2003: 226) shows how young children learn their community's moral order through the reactions of family members, in playing games, through teasing and shaming, punishment and praise, and through the example of others' moral learning. From this, it can be seen that 'fitting in', being respected, and maintaining strong peer and family relationships are often core to children's everyday concerns. This can be especially important for their developing sense of identity, belonging and control over their lives, which are strongly shaped by their social worlds. Hence, there is growing evidence that in the context of poverty, especially as boys and girls grow older, the young commonly find inequality and related social exclusion far more distressing than material deficiency (Attree 2006; Boyden et al. 2003; Camfield 2010; Mann 2010; Redmond 2008; Ridge 2002; Tekola 2009).

Again, this shows how much biography matters, in that perceptions of risk often invoke moral judgements about transgression and these vary with gender, social age and other status criteria. These biographical aspects are not just about the 'individual' child, but position each child within the broader moral order and within the prevailing social categories and relationships to which he/she belongs. Further, there are moral obligations which shape how young people engage with other kinds of risk, such as balancing school and work, coping with food insecurity and dealing with parental illness.

That said, perceptions, norms and values are not fixed but dynamic and contested, often presenting young people with difficult contradictions and dilemmas, especially in contexts of multiple, interacting risks. This circumstance requires acknowledgment of young people as social agents, in the sense that boys and girls do not develop by merely absorbing collective norms and practice but through active construction of competencies and engagement with the world. In other words, children are social and moral actors in their own right and are

continuously weighing up risks, making choices and negotiating strategies, with very diverse outcomes. Evidence of young people's moral and social competence challenges the widespread assumption in the literature that they lack the capacity to have a legitimate view of right and wrong (Frankel 2007: 1).

We explore these considerations within the context of Young Lives findings from Peru, beginning with a brief description of the research context, sample and research design.

2. Context: Young Lives in Peru

Peru is recognised as a post-conflict country, having experienced over a decade of political violence during the 1980s and early 1990s resulting in an estimated 69,000 deaths and disappearances.³ The violence impacted most heavily on rural, indigenous communities in the Andean highlands and led to widespread migration from rural areas to cities, heightening a trend that was already well underway prior to the conflict and a response to historical inequalities between regions and groups.

The Peruvian economy has performed well since the cessation of conflict and Peru is now regarded as a 'medium human development' country according to United Nations criteria, which in 2007 ranked Peru 78th out of 182 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index.⁴ Although there has been a national reduction in aggregate poverty rates and increased social public expenditure, monetary poverty continues to be very high, with nearly half the population (45 per cent in 2006) classified as poor – three out of five in the case of children – and one out of five, extremely poor.⁵ Poverty in Peru is more prevalent in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and indigenous groups (i.e., rural areas, mountainous areas, the Amazon and some coastal rural areas) (Justino and Acharya 2003: 11; Sanchez 2008: 9). Among the poorest 20 per cent of the population, infant mortality rates are 4.5 times higher than for the richest 20 per cent of families (Escobal et al. 2008: 6). Thus, while Peru's economic and policy context has become more favourable for children and young people in recent years, inequalities in wealth and access to services and opportunities persist, especially between urban and rural areas and between ethnic groups (Escobal et al. 2008: 54).

Young Lives has been following a group of nearly 3,000 children in two age groups in Peru, with a view to exploring their changing circumstances, perspectives and aspirations, documenting the earliest years of life through to early adulthood. Every few years the same children and selected adults in their families and communities participate in a questionnaire survey (which have so far taken place in 2002, 2006 and 2009). A sub-group of 50 children (and their families and community members) also takes part in qualitative case-study

3 The conflict was between the Peruvian armed forces, the Maoist guerrilla group Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru). Estimated deaths and disappearances based on The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report (2003).

4 See <http://hdr.undp.org/en>.

5 As reported by Sanchez (2008: 5) whose definition is of monetary, consumption-based poverty, established by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INEI) (National Bureau of Statistics). 'According to INEI, a person living in a household whose expenditure per capita is not enough to acquire a basket of basic goods is considered as poor (i.e., below the poverty line). Analogously, a person unable to satisfy a minimum amount of caloric intake (as defined by a daily caloric norm) is considered extremely poor (p. 5).'

research. Over 700 of these children, the older cohort, were born in 1994.⁶ This paper reports on analysis of data from the second round of the survey when the children in this cohort were roughly 12 years old, and from two rounds of qualitative data collected in 2007 and 2008 (when they were aged 12-14).

Since we study boys and girls living in families and households, the risks experienced by Young Lives children are to a significant degree framed by household circumstances. The quantitative research provides information from caregivers on household exposure to a diverse range of events and circumstances that have been defined by Young Lives in terms of 'risk' and 'adversity' as potentially affecting household welfare negatively. These circumstances include livelihood 'shocks', crime and family separation, morbidity and mortality. Qualitative research with children has addressed risk in relation to their understandings and experiences of well-being, key life transitions, and experiences of services and programmes such as schooling. These themes have been explored using a combination of individual and group-based interviews, including creative methods where young people kept daily diaries, took photographs or videos, participated in role play, and produced drawings intended to prompt discussion in groups.

The Young Lives sample in Peru is not nationally representative, but is 'pro-poor', in the sense that the top 5 per cent wealthiest districts were excluded.⁷ About 80 per cent of the Young Lives children live in absolute poverty (Escobal et al. 2008: 22), but their experiences represent a range of poverty circumstances, not only the extremes. There are 20 research sites across the country and these were selected on the basis of levels of poverty, area of residence (providing a contrast between rural and urban populations), geographical location, language, and ethnic and/or religious make-up of the population. Households with children of the target age group were randomly sampled within sites. Four of these sites were selected for qualitative research to capture similar contrasts: two rural (Rioja and Andahuaylas, both with high levels of poverty, the first in the high jungle region, the second an indigenous Quechua-speaking village) and two urban (San Roman and Lima-3, the first a market town in the Andean highlands and the second a shanty town on the outskirts of Lima).

Rioja village is located in the upper Amazon jungle region in the northern part of the country in the administrative Department of San Martin. Many of the residents are Andean immigrants from the neighbouring region of Cajamarca and make their living raising cattle and from agriculture (coffee being the main cash crop). Electricity only reached the community in 2007, and the closest location offering higher education is one hour's drive away. Andahuaylas is located in the country's southern highlands, with lands between 3,000 and 3,500 metres in altitude, and is part of the Department of Apurimac. This is one of the country's poorest regions and was particularly hard hit by the political violence of the 1980s and early 1990s. Most villagers are indigenous Quechua-speakers whose livelihoods consist of cattle-rearing and agriculture (with corn and potatoes the main crops). The nearest place for children to pursue higher education is in the provincial capital, a 45 minute-drive away. Analysis for this paper centred on the experiences of young people participating in the qualitative research in the villages of Andahuaylas and Rioja and is contextualised in findings from the survey data on the full sample.

6 The study also follows a younger group of 2,000 children born around the beginning of the millennium.

7 A multistage, cluster-stratified, random sampling technique was used to select the child participants. Sampling was based on the poverty map developed by the Fondo Nacional de Cooperacion para el Desarrollo (FONCODES) National Fund for Development and Social Compensation. See Escobal and Flores (2008) for further details on the Young Lives sampling frame.

3. Risk and well-being in the context of poverty

In this section we explore our first theme, which is how poverty and other risks co-occur and interact in everyday, 'ordinary' childhoods. Survey analysis of Young Lives data collected in 2002 and 2006 provides a poverty profile for the sample and indicates household exposure to risks, highlighting inequalities between groups of children and how these change or persist over time. Households in rural areas are over-represented in the poorer quintiles of our sample and they also report greater exposure to some types of adversity (see Tables 1 and 2). Between 2002 and 2006, urban families experienced slightly more 'inter-personal' shocks than rural families, such that crime and family problems were relatively more prevalent in cities. Meanwhile 'structural adversity' in the form of economic and environmental disasters struck a greater proportion of rural families in our sample. Tables 1 and 2 indicate household experiences of different types of adversity during the period between survey rounds, presented separately for rural and urban households and by wealth index quintile. Even the wealthiest of rural households are at greater risk of economic and environmental shocks than are the poorest of urban households, this suggesting that the location where children grow up is a strong factor in shaping their exposure to certain types of adversity.

Table 1. *Rural households' experiences of type of shocks by wealth index quintile (from R1)*

Type of shock	Bottom-most		Second		Middle		Fourth		Top-most	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Crime	25	10.9	27	11.7	34	15	24	10.4	32	14.2
Economic	35	15.2	52	22.5	61	26.9	68	29.4	53	23.6
Environment	102	44.4	103	44.6	109	48	115	49.8	67	29.8
Family	71	30.9	66	28.6	71	31.3	78	33.8	74	32.9
Total observations	230	20.1	231	20.2	227	19.8	231	29.2	225	19.7

Source: Round 2 Young Lives Household Questionnaire (younger and older cohort pooled)

Table 2. *Urban households' experiences of type of shocks by wealth index quintile (from R1)*

Type of shock	Bottom-most		Second		Middle		Fourth		Top-most	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Crime	50	16.6	55	18.5	42	14.1	51	16.9	61	20.7
Economic	44	14.6	59	19.9	43	14.4	44	14.6	50	17
Environment	38	12.6	21	7.1	12	4	16	5.3	8	2.7
Family	111	36.9	97	32.7	105	35.2	103	34.1	91	30.9
Total observations	301	20.2	297	19.9	298	20	302	20.2	295	19.8

Source: Round 2 Young Lives Household Questionnaire (younger and older cohort pooled)

Further, inequalities between urban and rural locations appear to be worsening. Between the two survey rounds there was an overall decline in poverty in the sample; however, most of the improvements have been in urban areas – which report improved access to basic services - and poverty rates in rural areas have remained virtually unchanged (Escobal et al. 2008: 4). Positive aggregate figures on school enrolment also mask persistent inequalities, namely where grade repetition and temporary drop-out have resulted in the problem of 'over-age' (students who are older than they should be for their grade). So, while enrolment rates in our sample are almost universal, about 60 per cent of the sample children are over-age with striking differences between children in the poorest quintile (71 per cent) compared to the richest quintile (44 per cent). Further, 70 per cent of children whose mothers speak one of the minority indigenous languages (i.e., Amazonian) were found to be over-age. Despite increased access to schooling across the country, rural girls have also been shown in other studies to be more likely than any other group to drop out of school at secondary level (Guadalupe 2002: 89). They were also shown in our sample to be more malnourished than their rural peers in both the first and second survey rounds (aged 8 and 12) (Escobal et al. 2008: 41). These findings suggest a worrying trend whereby some groups of children are shouldering a greater burden of risk than others in a national context of entrenched (and increasing) social and economic inequality.

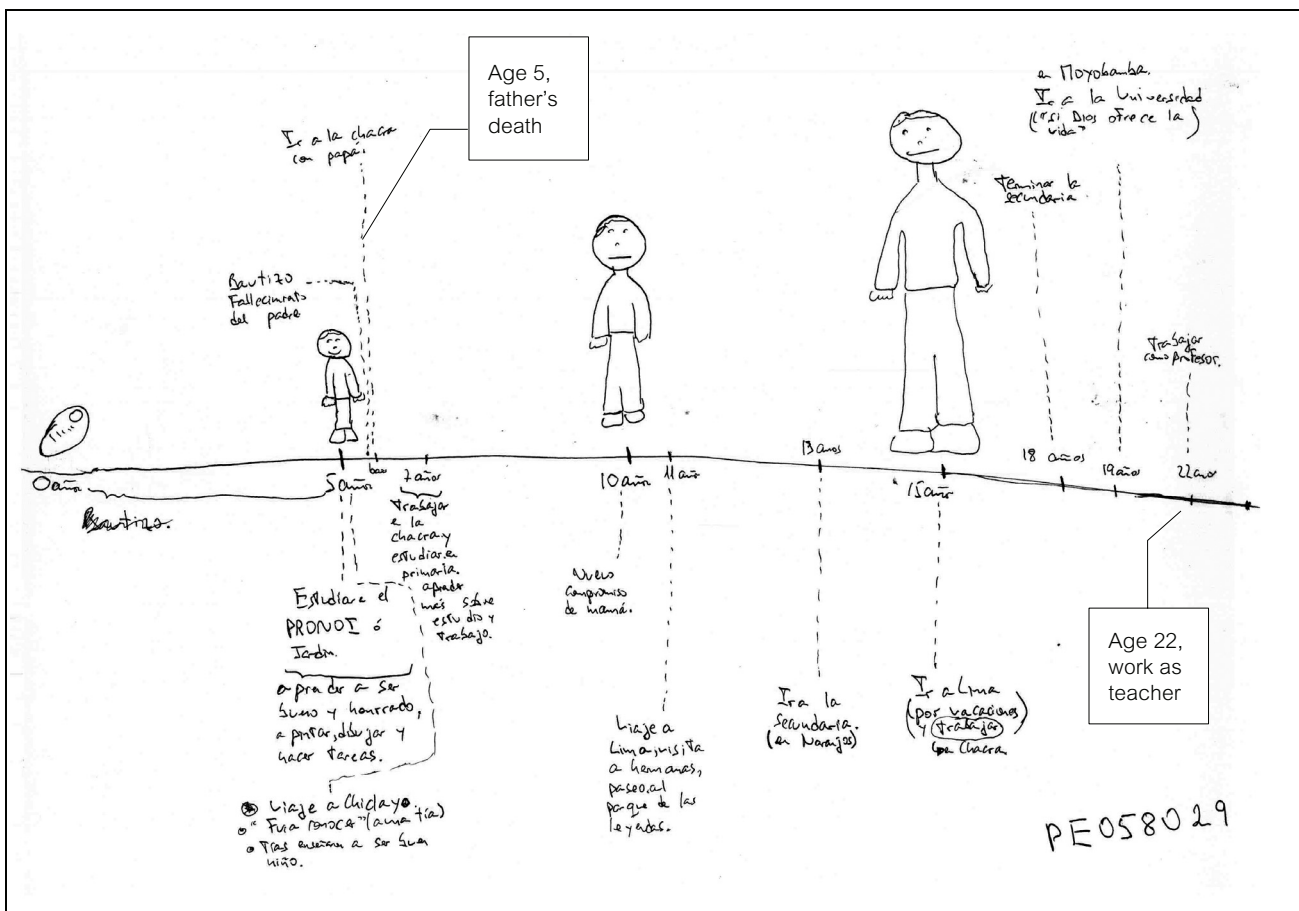
From this it can also be seen that poverty is an enduring circumstance for many Young Lives children in Peru and at the same time is commonly associated with and mediates other risks. Nevertheless, findings from our qualitative data reveal considerable complexity with regard to children's engagement with risk. First, even though poverty is pervasive in children's lives, boys and girls seldom conceptualise poverty, or material lack, directly in relation to risk, referring more often to its effects in daily life. In this sense, poverty can be taken as 'background' and as a broad lens for understanding how young people manage their daily life choices and future aspirations rather than a specific, separable risk.

We illustrate this point by citing an exchange with 12-year-old Atilio from rural Andahuaylas. Atilio described a drawing in which he had depicted a 'sad day' for a boy like him. Atilio's household is among the poorest in our sample and poverty features clearly in his account. When asked why the boy in his picture was crying, he explained: 'Because he wasn't helping his mother...and his mother whipped him (*le echó látigo*) [because] he didn't want to help in the fields...he didn't even want to go to his class.' When asked why he said, 'Because he was anaemic...he didn't have the will (*ganás*).' He attributed the boy's anaemia to his mother's poor cooking: 'She cooked, but...without meat and without vegetables... [because] she didn't have money (*plata*).' In his representation, poverty clearly underpins and mediates several aspects of adversity that contribute to the boy's sadness but is not in and of itself articulated as a risk.

Under circumstances of multiple, interacting adversities it becomes very difficult to isolate, measure and rank risks in order of severity of child outcomes. The effects of 'extraordinary' events and situations are often expressed in terms of a diversity of impacts in daily life rather than through the articulation of deeper deprivations, sorrows or grief. This calls attention to the 'ordinary' ways in which children deal with a range of hardships. We therefore argue for a focus on 'ordinary' childhoods in the context of risk, this being a conscious departure from the temptation to highlight the 'extraordinariness' of childhood adversity. We explore this point through the case study of 12-year-old Nicolas who relates an 'extraordinary' personal crisis – the death of his father – to the daily risks associated with growing up poor and his changing responsibilities and obligations to his family.

Nicolas lives in a village in Rioja (high jungle region) with his mother, step-father and younger sister (aged 10). His two older sisters, aged 17 and 20, live in Lima where they work as domestics. Nicolas' father died when Nicolas was 5 years old (according to him, from witchcraft, 'brujeria'), on the day of his first communion ceremony. At age 12, he was in the fifth grade of primary school and his household was categorised among the poorest ('quintile-1').⁸ In a 'lifecourse timeline' he depicted his earliest memories of his father. From this, it seems there are two phases to his life: a 'before my father died' and an 'after my father died'.

Figure 1. Nicolas' life course timeline, aged 12



Source: Young Lives qualitative research 2008

Nicolas explained that at one time the family owned a small shop and were never in need but when his father died the shop had to be closed. This had a significant detrimental economic impact on the family, as his mother explained: 'Well, since they were left small [orphans], we all worked in our field because there isn't any other kind of work here.' The death of his father and ensuing family poverty meant that Nicolas and his sisters had to work. But Nicolas did not necessarily regard this as a bad thing because work also features in his definition of what

8 The Young Lives 'Expenditure Index' is based on data from Young Lives surveys of individual households and calculated as the: 'Sum of the estimated value (approximated to the past 30 days i.e., a month), of food (bought + home grown + gifts/transfers) and non-food (excluding durables such as furniture, gold jewellery and one-off expenditure). [R2, HH questionnaire section 4] Divide this monthly figure by household size'. Households are then divided into five groups ('quintiles'); on a continuum: quintile-1 indicates the poorest category of households and quintile-5 the 'richest' (or least poor) of the sample.

it means for a child to be doing well in life. Indeed, in his view, *not* working is a risk for children, because it means they might become idle (*haragán*), lose their way, and become caught up in criminal activity.

For Nicolas, possibly the main personal risk associated with the family's poverty is the threat it poses to his education and this concerns him far more than the work burden it entails. For many poor families, including Nicolas', education holds the promise of escaping poverty and is increasingly important to children's successful transition to adulthood. It represents their pathway out of 'the fields' and away from the 'suffering' and insecurity often associated with agricultural work (Crivello 2011). In Nicolas' words, it is the way to 'become someone in life'. Education represents a degree of permanence, sometimes described as a legacy, or an inheritance. Nicolas' mother explained: 'I tell him, "study son, it's for you, what's of the *chacra* (fields) stays *chacra*, your studies, no one can take them away..."' But Nicolas' education is now at risk, as he indicates: '...because we're poor, we don't have school supplies, some others bring what their parents buy them, pens; they have everything.'

Nicolas' case reflects another common feature of children's perceptions, insofar as risks are understood to be cumulative – building on each other and increasing vulnerability over time – and connected, in the sense of having a 'knock-on' effect in their everyday lives and relationships. Children's everyday concerns came across strongly in qualitative group research on what it means for boys and girls, their age, in their communities, to be doing well or badly in life (a 'well-being exercise'). So, for example, in a discussion with 12-year-old girls in Rioja – the high jungle village – Gloria drew a girl who she said was 'thinking' a lot and very sad because she did not have her mother (*'porque no tiene a su madre'*) and she did not have any food to eat at home. Her father was a drunkard and did not work. The group discussed all of the drawings and agreed which were the best and worst scenarios for girls their age. The top five ranked indicators for 'ill-being' showed the worst scenario was when a girl: doesn't have her mother; doesn't have anything to eat; her mother punishes her for being disobedient; she doesn't do her homework well; and her father doesn't work, he's drunk.

The group explained that not having a mother caused the girl to 'think too much', which made her cry. Not having food at home meant she could become sick with gastritis or an ulcer. The girls also discussed what it meant for a girl to be doing well in their village and indicated the best circumstance as: being a good student; making her parents happy because she achieves good school grades; being obedient (by doing housework and farm work); and respecting her parents. In this example the girls viewed material adversity (e.g. not having anything to eat) as intertwined with their social relationships. Discussions in the other communities had a similar focus, with girls in Andahuaylas describing a girl doing poorly when: her parents die; she is abandoned by her parents; her parents fight; her mother and father whip her; her mother is a drunk; and she is not fed well. Their indicators of well-being also centred on consistent and supportive family relationships which encourage them in their schooling. Thus, they cited factors such as parents not fighting and being happy and parents helping with studies, as key to their well-being.

From these accounts it is evident that children in the study tend to ground their perceptions of risk within the context of their everyday realities and in what matters most to them. For the boys and girls involved in our qualitative research this means having opportunities and support in school and good family relationships, these being viewed as mutually reinforcing factors in their well-being.

4. Social and moral risks

The second theme centres on the argument that poor children's experiences of risk need to be understood within the broader context and complexity of their social and moral worlds and not narrowly focused on material needs. In making this case we point to two separate, but related, issues.

First, we find that children's moral and social learning is regarded as key to their integration within family and community in rural Peru, as well as to their transition to adulthood. Therefore, challenges to this learning can be perceived as a greater threat to children's well-being than material deficit. Second, adults in rural communities are not able to shield the young from poverty and other risks and indeed are often of the view that boys and girls can grow morally and socially and acquire crucial life skills by helping alleviate household hardship. In other words, it is accepted that moral and social learning can take place in contexts of risk. One way in which moral and social attributes are inculcated and expressed in the young is through their involvement in a range of productive and reproductive activities, which also serve to mitigate family poverty and other risks.

Beginning with the first issue, we find that Young Lives families place a great deal of emphasis on children's social and moral development; responsibility, respect and obedience are commonly valued attributes for the young, including for supporting their transitions to adulthood. As children negotiate their evolving sense of self and of belonging within families, peer groups and communities, they manage a range of social expectations and values and often come to share these understandings. This is illustrated by the discussions outlined above with the girls' groups in Rioja and Andahuaylas, in which social attributes like obedience and respect were perceived as key ingredients in personal well-being and domestic harmony. By the same token, failure to meet expectations around family roles and responsibilities, family discord and family separation, were all at the forefront of their accounts of ill-being and risk. Likewise, Nicolas' mother's concerns for her children are not limited to the family's material needs but involve vital social and moral considerations:

Mother: [W]hen they were made orphans, our children, we all left to the fields (*chacra*)...the first thing we taught him [Nicolas] was to weed, to gather coffee (*cafecitos*) when there's harvest...I told him to wash his clothes...that he learns how to show respect, that he doesn't talk bad about his teachers, or about people in general. (*Nicolas' mother, Rioja*)

It is important to her that Nicolas grows up to be responsible and respectful, despite his father's death and despite being poor, 'I tell him not to pay attention to what people say, even if they call you 'orphan', you be good, a good young man (*joven*).' Nicolas has been learning how to 'be good' by accomplishing tasks such as weeding on the family farm.

The choices Nicolas and his mother have made about how to manage economically after his father's death reflect and impact on their interdependence and on the quality of their social bond. Both Nicolas and his mother have high aspirations for his education and his future. This includes finishing secondary school, going to university in the city and becoming a 'professional'. The city represents hope and an easier life; as Nicolas' mother stated, '[I] always dream, always dream that the city isn't like here; here it's always suffering.' Nicolas' family is highly committed to his education and almost everyone contributes financially, including his sisters in Lima who send money home for that purpose. In turn, Nicolas is

that children become more responsible and self-reliant, skills viewed as essential 'insurance' against risk. With the expansion of formal schooling, education is also increasingly understood to play a part in risk reduction. However, while education is very much about investment in a child's or family's future and in long-term poverty reduction, children's work has a more immediate role in mitigating risk. That said, the relationship between children's work and risk is not straightforward. On the one hand, work can be essential to the domestic economy and risk reduction, whereas on the other, it can also represent a risk to the young. As a study of childhood poverty, Young Lives does not gather systematic data on the risks associated with children's work. However, we have uncovered specific instances of detriment, as when work undermines schooling, is bad for children's health, or is beyond their capacity (see for example, Ames et al. 2009; Boyden 2009; Morrow and Vennam 2010).

Issues of responsibility and self-reliance are commonly discussed by our respondents in terms of children learning to 'defend' themselves (*defenderse*) in the future. This is evident in an example from a mother who was worried that her daughter was intending to drop out of school: '[I]t's not for me, I told her, I beg her to study, I'll support them [her children] as much as I can, I tell them to study because it's not going to be for me, its going to serve you...so they can 'defend themselves' one day'. (Diana's mother, Rioja, 2008). Another mother, from urban San Roman, discussed the ways in which children's work acts as a type of insurance in case of parental death: 'At times I tell her [the daughter] to work because...what if something happened to me, how would she defend herself? She should learn, I sometimes tell her, so maybe she'll defend herself with this' (Aurora's mother, San Roman, 2007).

The idea that child work may be essential to children's moral and social development and a means for preventing personal and household destitution, may be especially prevalent in rural areas of Peru. So, for example, a survey of the perceptions of 1,000 adults found that children's work is generally more acceptable in rural areas and that although it was thought to entail certain risks for children, related mainly to education and health, there were also perceived benefits – such as learning 'to be responsible to their families' (Sulmont Haak 2007: 9). Eighty-four per cent of respondents considered 'responsibility' a core value for boys and girls to learn, while 74 per cent said that children who work 'become more responsible'. Based on ethnographic research in a Peruvian herding community, Bolin (2006: 62) also emphasises the importance of placing children's work within the context of local social and moral values and shows how it is integrated with other aspects of their lives, including play and learning. She observes that children's strong work ethic is shaped by respect, pride and survival strategies, the harsh living environment requiring the participation of boys and girls in work from a very young age.

The majority of boys and girls in our rural sample provide essential labour to their households and over time learn to become more self-reliant by taking on ever-greater work responsibilities within their households. In some cases, boys and girls aged 12 to 13 may already be contributing on par with adults; this can be especially important for their development given the uncertainty associated with poverty and widespread concerns about what happens to children if their parents die young.

Boys and girls who work with their families may be given the occasional 'tip'. Many also work on other people's land for pay, frequently turning their wages over to the family, often keeping a small amount for themselves. For example, Nicolas uses his earnings to buy food for the family as well as his school supplies. But work is not just about material need and also responds to the shared expectations for the young. Nicolas does not want to be paid directly for the work he does for his step-father on their family farm (the normal daily wage being 5 *soles* – about 1.75 USD) and is content to ask his mother for occasional pocket money. Here

we again highlight the potential 'positive' dimension of risk; as boys and girls confront difficult situations and choices this presents opportunities for them to 'prove' themselves in the eyes of others (for example, as a good son or daughter, as 'grown-up', or responsible). In this way, the link between morality, social responsibility and child work can be regarded as crucial to children's effective transition to adulthood as well as to household risk reduction.

5. Children's engagement with risk

Our third theme concerns the ways in which risk mitigation frames children's roles, choices and transitions to adulthood. We have seen that working to prevent and/or overcome risk is necessarily an ongoing process for many rural Young Lives households in Peru. We have also suggested that mitigating risk is most often a collective rather than individual responsibility and invokes all household members, including children, although there are significant lifecourse and generational dimensions at play here (cf Bourdillon et al. 2010).

That risk mitigation is a shared responsibility emphasises the interdependence of generations in Peru, which applies especially in contexts of poverty and uncertainty whereby individual roles (and aspirations) tend to be strongly shaped by collective interests (Rogoff 2003: 221). However, there are important biographical dimensions in that young people's roles, responsibilities and capacities, as well as perceptions of the risks they confront, evolve as they grow up. They also vary according to personal characteristics, such as gender and level of maturity, and household circumstances like wealth, sibling composition, birth order, adult labour capacity and the like. As children age they tend to take on more complex and challenging tasks, especially when there is a shortage of appropriate household labour, with girls doing different tasks from boys, older siblings having different responsibilities than younger ones and so on.

Boys and girls growing up in rural households in our sample described the gradual acquisition of increasing responsibility. Many reported that they were feeding the family's small animals and carrying water and firewood home by age 3 or 4, often accompanying older siblings or adults in their work. Between 6 and 8 years old they took on more responsibility for caring for younger siblings, working on their family farms and, among girls especially, preparing family meals. By age 12, many of them were balancing school with several household responsibilities and paid work on the weekends and during school holidays. Their acquisition of responsibility was described as a gradual process and, although patterned, for example by gender, their transitions to adulthood were not defined by a single threshold or age demarcation.

The boys and girls described in this paper were aged 12 to 14 when interviewed, which in many parts of Peru is considered an important point in the life course, marked in many cases by the transition from primary to secondary school and for some the transition out of childhood and into the teen years. This is also a period during which gender differences become more evident, as girls frequently experience social maturity earlier than boys — with attendant changes in their roles, responsibilities and general circumstances. It is at the same time a recognised period for children's developing sense of responsibility and autonomy, with accompanying changes in how they relate to others both inside and outside their households. This 44-year-old mother in Rioja reflected on changes in her relationship with her son and

shifts in their underlying dependencies: 'When he was younger we took care of him more (*lo cuidábamos*)...but now that he's bigger, he also has to take care of himself, realise the difference between right and wrong' (individual interview, 2008). In other words, this period of the early teens is a time of critical choices for young people, related, for example, to changing expectations around schooling, work and their relationships. Both children and caregivers perceived changes in the kinds of risks confronting this age group which they described as increasingly sexualised (e.g., fear of early pregnancy) and of a social character (e.g., negative peer influences).

Responsibility and respect are attributes that young people are expected to learn gradually and in the course of their daily activities and household obligations. But coping with adversity may precipitate children's transition to proto-adulthood and undermine their schooling, with the attendant possibility of introducing new risks into their lives. In the case of Nicolas, his father's untimely death resulted in a transformation in the roles and responsibilities of the children in the family. He recalled that from age 3 he started carrying firewood home and at age 5 he began accompanying his father to their farm. Following his father's death and the sale of the shop, the children started working on other people's land. By age 10 his mother had re-married and he was earning up to 10 soles (3.50 USD) a day working for other people. He contrasted this with the period when his father was alive, when he did not have to 'beg' (*rogar*). By age 12, each day before and after school he went to the family fields (*chacra*) to do some work, feed the horses, and he also helped out at home by sweeping and cooking.

All children negotiate competing expectations and demands, but many young people face myriad risks as they transition to adulthood and are confronted by difficult choices about how they deploy their time, choices that are made in the context of both material and cultural constraints. These 'choice points' can be seen as opportunities for young people to learn and to demonstrate to others their evolving sense of responsibility and autonomy. There is also a clear element of risk involved; it is therefore important to acknowledge the social and moral responsibilities which young people must manage amongst the other challenges of growing up disadvantaged. Often they confront risk within a context of 'thin agency' – the 'decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterised by few viable alternatives' (Klocker 2007: 85). It is within this framework that we might better assess and acknowledge the complex decision-making processes involved in children's transition to adulthood, such as the reasons why they work or choose to leave school.

We use one final example from Nicolas' case to reflect on the issue of choice and risk and the mediating role of poverty. His father's death had pushed his family deeper into poverty and as a result he and his brothers and sisters had to go out to work. He looked back on his transition into paid work as if he had little choice in the matter. In contrast, he felt he did have a choice in whether or not to accept payment from his step-father for working on the family farm, and he chose not to, asserting for himself his changing role within his family. Similarly, while he clearly did not choose to become an 'orphan', he could choose to be a respectful and obedient young man.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that in much of the literature definitions of risk presume its *a priori* existence as a discrete event embodying certain objective criteria and occurring at a particular time in a child's life. The research we have presented highlights a very different situation in which poverty is a pervasive feature and background to daily life for children and their households in the Young Lives rural sample in Peru. Although not often articulated by children directly as an adversity, poverty is a significant underlying cause of household insecurity and also mediates a diversity of other risks. In other words, in this context, children often struggle with multiple interacting risks, many or most of which are ongoing. We also argued that the risks that boys and girls face and their ways of managing them are often strongly shaped by their individual biographies, including their gender, age, ethnicity and where they live.

It has been shown that mitigating risk is most often a collective rather than an individual responsibility, with children playing important roles. Fulfilling the responsibilities associated with risk mitigation involves both social and moral maturity and mastery of basic life skills. Thus, families expect their young to develop a range of social and moral competencies, self-reliance, responsibility and respect being attributes which are especially valued. Children's work and schooling are viewed as vital means whereby boys and girls become competent moral and social actors, enabling the young to contribute to household poverty mitigation, building their ability to become self-reliant, and constituting an 'insurance' against other risks such as the death or illness of a household member.

In this way, risk can be seen as having an important part to play in shaping children's social and moral identities; in other words, by making effective decisions and assuming a constructive role in adversity, boys and girls may prove they are conscientious, obedient and good. So, children construct their social and moral personae through the choices they make in relation to varied social expectations with regard to the mitigation of adversity, including how they deal with being poor. Even 'extraordinary' adversities, such as parental death, are often managed by children through everyday processes, within familiar domains and in intimate family and peer relationships. Social risks are therefore at the forefront of children's concerns and merit far greater attention than they currently receive in the child risk and child poverty literatures.

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Young Lives is an innovative long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.

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