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Child Soldiers

[Fire Project Essay]

Introduction

The issue of child soldiers is a problem that continues to affect us as a society rather than individually. Child soldiers are defined as children that are under the age of 18 who serve an armed force group that are being used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, or sexual purposes. My reason for choosing this topic was because this issue isn't talked about much and awareness is needed. I am passionate about this issue because children are the next generation who will decide how the future will be. If children have their innocence killed, they can then develop many psychological defects. If children develop brain disorders and/or die faster due to the violent exposure they will be creative a non-moral/uncivilized society and future. Because of these violent exposures many children are dying because they are being exposed in violent situations or they develop a psychological problem that can make them commit suicide.

This issue affects society in general and people don't have awareness even if it happens in their own communities. I would like to inform people about this issue because I feel like people don't know or don't pay attention to this issue even if it happens in front of their own eyes. I feel like people know this is happening in front of their own eyes and instead of helping these children, society judges them without knowing the background story of why they are doing what they're doing. The reason of why I believe that this topic should be addressed is because it's affecting me but mostly my significant others. I have

family members that are constantly being pressured to become child soldiers for the cartels in Mexico. This issue has a critical importance to other people in the world who are different than me. This is an issue that happens for the most part everywhere in the world. Child soldiers don't necessarily mean joining a legal armed force sometimes is joining illegal armed forces like cartels/gangs. Child soldiers are a serious problem that needs to solve, but first it needs to be addressed to many people, so children won't have the need to expose themselves in dangerous situations like child soldiers have gone through.

Philosophy

I believe that social justice is a struggle that society faces day by day in order to receive what they believe are rights and justice that won't just benefit an individual, but a group of people. In my freshmen year, I had no idea what social justice was; all I thought was that social justice had something to do with strikes, but my teachers and peers helped me develop my understanding of what social justice meant.

My African Latino history class constantly teaches us about our own history and how our own ancestors fought and struggled for social justice. Our ancestors resisted oppressors' abuses, but once they had enough they did everything they could to run away and/or rebel. For example, a man called Yanga started the slave rebellion that occurred in Mexico. The slave rebellion caused them achieve freedom and equal rights.

I believe that speaking up for something that we believe is wrong is the biggest step, but the hardest to do. The obstacles people face usually start off with people being scared and finding the courage to speak up. The main obstacles when it comes to struggling and achieving social justice, is to have to deal with oppressors. Oppressors are usually the ones with the control and that don't want to make a change since it won't benefit them. The perfect example would be when the Spanish had control of New Spain, the natives and Africans didn't had rights and were being overworked and abused by the

Spanish for many years. Yanga who was an African slave spoke up and caused a rebellion against the Spanish. This rebellion caused equal rights and freedom to natives and Africans in Mexico.

The topic of child soldiers is connected to social justice is because it's an issue that affects us all and mainly the next generation. Child soldiers are linked with other issues like poverty, government corruption, and unequal rights for education. Children's rights are being abused and being put into situations in where their childhood dies by serving military/violent groups. This is a cruel problem that affects society globally since there are child soldiers in almost every part of the world. This topic also affects us nationally and locally, but people don't speak up about it for several of reasons. Children that are in gangs are also child soldiers that are killing their childhood and risking their lives to serve a violent group. Society tends to judge these children instead offering them help and don't realize that society is oppressing these children by giving them low expectations that can later develop into psychological problems.

Historical Context

The historical background about Child Soldiers was children were set to be fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or sexual purposes from the beginning of time. The main reason that children were child soldiers from the beginning of time was for survival. A famous time when being a child soldier was popular was in the 5th century B.C. in ancient Greece. King Lycurgus created a society that was much militarized, even after he died his people followed the laws he created and enforced. Spartans did not want their citizens to be thinking of fun, comfort or any happiness because they believed that this would lead to corruption and downfall of the country.

Officials would put baby girls and boys through fitness test at birth and if it was decided that if the baby was too weak the baby would be sent to the mountains to die. Its people thought that these babies'

would be useless to Sparta. At age seven the boys would be taken away from their family and were being put in military camps in the mountains and began a thirteen years of training. They would sometimes kill each other in practice battles. They were also sent to kill helots, and/or slaves. The leaders wouldn't give them food so they could purposely steal, they would then be punished for being caught not for stealing. At the age of 20 the boys officially become warriors, when they weren't in battles they were supposed to teach the younger boys.

This historical event was influential to my topic since child soldier's start from ancient history. We now have governments and violent groups that recruit children in a similar way.

Global Context

Child soldiers are a global issue because it's much more common than what people think. There's children that join armed violent groups in about every country. The reason why they might not being considered child soldiers is just because they have a different title, but they share similar responsibilities. There are many countries and situations in which children were/are being recruited or were/are used in hostilities. According to the global report during April 2004 to October 2008, Africa has 8 countries, Americas and the Caribbean has 1 country, Asia Pacific has 8 countries, and the Middle East has 2 countries children were/are being recruited (Child Soldiers.org, "Publications:" 2008). Global Issues are difficult to address because people have their own issues in their own place and don't see that importance on how these issue can affect them. Child soldiers is important for everyone to know because child soldiers is an issue that almost every country deals with and most of these armed groups recruit or use children to abuse them. Child soldiers is a very difficult topic to explain and difficult to solve. That child soldiers can be solved at a global level but it's an issue that will take an extremely difficult to solve not only that but it will take a long time. I believe that every country has to make a huge

contribution if child soldiers were a problem that society has to work on. Having a stable economy, changing military policies, and enforcing laws that prevent children from being abused could be factors that can abolish the recruitment of children to armed forces (Landau, "Use of Child Soldiers").

National Context

Child soldiers are connected to the United States because some young people under the age of 18 are also being exposed to be trained to join military groups after they graduate high school. A program called Junior Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) is a federal program that is being sponsored the United States Army and is being established in many high schools across the nation. "This program trains high scholars to gain leadership roles, patriotism, citizen responsibilities" (U.S. Department of Defense, "Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)"). This program presents itself to all the cities of the United States such as Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, and act. Even though this program is established nationwide it also brings a lot of controversy and debate. Just like theirs groups that say that this is a good program for teens to gain leadership and responsibilities others say that this is a recruit program that is much like boot camp that brings negative effects the program also brainwashes teens. Places like Lowell (Massachusetts), San Francisco, and Los Angeles have been working on abolishing such program in order to protect children from recruiters. There are also campaigns and activists like CAMS (Coalition against Militarism in Our Schools) that are teachers that believe that students are "students not soldiers" (Hanscom, "FrontPage Magazine - The War against JROTC", 2007). JROTC students are recruited similar like child soldiers from other countries because recruiters brainwashes these teens/children by making them believe that by joining armed forces is a duty of theirs and that by joining it will help them have a more successful career.

Local Context

When people think of child soldiers people right away think that it's an African child with an AK47 in their hand when in reality there's more to that. A local connection with Chicago is that many gangs recruit children to join. If people start thinking deeply about it gang members that are younger than 18 has similar causes for joining gangs, and have similar responsibilities. People that are younger than 18 join gangs either willingly or by forced. Even though most of the gang members willingly join, there are so many factors on why they choose to join a gang, which are similar to why a child soldier might join an armed group. Poverty, lack of resources, and lack of opportunities are factors could be reasons why a child would be interested in joining gangs. There are also cases of teen being forced to join gangs. An example would be a case that happened on the last week of March of this year when a person was charged for attacking a teen because the teen refused to join the gang (Chicago Tribune "2nd person charged in attack on teen who refused to join gang"). That's not the only factor a young gang member under the age of 18 have in common with child soldiers but also the duties that they have are similar, they become fighters, porters, messengers, and/or spies. If we want to make a change for child soldiers we should begin with making an action locally and solve the problems locally before we want to solve this problem nationally, and globally. Thinking globally and acting locally is important for a resolution to child soldiers. An organization that is being held in Chicago is the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention; the main purpose for this organization is to end youth violence (City Of Chicago "National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention").

Root Causes

Something to keep in mind is that not all children are being forced to join armed groups, but there are different scenarios on why a child would willingly join armed groups. Based on my research the three reasons for a child would join an armed group would be poverty, lack of opportunities, grievance

("Poverty and Child Soldier Recruitment: A Disaggregated Study of African Regions"). These three-root causes play a huge role for the recruitment of children. The main causes for my issue economic, political, and social. Poverty and high orphan rates are thought as the two main root causes but it's not statistically proven (Landau, "The Use of Child Soldiers"). Poverty is an important root cause because many children join armed groups do to survival. The poverty could be so extreme to the point in where joining an armed group would give a child a meal or the family of this child would receive some kind of benefit. If these countries were economically stable I believe that families would feel the need to send their child to become a child soldier in order for him/her to receive a meal. Poverty is also linked to lack of opportunities since depending in the country some families can't afford education and/or the culture or the politically speaking doesn't reinforce education. Lack of opportunities is a reason of why families and children decide to contribute to becoming a child soldier in order to escape poverty. Last but not least grievance also plays a big role on children joining armed groups. Grieving is a reason why a child would join an armed force; having an important family member passing away can make a child to take arms. In other word revenge can impact a child in order receive 'justice' it can be due to inequality, unfair treatment or for revenge because a significant other passed away do to an armed group. Revenge social root cause issues that people feel they need to do in order to feel like a person with more power.

Debate and Controversy

Child soldiers is a big general issue that is going on practically everywhere that has caused many debate and controversy. An example of a debate, is if child soldiers should be prosecuted or not. These soldiers are children, but at the same time these are children who have cause mass murders and abuses towards other people. In the end a big question is if whether these children are victims or not.

A point of view of prosecuting child soldiers is that children should pay for the acts that they committed because if the children choose to join an armed group they should be responsible to pay for the crimes they committed because in the end they have committed mass civilian murder, raped, and mutilated people. If children aren't being prosecuted then commanders will continue to recruit children. Children knew exactly what they were doing and shouldn't be excused from their actions simply because they are thought to be too young to take responsibility. Another point is that denying the prosecution for child soldiers is denying the just for the victims.

The other point of view is that child soldiers should not be prosecuted because child soldiers aren't morally responsible for their actions. Children are forced to become involved in armed group due to many factors it could be because they were kidnapped or because of extreme poverty. All the actions that child soldiers commit are due to adult orders and out of their free will because for the most part these children are being drugged. Also, it's difficult for a child soldier to escape and leave an armed group because they become highly dependent towards their commanders and believe that's the only way they can receive money for food, not only that but they also believe that this is the only thing that can secure their safety.

Psychology

Psychology is defined as the study of mental functions and behavior of individuals. Psychology is extremely important to humanity because knowing the basics of this subject can enable the opportunities to help people that we care about. There are many situations in where mental disorders/diseases are much more dangerous than physical disorders/diseases. The reason why, is because in some cases physical disorders/diseases are much more easy to identify and cure rather than mental disorder/diseases. The world of psychology is well presented with my issue of child soldiers. Child

soldiers have been exposed to many violent and negative situations such as being raped, forced to kill, and/or having witnessed many deaths. These experiences have developed into many psychological effects such as traumas, depression, and PTSD (posttraumatic disorder). These psychological effects can lead to suicides and/or thoughts of suicide. In a sample group called Pfeiffer et al has showed that 34% of children showed a risk of suicidal and 17% of them had a high risk of committing suicide (The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering, Elisabeth Schauer). Children who were abducted and were turned into child soldiers need psychological help. Severe victims feel “weak, dependent and without control and competence that is vital for the psychological and cognitive coping with the environment.” The best psychological approaches that can be used to help severely affected children would be clinical and therapeutic approaches. Some examples of approaches that are clinically would be Psychodynamic, Cognitive Behavioral Perspective, and Humanistic. Other approaches that are therapeutic are Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Person Centered, Integrative therapy, Systematic, and Existential. This means that they would receive vocational training, family tracing, and reunification. It’s assumed that once a child lives with his or her family again, the psychological wounds will automatically heal (The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering, Elisabeth Schauer). Even though these are recommended approaches, there is no proven approach that can completely heal a child soldier in the mental perspective. My major takeaways from psychology are the fact that by knowing basic things of psychology I can then help people who need psychological help. I believe that the field of psychology can positively help change the world by changing individuals, after changing individuals we can the change a whole society and after changing society we can also change the worlds environment.

Sociological Imagination

A value is a group's principal and/or standards of behavior judgment of what is important in life. Values that conservative Africans usually follow are not being "manifested" with the western culture. This means that according to this culture women shouldn't go to school and men should take patriotism and fight. A recent example that has been gaining a lot of controversy is the case that is going on currently in Nigeria. A man called Boko Haram kidnapped 270 girls from school and is threatening to sell them and/or converting them to child soldiers. His excuse for kidnapping these girls is the value and belief that he has which is "girls being educated is a 'Western/Eurocentric' influence and it shouldn't be followed" (Abubakar, "Over 270 school girls kidnapped in Nigeria", 2014).

The definition of a norm is something typical, usual or standard. Norms that child soldiers follow is following rules from their leaders. In some cases becoming a child soldiers is the norm because its part of coming of age ("Child Soldiers").

A sanction is threatened penalty for disobeying a law, rule, or value. The sanction would be that the children would be drugged if they refuse to obey orders. The commander of the child soldier mostly uses operant conditioning factor, which is positive punishment. This means that that by abusing them in an unpleasant way it will make enforce the child to obey the rules. Children might also suffer physical abuse from the commander if they disobey any of the rules ("Child Soldiers").

A perspective that is correlated to the concept of child soldiers is the conflict theory. The meaning of conflict theory is the belief that those in authority and/or in control maintain their power by oppressing the poor and powerless. It also describes society as being in conflict due to competition on limited resources.

This theoretical perspective is connected to my issue because corruption plays a big role in most of these countries. The main reason why children suffer of this issue is due to poverty. Poverty is usually

the result of corruption and how people with power and authority want to keep gaining power without helping the poor and powerless. In other words greed is a reason of why poverty exist (Landau, "Use of Child Soldiers").

Due to the fact that poverty is a big issue for child soldiers the "group competition" is for survival.

Everyone who is suffering from extreme poverty is fighting his or her way out of it. Those who are suffering from extreme poverty are fighting for the "basics needs" of survival. Thing like food, shelter, and water is what I consider the "basic needs".

The group who is in "power" would be the politics that occur in these countries. If they had a strategy on preventing extreme poverty and corruption this issue wouldn't exist. They need to take consideration on how to protect the people of their homeland and not take advantage of them.

This theoretical perspective fits best to this issue since there is nothing good about this issue. The group in power and authority isn't helping those in need and is instead oppressing the poor and powerless for their own benefit. Because of this issue, the rich and powerful are gaining their power and control and those who are poor and powerless are becoming more oppressed. The poor are practically forced to find their own way of survival even if it means to join an armed force as a child.

Action

My partner and I took action on giving our classmates and other students of social justice awareness of this issue. We both decided to make a pamphlet that showed a few interesting facts about what our topic of child soldiers are. I designed and added a few facts about child soldiers, while my partner distributed them. We wanted people to pay attention to this issue and take action about this issue. The purpose behind giving people at a young age awareness was to hopefully make people around my age

to think and put themselves into a child soldiers shoes. This would hopefully encourage them to do something about this issue.

We also took advantage that a marine came to visit LVLHS to recruit juniors. I decided to come up with a few questions while my partner Luis conducted the interview. We decided to interview him about JROTC, Child Soldiers, and psychological effects. The purpose behind this interview was to know what stands did this individual had about child soldiers.

Action Reflection

Since I had to decide on how to create this pamphlet it was a bit of a challenge. I wanted to be straightforward yet get peoples attention about this issue, but at the same I practically felt the need to give them all of the knowledge that I learned through this research. I ended up giving a few of the basic and interesting facts about child soldiers.

I also came up with 4 questions to ask the marine whom visited LVLHS. Lets start of by saying that I had no idea that a marine was in LVLHS recruiting juniors until I went to lunch. I had to come up with questions as fast as possible. With the help of my mentor (Mr. Hernandez) and Ms. Lisasuain I came up with 4 questions. I think that if I would have known that a marine was going to visit us I would have come up with more interesting questions regarding to JROTC and child soldiers.

The answers that my partner and I received were quite shocking in my opinion. He believe that it was “okay” if a person that is younger than 18 to join an armed force. He also believed that joining an armed force brainwashes a person but in a positive way. Even though his answers were shocking I also had to consider that his job was to say positive thing about armed forces since his job was to do so in order to get juniors interested.

I had a lot of fun on creating a pamphlet and interviewing a marine regardless of how stressing it was in the beginning. In the end I' am glad I educated a few sojo students and also learning another point of view coming from a marine

Resolution

Committee: Peace and Security Rights

Topic: Child Soldiering

Dear Society,

Deeply concerned by the fact that child soldiering still exist till this day and continues to be a problem,

Realizing that 300,000 children are serving as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, and/or are being used for sexual purposes is upsetting,

Encouraging children to join rehabilitation centers, especially if they have joined an armed group or were trained to join an armed group,

Stressing with the fact that this issue happens worldwide because of its root causes,

Noting to regret that this issue was happening right in front of my own eyes and not noticing; the reason why i regret for not noticing that child soldiers was happening where I live is the fact that I could have helped a few friends,

Bearing in mind that children have psychological such as trauma, depression, and post traumatic disorder are making children to commit suicide,

1. Open more rehabilitation centers that are free and/or affordable for those who are in low income neighborhoods in Chicago.
2. Create laws that restricts ROTC schools to open and stop preventing the promotion of JROTC and of ROTC, so families and children won't be brainwashed in believing that this would make children/teens more "successful" and "discipline".
3. Aring news that cover world wide issues more not just Nation wide issues, so people could be more aware of issues that occurring in the world and see how it affects us.

4. Politics giving a percentage of money to give to important organizations such child-soldiers.org

Reflection

The reason why I choose my topic was because this issue of child soldiers impacts us as society and there isn't enough awareness. I have spent about 2-3 weeks on my fire project, but I have not kept track on exactly how many hours I have spent. My experience on working, researching, and learning about my issue made me realize of how big this issue is and how unaware people are of this issue. While I was conducting my research and writing about my topic for the most part I was shocked of all the factors that involved with the meaning of the phrase 'Child Soldiers'. Managing time wasn't a problem for me since I didn't have to worry about work, and/or sports. The only problem with time that I had was that I've been really busy on family stuff. I have an upcoming event that involves me being out of the country, which affected my time. I had to have my project done sooner than my classmates and had to be more prepared with my presentation without legit practice. I had to be ready for my project and my upcoming event, which was a bit of a hassle. My partner is Luis F. Ruiz and something that I learned about my partner is that when we work together its a bit difficulty. He distracts me, and I distract me, but when we are both in a serious zone we get a lot done and well done. I don't want my audience to think that child soldiers are just an African with an AK47 in their hands because there's more to that. Child soldiers go through many things and it's a problem that occurs everywhere not just Africa. I also want to let people know that child soldier doesn't that they just join a military arm force but different types of groups such as gangs, cartels, and other violent groups. I would give myself a passing grade I worked really hard on it and made it into my main priority to finish for the last two weeks. I had a lot of trouble I gladly overcome them. I feel like I mastered on finding legit articles, and resources. I also think

I learned how to cite articles and adding them to my essay. I think my argument could have been better;

I need to work on making, supporting, and explaining my argument/claim.