Analysis of the Problem

Past experience substantiates that unaccompanied children exist in virtually every war, famine, refugee situation, and natural disaster. As discussed in Chapter 1, millions of children have been separated from their families in emergency situations over the past fifty years. Each child, each separation of a child from a family, and each emergency is unique. Yet comparison of emergency situations shows that there are many similarities including, for example, the ways in which parents and children separate, the reasons for the separations, the needs of unaccompanied children, and the problems in providing services. Thus, children were separated from parents for many of the same reasons during the Spanish Civil War as during the Vietnam War; similar legal issues arose for unaccompanied children who crossed national boundaries after the Hungarian uprising as for those who entered Thailand from Kampuchea; and similar questions about the placement of unaccompanied children arose after World War II as were faced by relief agencies in recent emergencies. The recurrence of similar issues and problems in past and present emergencies affirms the usefulness of examining past experience as a basis for improving the assistance provided to unaccompanied children in present and future emergencies.

Various terms have been adopted in past emergencies to describe children not in the care of their parents or guardians. In addition to “unaccompanied children,” which has been used since World War II, other terms have included: “abandoned children,” “beggar children,” “detached children,” “foundlings,” “homeless children,” “orphans,” “separated children,” “street children,” “vagabond children,” and “waifs.” The most commonly used term is “orphan,” and although the term implies a parentless child it has often been erroneously used to refer to any child not accompanied by his parents and to children who have lost one parent. This has frequently caused misunderstandings and has led to mistaken assumptions about the existence of parents and about services required for the children. Sometimes the term is qualified as “half-orphan,” “orphaned of father,” or “orphaned of mother.” The authors recommend that the word “orphan” be reserved to only refer to a child who has lost both parents. Experience has shown that it should not be assumed that a child’s parents are dead simply because a child is not in their company because they may be separated for other reasons. The term “unaccompanied child” is preferable to the other terms because it avoids unsubstantiated implications about the cause of separation or the existence or intent of the parents.
Table 10-1. Stages in the Experience of an Unaccompanied Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pre-separation:</td>
<td>when the child is in the care of the parent before separation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Pre-identification:</td>
<td>the interval before parent/child separation and identification of the child</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as unaccompanied.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Emergency care:</td>
<td>the interval immediately after identification, measured in days.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Interim care:</td>
<td>the interval between identification and when long-term care is provided,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>measured in weeks to months.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Long-term care:</td>
<td>when a child is in a care situation considered to be permanent, measured</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-2. Overview—Unaccompanied Children in Emergencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Preseparation</th>
<th>Time Between Separation and Identification</th>
<th>Initial Care</th>
<th>Interim Care</th>
<th>Long Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time (Emergency) [days]</td>
<td>(Temporary) [weeks - months]</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Permanant) [years]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maternal and paternal support</td>
<td>Permanent Care and Placement</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By Local Families</td>
<td>Arranged Locally</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>By Special Services For Children</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the Problem

The experience of an unaccompanied child as well as the actions taken on his behalf falls into five categories: preseparation, preidentification, emerge interim care, and long-term care. (See Table 10-1.)

Within these five periods assessments are required to determine whether a child is in care situation considered to be permanent, measured in years. If so, decisions must be made and actions taken to provide protection most suitable for each child. The assessments upon which these decisions are based include analysis of the cause of the parent/child separation and the availability of tracing services may determine whether family reunification is possible. Therefore, services to unaccompanied children are best provided in a program that integrates long-term goals with emergency actions. Table 10-2 illustrates the relationship between the periods, decisions about the kind of assistance provided, assessment considerations, and general program responses.

The separation of children from parents can be divided into two broad categories: voluntary and involuntary. These two types of separation fall into one of the following categories:

1. Abducted: a child involuntarily taken from parent(s)
2. Lost: a child accidentally separated from parents.
3. Orphaned: a child whose parents are both dead.
4. Runaway: a child who intentionally leaves parents without their consent.
5. Removed: a child removed from the parents as a result of the removal or parental rights.

Table 10-3. Categories of Parent/Child Separations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Separation Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involuntary Separation:</td>
<td>Against the Will of the Parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Abducted:</td>
<td>a child involuntarily taken from parent(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lost:</td>
<td>a child accidentally separated from parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Orphaned:</td>
<td>a child whose parents are both dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Runaway:</td>
<td>a child who intentionally leaves parents without their consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Removed:</td>
<td>a child removed from the parents as a result of the removal or parental rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voluntary Separation: With the Parent’s Consent.

6. Abandoned: a child whose parent(s) has deserted him with no intention

7. Entrusted: a child voluntarily placed in the care of another adult, or is in the care of another adult, or is determined, by parents who intend to reclaim him.

8. Surrendered: a child whose parents have permanently given up their parental rights.


Resler and Steinbock
THE PROBLEM OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

- *Abducted children.* Children have been abducted in various emergencies, particularly in wartime. In World War II, children between the ages of two and twelve were kidnapped for a secret Nazi adoption program and adolescents were abducted as slave laborers. In the Greek Civil War, insurgents abducted thousands of Greek children and took them to neighboring Eastern European countries. The Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979, after taking children from their families, placed them in mobile work teams. In Zimbabwe during the war for independence children were kidnapped from homes and schools to serve in guerrilla movements. Such kidnappings are sometimes used as a means of coercing parents.

- *Lost children.* Accidental family separations have been recorded in most emergencies although they seem more likely to occur in wars, refugee situations, or famines with large-scale population movements and emergency evacuations. In the confusion of a mass exodus and during bombing raids for example, children are sometimes inadvertently separated from parents.

- *Orphaned children.* Some children are left without adult care because both parents die. This type of separation occurs in all emergencies. Experience suggests, however, that only a minority of the unaccompanied children are orphans, contrary to commonly held assumptions. An exhaustive tracing program after the Nigerian Civil War, revealed that only 327 children out of 3,922 unaccompanied children were found to be orphans. Similarly, an analysis of the records of some 2,500 unaccompanied Kampuchean children in the displaced persons centers in Thailand in 1980 indicated that, while a majority of the children did not know their parents whereabouts, many of these parents were possibly still alive.1

- *Runaway children.* Some unaccompanied children leave their homes against the wishes of their parents. Runaways were found, for example, among unaccompanied Lao children in the refugee camps in Thailand, among the street children in Addis Ababa during the Sahel drought in the early 1970s, and in most emergencies.

- *Placed children.* Some children who are unaccompanied in emergency situations have been removed from their homes earlier by the authorities because of either the child’s or the parent’s behavior. For example, some of the unaccompanied Hungarian youth who fled after the 1956 revolt and some of the unaccompanied Cuban youth who entered the United States in 1980 came from jails and mental institutions. During emergency situations, as in nonemergency times, children may also be removed from their parents because of abuse or neglect or the case of abuse or neglect.

- *Abandoned children.* In virtually every war, refugee situation, and famine, some children are abandoned. A child may be abandoned at any age, although it occurs more often in infancy. Over a fifteen-year period after the Korean War more than 80,000 children were abandoned in Korea. More recently, in a camp having an estimated population of about 20,000 persons on the Thai-Kampuchea border during 1980 to 1981, at least seventy children were abandoned over a six-month period, that is, about one every three days. Forty-four of the children were less than three months old. Some were abandoned in the maternity ward of the hospital or at the food distribution center; others were found elsewhere in the camp or in the forest nearby. The mothers of seven of eleven children abandoned in the maternity ward were unmarried. Some of their stated reasons included: "[I am] too poor," "I prefer a boy [or girl]," "I'm afraid of having to run with a burden in case [there is] fighting," "[I am] very busy," "I have no husband."2

- *Enrolled children.* In difficult times parents frequently ask family friends and neighbors to care for their children. Although no statistics exist, most separations occur in this way during wars, refugee situations, famines, and natural disasters.

Families have also often entrusted children to child-welfare institutions, orphanages, and boarding schools during emergencies.

- *Surrendered children.* Sometimes a child is unwanted, or wanted but parents are unable to keep the child for such reasons as destitution or illegitimacy, so parents consign the total responsibility for the child to another person or party and terminate their own rights and obligations as parents. Parental rights are terminated to facilitate adoption, for example. In some situations less formal means of surrender have been used by parents and children have been given or sold to persons or agencies.

- *Independent Children.* Some children, particularly older adolescents, are likely to be living independently through their own choice and that of their parents. This is true for many unaccompanied minors who have migrated in times of war, as part of a mass population movement, and in famines. Thousands of unaccompanied Vietnamese adolescents, for example, left their homes and country with the consent of parents. Usually they have maintained personal communications and family members have continued to influence decisions made by the absent child.

In every war, refugee situation, or famine, and in many natural disasters, there are likely to be unaccompanied children in all or most of the nine categories mentioned above. In the refugee and displaced persons camps in Thailand in the early 1980s, for example, there were unaccompanied children who had been abducted from their families by Pol Pot forces. Some had been accidentally separated from their families during bombings and emergency evacuations. Others had been abandoned. Some children were living with other families with parental consent (for example, an infant being cared for by the friend of a hospitalized mother). Older adolescents were sometimes living in the camp independently, although child and parent(s) knew of the others’ whereabouts. Some children were orphaned, as when a mother had died during childbirth. Some children had left home against their parents’ wishes.

Several important implications arise from recognition that family separations may occur in quite differing circumstances and with various possible intentions on the part of parents and children. First, it challenges the common assumption that unaccompanied children are generally orphaned or abandoned. Second, because individual circumstances are likely to be so varied, the plight of each unaccompanied child must be individually assessed. Third, assessment must include a determination of the intent of both parents and child regarding separation and reunion. Fourth, the circumstances at separation, the intent of both parents and child, and the potential for reunion can only be determined if the parents are located and consulted. Tracing is therefore likely to be required.

CAUSES OF PARENT/CHILD SEPARATIONS

The underlying causes of parent/child separations are specific to each family and situation and are extremely varied. Common causes may, however, be grouped into seven categories: social, psychological, cultural factors; parental inability to provide care; emergency-related circumstances; perceived opportunities; military/government policies; relief interventions; and child’s initiatives.
Analysis of the Problem

- Social, psychological, cultural factors. In considering the problems that cause parent-child separations in emergencies, it should be remembered that even in "normal" times large numbers of children throughout the world live in foster and adoptive family situations, group homes and institutions, and as street children. The same social, psychological, and cultural problems that ordinarily cause separations are exacerbated by emergencies—as children may be rejected by step-parents, abandoned because of physical handicaps, given away because of illegitimacy, deserted as a result of an unwanted pregnancy, or neglected because they are of the wrong sex. Cultural mores and religious values also play an important role. For example, women abandoned illegitimate children in Korea in part because such births resulted in social ostracism and job loss.

- Parental inability to provide care. Separations sometimes happen because parents are unable to care for their children. Parents may be absent because of work, imprisonment, or conscription for example. Poverty and single-parent status are the two most commonly identified characteristics of the families of unaccompanied children. Abject poverty is an important cause of parent-child separations, and single-parent families are often the poorest of the affected population. Separation may also arise from family relationship problems between parents or between a child and parents.

- Emergency-related circumstances. Hostilities, famine, and other life-threatening circumstances may cause additional separations. Sometimes the separation is accidental, as may occur in bombings and mass population movements. Separations may also be purposeful. Families living in danger have often entrusted children to the care of others as a preventive measure. Sometimes the separation is a life-saving measure during the Nigerian Civil War and during the Ethiopian famine in the early 1970s, starving children were left in feeding centers by parents who had no food and who believed that such centers would provide for their children. During the Vietnam War, orphanage personnel often received critically ill children after the parents had apparently exhausted all other means of care for them.

- Perceived opportunities. Many parent-child separations during emergencies have occurred for reasons not directly related to threats to survival, but for perceived opportunity or benefit. Sometimes children have been sent away by parents so that they may be spared hardship or removed from environments the parents believed to be morally harmful. For example, some children were sent overseas from Germany before World War II and from Cuba after the revolution by parents who opposed state indoctrination of their children with ideas contrary to personal beliefs. In past emergencies, separations often occurred because parents wanted to provide children with opportunities, goods, or services that were not locally available or that parents could not afford, such as educational opportunity. In the years after the Vietnam war, thousands of children left their families to travel at great risk to seek opportunities in resettlement countries. In virtually all disasters, stories are told of children who were intentionally placed by parents in orphanages and children's programs for the children's benefit. When such programs restricted services to children without families, parents often temporarily concealed their own existence. During the Ethiopian drought of the early 1970s and in the Kampuchean displaced persons camps in Thailand, parents whose whereabouts had been unknown sometimes appeared unexpectedly to claim their children when it was rumored that children's centers were to be moved.

- Military and government policies. In wartime and refugee situations, malevolent policies are sometimes purposefully adopted to separate children from families, as was the Nazi policy forbidding foreign slave laborers from caring for their own children. The abduction of children by military forces has occurred in many emergencies. Drafting or indictment of children into the military is also a phenomenon in many countries and a cause of separation. Sometimes government policies purposefully cause separation, as did the decision of the Greek Government to evacuate children from the occupied areas during the Greek Civil War. Policies can also inadvertently cause separation. For example, immigration and refugee resettlement policies that provide to unaccompanied children resettlement possibilities not available to the larger population may encourage parents to separate from their children in order to give them special advantages.

- Intervention. Sometimes the separations are the unplanned result of the way relief assistance is provided. For example, relief workers have sometimes removed children from a dangerous area or to a medical facility without notifying the family or others in the vicinity. In the Nigerian Civil War, as in many other emergency situations, the lack of proper records or adequate documentation for children in hospitals, orphanages, and other facilities made it impossible to establish their identities, particularly for the very young children. Parents in refugee centers were sometimes encouraged to place their children in special facilities when food and education were provided. In various emergencies, children with handicaps and special medical problems are sometimes separated from their families for treatment in foreign countries. Where the amount of relief goods and services provided to unaccompanied children in separate facilities is far greater than that available to other children, family members may separate to allow the child access to these services. This paradox haunts child welfare efforts in virtually every emergency: the very existence of special programs for unaccompanied children may have a "magnet effect" which actually causes more separations. Often by wanting to do what seems best for the child, the parent separates from it purposefully.

- Child's initiatives. Parent-child separations also occur because of a child's own circumstances and wishes, with parental consent or involvement only sometimes at issue. After the Hungarian revolt, some older children fled the country fearing persecution because they opposed the political system. In that case as well as in others, some children took the opportunity to leave bad homes, to seek fortune or opportunity in other countries, or simply to follow their friends. Many times older adolescents have left home to avoid being drafted into the military, particularly when the conflict is unpopular.

Three program implications arise from review of the reasons why parents and children separate in emergency situations. First, the diversity of reasons affirm the unique situation of each unaccompanied child and reconfirms the need to document and assess the specific circumstances of each. Second, assessment is therefore required in each situation to determine the causes of separation. Third, as most of the causes of separation are related to resolvable problems, many parent-child separations can be prevented with appropriate intervention.

Advocacy or social welfare services may help prevent separations. Advocacy includes public and private efforts to change policy or administrative procedure in order to defend or protect the interests of unaccompanied children. Advocacy, for example, may be required when the causes of parent-child separations are military actions, such as abduction, government policies, or inadequate relief policies. Many of the difficulties which cause family separations are familial problems which can be influenced by social welfare services. Social welfare services include any assistance which helps the individual or family cope with the difficulties faced. Social welfare services, for example, may prevent parent-child separations by enabling destitute fami-
WHEN PARENT-CHILD SEPARATIONS OCCUR

Parent-child separations occur as a continuing phenomenon in most war, famine, and refugee situations. Some unaccompanied children identified during an emergency are likely to have separated from their families prior to the emergency and others separate during an emergency. In Ethiopia during the drought of the early 1970s, children separated from families because of the famine were found together with unaccompanied children who had been living in orphanages or on the streets before the famine. Children were separated from families over the six-year duration of World War II and during the entire Nigerian Civil War. In the refugee and displaced persons camps in Thailand between 1974 and 1984, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repeatedly attempted to move all known unaccompanied children from the camps, but new unaccompanied children continued to appear. Separation of children also continues after an emergency, as when a war has ended, refugees have settled, and the situation appears stable. The number of institutionalized children increased for more than fifteen years after the Korean War. After World War II, programs for unaccompanied children in the displaced persons camps were required for at least seven years—new children continued to be found by the tracing programs, families continued to separate, and unwanted children continued to be born. The program implication is that services for unaccompanied children are likely to be needed over the duration of and after an emergency. This challenges the assumption of relief agencies which assume that the issue of unaccompanied children is a fleeting problem which is quickly resolved.

THE CHILDREN

Unaccompanied children in past emergencies have included both boys and girls, and have been of all ages, from infancy to the age of majority. Yet some broad trends exist as to age group and gender. Abandoned children are often infants. Abducted children may be of any age. In World War II, for example, young children were abducted for adoption and older children for work programs. Children who have been orphaned or accidentally separated from parents, and those who have been entrusted by parents to the care of others, fall into all age groups. Most runaways are adolescents as are those youth who are living on their own with parental consent. A majority of the unaccompanied Hungarian, Cuban, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese children who crossed national borders as refugees were adolescent and male. Abandoned infants after the Korean war were predominantly female. The age span of unaccompanied children in emergencies confirms that a range of services may be required to meet the needs of children of differing ages. As is well known, children of different ages have different needs. The needs of children, based on age-related developmental differences, are elaborated in Part II.

LOCATING THE CHILDREN

If a search for unaccompanied children were to be carried out in an emergency situation, where would they be found? Experience confirms that many, a majority in most situations, are likely to be living with other families—in the homes of brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other relatives; in the homes of neighbors and family friends; and in the homes of new acquaintances. Some, however, are found in hospitals where they are brought for treatment, abandoned or surrendered at birth, or left alone by the death of the parent who accompanied them there. They are also found in any facilities providing residential care for children, such as orphanages, children's centers, group homes, children's villages, and boarding schools. They may be at any other facilities where food and/or temporary shelter are provided, such as relief and feeding centers, welfare offices, and religious establishments. Sometimes unaccompanied children have been found in jails, prisons, detention centers, and around military camps. They may also be found in public places, along roads, in markets, in forests, or on the streets in larger cities. Two implications arise from the fact that unaccompanied children in an emergency may exist in any or all of these circumstances. First, a determination of the existence of unaccompanied children must include surveys of all the above-mentioned places and any others where they might have taken refuge or have been placed. Second, all services that may assist unaccompanied children should be provided with technical support and training to ensure that the special needs of the children are adequately met. For example, in the Korean War, as in many other emergencies, active family tracing was not provided for children in many institutions.

UNACCOMPANIED BUT NOT ALONE

In past emergencies children, at the time they are identified as being unaccompanied, had been separated from parents for greatly varying lengths of time—some only for days; others for many years. Some, such as street children, maintained contact with their parents who lived nearby; others may have been separated before the onset of the emergency and may have had no contact with their family for periods longer than the emergency itself. Some unaccompanied children identified after World War II had been separated for seven years or more. Interviews with unaccompanied Khmer children in the camps in Thailand in 1980 revealed that they had been separated from parents for periods ranging from a few days to more than five years. When unaccompanied by parent or guardian, children typically establish relationships with other individuals. In every emergency examples abound of unaccompanied children who, without outside help, integrated into new homes and established intimate long-term relationships with nurturing caretakers, who may have been relatives, neighbors, old friends, or new acquaintances. Strong peer relationships also developed. After World
War II, for example, groups of unaccompanied children who had survived extreme hardship through mutual support were identified, and subsequently resisted every effort to separate them from each other. Irrespective of the length of time a child might have been separated from parents or guardian, documentation, family tracing, and assessment of the potential for family reunification is required. However, the longer the separation from the family, the more likely a new relationship will have developed which, from a psychological perspective, becomes the primary criterion for determining family reunification or alternative care.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AT RISK

Left on their own, unaccompanied children have usually survived by taking advantage of new opportunities. As noted above, they have often been taken into homes or services. Many, however, were not so fortunate as to find circumstances which met their needs and protected their rights as individuals. They lived in situations in which they were very unhappy—in displaced persons camps or centers, in homes willing to provide only temporary accommodation, and in extreme situations, have been abused or exploited for the labor they could provide. Some unwanted children have been passed from one family to another and others have lacked such basics as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education.

Unaccompanied children are uniquely at risk during emergency situations. Malnutrition and preventable diseases have caused the deaths of millions of children in past emergencies—the unaccompanied child is the most vulnerable. A study of abandoned infants less than three months of age at a Khmer refugee border camp in Thailand found an unusually high mortality rate, more than twice that in any developing country. Survival also depends upon adult protection in bombings, emergency evacuations, and famines. Sometimes protection is required to prevent children from being abducted or forced to participate in military actions. In Thailand in 1981, UNHCR had to move unaccompanied children from one displaced persons center to another to protect them from being recruited forcefully to fight with the guerrillas. In some situations unaccompanied children have been violently treated or sexually abused. After the 1980 Cuban Maelstrom exodus to the United States, some unaccompanied Cuban minors lacked adequate protection and were raped in detention centers where they were being held with Cuban criminals. Children must also be protected against actions taken presumably on their behalf that may, in fact, violate their basic rights and interests and those of other family members. In many past emergencies unaccompanied children required protection when well-intentioned interveners, acting only on their own authority and without having made an adequate assessment of each child's circumstances, attempted to carry the children away. After World War II intervention by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) was necessary to prevent independent agencies from moving unaccompanied children to other countries until the circumstances of each child had been determined. During the Nigerian Civil War, some children were placed on planes and sent out of the country without parental approval. In the United States during 1975, people reportedly went into the reception center for Vietnamese refugees at Camp Pendleton and simply removed unprotected, unaccompanied children. In the same way, in the first weeks of

Analysis of the Problem

the Kampuchean crisis, people visited the Sakaeo camp in Thailand and, without authority or an assessment of the children's eligibility for adoption, removed children assumed to be orphans. In other situations, children have been released to foster families without consideration of the children's wishes, without verification of the claimant's identity, and without home studies done to determine the suitability of the placement. These are but a few of many experiences that substantiate the need for special protection of unaccompanied children in emergencies.

There are two implications arising from the chance arrangements unaccompanied children typically exist in. Experience has shown that it should not be assumed that unaccompanied children have by chance found situations that meet their needs or protect their rights. These vulnerable children should be identified and their situations assessed whether they live alone or with families or in institutions. Any necessary intervention must consider the psychological relationship that may have developed between a child and his new caretakers. Such psychological considerations are discussed in more detail in Part II of this book.

THE EVACUATION OF CHILDREN FROM EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Organized programs to move children away from emergency situations have caused many parent-child separations in the past. Such children can be described as entrusted, usually to authorities or agencies. Selected examples of evacuations are given in Table 10-4. Most of the children evacuated were between the ages of five and fourteen, although there have been some as young as one year and others as old as eighteen years. Evacuations have taken place for at least three reasons: as a preventive measure, before there was any immediate threat to the children's lives; for rescue, when the lives of the children were endangered; and for support, when the lives of the children were not actually threatened but to provide the children with special assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children Evacuated</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Estimated Number Reunited</th>
<th>Estimated Length of Separation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Civil War to other countries</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>18,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II within Great Britain</td>
<td>730,000</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>730,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English children to other countries</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>5-14</td>
<td>13,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish children to Sweden</td>
<td>69,000</td>
<td>1-14</td>
<td>52,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European children to Palestine</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>6-18</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Civil War within Greece</td>
<td>14,500</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td>11,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian Civil War</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuban Refugees to the U.S. (1960-67)</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>6-18</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War (Babylift) to the U.S. and England</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>less than 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many hardships in a poorly planned and executed program, although well-intentioned and labeled a “model” by organizers. In England, the initial reception program and at least one institutional placement proved unsatisfactory. Review of the placement of the Basque children, as with other evacuated children, confirms that some children were very unhappy in the placements provided, whether they were in foster care, group care, or institutions. In the Spanish Civil War and in others, the care of evacuated children was usually planned and carried out on the assumption that the children would within several months be returned to their families; therefore only short-term arrangements were necessary. As the period of care was much longer than expected, the initial programs often proved inadequate for longer-term care.

The children’s reactions to their experience depended on the kind of care and placement they received. From the information that is available, most children apparently look back on their experience positively. For some, however, as for those evacuated in the Spanish Civil War, the evacuation was an unhappy experience and the lack of loving care was frequently recalled.

The youngest children sent into Belgium and Mexico tended to suffer such trauma, commenting that they almost “died of fear,” or suffered from a lifelong lack of confidence, or cried for weeks, or still have a feeling of insecurity, or vomiting for years, or lacked parental counsel when leaving young manhood or womanhood. Some few still live at home or with siblings, being unable to live independently.

The separation of siblings usually has had a devastating effect on children. Lagarreta also noted that the initial reception was important to the children because it conveyed a lasting impression as to their welcome. It was also helpful to the children if attention was given to maintaining the children’s fluency in their native languages, and respecting their cultural traditions and folklore, and also continuing their traditional religious practices. Receiving familiar foods contributed to a sense of wellbeing.

The limited financial resources of the organizing agencies often limited services provided to the children. Program funding was usually based on the assumption that services required for the evacuated children would be only temporary. As the period of care extended, many agencies had difficulty finding additional sources of funds and had to reduce services.

Fifth, the evacuation of a child sometimes led to changes in the relationship between parent and child. Some parents lost interest in the child, or were happy for the child to remain in the care of the evacuating organization or with the foster family. On their part, children established new relationships with their caregivers and sometimes had no desire to return home. Even though Swedish foster parents had signed forms stating that the evacuated Finnish children could not be adopted, some filed petitions for adoptions after the children had integrated into the family, and in several cases the courts honored the petition to protect the relationship that had formed. Others who returned home found adjustment difficult. Some had become accustomed to different foods and better living conditions during evacuation than they were to receive at home. They had not shared the common difficulties of other family members and found their place in the family altered by siblings born in their absence. Such changes make reintegration difficult for some children.
INTERVERNORS: THOSE WHO MAY ASSIST

In the absence of the family, the care and protection of unaccompanied children becomes a public responsibility by conscience and law in most societies. Many benefactors intercede on behalf of the children in emergencies, both from within and outside the affected community. In emergency situations outside intervensors often assume that local intervensors will be overwhelmed by the crisis and thus be unable to provide services to unaccompanied children. This has not, however, been substantiated in past emergencies. In all emergencies reviewed most of the assistance provided to unaccompanied children has come from local and national intervention. Outside intervenors, for their part, have also contributed substantially. In virtually all major emergencies international assistance for unaccompanied children has arrived in the form of money, relief supplies, and personnel.

Analysis of the Problem

INTERVENORS FROM WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Family and Relatives

Experience has shown that when children are separated from their parents they are most likely to be cared for by other family members—adult brothers and sisters, grandparents, and aunts and uncles. In Guatemala, for example, a sample of eighty-eight children who remained in their home villages after being orphaned by the conflict of the 1980s revealed that ten (11%) were cared for by other siblings, forty-two (48%) by grandparents, fourteen (16%) by uncles, and the remaining 25% were cared for by neighbors or left the community. Families often consider themselves responsible for unaccompanied children. Some legal systems and religious traditions require relatives to take responsibility. In the Guatemala highlands orphaned children traditionally go immediately to their grandparents’ home. On the ninth day after the parental funeral, the remaining family members meet to decide with whom the children should live.

Unrelated Individuals and Families

In virtually all emergencies individuals and families have spontaneously provided assistance to children other than their own, even in the face of danger, scarcity, and risk. In Holland during World War II, Dutch families hid and sheltered at least 15,000 Jewish children. In the mass evacuation of northern France in 1940, individuals who were themselves fleeing, searched for and assisted unaccompanied children. In refugee and displaced persons camps, families have adopted and cared for unaccompanied children. In the holding centers in Thailand, a study of the Kampuchean families who were caring for children other than their own showed that the majority of foster care arrangements had taken place spontaneously during the crisis. Of the eighty-two families interviewed in that study, fifty-one percent had not known the child before initiating foster care. Even in countries where foster care is not customary, such as Nigeria, families voluntarily assumed responsibility for children when foster care programs were organized after the civil war.

Social Welfare and Court Services

Community social welfare and court services usually have legal authority for programs for unaccompanied children. When they have not themselves provided direct services, agencies have delegated the responsibility while usually maintaining at least a supervisory role. In the Spanish Civil War, the social welfare department of the Republican government established “children’s colonies,” assisted needy families and encouraged the evacuation of children. During the Vietnam War, the Republic of Vietnam operated most of the orphanages in the country. After the war in Nigeria, the national social welfare department carried out a large-scale tracing and family reunion program.
Independent Group Efforts

Privately organized efforts have played major roles in assisting unaccompanied children in past emergencies. Such assistance has often come from private hospitals, schools, child welfare institutions and agencies, churches and temples, and social and relief organizations, such as the National Red Cross societies. Some provided assistance as an extension of already existing child welfare services, while others hastily established services expressly for unaccompanied children. Throughout Europe during and after World War II, and similarly in other emergencies, private initiative led to establishment of programs, children’s centers, orphanages, and schools to provide for children generally and unaccompanied children specifically.

INTEVENORS FROM OUTSIDE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

In most large-scale emergencies, individuals, independent agencies, and international organizations from outside the affected community have also helped provide services for unaccompanied children. Sometimes outside intervenors have been called in by local or national authorities, but most often the agencies initiate assistance. A review of past experience confirms that various types of intervenors from outside the victim community usually offer assistance.

Individuals

Individuals acting on their own initiative often go to areas affected by emergencies and offer to assist. They usually give constructive help to established organizations and programs. There are, however, in most emergencies, examples of individuals working independently of all established programs, and contrary to child welfare principles.

Independent Agencies

The number of private international voluntary agencies providing assistance in emergencies is steadily increasing. At the time of the Russian Revolution and subsequent famine, for example, very few international agencies existed. By the end of World War II, there were approximately fourteen private international organizations working with unaccompanied children in the displaced persons camps in Europe. More than 60 private voluntary agencies have assisted in each major emergency since 1970. Most do not generally provide services explicitly for unaccompanied children, although many may have done so in one or more emergencies.

International Organizations

The United Nations relief organizations were established after World War II. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA), was founded to assist

Analysis of the Problem

The substantial efforts made in past emergencies must be examined in the context of actual needs. In many emergencies timely assistance has been provided, but in most, the assistance has been inadequate, late, and sometimes misguided. Many unaccompanied children have received basic assistance, but tens of thousands have died for lack of care, food, clothing, or shelter. Many unaccompanied children have been reunited with their families, but they are only a small percentage of those who could have been reunited. Some have received interim or long-term alternative care that has met their needs, but hundreds of thousands of others have lived as street children or have been placed in institutions or otherwise never received care adequate for their developmental needs. Sometimes efforts to provide care have only increased the
trauma, as when children have been held in interim situations for extended periods, or passed from one care-giver to another, or separated from the few people to whom they had been attached. Some children have been provided with assistance according to an established legal and child welfare system, but in many situations, existing laws relating to the care and protection of children have not been observed and the rights of the children and families have not been respected.

There are unaccompanied children in nonemergency times as well as during emergencies and all nations have formal and informal legal and social welfare systems to provide for children separated from their parents. As mentioned above, local, national, and international emergency relief assistance is provided to children during and after emergencies. In light of the existing structures and substantial efforts made to assist unaccompanied children, why then have the needs so often not been met?

To begin with, in many past emergencies the local social welfare systems have proven ineffective. In some situations the exigencies of a large-scale emergency exceeded the resources of the established services, particularly when the number of unaccompanied children increased by thousands in a very short time. Sometimes local systems were not effective because other pressing needs were given priority over those of unaccompanied children. In other situations, the social welfare and legal procedures that would otherwise have been used to evaluate the circumstances of each child and assess the interests of all parties were disregarded as superfluous. In wars, the legal and social welfare services often gradually disintegrated, particularly on the losing side.

Secondly, in refugee situations unaccompanied children are away from usual community services. Legal and social welfare structures in the communities from which the refugees came do not ordinarily survive in refugee camps and temporary settlements. Displaced persons therefore have depended upon others for such services or for opportunity to recreate their own. When unaccompanied children have crossed national borders, the host country determines services for their care and protection. When the host country has opposed their arrival, alien children have often been denied access to local child welfare services, and consequently, routine child welfare procedures for care and protection have not been followed. This has been and continues to be a problem in many first-asylum countries. Thus, unaccompanied refugee children often live in a care and protection vacuum: separated from home area services, but not eligible for or provided with local services.

Thirdly, because systematic searches for unaccompanied children have not been routinely carried out in emergency situations and because the children’s circumstances have not been documented and evaluated, programs have been based largely on conjecture and assumptions, often fallacious. Relief services have not anticipated large numbers of unaccompanied children in emergencies and have therefore often been late in providing aid. The needs of the children were often assumed to have been met locally by existing relief measures with the result that assistance to the affected community has often been inadequate. The unaccompanied children have been commonly assumed to be orphans or abandoned; as a result, efforts to find and reunite the children with their parents have been lacking. The general public, sometimes misinformed by the media, has assumed that unaccompanied children are infants, and relief agencies have sometimes assumed them to be self-sufficient adolescents. In both cases, actions inappropriate to children’s ages have followed. Programs for unac-

Analysis of the Problem

accompanied children have been established on the assumptions of recent and traumatic separations from parents. Interveners have not realized that some may already have been apart from parents for years because of reasons unrelated to the emergency. They have also assumed that required assistance should be short-term rather than a continuing social service.

Fourthly, in many emergency situations the assistance to unaccompanied children is inadequate because there is no program for meeting the developmental needs of the children. Children receive food, clothing, and shelter, but not the equally essential care and nurturance necessary for normal growth and development.

Fifth, because a systematic and coordinated approach to the care and protection of unaccompanied children has been lacking, programs have developed largely by chance. For example, if someone within the situation was committed to family tracing and worked to establish it, then families were traced. On the other hand, if the interest of the intervenor was in establishing orphans, than tracing may not have been attempted. In the complex and uncertain environment of large-scale emergencies responsibility for the care of unaccompanied children is often ambiguous. To a large extent, programs have been undertaken by whatever agencies or persons happen to have been involved in the emergency, not necessarily by those with experience and expertise in the care of children.

Sixth, usefulness of outside assistance has been limited by the lack of programmatic guidelines for international organizations and voluntary agencies. As a result, these organizations have not provided systematic assessments, guidance, and coordination to solve the particular problems of care and protection for unaccompanied children. There are noteworthy exceptions in which major efforts were made on behalf of unaccompanied children, such as UNHCR’s assistance after the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and its activities during the Cambodian and in the early 1980s. In many situations, however, assistance has been less than adequate, and coordination and continuity have faltered. There is presently no international organization to act for unaccompanied children in all emergencies: UNHCR provides assistance only in refugee situations; UNICEF has until recently largely restricted itself to providing food, clothing, and medical care; and ICRC is limited to conflict situations and does not provide child welfare services. In some regional emergencies this means that international support for unaccompanied children has existed on one side of a border but not the other. Sometimes international organizations have actually contributed to the institutionalization of children by funding only orphanages or children’s centers while withholding support for other forms of care.

The failure to satisfy the needs of unaccompanied children is due, in part, to the staffing and orientation of the intervening agencies themselves, both internationally and nationally. Some agencies working with unaccompanied children have neither emergency nor child welfare experience. Although others have had emergency experience, they lacked the orientation and background of working with children in general and unaccompanied children in particular. Some agencies with adequate child welfare expertise were unfamiliar with the special problems of assisting children in emergencies. Furthermore, other groups offered only narrowly defined, predetermined services such as intercountry adoption or the establishment of children’s villages or orphanages. Many programs for unaccompanied children lack such essential services as tracing.

The absence of experienced staff and the lack of special training also limits the
effectiveness of programs for unaccompanied children, despite the good intentions of the agencies. Agencies often claim to have worked with unaccompanied children for years, yet individual staff members may lack personal experience. Few agencies employ regular child welfare specialists and even fewer have provided preparatory training or technical support in child welfare issues to field staff. Agencies are inadequately prepared to establish emergency care procedures, assessment techniques, training methodologies, and verification procedures, nor are they prepared to establish more general social services. Seldom have emergency plans included contingency measures for the protection of unaccompanied children. Where agencies have provided exemplary services, it has often been because particular staff members were committed to and knowledgeable about unaccompanied children. However, unless these individuals are present in later emergencies, the agency's expertise is often lost.

Decisions about unaccompanied children are many times shaped as much by extraneous influences as by the needs of children. The actions of intervenors often reflect different philosophies, political preferences, religious beliefs, military priorities, or cultural biases. Rather than focusing on the genuine needs of unaccompanied children, programs are sometimes based on donor and agency interests. For example, orphanages are sometimes built because donors have contributed money for this purpose, not because orphanages best meet the needs of children. In the past, short-term crisis intervention measures have often become permanent because of the self-perpetuating nature of organizations themselves. This was clearly demonstrated after the Korean and Nigerian civil wars when orphanage directors opposed the closing of their institutions. Political factors sometimes prevent the reunification of unaccompanied children and their families. After World War II, for example, the U.S.S.R. refused to permit UNRRA to search for unaccompanied children in the Russian zones of Austria and Germany. After the Greek Civil War, Eastern European countries refused for years to permit the return of children confirmed by the Red Cross to have families in Greece. The establishment of effective programs for tracing the families of unaccompanied children has not been permitted in Kampuchea, and political considerations have prevented the reunification of children claimed by parents.

Four recent international developments likely to contribute to an improvement in the care of unaccompanied children deserve mention. In 1982 UNCHR proposed guidelines for the care of unaccompanied children in refugee situations in the "UNCHR Handbook for Emergencies." These guidelines were amplified further in the "UNCHR Handbook for Social Services" published in 1984. In 1986 UNICEF published "Assisting in Emergencies: A Resource Handbook for UNICEF Field Staff," which includes guidelines for the care and protection of unaccompanied children. Also in 1986, the UNICEF Executive Board adopted resolutions which sanction UNICEF program support for "children in especially difficult circumstances" and recognized unaccompanied children as one such group.

II

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Central to a discussion of unaccompanied children in emergencies are issues arising from family separation and loss. Desertion, loss, and separation in infancy, childhood, and adolescence constitute universal themes for subsequent grief, despair, and bereavement. Yet, separation or loss never occurs in isolation of other factors, especially in emergencies, where events of extraordinary intensity—violence, hunger, destruction, deprivation, and enormous social change—can compound the initial trauma of family separation or loss and lead to far more suffering. Conversely, during emergencies, there are also factors which can protect children from developments harmful; chief among these is the presence of family, other trusted adults, and to a lesser extent, peers.

Thus, while family separation or loss is indeed the central issue, any assessment of psychological risk needs to be multidetermined. First, one must begin with the children themselves as previous family backgrounds, cultural experiences, temperaments and personality characteristics, and most importantly, age at the time of separation or loss will determine to varying degrees how a particular child is affected by, under stands and responds to, the stress of family separation or loss.

Secondly, close attention must be paid to the kinds, numbers, and length (acute sustained) of adversities the child is subjected to after the initial separation or loss and before reaching the "safety" of the relief community. In some cases, unaccompanied children have immediately received adequate adult care in reasonably stable communities. Here, disruptions were kept to a minimum and children's outcomes were generally favorable. In other cases, however, family separation and loss has occurred against a backdrop of concurrent stress, trauma, and deprivation. The far greater adversities these children were subjected to resulted in more serious adjustment problems and often in long-term psychological disorders.

Finally, an analysis of the relief community's response to unaccompanied children must be included. As detailed in Part I, initial assistance for unaccompanied children has been both absent and present, and when present, effective as well as ineffective. Further, unaccompanied children have been cared for in foster and adoptive families, group homes and institutions, which have been located both within the original communities as well as within different communities and nations. The kin