

## Possible Research Projects

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#### 1) **Title: Environmental Disasters and Childhood Development**

Background: The number of children environmental disasters has significantly increased over the recent decades. As the number of humans continues to exponentially grow, populations are living in areas where previously there had been no people. When an environmental disaster does occur, the impact on such areas can be more acutely felt than in longer inhabited areas due to the lack of rescue infrastructure and ability to quickly get needed support materials to the site. For young children living in these areas, a disaster may represent a significant life change that could have long-term ramifications on development. The goal would be to understand if effective policies are being put into place that would help prevent the disruption of childhood well-fare.

#### Questions:

- Are children in areas of new settlements in greater danger during an environmental disaster and its aftermath than children in longer established settlements?
- What impact does local, state, and federal policy have on the safety of the children in these new settlement areas?

Proposed Approach: This project would attempt to achieve two things. First, the researcher would need to define an area as either prepared or not prepared for the normal environmental disasters that occur throughout the year. Random events that are unusual should not be considered because it is unlikely that people would have the forethought to prepare for a disaster that has not occurred within their lifetime. From this, the researcher would try to guestimate a number of people, and hopefully young children, who are living in more dangerous areas. This would need to be done through a variety of sources including the U.S. census and state and local archives which offers invaluable information on population and growth. Initially the study will look to see if there are any major patterns that can be discerned over the Central Atlantic Coast area of the United States. This area should be compared to other areas of the US to see if any differences and continuities have occurred and why this may be the case. This should produce a tentative number of people who have moved into areas that are unprepared to handle a disaster. This number can be turned into information based on region.

Finally, the researcher will want to study what preparedness policies are implemented in the various regions. This will involve looking into local ordinances and maybe even speaking to the officials who live in the area. From this, a comparison can be made with established areas that have long dealt with such environmental disasters and one would hopefully gauge how effective it would be. Federal, state, and municipal policies should all be explored because they will all play a role in the event of a disaster. This should give a relative understanding if the policy would need to be updated or if it would be more helpful than not in the case of an environmental disasters. This also should be broken down into regions that match the borders of the population portion mentioned previously.

Purpose: The purpose of studying such a topic would be to gain knowledge about three important points.

- The number of people, including children, would be understood.
- The nature of disaster preparedness will be elucidated.
- Disaster relief policies that may not yet have been tested can be compared to those that have highlighting which areas may want to undertake reform. This could allow for the decreased need for temporary shelters and allow children to get back to their pre-disaster lives more quickly.

## 2) Title: **The Opioid Crisis and Childhood Development**

Background: The United States has been hit with an increasingly severe opioid epidemic. This report will look at how this recent drug craze is affecting urban areas. Many of these areas have seen drug problems decimate their people before. What seems unique about the recent opioid wave is the large number of overdoses that end in death meaning the drug use appears to create a higher number of children that have a deceased parent than previous outbreaks. Any area of the country recognized as an affected area will work but for the purposes of this study the research may wish to stay in Maryland.

Questions:

- Is the opioid crisis creating more single parent children of a young age?
- If this turns out to be the case then what is happening to all the children?
- Are they living with a surviving caregiver?
- How might the drug overdose death of a single parent impact the development the child?
- Are these children being turned into institutionalized homes where they are left for long period of time?
- Are they losing their connection to their families when their caregiver overdoses?

Proposed Approach: Target areas will be discerned by the FDA and medical organizations previous work on the opioid crisis. They have created documents about the problem and where it is occurring. The researcher should then try to study how many people died from an opioid overdose in the chosen area and whether they had children or not. If they had children the researcher should study the children to see what happened to them after the death of the parent. Introductory information such as whether the child lived with the deceased parent or not and their age at the death of the parent will be essential as it may easily become important in the development of the child's character.

The researcher should first try to discern macro characteristics of the opioid issue and the children who have lost at least one caregiver to it. Is there an age where the impact seems to be at the greatest? These can help classify a large population into more manageable sections. Finally, representative sections should be created and studied more closely if possible. A priority should be placed on children who do not remember their deceased parent as this could mean that the

trauma of the death itself is less likely to have impacted their development. It needs to be found out if these children are staying with family or entering institutionalized living and remaining.

Purpose:

- This project purpose will be to better understand the impact the opioid crisis is having on the children who are part of it.
- A secondary purpose could be what impact this is having on the local communities who may have to care for the children..

**3) Title: Child Development in Privately Owned Institutionalized Homes**

Background: More and more previously public institutions are being privatized and run for profit. Prisons are a clear example of this but orphanages and other institutionalized homes for children are also following suit. This study will compare the differences in public vs. private in regards to the running of orphanages and compare the probable impacts on childhood development. This is not a research project that would need to be connected to a specific area. However, research on where privatized orphanages have become more common will need to be done so the researcher can pinpoint areas that have been more greatly affected. The researcher may want to even put orphanages or other forms of institutionalized child homes into three categories, public, private, and religious because many are run through local churches.

Questions:

- How do the public and private institutions differ in regards to the environment into which children enter?
- Do they offer different institutionalized structures? Is one more lenient than the other?

Proposed Approach: To undertake this study, the researcher will need to compare policies. The researcher will also want to look into how long such policies have been in place and what sort of environment the institution seeks to create. This should allow the researcher to elucidate the differences between types of institutions, and it should be readily apparent if there is a major split between public and private institutions. With this information, the researcher could begin to focus on the individual children who are in the home and those who have left.

For the children who are in the home, the researcher should focus their energy on whether or not they appear to be developing along acceptable lines. Do the children show signs of neglect? If so what are the signs and are they more prevalent in one group of homes or another? In regards to children who left institutionalized living, the researcher should focus on what happened to them by looking into how their life turned out. Do these children show an unusual predilection towards developmental or social problems? If so, is there any indication that a larger number of children were from a single version of institutionalized home?

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study would be to better understand the impact policies have on children who inhabit institutionalized homes.
- This could uncover a connection to specific policy that leads to a greater amount of developmental difficulty and could create reform to policies that would better help the children.

**4) Title: The Stigma of Adoption and Childhood Development**

Background: Adoption has often had a negative stigma attached to it. Does this still exist and if so how has it changed? This study will pay particular focus on the rise of the internet and the impact that new forms of communication have had on the stigma of adoption. Recent studies indicate that childhood adoption can effectively reduce the likelihood of developing emotional or cognitive issues. However, these studies do not indicate that adoption is free from its own developmental issues.

Questions:

- Does the stigma surrounding adoption still exist and if so how has it changed in the recent decades?
- What impact, if any, would this societal stigma have on the cognitive and emotional development of young children.

Proposed Approach: To investigate this, the researcher would need to create two samplings of families who have adopted children. One would be with young children and the other would be with older children who may or may not know they are adopted. This could be very difficult to achieve because many parents who have not told their kids they are adopted would be unlikely to want to take part in a study like this. However, some parents may be open to the idea. There is also a population of more open house holds where the children know they are adopted and this may be a fruitful source to populate your blind sample.

The researcher should look into a wide variety of developmental issues that are commonly associated with children who have spent time in institutionalized homes. Evidence should come from speaking with the child but may also come from parents and medical personnel if such people can be found and spoken to ethically. The researcher should see if the macro patterns that many believe exist can be found. If they are found, is it to a specific population? Are the issues found more in one group of kids than another? If so, does the group that shows the issues have kids who knew they were adopted or not? If such a macro pattern can be found, it could have serious ramifications for children's adoptions and development.

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study would be to better understand adoptions and the impact such an even may have on children.

- This study would elucidate such issues and hopefully create a more complete understanding of childhood development within a unique situation.

### **5) Title: The Development of the 2014 Immigration Crisis Children**

Background: In 2014, thousands of children fled gang violence in Central America and came to the United States. This research project will seek to parcel out the refugees that met with family and those that had no one here. Then the project will seek out the kids who had no family and try to discern what happened to them. Finally, the impact of such a trip on their development will be studied in depth.

#### Questions:

- How did having family in the US impact the development of children fleeing gang violence in 2014?
- Did the children who had no family in the US stay in the country?
- If so, how did this impact their cognitive and emotional development?

Proposed Approach: In order to explore this important question, the researcher will need to look into immigration records. This should be both at the border and at centralized archives where such information should be stored. This portion would be for the purpose of finding out as much macro information as possible about the extremely large number of mostly unaccompanied children who entered into the US. Hopefully large patterns could be discerned beyond they were from Central America and they fled gang violence. This should also give us the ability to learn what happened to a representational section of the children. The researcher should try to contact the kids or their families. If the families allow, the kids who moved into stable households should be interviewed to find out essentially what happened to them. Special priority should be given to these individuals if any can be found and interviewed.

#### Purpose:

- The purpose of this research project will be to better understand the long-term impact the 2014 migration had on the children and the US.
- Many of the children experienced real traumas both before they left their home and on their way into the US and their experiences may impact US society should the individuals remain here in large numbers.