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Inquiring Children's Security within the Framework of Human Security: A Theoretical Assessment

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ABSTRACT

While there is consensus on the individual as the primary referent object within the human security debate the question of which individuals remains inadequately addressed. In this paper children are the primary referents and beneficiaries of security, arguing children's human security possesses distinct characteristics that differentiate the nonviolent, preventable threats they face from those encountered by adults. Addressing these threats requires an integrated approach that combines theoretical exploration with practical policy implementation. The current academic discourse on human security, while extensive, must prioritize children's specific needs by acknowledging them as key referents of security and essential subjects in both theory and practice. This involves recognizing children as active social and political agents, and addressing the unique dimensions of their vulnerability through comprehensive, targeted strategies. Achieving meaningful progress in safeguarding children's security demands concerted efforts from all sectors, including researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and political leaders. Effective policy and practice require a collaborative approach that emphasizes the prevention and early identification of risks. Enhanced academic attention and robust discussions on children's security are vital in shaping policies that reflect the urgency of these issues and drive effective interventions on a global scale.

Keywords: Children's Security, Children's Rights, Child Well-Being, Human Security, Critical Security.

JEL Classification Codes: J13, H56, I31, K33, K38

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INTRODUCTION

The human security approach represents a significant shift from traditional security approaches that predominantly focus on states' security to individuals' security. While there is widespread agreement in the human security discourse regarding the individual as the primary referent object of security, particularly which individuals are being addressed remains insufficiently clarified. This study seeks to address this gap by claiming that children are the principal referents and beneficiaries of human security: it asserts that the security of children possesses unique characteristics that differentiate them from those experienced by adults, particularly in terms of the nonviolent, preventable threats they face.

The examination begins by exploring the conceptual relationship between *human security* and *children's security*, offering a detailed analysis of how the two intersect. This analysis is followed by an evaluation of the theoretical, legal, and practical developments pertinent to this area. As the global landscape evolves, children are increasingly exposed to a wide array of human security threats, including but not limited to violence during armed conflicts. The escalation of such threats, alongside numerous nonviolent and preventable risks, significantly impacts the physical, emotional, and social well-being of millions of children worldwide. The urgency of addressing these issues is underscored by the need to recognize and respond to the distinct and multifaceted nature of threats facing children today. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of children's security within the human security agenda is imperative, as both *violent and nonviolent threats* pose profound existential risks to children in our increasingly interconnected world: the *2024 Global Outlook Report of UNICEF* emphasises an urgent call for global cooperation to protect rights and well-being of world's children who represent 30% of the world's population. The report highlights the growing global geopolitical and geoeconomic fragmentation under eight key trends affecting and threatening children's lives all around the world (UNICEF, 2024).

For a long time, children were largely invisible in the field of International Relations (IR). The discipline showed little interest in incorporating studies of childhood or recognizing children as social/political actors or agents. This oversight left a significant gap in understanding

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the role of children within global political contexts, with children often excluded from discussions of agency and power in IR. On the other hand, the unique vulnerabilities of children in various international settings were overlooked; relatively young human security approach has also had no particular interest in studying children's security own its own merit. This study seeks to incorporate children's security into the human security approach asserting that the security of children should be regarded as an essential component of human security research. Thus, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of particular challenges that children face and advocate for more effective measures to safeguard children's security in a contemporary globalized world.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section aims to provide a clear understanding of key concepts related to human security and children's security. It addresses the theoretical frameworks, definitions, and scope of these concepts to ensure a comprehensive foundation for subsequent analysis. By clarifying these concepts, we can better evaluate the intersection of theoretical, legal, and practical developments concerning children's security and understand the diverse threats they face in both violent and nonviolent contexts.

Since the mid-1990s, human security has become a widely utilised concept. It is founded on the principle that human lives should be the security policy's prime objective, with the individual serving as the security referent. Thus, human security approach is normative; grounded in solidarism and cosmopolitanism; and predominantly policy-oriented (Newman, 2010). Furthermore, human security approach is closely linked to human development and human rights, encapsulated by the notions of *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*. Most academic efforts have focused on defining the human security concept and enumerating the particular threats that individuals are confronted with.

Human security can be categorised in four distinct ways. The first one is a narrow conceptualisation that focuses on violent threats such as political violence by repressive governments, armed conflicts, or failed states. This perspective is primarily advocated by several IR scholars criticising this broad understanding as being overly vague as it hinders policy implementation as well as conceptual inquiry (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006; Krause, 1998).

The second one is a broad conceptualisation of human security, first presented in the *1994 UNDP Human Development Report*, and later supported through several IR studies (Bajpai, 2000; Thakur & Newman, 2004; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007). It encompasses all threats and risks that can endanger freedom, dignity and human well-being, for instance, environmental disasters, diseases and poverty. It broadens the conception of human security to incorporate more than protection from violent threats such as socio-economic, political, and psychological, aspects (Alkire, 2003).

The third approach to human security involves expanding it by highlighting the role of actors beyond the state: these actors could be sources of threats or responsible actors for the protection and empowerment of individuals (Commission on Human Security, 2003). The fourth approach regards human security as an umbrella concept for addressing a range of non-traditional security issues such as HIV/AIDS, terrorism, drugs, small arms, anti-personnel landmines, and human trafficking (Newman, 2010). It contributes minimally to theoretical discourse, but seeks to integrate human security into states' foreign policies (Dodds & Pippard, 2005; Chen, Leaning, & Narasimhan, 2003).

Despite the increasing academic engagement in human security, it remains one of the contested concepts within IR. Although there is no consensus on its definition, threats, and strategies, the debate on human security in IR continues to be dynamic. For several academics, it appears fruitless and never-ending, while others believe that it has the potential of creating a critical and policy-oriented debate. Therefore, Ağır claims "the concept of human security blurs the distinction between national and global security, while also challenging the traditional norms and realities of the discipline of International Relations" (Ağır, 2022). For instance, there have been attempts to incorporate human security into foreign policies and to institutionalise it within the UN, which created considerable controversy. Consequently, human security was distinguished from the *Responsibility to Protect (R2P)* since the developing countries have been hesitant about its consequences for sovereignty (Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012). The *2005 World Summit Outcome* addresses R2P in articles 138-140, while separately defining the overarching goals of human security in article 143, stating that individuals have a right to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair (2005). The UN also acknowledged that all humans are qualified for *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*, and that they should enjoy equal opportunities to live

up to their basic rights and develop their full potential. (2005). They committed to discussing human security further. Consequently, more and more IR scholars and practitioners pursue answers to the questions of what human security is and what function it serves.

Within this context, another group of theorists emphasises the need for a debate aimed at broadening the human security perspective. This newly emerging view seeks to understand human security theoretically and tries to integrate it into security studies (Newman, 2010). As for Wibben, these theorists particularly focus on *opening the human security agenda* to discuss various meanings of security. This broader conceptualisation includes alternative conceptions of security, noticeably based on a normative foundation (Wibben, 2008), such as Galtung's structural violence, feminist security approaches, and the critical security studies (Welsh School).

Hence, Newman advocates for a renewed relationship between critical security studies and human security: He claims this could result in a new approach - *Critical Human Security Studies*. He outlines several reasons for criticism by critical security theorists since they argue that the human security approach is uncritical and simplistic. First, because human security is policy-oriented, it reinforces state-centred norms and institutions that are themselves responsible for generating human insecurity. Second, it furthers the hegemonic discourse by linking human security with humanitarian intervention through the justifications of domestic regulations (anti-terrorism laws, counter-terrorism measures, etc.). Third, many human security perspectives are classified as problem-solving theories as they do not question existing power structures, gender norms, or distribution mechanisms related to economic and political organization. Moreover, they do not contribute to an objective conceptualisation of security (Newman, 2010). Despite these critiques, Newman asserts that scholars working on human security should take their part in the development of *Critical Human Security Studies* by engaging in conceptual discussions on the nature and array of security threats, the referent objects, and viable reactions to insecurities. This involves investigating the sources and factors creating insecurities, and making in-depth discussions of the security institutions (Newman, 2010).

More recent "discussions about human security largely focus on which threats it should address and what the core focus of human security should be" (Ağır, 2022). In fact, Owen has introduced a *threshold definition* of human security as follows: "the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive environmental, economic, food, health, personal, and political threats" (Owen, 2004). In his *hybrid definition*, Owen categorises threats based on their scope, immediacy, and severity. He categorises them into six conceptual groups: political threats, economic threats, environmental threats, food threats, health threats, and personal threats. He leaves out community security from his definition, arguing that the preservation of cultural integrity does not align with the pervasive and critical threats faced by individuals (Owen, 2004). Consequently, Owen supports the idea that human security should address *nonviolent preventable human security threats* by reevaluating security theories as well as policies today, to mobilise global political leaders, intellectuals and public opinion leaders to engage in strategies and redirect resources to resolve human security issues of all (Owen, 2004).

EXPLORING CHILDREN'S SECURITY: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

This section delves into both the theoretical frameworks and practical applications related to children's security. It aims to examine the intersection of human security with children's security as different conceptual approaches to children's security, including definitions, referent objects, and the categorization of threats, are discussed. Additionally, the role of national governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in mitigating threats to children's security is analysed, alongside the evaluation of policies and programs aimed at protecting children's rights and ensuring their well-being. Specific threats to children's security, such as violence, exploitation, and deprivation, are identified and briefly discussed, highlighting the unique vulnerabilities of children in various contexts, including conflict zones, impoverished areas, and marginalized communities.

In a globalized world, many argue that the traditional state-centric security theory is not fulfilling the fundamental commitment of securing individuals (Owen, 2004). While there is consensus on the individual as the primary referent object within the human security debate the question of *"which individuals?"* remains inadequately addressed. Whereas this fundamental conception encompasses *all human lives*, the scope, severity, and immediacy of threats and risks are influenced by the specific identity of the individual – whether they are disabled, elderly, a woman, or a child. In both mainstream IR discourse and existing human security discussions, children are often not recognized as significant actors or referent objects. In such an effort,

Watson claims that mainstream IR discourse should recognize the fundamental role that children play in the international system (Watson, 2006). Despite the well-established presence of *childhood studies* in other disciplines, such as sociology, economics, history, social policy, social psychology, anthropology, geography, and philosophy, IR remains hesitant to acknowledge children as a critical area of knowledge.

The *1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* defines a child as any humanbeing under 18. The *UNCRC,* in alignment with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),* asserts children require appropriate assistance as well as special care. Especially, *Preamble of the UNCRC (1989)* emphasizes that to ensure the full and harmonious development of a child's personality, the child should grow up in a family setting characterized by love, happiness, respect, and understanding. Furthermore, it states that children must be adequately taught to live independently in their communities; they must also be raised in line with the ideals stated in the *Charter of the UN*, including dignity, freedom, equality, tolerance, and solidarity (UNCRC, 1989). Additionally, due to their physical and mental immaturity, children require special care and protection, including appropriate legal protection, both before and after birth (UNCRC, 1959). Despite the high standards for child protection established by the *UNCRC,* Lewis points out that "children's rights are meaningless unless they are capable of exercising them. The notion of the rights of the child may appear robust in the Convention, but in practice, children are not fully recognized as legal subjects capable of exercising equal rights" (Lewis, 1998).

Unlike other oppressed and vulnerable social groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, or ethnic minorities, the dependence and vulnerability of children necessitate a shift in focus from the rights of the child to the obligations of adults to protect them. Consequently, parents, legal guardians, and the state are responsible for the upbringing and comprehensive development of children – encompassing social, physical, mental, and moral aspects. Children typically lack the capacity to form and express their own views on critical matters such as conception, upbringing, and the legislative, social, and educational measures affecting their protection and development. Therefore, it is imperative to reassess the roles of those accountable for a child's development, including parents, legal guardians, and the state. The roles of other actors influencing children's development directly or indirectly can be identified as political systems, international institutions, judicial systems, civil society institutions, and media. This reassessment should be based on their effectiveness, activities, and commitment to providing the necessary protection and care for children.

As referent objects of security, children represent a significant portion of the population whose personal security relies on adults' capacity to protect them from various forms of violence (terrorism, crime, war), and, from deprivation of fundamental rights and freedoms. Additionally, children may be vulnerable to structural violence stemming from existing cultural, political, socio-economic, and legal systems nationally or internationally. Such violence may involve coercion or restrictions affecting the essential aspects of their existence. Elshtain observes that the infant, akin to all new beginnings, is inherently vulnerable; thus, we must support and nurture this early stage, despite our inability to predict or control its eventual outcome (Elshtain, 1991). Drawing on Arendt's work entitled *The Human Condition*, Elshtain points out that fully experiencing the essential capacities of faith and hope, which are rooted in birth, enables us to recognize and appreciate individualities and differences, rather than perceiving humans merely as a homogeneous mass subject to control or manipulation (Elshtain, 1991). Thus, children represent both miracles that renew and transform the world and are also potential agents of future change. In recognizing children, we acknowledge our own inherent vulnerability and the essential nature of our dependency on others (Elshtain, 1991).

Recent academic efforts have increasingly focused on issues related to children, including child soldiers; children in conflict and post-conflict situations, child labour, child trafficking, child refugees, child consumers, and child mortality (Roberts, 2008). Particularly focusing on child trafficking, it "could be identified among the direct threats to human security under the category of dehumanization, which does not only include physical abuse, but also implies degradation of human dignity" (Öztürk, 2019). Additionally, the growing emphasis on children's rights has led to their recognition as *rights-bearers* under international law (Lewis, 1998). Nevertheless, further efforts are needed to recognize children as *social and political actors* within international relations, enabling them to be considered *subjects of security*. Building on the foundational concept of the individual as the referent object of security, the human security approach should also include children among the *subjects of security*. Therefore, this study identifies *children* as the *principal referents of security,* arguing that the human security of children involves distinct

characteristics that differentiate both violent and nonviolent preventable threats faced by children from those experienced by adults.

Another critical issue related to children's security is child well-being, which encompasses the overall quality of children's lives. Being multidimensional, it includes physical, material, social, and psychological dimensions. Child well-being pertains to political rights, economic status, development opportunities, and peer relationships – all of which are influenced by the social context in which they exist. This encompasses two primary perspectives: the developmentalist perspective and the child rights perspective. The developmentalist approach emphasises social skills and human capital, focusing on *well-becoming* and preparing children for future success. Conversely, the child rights approach views children as individuals who experience *well-being* in the present. This perspective focuses on children's input in defining and measuring their well-being (OECD, 2009).

Children in global politics face a range of vulnerabilities due to their inherent dependency, developmental stage, and lack of political representation. These vulnerabilities may range from exposure to violence in conflict zones and human trafficking to lack of access to education and healthcare, or even political marginalization. In sum, children's unique vulnerabilities in global politics stem from their exclusion from decision-making processes, their dependence on adults, and the harsh impact of global challenges like conflict, poverty, and exploitation. Recognising these vulnerabilities within international policy frameworks remains crucial for addressing their human security and fundamental rights.

Owen (2004) claims that human security threats are predominantly addressed by governments, IGOs, and NGOs, depending on their political commitment, foreign policy objectives, and their capabilities to manage these threats. He suggests that if these threats surpassing the threshold are either perpetrated by governments or if governments cannot provide adequate protection against them, then the international community should intervene (Owen, 2004). Although Owen's conceptual evaluation hints an R2P approach to human security, it would complicate further the implementation of R2P strategies in a multifaceted intervention setting. According to Owen (2004), insecurities and issues that may escalate to these security threats for children encompass a myriad of survival risks; diseases; malnutrition; disabilities; sexual abuse; physical violence; child labour; child poverty; child trafficking; juvenile crime; adolescent marriage, and environmental disasters. Additionally, constituting significant numbers of immigrants, refugees, and those in war, conflict, and emergency settings, children are also at significant risk.

Owen contends that among the potentially limitless array of threats, only some will exceed a critical threshold and be recognized as human security issues. In contrast, other threats will be addressed by established mechanisms (Owen, 2004). This determination depends on the severity of threats and the extent to which they systematically affect children within the specific social and cultural contexts of their national settings. Especially intrastate and interstate wars expose children to serious forms of violence such as forced displacement, war rape, sexual exploitation, abduction, amputation, mutilation, and even genocide. These issues have been progressively explored over the past decades. Additionally, numerous IGOs and NGOs have been extensively working on various forms of violence against children such as neglect, physical and mental abuse, sexual exploitation at homes, orphanages, schools, on the streets, and in the workplace. Targeting the physical integrity and dignity of children, regional IGOs like the European Union (EU) puts "particular emphasis on the bottom-up approach: on communication, consultation, dialogue and partnership with the local population in order to improve early warning, intelligence gathering, and mobilisation of local support, implementation and sustainability" (Ağır, 2015). Hence, effective solutions to different forms of violence against children should be dealt with the participation of civil society and the support of local communities in which children live. Alongside those NGOs supporting children's security, there are other "violent non-state actors that include terrorist organizations, militias, warlords, and criminal organizations. VNSA refers to any organization that uses illegal violence to reach its goals, thereby contesting the monopoly on violence of the state" (Ağır & Arman, 2014). Through their illegal violent activities, the VSNAs affect children's security directly or indirectly in the communities of their particular regions.

Another critical, yet often overlooked, human security issue is the treatment of children within the criminal justice system. Children within the criminal justice system may face numerous violations of their rights, which can aggregate to a critical extent at both national and international levels. These violations can impede the child's development and deprive them of their fundamental rights and freedoms. These violations can impede a child's development, and infringe upon their fundamental rights and freedoms. *Children in conflict*

with the law is defined as any individual below the age of 18 who interacts with the justice system due to being regarded as suspects or accused of committing an offence (UNICEF, 2006). In addition, child witnesses and child victims can be adversely disturbed by incompetent justice systems failing to effectively address the abuse, violence, and exploitation they face during and after judicial proceedings.

Children within the criminal justice face significant threats because "states are more accepting of the notion that children can acquire *'negative agency'* as opposed to *'positive agency'*" (Watson, 2006). *Negative agency* implies that children are held accountable for crimes they commit, whereas *positive agency* suggests they are generally considered too young to make meaningful societal contributions or decisions for themselves. Issues such as poverty, urbanization, unemployment, social and economic discrepancies, inadequate public services, substance abuse, family breakdown, and parental abuse can lead to feelings of exclusion and frustration among children, which may result in criminal behaviour. Those children within the justice system as witnesses, victims, suspects, or offenders are particularly susceptible to nonviolent, preventable human security threats. These threats can include immediate effects alongside long-term negative effects on the children themselves, such as impeding their development and eroding their trust in adults and societal structures. Additionally, such threats can have broader implications for both national and global societies.

Illustrating this, *UNICEF* reports that over one million children globally are held in detention. In numerous prisons, these children frequently face denial of essential rights, including access to education, medical care, and opportunities for personal development (UNICEF, 2006). As stated by the *UN Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice (IPJJ)*, detention and sentencing processes can be frequently arbitrary or at times, unlawful. Children in detention may be below the age at which they can be held criminally responsible and are often placed with adult prisoners, exposing them to potential abuse. Additionally, the conditions in which these children are confined are often characterised by severe neglect and inhumanity (IPJJ, 2008). The *2006 UN World Report on Violence against Children* underscores troubling observations about justice systems globally. Despite being banned by the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Part 3, Article 6), as well as the *UNCRC* (Article37), numerous sovereign states continue to impose the death penalty for crimes committed by individuals under the age of 18. Currently, 31 countries allow corporal punishment as part of sentencing for juvenile offenders. Additionally, corporal and other forms of violent punishment are legally sanctioned as disciplinary measures within penal institutions in 77 countries. Children in these settings may endure severe physical abuse. Particularly, girls in detention facilities face heightened risks of physical and sexual abuse (UNGA, 2006).

Currently, children constitute over one-third of the global population. Specifically, among the 8.2 billion people on Earth today, over 2.4 billion individuals are under the age of 18 (UNICEF Data, 2023). Thus, they constitute one fourth of the world population who deserve utmost attention to their fundamental rights, well-being, development, and security. Research conducted by The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) among the 24 wealthiest member-states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to assess which nations allow children to lag behind in three critical measures of well-being: material conditions, health conditions, educational facilities and opportunities (UNICEF, 2010). This study highlighted significant disparities among these countries (including European OECD members except Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, and Turkey plus the United States and Canada) and emphasized that the issue of children *falling behind* is not only a pressing concern for countless individual children currently but also poses risks for the socio-economic future of their countries (UNICEF, 2010). A more recent UNICEF report of 2023 reviewing the status of child poverty in 43 high-income and upper middle-income countries of the EU and the OECD underlined the fact that "more than 69 million children live in poverty in some of the world's richest countries" (UNICEF, 2023).

Extensive research conducted over several years across various countries by UNICEF has identified numerous costs of inequality and poverty associated with children falling significantly behind. Poverty experienced by children include monetary poverty (based on relative household income), non-monetary poverty (deprivations such as nutrition, water, sanitation, clothing, housing, education, health, information, and play), and inequalities in child poverty (such as high levels of poverty experienced by children in specific minority groups, including children affected by migration, children with disabilities and children who come from racial or ethnic minorities) (UNICEF, 2023). On the other hand, these costs of inequality include low birthweight, parental stress, chronic stress leading to potential long-term health issues and diminished cognitive abilities,

inadequate nutrition, food insecurity, poor health outcomes, increased hospital and emergency room visits, low levels of educational achievement, diminished returns on educational investments, lower linguistic abilities, lower skills, higher rates of unemployment and dependency on welfare support, behavioural problems, juvenile crime, early-age pregnancy, and substance usage (UNICEF, 2010).

Poverty is a critical component of human security, as it is closely interlinked with various other threats to human security. This is equally true in the context of children's security. Poverty not only deprives children of basic needs like food, shelter, and healthcare but also increases their vulnerability to exploitation, violence, and neglect. It exacerbates risks such as child labour, trafficking, and limited access to education, all of which pose significant threats to their overall well-being and development. As such, addressing poverty is essential for ensuring the security and protection of children. However, poverty is not merely about the physical and material needs and wellbeing of children. It is also about child's subjective well-being which include experiences of positive emotions (such as optimism), negative emotions (such as sadness), satisfaction related to specific domains (such as work or relationships) and overall judgements of life satisfaction (UNICEF, 2021). Thus, for poor children, poverty is about growing up in a home without enough heat or nutritious food; poverty means no new clothes, no mobile phones, no access to internet; poverty means no money for a birthday cake or for watching an animation movie at cinema. All of these deprivations and lack of seemingly material conditions make children's contentment in their lives, and happy memories of their childhood which corresponds to human dignity and fulfilment beyond survival and livelihood. In fact, children are disproportionately affected by poverty in the world today: "they represent half of those struggling to survive on less than $2.15 a day. An estimated 333 million children live in extreme poverty" (UNICEF, Child Poverty). Consequently, children are more likely to experience poverty than adults and are particularly susceptible to its impacts. Their developmental needs, physical health, and educational opportunities are more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of poverty, which can have long-term consequences on their well-being and future prospects.

Furthermore, the UN General Assembly underlined the fact that a growing number of children are being affected worldwide by wars, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking (UNGA, 2005). Thus, the UN committed itself to upholding and securing the rights of every child; and urged sovereign states to ratify the *UNCRC* as soon as possible (UNGA, 2005). According to the *UNICEF's Annual Report of 2023*, "children's lives continued to be significantly affected by great challenges. … conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, the Sahel and Sudan, earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, and gang violence in Haiti" are just few examples of the threats children and their families have faced with. The list of challenges and threats also included persistent food insecurity, energy crisis, challenges to democracy and child rights, factionalism, stress on the multilateral system and dangers caused by the fragmentation of the internet. On the other hand, the *2024 Global Outlook Report of UNICEF* underscores the increasing global geopolitical and geoeconomic fragmentation, emphasising eight key trends that pose significant risks to children's lives worldwide. These trends range from conflict and economic instability to environmental challenges and the impacts of emerging technologies, all of which threaten the well-being and development of children on a global scale. However, the report also highlights potential avenues for reform, cooperation, and innovation that could mitigate these threats and improve outcomes for children (UNICEF, 2024). Geopolitical shifts, economic fragmentation, and a fragmented multilateral system present significant challenges to children's survival, well-being, and development. However, opportunities for accountability, cooperation, and economic solidarity offer promise. Structural inequities in developing economies hinder investments in children's futures, yet reforms to financial systems and the rise of new technologies hold hope for progress. As global democracy faces threats from disinformation and political violence, positive youth-led movements provide a potential counterforce. Meanwhile, the green energy transition, if managed responsibly, can benefit children, while climate-related health threats like El Niño and water scarcity can be mitigated through collaboration and innovation. Finally, while emerging technologies pose risks, responsible policy-making and digital cooperation can safeguard children's well-being (UNICEF, 2024).

In conclusion, this study claims that children's security within the broader framework of *human security* should be identified as a sub-study area that emphasises the specific and unique threats children face in terms of their rights, well-being, development, and security. It should focus on the physical, emotional, social, and psychological vulnerabilities of children, recognising them as distinct from those of adults. The idea of children's security highlights that children are not merely smaller adults but individuals with unique developmental needs and

rights that must be addressed in specific ways. Therefore, children should be regarded as human capital for the future, as their healthy and positive development will yield positive contributions to their communities. In fact, children's needs and agency are fundamental to the future well-being of individuals, communities, and nations as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Within the framework of the human security agenda, children's security requires an intensive and detailed examination due to the presence of both violent and nonviolent threats that pose existential risks to children. Given their profound need for nurturing, protection, education, and care to ensure their comprehensive physical, mental, moral, and social development, addressing human security threats directed at children is of paramount importance. Ensuring the well-being and safety of children is essential for their growth into healthy, productive, and self-sufficient adults. Consequently, it is imperative to prioritise strategies and policies that effectively mitigate these threats.

To advance theoretical development and policy impact, IR theorists must prioritize human security and child security issues through rigorous conceptual analysis and theoretical discourse. This entails recognising children as both social and political actors, identifying them as primary referents and beneficiaries of security, and establishing them as a critical area of inquiry within IR. On the policy front, national governments, IGOs, and NGOs need to collaborate and coordinate efforts to develop a more comprehensive child protection strategy. This strategy should emphasise the prevention and early identification of children at risk. Key risk factors include poverty, substandard housing, inadequate parental supervision, parental conflict and separation, unequal access to education, child labour, adolescent marriage, the negative impacts of rapid urbanization, and the proliferation of drug and alcohol abuse. Consequently, national governments should be encouraged to reform their child protection and care systems to address these issues effectively.

Significant efforts are required from researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and politicians to develop effective and coherent public policies and practices for addressing both direct and indirect, as well as violent and non-violent, threats to children's security. Reflecting her broader views on child-rearing and cultural development found throughout her career and works Margaret Mead, the renowned American cultural anthropologist, aptly noted, "the solution to adult problems tomorrow depends in large measure upon how our children grow up today" (Mead, 1930). It highlights the critical importance of child development in shaping the future of society emphasising that nurturing the well-being, education, and environment of children today directly impacts the adult challenges we face in the future. Therefore, it is essential for state actors to demonstrate political will in fulfilling their primary objective: the protection of people, with particular emphasis on prioritising what is best for children since it is also integral to societal well-being. To mobilise national leaders and resources in addressing the security issues affecting children and, by extension, society at large, IR specialists should investigate various dimensions of children's human security in theory and practice. Given that issues such as *falling behind* are critical not only for individual children but also for all nations within our interconnected globalised world, fostering academic interest and promoting detailed discussions on children's security can significantly engage public opinion and influence policymakers and practitioners in IR.

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