

The Impact of Crises on Youth

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Today's youth have experienced hard times unlike any since the Second World War. After COVID-19, society, and especially young people, are in need of answers to regain momentum.

A book like *Hard Times Create Strong Youth* provides solutions for youth to realize and regain their momentum by examining the present situation, analyzing past situations, and how these were overcome. The book's editors, Péter Pillók and Levente Székely, have a deep understanding of how recent crises like the recessions of 2008 and 2011 and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused psychological and economic damage to the youth populations of nearly every country on earth. A fear of the unknown connects with every crisis. Pillók and Székely term this unknown fear "nomos." "Accepting that these are phases or events of socialization, we can ask how the construction of reality happens in each phase and what the instruments of creating 'nomos,' the preventive factor against the fear of the unknown adulthood" (Székely & Pillók, 2023:10). This unknown fear can cause a type of trauma that constrains all of society, but especially youth.

To demonstrate this point, the book outlines several distinct crises, the response to these, and how they were resolved. The first category of crisis analyzed were the three economic crises of the 21st century: the housing crisis of 2008, the sovereign debt crisis of 2011, and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. Studies showed that the economic position of youth following these crises was largely reflective of the population at large. Various measures were used for evaluating effects of the housing crisis,

an example being the share of adults between 18-34 living with their parents ranging from 16 percent in Denmark to 77 percent in Croatia. Furthermore, a distinction is made between the independent-minded and financially well-off Scandinavian model, the more traditional and less economically stable Southern European model, and the French / German model somewhere in the middle.

Another aspect highlighted in this work is the fear and uncertainty produced by the recent world crises. Fear of the unknown also leads to collective trauma, a concept that has taken on new dimensions due to the COVID-19 epidemic. "The authors believe that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic period, the youth may also develop a collective personality rooted in collective generational trauma" (Székely & Pillók, 2023:82). The authors have also used Maslow's pyramid of needs to gauge what youth need in today's post-Covid world. Interestingly, the analysis determines that youth in the developed world today face less risk than youth did in the past. "Looking at what is happening today and the surrounding discourse, we can sense that man in the 21st century is living in an era of uncertainty. However, our world, and especially the so-called developed world, is relatively risk-free by historical standards" (Székely & Pillók, 2023:63). Thus, while youth in the developed world may be more physically secure than they realize, the

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authors suggest that the greater burden may be psychological.

This psychological state is defined as “The Crisis of Security and Predictability.” Using the GPI (Global Peace Index), it was corroborated that youth feel generally safer and more secure in the West (especially the Nordic countries) than they do in the East (especially Africa). Such findings show that a sense of peace and prosperity, or lack thereof, has great effects on the mental and emotional well-being of youth. Again, the research found universal similarities in youth reporting fear and uncertainty, despite their geographical location. The studies used in this book show that youth in all countries that were examined feel a greater sense of fear and uncertainty when compared to pre-COVID years.

Besides recent wars and pandemics, the issue of climate change is addressed. Generation Z was the main focus as they are characteristically more active in the climate change cause than other generations, primarily exemplified by Greta Thunberg. This study of climate change started in 2018 (beginning with Thunberg) and spans to the present day looking at the media coverage of the phenomena as well. The authors recognize that Gen Z may be more vocal about cause due to the greater likelihood of them living with climate change if it continues to be an issue in the future. Pillók and Székely also note that the majority of visible climate change activists are young, well-to-do white women. Furthermore, the emergence of climate change anxiety as a yet-to-be-diagnosed condition is also discussed.

Building on the theme of social problems, the set of studies also deals with the crisis of communities falling apart as well as the possibility of false conspiracy theories indoctrinating youth. The authors determined that countries with lower levels of trust in public institutions also report higher levels of community involvement.

Western Europeans are more likely to trust public institutions, while those in the East (often with more recent histories of authoritarianism) report lower levels of trust. The authors determined that post-socialist nations have populations who remember the tyranny and corruption of past governments and are less willing to trust current institutions, with youth being no exception to this distrust. Likewise, the authors have determined similar conclusions about conspiracy theories -- that a fundamental lack of trust in elites and powerbrokers has encouraged many to seek information from alternate sources. Extreme positions, morally and politically, as well as moral relativism are linked to conspiracy theorists. Youth are also observed gravitating toward conspiracy theories, with a call for expanded research on how and why people become conspiracy theorists.

The compilation of studies also includes a section emphasizing the importance of youth being leaders through new means of technology. They have a clear understanding that in an ever-evolving world, transforming mediums to affect change are not only available but are only as effective as people use them. The volume explains how the current generation of youth relies on technology not only for convenience but also for social causes important to them. The study acknowledges that with increasing use of technology, there also come deeply divided results concerning positive and negative outcomes. The use of technology has caused Generation Z to mature at a different pace. Time will tell the full extent of the identity that Gen Z will assume through its extensive use of technology.

Lastly, *Hard Times Create Strong Youth* contains thoughtful analyses of the difficulties of truly defining generations in very clear terms. Pillók and Székely note that not everyone defines themselves or associates with the generation based on when they were born. The work argues

for a new concept of defining generations based on updated criteria such as the use and application of technology.

In conclusion, *Hard Times Create Strong Youth* is essential for all youths and those looking to understand them -- especially after the COVID-19 crisis and in the ongoing Ukrainian and Israeli / Palestinian conflicts. Youth identity is examined in societies throughout the world, with a focus also on young immigrants to Europe from less-developed nations. This book

highlights not only how today's youth have gotten where they are, but how to move forward and avoid the same mistakes of the past and previous generations. With practical advice and analysis provided in this work, the youth of today and those around them will have a greater understanding of how to cope with "hard times."

[Péter Pillók – Levente Székely: Hard times create strong youth. The Impact of the Era of Crisis on Future Generations. Budapest: National Youth Council of Hungary, 2023](#)