

Adolescent Social Orphans and the Transition into Young Adulthood: The Role of Social Work Research with Vulnerable Populations

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Research access to vulnerable populations such as institutionalized adolescents in the developing world often result in studies in which the voices of these youth are neglected while the perceptions of the adults with whom they interact are privileged. Due to the many complications with respect to access, recruitment and retainment, investigatory results and policy initiatives are generally based upon adult interpretations of the needs of this population as they transition into young adulthood. Thus, social work research that aims to promote the voices of underserved as well as vulnerable populations is well poised to promote the human rights of these individuals and enhance the social justice aspect of the social work profession, which appears at times to be obscured by the dominance of clinical practice in the United States. This presentation will not only highlight the process of acquiring the necessary permissions to interview members of a protected population within the context of a foreign culture, but also discuss the political and human rights perspective behind the decision to use only the voices of these social orphans within a study conducted by this author in Cali, Colombia, in which 32 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 were interviewed while institutionalized.