Being at-promise girls in the 2020s

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Based on...


Recent researchers and educators, in line with the positions from B. B. Swadener and Lubeck (1995) and Fine (1990), have claimed that the ill-defined description, “at-risk,” penalises children and youth for factors in their lives often beyond their control and is stigmatising. Though the terminology had transformed from “culturally deprived and deficient” (used broadly in the 1960s and 1970s) and “disadvantaged” (in the 1980s) to the current label “at-risk” (Swadener, 2010), the conversations around the use of it persisted. A bill to withdraw references to “at-risk youth” and replace the term with “at-promise youth” in California’s Education Code and Penal Code was authorised by California governor Gavin Newsom in mid-October 2019.
At-promise girls

- Non-pathologising perspective and strength-based approach
- At-promise girls present an additional challenge and are situated as at risk for “a variety of negative behavioural, relational, legal, or occupational outcomes upon their transition to adulthood” (Charles et al., 2022, p. 1).

- Women’s **agency** is the capacity to establish goals, take decisions, and act upon them, either as a person or jointly amongst relationships, labour markets, and any other intricate networks.
The dominant culture and the subsequent risk factors, negative messages defended and justified by certain groups of people with certain shared attributes may still put adolescent girls in jeopardy, but the prevalence of cyberactivism has created possibilities for women's agency in forming online collectives and making the matters of violence and obstacle against young females visible universally by virtue of online feminist praxis.

Brysk (2022) states:

Gender regimes shape the rights at risk from any exogenous challenge and filter the rights repertoires available to respond ... . The intersection of gender regimes with political regimes will further shape the incidence and impact of the new wave of *pandemic patriarchy* unleashed by the global health crisis. Women's security and social rights are at greater risk under nationalist populist regimes due to their tendency to mobilise the masses by heightening ethnic conflict, suppressing political challenges from civil society movements, seeking control of reproduction, and mismanaging public health.

(p. 286)
Moving Forward

Social capital initiatives draw from ideologies like neo-liberalism, philanthrocapitalism, and neo-capitalism. **Neo-liberalism** emphasises market forces and personal responsibility, while **philanthrocapitalism** applies business principles to philanthropy. **Neo-capitalism** involves wealth and power concentration. These ideologies shape how social capital is generated through voluntary associations, entrepreneurial strategies, and social networks. The blend and prioritisation of these ideologies in **social capital initiatives** vary based on goals and circumstances.

To help at-promise girls in the 2020s, we should focus on the following approaches:

1. Develop a **curriculum** that guides mentors in fostering soft skills and leadership capabilities.
2. Create **safe spaces** where girls can freely interact with mentors and peers.
3. Provide hands-on learning experiences to cultivate skills through **practical activities**.
4. Establish **networks** to connect girls across different locations for ongoing support.
5. Involve **men and boys**, including fathers and community leaders, in the process for comprehensive engagement.

These strategies aim to empower at-promise girls and support their growth in the current decade.
References