

CHILD PROTECTION

FACT SHEET

Children in every country, every culture and at every social level face various forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence¹. The abuse takes place at home, in school, in institutions, at work, in the community, in armed conflict and natural disasters. Much violence against children, such as corporal punishment and sexual abuse, remains legal and socially approved in many countries. Growing up with violence and abuse seriously affects a child's development, dignity, and physical and psychological integrity. Save the Children works to prevent abuse and neglect from happening, ensure the victims of violence are supported and that justice is ensured.

The violence children face takes many forms, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking, physical and humiliating punishment, harmful traditional practices (including early marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting) and recruitment into armed forces and groups.

- At least **150** million girls and **73** million boys worldwide are raped or subject to sexual violence each year²
- **115** million children are involved in hazardous work³
- **1.2** million children are trafficked every year⁴
- **3** million girls and women are subjected to female genital mutilation each year⁵
- In the last decade, an estimated **20** million children have been forced to flee their homes, and more than **1** million children have been orphaned or separated from their families by an emergency⁶

Though those numbers are striking, much more of the violence against children remains hidden. Children are often afraid to report incidents of violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse against them. In many cases parents remain silent if the abuse is perpetrated by a spouse or other family member, a more powerful member of society such as an employer, a police officer, or a community leader⁷. In many countries, the process of bringing a case to court leaves a child victim more traumatized; the judicial systems often do not believe children, make them repeat evidence several times, the demand for physical evidence can discount almost all cases and perpetrators are rarely punished.

"My husband used to punish me a lot by tying me up and whipping me with a bamboo cane. He would do it until the lashes caused my back to bleed. When I fainted during the torture he would wait for me to regain consciousness and start all over again. On one occasion, I lost consciousness three times." - A 16-year-old in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2003)



Monitoring and responding to violence
On May 20, 2007, the Nahr el Bared Camp in Lebanon was destroyed and its adjacent areas heavily damaged after a 105 day war between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Islamist militant group Fateh al Islam. As a consequence 30'000 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians sought temporary shelter in the neighboring Beddawi camp.

Palestinian children have been growing up in an environment of unpredictable violence; and there was increased poverty and unemployment denying them the right to live in freedom and security.

In response a **Child Protection Network** was established to provide specialized support for children and take actions against child rights violations. The network established a referral system for documentation and monitoring of child rights violations in the community and empowered children to actively participate in a child-led awareness campaign. The network, together with Save the Children, developed monitoring forms and presented a report of all the cases of abuse in homes, schools and in the streets. Meanwhile, children produced radio programmes about violence which were broadcast and they developed short, animated films which will be shown in schools and in the community. Through this simple reporting mechanism, children felt there was a possible solution to the violence they were facing. They were empowered to report and saw that reporting resulted in solutions.

Societal acceptance of abuse and exploitation is also an important factor: both children and perpetrators may accept physical, sexual and psychological violence as inevitable. In fact, many parents consider physical punishment as a positive, and even essential, way to raise a child to become an ethical adult. Discipline through physical and humiliating punishment, bullying and sexual harassment are frequently perceived as normal, particularly when no “visible” or lasting physical injury results. The lack of an explicit legal prohibition of corporal punishment in the majority of countries in the world reflects this⁸.

Girls are more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation in many situations, such as sexual abuse and exploitation, early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), due to unequal gender based relations in the society. At the same time, boys are more likely to be victims of homicide, street based violence and to recruitment as child soldiers. Discrimination, poverty and social exclusion make girls and boys vulnerable to exploitative working conditions, especially in the informal sector such as in agriculture and as domestic workers.

During and after armed conflict and natural disaster, the cultural and legal norms that protect citizens often disappear, leaving the most vulnerable at risk of serious violations. Rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking, family separation and forced or coerced recruitment into armed forces are common phenomenon in crisis situations. Children are often the victims and sometimes specifically targeted.

International law and policy

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. It is the first international treaty to place a comprehensive legal obligation on State parties to protect all children from all forms of abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child calls upon duty bearers to prevent family separation (Article 9) and look to ensure family reunification across borders (Article 10), stop the illicit transfer

of children (Article 11), protect children from violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation (Article 19), review and ensure appropriate and alternative care (Article 20), protect children within juvenile justice systems (Article 37), protect children in armed conflict including from recruitment (Article 38) and ensure recovery and reintegration (Article 40).

Two Optional Protocols, adopted in 2000, supplement the CRC: one addresses the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the other bans the involvement of children (under 18) in armed conflict.

Each country is expected to enact national law which follows these principles and guides the implementation of public policies to protect children.

What is Save the Children doing?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the basis of Save the Children's work on child protection. Save the Children believes that the **building and strengthening of rights based national child protection systems** represents a holistic, inclusive, sustainable, and well coordinated way to protect children. A functional national system recognizes the State's ultimate responsibility and human rights obligations to children. It consists of a set of laws and policies, a central Government coordination mechanism with a clear mandate, effective regulation and monitoring at all levels, and a committed work force with competence and mandate. A functioning child protection system is informed by children's views and experiences and strengthens families in the care and protection of their children. It connects child and family support mechanisms in the community with child friendly services at all levels, regulated by quality standards and delivered by the government or other accredited social agencies.

“Since Save the Children started working with me, I have really changed the way I work with children.” Konan, a teacher in Cote d'Ivoire explains. *“It is not by hitting a child that you will educate him, but by using dialogue. You talk to the child, find out what the problem is, and try to understand from him what has happened.”*

Showing adults the value of positive discipline

Save the Children in Romania has a training programme for children, parents, teachers and school counsellors on positive discipline. The sessions for the adults work to change attitudes, convictions and behaviour of parents and professionals working with children, regarding education of children in favour of positive parenting and positive education. The sessions with the children empower them to better deal with violent behavior, how to deflect it and report it. The sessions cover topics like conflict prevention and anger management; how to express feelings, developing social skills; self esteem, decision making, tolerance, sexual abuse and safety on the streets, at home and on line.

“If the message that rape, trafficking and violence against children are illegal comes from the prime minister through television programmes, people will be afraid to do it.” – A child from South and Central Asia during a consultation of children on violence against children, 2003.

Making a case for law reform in Fiji
Save the Children in Fiji conducts child rights training for people working with and caring for children. It also supports local government and encourages legal reform, including the abolition of corporal punishment, by submitting evidence to key decision-makers within government. The programme has been instrumental in creating a Family Law Act in 2005 and the opening of the Family Law Court.



Coordinating for an effective response
Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar on May 3rd and 4th 2008. More than 85,000 people died and 2.4 million people were severely affected by the cyclone. Many of the child survivors lost families and loved ones, shelter, livelihoods and other basic necessities.

At the onset of the crisis, the UN initiated a Protection of Women and Children Cluster- a forum for coordination and planning between the UN and NGOs. The cluster was jointly chaired by Save the Children and UNICEF.

Specifically, the cluster established a Family Tracing and Reunification system; advocated for the inclusion of children and women's interests in national assessments and strategic planning documents; supported the Department of Social Welfare to develop a Plan of Action for Child Protection in Emergencies; and conducted training of all members on the above mentioned initiatives. Through this co-ordination, the most vulnerable were not forgotten and the response from all agencies was informed and co-ordinated, leading to more efficient and effective programmes?

Save the Children will focus on the following strategies within the next five years:

Advocate for laws and policies that prohibit all forms of violence against children.

Having laws and policies in place to protect children from violence is a critical step in ensuring child protection now and in the future.

Save the Children advocates for each country to comply with and domesticate the international laws. The organisation is negotiating with governments throughout the world to ensure constitutions, Family Codes, Children's Codes, juvenile justice regulations, education policies and policies for orphans and vulnerable children all explicitly prohibit all forms of violence against children.

The organisation also lobbies and supports governments to develop Plans of Action for the implementation of each policy and encourages governments to allocate adequate budget to each plan.

Promote coordination amongst those responsible for child protection

Save the Children encourages governments, civil society, human rights bodies, and international organisations to come together and develop coordinated strategies to prevent and respond to the violations of children's rights to protection. This is even more important in emergency settings. When crisis hits, organisations often work independently resulting in forgetting vulnerable groups and not managing protection issues effectively. Save the Children works to bring together agencies to sit and plan so that the work is seamless, there are systems in place to prevent exploitation and abuse and perpetrators are punished.

Promote child sensitive reporting mechanisms to ensure accountability and end impunity.

Within child protection systems, Save the Children promotes and supports effective complaints mechanisms with clear legal sanctions, which are both

publicized and implemented. Currently, violence, in both emergencies and long-term development, is often perpetrated in a culture of acceptance and impunity. Children should be able to report incidents of violence and get access to remedies. For example, the organisation supports projects that provide free and confidential legal advice to children; it establishes telephone hotlines to report abuse and works with governments to require social workers and teachers to report any suspicious behavior or sign of violence.

Support child sensitive and inclusive mechanisms which actively solicit children's involvement.

Whether it is safe spaces in emergency contexts, children's clubs or child protection committees, the participation of children plays an important role in protecting them from violence, abuse, and exploitation. Participation builds upon children's resilience, and it can help survivors recover. Through their participation, girls and boys – survivors and those at risk – can highlight the violations they experience and, as agents of change, take action to prevent and address abuse and exploitation. They also have an important role to play in policy development and in monitoring the effectiveness of services that are available to them. They are effective advocates for realizing their protection rights.

Promote services that support families in the care and protection of their children.

States have the obligations to support and strengthen families to care and protect their children. Family separation is often avoidable. Children often leave home because parents cannot afford to sustain them, they are stressed because of life circumstances and take it out on their children or they simply do not have access to services and support when they need help.

Save the Children works to strengthen the services and support available to families when families are unable or unwilling to fulfill their role appropriately.



Children taking action on early marriage in Bangladesh

Children from two different child clubs in Tangail, Bangladesh developed dramas depicting the negative impacts of early child marriage and the actions children were taking to end the practice. Confidently overcoming traditional barriers, the girls' groups presented their drama to a crowd of about 200, including some male village elders.

The children also undertook a survey of early child marriages in their village. They found that 65 children under 18 years old had been married during the past year. A nine-year old girl was the youngest child married, with most married children being 13 or 14 years old. The children shared their results with adults and engaged in discussions on the negative impacts of early child marriage. They sought support from local NGOs and Save the Children to bring together religious and community leaders and other influential people to form a committee against child marriage. They children were successful in preventing early marriage for at least five girls they knew¹⁰.

Advocating for social security as a way to protect children

Save the Children in South Africa works with partners to advocate for the implementation of a national social security scheme and to raise awareness among adults and children on how to access these grants. After successful lobbying, the South African government provides monthly cash grants to poor families with children up to 18 years of age. The grants are a key factor in ensuring children stay with their families, are not forced into exploitation for money, go to school and access healthcare.

This kind of support includes the creation of child-friendly spaces in emergencies, after-school programmes, safe houses and shelters for children, physical and psychosocial rehabilitation and financial and technical support to poor families.

Encourage effective regulation of services and responses.

So much abuse and exploitation happens in institutional settings: either in orphanages, detention homes, prisons, or boarding schools. In many countries, these institutions are not required to be accredited and are not subject to any sort of quality control. This is a recipe for disaster in any context, but when it comes to the protection of children, the damage can be life-long.

Save the Children advocates for the development of effective regulation of all services for children. This includes the need for proper government accreditation and licensing as well as developing, monitoring and enforcing minimum standards. This also gives governments, civil society, international agencies and independent monitors a standard by which to gauge what is an acceptable institution that will meet the developmental needs of the children inside.

Lobby for adequate and appropriate funding for family services.

Keeping children safe and in their communities and families costs money. So often when governments, international agencies and donors begin to allocate their budgets, child protection is forgotten. Too often funding is misallocated by governments and donors, giving priority to the construction of orphanages and large-scale institutions. Save the Children lobbies at country and international level to ensure that money is allocated for interventions including care system reforms, family-support schemes, action plans to de-institutionalize children, foster care systems, community-based child protection committees, social work systems, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, family tracing, and child friendly spaces in emergencies.

Support the creation of a skilled and committed child protection workforce.

A critical factor in ensuring children are protected is having a sufficient number of highly trained individuals to help prevent abuse and help victims across every country. Save the Children supports the training of teachers, social workers, staff working in orphanages and other residential care institutions, volunteers, lawyers, police and military forces so that they are aware of child protection issues and know how to address them when they arise. The organisation also works with universities and training institutes to ensure child protection is a subject that must be taken in order to graduate in any field that deals with children.

Galvanize the public to be engaged in efforts to prevent and respond to child protection issues.

Being informed is the most critical step in finding solutions. Much of the violence and abuse that children experience is hidden and under-reported. Save the Children works to inform and create awareness amongst children, families, communities and the general public around the world of the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation that children experience and help them to understand how they can prevent it, report it and respond to it. An informed public is the key to change attitudes and social norm, the best watch dog and the most essential prevention tactic.

Quick reference guide

Convention on the Rights of the Child:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

UN Study on Violence against Children: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>

Key documents for the protection of children in armed conflicts: <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/keydocuments.html>

UNICEF's work on child protection:

<http://www.unicef.org/protection/index.html>

CRIN pages on children and violence:

<http://www.crin.org/violence/>

Global Initiative to end all corporal punishment against children: www.endcorporalpunishment.org



Building a movement to end Female Genital Mutilation in Ethiopia
Save the Children has been working with local authorities, traditional leaders and community members to end Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Ethiopia. The organisation emphasized community ownership and was able to build relationships between all institutions and groups of possible change agents.

One key method to encourage change was through community conversations and radio broadcasts. The community, in collaboration with Save the Children, has spotlighted individual women to take a stand against FGM. This is done through radio programmes and through public ceremonies such as weddings and rites of passage. This gives status, pride and encouragement to the individual women and is used as a positive example for others. The organization has also been systematic about involving and targeting churches, schools, mosques, religious leaders and elders. Through years of intensive work, there is now a movement of people in Ethiopia demanding an end to FGM.

End notes:

- 1 In this paper the terms violence, abuse and exploitation are used individually to encompass abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence
- 2 United Nations, (2006), Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, A/76/1/299, p. 12
- 3 International Labour Organisation (2010) Accelerating Action against Child Labour; p. 5
- 4 United Nations, (2006), Report of the Independent Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, A/76/1/299, p. 12
- 5 Ibid
- 6 UNICEF, UNICEF's role in emergency, <http://www.unicef.org/>
- 7 UN Global Study on Violence against Children, 2006, p. 10
- 8 Ibid
- 9 Inter-agency review of the Myanmar Protection of Children and Women Cluster Response to Cyclone Nargis, UNICEF, UNFPA, Save the Children, October 2008.
- 10 Claire O'Kane, Children and Young People as Citizens: Partners for Social Change, Highlighting Positive Impact, International Save the Children Alliance, 2003.

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Other fact sheets exist on Child Protection in Emergencies and on Children without Appropriate care.

For more information please check the website:
www.savethechildren.net or contact cpi@rb.se