



Bolivia. Determining factors in violence against children and adolescents

The study entitled *Bolivia. Determining factors in violence against children and adolescents*, drafted by the Social and Economic Policy Analysis Unit (UDAPE), with support from UNICEF Bolivia, is a novel research work that sets out to synthesise the signs or signals that indicate that violence is being committed against this country's children and adolescents. In order to do so, it uses econometric techniques to detect the main factors that lead to violence, analysing the consequences to the victim, as well as to family, economic, social and inter-generational environments.

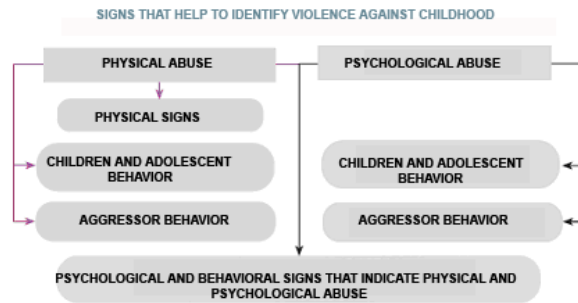
The aim of the study is to unravel the question of violence against children and adolescents and to make it visible in this country. It presents information which contributes to the discussion of public policy aimed at preventing and dealing with this problem.

Violence against Children and Adolescents (VAC) has gone from being seen as merely isolated episodes to being a concern for society as a whole. In recent years news stories and denouncements of these acts have begun to give evidence of the size of the problem.

Violence against children and adolescents

VAC is understood as being any sort of mistreatment of children or adolescents within or outside of the family environment. The aggressor inflicts light or severe damage, the causes of which can be related to individual, family, socio-economic, environmental or cultural factors.

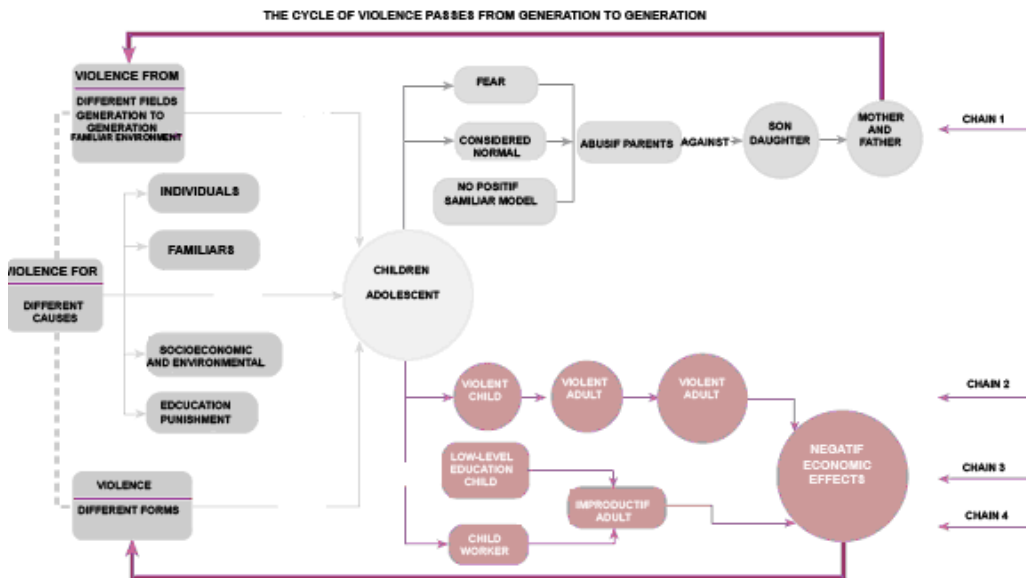
Recognising cases of physical or psychological abuse is complex. Nevertheless, there are signs and characteristic behaviours associated with the children themselves or their aggressors that can be identified. When a diagnostic is done, it is very important to differentiate between an accidental wound and an intentionally inflicted one. A mistake made in diagnosing this can cause damage to the child and his or her family, yet if the abuse goes unrecognised the victim will be exposed and defenceless and will run the risk of losing their life.



The consequences of violence against children and adolescents

VAC has severe present and future consequences for society in general. The victims suffer physical and psychological damage resulting in both short- and long-term emotional and cognitive problems, with consequences to their physical, mental and emotional health.

According to UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2007*, boys who are exposed to domestic violence are twice as likely to become abusive men themselves; for girls who witness acts of abuse against their mothers, they are more likely to accept violence within the marriage than girls who come from non-violent homes. In this way, it is highly probable that the victims will transmit violence from generation to generation.



The determining factors in physical and psychological abuse against children and adolescents

The results of the study show that the mother's age and level of schooling are key factors. When she is young, she tends to punish children at home more often, but when she is older, she tends to protect them. Likewise, the greater her level of schooling, the less likely she is to physically or psychologically punish her children.

The main risk factors are related to the presence of physical or psychological violence against women in the home and with the types of punishment one has received during their childhood. If the mother was subject to aggression it is very likely that she will use or tolerate violence against her own children. When a mother has been punished during her childhood, the probability that she will use the same kind of punishment with her children is greater, since it is the mother father or other family members who perpetuate this type of behavioural pattern.

Regarding ethnic background (indigenous or non-indigenous), the results indicate that this has no influence on physical or psychological aggression in the home, and backs up the findings of other authors that find no differences according to race, colour or ethnic background when it comes to violence.

Another risk factor involved is the number of children under five that live in the household, since the greater the number of children in this age group, the greater

the probability that physical or mental abuse will take place. One possible explanation for this could be the higher levels of stress generated by overcrowding.

Finally, being poorer and living in a rural area are factors which do not explain the presence of psychological abuse in the home, but that do increase the probability of physical mistreatment. Therefore, physical abuse is more common in lower-income households. Nevertheless, there are other cultural, psychological and sociological factors that have an influence on whether violence is committed and contribute to keeping it hidden.

Some public policy recommendations

The results of the study suggest that in order to start combating violence against children and adolescents, the following must be worked on: i) Fostering or strengthening sexual and reproductive health policies, ii) Reinforcing the culture of good treatment among children, adolescents, parents and teachers, iii) Reinforcing policies that combat and prevent the problem of violence against women.