



Cherish Our Children – Stop Violence Now!

Thursday, 19 October 2006 • Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

PROTECTING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AGAINST VIOLENCE

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While “children with special needs” refers generally to those with disabilities, it must be acknowledged that there are other situations of “special needs” that makes protection against violence imperative – such as street children, marginalized children and children in difficult circumstances which include children in armed conflict, displaced children, stateless children

There are two stark realities:

- *First*, there is the phenomenon of ‘double burden’, children are vulnerable by being children (dependent on adults), disabled people are vulnerable by being disabled. Therefore by being both a child and having a disability doubles the vulnerability
- *Second*, there is a very close link between violence and children with special needs; being disabled is a risk factor for violence, and multiple disabilities increase the risk; and disability is often a consequence of violence. Thus disability figures both in the “causation” and in the “outcome” of violence

Therefore we can use these two lenses and link them

- (a) Using the violence lens – The UN Secretary General’s Report mentions three perspectives of violence prevention namely human rights, using the public health approach and child protection. These underscore the need to give special consideration to children with special needs
- (b) Using the disability lens - The Biwako Millennium Framework For Action for persons with disabilities also has three perspectives – an approach that is inclusive, barrier free and rights based, and these underscore the need to consider violence as a threat to disabled people especially children

The UN Secretary’s Report has made mention of violence in the context of disabled children, in paragraphs C(31) and 93(e) which highlight disability as a risk factor for increased vulnerability to violence.



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The vulnerability of disabled children to violence has many factors.

1. The disabled child often requires intimate personal services and care, possibly from more than one carer, this may make it difficult to establish and maintain physical barriers
2. The disability itself (and more so if multiple disabilities) leads to impaired capacity to resist violence and abuse
3. Disabled children have communication problems, which make it difficult for them to tell others what is happening to them
4. Even if communication is possible, there may be fear, especially of losing the care and service
5. Disabled children also have fewer outside contacts with other children and the wider world, and therefore has limited opportunities to tell others

The consequences of violence are many and multifaceted, and disability (physical, emotional, psychological) is one well known consequence. Some of the well known consequences are:

1. Hyperactive, aggressive, easily provoked, violent behaviour, even homicidal (hence, "violence breeds violence")
2. Punitive and lacking empathy to other children
3. Emotional vulnerability, can be expressed as bullying, delinquency
4. Interpersonal, vocational and academic difficulties
5. Prone to blame others
6. Socially unresponsive
7. Sad and easily depressed
8. Emotionally blunted, apathetic
9. Low self esteem, depression, suicidal
10. Substance abuse



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Of the 2 billion children in the world, 100 million have disabilities, and there is ample evidence to show that the disabled child:

- has restricted life opportunities
- is often deprived of love and affection, and intellectual stimulation
- experiences social exclusion
- is largely “invisible”
- is a victim of maltreatment - abuse, neglect, and violence

It is pertinent to take note that the UN Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) has identified annual themes, and three of these themes were:

1997 : Children with disabilities

2000: State violence

2001: Violence in family and school

It must be recognized that the response in order to curb violence against children with special needs, much needs to be done. The broad strategies must include

1. Raising awareness of the public on the problem
2. Raising the standards of service and practice for disabled children
3. Safeguarding the disabled child
4. Strengthening their capacity to resist violence

Some of the actions can include

- Have mechanism to make the feelings and wishes of disabled children known
- Disabled children should receive adequate education including sex education
- Provide them with access to a range of adults who they can trust and communicate with
- Foster a culture of openness
- Provide guidelines for specific services
- Put in place policies and legislations that are effective, with appropriate penalties