



STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN! UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

MAIN FINDINGS

- The study concludes that violence against children happens everywhere, in every country and society and across all social groups. Violence does not discriminate between rich and poor nations.
- Extreme violence against children may hit the headlines but children say that daily, repeated small acts of violence and abuse also hurt them. While some violence is unexpected and isolated, most violent acts against children are carried out by people they know and should be able to trust: parents, boyfriends or girlfriends, spouses and partners, schoolmates, teachers and employers.
- Violence against children includes physical violence, psychological violence such as insults and humiliation, discrimination, neglect and maltreatment. Although the consequences may vary according to the nature and severity of the violence inflicted, the short- and long-term repercussions for children are very often grave and damaging.

OTHER FINDINGS

- Much violence remains hidden or unreported, and figures therefore often underestimate the scope of the problem;
- Violence is part of the economic, cultural and societal norms that make up many children's environment;
- Violence against children occurs in schools, orphanages, detention centres and other residential care facilities, on the streets, in the home as well in the relatively new context of the internet where children are both abused and exploited by the production of pornography, and risk being exposed to images of violence and degradation;
- Violence in all its forms has its roots in issues such as the power relations between men and women, exclusion, absence of a primary care giver and in societal norms and values that often disregard the rights of children; and,
- Other factors contributing towards the unacceptable prevalence of violence against children include drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment and youth disenfranchisement, crime, and a culture of silence and impunity.

THE STUDY

- On the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Secretary-General in 2001 to conduct an in-depth study on violence against children.
- An Independent Expert, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, was appointed in February 2003 to direct the study, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and WHO.
- The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children has been a global effort to report on the nature, extent and causes of violence against children, and to propose clear recommendations for action to prevent and respond to it.
- This is the first time that an attempt has been made to document the reality of violence against children around the world, and to map out what is being done to stop it.
- Since 2003, many thousands of people have contributed to the study in consultations and working groups, through questionnaires and in other ways. Children and young people have been active at every level.
- The Report was presented to the UN General Assembly on 11 October 2006.

THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

1. **National and local commitments are strengthened** to tackle violence in all settings; rehabilitate and care for child victims; raise awareness and build capacity; and carry out research and data collection.
2. **All violence against children is prohibited** by sending a clear message across societies that any form of violence against children is unacceptable and unlawful while reinforcing positive, non-violent social norms at the same time. Prosecutions and formal interventions must take place to protect a child from significant harm and when judged to be in the best interests of the child. Strong and enforceable legal sanctions should be implemented to deter violence against children.
3. **Prevention must be prioritised** by developing a consistent legal and policy framework that prohibits all forms of violence; challenges social norms which condone violence, and enhances the capacity of all those who work with and for children and families to promote non-violence.
4. **The capacity of all who work with and for children must be consistently enhanced** through systematic and long-term support, in pre-service as well as in-service training at all levels to ensure highly functional staff and high-quality services for children.
5. **Recovery and social reintegration services must be provided** to help reduce the risk of child victims of violence continuing the cycle of violence.
6. **Children must be given a voice** as they can make vital contributions to both describing the problem of violence against them, and to the design of services and other interventions that they can trust and use.
7. **Child-friendly reporting systems and services must be accessible** to enable children to talk in confidence about anything that is worrying or hurting them. Making confidential services available to children, including those most vulnerable to violence, challenges outdated concepts of parental 'ownership' of their children. What we now know about intra-familial violence demands that children should have the same rights as adult family members to seek confidential advice and help.
8. **Programs must be accountable and impunity brought to an end.** Court processes must ensure that child witnesses are treated sensitively, that they are not subjected to extended court proceedings, and that their privacy is respected. The stress of court proceedings should be minimised with appropriate services. When parents or other family members are the perpetrators of violence, decisions concerning formal interventions and prosecutions must be made according to the best interests of the child. When the perpetrator is another child, the response should be focused on rehabilitation, while ensuring the protection of the affected child.
9. **The gender dimension of violence against children must be addressed** openly since girls and boys are at different risk for different forms of violence across different settings. All research into violence against children and into strategies to prevent and respond to it should be designed to take gender into account. In particular, the Study has found a need for men and boys to play active roles and exercise leadership in efforts to overcome violence.
10. **Systematic national data collection and research efforts must be developed and implemented** as these are critical for knowledge building and improved program development. Such plans should include children, parents, service providers and others, and use a range of methods such as interview studies, improved reporting and registration systems and investigation procedures, and regular surveys, with particular attention given to vulnerable groups of girls and boys.