

STOP VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN COMMUNITIES! THE NATURE, SYMPTOMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

- The community is defined as any space used or occupied by children other than homes, schools, institutions, and organised workplaces. These include the neighbourhoods, streets, parks and playgrounds, shopping malls that children and young people grow up in.
- The community however is not only a physical space, but a social environment. Children are born and grow up under its framework of behaviours, attitudes, customs and beliefs and are thereby socialised through it to engage with the wider world, including learning how to deal with the network of relationships and institutions that provide the non-familial context of their lives.
- A child's vulnerability to violence in the community increases with age and maturity and increased contacts with the wider world.

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Article 19 contains general provisions against violence and abuse of children:
“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child”.
- Additionally, there are provisions in the CRC that deal with specific aspects of violence, abuse and exploitation. These include:
 - ▶ Protection of children from traditional practices that will harm the child (Art. 24(3))
 - ▶ Protection from sexual exploitation (Art. 34)
 - ▶ Protection from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Art. 37)
 - ▶ Rehabilitative care for victims of violence (Art. 39)

NATURE OF VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

- Homicide as a result of interpersonal arguments, intoxication (alcohol and drugs), gang fights, availability of weapons, and sexual violence.
- Violence within adolescent intimate and dating relationships
- Forced sexual initiation, and ongoing sexual coercion by people known to the child or young person
- Sexual assault by strangers in the community, often accompanied with abduction and trafficking
- Abduction and trafficking of infants, children and young people for begging, illegal work, and commercial sexual exploitation.

- Child pornography which is exacerbated by new online technology. Acts of making a child the subject of pornographic material, disseminating depictions of child sexual abuse for the gratification of others as well as profit, accessing such materials online, and keeping the materials for one's own sexual gratification are known to occur across the region.

CHALLENGES TO STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- Often, enforcement of child protection legislation tends to be hampered by a combination of factors including a lack of clear definitions pertaining to the types of violence and maltreatment specified in the relevant laws of a country, lack of implementation guidelines and resources for enforcement.
- Legal action in cases of violence and abuse tend to fall within a narrow range of situation and often are limited to more extreme form of violence including rape.
- There is a lack of comprehensive and systematic data collection, reporting and monitoring system. Data on child abuse, exploitation and maltreatment is – when collected and recorded at all – scattered among various government departments and agencies, local welfare authorities, hospitals, police offices and voluntary organizations. Methods for the recording of data on children tend to also vary between these institutions, making comparisons and analysis even more difficult.
- Discriminatory attitudes are also ingrained in both traditional and popular culture, in much the same way as attitudes that accept domestic violence and corporal punishment.

SIGNS IN A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON WHO HAS SUFFERED VIOLENCE

a) Physical Signs

- Scratches, bruises, itching, rashes, cuts or injuries, especially in the genital area if the abuse is sexual
- Blood or discharge in bedding or clothes, especially underwear

b) Behavioral Signs

- Aggressive behavior towards younger children
- Advanced sexual knowledge for the child's age
- Regressed behavior (for example, the child who has been toilet trained starts wetting the bed)
- Excessive masturbation, masturbation in public places, difficulty with being re-focused to another behavior
- Poor relationships with peers
- Fear of a particular person, place or thing
- Sudden or extreme changes in behavior (i.e., a previously good student starts having trouble with school work, a child who was not sad before starts crying frequently or acting sad, or a formerly cooperative child acts defiantly or is uncooperative or unusually overly cooperative)
- Eating disorders (overeats, undereats)

c) Additional Behavioral Signs in Pre-teens and Adolescents

- Self-mutilation (the child may repeatedly pick at scabs, cut him/herself with a razor blade, bite his/her finger or arm, burn him/herself with a cigarette)
- Threatening or attempting suicide
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Becoming promiscuous (a child is sexually active without discrimination, or just has that reputation)
- Being prudish (the child avoids any sexuality, does not see him/herself as a sexual being in any way)
- Fire-setting
- Lying, stealing
- Running away
- Isolating self or dropping friends
- Pre-occupation with death (the child may write poems about death, may ask a lot of questions about death, such as "What does it feel like and where do people go?")

CONSEQUENCES WHEN A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON HAS SUFFERED VIOLENCE

- Violence against children often has extremely severe consequences, which include:
 - ▶ Depression, anxiety, post-trauma stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychological problems
 - ▶ Anti-social behaviors
 - ▶ Decreased school performance and delinquency
 - ▶ Substance abuse
 - ▶ Promiscuity
 - ▶ Teen pregnancy
 - ▶ Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV
 - ▶ Prostitution
 - ▶ Homicide and suicide
 - ▶ Incarceration