



UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STUDY ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

2. STUDY FINDINGS

The Study focuses on the nature and extent of violence against children in five settings:

- The home and family
- Schools and educational settings
- Other institutional settings (orphanages, children in conflict with the law)
- Work situations
- The community and on the streets.

It concludes that violence against children happens everywhere, in every country and society and across all social groups. Extreme violence against children may hit the headlines but children say that the daily, repeated small acts of violence and abuse also hurt them, eroding their self-esteem, well-being and trust in others.

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.

Most violence against children remains hidden; children who face violence, as well as those who witness it, often remain silent for fear of retribution and because of the stigma that violence carries for both victim and perpetrator. Many people, even children, accept violence as an inevitable part of life. Often, children who have suffered violence or those who are aware of such violence keep quiet because there are no safe or trusted ways to report the violence or get help.

The extent of the problem*

Worldwide, there is a chronic lack of data on violence against children, which undermines understanding and action. The available numbers almost certainly understate the problem. For example:

- Using a range of studies and 2000 population data, WHO estimates that the prevalence of forced sexual intercourse and other forms of violence involving touch, among boys and girls under 18, is 73 million (7 per cent) and 150 million (14 per cent) respectively.
- In 16 developing countries reviewed by a Global School-Based Health Survey from WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the percentage of school-aged children that reported having been verbally or physically bullied at school in the previous 30 days ranged from 20 per cent in some countries to as high as 65 per cent in others;
- Each year, as many as 275 million children worldwide are estimated to witness domestic violence. This exposure has both short and long-term negative impacts on children's development.



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- Of the estimated 218 million child labourers in 2004, 126 million were engaged in hazardous work, according to the ILO in 2006. ILO's latest available estimates show that in 2000 5.7 million children were in forced or bonded labour, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography, and an estimated 1.2 million children were victims of trafficking. Many more children of legal working age face violence in their workplaces from employers or co-workers.
- Between 100 million and 140 million women and girls worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, according to WHO.
- WHO figures show that almost 53,000 children aged 0-17 years died in 2002 as a result of homicide.

Children at risk

All children are potentially at risk of experiencing violence, however:

- Boys face a greater risk of physical violence than girls; girls face a greater risk of sexual violence, neglect and forced prostitution. In a major multi-country study, up to 21 per cent of women in some countries reported having been sexually abused before the age of 15.
- Children in low- and middle-income countries are more than twice as likely to die as a result of homicide than children in high-income countries, according to WHO. Boys aged 15-17 years and children aged 0-4 years are at greatest risk.
- Certain groups of children are particularly vulnerable, including children with disabilities, children belonging to minority groups, living on the streets, in conflict with the law, and those who are refugees or displaced from their homes.

What is at stake

Violence has a devastating impact on children, exposing the survivors to the risks of lifelong health, social, emotional, and cognitive problems. Violence breeds violence: in later life, child victims of violence are more likely to be victims or perpetrators themselves.

Violence perpetuates poverty, illiteracy and early mortality. The physical, emotional and psychological scars of violence rob children of their chance to fulfil their potential. Multiplied many times over, violence robs a society of its potential for development. Ending violence will increase opportunities for development and growth.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Research has identified factors that strengthen the resilience of children who have experienced violence. These include secure attachment to an adult family member, high levels of paternal care, a warm and supportive relationship with a non-abusing parent and supportive relationships with peers.



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Gaps in legislation and prevention

Government responses to the Study questionnaire show that many countries have made real efforts to reform laws to address violence against children. At the same time, these efforts contrast sharply with the frequently minimal investment in policies and programmes to document the prevalence and characteristics of violence against children, to intervene in its underlying causes and to monitor the impact of interventions.

There are important gaps between commitments to prevent violence against children through legislation and investment in positive programmes to stop it occurring. This is especially true in relation to homicides of children between the ages of 15 and 17, sexual violence against girls, and maltreatment of infants and young children from birth to the age of 14.

Only a small number of children are protected by laws banning corporal punishment in all five settings examined in the study:

- At least 106 countries do not ban corporal punishment in schools
- 145 countries do not ban corporal punishment in care institutions
- Corporal punishment is permitted as discipline in penal systems in 78 countries, and as part of criminal sentences in 31 countries.

* There are gaps in data as not all countries record data on violence against children.