RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN BHUTAN

A REPORT

This report was produced by the National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Government of Bhutan and UNICEF Bhutan in May 2016. The opinions and statements presented here do not necessarily represent those of the NCWC or UNICEF.

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Foreword

The Violence Against Children Report 2016, an outcome of the first study carried out at the national level by the Royal Government of Bhutan with support from the UNICEF, describes the types of violence children experience and also provides information on the drivers and perpetrators of violence against children.

The three-phased study (Phase I – Literature Review and Secondary Analysis, Phase II – Qualitative Assessment and Phase III – Quantitative Survey) carried out over a period of three years provides an in-depth situation of violence against children and ensuing impact as seen from the eyes of parents, caregivers and children themselves. It was a culmination of the combined efforts of government and non-government partners who contributed towards the design and implementation of the three phases, the finalisation of the report and shaping of the recommendations to address child protection issues in relation to violence against children.

The findings of the study and the recommendations will be used to update the National Plan of Action on Child Protection and inform the development of a National Child Protection Strategy to guide the mainstreaming of child protection into the Twelfth Five Year Plan. This will ensure the provision of effective and appropriate services to prevent and respond to violence against children issues.

Within the tremendous investments made by the government to provide a conducive environment for the wholesome development and growth of our children, it is now time for a more focused approach to step up programs to prevent and respond to violence against children. Against the backdrop of complex and emerging issues, a sustainable and coordinated multi-sectoral effort is vital if we are to ensure that our children are protected from all forms of violence and exploitation.

It is recognised that violence against children is not only a protection issue but is central to child wellbeing and development and as such must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Children need immense care and protective services within multiple environments – at homes, schools, institutions and communities, and it is with the information contained in the report that we as parents, members of a community and nation must take collective and individual action to move on a path to prevent violence against and exploitation of children, and lead them on a path to productivity.

(Dorji Choden)
Hon'ble Chairperson, National Commission for Women and Children

29 July 2016

Message from the UNICEF Representative

In 2015, the global community set for itself an ambitious yet achievable target of ending all forms of violence against children by 2030. At every level of society, in every country, children feel the effects of violence. It is a universal challenge that must be addressed urgently. If it is not, efforts to end poverty, improve children's health and education, and create a more sustainable and equitable world for all will be undermined.

Protection from all forms of violence is a right guaranteed to children by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The Kingdom of Bhutan, as a party to the Convention has committed to ensuring this right of every child. Over the years, this commitment has led to progressive constitutional and legislative provisions, increased awareness, and enhanced services to provide every child a safe and nurturing environment – at home, in the community, and in public spaces.

Global evidence suggests that violence against children is all pervasive – children across the world face some form of violence in their lifetime. At the same time, lack of robust data on violence makes it difficult to develop a nuanced understanding of its causes, as well as nature and impact of violence on children. The evolving nature of violence against children – in terms of its manifestations and impacts, essentially means that the policies and programmes aimed at preventing and responding to violence are adaptable, and take into account the current trends as well as anticipate future challenges and opportunities.

The impact of violence against children can last a lifetime and pass from generation to generation. When young people experience violence, the likelihood increases that they will become future victims or act violently themselves as adults.

Concerned about the lack of data on violence against children, while at the same time, fully acknowledging that violence can have long term impact on children's wellbeing and development, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in 2013 initiated a research, which has now culminated into this comprehensive report on violence against children in Bhutan. Spearheaded by the NCWC and supported by a multi-sectoral team of experts from various ministries and civil society organizations, this report – A Study on Violence Against Children in Bhutan – is a landmark publication that reveals the nature and magnitude of violence faced by children, as well as its impact on their wellbeing. Along with valuable data on prevalence of violence, the report also highlights and call for addressing the social and cultural norms that accept and tolerate violence against children.

We hope that the evidence-based policy and programmatic recommendations provided in this report will shape the immediate, and long term strategy for Bhutan to end violence against children in the country.

UNICEF is proud to be a partner in this collective effort to gain insights into some of the complex violations of children's rights, and is fully committed to working closely with the Royal Government of Bhutan and the civil society in the country to ensure ***every child's right to protection from violence***.

Violence is not inevitable. The cycle can and must be broken. Otherwise, it will significantly impede a nation's efforts to advance.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!

Shaheen Nilofer
Representative

Acknowledgements

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) would like to thank a range of individuals and agencies for their support to the national Study on Violence Against Children in Bhutan.

The study was conducted in three phases:

1. A literature review.
2. A qualitative study on violence against children.
3. A national survey on violence against children and young people.

At each step of the way, the research agenda has been admirably overseen by a Steering Committee of experts from a range of government ministries and agencies, as well as leaders from civil society organizations in Bhutan. Throughout the process, they contributed invaluable advice and commentary to ensure the quality of the research. The Steering Committee was supported by a dedicated Core Working Group responsible for bringing their ideas and experience to inform the nature and scope of the study and to guide the research team in its work. To all these agencies and individuals, NCWC is highly appreciative of your involvement.

Likewise, NCWC acknowledges the contribution of UNICEF, especially the Child Protection and the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Sections, whose technical expertise and financial support made the study possible. Special thanks are extended to Aniruddha Kulkarni, Child Protection Specialist, Karma Tsering, Child Protection Officer, and Dechen Zangmo, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer.

Finally, NCWC is grateful to all the organizations managing the research in each phase of the study. Special thanks to Child Frontiers Ltd, the Institute for Management Studies, the AMJ Group and the Bhutan Interdisciplinary Research and Development – BIRD.

See the Annex for the list of representatives of the Steering Committee, the Core Working Group and the research teams.

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Figures

NOTE: All figures contained in this report are based on data from the National Survey on Violence Against Children in Bhutan, 2015.

Abbreviations

CBSS	Community-Based Support System
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HICS	Health Information and Service Centre
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
SAIEVAC	South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
RENEW	Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Study	United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Global overview

A decade after the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children (2006), the issue remains an urgent global challenge. The UN Study confirmed that such violence exists in every country, cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin.[1] In every region, in contradiction to human rights obligations and children's developmental needs, violence against children is socially approved and is frequently legal and State authorized. The UN Study explored the extent of violence in a range of settings, including the home and family, community, school, care and justice institutions and in the workplace. A variety of additional initiatives, ranging from international statistical analysis to local-level action research, revealed a clearer picture of the magnitude and pervasiveness of the problem.

Data generated by these initiatives indicate that although some violence is perpetrated by strangers, the majority of violent acts experienced by children are committed by people who are a part of their life: parents, peers, teachers, employers, boyfriends or girlfriends, spouses and other family members. A central recommendation of the UN Study called on governments to develop realistic, time-bound and measureable national strategies, policies and plans of action to tackle violence against children. These programmes should be evidence based and underpinned by research and systematic data collection that is disaggregated by sex, age, urban/rural locality, household and family characteristics, education and ethnicity.[2]

South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children

The South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), an apex body of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, was established in 2010 to advance the recommendations of the UN Study. It has subsequently developed its own work plan, commissioned research and engaged in advocacy at the regional level. The work plan is a strategy framework to strengthen regional coordination and standardize and monitor progress annually.[3] To better understand the phenomenon of violence against children, the Government has consistently initiated research to elicit the experiences of children and young people and to seek their perspectives about the solutions.

The conclusions of this first national Study on Violence Against Children in Bhutan, commissioned by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and undertaken between 2013 and 2016 and which this report presents, provide the learning and recommendations upon which to base national activities.

[1] United Nation General Assembly, 2006.
[2] ibid.
[3] SAIEVAC, 2010.

International and regional commitments

Beyond the commitments described above, the Government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 without reservation and subsequently ratified the Optional Protocols on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Bhutan also ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. At the regional level, Bhutan ratified the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution and Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia.

With regard to incorporating international conventions and treaties into national legislation, the country has adopted the principle of monism whereby any international instrument ratified by the Government becomes a part of domestic legislation automatically and does not require Parliament to pass enabling legislation to give effect to the ratified instrument.[4] The Constitution of Bhutan reflects and is consistent with the protection of children's rights as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child; Article 9 (18) of the Constitution states that the country shall "endeavour to take appropriate measures to ensure that children are protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation, including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation".[5]

In its 2008 recommendations to the Government, the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the country seek assistance from development partners and, in particular, UN agencies to fully implement the recommendations made in the UN Study on Violence Against Children.

More specifically, the Committee recommended that the Government:

- prohibit all forms of violence against children;
- strengthen national and local commitment and action;
- promote non-violent values and awareness-raising;
- enhance the capacity of all who work with and for children;
- ensure accountability and end impunity; and
- use the recommendations of the UN Study "as a tool for action in partnership with civil society and, in particular, with the involvement of children to ensure that all children are protected from all forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence and to gain momentum for concrete and time-bound actions to prevent and respond to such violence and abuse".[6]

[4] NCWC and UNICEF, 2012.
[5] Gross National Happiness Commission, 2013.
[6] See www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.BTN.CO.2.pdf

Global statistics on violence against children

1. In 2012, homicide took the lives of about 95,000 children and adolescents younger than 20 years—almost 1 in 5 of all homicide victims that year.
2. Around 6 in 10 children between the ages of 2 and 14 worldwide (almost a billion) are subjected to physical punishment by their caregivers on a regular basis.
3. Close to 1 in 3 students between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide reported involvement in one or more physical fights in the past year.
4. Slightly more than 1 in 3 students between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide experience bullying on a regular basis.
5. About 1 in 3 adolescents aged 11 to 15 in Europe and North America admitted to having bullied others at school at least once in the past couple of months.
6. Almost one quarter of girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide (almost 70 million) report being victims of some form of physical violence since age 15.
7. Around 120 million girls younger than 20 years (about 1 in 10) have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. Boys are also at risk, although a global estimate is unavailable due to the lack of comparable data in most countries.
8. Around 1 in 3 adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide (84 million) have been the victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives.
9. About 3 in 10 adults worldwide believe that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children.
10. Close to half of all girls aged 15–19 worldwide (around 126 million) think a husband is sometimes justified in hitting or beating his wife.

NOTE: *Estimates are based on a subset of countries with available data covering 50 per cent or more of the global population of children or adults within the respective age range.*

Source: *UNICEF, Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, 2012, citing UNICEF global databases, 2014, based on Demographic and Health Surveys, Global School-based Student Health Surveys, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), other national surveys, and relevant studies. Population data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2012 revision, CD-ROM edition, United Nations, New York, 2013.

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PART 2: Purpose and methodology

The National Commission for Women and Children, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Bhutan, embarked upon a comprehensive multi-phase research agenda to better understand the situation of violence against children within Bhutan. In 2013, NCWC brought together a range of stakeholders from different ministries, government agencies and civil society organizations to form a Steering Committee to guide the research agenda and oversee a Core Working Group that would provide technical expertise. The research agenda set out to learn more about children's experiences of violence and thus generate a better understanding of the factors that influence or perpetuate the phenomenon (drivers) and the kind of child protection system that would help children and families.

Ultimately, the research agenda was designed to:

(i) provide robust, evidence-based primary and secondary research, creating a platform upon which to conceptualize the policies, strategies and programmes that would most effectively prevent and respond to violence; and

(ii) guide the development of a comprehensive and sustainable national child protection system, founded upon the expressed expectations and priorities of the people, most especially children themselves.

The conclusions of this research were intended to contribute to the implementation of the country's ongoing Eleventh Five-Year Plan (July 2013–June 2018), the National Plan of Action for Child Protection (finalized in 2011), the UN One Programme (2014–2018) and the formulation of the Twelfth Five Year Plan (July 2018-June 2023) .

An incremental three-phase research programme was established in 2013, supported by three Bhutanese research groups: the Institute for Management Studies, the AMJ Group and the Bhutan Interdisciplinary Research and Development – BIRD, along with Child Frontiers, an international consultancy group specializing in child protection.

This report is a summary of the macro findings of the research, with recommendations for preventing and responding to violence against children. It cross-references the three phases of the study and should be read in conjunction with them, as far as possible. The synthesis presents salient issues and conclusions for policymakers and practitioners to tackle in the future.

Phase 1: Literature Review (2013)

The literature that was reviewed was clustered into six categories, all of which was captured in a specially tailored matrix. The review drew from:

- recent global and regional studies and learning on violence against children;
- quantitative and qualitative research studies;
- situation analyses and needs assessments relating to violence against children;
- programme reports from service providers engaged in both prevention and response activities;
- documents pertaining to the legal and regulatory framework; and
- national statistical information and reports (from government ministries, child protection and other relevant service providers, the judiciary and the police).

Please see the full list of documents included in the Phase 1 Literature Review at:
http://ncwc.gov.bt/en/publication?type=National

Phase 2: Qualitative Study on Violence Against Children in Bhutan (2014)

The objectives of the qualitative study were to identify and better understand the various forms of violence experienced by girls and boys; the drivers of violence in different contexts; the social, economic and contextual factors that augment or mitigate children's exposure to violence; and responses to violence against children across the country. The study centred on the following research questions:

- How is violence against children defined and understood?
- Which children are most at risk of experiencing violence and why?
- Which types of knowledge, attitudes and practices exacerbate or mitigate boys' and girls' risk of violence?
- Which informal approaches and formal mechanisms and services exist to prevent violence and to support children who have experienced violence?

The study was conducted in 12 urban and rural sites across all three regions (Western, Central and Eastern). A total of seven districts were covered: Thimphu, Paro, Samtse, Bumthang, Sarpang, Trashigang and Samdrup Jongkhar. The methodology included a variety of tools, with an emphasis on primary data collection. At the central level, semi-structured interviews were conducted with government officials and civil society organization representatives. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted at the district level with local leaders, including *gups* (head of the *gewog,* or cluster of villages)*, magmis* and *tshogpas* (heads of villages), police officers, health officers, civil society organization staff, children, youth, school administrators, school counsellors, business community members and administrators of monasteries and nunneries. At the community level, focus group discussions were conducted separately with adult women and men.

Participatory workshops involving a range of creative activities were organized with groups of children, including younger girls (aged 8–12), younger boys (aged 8–12), older girls (aged 13–17) and older boys (aged 13–17). Ten testimonies were conducted with youth (males and females aged 18–25) to learn about their experiences of violence as children.

The research process complied with internationally recognized standards and was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of Health. The National Statistics Bureau provided technical advice throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection took place.

Please find the report of the Phase 2 Qualitative Study on Violence Against Children in Bhutan at: http://ncwc.gov.bt/en/publication?type=National

Phase 3: National Survey on Violence Against Children in Bhutan (2015)

The national survey generated information about the prevalence of violence experienced by children in the country, associated risk factors and level of uptake of services. Complementing and reinforcing the findings of the previous phases, the quantitative study provides compelling documentation of the types and frequency of violence suffered by girls and boys (aged 13–17 years) as well as young people (aged 18–23 years).[7]

The household survey was conducted in all regions and *Dzongkhags* of Bhutan. A total of 3,272 children and young people were interviewed.

Central questions investigated in the survey included:

- *Prevalence of violence*: The proportion of children and young people who ever experienced physical violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, emotional violence ('ever' refers to violence experienced at least once in their lifetime).
- *Location:* Where is violence most frequently occurring (at home, at school, in the workplace, at the monastery or nunnery)?
- *Perpetrators:* Who are the main perpetrators of violence? This broadly includes parents, family members, peers, intimate partners, adults in schools and institutions, strangers and other adults.
- *Typology and variations:* What gender-based differences exist in the types of violence experienced by children? Are there differences between urban and rural areas? Is there a relationship between poverty and violence experienced by children?
- *Reporting and services:* Do children report violence cases? If so, which services do they report to, and what services have they received?

[7] Although the national survey focused on both age groups, this report documents the experiences of children aged 13–17 years. In doing so, the report describes the experiences of children between the ages of 8–17 years. However, some data is provided about the age of first experience of violence among the older cohort.

A master sampling frame, consisting of mutually exclusive urban and rural frames, was provided by the National Statistics Bureau for this survey. The frames were based on the 2005 Population and Housing Census of Bhutan. The urban frame was updated in 2012 during preparations for the Bhutan Living Standards Survey. A stratified multi-stage cluster sampling design of probability sampling was employed. The study methodology was reviewed by the Steering Committee and the Core Working Group and was again approved by both the National Statistics Bureau and the Research Ethics Board of Health.

Please find the report of the Phase 3 National Survey on Violence Against Children at:
http://ncwc.gov.bt/en/publication?type=National

NOTE: The data tables relating to the survey are not provided in this summary report but can be accessed through the same electronic link as the Phase 3 National Survey.

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PART 3: Definitions of violence against children

The definition of violence against children used in the UN Study draws on article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and includes "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".[8] The UN Study was also influenced by the definition used by the World Health Organization in its 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health*, which defined violence against children as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a child, by an individual or group, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health survival or dignity".[9]

For the NCWC study, violence is considered as one of four components of child protection, along with abuse, neglect and exploitation. The definition of violence against children used in this study encompasses the emotional, physical and sexual harm experienced by girls and boys at home, in school, at work and in the community. This definition does not address violence against boys and girls during humanitarian crises, such as armed conflict or natural disasters.[10]

NOTE: Some of the definitions evolved and were refined during the period of the three- phase study to better reflect the Bhutanese context. This gradual fine-tuning at each stage allowed for more nuanced investigation of the subject and will ultimately generate more tailored responses.

Physical violence

Physical acts of violence are intended to inflict bodily harm and include the use of physical force, the use of weapons and the forcing of children to withstand extraneous and excessive physical endurance. Such acts include:

- *Using physical force to cause harm*: being slapped, punched, having ear pulled or twisted, having hair pulled, being kicked or having a knuckle rapped on the forehead.
- *Hit with an object*: having the back, head or bottom hit with a belt, stick, wire, rope, whip or other similar object.
- *Made to stand for a long time, carry stones, forced to do heavy work.*
- *Stabbed or cut*: being stabbed or cut with a knife or sharp object.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is any act of a sexualized nature that is perpetrated against someone's will and encompasses a broad range of behaviours, many of them criminal offences. As the study evolved,

[8] General Assembly of the United Nations, 2006.
[9] WHO, 2002.
[10] UNICEF, 2014a.

the definition of sexual violence in the Bhutanese context was extended to include verbal sexual harassment and exposure to pornography.

- *Forced sexual intercourse:* A child is forced to have sexual intercourse against his or her will. For this study, this form of sexual violence also includes attempted forced sexual intercourse, whereby the forced act was not completed. In this scenario, the victim of non-consensual sexual intercourse may have been either (i) physically forced or (ii) pressured through harassment, threats or tricks.
- *Sexual touching:* A child is touched in a sexual way against his or her will, including unwanted kissing, grabbing or fondling, but the perpetrator did not try to force the child to have sexual intercourse. This category also includes cases of children and young people who are forced or coerced to touch themselves or to watch another person touch himself or herself.

For the Phase 3 national survey (only), the category of *verbal sexual harassment* was added. This decision was based upon the testimonies of children during the focus groups for the Phase 2 qualitative study. The non-contact nature of verbal sexual harassment makes it a different experience from forced sexual intercourse and sexual touching, and it is therefore dealt with separately in this summary report, albeit within the overall framework of sexual violence.

- *Verbal sexual harassment:* A person uses sexualized language about another person or other type of abusive or dirty language of a rude, sexual nature.

Based on the testimonies of children, the category of *digital pornography* was originally included within the overall framework of sexual violence. However, the categorization and terminology used for exposure to pornography is inherently problematic, and it is therefore not included within the category of sexual violence in this report but is treated separately:

- *Digital pornography:* A child or young person takes photos or films of their own or someone else's body parts or actual sexual acts that are then sent over the internet. This type of violence also includes children looking at photos or watching films of someone else's private parts or other people doing sexual acts via the internet.

Emotional violence

Emotional violence includes being called bad names, being made to feel unloved or being threatened with abandonment. Specifically, the research sought to understand more about the following types of emotional violence children experience:

- *Humiliation or public shaming:* being made to feel stupid, embarrassed, and/or ashamed.
- *Intimidation or threats:* being made to feel frightened, afraid or very worried.
- *Lack of love:* being told that you are not loved or feel that your feelings are not understood.

PART 4: Core findings

This section of the report summarizes the central findings across all three phases of the study and focuses on the following aspects:

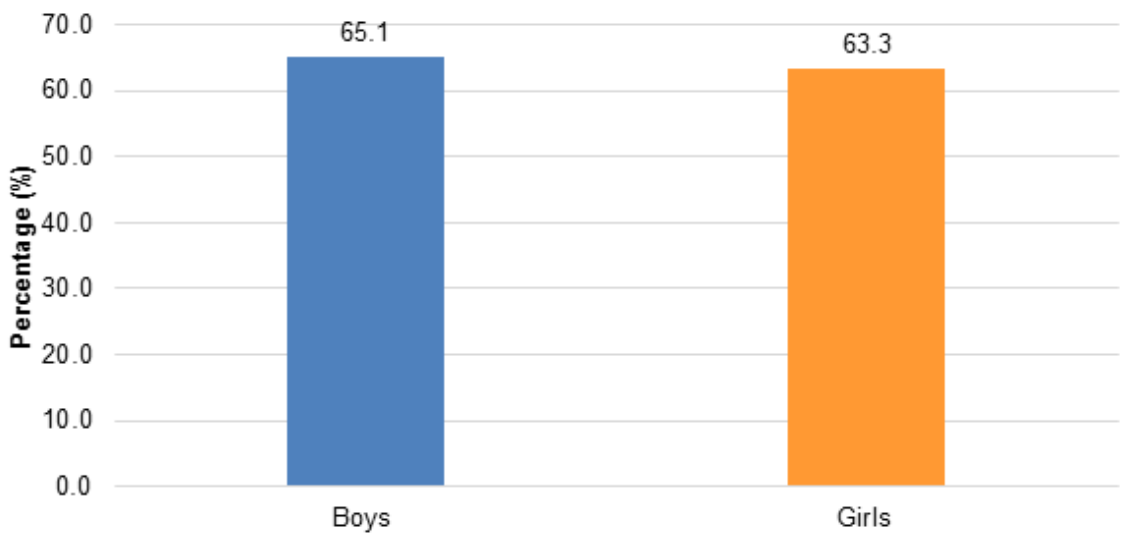
1. The types and prevalence of violence against children.
2. The drivers of violence against children.
3. The ways in which families and communities prevent and respond to violence against children.
4. The measures taken by the Government and civil society organizations to address violence against children.

1. Types and prevalence of violence against children

1.1 Physical violence

According to the national survey, more than 6 out of 10 children (64%) aged 13–17 years have experienced at least one incident of physical violence in their lifetime. The majority of boys and girls (44.8%) first experienced physical violence before they reached their teenage years (Figure 1).

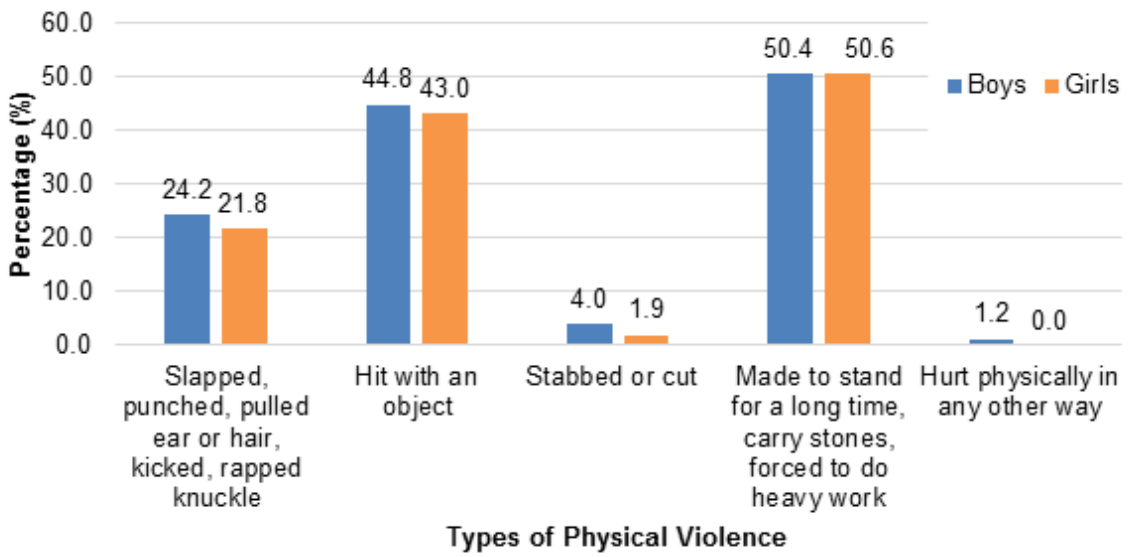
Figure 1: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by ever experienced physical violence



Among young people aged 18–24 years, a larger proportion of young men than young women first experienced physical violence before the age of 13 (30% of males, 24% of females). A larger proportion of young people experienced physical violence before their teenage years in rural areas (30%) than in urban areas (21%).

The most common forms of physical violence experienced by children seem to be in the context of corporal punishment. In the national survey, children reported they had been most often subject to tasks involving excessive physical endurance, such as being made to stand for a long time, carry stones or forced to do heavy work (50.5%), followed by being hit with an object (43.8%). More than 20 per cent of children (22.8%) said they had been slapped, punched, kicked, had their ear pulled or twisted, their hair pulled or their knuckles rapped on their forehead. Nearly 3 per cent of children (2.8%) had been stabbed or cut with a knife or sharp object; of them, nearly 2 per cent (1.9%) were girls and 4 per cent (4%) were boys (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by type of physical violence experienced

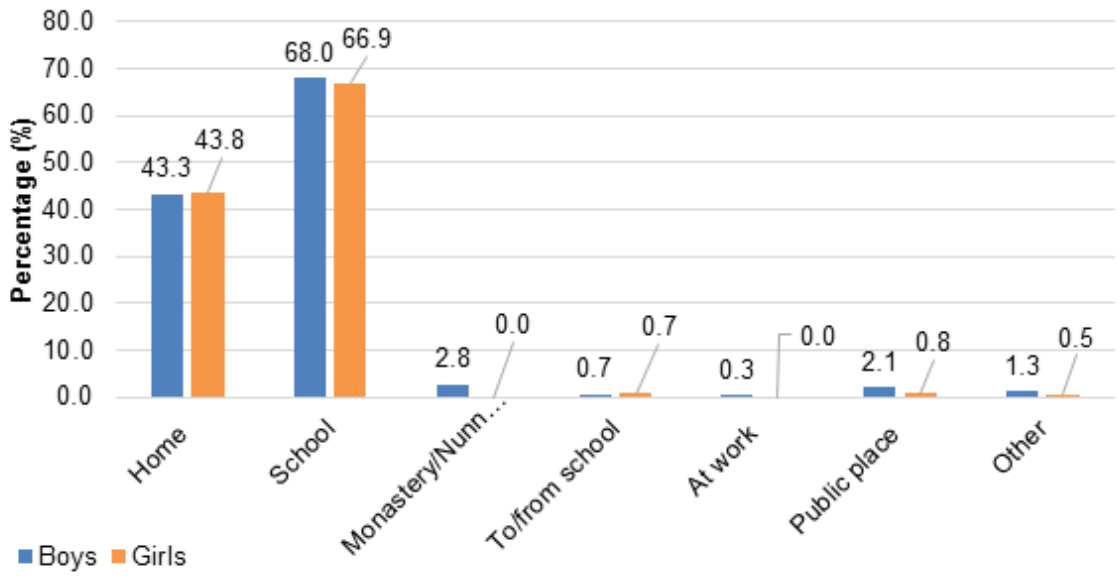


Of those children who had experienced physical violence at least once in their lifetime, more than half of them (67.3%) reported that they had experienced physical violence at school. Three quarters (75%) of the children attending day school experienced physical violence at least once by a teacher, most likely in the context of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment was reported a lot less frequently by children who had attended a boarding school, with only one fifth (22%) of such children affected.

More than 4 in 10 children (43.6%) recalled physical violence at home, usually meted out by parents, relatives or siblings (Figure 3). Less than 2 per cent of the small number of children who recalled experiencing physical violence said it occurred in public place (1.5%), while three-quarters of them experienced violence on the street or when travelling in a car or on a bus.

Fighting between groups of boys and bullying of younger children was pervasive in homes, schools and other institutions. Twenty-three per cent of children (23%) reported experiencing physical violence by their peers, mostly boys of the same age or older.

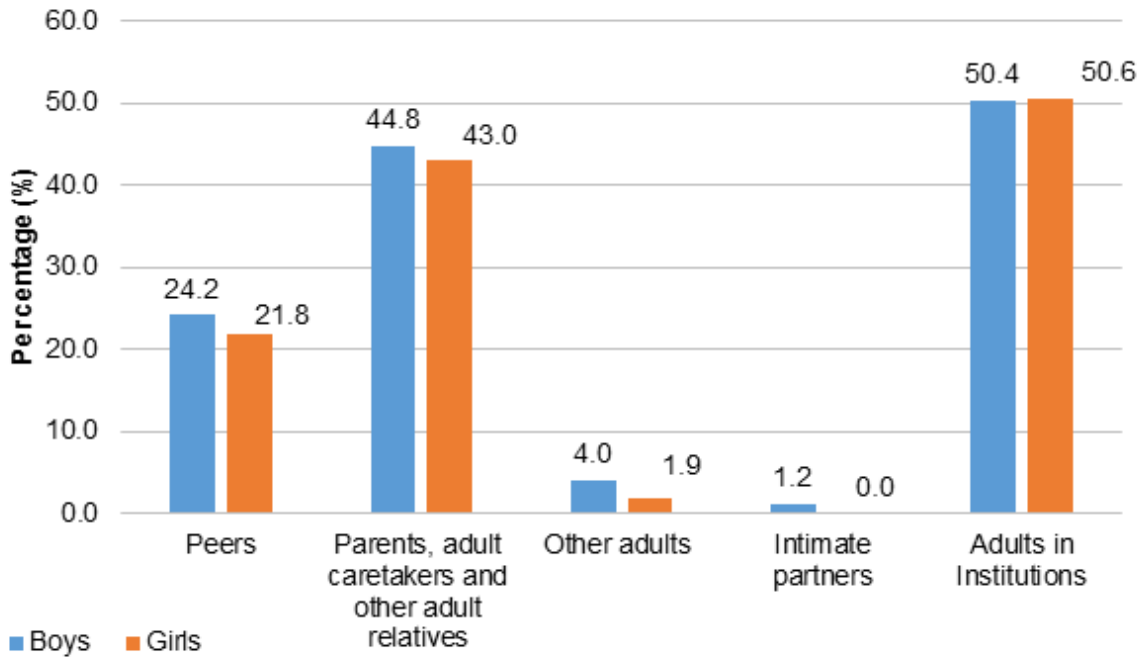
Figure 3: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by location of physical violence



In the focus group discussions, child monks reported being beaten by the *kudrung* (discipline master) or other adult monks for committing 'offences', such as being late for prayers. A *teycha or yuepalm* (leather whip) is sometimes used to beat child monks on their head, back or bottom, or they are tied with their robe to a pillar before being beaten with a *teycha* on their bare bottom. An assessment in 2010 by the Eleven-Expert Committee of the situation of young monks and nuns found that corporal punishment was used as a last resort in around 10 per cent of monastic institutions. Most monks were using alternative, non-violent forms of discipline.[11] In the Phase 2 qualitative study child monks said they were bullied by older students who punched and kicked or locked them in a dark room, whereas child nuns reported only being lightly beaten by *kudrung,* or adult nuns.

[11] NCWC, 2011.

Figure 4: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by perpetrator of physical violence



The focus group discussions also revealed that girls and boys are subject to physical violence by their employers. This practice was reported to take place among young girls in domestic work who lived full time with their employer, girls and boys working in local businesses while living at home and older girls working in *drayangs* (bars) or in the commercial sex trade.

In the national survey, more than 6 per cent of children (6.6%) had been left with bruising, redness, swelling or soreness on their bodies as a result of physical violence, of which nearly twice as many were girls (8.8%) than boys (4.6%). More than 3 per cent of children were left with cuts or bleeding (3.3%). The slightly larger proportion of boys with cuts or bleeding perhaps reflects the larger proportion of boys who experienced stabbing or cutting with a knife or sharp object. Few children had experienced a broken bone, fainting or unconsciousness or long-term damage to an eye or ear or permanent scarring as a result of being beaten.

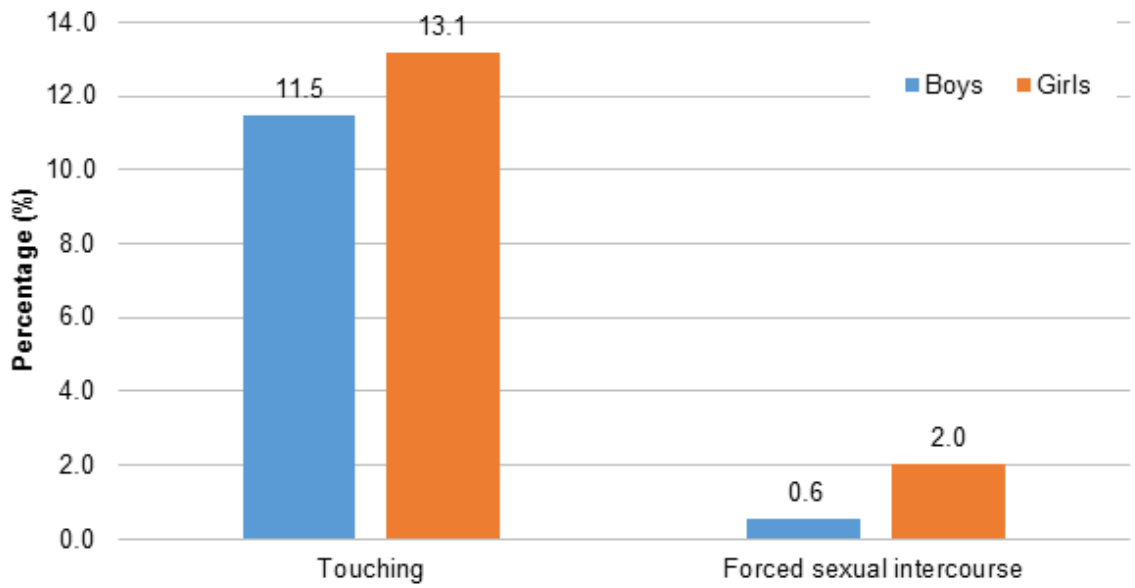
1.2 Sexual violence

The initial stage of the study started with a single category of sexual violence. As the findings revealed at each step of the way, this category does not adequately distinguish between sexual acts that involve actual physical contact with a child and actions that are essentially non-contact. This distinction became important during the design of the survey to avoid a false or misleading portrayal of the magnitude of sexual violence. For the purpose of clarity, this section separates out different manifestations, albeit within the generic heading of sexual violence.

1.2.1 Sexual violence

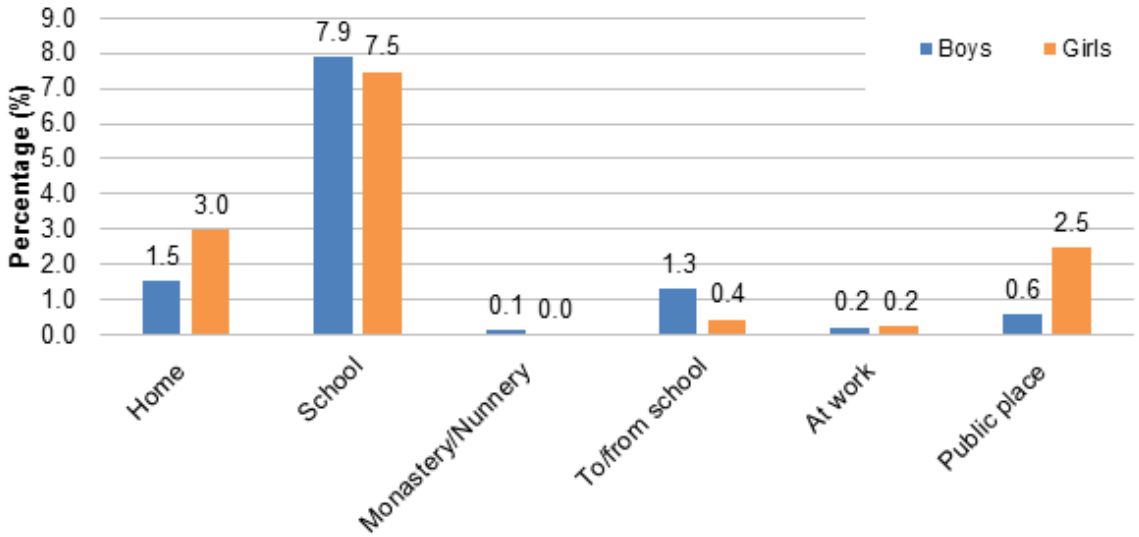
More than 1 in 10 children in the national survey reported experiencing at least one incident of sexual violence in their lifetime (12.8%), with a slightly larger proportion of girls (13.5%) than boys (11.9%). Unwanted sexual acts ranged from pulling down underwear to touching of girls' breasts and buttocks to 'forcing sex'. The most common type of sexual violence reported was sexual touching (11.5% of boys, 13.1% of girls), with a much smaller proportion of both boys and girls having experienced forced sexual intercourse. Children reported that they experienced sexual violence in one form or another at a young age, with nearly 5 per cent (4.8%) experiencing it before the age of 13 years while more than half (7.3%) had experienced it between the ages of 13 and 17 years (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by type of sexual violence experienced



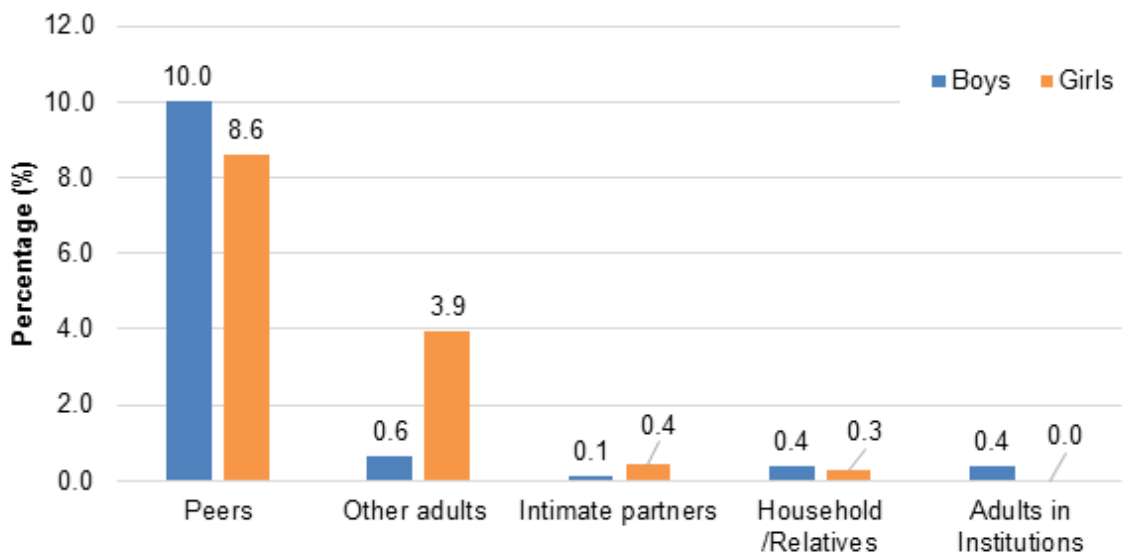
More children who reported sexual violence said it occurred at school (7.7%) or, to a lesser degree, at home (2.3%). Sexual violence was more frequently experienced in boarding schools (5.4%) than in day schools (2.2%), with the vast majority of perpetrators from within the peer group, presumably schoolmates (10% of boys and 8.6% of girls reported the perpetrator was from their peer group). A surprising revelation of the survey is the high level of non-consensual sexual touching among adolescent boys in schools, most likely in the context of inappropriate sexual experimentation but perhaps also deliberate sexual assault.

Figure 6: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by location of sexual violence



In the home, sexual abuse was more prevalent against girls than for boys, usually committed by fathers, stepfathers, brothers-in-law or family friends (Figures 6 and 7). A greater proportion of girls experienced sexual violence by 'other' adults (3.9%), with most of it perpetrated by male strangers rather than neighbours or community members. More girls (2.5%) than boys (0.6%) reported experiencing sexual violence in public places; girls cited instances of sexual violence on the road or when travelling in public transport (1.4%). 'Night hunting', which involves a male sneaking into the home of a 'desired' girl or woman for sex, has apparently decreased in recent years but is still practised in some rural communities, especially in eastern and southern Bhutan.[12]

Figure 7: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by perpetrator of sexual violence



[12] Traditionally, night hunting was intended to be a practice of courtship, but it is now widely accepted as putting girls and women at risk of sexual harm.

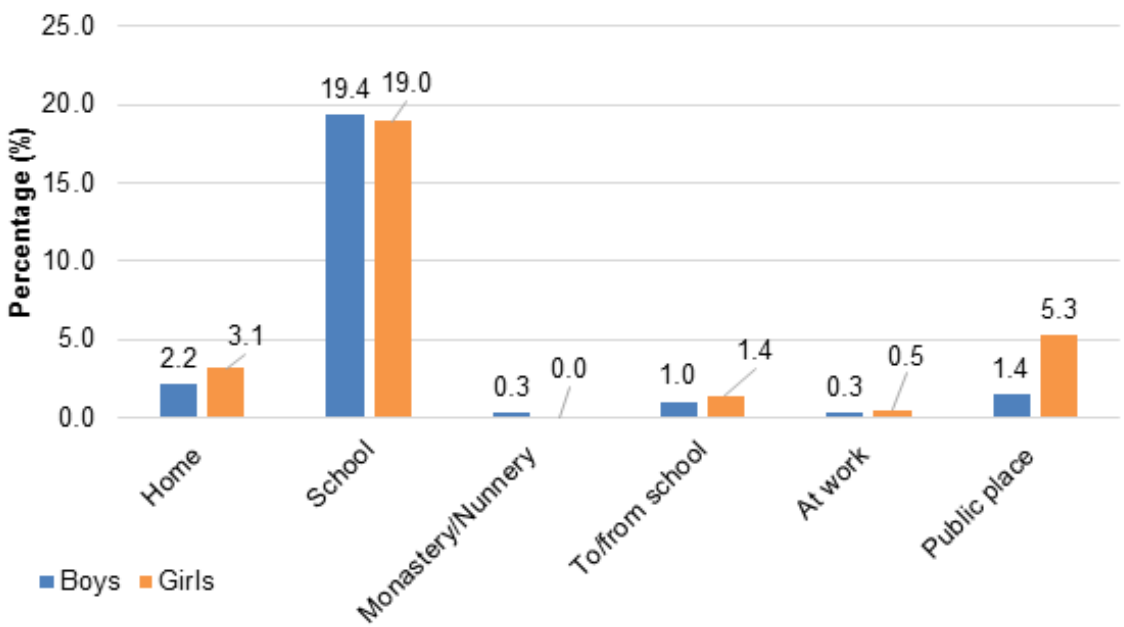
1.2.2 Sexual exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation only emerged as an issue in the southern and south-eastern sites in the focus groups discussions and interviews. In these regions, girls were understood to experience sexual violence and harassment more than boys, although a few examples of commercial sexual exploitation of boys were described in the southern urban sites. Civil society organization representatives working with exploited children estimated that approximately half of the female commercial sex workers in southern cities are Bhutanese and Indian girls younger than 18 years. These vulnerable girls work alongside women in hotels, *drayangs,* karaoke bars or snooker halls. The Bhutanese girls were reported as coming from various parts of the country but typically from poor families, with many said to be addicted to drugs or alcohol.

1.2.3 Sexual harassment

For many children in the country, verbal sexual harassment appears to be a prominent feature of adolescence. As revealed in the Phase 2 qualitative study, children and young people are affected by the vulgar, sexualized language people use around them and about them.

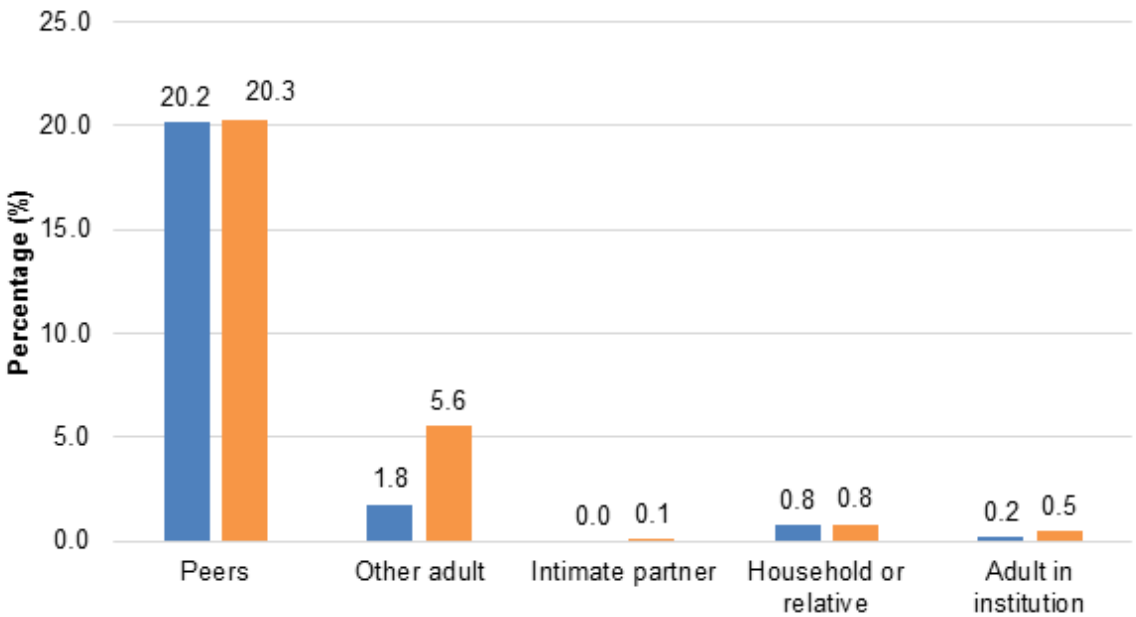
Figure 8: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by location of verbal sexual harassment



In the Phase 3 national survey, children—boys and girls—reported experiencing verbal sexual harassment most often in school (19.2%), while a much smaller percentage experienced it at home or in another person's home (2.7%). The vast majority of verbal sexual harassment was reported as occurring in day schools (14.9%), with more than 4 per cent reporting they experienced it while in their boarding school or school with informal boarding (4.3%). Boys and girls reported that they were

most frequently verbally sexually harassed by their peers (20.2% of boys, 20.3% of girls). Considerably more girls (5.3%) than boys (1.4x%) reported experiencing sexualized and insulting verbal harassment in public (Figures 8 and 9). For example, as explained in the focus group discussions, sexualized comments were made by people known to them as well as strangers when walking alone or tending animals in grazing areas. Girls working in *drayangs* said they often feel sexually harassed by their clients.

Figure 9: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by perpetrator of verbal sexual harassment



1.3 Digital pornography

The research indicates that exposure to digital pornography is an emerging issue in the country. Initially and in line with the findings of the qualitative report, there was an expectation that children were increasingly using their mobile devices to share sexual videos and images among themselves. The national survey found that children are much more likely to have watched sex videos rather than (i) having been forced or pressured into making videos of themselves naked or involved in sex acts or (ii) voluntarily making such videos of themselves naked or involved in sex acts.

In the national survey, more than 20 per cent of children reported exposure to pornography either in their home (10.3%) or in someone else's home (11%). This is probably made possible with the increased ownership of combined TV-VCR-DVD machines and with greater access to the online world through mobile phones and tablets. The survey did not probe the context in which children had viewed pornography at home; for example, whether children, both boys and girls, were asked to watch by another person, watched with a friend or sibling, or discovered and watched the videos on their own.

Figure 10: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by exposure to digital pornography

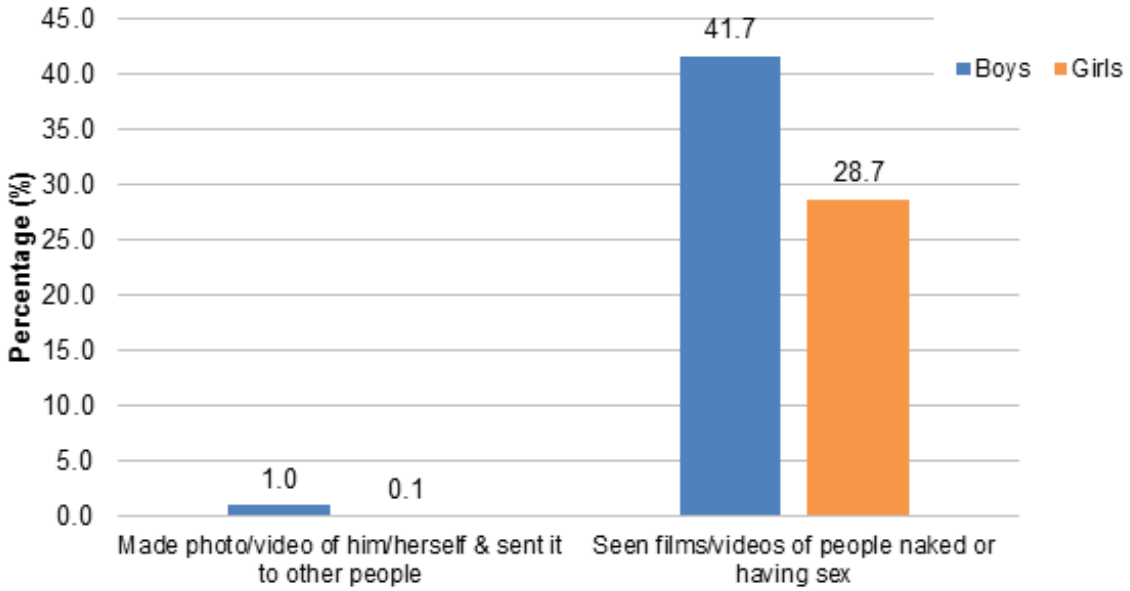
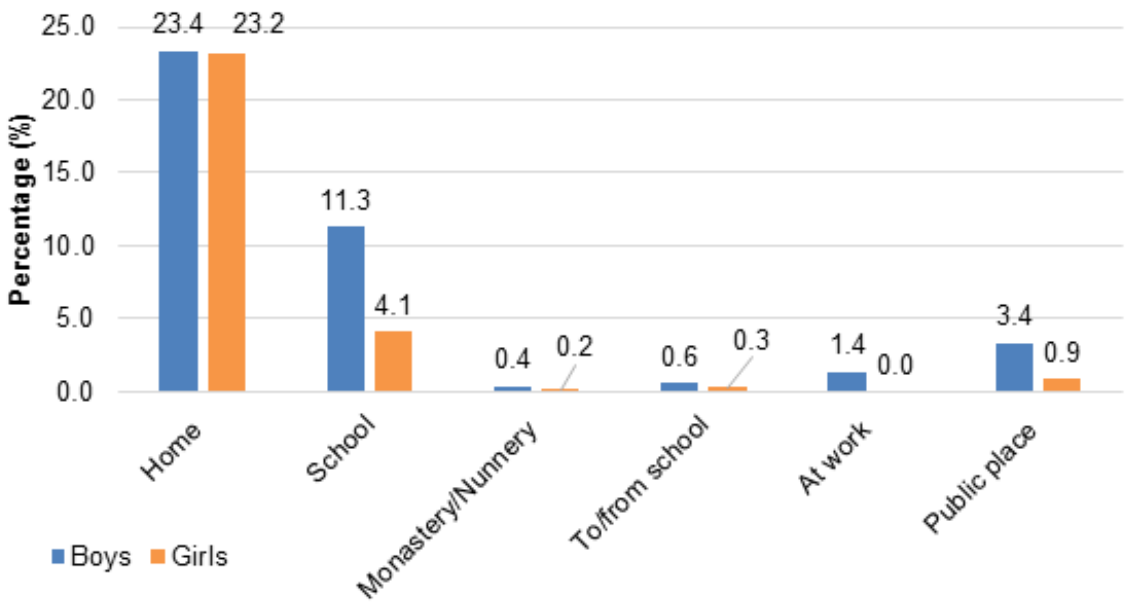


Figure 11: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by location of exposure to digital pornography



More than twice the number of boys reported exposure to pornography at school (11.3% of boys, 4.1% of girls) and in public places (3.4% of boys, 0.9% of girls) (Figures 10 and 11). Boys reported accessing pornographic sites while at day school (4.3%) or boarding school (3%). Although the survey did not probe, the implication is that boys are probably sharing images within their peer group through mobile applications.

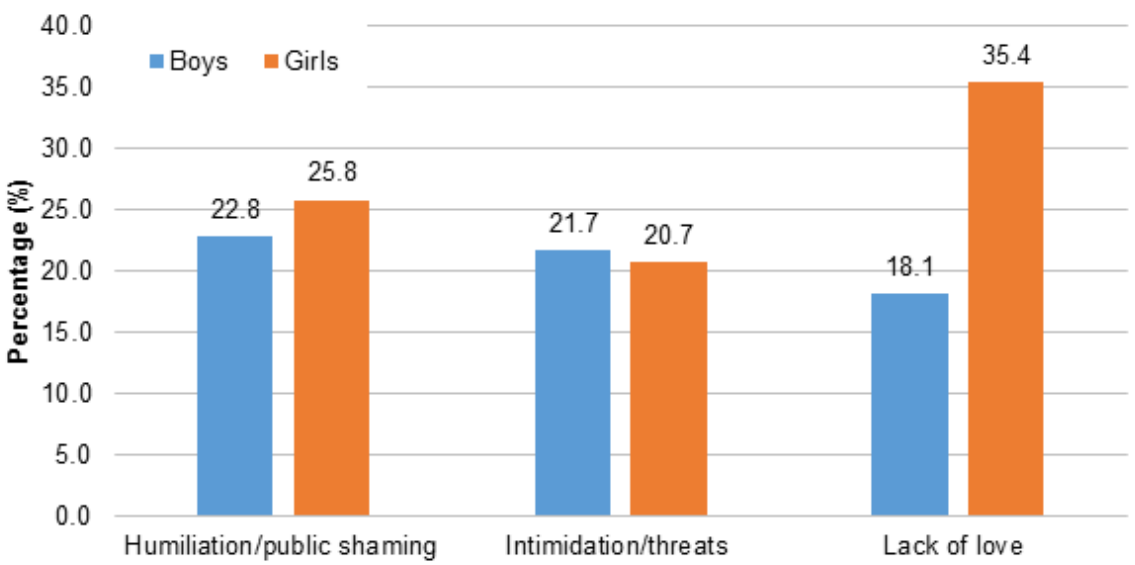
1.4 Emotional violence

Children, even from a very young age, interpret many parts of their lives as emotionally violent and seem to have a keen sense of injustice regarding, for example: the way they are sometimes treated by their parents and teachers; how their parents and step-parents relate to each other; preferential treatment and discrimination at home, in monasteries or in school; a feeling of being unloved; or teasing (ragging) and 'down-looking' by other children.

In the national survey, nearly half of all children reported experiencing at least one form of emotional violence in their lifetime (47.4%), with prevalence rates higher for girls (52.3%) than for boys (40.9%). Twenty per cent of children (20.2%) said they had most frequently experienced emotional violence when they were younger than 13 years.

Overall, the most prevalent form of emotional violence reported by children aged 13–17 in the national survey was the feeling of being unloved (27.8%), followed by humiliation or public shaming (24.5%) and intimidation or threats (21.1%). However, a significantly larger proportion of girls (35.4%) than boys (18.2%) recalled experiencing lack of love, compared with boys (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by type of emotional violence experienced



The national survey findings indicate that although children and young people experience emotional violence in their families, the emotional violence perpetrated by their peers is also very significant to them. As expected, the findings show that adolescent friendships and social networks are an extremely important feature of children's and young people's lives, especially in same-sex groupings. While these peer groups provide support and assistance in times of problems, the dynamics of the peer group can be painful for children and young people. According to both girls and boys in the study, 'ragging' (teasing) by other children is a fairly common experience. In particular, boys 'rag' girls

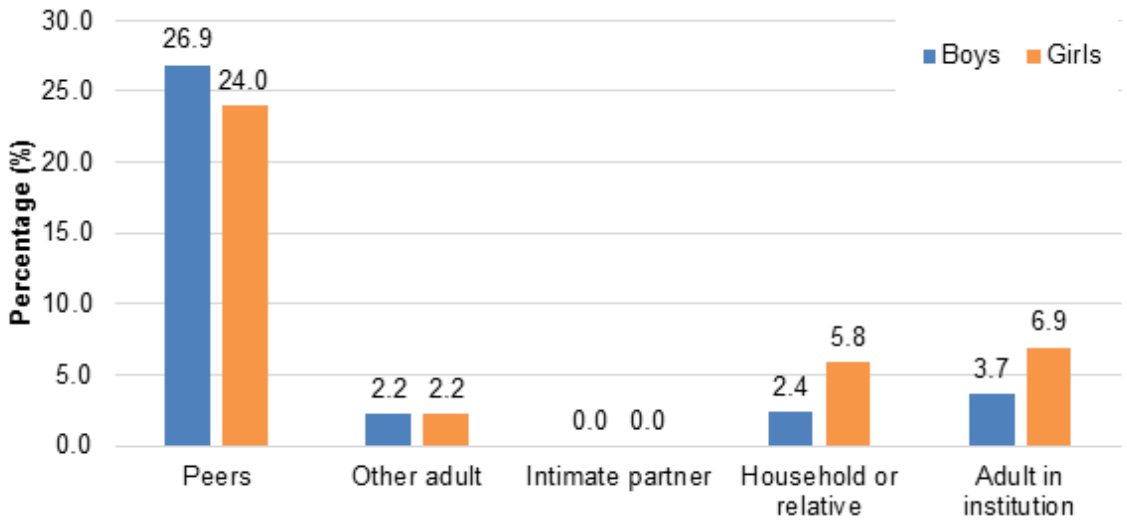
and, to a lesser extent, girls rag boys. Shy girls are at special risk of ragging by boys because they do not voice their opinions forcibly. Girls and boys are teased by other children because of their physical appearance, especially their weight and skin colour, for living with a single parent or for not having parents at all. 'Down looking' is a particular form of teasing whereby poor girls and boys are made fun of for their torn *kiras* (traditional dress worn by females) and *ghos* (traditional dress worn by males) or for their lack of food. According to both girls and boys, 'down looking' leads to poor children feeling isolated within their peer group.

At home, according to the study's overall findings, it is largely parents, step-parents and adult caregivers who commit emotional violence against children. Common forms of emotional violence include children witnessing verbal abuse and physical fighting between their parents or step-parents; differentiation between siblings on the basis of academic ability, sex or whether they are biological children or stepchildren; and 'a lack of love', defined as parents not spending enough time with their children, not listening or understanding their feelings or sending them away to boarding school. Children experience the absence of affection and care from their parents as harmful to their emotional well-being. Within the rubric of 'lack of love', younger and older children focus largely on the lack of time parents spend with them. In the focus group discussions and testimonies, girls and boys described many situations in which they want more time with their parents, including cooking and eating meals, doing homework and trying to solve problems at school or with friends.

In schools, girls and boys are frequently scolded, threatened or publically shamed by their teachers, principals, wardens or matrons. In the focus group discussions and testimonies, girls and boys reported experiencing differentiation by teachers according to their looks, academic ability, family wealth or association with important people. Some teachers differentiate between students according to caste. Child monks and nuns reported being scolded, threatened and humiliated by their teachers and *kudrung* for committing offences or not succeeding academically. Many child monks and nuns miss their families profoundly and are distressed when they cannot visit their home town or village regularly.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, according to the national survey findings, boys and young men were intimidated or threatened only by male peers; for example, 16 per cent of boys were intimidated by male peers (16%), while a smaller proportion were intimidated by female peers (1.7%). Girls and young women were intimidated or threatened by both male and female peers: nearly 8 per cent (7.9%) of girls and young women were intimidated by female peers (7.9%), while more than 4 per cent were intimidated by male peers (4.5%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by perpetrator of emotional violence



1.5 Structural violence

To determine what in the country's context constitutes violence against children, both children and adults were given an opportunity to express their experiences of and opinions about violence in the focus groups discussions, interviews and testimonies. Through the incremental phases of dialogue and investigation, a notion of the problem—as perceived by the people—gradually emerged. Beyond the parameters of physical, sexual and emotional violence, both children and adults spoke about *structural* violence. They articulated not only how socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and discrimination, rendered children vulnerable to violence, but they thought that these factors represented a form of structural (or institutionalized) violence.

The most significant form of structural violence is poverty. Parents who are unable to provide for their family's basic needs often require their children to work outside the home, even from a young age. Children from poor families may also work all day alongside their parents, thereby ensuring their family's survival. Working full-time means that children forego their education, which limits their futures, including their employment opportunities as adults.

The study participants considered discrimination as another form of structural violence, including against children who do not have 'census' (official citizenship) as a result of their father's name not officially registered at their birth. This can result in difficulties with certain forms of employment as adults. Children reported the emotional suffering and discrimination they experience as a result of not having a father, especially if they live with extended family members.

2. Drivers of violence against children

Children and adults were asked about the drivers of violence, children's vulnerability and the risk factors that increase the likelihood that girls and boys will experience violence. The stand-out findings presented here largely emanate from the Phase 2 qualitative study in relation to intrafamilial violence and do not explain the reasons for the very high levels of peer violence that characterize the Phase 3 national survey results. Further analysis of these findings is provided in the report conclusions.

Alcohol misuse: Alcohol misuse by parents, step-parents and caregivers is considered to be one of the most significant direct triggers of violence against children, as well as generally increasing children's vulnerability to violence. Domestic violence between parents or step-parents causes emotional harm to children and results in physical harm if children, especially boys, intervene to try and protect their mothers. A parent or step-parent who drinks regularly might spend the household income on alcohol rather than on basic needs, such as food. Some adults' alcohol addiction is severe enough that they are unable to work and, as a result, children quit school to provide their family with an income. Likewise, drug abuse by children causes them to engage in violent behaviour and increases their vulnerability to abuse and violence.

> *"I hate my father because he left me when I was in my mother's womb. He divorced my mother when I was not even born. I don't know who my father is. Many children do not have a father.... I stay with my mother's sister and she treats me worse than her own children. All this makes me frustrated and I beat the wall, but it does not respond."* **Girl, age 8–12 years**

Economic status: As described by the study's participants, poverty is the broader socioeconomic context in which many children experience violence, as well as exacerbating other causal factors. Parents dealing with multiple stress factors become short-tempered and vent their frustrations on their children through beatings and scolding. While children in wealthier families are also vulnerable to intrafamilial violence, poor parents often have to work long hours or multiple jobs, resulting in their children not being adequately supervised or feeling unloved, a particularly important form of emotional violence cited by both girls and boys. Poverty can result in children quitting school and working to contribute to family income.

Social norms and traditional practices: Violence against children is prompted by traditional beliefs and practices—from the belief in karma and the acceptance of 'light beating' as an appropriate means of disciplining a child to the cultural practice of night hunting. Adults also have certain social expectations of children, primarily to be 'good' and 'well mannered', and will resort to harsh physical discipline measures and verbal harassment when these expectations are not met. The study participants thought that the cyclical nature of violence means that parents who experienced physical, emotional or sexual harm as children are more likely to use violence against their own sons and daughters.

"Karma, which is 'the situation of present life, whether it is good or bad is caused by your deeds in the past life' is strongly believed in Buddhist religion. An example would be if a boy abuses or does some harm or injury to a girl in this life, then the boy will face the same deed in the next life from a boy. This is also called 'lay jum drey', which means 'cause due to ones deeds in the past life'. If a teacher beats a child in this life, that child will beat another one in the next life. This is sort of a cycle that goes on endlessly." **Child monk, aged 13–17 years**

Divorce: According to the study participants, divorce is one the most significant risk factors associated with violence because it leads to the restructuring of families and the increased likelihood that children will live with single parents, step-parents or extended family members. Divorced or single parents are often financially strained and sometimes use violence against their children out of frustration. Boys and girls reported that divorced or single parents may resort to employment in several jobs to sustain their family income, leaving children without adequate supervision and at increased risk of violence. After divorce, parents often remarry. Both children and adults referenced girls and boys who live with a step-parent as being at increased risk of physical, emotional and sexual violence. According to the study participants, step-parents often show 'partiality' or favouritism for their biological children over their stepchildren and may perceive stepchildren as an additional financial burden. This can result in physical or emotional violence towards a stepchild.

Extended family care: It is quite common for children to live with extended family members, especially an aunt or uncle or older sister and her husband, in order to attend school or because these family members are doing well financially. Many children in these circumstances reported being at increased risk of physical, emotional and sexual violence. In particular, study participants described cases of girls who were sexually harassed or raped by a brother-in-law. The response of the girls' families to these instances of sexual violence was complicated because a brother-in-law might often be an important income earner, and prosecution or imprisonment would result in additional economic hardship for the extended family.

Disability or non-academic children: Not understanding their lessons or being unable to complete their homework frequently led to children being beaten, scolded or humiliated by their teacher and sometimes their school principal. According to school counsellors, teachers sometimes feel frustrated and think they can force students to perform better by punishing them. Both girls and boys with physical and mental disabilities are considered to be at increased risk of all forms of violence because they are often unable to physically defend themselves or verbally protest against the violence. Civil society organization representatives working for the welfare of disabled children reported that these children are frequently locked in a room with little or no care until their parents return from work in the evening. Girls with mental disabilities are considered at particular risk of sexual violence.

3. How families and communities prevent and respond to violence against children

3.1 Preventing violence

An important rationale for this study was to better understand what helps to prevent or respond to violence against children, especially in light of the drivers and risk factors identified. On the effectiveness of various prevention measures, however, there was not always consensus among the study participants.

Laws and policies: Knowing that child protection laws exist has apparently deterred some adults from committing violence, even without them knowing the details of these laws. However, the legislation, such as the Child Care and Protection Act does not seem to have significantly transformed attitudes towards violence. Parents expressed their fear of official penalties for acts of violence but did not talk about the negative impact of violence on their children. For example, adult men feared punishment for night hunting but did not appear to think that this kind of sexual activity with girls was problematic. In 2008, the Ministry of Education, during its 11th Annual Education Conference, passed a resolution to reinforce the ban on corporal punishment and issued a guide for the management of school discipline in 2011. While these initiatives have helped reduce corporal punishment in schools, they need to be further reviewed and strengthened across the country.

Self-regulation: Many of the study participants, especially children, cited informal behaviours and practices as the most effective means of preventing violence. These include self-regulating behaviours that result in 'good children' and 'good parents'. Being a good child involves being well mannered, respectful of adults and working hard at school. Other preventive self-regulating behaviours for older children are independence and contributing to family income through paid work. Not taking drugs is an important prevention strategy for older boys, while older girls said they prevent sexual violence by not going alone to markets and not dressing "fancy".

> *"Well educated and clever children are least likely to face violence. They are smart and behave well. This automatically acts as a mechanism that protects them from violence…. Hardworking children get boomed with luck. They are appreciated by all and succeed in everything."*
>
> **Boy, aged 13–17 years**

Good parenting: According to the study participants, 'good' parents are married and living together. They act lovingly towards and spend time with their children. Most importantly, they do not drink alcohol. Good parents also practise family planning that results in small-sized families. Both adults and children think that violence can be prevented when parents give 'good advice' and children heed that advice. According to both girls and boys, mothers advise their children when to stay away from their fathers to escape beatings. They also tell their daughters which men in the community to avoid, thereby reducing the likelihood of sexual violence. Being educated also helps teachers and parents to understand the negative impact of violence on children and to use alternative discipline methods.

"[There is] lots of advice giving. Everyone gives advice – grandmother, grandfather, parents."
Nomadic male youth

"Parents tell children 'don't go out at night. 'Latch the door properly.' 'Don't roam at night."
Girl, aged 13–17 years

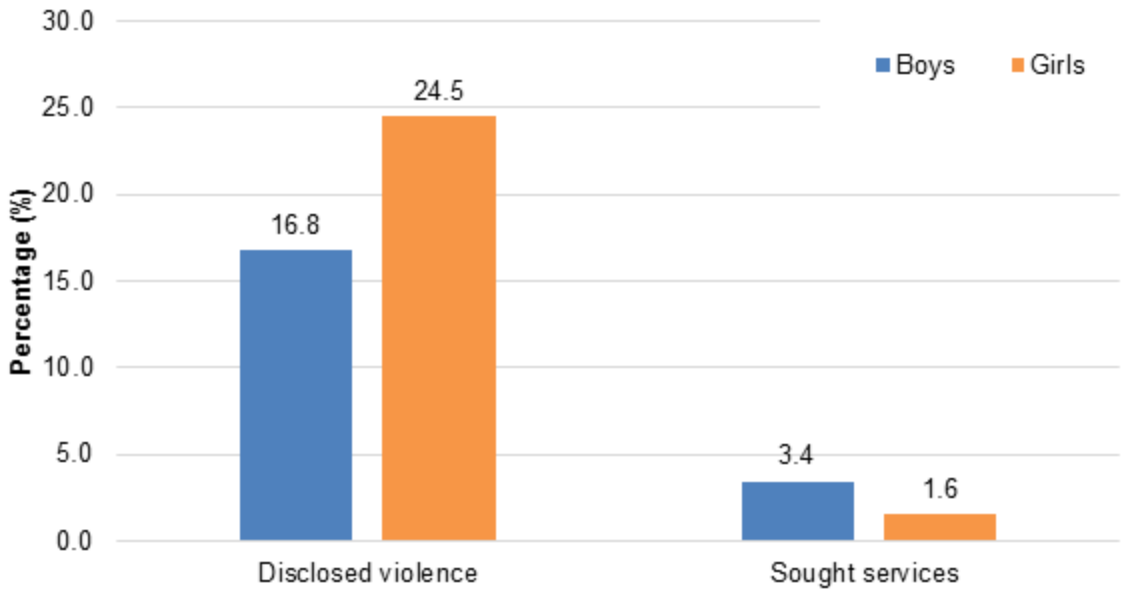
Buddhism: The majority of adults do not think Buddhist beliefs help protect children from violence. This is in contrast with monks and nuns, who think that Buddhism has an important role in preventing violence.

3.2 Responses to violence

The research sought to understand the response to violence against girls and boys, whether from friends and peers, families and communities, civil society organizations or government agencies. The Phase 3 national survey found that:

- Of those children who experienced sexual violence and harassment, more than 1 in 10 (13.5% of boys, 15.4% of girls) told someone about it, the vast majority telling their peers. A greater proportion of girls (6%) than boys (2%) told family members or relatives. No cases of sexual violence and/or sexual harassment were reported to child protection or health services for this age group.
- Of those children who reported experiencing physical violence, more girls (24.5%) than boys (16.8%) told someone about it. Girls primarily disclosed the violence to their peers (15.3%) and their family members (12.7%). Of the few boys who reported physical violence, most told friends in their peer group (10%), with a smaller proportion disclosing to members of their household or relatives (6.8%) (Figures 14, 15 and 16). According to the findings from all three phases of research, children almost exclusively rely on their peers or, to a lesser extent, household and family members, for the support they need.

Figure 14: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by pattern of disclosure after physical violence and help-seeking behaviour



Friends and peers: Friends seem to be the most important source of emotional support for children. In particular, friends help girls and boys find strategies to prevent violence from reoccurring. For example, boys ask their friends how to avoid bullies at school. In the discussion groups, girls said they would turn to their friends instead of their parents for help in dealing with sexual harassment or rape. Older girls working as *drayang* dancers mentioned other dancers as their main source of support. For girls and boys living in a boarding school, help is usually sought from the group of children from their own village with whom they live, eat and play.

Figure 15: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by people or agency to whom they disclose or report physical violence

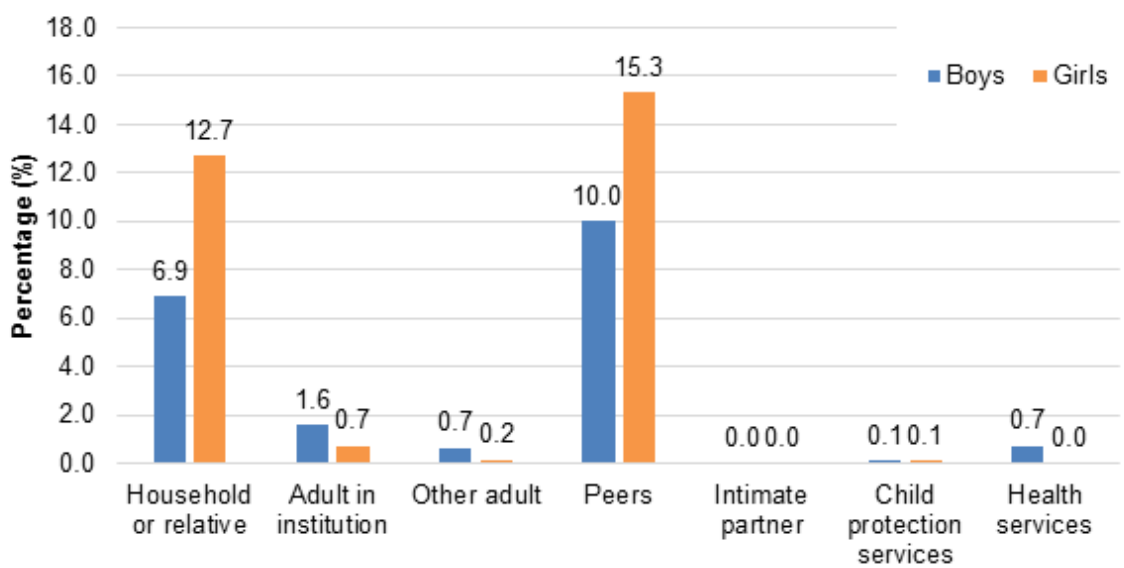
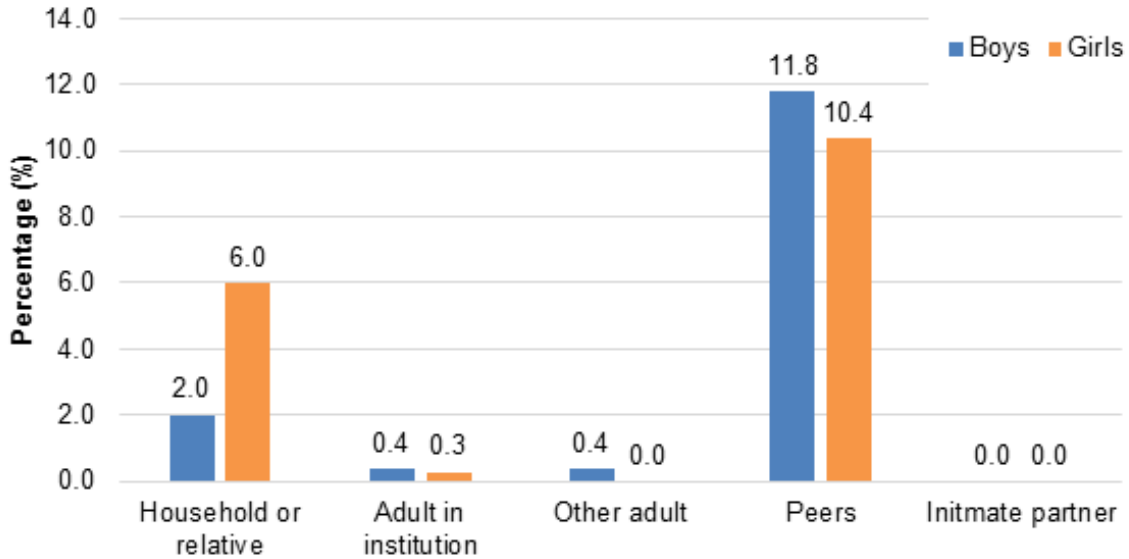


Figure 16: Boys and girls aged 13–17 years, by reporting of sexual violence and harassment



Families: Although peers are by far the most important source of support to children, families also help resolve cases of violence against girls and boys. Family support for children experiencing violence comes primarily from immediate family members, especially mothers and fathers, and from extended family members, including grandparents and aunts. Children reported that they sometimes stay at their grandparents' home when their parents verbally or physically fight with each other. Intrafamilial support often includes advice giving, emotional comfort and efforts to limit or stop the violence altogether. Only infrequently do families involve external authorities, such as the police or local leaders, in resolving violence.

Neighbours: Neighbours generally do not get involved in cases of violence within the home because it is considered a private family matter. However, adult neighbours are more likely to intervene in the case of sexual violence against a child, especially ongoing sexual violence, such as incest. This is because sexual violence is considered unacceptable by most adults. During the focus group discussions, adult men and women stated that they would discuss sexual violence against a child with the parents or report to the police.

Community: At the community level, there are no standard practices or processes for dealing with violence against children. Local government leaders—the *tshogpa* and *gup*—do not appear to be routinely consulted about cases of violence against girls and boys, although individual leaders may decide to help. And although children rarely disclose violence to external actors, community members (such as RENEW volunteers, *tshogpas*, police officers, school counsellors and teachers) may try to help individual children by organizing clothes, shelter, food and other material resources and mediating with parents and families. Their efforts are largely dealt with using personal judgement and on a case-by-case basis, without clear processes and structures within their own organizations.

RENEW volunteers and other individuals from the community who intervene to help children experiencing violence often involve a child's family in finding a local solution. It appears that the best interests of an individual child sometimes determine the course of action while, at other times, broader family well-being is the priority. For example, the police may not be contacted in a case of sexual violence if the perpetrator of the violence is the main income earner for the family. Instead, alternative living arrangements may be made and the child is removed from the unsafe environment.

> *"Few cases come to us for help. That may be because there are no rules or system stating that if you are experiencing violence, you should go to the community leaders. Maybe the people are not sure where to go?"* **Tshogpa**
>
> *"So far, we haven't dealt with cases of violence against children. We don't even know whether it is our responsibility or not, but if we received the order from higher authority, then we would deal with it."* **Local leader (in a group discussion with magmi and tshogpas)**

Buddhist leaders: Despite the profoundly Buddhist nature of much of the country, adults and children do not seek help from monks or nuns in monasteries or nunneries. Monks and nuns offer important spiritual guidance to communities and perform sacred Buddhist rituals in temples and family homes on a regular basis. However, monks and nuns do not have a role in resolving problems, such as violence in the family or community.

Formal authorities: Few children report to the formal child protection services (NCWC, RENEW or other civil society volunteer), adults in institutions or schools, including the responsible authority in the monastery or nunnery or law enforcement, such as the police or lawyers. This finding is borne out by the number of cases of violence against children younger than 18 that were reported to the Royal Bhutan Police in 2015: Approximately 25 cases of physical violence (battery) and 30 cases of rape and other sexual abuses were reported nationwide.

Although the national survey revealed some slight variations, depending upon the nature of the violence suffered (physical, sexual or emotional), children gave similar reasons for not seeking help:

- they did not feel the need to;
- they did not consider it to be a problem;
- they felt embarrassed for themselves or felt it would embarrass or shame their family; or
- boys were afraid of getting into trouble.

4. The ways government, civil society organizations and monasteries prevent and respond to violence against children

The study sought to document the kinds of formal measures that the Government, civil society and monasteries have taken to ensure the protection of children. These were explored in depth in the Phase 1 literature review and only a snapshot is provided here.

4.1 Government

Although the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2008–2013), published by the Gross National Happiness Commission, did not directly refer to child protection or violence against children, it led to a landmark achievement with the completion of a mapping and assessment of the child protection system and the development of a National Plan of Action for Child Protection in Bhutan, 2012".[13] The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2013–2018) continues that commitment to children, stressing the importance of implementing the action plan "to ensure systematic and effective prevention and response to child protection issues", thereby raising the importance of child protection as part of the national development agenda.[14]

The legal framework: The Government has enacted legislation to address violence against individuals, including the Child Care and Protection Act, 2011, the Child Adoption Act 2012 and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, 2013. Various Government and civil society organizations have been raising awareness on the Acts, with particular focus on the rural areas. It is envisaged that with the provision of dedicated financial and human resources comprehensive prevention and response services for vulnerable families and children will be in place. For example, the Act envisions the recruitment of Child Welfare Officers/Protection Officers who are trained before being assigned to communities. At present, there is some confusion among local leaders and teachers about the status and provisions of different laws and policies. In a number of interviews, teachers stated that they did not know whether or not the policy banning corporal punishment in schools was reaffirmed in the Child Care and Protection Act. As stated by many government officials during the research, without both clarity of strategy and tangible, well-resourced support services for families and children, the provisions of the legal framework cannot be achieved.

> *"There are no services so the Child Care and Protection Act is not implementable."*
>
> **Senior government official**

The National Commission for Women and Children: Established in 2004, the mandate of the NCWC is to serve as the national mechanism for coordinating, monitoring and advocating for activities related to women's and children's rights and for submitting reports to treaty bodies and monitoring the implementation of regional and international conventions.[15] Its secretariat has a technical division

[13] Gross National Happiness Commission, 2013.
[14] ibid.
[15] National Commission for Women and Children and UNICEF, 2012.

focused exclusively on children, although it does not provide direct services. It is perhaps for this reason that the majority of children and adults in the study were unfamiliar with the role of NCWC.

The NCWC has mechanisms to receive complaints or reports relating to rights abuses and to take action on violations against women and children.[16] The NCWC is the competent authority for enforcing the three Acts relating to child care and protection, adoption and domestic violence. As such, with the approval of the Rules of Regulations of the three Acts in 2015, the establishment of a sustainable child care and protection system is underway.

> *"There is no child welfare system… the health sector has specialists like paediatricians. We need a system."* **District health officer**

Ministry of Education: The most recognized policy to address violence against children is the Ministry of Education's ban on corporal punishment in schools, even though the study's findings demonstrate that the ban has yet to be uniformly implemented across the country. As a result of this ban, parents can now sue a teacher or principal for "severely harming" their child.[17] According to Ministry of Education officials, there are approximately one or two lawsuits a year.[18] These lawsuits often result in fines, as was the case of a principal who ruptured a child's eardrum. In more severe cases of corporal punishment or sexual violence, lawsuits have resulted in teachers or principals losing their jobs.

There are currently 76 counsellors at middle secondary and higher secondary schools and 147 at primary schools across the country. School counsellors are professionally trained at the teacher's college in Samtse and receive additional training after school placement.[19] Other schools have teacher counsellors who have regular teaching jobs but work part time in a counselling capacity. Although they had received some training, teacher counsellors told the researchers during focus group discussions that they generally feel unsupported by the school administrators. They would like more of their time dedicated to proactively supporting children's emotional needs instead of dealing only with students referred to them for behavioural problems. Some schools also have a network of peer counsellors, for which students receive informal training by the school counsellor on how to provide emotional support to other young people.

> *"Our counsellors can identify children who have experienced violence. We don't have a systematic process, but they can help the child find a better environment. Either relocating schools or homes or placing in a boarding school."* **Ministry of Education official**

[16] Save the Children, 2010.
[17] It is however unclear how this policy has enabled parents to sue in courts, given that the ban on corporal punishment has not been included in the Penal Code to date.
[18] The Penal Code and the Child Care and Protection Act can be applied for charges of battery, abuse or sexual offence.
[19] For example, the Department of Youth Services recently organized a two-day training course for teachers on parent education that was funded by UNICEF.

Royal Bhutan Police: The Royal Bhutan Police has established a Women and Child Protection Division at Thimphu; three Women and Child Protection Units (in Thimphu, Phuentsholing and Paro); and Women and Child Protection Desks in eight police stations (in Wangdue, Samdrup Jongkhar, Trashigang, Gelephu, Mongar, Tsirang, Trongsa and Samtse). Their primary responsibility is to investigate criminal acts of violence against women and children. Police officers are undergoing training on dealing with cases related to women and children and efforts are underway to institutionalize such training in the police training curriculum.

Perhaps because of the concerted efforts by the Royal Bhutan Police to promote child-friendly community initiatives, children asserted that in the case of severe physical or sexual violence by strangers, they would seek help from the police. Groups of older boys from rural villages now living in towns (to attend school or work) reported that they have asked the police for help in resolving physical fights with other groups of boys, especially at *drayangs*. Except for a few older boys in one rural community who threatened their grandfathers with calling the police on the 113 helpline if they were beaten, none of the children in the research study had ever called this helpline.

4.2 Civil society organizations

Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW): The organization's official mandate is to support the victims of domestic violence. In practice, RENEW primarily serves women but also, to a lesser extent, girls, with a large network of volunteers in communities in every district. Both adults and children in urban and rural areas said they are aware of the support services that RENEW provides to victims of domestic violence. Beyond this, however, and in the absence of an organization specifically focused on children and visibly working in communities, RENEW is considered the best option for girls and boys experiencing violence. A focal point for child protection was appointed in 2016, based in Thimphu.

Each of the RENEW district coordinators has created a committee of approximately 20–30 volunteers, known as the Community-Based Support System (CBSS). According to one coordinator, it is important to strategically pick the core members of the CBSS from different parts of society, such as the police, the business community, teachers and midwives. This helps the RENEW coordinator build informal links with key institutions in the community. In 2014, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck directed the Multi-Sectoral Task Force, a formal structure in each district with representatives from every government department, to work more closely with the CBSS. A RENEW volunteer in one district reported that recent meetings of the Task Force and core members of the CBSS involved follow-up discussion of domestic violence cases. In the same district, the Task Force and CBSS jointly host World AIDS Day activities, including presentations by a health officer on HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and by a RENEW volunteer on domestic violence against women.

Despite their primary focus on supporting women, RENEW provides a few services to children. RENEW offers housing at their Gawailing Happy Home shelter near Thimphu to girls and boys who have been abandoned or who have left their home due to a court order. 17 boys and girls live at the RENEW shelter, either full time or during their holidays from boarding school.

Youth drop-in centres: The Bhutan Youth Development Fund runs youth drop-in centres in several towns. These centres host youth addiction support groups in which older girls and boys (aged 15–17) can participate. Although addiction is the primary topic in these support groups, given the prevalence of violence in the lives of many youth addicts, discussions on violence are interwoven into many of the group sessions.

Voluntary counselling and testing on HIV and sexually transmitted infections: The Health Information and Service Centre (HISC) is a voluntary counselling and testing facility established under the Ministry of Health. It provides testing and information dissemination on HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. It also provides general support to sex workers and other vulnerable persons. According to HISC staff, many of its clients are sex workers, and approximately half of the girls are younger than 18. HISC staff regularly visit local *drayangs*, karaoke bars, discos and snooker venues to discreetly seek out sex workers and offer them support.

4.3 Monasteries

Child Care and Protection Office of the *Dratshang*: The Child Care and Protection Office of the *Dratshang* (the Commission for the Monastic Affairs) has responsibility to increase awareness of children's rights, to promote alternative forms of discipline and to provide protection for child monks and nuns as the need arises. The Eleven Expert Committee that includes monks from public and private religious institutions was established to help with this sensitization work around children's welfare and protection.

When a case of violence is disclosed, it is usually dealt with internally by the Chief Abbot. There is no referral to the police or external agencies, such as the judiciary. Monastic institutions have the authority to deal with their own internal affairs. The Child Care and Protection Office established under the *Dratshang* will become involved if justice is not considered to have been done, but in practice it receives few reports. Many adult monks, nuns and *kudrung* participating in the study did not know about the Child Care and Protection Office, although several knew the monk responsible for the unit.

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PART 5: Conclusions

While part 4 provides an integrated summary of the central findings that emerged from the three-phase research agenda on violence against children in Bhutan, Part 5 analyses the complex issues that perpetuate and sometimes legitimize the different manifestations of violence. It explores the implications of the study's findings to frame the recommendations for better protecting children from all forms of violence.

To bring some perspective to the challenges of violence, it is pertinent to reflect upon the unequivocal statements of children about their wishes and expectations for a good childhood. During the qualitative study and in recognition of the country's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness,[20] children were asked:

What makes girls and boys happy?

Girls and boys of all ages in urban and rural settings were clear that their happiness is fundamentally linked to the well-being of their family, their experiences at school, their ability to contribute to others' happiness and their own physical, emotional and social well-being.

> *"We are happy when our parents stay frank with each other and joke with each other."* **Girl, aged 13–17 years**
>
> *"We came here at a small age to the Dratshang and get to meet our parents only at a few occasions. So when we meet them, we feel so happy."* **Monk, aged 8–12 years**

Family harmony is important for children's happiness.. As the study participants explained, when boys and girls live with their parents and spend time together, children feel happy. Boys and girls like it when their parents do not fight, when they do not hit or scold their children and when children are encouraged and feel that their opinions are respected and listened to.

Children also said that their happiness is determined by their experiences at school. Having supportive teachers, understanding their schoolwork and doing well academically are important to boys and girls. Some expressed sheer joy associated with being able to attend school in the first place.

> *"People think that money brings happiness but money does not always bring happiness. Being kind to [the] poor and spending time with family brings happiness. Happiness always comes to us when we see others happy."* **Boy, aged 8–12 years**

[20] The philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) is central to the national development process in Bhutan; the GNH index is used to review and evaluate new laws, policies and programmes. The four pillars of the philosophy are sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development; preservation and promotion of cultural and spiritual heritage; conservation of the environment; and good governance.

Feeling like a valued member of the family and community is especially important to children's happiness. Being happy is not about how much money or things they owned, rather, it was about doing good things, like helping parents with agricultural work, giving money to poor people in the community or rescuing animals. Older girls and boys said they are especially happy when they can work, even temporarily during school holidays, and contribute financially to their family's income. Several girls and boys asserted how content they are with what they have. This philosophical commitment to personal satisfaction and happiness in the present is pronounced and influences boys' and girls' interactions with one another, their families and community.

> *"We are happy when playing games and eating chicken meat at [boarding] school in Merak."* **Nomadic child, aged 6–12 years**
>
> *"When we do Rimdo, it makes us happy since we can make all happy, can cure people from illness."* **Monk, aged 10–13 years**

Finally, children's happiness is dependent on their physical, emotional and social well-being. Children like to be physically healthy and strong and appreciate having good food to eat. They also enjoy spending time in nature and engaging in physical activity, such as archery, football, volleyball, hiking and swimming. Be it spending time with friends and hosting guests, celebrating *tshechus*, singing or dancing on national days or attending religious rituals, boys and girls derive great pleasure from their social relationships and engagement in the religious and cultural lives of their communities.

Understanding children's own conceptions of happiness is crucial to framing their experience of violence in all its forms and hence a core component of this study. In the debates and discussions over the general findings of this research, the expressed desire of children to live in happy, non-violent families and communities should be at the forefront.

What do the findings of the three phases of research tell us? What are the implications for the development of a national child protection system?

Conclusion 1: Notions of violence against children in the country are shaped by the cultural and contextual definitions attributed to it.

The study on violence against children sought to explore the spectrum of childhood experiences and prompt reflective deliberation about how to address this inherently complex and evolving issue. At first glance, the findings reveal that violence against children is a common and entrenched phenomenon, with violence (especially physical) often beginning before adolescence. However, the overall picture is nuanced and complex, with violence being perpetrated against children for a wide spectrum of reasons and manifesting in myriad of ways.

Although the research was guided by the definition of violence as embraced in the 2006 UN Study, the methodology aimed to elicit a more contextualized understanding of violence through discussion with a range of participants across the country, including children, young people, parents and caregivers, community leaders, spiritual leaders, civil society actors and government officials.

Through those incremental phases of dialogue and investigation, a notion of what constitutes violence against children — as perceived by the people — gradually emerged. The definitions transcend the abusive and exploitive forms of violence that might be expected. For example, the findings reveal that children, especially girls, feel a keen sense of victimization when their friends and peers are unkind towards them or do not make them feel loved. In the focus group discussions, interviews and testimonies, both children and adults spoke about *structural* violence. They articulated not only how socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and discrimination, rendered children vulnerable to violence but thought these factors also represented a form of structural violence.

Throughout the study, participants consistently revealed that their definition of violence was guided by a strong sense of injustice. That corporal punishment is ostensibly meted out to educate and socialize a child explains why, for example, children and adults justify and often accept harsh physical discipline.

Beyond this, the study reveals the need for policymakers to set aside some of their own assumptions and reflect upon the evidence generated to tackle the less visible types of violence as well as new emerging issues. For example, the survey findings demonstrate that exposure to pornography is widespread and accessible to pre-teenage children, sexual violence is equally perpetrated against boys and girls, and peer-to-peer violence is a common feature of children's lives. These issues have not previously been examined by research, and an open dialogue about these issues is now warranted so that interventions and services for children can be prioritized and adapted to meet their real needs.

Conclusion 2: Violence against children is not only a protection issue but is central to children's well-being and development

The overall approach currently being taken by both the Government and civil society partners to address violence against children is an appropriate one. As rightly defined in the National Plan of Action for Child Protection, the issue of violence needs to be construed broadly in terms of child well-being, development and protection rather than through a narrow lens of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The national study was designed to capture information about the types of violence experienced by children. However, of equal relevance for policymakers and agencies working for the well-being and protection of children is the context in which these types of violence are perpetrated. The study demonstrates that although there are cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation, much violence takes place in the context of corporal punishment and discipline as well as peer-to-peer bullying and harassment. It is also evident that the different typologies of violence are not mutually exclusive, and the boundaries between them are often blurred and complex.

The overall study findings demonstrate the need to reflect and think creatively about ways to address the types of issues that children and young people experience as they are growing up today. The kind of child protection system that is envisaged should reinforce current initiatives to develop both

prevention and response services for children who are vulnerable to the most abusive and harmful forms of violence (such as intrafamilial sexual abuse, severe physical violence and exploitation). Similarly, the study highlights the need to reassess the approach to entrenched social norms that, despite recent efforts to ban such practices, perpetuate harsh corporal punishment in homes and education institutions.

At the same time, the national strategy provides an opportunity to tackle the other issues that have been shown to significantly affect the broader well-being and development of children. Most notably, the study reveals the importance of understanding what drives children to act violently towards their siblings, friends and schoolmates. Presumably, these negative patterns of behaviours learned in childhood are perpetuated generationally and are reinforced by a degree of sexism and gender inequality that heightens the experience of violence for girls and young women.

Conclusion 3: Children's experience of violence is often defined by their sex

The findings indicate that types of violence against children—in all its forms—are determined by a range of factors. By far, the most important finding is that violence is very much a gendered experience. Although there is not huge disparity between males' and females' experiences of physical violence (presumably corporal punishment), the experience of sexual and emotional violence for girls and young women is markedly different. Girls and young women experience verbal sexual harassment on a regular basis and far more so in public spaces (in the streets and on public transport) from strangers. This kind of chauvinistic and sexist behaviour is considered offensive and demeaning. The survey reveals that girls are more likely to suffer sexual violence in their homes at the hands of parents and relatives. The findings also show that in all categories, violence is disproportionately perpetrated against girls and young women by boys and young men, as is corporal punishment by male teachers.

The levels of sexual and emotional violence perpetrated by boys against other boys are surprisingly high. Although adults in institutions (schools, monasteries and boarding schools) were found to be the main perpetrators of physical violence in the national survey, the findings also showed that the vast majority of sexual and emotional violence was inflicted by peers, presumably other children of approximately the same age or a little older and mostly at school. Schools with boarding facilities are associated with a particularly high incidence of male-to-male sexual violence, and attention should be given to this phenomenon, especially as new central schools are established across the country. This said, the nature of and context in which sexual violence occurs among boys needs to be better understood if appropriate measures are to be created.

The national survey explored the extent to which wealth dictates the type of violence that children and young people experience but found that this was not a significant factor in determining exposure to violence. There is some correlation between wealth and access to the online world, reflected in the elevated numbers of young men watching pornography. Similarly, there is little indication that those living in rural areas are any more exposed to violence than their urban counterparts, except that children seem to be exposed to physical violence at a younger age in rural locations. However, it

does appear that evolving social norms and patterns of behaviour pertaining to, for example, sexual relations, access to pornography, or corporal punishment are permeating to rural and remote areas.

Conclusion 4: Corporal punishment remains common in homes and schools

The levels of physical violence found through the study are in large part attributable to the persistence of harsh disciplinary measures meted out to children and young people. Disciplinary practices are deep rooted, and punishment is generally applied to provide children the best opportunity to thrive in their families, communities and society more widely. Corporal punishment is not generally intended to cause harm or injury to a child but is employed as a means to ensure children learn and abide by societal norms. In recent years, there have been noteworthy initiatives to end corporal punishment in all settings, including schools, monastic institutions and in homes. It is hoped that these measures have already started to take effect, and it is anticipated that the prevalence of corporal punishment among the next generation of children will be significantly reduced as a result.

In recent years, concerns have been raised about the lack of decorum and discipline of students in schools. The Ministry of Education developed guidelines for education professionals to achieve a balance between zero tolerance for children's lack of discipline while finding alternative punitive measures that cause no harm. Despite the ban on corporal punishment in schools and the prohibitions on degrading physical punishment in Section 214 of the Child Care and Protection Act 2011, the most pressing issue to monitor is corporal punishment by teachers, especially male teachers, in day schools across the country.

By all accounts, it appears that corporal punishment in boarding schools is used less frequently, while physical punishment in monasteries is applied reluctantly and, at times, poses a considerable moral dilemma for the monks. Corporal punishment is still a feature of many children's home lives, with parents and family members using objects to beat children and forcing them to undertake heavy endurance tasks to correct their behaviour, often before they reach adolescence.

The research does not fully explain why recent efforts to reduce harsh disciplinary measures have not had the intended impact. It is evident that social norms legitimize and perpetuate corporal punishment. Indeed, children often consider corporal punishment as justified and fair if they have not complied with the rules, and they clearly understand the difference between discipline they consider proportionate and the kind of violence that is meted out by a drunk or angry parent or other adult. Children across the country express a positive sense of responsibility and duty to behave. For this reason they often assume responsibility for the corporal punishment they receive and do not disclose or report to other adults or authorities. Nonetheless, children suffer injuries as a result of corporal punishment, whether bruises and swelling or more serious wounds from being beaten by objects, such as *teycha* or canes, having their knuckles rapped or ears pulled or being made to stand for a long time in the sun. Regardless of the intention to educate, the issue of corporal punishment is highly problematic and requires a considered and realistic strategy to reduce the incidence of children experiencing such violence.

Conclusion 5: Children are harmed by people who have responsibility to care for them, including their family

Much of the physical violence perpetrated against children by parents and family members seems to be inflicted as a disciplinary or punitive measure. It is evident, however, that some children and young people experience physical, sexual and emotional violence intended to harm or hurt them, often perpetrated in the context of an abusive family relationship. These children are defined as *children in difficult circumstances* under Section 59 of the Child Care and Protection Act. Because intrafamilial violence occurs at home, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which physical violence suffered behind closed doors is committed within the context of deliberate harm or as a means of disciplining, educating, socializing or instructing a child. The reality is that both scenarios are highly likely; children who are punched, kicked and/or verbally insulted and humiliated at home indicates, by any measure, an intention to cause pain or harm to a child.

The perpetrators of physical violence at home are almost always known to the child (parents, adult caretakers, relatives) and in a position of authority and trust. In terms of sexual violence, girls appear more at risk than boys of sexual violence at home, with perpetrators primarily male family members, presumably fathers, stepfathers and brothers-in-law. Girls and young women also experience incidents of sexual violence at the hands of strangers who prey on them on public transport and in other public spaces.

Conclusion 6: Peer violence appears to be endemic and has a significant impact upon children's physical integrity and emotional well-being.

At every level, peers such as siblings, young relatives, friends, classmates and older children, are inflicting all types of violence against other children, both at school and at home. In terms of physical violence, this takes the form of fighting, punching, kicking and hitting. Once again, the context is important. Much of the violence may reflect 'normal' patterns of child or adolescent relationships, power dynamics and negotiation. On the other hand, it is evident that such violence also occurs in the context of severe bullying that leaves children physically hurt and emotionally traumatized. The study's findings suggest that younger children suffer physical violence at the hands of older peers and, depending upon the nature of the violence and the power dynamic between the children and young people, such actions may be inherently abusive, even criminal in nature. The finding that nearly 3 per cent of the children in the national survey had been stabbed or cut with a knife or sharp object (2.8%) raises questions about the context in which this act (potentially highly injurious and probably a crime) is perpetrated and by whom.

It is most worrying that peers are largely responsible for non-consensual sexual touching of both girls and boys. Although this behaviour may be perceived as a 'rite of passage' by adolescent boys, their actions can be classed as or verging on criminal sexual assault. The extent to which bullying falls into the broad categories of (i) deliberate (potentially criminal) sexual assault, (ii) extreme peer bullying

or (iii) tolerated social norms around sexual initiation is worth further exploration. The prevalence of sexual violence among boys and young men is especially surprising, and whether such acts are considered by adolescent boys to be violent or abusive is not clear; however, it is unwanted sexual touching and most often by older boys.

Beyond the more serious sexual violence that involves direct contact, there is a pervasive climate of sexual harassment whereby girls and boys experience the indignity of sexualized insult and language. The study reveals that children are highly attuned to the injustices of this verbal harassment as well as other perceived injustices, such as preferential discrimination, shaming and humiliation, especially when perpetrated against children who are vulnerable.

The philosophy of Gross National Happiness prioritizes psychosocial well-being. It is clear from the study's findings that this ambition is compromised when children are treated badly by their peers. Violence among and by young people is an urgent matter to be addressed so that future generations do not suffer the same levels of childhood violence.

Conclusion 7: Efforts to protect children from violence must address the structural causes of vulnerability

Throughout the study, children and young people articulated the links they perceived between the structural issues of poverty and discrimination and the kinds of violence affecting children. For example, children drew parallels between inherent social discrimination and the physical and emotional violence experienced by children on the basis of, for example, caste, birth outside marriage, lack of census or disability. Beyond the immediate consequences of this kind of bullying and harassment, the study reveals that poverty and social discrimination are perceived as creating real vulnerability in childhood. Not only do poverty and discrimination affect access to education and opportunity but they also enhance the risk of serious protection issues.[21] When parents are under financial pressure, the tension may lead to intra-familial violence, and children may be abandoned or neglected as parents try to make a living. In the worst-case scenario, children may be forced into labour and sexual exploitation to help the family survive. To prevent these child protection concerns, a far wider, multi-sector response involving the social protection, education, health and justice sectors will be required to effectively address discrimination, social exclusion and lack of opportunity in all its forms.

Conclusion 8: Access and exposure to digital pornography is an evolving issue to be tackled

The survey reveals, perhaps for the first time, the levels of exposure to pornography, in large part due to access to the internet and ownership of technologies, such as smart phones, computers and TV-VCR-DVDs. Fortunately, it does not appear that children are being forced or coerced into the making of pornographic material. In slight contrast to the findings of the qualitative study, it does not seem

[21] These scenarios were described during the Phase 2 qualitative study focus group discussions but were not reinforced by the Phase 3 national survey in which the vulnerability to violence was not markedly different across the wealth quintiles.

that the vast majority of children and young people are making videos or images of themselves naked or involved in sexual acts and sharing them online.

The finding that children are increasingly exposed to pornography before their teenage years is not unexpected. That they have been exposed to pornography signals that children and young people have more sexual awareness and are not as naïve as adults might like to believe. This finding raises a number of moral and practical dilemmas to reflect upon. For example, it probably means that adults (whether they are teachers, parents or counsellors) need to engage children on the issues of sex and sexuality so that they have a balanced understanding and appropriate initiation into the topic.

It is not clear to what extent children consider their exposure to pornography as violent. In many societies, with almost universal access to the cable television and the internet, discovering pornography (even as a pre-teen) may have become a part of 'normal' adolescence. It is essential that adults, especially welfare agencies, engage with these findings to learn whether exposure to digital pornography impacts the sexual behaviour that adolescent boys exhibit towards both their female and male peers. Finally, it is important to recognize the potential dangers that children and young people expose themselves to by searching for pornography, especially in a world in which sexual predators are omnipresent.

Conclusion 9: Children do not seek support and rarely receive assistance

The research highlights the reality that children and young people rarely disclose or report violence, even in the context of child abuse, to adults and authorities. The responses to the survey endorse the qualitative findings by showing that, for a multitude of reasons, children are reluctant to talk to parents and family members about personal issues, preferring to confide in friends.

The national survey did not consider the severity of physical violence or sexual touching, and it is not clear if children report it to adults in the most egregious of cases, such as rape. Throughout the study, children said that they did not feel the need to disclose violence to an adult or authority, or they felt too embarrassed. These statements can be interpreted in many ways, but throughout the study, a strong culture of self-blame among children emerged. Children often conceded that they deserve to be beaten when they misbehave. In the case of corporal punishment, one reason for not reporting is that the harm (such as bruising or redness) did not reach a threshold they considered abusive or that it is so commonplace that it is not considered extraordinary.

It is important to be realistic about the reasons why children and young people do or do not disclose sexual violence and harassment. Although the Child Care and Protection Act contains provisions pertaining to different forms of physical, sexual and emotional violence, as well as sexual harassment, it appears that only cases of physical battery and assault (such as physical violence that results in significant injury) and cases of child molestation and rape are ever reported to the police. Non-consensual sexual touching, verbal sexual harassment and corporal punishment seem to be considered by adults and children alike as an annoyance rather than a crime to be reported. Although children

may feel distressed, threatened or degraded by such violence, they perhaps feel that they have no choice but to tolerate many forms of the violence they experience.
Children also highlighted the reality that disclosing sexual abuse or extreme punishment by family members creates a risk that the family breadwinner might be sanctioned or removed from the household, bringing shame and retribution to the child who would probably be blamed. It is concerning that, despite the levels of forced sexual intercourse, so few cases appear to be reported to hospitals or social services.

As children frequently reiterated throughout the study, child welfare and protection services are unknown to them. This is not surprising, given the remoteness of many communities and the challenges for government and civil society agencies to reach out to vulnerable families or children in difficult circumstances. Although it may be more feasible today to address the issue of violence through initiatives in, for example, schools and monasteries, there is an urgent need to tailor a more effective, appropriate and accessible set of social services to address difficulties children and families confront in their own homes and communities.

Conclusion 10: Creative and tailored strategies will be required to tackle the issue of violence against children

The study's findings shine a light on both well-known and emerging issues that need attention. For example, the research highlights the need to address entrenched social norms that perpetuate harsh corporal punishment, despite recent efforts to ban such practices. Previous research studies focused on the ways in which and reasons why parents and caregivers treat their children neglectfully or abusively; but it is now time to also examine and deal with the factors that drive children to act violently towards their peers.

The current study's findings reveal a dedication by government agencies, civil society organizations and the general public to eliminating violence against children. The conclusions show that the drivers of violence need to be factored into the solutions, and a child protection system needs to be tailored to address priority issues. The current national strategy for child protection cannot begin to address the myriad of problems unearthed by the research, and it will be necessary to forge new partnerships and joint initiatives to address the causal factors that underpin the problems raised.

The study demonstrates the urgent need to reflect and think creatively about ways to address the kinds of issues that children and young people experience as they grow up today. Children and their experiences must be at the heart of this dialogue. Although the study did not thoroughly investigate the most egregious of child protection issues, such as sexual exploitation and child labour, it appears that the country does not experience the overwhelming numbers of abused, exploited, orphaned and other vulnerable children that can be found in other countries of the region. This provides the Government with an opportunity to craft a tailored, incremental and systemic approach to respond to the issues raised through the study.


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PART 6: Recommendations

The recommendations presented here build upon the core conclusions across all three phases of the study on violence against children in Bhutan. They represent the most important and urgent steps to be taken to prevent and respond to the complex spectrum of protection violations that emerged through the study. Rather than a 'laundry list' of activities, the recommendations highlight the macro areas to reflect and strategize upon as the current National Plan of Action for Child Protection is revised and the process of conceptualizing the subsequent five-year strategy begins.

A recent evaluation of global initiatives highlighted the importance of developing evidence-based initiatives to tackle violence against children[22] while a 2014 study report by UNICEF encouraged exhaustive research:

> "*The first step in curbing all forms of violence against children is bringing the issue to light—in all its complexity. Solid data and research are essential in bringing the issue out of the shadows. They are also important in revealing hidden attitudes and social norms that may perpetuate violence against children and factors that may place certain children at higher risk*."[23]

In conducting this extensive and in-depth national study, the Government has established a foundation for contextualizing and adapting the learning from around the world and for experimenting with new best practices. Since the Phase 1 literature review was undertaken in 2013, a number of studies and evaluations have been published that provide practical, empirical lessons for programming from South Asia and beyond.[24] Such evidence should be used to guide and streamline some of the macro recommendations presented here, especially in relation to tackling specific manifestations of violence, such as corporal punishment, youth-to-youth violence and online protection.[25, 26]

The completion of the VAC study in 2016 is timely: It represents the start of the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the specific targets of Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8 and 16 (see the following box).[27] The strategies selected to address the issue of violence against children will not only impact the children of today but will have a direct bearing on childhood—and society more broadly—for generations to come.

[22] UNICEF, 2015.
[23] UNICEF, 2014b.
[24] WHO and University of Cambridge, 2015.
[25] WHO, 2015.
[26] UNICEF, 2015.
[27] United Nations, 2015.

Sustainable Development Goals directly relating to violence against children

SDG 5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

SDG 8

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

SDG 16

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

Source: See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300

Recommendation 1: Prioritize the establishment of a body with special responsibilities for the provision of services for children and their families

At the present time, the approach to service provision is somewhat ad hoc, with NCWC and other government and civil society partners responding to problems as they arise, albeit with great dedication. The conclusions of the research demonstrate the need for a specialized body with the mandate and duty to provide social services to children, families and communities. Within the current system, there are supervisory functions that NCWC is able to perform, including: development of strategy and coordination; monitoring and evaluation of performance; compliance with international obligations; and promoting a research agenda. However, the critical role of providing social services nationwide— and ensuring the requisite capacity building and management of social service resources— remains limited. There are many different permutations of the structure and location of such a social service body; it is recommended that these questions are decided only when the core mandate and functions of a social service body are defined.

Recommendation 2: Design a paradigm of social welfare and protection services for children and families

As was recommended in the 2012 Mapping and Assessment of the Child Protection System,[28] a first step is to systematize the delivery of assistance to children and families across the country. Using the national study findings as guidance and given that families currently do not use services available to them, it is recommended that a process of consultation be undertaken with families and children to learn more about the kinds of assistance and services that would be helpful to them and that they would use.

The study reveals that, generally, children and families rely on informal community support, but there is reluctance among community members to become involved in issues of family violence. As part of the service paradigm, it will be essential to reinforce community support and delineate the kinds of assistance that parents, family, kinship networks and community can contribute to the protection of children as well as the traditional care practices that should be promoted within the system. Once there is consensus about the kinds of assistance families and children perceive as helpful, a paradigm of interlocking services at the national, district and local levels should be developed, and partnerships between government sectors and civil society agencies agreed. These services need to be gender-sensitive and appropriate, recognizing, for example, that many civil society organizations working on sexual violence do not work with men and boys, either as perpetrators or victims of abuse. Likewise, in a country with a geographically and ethnically diverse population, ensuring equitable access to services will be fundamental. As a baseline, the study suggests that the following broad types of services should be considered.

[28] NCWC and UNICEF, 2012.

Prevention services: designed to support parents, families and communities to better care for their children.

- Social protection measures to help poor and marginalized families.
- Services that support parents in their role as caregivers. To be effective, this support should be designed to change the external factors that compromise parents' ability to parent as much as focusing singularly on poor parenting.
- Community outreach services able to identify families and children in difficult circumstances or at risk of becoming vulnerable.
- Alcohol and drug programmes for adolescents, young people and adults.

Response services to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable children.

- Special measures for working with children most at risk, such as children in drayangs, in domestic servitude or in child labour.
- Effective reporting measures (accessible and safe for children, families and communities) as well as remedial assistance and reintegration measures to ensure that children are able to remain and thrive within their family.

The capacity development of professionals responsible for providing social services should be tailored accordingly as part of the overall strategic master-plan.

Recommendation 3: Promote social change to reduce the prevalence of violence against children

A set of social norms, beliefs and deeply rooted attitudes and behaviours persist in the country, some of which perpetuate and justify the violence that compromises the development, well-being and protection of children. These social norms and their drivers need to be better understood, debated and—where necessary—deconstructed to reduce the risk factors to and prevalence of violence against children. In adherence to the Eleventh Five-Year National Plan, the Government should design social policies that tackle the prejudicial societal attitudes and structural disadvantage that perpetuate, and sometimes fuel, social exclusion, wealth inequality and ethnic discrimination. Advocacy efforts should target social policymakers to impress upon them the direct and indirect consequences of prevailing social norms on the development, well-being and protection of children.

At the individual level, it is recommended that a series of proven programmes, based upon robust theories of change, be established to open a dialogue, raise awareness and begin the process of transforming entrenched mind-sets about the inevitability and acceptability of violence against children. However, the strategy will need to be bold: It will need to attempt social change around accepted social norms (such as corporal punishment) as well as those social norms around family privacy and 'saving face' that deter people from intervening even in cases of universally forbidden or socially unaccepted violations (such as rape and incest). The study's fieldwork demonstrated a general openness to discuss the issue of violence and the evidence generated may prove to be a

useful entry point for finding solutions to these social norms. Increased opportunity should be given to children and young people to find their own strategies for bringing about social change, not least because they are the ones to make the difference in the lives of the next generation.

Recommendation 4: Develop a comprehensive, realistic strategy for child well-being and protection

The first National Plan of Action for Child Protection in Bhutan (2012) provides a framework for the development of the child protection system. To move the agenda forward in light of the findings of the research on violence against children, it is recommended that the new strategy—which is currently being drafted—take into consideration the central conclusions of the study on violence against children.

The strategy is due to take effect in 2018. It should articulate the Government's vision for, and approach to, the well-being and protection of children and include a series of priorities to be dealt with. This broad conceptual clarity, coupled with a realistic operational plan, should feed into the Government's Twelfth Five-Year National Plan.

At a minimum, the strategy for child well-being and protection should establish:

- the mandates of various government ministries, outlining the inter-sector functions of agencies responsible for children;
- the partnership arrangements and mandates of civil society;
- the social change the system aims to bring about; and
- the scope of issues the national system should be designed to address (broad issues of child well-being and/or the narrower protection issues of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation).

Recommendation 5: Develop a realistic, costed operational or implementation plan in conjunction with and based upon the new national strategy for child well-being and protection

For the strategy to be achievable and effective, it is critical to undertake an exercise to prioritize the most urgent and important issues and system components to work on. An operational plan will need to be fully resourced and, for this reason, careful consideration should be given to:

- the priority issues to be addressed by the system;
- the financial investment (costing) to implement the system, most especially the components that are prioritized and considered as urgent;
- a cost-benefit analysis for the purpose of advocating the positive societal outcomes from investment in child well-being and protection; and
- the human resources that are incrementally required to implement the system.

Recommendation 6: Reinforce the ban on corporal punishment in educational establishments and institutions

The research indicates that harsh corporal punishment of children persists largely because it is ingrained within the social norms of child-rearing. There is some evidence to suggest that the measures put in place in schools and institutions has reduced the extent of corporal punishment, or at least the severity of the discipline measures, but the knowledge or acceptance of alternative disciplinary actions remains limited. Further to specific recommendations made to the Government by the Committee on the Rights of the Child[29] and the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children,[30] it is proposed that:

- a review be undertaken to understand why corporal punishment continues to be meted out in all educational and institutional facilities, including day and boarding schools, day care, alternative and residential care, penal institutions, and monasteries and nunneries,
- a review and analysis of existing laws, including the Penal Code, the Child Care and Protection Act and the Domestic Violence Act to untangle how they are interpreted by parents and other caregivers, including teachers, to justify the use of corporal punishment at times (such as articles 109 and 111 of the Penal Code);
- review global best practices and success stories for changing social norms around corporal punishment and discipline of children, with a view to finding solutions appropriate to the country's context; and
- based on the above and in conjunction with representatives from different sectors, measures should be agreed to prohibit corporal punishment in educational settings and institutions, including clarification of the legal status of corporal punishment; harmonization of laws and policies; guidance and training of educators and child care providers; and monitoring of progress.

Finally, it is recommended that a national dialogue, led by an expert on parental discipline, should be organized to debate the issue of corporal punishment in the home. Children's rights activists and organizations have already recommended that all forms of corporal punishment by parents and family members be explicitly prohibited by law. However, the issue is one that requires further analysis to understand the social norms that underpin the practice today and the potential, given the reality of the resources available, to implement any ban imposed. The findings of this study's research reveal the pain and potential injury to children from parental physical punishment, but legislating against all forms of physical discipline at home may not be the best starting point. Rather, a process of social change, supported by a robust communications strategy, should be established to lay the groundwork for introducing more positive discipline methods.

[29] Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2008.
[30] Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2012.

Recommendation 7: Develop a national strategy to counter peer violence and bullying in all settings

The findings reveal a very high prevalence of violence among children and young people. It is necessary to understand more about how and why children and young people interact and treat each other in such violent ways. The survey findings have generated a foundation to examine in more depth the nature of peer violence, especially the spectrum of actions (from criminal acts, such as violent sexual assault and battery, to anti-social actions, such as insulting and being mean to other children) that were described by children and young people as peer-to-peer violence. It is recommended as a starting point for strategic action to:

- conduct focus groups with children and young people to learn from them why such behaviours persist;
- learn more about the gender dynamics of peer-to-peer violence; and
- explore and contextualize global lessons for tackling peer bullying and violence.

Recommendation 8: Engage men and boys on the issue of violence against children

At all levels, it is essential that men and boys are strongly encouraged to be part of the solution. The national survey found that males are the main perpetrators of violence in all categories. Thus, their ability to influence the attitudes and behaviours of their male peers is crucial to change the concepts of masculinity and, thereby, the cyclical patterns of violence.

The traditional role of men as the enforcer of discipline persists, whether at home or in school, and seemingly across all social strata and geographical regions. While parenting programmes and support to families have typically focused on mothers and female caregivers, there is an opportunity for both government and civil society agencies to zoom in on the role and contributions of fathers and male caregivers, considering the external factors that drive men to resort to violence, but also the inner, social and cultural concepts of masculinity. It is clear from the study that boys of the current generation are repeating the social norms that they live with and which—in all likelihood—are expected of them. Based upon the evidence, it is now time to explore gender norms and develop proven, adapted gender-sensitive initiatives that are capable of transforming the childhood experiences of both boys and girls.

Recommendation 9: Develop a strategy for understanding the impact and risks associated with exposure to pornography

The findings accentuate the importance of understanding more about the access to and use of pornography in the country. This is an emerging issue, one that does not yet generally appear to be placing children at direct threat of online abuse and exploitation. However, the new generation will become ever more online savvy and interested to explore the world through the internet; it is

essential to gain more insight and to keep up to date on teenage online practices. It is recommended to start the process by:

- treating children and young people as agents of change and conducting focus group discussions with them to understand more about access and exposure to pornography;
- exploring global lessons and good practices relating to children's exposure to pornography, especially as it relates to their online safety and their right to protection online;
- engaging with parents, caregivers and educators as well as the private sector and law enforcement agencies to protect children online;
- developing a strategy to educate children on identifying and mitigating risk associated with grooming, abuse and exploitation; and
- developing a legal framework for protecting children online, underpinned by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and supported by amendments to the Penal Code.

Recommendation 10: Review the legal framework for the care and protection of children

The legal framework for the protection of children is, in places, not adequately specific about the status of offences against children, and the definitions of the different manifestations of violence against children are not clear. It is recommended that, once the vision for the child protection system is further elaborated, the legal framework should be adapted and strengthened.

First, the legal framework would benefit from increased harmonization between the definitions and the provisions of the Child Care and Protection Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Penal Code. Although there is clear reference to offences of battery or assault in the Child Care and Protection Act, there are also provisions that allow for an adult to beat a child in special circumstances. This level of vagueness undermines the principal intention of the law and is used as a defence by those who perpetuate corporal punishment.

Second, the Child Care and Protection Act outlines a series of duties and powers of social welfare staff to intervene and provide support to families and children. Many of the services and interventions have yet to be established and implemented. It is recommended, once the vision and core pillars of the service paradigm are clarified, to revise the law to make it enforceable.

Finally, many of the acts of violence unveiled through the study are perpetrated by children and young people, including the misdemeanour crimes of verbal sexual harassment and bullying. Given that the age of criminal liability is 10 years, the law needs to clarify the status of children who are, under the law, criminal perpetrators of violence. Although laws are often not implemented, it would be unfortunate if—in a push to sanction or bring justice to perpetrators of violence—children and young people were to be labelled as perpetrators or offenders, especially when many of their actions, though illegal, are essentially a typical part of the adolescent experience in the country today.

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