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ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL NORMS IN RELATION TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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ქვეყნის უფლებები ყველასთვის
HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL

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About the document

"This document has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UNICEF and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union"

The following document contains analysis of social norms in regards to violence against children financed by UNICEF, and the report for research conducted in frames of the project for facilitating the communication strategy for social change aimed at analyzing the social norms which are at the root of violence against children in Georgia. The following methods were used during the research: analysis of secondary sources (Desk Research), focus groups, interviews and workshops with field experts (psychologists, sociologists, representatives of public institutions that work on issues of child violence). The report contains primary findings and conclusions that will be used in facilitating the communication strategy aimed at overcoming violence against children.

The report was prepared by PR & Marketing Communications Agency GEPRA and Applied Research Company ARC

Methodology

Desk Research

In frames of the research, the following information sources pertaining to violence in Georgia were analyzed:

- Reports for abuse-related research conducted in Georgia
- Report from the cabinet of the Public Defender of Georgia

Additionally, international experience and practice in changing social norms for family-related violence was also studied.

Studying conducted researches helped us formulate guidelines for the focus groups and discussion notes for experts' workshops.

Workshops with experts

The goals for meeting with experts was to hear out their thoughts regarding the social norms, attitudes, values and stereotypes that in their opinion provide conditions for violence against children in Georgia. We also expressed interest in their recommendations for possible ways at changing the social norms that cause violence.

Two discussions were conducted in total, one before and one after the focus groups. Additionally, 1 expert/psychologist who could not manage to attend the meeting was interviewed separately.

Discussions with experts went on for 2 hours each.

Focus groups (group discussions)

It was crucial for the research to contain the public's opinion on violence against children, their thoughts on children's role in families and attitudes towards them, on what constitutes as abuse towards a child and what is a widespread style of upbringing¹.

In frames of the research, 3 focus groups were conducted in Telavi, Batumi and Marneuli. The focus group locations were chosen according to the following criteria; we wanted the discussions to span both western and eastern Georgia, cover a region that was ethnically

¹ You can view the focus group guideline in annex N2.

populated by non-Georgians, and to hear out representatives of the Muslim community, as well.

10 participants were involved in each discussion. The members were parents who had children between the ages of 2-18. Mothers and fathers were represented evenly in the group. 3 Muslim Georgians were included in the Batumi group, while the Marneuli group was ethnically mixed (ethnic Georgians, Russians, and Azerbaijanis). Members of both urban and village-type communities were involved in the discussion.

The research topic is a rather sensitive one. There were expectations that the group members themselves would refrain from being honest about their own utilization of physical abuse in upbringing. For this reason, we not only asked the participants to talk about their specific experiences (both parents and children), but about the environment they live in and the experiences of their neighbors, their close acquaintances, their friends.

Opinions derived from the focus groups and experts were analyzed and are summarized in the report.

Theoretical concept

Reasons for violence against children were studied in context of the social norms analysis. Both during the experts' discussion and the focus groups the attitudes, viewpoints, values and beliefs that prove the existing social norms were studied. In this part of the report, we would like to briefly describe the theoretical framework, according to which the acquired data was analyzed and systematized.

A social norm is a rule of behavior that an individual adheres to when they believe that the majority in their referential group exhibits the same type of behavior (empirical expectation). The same majority from this referential group expects similar behavior from this individual, in turn (normative expectation).

In terms of violence against children, the preferred method of choice for their upbringing - a strict approach frequently including acceptance of psychological or physical abuse towards the child - is a social norm. The individual chooses abusive methods towards their child as their behavior model with the assumption that their immediate environment behaves similarly (empirical expectation), and the environment/society expects that behavior from him (normative expectation). In cases when the individual does not share widespread norms of strict upbringing in society (the referential group), they become denounced. It is important for the individual to identify with the referential group, which is why it is highly probable that they will not attempt to go against the established social norm - even when they personally don't share it - in order to not end up denounced and no longer accepted by society.

The individual's behavior is influenced by the type of behavior model that they give preference to, which in turn is defined by:

1. Beliefs based on facts
2. Personal attitudes and views
3. Social expectation (normative and/or empirical)

In order to study the nature of abusive behavior (including that towards children), we need to understand what lies at the root of choosing abusive behavior.

While analyzing reasons for violence against children, the primary task of the research was to answer the following questions:

- Do social expectations influence the choice of using abusive methods during child upbringing?
- Which social expectations assert this influence?
- What type of collective behavior are we dealing with?

Communication for development and violence prevention requires studying the social-ecological model that describes the defining factors in human behavior and how each element of this model relates to change-oriented communication means.

Our research topics covered the individual level (behavior, attitudes and knowledge), the interpersonal level (family, friends, and social connections) and the community level (the society as a whole).

Diagram 1: the social ecological model and change-oriented communication means

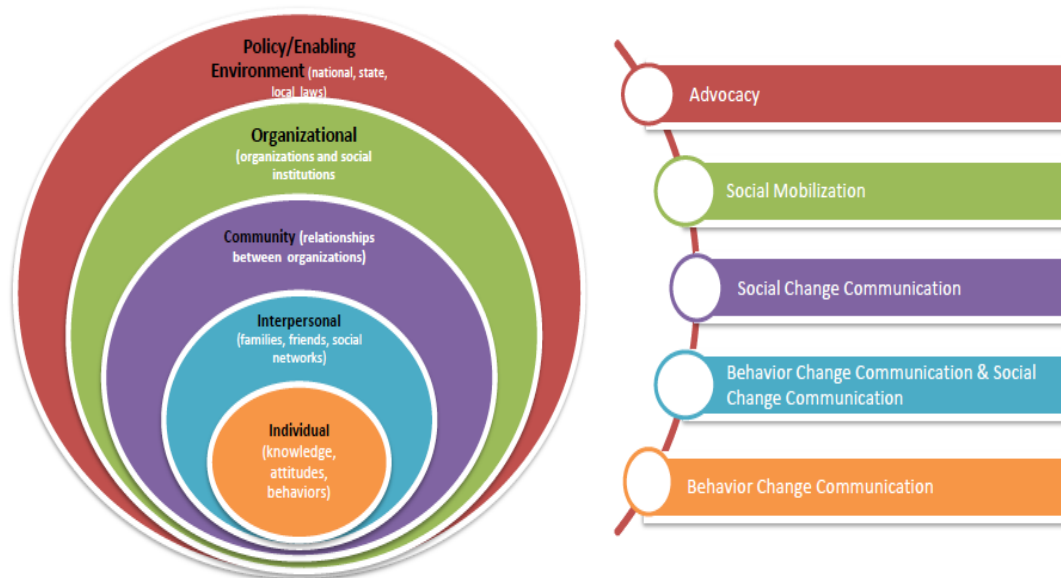


Figure 1. The Social Ecological Model (left side) and Corresponding C4D Approaches (right side).

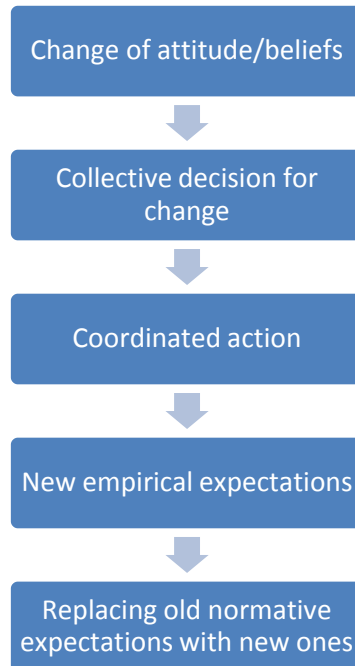
A communication program against abusive behavior needs to fulfill the following:

- Disseminate information in society (sharing arguments on why child abuse negatively affects everyone)
- Be aimed at changing factual beliefs and attitudes of society/collective (facilitating negative attitudes towards abusive upbringing)
- Collective decision favoring fulfillment of the changes (coordinated actions taken by various institutions towards abuse prevention)
- Acknowledge the social issue (change/replacement of social norms).

In order for the campaign aimed at preventing violence to be successful, it's necessary to first initiate change in established norms / replace the norms with new ones.

The diagram for changing norms that cause violence / replacing them is as follows:

Diagram 1: changing of norms



The following factors interfere with the change of social norms through the public:

- Lack of knowledge regarding alternatives in the public
- Inability for the public to acknowledge existing issues within established social norms
- Collective ignorance

Social norms are tightly intertwined with other norms, values, attitudes, factual beliefs and behavior stereotypes/scripts.

In order for the individual to change their abusive behavior/strict style of upbringing, the must not only be convinced of negative results stemming from abusive behavior, but also in others behaving the same way, as to not render the individual action as a “outlier” from the social norm.

Situational Analysis

A national research regarding violence against children was conducted in 2007. The goal of this research was to reveal the scale of child abuse, as well as various forms of violence and other factors relevant to the topic. The research tools used were screening methods towards child violence; questionnaires meant for parents provided information about the parents' methods and rate of punishment forms towards their children (*behavior/widespread practice*). According to the results of the research, 79.8% of parents/carers had used some form of physical punishment, and 82.3% had turned to psychological forms. The most often used forms of physical violence were revealed to be hitting by hand, shaking the child, pulling on their hair and their ears. Among psychological forms of punishment, the tendencies included shouting, name-calling and mockery, insults towards the child and threats of abandonment. It is notable that one fifth (21.5%) of the parent respondents admitted to systematically harming (beating) their children.

For the development of child protection systems in Georgia, in 2010 the government issued initiated the National Child Protection Referral and Response Mechanism. This was a joint order from three ministries – the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Sciences. The order obligates the police, schools, caretaking institutions and healthcare entities to refer instances of perceived or confirmed violence and humiliation towards state social workers in order to ensure relevant actions are taken. Since the order was issued, referral instances have grown from year to year, although their number is low compared to the overall scale of violence.

Category	Referral of Child victims of Violence	2009	2010	2011	2012			Total
					Jan-March	Apr-June	July-Sep	
N of Cases	Total referral cases	40	90	141	57	44	36	137
	Confirmed violence cases			92	31	24	18	73

Parties in connection to the referral system (field ministries, partner non-governmental organizations) note certain aspects regarding the system's ineffectiveness:

- Lack of knowledge regarding specific procedures;
- Inability to identify signs of violence;
- Weak coordination between participants;
- Low coverage level of abuse victims;
- Lack of required services needed for rehabilitating abuse victim children.

In addition to studying errors in the referral mechanism, in order to solve the issue of child violence it was important to study the knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to child abuse.

This was the goal of the joint project between USAID and UNICEF – “Social service agency Statistics on the Referral of Violence against Children Cases in Georgia” – in the frames of which two studies were conducted:

- Qualitative study of the Child Protection Referral procedures
- Quantitative study of widespread knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to child violence in society

The report on the study is based on the assumption that when reacting to abuse, an individual will be well-acquainted with what passes as violence. According to the study results, the public appears to have good knowledge on what type of action constitutes as physical violence (90% of respondents), psychological violence (64% of respondents), and neglect (79%). However, despite the high quality of knowledge, a large part of the respondents (45%) subscribe to the usage of physical punishment when raising their children, since otherwise they will “get spoiled”. 30% of mothers and 17% of fathers admit to using or planning to use physical punishment methods during upbringing. At a glance, this data contradicts the prior statistics of perceiving physical violence as an issue. 39% of respondents believe that physical violence is a serious issue, while 43% think it’s only moderately serious. In total, 82% admit to physical violence being an issue in Georgia. One of the reasons for this contradiction could be that the public accepts so-called “soft forms” of physical punishment when raising their children (hitting, pulling at hair, forcible shaking) and justify these means through good motivation (raising a good child), however once the conversation touches violence as an issue, they assume much more severe forms of abuse.

Despite the high level of knowledge through the public in relation to various forms of violence, 91% does not deem turning to schools, social services or the police when it comes to psychological abuse of a child.

Attitudes towards abusers significantly differ depending on the form of violence. The most tolerant attitudes exist towards psychological abuse and neglect. The most unacceptable form is sexual abuse. It is notable that only 36% of the respondents deem that cases of physical violence should be handled by the court.

Important results from the study include the public’s opinion on who should interfere in cases of physical violence. 30% of the respondents believe that the police should not interfere, 48% believe that social services should not interfere, and 50% believe that schools should not interfere. It is notable that only 4-6% believes that one of these institutions should interfere in all cases of revealed physical abuse. To some degree, this data explains the low level of referrals to some degree.

Society deems the most accepted form of response towards violence to be personal intervention (conversing with the parent). From those who claimed to know how to act in cases of revealed abuse, 70% answered that they would go engage the parent directly.

Thus the results of the aforementioned study, in addition to the referral statistics, show that despite the understanding of violence as an issue and knowledge of the various abuse forms towards children, the level of personal response to violence is low, and lower still is the portion of the public who believe that relevant services need to be involved in resolving/preventing such cases. On the other hand, studies show that using various forms of violence towards children is widespread practice. The goal of conducted quantitative studies was not to provide in-depth insight into defining factors of abusive behavior and low level of abuse response. However, gathered data points towards abusive forms of child upbringing being a social norm that is instilled by an expectation from society to raise a “good child.” On the other hand, one of the most notable defining factors of low response towards abuse is not interfering in “someone else’s business”.

In frames of the study shown below, we attempted to analyze the social norms that define abusive behavior and the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs that sustain it.

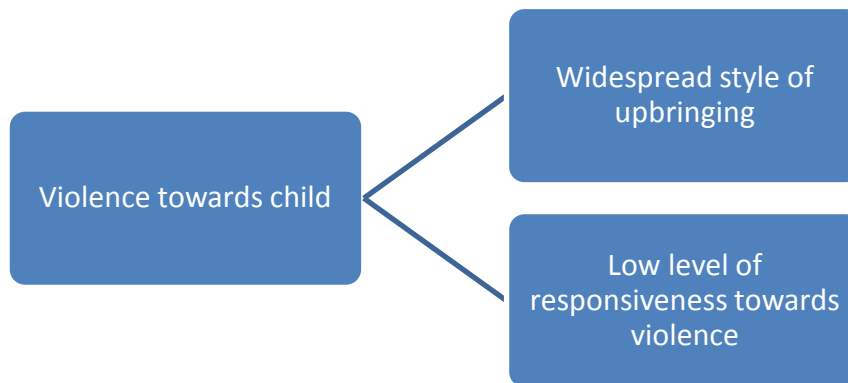
It is notable that the results of the study reflected on the state policy level as well. In September of 2016, by UNICEF’s initiative and by the ordinance of the Government of Georgia, the Strengthening of Child Care Services and Referral Procedures project was passed.

In accordance to the ruling, the list of subjects responsible for the referrals was expanded. In addition to central structures, local self-governing bodies were included. Social workers were granted the power to issue protective and restraining orders, extract victims, and isolate them from the abuser; even without the participation of the police.

Study Findings

In this part of the document, we would like to briefly go over the results from focus groups and expert discussions.

1. Violence against children is defined by **styles of upbringing** present in society - which accepts physical and psychological punishment methods by both parents and teachers in raising children – and **low level of response** towards physical violence.



2. Using abusive methods when raising children is a **social norm**. There is a widespread notion in society that families/schools still turn to **child punishment** (physical/psychological), and that **society expects the same from them**, otherwise they will be met with contempt.
3. In the process of socializing, the individual seeks **successful models** of behavior; if violent behavior is successful and lacks repercussions, there is a high probability that this specific type of behavior model will be chosen.
4. **Lack of alternatives for behavior models** – it is typical of authoritarian environments not to contain alternatives for their proposed behavior model. Any deviation from these governing models is considered a transgression and, consequently, grounds for punishment.
5. Violence towards children is reinforced through widespread attitudes towards children:
 - a. **The child is a property item of the family/parent**
 - b. **A good child is a “normal” child**, one that does not differ from the majority
 - c. **A “good child” needs to be bedient**
 - d. **A child is an investment**
6. Positive attitude towards **authoritarian styles of upbringing**
7. **The threshold for perceiving violence is high** – society deems complex forms of violence unacceptable, but relatively softer forms are not perceived as abuse

8. **Avoiding responsibility for violence** – the abuser shift the responsibility of the violent act on the child and not on themselves (“she made me beat her up”)
9. **Justifying violence** – the necessity of violence is justified through the desire to raise a “good child”, and if the child does not fall within the parent’s perception of a good child, then violence becomes acceptable.
10. **The abused party themselves justify** violent upbringing methods (“he beat me because he wanted what’s best for me”).
11. The study showed that in addition to the attitudes, perceptions and beliefs that define the social norm of violence against children, another factor hampering the change of the norm is **lack of knowledge about positive methods of upbringing**. The parts of society that are conscious of negative effects from violent methods admit that in many cases they do not know how to resolve the problematic situations.
12. Even when we are dealing with forms of violence deemed unacceptable by all, **the response level from a witness is very low**.
13. The low level of response is reinforced by the dominating notion that **it is unacceptable to interfere in the affairs/families of others**, and doing so can be grounds for contempt.
14. **Response towards violence depends on the severity of violence**, in more complex cases of violence the probability of a witness directly interfering is higher
15. **Fears towards the abuser – people refrain** from responding to violence since they are afraid of becoming the subject of abuse themselves.
16. **Low level of trust towards defense structures** – the mistrust is reinforced by the notion that when calling police to a scene of violence, the police do not react adequately. The police lack sensitivity towards internal family violence and they do not protect the anonymity of the witness. Society is unsure if involving protective structures will yield desired results in such cases.
17. **Lack of information about the abuse victim’s protective social services** – society is not well-informed of what follows a call to the police; they are unsure in the social services’ abilities to efficiently resolve the issue.
18. **Fear of repeated violence** – the abuse witness believes that interfering may cause the abuser to later lash out with double the violence against the victim.

Study Results

This part of the report contains the summarized viewpoints from focus group and expert discussions, in addition to notable quotes from participants.

Background to social norm formation

Formation of social norms happens in a certain historic context that is affected by both distant past and the present experiences of today's generation. In Georgia, the attitude towards child violence is defined by norms both relating to children and abuse, in addition to an entire network of established social norms.

Several sources for norm formation were revealed in the process of the study:

- Patriarchal traditions
- Totalitarian past of the Soviet Union
- Civil wars and mass violence

As a result, in society – and especially villages – we still see remnants of strict hierarchy; unacceptance towards deviating from stereotypical roles (or from requests made by someone on a higher hierarchal position); using physical means for punishment. Unpunished violence of the recent past has also left a large mark, which caused it to develop into an efficient goal-attainment method and consequently made use of force into a necessary attribute for successful males.

The aforementioned events were further affected by cultural nuances, or more specifically the focus on smaller groups of people, whose interpersonal duties and strive to fulfill expectations often stand above official legislature.

Unity of said factors create a locked cycle of social norms, where on one hand tolerant attitudes and tendencies of non-interference reign dominant, and on the other hand, powerful barriers are in place on the way to transforming them.

Widely Spread Social Norms in Child Upbringing

Using abusive methods during upbringing is a social norm: “Raise them like your enemy, and they’ll benefit you like an ally.”

In the process of upbringing, physical and psychological punishment is an accepted norm in society. Using abusive methods when raising a child are largely dependent on what the immediate environment/community thinks of and how they practice child upbringing.

Despite child beating being punishable by law, it still occurs if children misbehave; we still have cases of light beating, hitting on the head, pulling on hair and the ears, insulting, and berating.”

Focus group member

“Yesterday my child broke a very expensive vase of mine, and my neighbor who witnessed it got surprised and asked why I did not turn to beating. They left very surprised.”

Focus group member

“Those who beat children do not see it as violence; they think it is good upbringing and a benefit to the child. They probably think that I’m a bad parent since I do not beat my child.”

Focus group member

Violence towards children is rooted in a social norm that deems it acceptable for parents/teachers to employ physical and psychological punishment methods when raising children, and in a social norm that disallows response from a witness to physical violence.

In the first case, strict upbringing is rooted in the belief that discipline is attained through forceful methods, while the second is defined by the notion that one does not interfere in the affairs of another’s family, that raising another person’s child is not one’s concern.

Social norms are closely intertwined with other social norms, beliefs, attitudes, values and perceptions. They reinforce widespread social norms and interfere with the establishment of new ones, even when an individual believes that the existing norm is not good and personally acceptable to them.

What Feeds/Reinforces Violence towards Children

Incorporating successful but violent models in a child's socialization process

Violence is a form of aggression, and aggression is a natural instinct for humans. Overcoming the instinct of aggression is possible through the process of socialization, when models that are perceived as successful (models which are beneficial in certain situation, and bring victory, are rewarded, and are left unpunished) are internalized. In the process of evaluating/sharing models, an important role is assumed by the media, by personal experiences, by the passing of values through upbringing. If a child sees that during socialization violent models are more successful and without punishment, it is highly probable that these are the models the child will favor. If the violence will be disadvantageous, it will not be favored.

Lack of alternatives for behavior models – total dominance of models

Lack of alternatives for proposed models is a feature of authoritative environment. The problem is that during the process of raising them, the parent supplies the child with behavior models that have no alternative. There are dominant models, how a child should achieve certain goals, and any type of deviation from these models is deemed irregular and becomes justification for punishment. Families already have their children's futures predetermined in various fields (professional/personal).

Because of a singular model for thought, behavior, and emotional attitudes, there is no legitimization of alternative methods for achieving the same goal.

A parent not accepting their children as individuals

Georgian families do not consider their children individuals. If a person does not develop as an individual, they will constantly seek a carer, even after exiting the stage of childhood. In Georgian, the expression "Don't you have an owner?" has a semantically negative connotation. Despite the fact that in literary terms, not having an owner means freedom.

Considering children as property

A parent sees their children as property that needs to have decisions made for it. This attitude is evident in everyday talk. Phrases from parents like "we just teethered", "we started going to

school”, and “we are finishing school” are well-known to everyone. On each stage of the child’s life the parent wishes to make decisions for them.

“The parent thinks that the child is small and that I (the parent) need to make decisions for them. I know what is best for the child!”

Psychologist

“Many parents feel that since they gave birth to the child, they own them.”

Psychologist

“I have a neighbor who constantly yells and screams at their children, and when I remarked on it they said the child was their property and they would do what they wanted.”

Focus group member

The perception of a “good child”- same as others

Society is trying to unify children. A desired child is “normal”, a child that does not differ from the majority. Any deviations from “normalcy” are perceived as dangerous, unwanted events. Accordingly, one of the perceived tasks in raising a child is to make sure they are like everyone else.

„A parent also shows strictness because they do not want their child to stand out. Society is scared of a child that is different, that possesses differing skills or sexuality. In addition, this may not always be their own child; it could be someone else’s, too.”

Psychologist

“There is similarly identical perception of success and of a successful child in families, where they employ both widespread and various other clichés.”

Psychologist

“There is a template of how a boy should grow up and how a girl should grow up; a boy needs to grow up a real Georgian Valiant Man [proverbial local term], while a girl should become a Georgian Lady.”

Focus group members

The perception of a “good child” – a “good child” is an obedient one

In Georgia, a good child is one who is obedient and listens to their carer in all matters. If a child goes against the carer, they are a “babbling”. This begets the desire to quell a child’s right to express their own opinion. There is a tendency in families to not include children in decisions that pertains to them. A family can make these choices without the child, without taking the child’s opinion and wishes into account.

An absolute majority of meetings/focus groups stated that 20-30 years ago children had significantly less rights in families and that this tendency still has not been overthrown.

“Before, a child would need to follow their parent’s whims. There were many limitations; limitations on clothing, appearance, expressing an opinion both at school and in the family. Only the master parent’s opinion was important. The child needed to be obedient.”

Focus group member

“The carer’s word was law; the child had to discern what the parent needed from a single look from them, without a word.”

Focus group member

Attitude towards children – child as an investment

It is a widespread attitude to look at children as sources of material or psychological benefits in the future. A child needs to be raised in a way that ensures they appreciate you when you become old, that they pay their due.

“A parent thinks that a child that uses up a lot of resources needs to bring benefit in the future, they need to feed and care for the parent, and make sure the parent can be proud of them...”

Psychologist

“There is a pervasive opinion in Georgia that you need a child in order for them to care for you at old age.”

“The child is our investment. If we raise them well, it will be good for us.”

Focus group member

Authoritative style of upbringing

The root of violence is the authoritative style of upbringing, during which a parent is absolutely convinced of their rightful vision and values, and tries to steer the child towards the “right” path. The parents have a developed blueprint for their children and their children’s futures. Formulas ensuring a good life. The parent deems that they do everything for their child’s good life, hence justifying the violence.

Most members of the focus group agree that during their respective childhoods, they had no right to go against the word of their elders, the right to choose. Their carer was always right, even when they weren’t.

“Before, no one would ask if a child liked something or not, the boundaries of what were good and bad were very strictly defined. Quite often a mother would not be aware of what their child really liked.”

Psychologist

“My mother would tell me that if a river flows upwards, you should swiftly do the same.”

Focus group member

Violence perception threshold – varied perceptions of what constitutes as violence

A large part of society does not perceive relatively softer forms of violence as violence; like pulling at ears, hitting a child under the head, pulling hairs, sending them to the corner.

Bullying in schools also wasn’t perceived as violence.

The majority of parents believe that violence is bad, but because their parents never deemed strict upbringing as violence, they don’t have a singularly negative attitude towards various forms of strict upbringing either.

Oftentimes psychological abuses, forcefulness, threats, constant criticism, belittlement – widespread methods of raising a child – are similarly not perceived as violence.

Violence perception – violence is bad but sometimes necessary; “a bad horse won’t let itself be lashed”

If a child does not fulfill a parent’s expectation, is not obedient, does not fit in the parent’s ideas of a “good child”, is not similar to everyone else – in this case the parent/adult carer turns to various forms of violence.

“For a parent, the easiest way for bringing a child “to reason” is through violence, it does not require too much time or thinking.”

Psychologist

“A man in the village was telling me that if you don’t beat a child sometimes, they might not grow up good.”

Focus group member

It is notable that in cases of child violence, the responsibility is being shifted to the victim. The victim becomes the one to blame for inciting the violence.

“The widespread phrases in Georgian speech – ‘they made me beat them’, ‘they ended up beat’, ‘they did not settle down until I beat them’ – show that the violator shifts the responsibility to the victim.”

Psychology

“I’ve often heard from parents – ‘I won’t be able to communicate this unless I beat them.”

Focus group member

The parents deem it their duty to be strict, to use violent means of upbringing. Society expects parents to be strict, to get the child used to discipline, even if this requires physical violence. Otherwise society will think the parent is weak, a bad carer, and one to be condemned.

The victim of violence justifies the abuser's actions through good intentions

Using violent methods is justified through citing good intentions.

“We have all heard a person saying ‘I turned out good from my father beating me. He beat me because he wanted what was good for me.’”

Focus group member

Orienting on short-term results during upbringing

There is no belief in carers that using non-violent methods of upbringing is more beneficial in the long-term prospect. Methods of encouragement require much energy, and people prefer reaching short-term solutions through easier means. One of the negative results of violence is that a child might not be behaving badly, but doing so exclusively out of fear of punishment. As soon as they exit the situation and violence is no longer a threat, they will express violence themselves towards someone who is weaker.

“For a parent/teacher, using violence when a child misbehaves is the ‘easy’ solution to the problem. The notion of beat your child once and that solves the issue is very tempting for the carer.”

Psychologist

Lack of information about positive methods of upbringing

Young parents for whom using physical methods when raising their children is unacceptable are convinced that “hitting is not productive”. Some of them admitted to have tried violence, but the method failing to bear desired effect. These parents use the following methods for punishing their children most often:

- Not letting children play at the computer
- Not letting children play in the yard
- Temporary confiscation of mobile device
- Giving them the silent treatment

The majority was in agreement about the efficiency of the method of persuasion, but admitted that the parent “doesn’t always have the energy and nerves for it.”

Using examples of others, they recount how abusive parents are convinced that non-violent methods will be unproductive for their children, that “nothing cuts it with this one”. This points to the parents’ lack of knowledge regarding positive methods of upbringing, the inability to “handle misbehaving children.”

“I thought that if I didn’t bring my children up as strictly as my mother, I’d be a friendlier parent, and I know, theoretically, that a mother should not be this strict. But now that I am a mother and my children misbehave, it’s unclear to me where the line is, how much freedom I should give them, I don’t know what to do.”

Focus group member

Attitude towards children in a patriarchal society

Attitudes towards children are in large defined by attitudes developed in frames of the patriarchal society. Despite its sizable transformation by these days, a primary element – not recognizing children as individuals – is still relevant today.

“There is a mercantile disposition towards children in Georgia; they need them for a reason. A child does not exist for their own self, they need to do something specific, and once their parents get older, they must look after them. This is a typical patriarchal outlook towards children. In the middle Ages a child did not even represent anything of value; in those days of high mortality rates a child was deemed valuable once it would survive and reach the age of 12-13. Despite loving children here at Georgia, they are still not considered individuals until a certain age.”

Psychologist

Other findings

Changes in society

Family attitudes towards children’s rights and responsibilities are slowly changing in society.

“Before, teachers could send a student to the corner, they could order them out, and they could use a stick. Nowadays, teachers have no such right; schools are much more children-oriented.”

Young parents think children deserve more freedom as they are raised. It is important to take their opinions into account and grant them the right to choose. The children themselves request more freedom and equal disposition.

“I don’t repeat with my children what I didn’t like in my parents’ upbringing style. I don’t limit my child.”

“Now the kids are much freer. Before, no one would ask your opinion, but now I try to share my child’s point of view.”

Focus group member

Where violence is most prevalent

Violent means of raising children are more widely spread in village-type settlements. The basis of this claim for the participants is their own personal experience, in which they recalled facts of abuse happening mostly in villages. However, they also admit that this may be caused by less visibility of other families’ private lives in cities.

The focus group members believe that there are no notable differences between Christian and Muslim families in terms of child violence; differences are more prevalent between generations rather than through religious or ethnic indicators.

Main differences between Christian and Muslim families is the norm of marrying out underage girls, which, in the opinion of discussion participants, has decreased as of late; however, it is still quite prevalent in villages.

“Parents still initiate child marriages, no one will sue them and they themselves are brought up that way, them, their children, their parents, their relatives and even neighbors. That’s how they’ll marry out their girls. If the girl protests this, unless she’s expelled into the family, she will be constantly experiencing pressure.”

“Before, a girl had to get married either during school or right after finishing it, but now they know that she needs to learn, attain education and then form a family. This was a change more ushered in by education rather than law.”

Focus group member

Which is the abuser in a family

Both according to the quantitative study (UNICEF 2013), as well as the results of the focus groups and experts' workshops, most of all it is mothers who turn to various forms of psychological or physical violence in everyday life. Mothers believe they bear more responsibility towards their children's upbringing, while the father spends at most 1-2 hours with them and tries to be a good parent during this time. However, if we refer to heavier forms of violence, then usually it is the father.

"The role of the beater is more attributed to the mother, although there are certain fathers who beat their children harder."

Focus group member

Gender differences in upbringing

In the opinion of the discussion participants, the primary differences between boys and girls in terms of upbringing styles is that when raising girls, parents still try to establish gender role stereotypes of the girl as the caretaker of family members, mother's helper, and the one responsible for home affairs.

"Girls get more chores, be it homework, or something that her brother or father may need (water, dinner). I had 4 brothers and I was told to do everything because I was the girl."

Focus group member

In some cases, a child's contributions to family affairs will interfere with their education, as well. Exploiting child labor is more prevalent in village-type settlements, where boys are included in agricultural work which can reach quite severe levels.

A girl has more boundaries in a family, for the way she dresses, the way she looks, on when she needs to return home and when and how she will engage in romantic relationships.

Violence in child care establishments

Group members agree that schools are seeing a decline in facts of violence from teachers; if before it was common for them to pull at pupil's ears, their hair, berate them, and send them to the corner or even out of class – "now this right has been revoked from the teachers." This process began after the 90s, but introducing mandates in schools helped decrease

psychological and physical violence acts from teachers. However it remains evident that facts of teacher-on-student violence are still taking place.

A teacher knows violence is forbidden and that the student is protected by law, but what they don't know is how to achieve discipline in class with non-violent methods, which causes disruption in the educational process.

Responding/notifying of violence

The threshold of acceptable violence differs with each group in society, but even when we are dealing with forms of violence not accepted by any of them, the response levels are low.

“I once bore witness to violence and couldn't do anything. I decided that it was their problem, I got really upset but I still did not intervene. The situation hadn't escalated to a life-or-death level, which is something I would intervene in, but I decided not to since it was mere beating. I probably made the wrong decision.”

Focus group member

What reinforces the social norm of not responding to violence

Interfering in the affairs and families of others is considered a foul move (fear of condemnation by society)

Violence in society is reinforced by low level of response towards it, which in turn is rooted in notions that interfering in other people's families is a foul move.

Restraint from interfering in families of others is one of the most demanded behavioral social norms from society. The individual is afraid to “lose the image of a ‘good guy’” in the public's eye and confront the group they identify with. They are afraid of being marginalized from this group. This type of demand from the public manifests from the each member of society believing the same general rule, that no one should interfere in their families. This is an attempt at defending the societal institution which is family.

The violence witness is afraid of responding since they may get punished not only by the abuser, but by society, by their neighbors, by their colleagues.

“If there’s no alarming and dire situation, I don’t go to the police; I don’t go to the social services since this is a family matter and I will not intervene in family affairs.”

Focus group member

“I will never intervene. It’s none of my business, it is their child and they have their own gauge for upbringing, and what they sow is what they will reap.”

Focus group member

“Every time I have remarked on a case of beating, I have received an answer of ‘it is my child and not yours, isn’t it?’, that it is none of my business, that no one asked me to intervene. It was a public place and it got very uncomfortable for me, I felt ashamed.”

Focus group member

“I saw a mother kick their child in the street so hard that the kid got launched in the air. When I rushed to her and asked her what she was doing, she asked me what business of mine it was.”

Focus group member

“If I see a child getting beaten, I will help and reassure them, but I can’t start giving advice, I don’t like interfering in someone else’s business.”

Focus group member

“Not interfering in others’ affairs’ encourages all forms of violence, be it violence towards women, in the street, at schools...”

Psychologist

Responding to violence depends on the severity of the violence the person is witnessing. If it is life or health-threatening then most agree they would interfere to the best of their ability. This interference may take form of pacifying a fight, calming someone down, or threatening them with the police. These forms of interference are aimed at disarming the immediate situation and save the victim.

“If pacification is needed I will intervene, but not during less complicated situations”

Focus group member

The fear of the abuser – “pacifiers get hit hardest”

Professionals working on matters of violence believe that people restrain themselves from violence since they are afraid of becoming the target of violence themselves.

“If I had intervened, the situation may have flipped in an ‘it’s none of your business’ way and something may have happened between us this time, which is why I restrained myself.”

Focus group member

“I once bore witness to how a mother hit a minor, I really wanted to say something but I restrained myself and ended up displaying my displeasure through mimicry alone. She looked like a person who would either pull my by the hair or at least berate me. I decided there was no point to it.”

Focus group member

Empiric/factual beliefs – police not acting as they should (mistrust of protective structures)

Varied attitudes were revealed towards calling the police. On one hand, the participants understand that referring to the police during difficult situations is preferable, on the other – they deem the police’s involvement will not bear any results since they have no means at limiting subsequent abuse.

According to the members of the focus group, once called in by a witness of abuse, the police do not react adequately and the accuser mistrusts their competency and ability to resolve the situation well.

“When the policemen arrive they say ‘wish you had something better to do, this is a family issue and they will reach an agreement themselves.”

When calling the police, the witness is unsure if their identity will remain anonymous; members of the discussions stated that they have witnessed instances of broken anonymity personally, and that such cases lessen the chances of them calling the police in the future.

“I once called the police, and the abuser asked them who made the call and the police showed them my number. The police should not have disclosed my number.”

Focus group member

“The policeman turns out the nice guy here, telling the abuser: ‘I can’t do anything, this person sued you.’ Instead of doing their jobs, they start interrogating; who do you think you are making the call, why are you making it... Maybe I’d like to stay anonymous? But they don’t defend the anonymity.”

Focus group member

Violence victim lacking information about social protection services

Society is not informed of what comes after a police call. They are unsure if social services are prepared to effectively resolve issues. These circumstances impact the witness’ willingness to turn to the appropriate structures. There is no trust in that responding might yield results.

“It depends on the severity of violence; you can’t phone the police for everything. We lack a good enough legislative space, psychologists’ participation is required and instead of incarcerating people for minor violence, you should think about rehabilitation.”

Focus group member

“Let’s say we call the police, what follows this? We’re not informed enough, and you always avoid what you do not know.”

Focus group member

Fear of repeat violence

The abuse witness believes that with their involvement the abuser might be driven to harm the victim even more severely; this notion is reinforced by the empirical experience of responses towards violence against women inside their own families. According to specialists, instances when the abuse victim has been punished more after the involvement in their affairs are quite frequent.

“After identifying family violence, the woman goes to a shelter with her child but returns to the family, to the violator, a few days afterwards. The violator then punishes the wife with double the tenacity because of her behavior. The neighbor ceases to believe that intervening won’t end up in her returning again.”

Psychologist

Conclusion

Based on findings in frames of the given study, the followings conclusions can be made in relation to social norms that cause violence towards children:

- Significantly decreasing violence against children, society gaining a full understanding of this issue (like the everyday use of “background” physical force being a form of violence) and forming a negative stance against it is impossible without transforming the social norms that lie in the basis of these norms;
- During child violence, disregarding extreme cases (and sometimes even including them) parent or the carer is convinced that the forceful influence over the child will yield a positive result in the end, prevent the child’s bad behavior from happening again, and bring the child closer to the “ideal” stage recognized by society;
- Parents and other persons caring for children are not adequately informed of the long-term negative effects from strict upbringing, the short-term effects from punishment, the positive methods of raising children and the efficiency of the latter;
- Acknowledging and recognizing the problem and demonstrating the long-term effects of strict and positive styles of upbringing can serve as a basis for transforming social norms, since the bottom line is that various groups in society do not disagree what the upbringing process should serve in the end; the child’s interests, and being a foundation from which they will develop into full-fledged, balanced individuals. Revealing the discrepancy between this goal and the employed methods will be one of the starting points for realizing the necessity of an alternate model and towards initiating its formation.
- In order to transform social norms, it is necessary to engage the emotional component and demonstrate the traumatic effect of abused children to society;
- Encouraging abuse witnesses to more actively respond to the instances is an important factor; it’s necessary to demonstrate positive examples and establish the care for a child’s interests as a priority in family affairs, directing it against the principles of non-interference.
- On the basis of analyzing social changes that taking place in Georgia during the last period, it becomes clear that changing social norms may represent both a result of directed policies and communication (e.g. attitude towards minorities, where aggression towards them is noticeably declining), as well as an event running in parallel to certain social shifts (e.g. growth in women’s financial independence grew into their personal independence, less of a schism between male and female-oriented jobs). In the given moment the state policy and directed communication aimed at changing social norms that lie in the basis of violence towards children needs to influence several directions: identifying the issue and demonstrating the trend in order for the issue to be resolved; initiate discussion and ensure informing; Institute sanctions (bring existing ones to light) and provide arguments in favor.

Recommendations for transforming social norms

As it was described in the theory overview regarding individual behaviors, the factors influencing decision-making are:

- Personal attitudes and viewpoints
- Factual beliefs
- Normative beliefs
- Social expectations (empirical and/or normative)

All these factors feed and reinforce the social norms together/

In order to achieve behavior change in an individual it is required to exert influence on their defining factors (beliefs, attitudes, and social expectations).

Accordingly, the task for the communication campaign at transforming the social norm of violence towards children is as follows:

- **Changing personal attitudes** which reinforce the social norm of strict upbringing. Educational campaigns, media campaigns, and intense directed communication influence and change personal attitudes.

Existing attitudes	Desired attitudes
The child is not equal to the adult, must obey their carer/parent/teacher	The child should be treated as equal, be heard out and considered when they voice their opinion and desires
The child cannot make independent decisions	The child is an individual who has the right to make decisions on their own
A good child is a “normal child”, does not differ from the majority	Every single child is individualistic, and individualism needs to be guided and supported
“A good child” needs to be obedient	The child’s unconditioned obedience should not be the goal of raising them
The child is a parent’s investment, to become beneficial for us in our old age	We should not have a commercial disposition towards the child’s future
Violence is justifiable through “good intentions”	Justifying violence through a desire to raise a “good child” is unacceptable
So-called “soft forms” of abuse cannot be counted as violence	All types of violence are unacceptable
Sometimes punishing the child is unavoidable since for some of them “other methods don’t cut it”	Punishing a child only yields short-term results

- **Changing factual beliefs** – spreading information in forms of arguments, specific examples, expert viewpoints and research results, about why child violence begets negative results both for the child and society as a whole.

Existing factual belief	New factual belief
Without strict upbringing a child becomes “spoiled” (this belief is reinforced by the short-term result that parent/carer/teacher achieves through punishment)	Strict upbringing/use of abusive methods yield negative effects in the long run both for the child and the public
In instances of response towards violence the abuser punishes the victim twofold (this belief is reinforced by personal experiences or heard stories)	In instances of response towards violence, child protection services will render appropriate help to the abuse victim and work with the abuser
Calling the police in cases of violence does not guarantee protection of my anonymity	Calling the police in cases of violence ensures protection of my anonymity

- **Changing normative beliefs which are based on widespread/accepted viewpoints throughout society** – influencing this normative belief will be achieved through increasing legislative awareness, with the notion that the abusers themselves are also criminals.

Existing normative belief	New normative belief
Interfering in another family is unacceptable	If child abuse takes place in a family, it goes beyond “family affairs” and the witness needs to interfere in order to end violence

- **Changing social expectations (empirical or normative expectations)** – just influencing personal attitudes and normative and factual beliefs is not sufficient in order to initiate change of a social norm or establishment of a new one. It is not sufficient to convince the public that “violence is bad”, we also need to convince them that society (the reference group) believes the same (changing normative belief) and convince them that the abuser parent/carer will become the condemnation subject instead of the parent/carer who uses positive upbringing methods.

For this, it’s important for society to recognize the issue of how social expectations influence an individual’s behavior. During communication, it will be necessary to showcase positive examples of behavior that differ from social expectations, since “normative beliefs” form on the basis of “what we see”. The information sources need

to be reliable, expertly formed, with the issues being discussed openly and the messages spreading in a coordinated manner, without contradicting one another.

In order to transform established social expectations, it's necessary to spread the following notions: **“Not everyone thinks like this”** and **“not everyone expects this from you.”**

Existing social expectation	Changed social expectation
If I do not raise my child in a strict way, I will be condemned from the public (family, relatives, friends), I will be deemed a bad parent/carer	Society does not expect of me to employ strict methods of upbringing and will not condemn me if I use positive ones.
If I interfere in the affairs of another family, I will be condemned, I will not be a good neighbor/friend anymore	In cases of responding to violence, society will consider that I have performed my civic duty/done the right thing.

Changing social expectations is a lengthy process and is achievable through societal pressure on outdated norms, the public declaring their shared goals, and positive examples being showcased.

Annexes

Annex 1 List of Participants

First meeting, November 7th

- Lia Saralidze – Project expert
- Manana Omarashvili – Psychologist
- Keti Gurchiani – Anthropologist
- Vakhtang Nadareishvili - Psychologist
- Natalia Mchedlishvili - Psychologist
- Elene Japaridze - Sociologist
- Keti Tavartkiladze - Psychologist
- Maia Kurtsikidze - UNICEF
- Pierre Ferry - UNICEF
- Keti Kharatiani – ARC
- Marina Imerlishvili – ARC
- Giga Kharebava – GEPRA
- Kakha Magradze - GEPRA

2nd meeting, November 18th

- Iago Kachkachishvili – Sociologist
- Zura Mkheidze – Sociologist
- Tinatin Tsertsvadze – Psychologist
- Irina Tabutsidze – Psychologist
- Lela Tkeshelashvili – Psychologist
- Maia Kurtsikidze – UNICEF
- Keti Kharatiani – ARC
- Giga Kharebava – GEPRA
- Kakha Magradze – GEPRA
- Lazare Gvimradze - GEPRA

Individual interviews:

- Giga Nizharadze – Psychologist
- Giga Tevzadze – Sociologist, philosopher

Annex 2 Focus Group Guidelines

Introduction: goals and rules for the focus group

General Information: introducing participants, their family status, job status, children

Styles of upbringing, then and now

- What are the primary differences between upbringing styles now and before (20 years ago)?
- How did your parents raise you? How did they get you used to discipline?
- How would you describe a good parent? A good mother? A good father? What must a good child be like?
- When a child has some sort of issue, who will they discuss it with? Their mother, father, sister, brother, friend?

Discussion – reference group

- Who is the source of information for matters pertaining to children?
- How trustworthy do you think this information is? Why?
- Who decides how to raise a child in your family? In regards to their health, education, and discipline?
- Who do you discuss child upbringing matters with?
- What do you think influences the relationship between parents and children?

Types of physical abuse; context

- What do they think in Georgia/your immediate environment/your parents (father/mother) about physical abuse?
- What do people do when children do not listen to their elders, behave silly and bad?
- How much do you think parents use physical punishment methods in order to get their children used to discipline?
 - Where do they use the punishment methods (at home, in schools, on playgrounds etc.)? Does physical punishment take place mostly at private or public spaces?
 - Apart from the parents, who is responsible for raising the children, for developing discipline? Grandfather, grandmother, aunts/uncles, teachers? Do they have the right to punish the children?
 - Is there difference between rich and poor families from this standpoint? Between urban and village settlements?
- What are the widely spread ways of physical punishment?

- Do you think there's any difference between upbringing methods for boys and girls? If yes, what type of difference?
 - As for you, in case of a boy child and a girl child, do you use varying methods? Is what's permitted for the boy also permitted and acceptable for the girl?
- Is physical punishment a necessary form in order for the child to get used to discipline? When? In what situations?
- If the mother/father does not use physical methods of punishment in upbringing, can it be said that they are good parents?
- What can bystanders think of parents when they see the parents' their children misbehaving and receiving a hit under their head, a slap on their cheek, a pull of their ear or hair, a hit from a stick?
- Are girls more frequent subjects of physical punishment? Are boys? If there is a difference, please describe and provide arguments.
- Who is the culprit in this situation (physical punishment), the child or the punisher?
- In what age range is it acceptable to physically punish children?

Results of physical punishment

- How do children usually react to physical punishment?
- What are the results of physical punishment (children listen to their parents, they defy their parents more, no result)?
- What positive result comes out of punishment? What negative result comes out of it?
- Are there any alternative methods towards reaching the desired result?

Frequency of physical punishment and knowledge of legislature

- When were you last a witness to abuse from an adult towards a child? Describe the situation.
 - How did you react? What did you feel? How did you act?
 - How were others acting?
 - What is the right thing to do in this situation?
 - Could you do what you thought was the right thing to do?
 - What was hampering you from doing what you wanted to do?
- In which cases is physical punishment justified? Describe the situation.
- Is physical punishment protected by law or not, if it is used for achieving control and discipline over a child's behavior?

Annex #3 Discussion Topics

Attitude towards children and existing practices of raising them

- What is the child's role in the family? What is the family's attitude towards the child? What are some of the cultural nuances in these attitudes for Georgia?
- What are the factors that define the public's attitudes towards upbringing methods?
- What methods of punishment and encouragement do they use in families where child abuse is not prevalent?

Perception of violence

- What are the factors that the public's perception of violence depends on? Who counts as an abuser in society?
- How well does society perceive various types of child violence as a single form (e.g. Does pulling an ear, neglecting, psychological abuse all pass as child violence?)?

Reaction to violence

- What are the barriers for responding to acts of violence? From the answers that justify non-interference, which are legitimate and which are rationalizations?
- What can contribute in the public becoming more active in responding to violence?

Experience in changing social norms

- Please name, in your opinion, the most important social norm change in Georgia in the last decades? What was the primary catalyst for this change? How important was the factor of direct communication (from the government's and public organizations' sides)?
- Please name, in your opinion, unsuccessful cases of social norm changes in Georgia in the last decades? What were the primary reasons for these missteps?

Resistance in changing social norms

- As a result of the communication towards decreasing child violence, the change of which social norm will be most realistic to achieve?
- As a result of the communication towards decreasing child violence, the change of which social norm will generate the most backlashes?
- What is the cause of pluralistic ignorance? What, in your opinion, will contribute in overcoming it?