

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

# Eastern Regional Profile



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MINISTRY OF GENDER  
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION

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This profile of the Eastern Region summarizes the situation regarding violence, abuse and exploitation of children. It draws mainly on findings from the Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014<sup>1</sup> and will be a useful tool for evidence-based advocacy to better target resources for child protection, inform policy decision-makers and guide future strategies for community action.

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## The regional context

### Regional demographics<sup>2</sup>

**TOTAL POPULATION:**  
2,633,154 (10.7 PER CENT) OF  
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,  
ON AN AREA OF 19,323 KM<sup>2</sup>  
(8.1 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL  
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM<sup>2</sup>)

**38.4 PER CENT  
OF THE POPULATION  
IS AGED 0–14 YEARS**

### Resources

The Eastern Region is the location of the Akosombo dam on the Volta River. The economy is dominated by large- and small-scale diamond and gold mining, and high-capacity electricity generation from the dam. In addition, there is a variety of agricultural products and fishing on Lake Volta.



<sup>1</sup> Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Accra, Ghana. The report also draws on information from the Regional Qualitative Reports, 2013, Government of Ghana/UNICEF; Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Ghana Statistical Service; and Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

<sup>2</sup> Ghana Statistical Service Census 2010

# Child-protection concerns

## Child marriage

Child marriages were reported in the region. According to the MICS report (2011)<sup>3</sup>, the region has the second lowest child marriage rate after Greater Accra. However, almost one in three (27.2 per cent) women aged 20–49 married before their 18th birthday and the region is ranked fourth for marriages before age 15, at 7.8 per cent. People in the region are very concerned about the issue of child marriage in their communities.

## Female genital mutilation/cutting

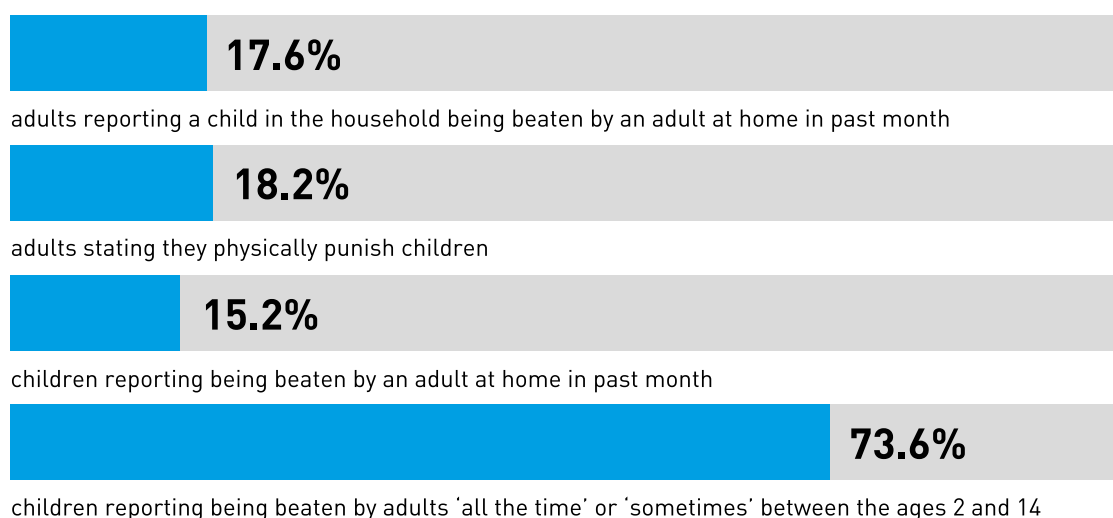
Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is difficult to research accurately because of the secrecy surrounding it. However, because the practice is illegal, parents do not send their girl children to the hospital when they develop complications because they fear a doctor or a nurse will notice that the practice has been performed.

Adults in the baseline research identified that 0.6 per cent of girls were subjected to FGM/C. The MICS report (2011) showed that 1.3 per cent of women aged 15–49 had a form of FGM/C. It is also worth noting that, while 65.3 per cent of women aged 15–19 in the MICS report (2011) had heard about it, 99.4 per cent of them believed the practice should be discontinued. However, the practice still occurs in the region among certain migrant communities.

## Violence at home and at school

### Violence at home

Children in the region experience the highest level of physical abuse at home in Ghana; 73.6 per cent of children report having been beaten between the ages of 2 and 14 at home. The cane, sticks and hands are the most common objects used to beat children.



**27.2%**

**WOMEN  
AGED 20–49  
MARRIED  
BEFORE  
AGE OF 18**



Traditional leaders are aware of the practice (of FGM/C) going on in their communities, they have not been able to do anything about it because it is carried out in secret.

**Chief, Eastern Region**

<sup>3</sup> Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service



The region had the highest level of verbal humiliation at home, with 48.2 per cent of children reporting that they had been humiliated verbally by an adult.

**29.7%**

adults reporting a child in the household being verbally insulted at home in past month

**48.2%**

children reporting being verbally humiliated at home in past month

### Violence at school

The region recorded a below average level of physical punishment in schools by a teacher or head teacher. One out of three children (31.5 per cent) reported to have been beaten by a teacher or head teacher.

Verbal humiliation by a teacher at school was also reported in the region with 23.0 per cent of children reporting that they had been verbally abused by their teacher.

Many children in the region expressed fear of verbal abuse more than physical abuse.

## Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

There were reported cases of defilement in the communities studied in the region, and where these occurred the girls were usually blamed.

The region reported lower rates of commercial sexual exploitation of children. However, sexual exploitation of girls and, to a lesser extent, boys, mostly by middle-aged men and rich migrant mining workers, is a growing phenomenon. It is very common in some areas, especially in the mining communities.

**39.4%**

adult respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community

**44.2%**

child respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community

### Pregnancy

Though sexual abuse is present in the region, the main cause of concern is the rate of consensual sex among children and the number of teenage pregnancies (accounting for 40.0 per cent of all pregnancies in one maternity ward in the region). Teenage pregnancy affects the schooling of girls; most of them drop out of school to look after their babies.

## Child labour

The baseline research revealed that children in the region are an important source of financial support to their parents, and economic duties begin at a very young age. As a way of supporting their families, children take on other physically demanding jobs such as weeding, planting, harvesting and acting as scarecrows. Other ways children support families include carrying firewood, working in markets and hawking on the streets. These activities make children too tired to go to school or pay attention in class.

According to the GLSS 6<sup>4</sup>, the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 10 years. Children are mostly engaged in agriculture, fishing and mining. The report indicated that 75.6 per cent of children aged between 5 and 17 years were engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing while 0.3 per cent were working at mining and quarrying in the region. Children working in these industries are exposed to a wide range of dangers such as severe injury or death.

Children who are trafficked for labour are forced to do more dangerous work on rivers such as diving deep to free nets that are stuck. Boys also assist in mines, although girls are used to carry loads and help with food preparation, exposing them to mercury fumes in the gold extraction process, which damages their health. Heavy work, such as carrying or pushing heavy loads, can also cause many injuries to young children and can inhibit their growth.

The GLSS 6 also indicated that 36.6 per cent of children aged 5–17 in the region are involved in an economic activity with 29.0 per cent involved in child labour and one in every five children (21.0 per cent) in hazardous labour. Of the children who were involved in child labour, 28.2 per cent were attending school while 19.9 per cent were working in other forms of hazardous labour. Among children who were not attending school, 38.4 per cent were involved in child labour with 33.5 per cent in hazardous forms of child labour.

**75.6%**

CHILDREN  
AGED 5–17  
ENGAGED IN  
AGRICULTURE,  
FORESTRY  
AND FISHING



**21.0%**

CHILDREN  
AGED 5–17  
INVOLVED IN  
HAZARDOUS  
LABOUR



<sup>4</sup> Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

11.5%

CHILDREN  
NOT LIVING  
WITH BOTH  
PARENTS

## Separation from parents

The family is the surest and most important unit that ensures the welfare of children. Anecdotal evidence among sections of the Ghanaian society indicates that children who are not living with their biological parents are likely to be subjected to conditions that may have adverse consequences for them. One in every nine children (11.5 per cent), according to the baseline study, were not living with both biological parents, the second lowest rate in the country.

The baseline study also revealed a gendered upbringing where girls are raised by their mothers and boys by their fathers. While the father will cover the children's financial needs (school, medical care, etc.), mothers assume a supervisory role.

## Mechanisms for protecting children

### Birth registration

Registering children at birth protects them from violations such as child marriage and trafficking. However, children in the Eastern Region are among the least likely in the country to have their births registered, with 56.8 per cent of children under five years registered.

### Families

Parents are the principal protectors of children. They are counted on for basic, school and health needs and for discipline. In the absence of parents, other actors within the family system are drawn into the web of responsibility, to ensure that younger ones are adequately cared for and put out of harm's way.

The foremost protective system for children outside the nuclear family is the extended family, comprising uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc. Children often resort to their grandparents, especially grandmothers, for advice and, in times of wrongdoing, are disciplined by them.

### Communities

Both chiefs and queen mothers play an important role in communities, acting as parents to orphaned or vulnerable children, and intervening before cases enter the legal system. Religious leaders also have strong roles, acting as mediators and often giving advice and counselling to children.

### Institutions

Teachers and children relate well with each other to ensure the children's well-being. In some cases, teachers help to feed children who are sent to school without food.

The Ghana Police Service, the courts, the Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development, and the District Assemblies all play key roles in child protection such as responding to incidences of child abuse and exploitation, protecting children who come into contact with the law, enacting by-laws, and providing resources to address child protection issues.

Some of them  
come to me  
saying Master,  
I'm hungry. If  
I have, then  
I give them  
one cedi. I  
encourage  
them by  
telling them  
that I went  
through the  
same thing  
and that they  
should be  
strong.

Head master,  
Eastern Region

## Health professionals

Herbalists are frequently the first port of call in rural areas when there is a health issue. Although the herbs and concoctions that are administered to children by faith healers put them at risk of developing sicknesses and organ failure, the healers take care of the patients until they are moved to a conventional health facility. Health professionals in the communities also educate families and young patients on health-related issues.

## Recommendations for positive change

### Increase financial and other resources for child protection

The regional institutions concerned with child protection receive little or no funds from the central government and so lack the means to fulfil their mandate. Public/private partnerships should be explored to help provide resources for children and their families. However, apart from seeking funding, mechanisms should also be set up in all communities as well as in all districts and sub-districts to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Stakeholders should collaborate and coordinate their resources to deal with child protection issues such as rape, defilement, assault, child labour, teenage pregnancy, truancy and abandonment, and report such cases to the relevant authorities.

### Capacity building

Existing social and public education programmes in the districts need to be strengthened to sensitize relevant entities about their roles in child protection. The district police departments should also be adequately staffed with well-trained probation officers who have suitable knowledge on child protection. There is a need for more trained and experienced teachers in schools. Shelters should be built to house trafficked and/or abused children.

### Policies and laws

Apart from the fair and equitable application of established policies, some further policy decisions could benefit the region. Local chiefs should provide by-laws and defined punishments for children; the level of allowable punishment for children should be clearly defined.

### Sensitization and awareness creation

Inadequate knowledge of child-related institutions, their focus areas and their location affects coordination and collaboration. Survivors of abuse often do not know where to report the abuse. It is therefore important for NGOs and community-based organizations that work in areas concerning child protection and development to intensify their public awareness programmes. There is also the need to increase or strengthen alliances and partnerships with government and other community structures such as opinion leaders, traditional authorities and religious leaders in engaging communities to address child protection.





## Conclusions

Although there are continuing threats to the welfare of children in the Eastern Region, the family structure is strong, with traditional values still protecting children. With better funding and coordinated participation from all stakeholders, the situation could be further improved.

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