

VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION AGAINST CHILDREN



Suriname has one of the highest prevalence of **violence against children** among Caribbean countries. According to MICS 2010, 86.1% of children aged 2-14 nationally and 91.2% in the interior have been subjected to any form of violence, and around 12% of children experienced severe physical discipline.

Suicide is a leading cause of death in Suriname. The number of registered suicides in Suriname has greatly increased from 6.2 per 100,000 population in 1965 to 26.7 per 100,000 in 2012; far beyond

the world average of 16 per 100,000 inhabitants. The average age people commit suicide in Suriname is 37 years. For women, the majority of suicides were registered in the age group 15-19 years. In the last few years there is also an increase of children aged 10-14 that attempt to commit suicide. Trauma or abuse is one of the risk factors causing suicide, and the estimates of prevalence and incidence of domestic violence and other forms of violence against children and intimate partner violence in Suriname are worrisome.

Inadequate child protection system and services. Suriname has a very limited child protection system which does not properly serve the interior. Lack of coordination among ministries reflect on the ground very scattered coordination among service providers. Both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Justice and Police are addressing cases of violence, neglect and abuse of children on an individual basis, with limited staff and low capacity. There is no formal social worker system in the country. Police Officers are not well trained and there are no clear protocols and procedures to address violence against children. Front line workers (such as teachers, nurses or social workers) who could identify and report cases of violence may not have received the necessary training on early identification and subsequent counseling and treatment of victims. A Child Helpline was set up in 2008 but its effectiveness has been reduced in recent years. Identifying and strengthening of existing community based protection mechanisms (parents, children themselves and community organizations) for referral as yet to be established.

Peer violence in schools is on the rise, and while corporal punishment is forbidden by a ministerial decree, it still takes place widely in the school system.

Insufficient enabling environment. Policies related to child protection are either unavailable or there is no concrete implementation plan. Budget allocation to several ministries responsible for protection has been limited, and been used ineffectively. There is no policy and very limited practices on alternative care that results in the care institutions becoming the only option for children with protection needs.

In general, data on violence against children is scarce and not always consistent. In addition, there is no coordinated child protection reporting system.

UNICEF Response

UNICEF has supported to improve child protection in the current Country Programme 2012-2016.

- **Child protection system.** UNICEF supported the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing to conduct the Child Protection System Mapping study and assessed the existing child protection system towards identifying and addressing critical gaps in legislation, institutional capacities and service delivery.
- **Domestic violence and child abuse and exploitation:** UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Justice and Police, supported awareness raising of violence against children through community mobilization and awareness in Apoera (a community on the South Amazonian part of the country).
- **Institutional care:** support was provided to the developing and adoption the national legislation on institutional care.
- **Child protection data:** UNICEF supported capacity development in collecting, analyzing and using child protection data to effectively inform policy and practice. A database has been established in the Ministry of Justice and Policy and a national research on Violence Against Children is currently undergoing.

Way forward

The programme will provide technical assistance to strengthen capacities and promote cross-sectoral collaboration in addressing bottlenecks related to violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation against children.

- To establish **Child Protection System** and strengthen culturally acceptable local child protection referral systems
- To support **capacity building** of child protection service providers in particular social workers and police officers with development of protocols and standards.
- Support **parenting skills programmes**
- To strengthen **national legislation framework and policies** in related to child protection including development of alternative care policies and implementation of the existing legislations.
- To support strengthening **national coordination** on child protection and develop partnership with NGOs and other stakeholders.
- To continue to support **child protection data collection and analysis**, with the target to establish a child protection information management system.
- To strengthen behavioral change interventions aimed at reversing social norms condoning violence.