

# MOTHERS SURVEY

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SURINAME



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Dr. Julia Terborg,  
Institute for Graduate Studies

## Message from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

**T**oegewijd Committed to harness the power of data as a change strategy, I welcome this report on Violence Against Children (VAC) in Suriname. In partnership with the Parliament and the Institute for Graduate Studies (IGSR), UNICEF has supported this national quantitative and qualitative research to collect data and to understand the underlying causes of violence.

VAC is a silent epidemic. Social stigma, lack of services and prevailing attitude that violence is acceptable in some forms – all contribute to the hidden nature of crimes against children. In Suriname, the prevalence of violence children face is high. As per MICS 2010, 86 % of children (2-14 y) are subjected to at least one form of violent psychological or physical punishment by a household member. 6 out of 10 children are subjected to any physical punishment.

Such study is a milestone for the country and a critical step to break the silence on VAC. Engaged in a 5-year programme of cooperation with the Government covering 2017-2021, UNICEF promotes a “safe and just” Suriname with a focus to address the alarming rate of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children to promote a child-friendly environment where children can develop and thrive.

One of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), overcoming violence calls attention to protect children from violence as a cross-cutting priority. Five goals and eleven targets address violence or abuse, trafficking, sexual -and other types of- exploitation, harmful practices and child labour, along with promotion of safe space, non-violent learning environ-



ment and birth registration. I believe the findings will initiate discussions and commitments to tackle violence and to ensure every child feels safe at home, in school and in their communities.

I thank mothers, children, teachers and participants for their time and critical part in generating evidence and sharing their experiences. A special thanks to the chair of the Parliament, Mrs. Jennifer Geerlings-Simons for her countless efforts to generate knowledge and have this issue high on the agenda. I also thank

the IGRS research team for carrying out this groundbreaking work with professionalism under the lead of Dr Julia Terborg and Director Danny Lachman.

This executive summary is part of a comprehensive qualitative research and analysis of VAC data. The full report will be soon available on our website or hardcopies.

*Violence against children is never justifiable. We all have a role to play - private companies, student and youth organizations, community members, parents and every Surinamese citizen cannot be passive bystanders; meanwhile must be involved in changing behaviours, reducing inequalities, rebuilding a social fabric to protect children's rights.*

*Let us join forces to create a safe and secure Suriname for every child to develop to its fullest potential!*

**Ms. Sylvie Fouet**  
**Country Representative**  
**UNICEF Guyana & Suriname**

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## Summary

Violence against children mainly occurs in the direct residential and living environment of the child, especially within the family circle. The Students Survey (see the report Students Survey) shows that perpetrators are often parents and/or direct family members. With the purpose of better understanding the issue of violence against children, a separate study was conducted among parents, notably mothers and other female caretakers, as part of the nationwide study 'Violence against Children in Suriname'. This 'Mothers Survey' is mainly intended to develop more insight in the behaviour of parents and caretakers, their interaction with children, and to what extent and how at this interpersonal level children are exposed to violence.

It was a deliberate choice to study female parents, because mothers, who are still the ones who are primarily tasked with the daily care and upbringing of children, are most often mentioned as perpetrators of violence against children and therefore are

the most important data source. In general, mothers are also relatively easier accessible in households. Furthermore, another important consideration is that it allows comparison with the 'Multi Cluster Indicator Survey' (MICS). In this worldwide study, which is also conducted nationally on a regular basis, data collection on children is also focused on the mother as primary data source. 'Mother' in this study is defined as: Biological or non-biological female caretaker of school aged children, in the age group 11-18 years.

A multiple stratified sample was drawn of 600 mothers of whom 473 have been interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The study population is distributed over 10 districts and mainly accessed through the schools and is randomly selected from the database with residential addresses of the students. The sample is representative, which allows a nationwide generalization of the results.

## Social demographic characteristics of study population

Most mothers are part of the age group of 30-44 years. The proportion of the relatively 'older' mothers, aged 45+ is 39%, of which 15% is older than 49. A part of this last group of respondents is a grandmother. Taking into consideration the geographic living area of the mothers, it appears that 70% lives in the urban area, 20% in the rural area of the coastal plain, while 10% resides in the rural area in the interior.

The distribution of interviewed mothers or female caretakers over the 10 districts is in good proportion to the nationwide pattern, in which 68% of the mothers is living in the two most densely populated areas, namely Paramaribo (44%) and Wanica (22%). This is followed by the 2 districts Nickerie and Sipaliwini, where respectively 6% and 7% of the mothers live.

In the other districts, the proportion of mothers varies from 0.6% in Coronie to 6% in Commewijne.

The variation in ethnic origin is somewhat consistent with the national patterns (MICS 2010). The proportion of mothers of Creole origin is the largest, namely 22% followed by Hindustani and Maroon

mothers that are represented with an equal proportion in the sample, namely 18% against 18%. At the fourth place are mothers that have identified as Javanese, 17%, followed by mothers with a 'Mixed' origin, who have a proportion of 13% in total. The proportion of Indigenous mothers is relatively the smallest, namely 9%.

Most mothers, 63%, indicate to be Christian. The proportion of respondents that identifies as Hindu or Muslim is almost equal, respectively 13% against 14%.

Mothers according to ethnic origin

Ethnicity	Mothers
• Creole	21.8
• Hindustani	18.3
• Maroon	18.2
• Javanese	17.0
• Mixed	13.0
• Indigenous	9.2
• Other	0.7



The educational level of the correspondents varies from 'no education' to 'university'.

The proportion of women that never has gone to school is small, namely 1.2%. Mothers with only primary level education are 23% of the total. Most mothers, 43%, indicate that VOJ is their highest level of education, while 21% indicates to have gone to VOS. The proportion of mothers with a higher education is the smallest: 7% has a higher vocational education, while 2% refers to university as their highest educational level.

Mothers with the highest educational level (VOS, higher vocational education and university) mainly live in urban areas, while mothers with only primary education almost all live in the rural coastal plain and the interior. The broad majority of the mothers in the interior, 70%, only attended primary school, while 2% doesn't have any form of formal education.

Approximately two-third of the mothers, 65%, does have a regular income, but in many cases this regards the income of the partner. The extent to which the regular income is available to mothers, strongly varies based on geographic area. In the interior and the rural coastal plain, the proportion of mothers with a regular income is approximately 54%, while in the urban area this percentage increases to 69%.

Mothers according to income situation

	Urban	RCP*	Int*	Total
• Regular income	68.6	54.7	54.3	64.7
• No regular income	29.7	43.1	45.7	33.6
* RCP = Rural Coastal Plain      Int = Interior				

Mothers according to highest level of education

Educational level	Urban	RCP*	Int*	Total
• Never been to school	0.9	1.2	2.2	1.2
• Lagere school	14.1	32.1	70.2	22.9
• VOJ (Mulo/LBGO/LTS)	44.4	52.4	14.9	42.9
• VOS	24.1	11.9	10.6	20.6
• HBO	8.8	2.4	2.1	7
• University	2.6	0.0	0	1.9
• Others	0.4	0	0	0.4
* RCP = Rural Coastal Plain      Int = Interior				

Approximately a third of the mothers indicate that there are living 4 or fewer children in the household. 48% of the families have 5-7 children living with them, while 19% reports a large family in which 8 children or more are part of the family. 61% of the mothers is cohabitating with their partner and children under 1 roof and is part of what is called 'the core family', often extended with other family members. The other mothers, 39%, live either alone with the children or live with children and other family members.

Mothers according to family type

Type of family	%
• Core family: with partner and children, other family	60.5
• With children and other family	17.9
• Only with children	20.2

A large part of the mothers, 47%, doesn't have their own regular income, of which 31% was unemployed at the time of the study, including retirees, while 16% did not have a steady job and generated irregular income through odd jobs. 42% of the women is employed by the government or another institution, while 3% is employed in the household of a family and 5% is an independent small entrepreneur.

## Extent of violence against children

Of the total number of mothers, 69% reports that children in their family experienced some form of violence in the past year. When it concerns the entire period of life, the extent of the violence increases to 78%.

Regarding **psychological violence**, more than half of the mothers, 56%, states that in the past year at least 1 form of psychological violence was used against a child in the family. Swearing at children is reported by 45% of the mothers. The proportion of children that witnessed a quarrel between adults or was threatened with being thrown out of the house is respectively 23% and 31%.

**Physical violence** in the past year is a little lower than psychological violence, namely 51%. The most common forms of physical violence are “a beating” (40%) and “smacking” (27%). More serious corporal punishments, such as kicking and a parent or other adult in the household causing injury to a child, is reported by respectively 3% and 2% of the mothers.

The extent of the **sexual violence** against children is 4% in the past year and 6% for the entire period of life. It mostly regards adult perpetrators. Reports from mothers about the violence against their children are significantly lower than the reports from the students (see the Students Survey).

**When you beat children, you need to beat them once. And you need to beat them good. The need to feel ‘hey, I don’t want my mom to hit me a second time’. And that’s what I did to her. Then she will get the message. That is how I beat her, I really beat her up.**

## Parental discipline

Regarding disciplining of children, parents and/or care takers use different forms of discipline, namely non-violent discipline techniques, psychological aggressive discipline options and/or physical discipline methods/corporal punishments. In this study, all sorts of parental discipline are discussed.

In individual and group discussions with parents, an attempt was made to obtain more insight in the attitudes, perceptions as well as the daily experiences of parents regarding the upbringing/discipline methods of children and the socio-cultural backgrounds in situations when violence was used and in situations when there was no use of violence.

More than three quarters of the parents, 76%, holds the opinion that raising a child these days is more difficult than it used to be and this can mainly be attributed to: loss of respect for parents, reduced social control of children, less attention from the parents for the children due to the increased economic pressure, drug/alcohol use of parents, exposure of children to social media and empowerment of children.

Approximately half of the parents, 51%, also thinks that nowadays parents don’t spend much time with their children. In this context ‘child neglect’ was also identified as one of the most common social problems. Both emotional neglect – not having any time for and giving attention to children – and physical neglect due to poverty were mentioned.

Most parents acknowledge that times have changed and in contrast to earlier times, children should be allowed more space to have their own opinion and express themselves. At the same time, they indicate that there are conditions and that the boundaries should be set by the parents. This attitude is well reflected in the finding that 63% of the parents think that their children should not be allowed to express their opinion limitlessly, because this promotes ‘rudeness and impertinence’.

### Reporting by children themselves of violence against children at home: past year

• Child has been called names at	45
• Child has gotten a beating	40
• Child has been smacked	27
• Child has been kicked	3
• Child is physically injured	2
• Child was denied food as punishment	3
• Child has been sexually abused	4

## EXPERIENCES WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REGARDING CORPORAL PUNISHMENTS

- Had a beating themselves 86%
- Frequent and regular corporal punishments in their own childhood 66%
- Has been abused in their own childhood 14%
- Situation at home was unsafe 6%
- Beating was useful 63%

That used to be normal. Children were beaten, you might say abused. They needed to be disciplined. And then we had a saying: *'Tranga ne tja kow go na pen'*.

The large majority, 85%, of the parents feels that decision making about children is primarily the task of the parents. In this context, an often-expressed standpoint among parents is that the issue of child rights is considered from one perspective, because there is insufficient or no attention for the obligations of children when providing education for and promoting child rights.

### Experiences of parents with 'a beating' during their own childhood

More than 86% of the parents got 'a beating' in their childhood, of which 66% experienced this 'beating' on a regular basis. Most of the mothers, 63%, indicate that the 'beating' was useful. One out of five mothers, 20%, did not experience the 'beating' as something positive, of which 14% thinks that they have been abused by their parents and/or caretakers as a child, and 6% has experienced the situation in the family they originally come from, as unsafe.

Parental behavior has changed, when compared to earlier times. When parents compare the current way of bringing up children with how they were raised themselves, then almost all parents agree that corporal punishments are far less used nowadays. Parents realize that children are better protected now and that hitting children, especially in schools, is no longer common.

## Raising children harder than it used to be

### Issues:

- Parents don't have much time for children
- Parents work outside of the home
- No social control
- Children are more impertinent/lack of respect for parents
- Social media
- Alcohol and drug use parents
- Mental stress

**I have two children, my granddaughter, she will be 6 and I am raising another little boy who is nine years old. They don't listen. Terrible children. I cry sometimes. I beat them terribly. I throw them, recently I threw one of them in the washing machine. I said that will teach you to behave yourself. The situation has become really bad. They are constantly fighting. I have medical issues and have high blood pressure**

## Good reasons to give children a beating

### Corporal punishments are justified if:

- 'Child is rude and impertinent' doesn't listen
- 'Child performs badly in school'
- 'Rebellious behaviour of children in puberty'
- 'Children have dangerous behaviour'
- 'To demand respect'
- 'To unlearn bad behaviour from a young age'
- 'The scare off the child'
- 'To make it clear to the child what his or her place is'

## Definitions of abuse

The extent, to which parents categorize violence against children as child abuse, significantly varies. Most parents think that corporal punishment of children is justified if the child 'behaves badly'. Beating a child is considered an acceptable way to: *'demand respect'*, *'unlearn bad behavior from a young age'*, *'scare the child off'*, and *'show the child his or her place'*. Parents that explicitly disapprove corporal punishment form a minority.

Most parents do make a distinction between 'a beating' and abuse, qualifying punishment as abuse in case of an injury. Some parents take into consideration that 'a beating' can lead to injury and are ok with this, as long as this violent 'beating' is limited and incidental and there is no regular pattern.

Another part of the mothers does understand why corporal punishments are given, but disapproves of violent upbringing methods, giving different arguments, including: *'it is better to talk with the child'*, *'the child might get injured'*, *the child is too young to understand'*, *'hitting the child is of no use'*, *'the child will become afraid of the parent'*.

Three quarters of the parents, 76%, think that parents sometimes have good reasons to give their child a 'beating'. The main reasons mentioned and related to the behavior of the child: 'The child is rude and impertinent', 'the child performs badly in school', 'rebellious behavior of children in puberty', 'children show dangerous behavior'.

Most parents think that corporal punishments should be looked at in the context of specific circumstances and are closely related to situational factors that result in the use of violence. Specific circumstances are in part related to the behavior of the child and partly to the conditions of the parent. Children with 'behavioral problems' (aggressive, antisocial and/or dangerous behavior), can cause a parent to lose control and respond in a violent way in case of parents that are in a specific situation (sensitive mental state of the parent due to fatigue, stress, worry) can make a parent lose control and respond in a violent manner.

My daughter is 9 years old. She is also very cheeky, a little bit impertinent. I have stopped talking. I don't like hitting. But when I am really angry or when she goes too far I hit her for all those other times that she was impertinent and that is not good.



## Preferred discipline methods

Practically all parents agree with the statement, 98%, *'that all parents want what's best for their children'*. The use of physical and/or psychological violence against children, does not exclude most parents from also positively stimulating their children. When parents were asked to name three discipline methods that can be used to punish children, more than three quarters of the parents, 78%, chooses for *'talking to the child'*. In general, most parents don't think of violent punishment and the use of physical or psychological punishments when thinking about discipline methods for children. The focus is not on violent methods, but limitation of privileges, such as prohibiting contact with their friends (38%), *'taking away the phone'* (29%) and *'grounding'* (26%) or *'no use of the internet'* (35%).

In general, parents acknowledge that they don't always succeed in consistently striving for the use of non-violent punishment. Also notable is, that parents highlight the importance of *'a beating'* when talking doesn't work. Against most parents who chose for these non-violent punishments, a minority indicates that they would use *'a beating'* as punishment (13.3%), *'taking the child to the police for children'* (11.4%).

## Appropriate punishments

Most mothers use violent and non-violent methods

• Talking to the child	78%
• Prohibition to contact friends	38%
• Taking away the phone	29%
• Grounding	26%
• Prohibition to use the internet	35%
• A beating	13.3%
• Taking the child to the police for children	11.4%

## Reasons for non-violent punishments

- Abuse in their own childhood
- If people know you hit your child, you may get into trouble
- You could injure your child
- The child can commit suicide
- You need to be able to control yourself
- You child should not be afraid of you
- Once start hitting your child it will become a habit
- Hitting your child doesn't get you anywhere
- Yelling and threatening is also effective
- Bad example: that child will become violent later in life



## Sexual violence

The issue of sexual violence was also submitted to parents. All parents strongly disapprove of sexual abuse and agree that this is a serious problem in Surinamese society.

Although most parents think that sex between an adult and a child is not acceptable, most parents also hold the opinion that 'girls encourage sexual abuse by their behavior and indecent clothing'.

Many parents agree that the increased freedom, for both boys and girls, to have social contacts outside of the home, contributes to the sexual abuse of children and that there is more pressure on children to have sex at an early age.

Most parents are familiar with the practice of transactional sex between children and adults, and in part attribute this to poverty and partly to social acceptance of this behavior.

## Sexual education

The large majority of the parents, 81%, advocate sexual education at school, from the fifth grade. The preference of sexual education provided by the school is in part related to the acknowledged limited capacity of parents to talk about sex with their children in an appropriate way.

More than 1 out of four parents indicates that they find it difficult to talk about sex with their children (22%) or feel insecure about doing so (7%). Especially in small communities, with traditional upbringing patterns there are many barriers. However, also when parents do think that they can talk about sex with their children, the discussion is mainly focused on general warnings such as 'don't start with sex, first finish your school'. Acknowledgement of sexual activity of youngsters and talking about 'how to deal with sexual emotions or with sexual partners' is not so much a part of the conversation about sex.

### Opinions about (reporting) sexual violence

- Sex between adult and child is not acceptable
- There is no sexual violence if the child him/herself wants to have sex: girls act provocatively with the way they dress and their behaviour.
- It is difficult to talk about sex with your children.
- Most mentioned reasons to remain silent about sexual violence: 'I don't want to interfere in the private affairs of others, especially when it regards family
- Lack of local support services
- Insufficient adequate response of the local police



## Prevention and response to violence against children

More than three quarters of the parents, 76%, confirms that violence against children in Suriname is a big problem.

Approximately 1 out of 5 parents knows of child abuse cases that occurred in the past year in their immediate vicinity. The large majority of the cases regarded physical abuse. Some parents also mentioned sexual abuse (2%) and psychological abuse (5%).

In three quarters of these cases, no report was filed although it concerned a clear case of child abuse. Parents are often willing to undertake action if they are sure of violence against a child in their immediate vicinity: 45% would notify the police, while 37% prefers to talk to the parents/family of the child. Alarming, 27%, more than 1 out of four parents, think that they should not take action because they don't want to interfere in family matters of others (12%), don't know what they should do (6%) or aren't sure about what to do (8.4%). More than half of the parents, 54%, mention *'afraid to interfere in the family affairs of others'* as a reason to have doubts about taking action.

Especially in small communities, there is much reluctance about making matters public that might harm the reputation of the family. The reluctance of reporting violence against children is also seen in cases of sexual violence. Approximately 1 out of 4 parents, 24%, states that if the sexual violence of the child occurred in their own family, they would not immediately go to the police, or would have doubts about what to do. But even if some individuals do take the step to report a case, there are barriers in access to effective services, especially the lack of local response services, including the police.







## Conclusions

### Parents experience raising children as problematic

More than three quarters of the parents, 76%, thinks that nowadays raising children is more difficult than it used to be, which can mainly be attributed to: loss of respect for parents, reduced social control of children, less attention of parents for children due to pressure of economic survival, increased drug/alcohol use of parents, more exposure of children to social media and increased empowerment of children. Parents experience both emotional neglect – time and attention for children as well as physical neglect of children in their immediate vicinity, due to poverty.

### Parents want balanced approach of 'child rights'

Most parents acknowledge that times have changed, and that contrary to earlier times, children should be allowed more space to have their own opinion and be more empowered. At the same time, they indicate that there are conditions and that the boundaries must be set by parents. Most parents, 63%, think that children should not be able to limitlessly express their opinion, because this would encourage 'rudeness' en 'impertinence'. The large majority, 85% of the parents, holds the opinion that decision making regarding children, is primarily the task of the parents. The general opinion is that the issue of child rights is looked at from one perspective, because in the education and promotion of child rights there is insufficient or no attention for the responsibilities of children.

### Reporting of violence against children by children themselves is high

Parents report less violence against children, than children do, which might suggest underreporting. Even taking into consideration possible underreporting, the extent of the violence that is reported by parents is alarmingly high: More than half of the mothers has reported at least 1 form of psychological violence or physical violence against children in the past year. Approximately 1 out of four children, 23%, has experienced domestic violence. Furthermore, it is disturbing that 4% of the mothers, report that at least 1 child in the family experienced sexual violence in the past year.

### Violent discipline methods still widespread

Violent discipline techniques of children in the home by parents and/or other care takers are still very topical among all groups of parents in Suriname. Violence against children is part of the upbringing practice in which children are disciplined, using both physical and psychological violence. Violence against children is strongly related to the opinions of adults/parents about how children should be disciplined.

### More occurrence of psychological violence than physical violence

Parents use different forms of psychological violence when disciplining children. There is especially mild psychological violence, characterized by screaming or yelling at children. To a lesser extent, parents also confirm the use of worse forms of psychological violence, such as swearing at children, humiliation of children and being offensive towards children.

### Parents think that there are good reasons to use corporal punishments

The fact that three quarters of the parents think that there are sometimes good reasons to impose corporal punishments upon children, demonstrates that the large part of parents still feels that certain behavior of children requires harsh, violent responses. Beating seems to be the only way to keep children under control, especially children with behavioral problems.

**I am telling you that if you come home with an insufficient grade, I will beat you up. He knows that I will hit him if I am angry. Then he will immediately work on improving his school performance.**

## Parents acknowledge the thin line between parental discipline and child abuse

Parents recognize that 'a beating' can turn into abuse. In these last cases, parents attribute a serious 'beating' to the 'loss of control' or other mental condition that leads to crossing the line. The extent, to which parents categorize violence against children as child abuse, strongly varies. Most parents think that a corporal punishment against children is justified, if the child 'behaves badly'. Corporal punishment is qualified as abuse in case of an injury and especially if the violent 'beating' is not limited to one incident, but is a structural pattern in the upbringing.

## Violence against children is closely related to the opinions of parents about 'bad behavior' of children

Many parents still have persistent opinions about appropriate behavior, that don't stroke with modern opinions. Many parents still think that children are 'rude and impertinent' when they talk back to a parent, or that physical force should be used to get children to perform well in school. There is also a strong tendency to give girls a protective upbringing and take strong action when girls don't abide by the rules.

Those parents who believe that there are good reasons for hitting children will also be more inclined to use violent discipline methods.

## Child abuse is especially due to parents 'losing control'

Most parents think that serious physical punishments/child abuse should be considered in the context of specific circumstances that are partly related to the behavior of the child and partly to conditions of the parent. Children with 'behavioral problems' (aggressive, antisocial and/or dangerous behavior), can cause parents in a specific situation (sensitive mental condition of the parent due to fatigue, stress, worry) to lose control and respond in a violent manner.

## Parents realize that corporal punishment is no longer as common as it was in their childhood

More than 86% of the parents received 'a beating' in their own childhood, of which 63% indicates that the 'beating' was useful, while 14% thinks that they were abused as a child by their parents and/or caretakers. Parental behavior has changed compared to earlier times. When parents compare the current upbringing of their children to how they were raised themselves, then almost all parents agree that children nowadays are more protected and that hitting children is no longer something that is common.

## Education and awareness activities as well as legal action against violence against children has an impact on parents

Parents with the intention of raising their child in a non-violent manner, mainly refer to the prohibition of hitting children in schools, information obtained through mass media about the negative effects of hitting children and to the negative responses from their immediate vicinity to violent discipline methods. They are aware that schools can respond to parents who hit their children. Parents also mention the increased social control and risk of sanctions, especially from the police, when parents use violence against children. Furthermore, the establishments of physical reporting points and hotlines have a preventive effect. Parents realize that there is more social control when it concerns the protection of children.

**If you beat her, the child will scream so loudly that the neighbours will hear her. My next door neighbour said: My God, leave her be, you are going to kill her. One time I locked her out in the dark. I told her you will stay outside today. I turned off all the lights. The child ran off. Do you know where she ran off too? She ran into woods, at night. I told her, go into woods and stay there. I said, my God, I am a mother, I am a father to both these kids actually. Because men don't worry about anything. They are out in the streets. They don't interfere with what is going on at home.**

### Negative attitude towards corporal punishments does not necessarily mean that parents no longer hit their children

Most parents have an ambivalent attitude towards hitting children. On the one hand, parents take into consideration that these are different times and hitting children is less accepted and on the other hand, they have persistent opinions that children, especially children with behavioral problems, need a strict approach. We also see contradictory results. On one hand 75% of the parents, states that there are good reasons to use corporal punishments and on the other hand, 75% of the parents, states that it is better to not use violent punishment.

### Not much awareness among parents about the negative effects of psychological violence

Although many parents recognize that corporal punishments may have negative effects, there is hardly any resistance against psychological violence. Screaming, yelling, being offensive and threatening children is considered a common part of the upbringing. Also, in the social discussion about violence against children, there is very little attention for the effects of the different forms of psychological violence. Furthermore, no appropriate indicators and tools have been developed for reliable data collection for these forms of violence within specific contexts in Suriname.

### Parents advocate non-violent discipline methods

Even when parents hit and scream at their children, they still advocate non-violent discipline methods. Almost all parents, 90%, agree with the statement that *'all parents want what's best for their children'*. When parents are asked to name the most appropriate discipline methods, the focus is on non-violent methods, especially, 'talking to the child' (78%), limitation of privileges, especially the prohibition of contacting friends (38%), 'taking away the phone' (29%) and 'grounding' (26%) or 'prohibition to use the internet' (35%).

### Physical and/or psychological violence goes hand in hand with positive stimulation

Results furthermore show that using violence goes hand in hand with positive stimulation, and that almost all parents report that they also give children compliments or rewards in case of good behavior. This result is also confirmed by children in the students' survey. This inconsistency might indicate the presence of good intentions, but at the same time insufficient knowledge and skills to use alternative non-violent methods.

### Not all forms of sexual violence against children is disapproved by parents

Generally, parents strongly disapprove of sexual abuse of children and agree that this is a serious problem in the Surinamese society. At the same time, there is no clear definition of 'child' or of sexual abuse. While rape, incest, sexual abuse of young children by adults is explicitly disapproved of, there is often acceptance or people close their eyes for the much more often occurring forms of sexual abuse, such as 'sexual molest', 'transactional sex or youth prostitution' and 'sexual relations (short-term or long-term) between young girls (<16 years old) and older men. The social acceptance of these forms of sexual violence against children is closely related to the widespread opinion that if children 'voluntarily' have sex, there is no sexual abuse or violence.

### Parents are in favor of sexual education at school

The large part of the parents, 81%, is in favor of sexual education at school, and then starting in fifth grade. The preference of sexual education provided by schools is partly related to the acknowledged limited capacity of many parents to talk to their children about sex in an appropriate manner. More than 1 out of four parents indicate that they find it difficult to talk about sex with their children (22%) or feel insecure about doing so (7%). Especially in small communities, with mostly traditional methods for raising children there are still many barriers.

## Parents don't act and/ or do not report out of fear for repercussions

More than three quarters of the parents, 76%, confirms that violence against children in Suriname is a big problem. Around 1 out of 5 parents is aware of cases of sexual abuse that occurred in the past year in their direct vicinity. Parents are often willing to act in case they are sure of violence against a child in their direct vicinity: 45% would notify the police, while 37% prefers talking to the parents/ family of the child. Alarmingly, 27%, more than 1 out of 4 parents, thinks that they shouldn't take action and mention as main reasons: 'fear of repercussions if they interfere in family matters of others'. Especially in small communities, families are reluctant to make matters public that may harm the reputation of the family.

### Some conclusions

- All parents want what is best for their children
- Parents realize that corporal punishment is not so common as it used to be in their childhood
- Parents are in favour of non-violent discipline
- Parents are in favour of sexual education in school
- Education and awareness activities and legal action against violence against children have an impact on parents



## Recommendations

For an extensive discussion of the recommendations, we refer to the sub-report 'National response in relation to GC13, Policy and legislation', with the focus on:

1. Public education and awareness campaigns.
2. Capacity building of parents.
3. Development of policy and programs for 'parent participation' for the development and strengthening of 'safe schools'.
4. Revision and strengthening of relevant legislation.
5. Strengthening supervision and compliance with legislation.
6. Capacity building of service providers.
7. Development and policy of strengthening of families.
8. Establishment independent institution for 'Child Protection'.
9. Decentralization of service provision in the context of 'Child Protection'.
10. Development or improvement of access to reporting points and complaint procedures.

## Specific Action Points based on Mothers Survey

### Short term

1. Public presentation of results based on informing key persons and promoting and developing policy and programs for, among others, parents/care takers.
2. Distribution of results of the study, using fact sheets, to all relevant stakeholders with the intention of strengthening the social discussion.
3. Formal establishment of inter-ministerial 'Council for Child Protection' (in agreement with the intention to map the 'Child Protection System', see report J. Terborg, 2015)
4. Establishment of more 'Reporting Points for Child Protection' in agreement with the initiative of the Ministry of Justice and Police.
5. Initiate preparations for the establishment of an independent National Institution for Child Protection, with special focus on 'Development and Implementation of Parent Programs'
6. Initiate national education and awareness campaign, using as much as possible impact studies: part of this campaign could be: TV documentary, exhibition, bill boards, etc.
7. Discussion of impact study in the National Assembly and development of draft legislation focused on the structural strengthening of families for the prevention of and response to violence against children.
8. Strengthening of 'Social Services' department of the department of Youth Affairs of the National Police Corps in the context of care for and supervision of children with an increased risk of experiencing violence and counseling of their parents/caretakers.
9. Strengthening of current programs focused on 'Safety in Schools'.
10. Strengthening of current programs focused on strengthening of parents in the 'Non-Violent upbringing of Children'.
11. Integration of principles and guidelines of 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education' (CSE) in the 'Basic Life Skills' curricula for both GLO as VOJ schools.
12. Anticipating the integration of CSE in the BLS curricula, promoting sexual education in schools.



'We know enough now to stop hitting our children. Of 55 original studies on externalising behaviour, the overwhelming majority (42 studies) found that physical punishment predicted increases in externalising behaviour, including aggression and conduct problems, increases in delinquency and antisocial behaviour, lower trustworthiness and higher levels of Oppositional Defiant Disorder'.

**Gershoff (2010)**

