

# African Child Policy Forum

## Violence Against Children in Ethiopia: In Their Words



**Save the Children**  
Sweden



## About The African Child Policy Forum

The African Child Policy Forum is an independent, advocacy organisation working for the realisation of child rights. Founded in 2003, through the generous support of Plan International, the Forum is headquartered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Its mission is to contribute towards the development and implementation of effective laws and policies to put African children on the public agenda. To this end, it will provide support where the political will exists and exert pressure where it is absent.

The work of the Forum is inspired by universal values, informed by global experiences and knowledge, and guided by the needs and conditions of African children.

Working in collaboration with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Forum regularly publishes research that, along with its programmatic focus, aims to provide a forum for dialogue; contribute to improved knowledge of the problems that face African children; strengthen the capacity of child-rights and human-rights organisations; and finally, to assist governments, policy makers and NGOs in developing and implementing effective pro-child policies and programmes.

This publication and others published by The African Child Policy Forum are available online at: [www.africanchildforum.org](http://www.africanchildforum.org).

## About Save the Children Sweden

Save the Children Sweden started working in Eastern and Central Africa in 1965. It has offices in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Nairobi, Kenya; and Khartoum, Sudan. Save the Children fights for children's rights, delivering immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. Save the Children works for a world:

- which respects and values each child;
- which listens to children and learns;
- where all children have hope and opportunity.

Save the Children Sweden is a non-governmental organisation that is an active member of the International Save the Children Alliance – a global movement for children's rights. Save the Children Sweden publishes books and reports to disseminate knowledge about the situation of children, to provide guidance and inspire new thoughts and discussions.

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## PREFACE

State Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

-- Article 19,  
***Convention on the Rights of the Child***

State Parties... shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of a parent, legal guardian or school authorities or any other person who has the care of the Child.

--Article 16, ***African Charter  
on the Rights and Welfare of  
the Child***

Violence against children remains a pervasive, but largely ignored issue in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa. This is certainly the case in Ethiopia, where children regularly face humiliating physical punishment and psychological abuse at home, in school and in the community-at-large. Children endure painful and harmful acts against them, primarily, and ironically, committed by those closest to them - parents, family members, neighbours, schoolteachers and peers. Violence comes in all shapes and forms including rape, beatings, bullying, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, abduction, early marriage, female genital cutting, committing children to abusive and exploitative labour, trafficking, and the use of children as weapons and targets of war.

There is little understanding, if any, of how harmful such violence can be to a child's development, growth and survival. Regrettably, too often and in too many African countries, cultural and traditional beliefs deeply rooted in society sanction violence as a way of disciplining children. In addition, there is no tradition or knowledge of alternative ways of disciplining children other than resorting to violent practices. Worse, is the fact that children remain powerless victims, their viewpoints and opinions generally ignored, with no formal or traditional recourse for redress or protection.

For these reasons, The African Child Policy Forum considers violence against children an important area of concern for those involved with the protection of children and the creation of an Africa truly fit for children. If there is to be a prosperous, peaceful Africa of laws and solidarity, it must start at home and there must be a change to the way children are treated. The African Child Policy Forum intends to contribute to this effort and vision.

The Forum has initiated a major programme of work on violence against children that combines research, advocacy and policy dialogue. One outcome of this programme is a major research study into the nature of the problem in Ethiopia in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden. The results of this study are available in three parts:

- (i) *Ending Physical and Humiliating Punishment against Children: Ethiopia* (separately published by Save the Children Sweden)
- (ii) *Stick, Stones and Brutal Words: The Violence Against Children in Ethiopia*
- (iii) This current publication, *Violence Against Ethiopian Children: In Their Words*

These three studies come together to give only a glimpse of the type and extent of the violence Ethiopian children face including astounding statistics such as:

- More than 60 percent of adults in the study admitted to tying up a child with rope or electrical wire and 57 percent admitted to punching a child
- More than 70 percent of the children have been hit with a stick or other instrument
- 60 percent have personal knowledge of children being abducted
- 62.6 percent of adults admitted to forcing a child to inhale the smoke of burning chill peppers

While the statistics in the report are powerful, hearing the children's own revealing comments and stories gives the study a particular significance and sets it apart from others. It is the third study that details the children's perceptions, allowing them space to explain how violence affects their everyday life and how it diminishes their basic development. Their own words dive deeper into the magnitude of the problem:

- *"The teacher beat me with a stick. While doing so he knocked my head against the wall. As a result, my forehead was bruised."* 15-year-old girl
- *"I know a man who beat his stepdaughter with a hot iron."* 14-year-old boy

This major study confirms that knowledge of the nature and extent of the problem of violence against children remains limited. The surveys and focus group discussions carried out in the context of these studies have only "scratched the surface."

Three conclusions emerge from this study: First, there is an urgent need to know more about the nature and incidence of violence, and the views and perceptions about it. Second, harmful and traditional attitudes toward violence must be addressed through concerted social mobilization and vigorous advocacy. And third, there is an urgent need to formulate and implement effective policies and programmes to combat violence against children.

The Forum intends to engage governments, policy makers and local authorities in all three areas. This is an issue of overriding importance: We need to understand it; and we need to act. Fundamental to success is gaining better knowledge of the social beliefs that underpin the physical abuse and humiliation of children. To do this, it is imperative that children's views and experiences are heard, loud and clear, in any discussion or research on the topic.

Finally, I would like to thank the research team – Yoseph Endeshaw, Meberatu Gebeyehu, Getachew Assefa, Belete Reta, Tesfu Baraki, Kedrelah Idris – as well as the Forum's staff, especially Kidist Alemu, the Project Office responsible for the project, Rakeb Messele, Manager, Technical Programmes, and our editorial team – Darcel Gabriel-Nelson, Antoinette Powell and Katie Taft – for making these studies happen.



Assefa Bequele, PhD  
Executive Director

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The research team was composed of:

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*The Research Team*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT THE AFRICAN CHILD POLICY FORUM.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN SWEDEN .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>II</b>
RESEARCH TEAM.....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.0 Background.....	3
1.1 Objectives of the Study .....	3
<b>CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.0 Research Site .....	4
2.1 Data Gathering Methods.....	4
2.2 Sample Selection and Size .....	4
2.3 Ethical Considerations .....	5
<b>CHAPTER THREE: CHILDREN’S VIEWS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.0 What is Violence Against Children? .....	6
3.1 Acceptable and Unacceptable Forms of Violence at Home and in School.....	6
3.2 Forms of Violence Regarded by the Community as Acceptable and Unacceptable .....	7
3.3 Physical and Psychological Punishment as an Effective Means of Discipline.....	8
3.4 Prevalence of Punishing Children at Home .....	9
3.5 Prevalence of Violence Against Children in Schools .....	10
3.6 Prevalence of Violence Against Children in the Community .....	11
3.7 Prevalence of Sexual Violence in the Community .....	12
3.8 Causes of Violence Against Children in the Community .....	13
3.9 Negative Effects of Violence Against Children.....	14
3.10 Children’s Emotional Responses to Violence Committed Against Them or Other Children .....	15
3.11 Programmes That Address the Problem of Violence Against Children .....	16
3.12 Recommendations to Eliminate Violence Against Children .....	17
3.13 How Children Can Stop Violence Against Them .....	18
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUAL CASES OF VIOLENCE .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Case 1 : A True Story Told by a 17-year-old School boy .....	19
Case 2 : A True Story Told by a 13-year-old .....	19
Case 3 : A True Story Written by a 16-year-old Boy .....	19
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>21</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1 - Research Sites.....	4
Table 2 - Children Targeted and Reached by the Survey .....	5
Table 3 - Percentage of Children who Experienced Punishment at Home .....	9
Table 4 - Percentage of Children who Experienced Violence in Schools .....	11
Table 5 - Percentage of Children who Experienced Violence in the Community .....	11



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A large proportion of children, our beloved children, are victims of violence everyday around the world. This is especially true in Ethiopia, where approximately 99 percent of the children polled in this study said they had encountered violence in their home, school or community. Physical and humiliating punishment is a violation of children's fundamental human rights. The violence needs to end. We should all be involved, including children, in the eradication of violence. For this reason, the role of children in protecting those rights is crucial for effective research, advocacy and policy-making. Child participation is one of the basic principles under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which underlines the right of children to express their views in all matters affecting them.

This study – one of three that researched violence against children in Ethiopia – illustrates the participatory research done with Ethiopian children on physical punishment and psychological humiliation that have been committed against them. The children's views and experiences were central in the research for all the studies. Particularly this study, where children were the lead source of information. The high degree of child participation at every stage is among the distinguishing features of these studies.

The issue of violence against children and their entitlement to be protected from it is beginning to receive global attention. In light of this, The African Child Policy Forum in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden, conducted research to collect information on violence against children across Ethiopia. The study is written from the child's view point, looking at how physical, psychological and sexual violence affects them. As well as being respondents, the children also participated as advisors and co-researchers.

The research targeted Addis Ababa and the regional states of Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS). It focused on physical, psychological and sexual violence against children at home, in schools and in the community. This study used qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The respondents to the study were school children, street children, orphans, children in foster institutions and children with disabilities. In order to address the ethical implications of asking children to recall their experiences of sexual violence, only young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, were asked to respond to that part of the study. Overall, 1873 children participated in the study.

The findings of the study showed that children had their own way of understanding violence, which differed significantly from adults. While a large proportion of adults considered physical and humiliating punishments as acceptable ways to discipline a child, children recognised these types of punishments as excessive and unacceptable. In general, they stated that violence is an act that causes harm to them. The children further indicated that while violence was widespread, the primary settings for physical and psychological violence were at home and in school. In addition, the children acknowledged the prevalence of sexual violence in the community. Regarding the acceptability of violence, children felt that mild forms of physical and psychological violence were tolerable. They clearly stated, however, that sexual violence and grave physical punishments were objectionable and unacceptable.

All three studies revealed that a large proportion of adults used severe punishment as a principal approach to teaching children how to behave. Many of the children in the study, however, were not positive about the effectiveness of violence exercised as discipline. In fact, more than 70 percent of them responded that they learned nothing from such punishments. Rather, they indicated advising and other non-violent means to be more effective. The children indicated that violence has a negative impact on their social, physical and mental well-being. They said in the interviews and polling that violence made them feel anger, fear, hatred, depression, vengeance, confusion and helplessness.

In the study, 63.4 percent of children who were interviewed said that they considered violence against children as a human rights issue. It is imperative the children are empowered to include themselves in the process and that their voices are heard. Using the children's suggestions and their stories, the study recommends measures aimed at creating awareness; law reform and effective enforcement of existing laws; establishing mechanisms for effectively reporting violence; systematic data collection from children; providing support to victims of violence; and enhancing child participation in research and decision-making activities.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background

Children's participation in matters affecting their lives is a fundamental right. This right is considered to be one of the pillars of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Children's participation, as enshrined in Article 12 of the CRC, includes the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, the right to be heard and the obligation to give due weight to their views. Despite this recognition, in most societies around the globe, children are not usually given the chance to articulate their views on matters that affect them, and the opinions they are allowed to express are not given value and credence. Children are not normally thought to have wisdom and insight on matters that influence their lives or society. More often than not, they are excluded from debates on issues or measures involving them.

In the context of violence against children, the views and experiences of children and their participation should be central to dealing with the problem effectively. Only children can speak from direct and contemporary experience about the various aspects of violence against them – its magnitude, causes, effects, etc. Children should not be treated only as victims of violence needing protection, but also as actors and agents who can help to bring social change regarding violence against them. Children's views and experiences, and their active participation, are essential if policies and programmes that address the root-causes of violence are to be designed and executed.

Like many societies of the world, children's views are not considered significant or valuable in Ethiopian society. Most people believe that children have little or no understanding and insight on issues, whether or not the issues relate to them. So, they are not given the chance to express their views. Although there has been some effort in Ethiopia to promote children's participation in matters concerning them, much remains to be done. Society must acknowledge that the views of children should be included in decision-making, and their experiences identified and documented. In particular, information on their views and experiences of violence against children is negligible. To address these failures, The African Child Policy Forum, in collaboration with Save the Children Sweden, carried out this study.

### 1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to document the views and experiences of children on violence against them by focusing on five selected regions of Ethiopia, namely: Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS). The specific objectives of the study include:

- a. identifying children's perceptions and understanding of violence;
- b. identifying children's perceptions on the type, prevalence and magnitude of violence against them in their communities;
- c. ascertaining children's views of the perpetrators, causes and effects of violence against them;
- d. assessing children's awareness and opinions on the prevention, treatment and reintegration mechanisms regarding violence against them;
- e. identifying children's views on measures that should be taken to address the problem of violence against them;
- f. documenting individual cases of violence against children.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### 2.0 Research Sites

The research was carried out in five regions that, together, represent a significant area of the country, and its major socio-economic, racial, ethnic, religious and related population characteristics. The table below (Table 1) summarises research sites selected on the basis of these criteria.

**Table 1 - Research Sites**

Region	Site	
	Urban	Rural
Addis Ababa	-Gulele sub-city -Arada sub-city -Bole sub-city	
Oromia	-Nazreth town -Assella town	Rural communities adjacent to Nazreth and Assella towns
Amhara	-Bahir Dar town -Debre Berhan town	Rural communities adjacent to Bahir Dar and Debre Berhan towns
Tigray	-Mekele town -Adigrat town	Rural communities adjacent to Mekele and Adigrat towns
SNNPRS	-Awassa town -Dila town	Rural communities adjacent to Awassa and Dila towns

### 2.1 Data Gathering Methods

For the collection of children's views and experiences on violence against them, the following methods were used:

- Structured Interview
- Focus Group Discussions
- Story Telling/Narrative Research

### 2.2 Sample Selection and Size

Sample selection employed a combination of stratified, purposeful and quota sampling techniques, using gender, age and children's living situations as selection criteria. Information was collected from children from categories including:

- school children;
- street children;
- orphans;
- children in care centres;
- children with disabilities.

The table below (Table 2) summarises the sample size targeted and reached through the research instruments and techniques that were used.

**Table 2 - Children Targeted and Reached by the Survey**

Method	Sample	Reached			Response rate
		Total	Male	Female	
Structured interview	1150	1223	635 (52%)	588 (48%)	106%
Focus group discussions	500	424	226 (53%)	198 (47%)	85%
Narrative/story telling	100	226	115 (51%)	111 (49%)	226%
Totals	1750	1873	976	897	107%

### 2.3 Ethical Considerations

The study was carried out in line with research ethics that include the need to:

- give enough information and explanation to all research participants about the research (who it is for; what it is about; its purpose, objective and methodology; actual and potential benefits to various bodies, including the institutions carrying out the research, the research team, research participants and their related populations);
- inform all research participants that they have the right not to partake in or to withdraw from the research at any stage;
- secure the informed consent of all respondents who participate in the research;
- protect research participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Moreover, questions on the personal experiences of children in relation to sexual violence were excluded from the research instruments designed to collect data from children. It was instead, retrospectively collected from adults between the ages of 18 and 24. This was done to avoid the negative consequences (psychological or otherwise) such questions may have on children.

It should be mentioned that the views of children have been taken verbatim, with just minor editorial changes made for clarity.

## CHAPTER THREE: CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM

### 3.0 What is Violence Against Children?

Children were asked what they understood by the term 'violence against children'. The definitions forwarded by them include:

- actions that cause children pain;
- violence is an act which physically hurts children;
- psychological and physical abuse of children;
- a harmful act one person causes against another;
- a violation of the human rights of a child;
- inappropriately punishing or harming a child.

Most children also responded by enumerating specific acts, which they consider as violence against them. The most frequently cited acts include:

- rape;
- insult;
- beatings;
- being deprived of basic necessities such as food or clothes;
- being made homeless;
- abduction;
- early marriage;
- female genital mutilation (FGM);
- child labour.

#### **Summary of Views**

Children understand violence as acts that hurt them, or cause harm or pain to them. They consider most sexual, physical and psychological acts that cause harm to them as violence. It is interesting to note that being made hungry or homeless, or being forced to go without necessities such as clothes, are also considered to be violence.

### 3.1 Acceptable and Unacceptable Forms of Violence at Home and in School

When asked which forms of violence they accept or tolerate at home and in school, children responded as follows:

*"A knock on the head and pinching at home, and being hit with a duster or rags in school are acceptable. But being beaten on our backs with sticks by some teachers resulting in bruises is unacceptable." 14-year-old girl*

*“Rape, early marriage and abduction are not acceptable as they cause a lot of health and psychological problems.” 15-year-old girl*

*“I hate insults more than beatings.” 16-year-old girl*

*“I can tolerate pinching, but I don’t want beatings at all.” 15-year-old boy*

*“Giving advice is the only appropriate measure to be taken against children.” 14-year-old girl*

*“Pinching and minor beating with a stick is not violence at all.” 14-year-old street boy*

*“Pinching by family members has never been a problem for me.” 12-year-old street boy*

*“We accept pinching if we misbehave, since we are used to it. But we do not accept more than that.” 13-year-old*

*“My brother was caught stealing from the neighbours. My mother beat him with a stick. He did not experience any physical problems. For the time being, he feels some pain that will surely go away very soon. The purpose is to correct him and make him a useful citizen for the country.” 15-year-old girl*

*“I think kneeling down is better than beating.” 15-year-old girl*

#### **Summary of Views**

Children consider all types of sexual violence to be unacceptable. Their views on physical violence are divided. Most of them seem to accept minor punishments like pinching and kneeling down.

### **3.2 Forms of Violence Regarded by the Community as Acceptable and Unacceptable**

*“Burning with a hot iron is not acceptable.” 17-year-old boy*

*“Beating is acceptable in our community as a method of correcting a child.” 17-year-old boy*

*“Child labour is quite common and acceptable.” 16-year-old girl*

*“Slapping is common in our home. My mother also pinches me between my thighs. These are common practices in our neighbourhood as well.” 11-year-old girl*

*“The community believes that physical punishment is for a child’s own good.” 14-year-old boy*

*“In our culture there is a saying that if a female is not circumcised she will break things. So families circumcise their children.” 14-year-old girl*

*“In rural areas, FGM is acceptable.” 14-year-old girl*

*“Rape is not acceptable to the community.” 16-year-old girl*

*“Denying food to a child is not approved by the community.” 17-year-old boy*

*“Whipping is unnecessary. It may hit the eye and make a child blind. Thus it is not acceptable.” 15-year-old girl*

*“Expelling children from home is not acceptable.” 15-year-old girl*

*“Beating, slapping, harassing us is acceptable.” 12-year-old street boy*

#### **Summary of Views**

Children expressed the view that their communities generally regard physical punishment, excluding the grave forms, as acceptable. They also felt that their communities tolerate sexual violence in the form of traditional practices. However, they stated that rape is not acceptable to any community members.

### **3.3 Physical and Psychological Punishment as an Effective Means of Discipline**

Out of the 1121 children reached through structured interviews, 74.2 percent stated that they have not learned anything from the punishment they endured, and that it would not compel them to stop committing the same offence again.

Alternative ways of disciplining children were put forward during the structured interviews and focus group discussions. Almost all the children questioned believed that advising children is the best way of disciplining them. Other opinions include:

*“Instead of beating children after they have committed offences, it is better to prevent them from making them in the first place. For example, if the misbehaviour is related to watching films, then it is better to prohibit watching movies altogether.” 14-year-old boy*

*“Providing clear warnings to children so that they do not commit mistakes is preferable.” 14-year-old boy*

*“Having open discussions with children is a good alternative.” 15-year-old girl*

*“Showing love to children is an alternative to violent acts.” 12-year-old boy*



### Summary of Views

A large majority of children did not consider physical punishment as an effective means of disciplining children. Most children stated that adults should refrain from exercising even the mildest punishments against children. Instead they recommended advising children and other non-violent means of disciplining.

## 3.4 Prevalence of Punishing Children at Home

*“In our community, most parents beat their children. But in our house beating is not common.” 13-year-old boy*

*“My father was a very difficult man. Whenever he quarrelled with us [my younger sister and I], he forced us to leave the house. He would lock the door and leave us to sleep on the veranda.” 18-year-old girl*

*“My father used to beat me after tying my neck together with my leg.” 14-year-old boy*

*“I hate insults more than beatings. My brother is always angry with me and calls me a prostitute.” 16-year-old girl*

*“I became a street boy because of the beatings at home.” 12-year-old boy*

*“I remember my mother dragging me on the rough road.” 12-year-old boy*

*“My mother forced me to inhale the smoke of burning pepper.” 12-year-old boy*

*“I know a man who burnt his stepdaughter with a hot iron.” 14-year-old boy*

**Table 3 - Percentage of Children Who Experienced Punishment at Home**

Type of psychological violence	%	Type of physical violence	%
Shouting/glaring	71.9%	Hitting with a stick	74.1%
Insulting	76.7%	Hitting on the head	73.3%
Frightening/threatening	65.5%	Slapping	70.3%
		Pinching	69.1%
		Whipping with a belt	63.7%
		Kneeling down	53.1%

### **Summary of Views**

Children stated that physical and psychological punishment at home is very prevalent and that they experience every form of it there. The punishment is usually inflicted by fathers, mothers, older brothers and sisters, stepmothers and stepfathers, as well as close relatives.

## **3.5 Prevalence of Violence Against Children in Schools**

*“We feel like we are totally at the mercy of our teachers as they beat us for good or bad reasons.” 12-year-old girl*

*“A girl was disturbing the class. The teacher asked her to stop. Then he kicked her hand with his shoe. Her hand was badly hurt.” 13-year-old*

*“In our school insulting is common.” 14-year-old girl*

*“When I was in the fifth grade, I lost my pencil. When the school director learned that I was not writing, he beat me with a plastic hose. My nose was bleeding and I went to the clinic.” Sixth grade student*

*“In our classroom there was an intelligent girl. Our teacher liked her very much. Our class monitor was not happy with this and was rather jealous, so he notified the school authorities that she was misbehaving in the class. It was, however, found out later that the accusation had no grounds. Seeing that his plan did not work, he waited for her on her way home from school and punched her in her face. As a result, two of her teeth were broken.” 13-year-old*

*“One day, I was a little bit late for school. I was running fast to arrive on time. When I got to the gate of our school, I tried to sneak in. But the guard came from nowhere and severely beat me on my back with a big stick. I fell down. I fully recovered only after visiting the doctor.” Seventh grade student*

*“One day our teacher said that those who have not done their homework should come up to the front of the class. I had not done my homework on that particular day. So I went to the front. Then the teacher beat me with a stick. While doing so he knocked my head against the wall. As a result, my forehead was bruised.” 15-year-old girl*

**Table 4 - Percentage of Children Who Experienced Violence in Schools**

Type of psychological punishment	%	Type of physical punishment	%
Shouting/glaring	61.1%	Kneeling down	81.3%
Insulting	70.3%	Hitting on the head	77.8%
Frightening/threatening	54.3%	Pinching	74.4%
Ridiculing and embarrassing	46.6%	Slapping	72.0%
		Hitting with a stick	60.8%

**Summary of Views**

Children stated that physical and psychological punishment is very prevalent in schools and that they experience most forms of punishment there. Those who inflict such violence are usually schoolteachers, guards, class monitors and older boys.

**3.6 Prevalence of Violence Against Children in the Community**

*“I was beaten by the police for begging.” 13-year-old street boy*

*“I was beaten by the police for sleeping on the sidewalks.” 14-year-old street boy*

*“When we go to the shops, some boys frighten us, insult us and harass us on the street.” 15-year-old girl*

*“Sometimes I sit in the class and think about what those boys, who have been harassing me for quite a long time now, will do to me when I leave the school.” 16-year-old girl*

**Table 5 - Percentage of Children Who Experienced Violence in the Community**

Type of psychological violence	%	Type of physical violence	%
Shouting/glaring	47.6%	Slapping	53.7%
Insulting	64.9%	Hitting on the head	53.7%
Frightening/threatening	56.2%	Kicking	52.1%
Ridiculing and embarrassing	42.0%	Hitting with a stick	47.6%

### Summary of Views

Children stated that they also experience violence outside the home and school, although the prevalence is lower. The perpetrators are generally the police, street children and male youth.

## 3.7 Prevalence of Sexual Violence in the Community

*“Due to cultural practices, circumcision and early marriage are prevalent in our community like in most rural areas.” 15-year-old boy*

*“I know a child in my neighbourhood who works as a housemaid. The employers [a husband and wife] work at night in a textile factory. One day the son of the employers raped the child worker. She screamed. When we arrived to her rescue, she was covered with blood.” 14-year-old girl*

*“I remember a girl who was being harassed three years ago by a man who said he wanted to marry her. She refused. One day he forcefully took her to his home and raped her. She got pregnant and dropped out of school as a result. Now she has two children, lives in a rural area and leads a difficult life. She is so ashamed that she does not even want to meet us on the street and deliberately avoids us.” 17-year-old girl*

*“In our neighbourhood, a 22-year-old man raped an eight-year-old girl. He was released on bail without being punished for what he did. I am very much disappointed.” 14-year-old girl*

*“I have a girl friend who was raped by a street boy.” 14-year-old street girl*

*“I know a child who was brought here by her relatives for education in my neighbourhood. She is about 13-years-old. But she has never been sent to school. She works every day. One Saturday I was bored and wanted to play with the girl. I went to her house. I called her name but no answer came. Then I heard a whisper in one of the rooms. I opened the door and saw her in the bed with the father of the family.” Eighth grade girl*

The questionnaire administered to children contained an exhaustive list of the major forms of sexual violence. Using this list the children could point out whether or not they know of cases of sexual violence perpetrated against other children. This methodology was used as it is considered unethical to ask children to recount their own personal experiences of sexual violence for research purposes, and doing so may put children at risk of double victimisation.

Children questioned reported that they know of cases of abduction (60.8 percent), rape (52.2 percent), seduction (42.5 percent), sexual harassment (33.2 percent) and unwanted sexual advance (33.2 percent), experienced by other children. 48 percent and 38.7 percent of the children indicated that they personally know of cases of early marriage and FGM, respectively.

### **Summary of Views**

Children stated that all types of sexual violence including rape, abduction, early marriage, FGM, and sexual harassment are prevalent in their communities. Most of these humiliating and damaging acts are committed by male vagrants, older boys, teachers, traditional doctors and parents.

## **3.8 Causes of Violence Against Children in the Community**

*“They beat us because there is this traditional attitude that believes in the physical punishment of children.” Focus group participants aged 10 to 18 years old*

*“There are traditional practices like FGM and early marriage. These are causes for the increased violence against children.” 14-year-old boy*

*“There is an economic problem. Poverty aggravates the problems of children.” 14-year-old girl*

*“A low standard of living or poverty is one cause of violence against children.” 12-year-old boy*

*“Most violence against children is committed due to outdated cultural beliefs.” 12-year-old girl*

*“When families separate due to divorce, it creates problems for children.” 13-year-old*

*“They hit us because they passed through the same experiences during their childhood, and they think that corporal punishment is the best way of disciplining children.” Focus group participants aged 10-18-years-old*

*“My stepfather hits me for no reason. I think he just hates me.” 12-year-old boy*

*“Some teachers beat you just because they do not like how you walk.” Focus group participants aged 15 to 18 years old*

*“My stepmother does not give me enough food, but she gives a lot of food to her own son. I do not know why.” 9-year-old boy*

*“One day my father was angry with me and he started to hit me. He beat me more whenever I gave answers to what he asked me as he was beating me. I then understood that I was being beaten because I spoke back.” 15-year-old focus group participant*

*“Leniency of the law also contributes to violence against children.” 17-year-old boy*

*“The government does not take strict measures against child abusers. Even those that are doing terrible things like rape and abduction are treated leniently. Also parents go unpunished in most cases even when they do terrible things to their children.” Focus group participants aged 10 to 18 years old*

*“Ethiopia is not implementing her obligations under the international conventions relating to the rights of children.” Extract from a story written by a 16-year-old student*

*“My grandfather beats my three-year-old brother whenever he gets drunk.” 13-year-old*

### **Summary of Views**

Children identified cultural and attitudinal problems, lack of awareness, family disagreements, perceptions about how children should behave, the government’s failure to take strict measures against child abusers, as well as poverty and alcoholism as some of the major causes for the continued practice of violence against children.

## **3.9 Negative Effects of Violence Against Children**

During the structured interviews, children were asked to enumerate the negative effects of violence against them. The most frequently stated effects include:

- physical disability and injury;
- lack of self-confidence;
- fear;
- mental problems;
- involvement in street life and vagrancy;
- truancy and dropping out of school;
- suicide and permanent hopelessness;
- HIV and other STD infections;
- unwanted pregnancy;
- stigmatisation;
- birth related problems;
- child prostitution.

In the focus group discussions and during the narrations, children further articulated some of the negative effects that violence has on them:

*“I know of a 10-year-old girl who was raped by a 35-year-old HIV-positive man. She died because of the virus transmitted to her.” 16-year-old girl*

*“I lost my two eyes by a person who wanted to use me for begging.” 16-year-old boy*

*“A girl [domestic worker] was processing butter. When she finished, she put it somewhere. For some reason the butter spilled over. Her indignant employer beat her with a steel rod used for grinding coffee. As a result, the child’s spine was broken and she became handicapped.” Seventh grade girl*

*“One day my brother came to me and said that he heard I had an intimate [sexual] relationship with some of the boys. Without any evidence, he began to beat me so severely that I was not able to control myself and I urinated. I will never forget the humiliation of that incident for the rest of my life.” 16-year-old girl*

### **Summary of Views**

Children stated that nothing negatively affects their lives more than violence. They emphasised the physical and psychological effects of violence, as well as its effect on the social status of children and their ability to interact with other people.

## **3.10 Children’s Emotional Responses to Violence Committed Against Them or Other Children**

Children articulated in great detail the emotions they experience when violence is committed against them. Experiences that the children recounted include:

*“We feel like we are totally at the mercy of our teachers as they beat us for good or bad reasons.” 12-year-old girl*

*“When violence is inflicted on us, we cry. We also feel like taking revenge. However, our strength does not allow us to take revenge.” 14-year-old girl*

*“I get very scared and depressed because the people with whom I live always beat me. I am also jealous and always cry when other kids in the neighbourhood play and enjoy themselves.” 12-year-old girl*

*“I know a girl who lives in our neighbourhood who was insulted and beaten by her mother. The mother’s reason for doing so was the fact that she heard that the girl started going out with boys. Because of the severe beating and verbal abuse, the girl moved out and started to stay with her girl friend. She attempted to commit suicide several times.” 16-year-old girl*

*“My mother treats me very badly by discriminating against me compared to all my sisters and brothers. I do not know what I should do.” 17-year-old girl*

*“When I experience violence, I wish I could disappear.” 12-year-old boy*

*“When I am beaten, I long for the time when I become an adult.” 12-year-old boy*

*“I sometimes think of that girl [13-year-old] who ran away from home because her parents wanted to give her hand in marriage to a 27-year-old man. She became a prostitute and died last year of AIDS. I feel like her parents murdered her.” 17-year-old boy*

*“I got very scared and felt useless when my mother threatened me that she would rather*

*kill me and go to jail.” 13-year-old*

*“Our drunkard uncle with whom we live beats my little brother, who is three years old. As a result, he is now very scared of people. I cry for him and I feel terrible about how we live.” 13-year-old*

*“One day an older boy in our school hit me on my head for no reason. I would have been happy if I had the strength to kill him.” 15-year-old boy*

*“I was scared to death when my father kicked me out of our house.” 14-year-old boy*

*“I hate the subject matter my instructor teaches because he beats me up very badly when I ask him difficult questions.” 16-year-old boy*

*“This year I was serving my family dinner. My uncle called me in his room and asked me why I did not clean the house. He slapped me and beat me with his belt. I thought about running away from home. But where would I go?” 14-year-old girl*

#### **Summary of Views**

Children stated that when violence is committed against them they experience various negative emotional reactions. The most frequent feelings include anger, fear, hatred, depression, vengeance, confusion and helplessness.

### **3.11 Programmes that Address the Problem of Violence Against Children**

To assess the level of intervention programme awareness, children were asked during the structured interviews whether violence against them had increased or decreased in the last three years, and to identify the contributing factors to the changing situation.

About 46.8 percent of the children questioned said the problem of physical and psychological violence is decreasing, while 40.5 percent of the children felt that sexual violence is also decreasing. Children who thought violence against children is decreasing cite a number of factors contributing to the change including:

- the attention the government has given to the problem;
- directives issued banning corporal punishment in schools;
- inclusion of children’s rights in the Ethiopian Constitution;
- imposition of heavier penalties on perpetrators of sexual violence;
- mass media awareness-raising;
- the work of NGOs in educating the public.

During the focus group discussions, children were asked whether they knew of any intervention programmes in their community or at a national level. The responses include:

*“There are some initiatives in our community. The police ask the community to report any potential circumcision of a child. When the police are informed, they punish the*



*perpetrators.” 15-year-old girl*

*“The police have given us telephone numbers that we can use in case of violence. We call them when violence occurs.” 14-year-old girl*

*“In schools, the efforts of child rights’ clubs are commendable.” 17-year-old girl*

*“The meetings in schools to create awareness among parents on children’s rights are good.” 17-year-old girl*

*“Elders in our community advise those who commit violent acts against children about more constructive ways to act in the future.” 16-year-old girl*

*“Police are watching the streets.” 16-year-old girl*

*“We do not go to the police, since we do not have full confidence in the protection given by the police.” 14-year-old street girl*

*“Apart from some TV programmes, not much is being done to address the problem.”  
Focus group participants aged 12 to 15 years old*

#### **Summary of Views**

Children are to a certain extent aware of some of the interventions taken to address the problem of violence against them. However, many of them do not completely comprehend what is available to them, and some have doubts about the effectiveness of the interventions.

### **3.12 Recommendations to Eliminate Violence Against Children**

Children suggested a number of solutions to eliminate violence against them including:

- Parents should try to provide the basic necessities for their children. If this is done, children will not commit so many offences and this may avoid corporal punishment.
- Parents’ living conditions and education level should be improved.
- Any person who commits a violent act against a child should be brought to a court of law open to the public.
- Those who commit crimes should be penalised by the government for their acts.
- School personnel and other adults should be taught that violent punishment of a child has a negative impact on the future of the child.
- The government and policy makers should widely educate teachers and parents about alternative ways of disciplining children.
- Those who know that violence against children is harmful should try to educate those who think that it is beneficial.
- It is necessary to take legal measures against the perpetrators, particularly

those parents who commit violence against their own children.

- The government should implement the Constitution with respect to children's rights.
- The government should try to eradicate harmful traditional practices.
- The government should try to enforce the existing laws concerning children's rights.

#### **Summary of Views**

Children emphasised legal measures and awareness-raising activities as the most appropriate interventions to eliminate violence against them.

### **3.12 How Children Can Stop Violence Against Them**

*"Children should control themselves from misbehaving." 14-year-old boy*

*"Children should know their rights and responsibilities. For example, if it is my mother who violates my rights, I should advise her and tell her my rights." 15-year-old boy*

*"When children commit mistakes, they should apologise instead of lying and denying their mistakes." 15-year-old boy*

*"Children should be open enough to discuss problems with their family and teachers." 14-year-old girl*

*"Children should observe laws and regulations." 14-year-old boy*

*"Children should listen to advice." 15-year-old boy*

#### **Summary of Views**

Children recognised that they have responsibilities and a role to play in facilitating interventions to assist in eliminating violence against them.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INDIVIDUAL CASES OF VIOLENCE

### Case 1: A True Story Told by a 17-year-old School Boy

*First of all, I want to point out that I am a clever student. I ask difficult questions. One Friday, I asked a difficult question to one of my teachers, whose name I do not want to mention. He thought that I was trying to embarrass him in front of the other students. On Monday, he ordered me to get out of class and took me to an empty classroom. He then started to beat me until he broke all the five big sticks in the room into small pieces. He then reached for a long handle of a wiper and also broke that on my body. He then ordered me to leave the school and to bring my parents. I told my mother about the story and she wanted to report it to the police. But we then thought that he might reduce my grades in revenge, so we dropped that option. From then on, I started to hate the subject matter he is teaching, and I perform very badly in that course. Punishment against children must stop!*

### Case 2: A True Story Told by a 13-year-old

*A girl child lives with her aunt and a man lodging in the same house. The man is a daily labourer. Once the aunt left for a few days to visit her daughter who was giving birth. The man took that opportunity to ask the girl to sleep with him. When she refused, he raped her. As a result, she ran away from home. Nobody was able to trace her. She was finally found in the home of one of her other relatives. When her aunt asked her what happened, the girl denied that anything happened. She said "I don't want to live. I will drink poison before telling the truth."*

### Case 3: A True Story Written by a 16-year-old Boy

*This is the story of a girl who lives in my neighbourhood. The girl started to live with her grandparents after the death of her father at the age of 12. Her mother was forced to give the girl to her grandparents because she was too poor to take care of her. The girl, however, suffered in many ways. For example, she does a lot of chores in the house and she very rarely goes to school on time. Besides, every member of that family beats her up. She failed her exams and had to repeat the same grade several times. As a result she is now in fifth grade although she is 15-years-old.*

*The grandparents have other grandchildren. But they treat them much better than this girl. The main reason I think for the grandparents treating the others better is because they inherited a lot of property when their parents died but did not inherit anything when the father of this girl died.*

*Of all the beatings she endured, the one inflicted on her a week ago was unforgettable. Her father's brother did it. He beat her with a metal car spare part. She severely bled and they did not even take her to a medical centre.*

*I do not know how we can expect children to grow up to be responsible and capable*

*adults if we treat them like this. I hope the government will follow up the situation of children seriously. I also hope that Ethiopia will seriously undertake the obligations it entered into under the Child Convention.*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“Ethiopia is not implementing her obligations under the international conventions relating to the rights of children.” Extract from a story written by a 16-year-old student*

Children should be given the opportunity to participate in all matters affecting them, especially when it comes to fighting for their own rights. Allowing children to express their views and their experiences will produce a meaningful contribution to research, advocacy and policy-making. This study was undertaken with an intention to enable children to voice their own stories and observations on the violence that affects them, thereby enhancing the findings of the study. While it is important that the children’s voice have a lasting impression, the following points are a summarised interpretation of the children’s remarks, suggestions and perceptions.

### **Meaning of Violence**

*“When I experience violence, I wish I could disappear.” 12-year-old boy*

Children perceive violence to be any action – ranging from brutal physical abuse such as hitting or sexual assault, to denying food or shelter – that hurts them, either physically or physiologically.

### **Acceptable and Unacceptable Forms of Violence**

*“In our neighbourhood, a 22-year-old man raped an eight-year-old girl. He was released on bail without being punished for what he did. I am very much disappointed.” 14-year-old girl*

Children do not accept any form of sexual violence. With regard to physical and psychological violence, they consider mild punishments such as pinching acceptable only when they perceive it to coincide with improper behaviour.

### **Punishment as a Disciplining Measure**

*“My father used to beat me after tying my neck together with my leg.” 14-year-old boy*

Children do not believe severe punishment is an effective approach to teaching children how to behave. In fact, more than 70 percent of them responded that they learned nothing when violence is used as a form of discipline. Rather, they indicated advising and other non-violent means to be more effective.

### **Magnitude of Violence**

*“I know a man who beat his stepdaughter with a hot iron.” 14-year-old boy*

Through their stories, the children confirmed the pervasiveness and the severity of the physical and psychological violence against them both at home and in school. In addition, they indicated that though it is not practiced as widely as in the above two settings, children suffer from violence by other members of the community. The children

also validated the prevalence of sexual violence against them both inside and outside of the home environment.

### **Causes and Effects of Violence**

*“A low standard of living or poverty is one cause of violence against children.” 12-year-old boy*

The children indicated tradition and attitudinal problems, lack of awareness, poverty and failure to penalise perpetrators of violence as the main causes of violence. Children explained in the interviews and focus group discussions that violence has an adverse effect on their emotional and physical well-being. They stated anger, fear, hatred, depression, vengeance, confusion and helplessness among the emotional reactions experienced by them.

### **Recommendations**

*“The meetings in schools to create awareness among parents on children’s rights are good.” 17-year-old girl*

Children have some information about the different measures taken to address the problem of violence. However, they don’t have a clear understanding about the remedies available to them. Some even expressed their doubts about the effectiveness of the measures that are already in place. Many of them acknowledged that raising awareness in the home, school and community would be a major step towards solving the problem.

Children’s recommendations on the prevention and eradication of violence included:

- Improving the standard of living of parents
- Enacting appropriate legal measures against perpetrators
- Education on the harmful impact of violence and on alternative ways of disciplining
- Implementing laws that explicitly protect children
- Eradicating harmful traditional practices

Lastly, the children in the study indicated that they also have roles to play and responsibilities in the process of eradicating violence. They acknowledged that children in Ethiopia are consigned to a low position in society and have little say in issues affecting their lives. And, they indicated that unless the status quo is broken, problems affecting children may not be effectively addressed. In essence, children need to be heard and empowered in order for change to happen.





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