

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

 East Asia and Pacific Launch of the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children

VIOLENCE IN THE HOME AND FAMILY

Context

Children are usually happiest and most protected when they are in their own homes and with their family. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the family as the natural environment for the growth and well-being of children. Sadly, for some children the home is a violent place. And most of this violence is hidden behind closed doors or because of shame or fear.

- Many children experience violence in the form of harsh discipline – not only physical violence but humiliation and insults. As yet only 16 countries have prohibited corporal punishment in the home.
- When children are sexually abused, it is usually by someone they know, too frequently a member of their own family or someone from the close circle of family and friends.
- Neglect and maltreatment constitute indirect violence against children.

Facts and figures

- An overview of studies in 21 countries (most developed) found that up to 36 per cent of women and up to 29 per cent of men reported sexual victimization during childhood. The majority of studies found girls to be abused at higher rates than boys.
- Exposure to domestic violence can have a severe impact on a child – an impact that can last a lifetime. It is estimated that as many as 275 million children worldwide are witness to domestic violence annually.
- Insults, name-calling, isolation, rejection, threats, emotional indifference and humiliation are all forms of psychological violence that can undermine a child's development – especially if they come from a parent or someone the child cares for.
- Neglect is a major cause of mortality among young children. The imbalance in the sex ratio between girls and boys in some regions suggests that girls are at particular risk of neglect. Children with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to neglect and abuse.
- In some parts of the world, children suffer violence in the form of harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), binding, branding, violent initiation rites, fattening, early and forced marriage, so-called "honour" crimes and dowry-related violence, exorcism, and myths about "witchcraft" that can involve child victims.

Recommendations include:

- Strive to transform attitudes that condone or normalize violence against children, including acceptance of corporal punishment and harmful traditional practices.
- Develop or enhance programmes to support parents and care-givers in their child-rearing role, including gender-sensitive parent education programmes focusing on non-violent forms of discipline.
- Investment in social welfare services should include quality early childhood development programmes, home visitation, pre- and post-natal services, and income-generating programmes for disadvantaged families.
- Develop targeted programmes for families in especially difficult circumstances, such as female and child-headed households and families from ethnic minorities.