

CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN

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Violence Against Children Within the Family

Formed in 1993, the Consortium for Street Children is a network of non-governmental organisations which work with street-living children, street-working children and children at risk of taking to life on the street.

Working collaboratively with its members, the Consortium for Street Children co-ordinates a network for distributing information and sharing expertise around the world. Representing the voice of many, we speak as one for the rights of street children wherever they may be.

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1) INTRODUCTION

The Consortium for Street Children strongly supports the Committee’s recommendations arising from its last discussion day on ‘State Violence Against Children’ and welcomes the opportunity to examine ‘Violence Against Children within the Family and in Schools’.

CSC also welcomes that “particular attention should be paid by the discussions under both sub-themes to the position and special vulnerability of ethnically discriminated or socio-economically marginalised children, who can be, for example, singled out in schools for bullying or degrading treatment by teachers or be more vulnerable to violence within the family that escapes detection by the normal monitoring systems”.

It is with this in mind that the Consortium for Street Children aims to set out various issues concerning street children and violence within the home. CSC understands the term ‘street children’ to include street-working children, who may maintain strong relationships with their family of origin, and street-living children who have very limited or no contact with their family. CSC’s member agencies also work with children at risk of taking to street life. Despite these working definitions, CSC acknowledges the

ongoing debates concerning definitions of street children and highlights the importance of taking into account children's perceptions of their own circumstances. We emphasise that street children often defy such convenient generalisations because each child is unique.

We understand the term 'violence' to refer to physical abuse, physical neglect, psychological abuse, psychological neglect, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. However, we also refer to economic, political, structural and societal violence, with the aim of drawing attention to broader contextual injustices which cause and perpetuate violence. We seek to promote an understanding that the underlying causes of many types of violence result from discrimination and disadvantage and that effective and sustainable action to combat violence in all its forms must be based on an interdependent approach to civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

The main link between street children and violence in the home (and to a lesser degree at school) is that violence within the family is cited as one of the most significant contributing factors to children leaving home and taking to street life. The causes and consequences of this violence are complex and will be further explored within this paper. However, without wishing to oversimplify - and in order to highlight the need for an integrated rights approach - it is possible to say from the outset that the family backgrounds of children at risk of taking to street life are often characterised by the pressures of extreme poverty on marginalised (often ethnic, racial or indigenous minority) communities. These economic pressures can contribute to violence within the family. This violence can also be exacerbated by alcohol and drug abuse which may be both a cause of economic difficulties and a response to them¹.

"Everyday I fight with my father. Every day my father drinks and fights with the family, so I left home. My brother left later. My family asks me to stay but I run back to the streets again." 14-year-old street boy, Ethiopia².

One street children project in India explains that common causes for beatings are because a child has not brought home enough money from begging or petty trading to meet the family's (usually father's or step-father's) expectations, confirming that violence is often made worse by adults' addictions to alcohol or drugs. The project cites the example of Razi, aged 8, whose mother's death led to his father becoming an alcoholic and withdrawing the boy from school in order to earn money meet his alcohol costs. Razi often failed in this task and was beaten. One night, after answering back, he had his tongue cut out by his furious and drunken father which caused him to run away and become a street-living child (Sarjan project, Ahmedabad).

¹ Ruth Aitken argues that it is important to note the difference between 'causal' factors and 'aggravating' factors (e.g. drugs etc) of domestic violence. This has important connotations for prevention and intervention strategies. *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children: Results of a survey into the knowledge and experiences of educational personnel within two European countries*, 'Refuge' 2001, p. 19.

² Quoted by Angela Veale, Child Studies Unit, University College Cork, Ireland, 'Developmental and Responsive Prevention' in *Prevention of Street Migration: Resource Pack*, Consortium for Street Children and University College Cork, 1999, p. 6.

2) VIOLENCE AS A 'PUSH FACTOR' IN STREET MIGRATION

There is strong evidence from around the world that violence within the home is a precursor to children ending up living on the streets and that this violence often constitutes the critical differentiating factor between children who work on the streets, and the relative minority who actually live on the streets.

- According to research conducted in **Peru**, family violence and child mistreatment was the precipitating factor in 73% of cases of children migrating to the streets³.
- 53 % of **Guatemalan** street children interviewed reported having been abused by a family member⁴.
- **Brazil** – 1992 research: street-living children reported higher levels of corporal punishment at home (62%), compared to street-working children (23%). The same trend was evident in **Ethiopia** (1996)⁵.
- It is important not to underestimate psychological violence in this equation; for example, according to a 1997 study in **Angola**, “Many children complain of being shouted at or hit and talk of the fear of punishment, even if it is for a single misdemeanour, as a reason for leaving home.”⁶

3) THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE:

a) The Changing Nature Of Families

The background to this violence often consists of ‘re-constructed’ families⁷ where children from previous relationships can end up bearing the brunt of any resulting power shifts within a changing household⁸. This can manifest itself in the following ways: “Children complain of being treated differently in the house to other children. This can include being shouted at and beaten more often, being asked to do a larger share of the work, not being given food or other goods or being made to feel an intruder.” This may be linked to either *real* pressure on resources or *perceived* pressure on resources. “It may be that the current precariousness of the general economic situation induces a feeling of vulnerability and leads to resentment against any extra element within the household.” This resentment can be exacerbated if the child’s ‘direct’ relation is out of the house for long periods of time leaving primary

³ ‘Family Structure Problems, Child Mistreatment, Street Children and Drug Use: A Community-Based Approach’, Dr Dwight Ordoñez Bustamante, Peru, in *Prevention of Street Migration*, p. 34.

⁴ ‘Families Worldwide’, fact sheet by the International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition, June 2001.

⁵ Angela Veale, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.9.

⁶ Clare Moberly, ‘The ‘Voluntary Separation’ of Children in Angola: Recommendations for Preventive Strategies’, in *Prevention of Street Migration*, p. 42.

⁷ “The greater fluidity of sexual relations and weakening of traditional rules and sanctions as to how they are conducted is creating extremely complex family situations. In the current climate parents do not have the economic power to support all the children that result from these unions nor the time to give them all the emotional attention they need. Some children are falling through these gaps.” Clare Moberly, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.42.

⁸ “Most children had experienced not only a conflictive and violent family context, but mainly a loss of their ‘place’ and status in the family, having previously experienced serious affective losses (mainly of parents) and having become the hostages of the power struggles which resulted as the family redefined itself.” 90% of the street-living children in a survey in Lima, Peru were found to have come from rebuilt (step-parent) or monoparental families or from rural families that had given the child to people in the city to raise. Dr Dwight Ordoñez Bustamante, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p. 28.

care of the child to the new partner. Likewise if there is conflict between the child's direct relation and their new partner this can be taken out on the scapegoated child⁹.

b) The Pressures Of Extreme Poverty

“Violence and abuse should be condemned. Yet it is important to remember the context in which many of these families are living. Working all day, returning home late to find chores not done or younger brothers and sisters abandoned, their frustrations (if not the manner of their response) are understandable”¹⁰.

The pressures of extreme poverty can include economic stress and lack of time and energy to devote to children's upbringing. Combined with lack of awareness of positive, non-violent parenting skills and, in many cases, societal acceptance of violence, the links between extreme poverty, violence in the home and street migration become apparent.

“The picture that emerges from the research is not a simplistic one of ‘incompetent parents’ or of children as either ‘victims’, ‘deviants’ or ‘heroes’. It is a description, rather, of households and children within them struggling to adapt to a rapidly changing economic and social environment and within the limits of the choices available to them, to survive and develop”¹¹.

c) The Cycle Of Violent Response

The process of leaving home is often characterised by a ‘cycle of violent response’: adults who are out of the house for a lot of the day (most likely due to economic pressures) may not be aware that their child has dropped out of school and is spending a lot of time on the streets. This growing gap of misunderstanding between them and the child, possibly combined with a growth in the child's own economic power, undermines traditional lines of authority within the house, leading to a crisis in family relations: “Many [parents] on realising what is happening respond by telling the child off or trying to punish them, often violently”¹². This appears to be especially true of monoparental and reconstructed families.

“What emerges in many cases is a recurrent pattern. The reaction of adults, whether extreme or not, far from resolving the problem provokes the child to leave even further. Often in response to a first conflict the child will run away and will spend several days sleeping out of the house nearby and then return either of their own volition or brought back by his/her carers. This often provokes further and often more severe punishment causing the child to run away again. This cycle can continue for several months and is often accompanied by the child as he/she starts sleeping on the street, becoming more involved with other children who are actually living on it. It may also be accompanied by new larger ‘offences’.

⁹ Clare Moberly, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p. 41.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 43.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 49.

¹² Ibid, p. 42. In general, see pp 42-43.

Some parents talk of children's behaviour becoming gradually worse, of them starting to steal both at home and in the neighbourhood or beginning to take drugs or in general becoming more 'disrespectful'.

Finally, the child decides to run away and does not come back'¹³.

4) THE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE WITHIN THE HOME

The effects of violence within the home are experienced by children in two main ways:

- as direct victim-survivors of violence; and
- as witnesses of violence against another family member (usually the child's mother): witnessing domestic violence is, in itself, a form of abuse¹⁴.

In addition to the more obvious reaction of leaving home, the long term effects of domestic violence on children can include: insecurity and low self-esteem; behavioural and developmental problems and under-achievement; fear and an inability to trust; problems with social competence and peer relationships; resentment; guilt (especially if the mother or a younger sibling is left behind); self-blame; aggression and tantrums; introversion and withdrawal; disruption of routines; copying the violent behaviour of the aggressor; normalisation of violence as a form of communication or in response to conflict resolution which may, in turn, lead to a cycle of abuse¹⁵.

These effects are taken from research on children in general who have experienced domestic violence and are not specific to street children. However, it is probably safe to say in the case of children who do leave home that these negative psychological reactions may be intensified and further ingrained as a result of having to survive the inhospitable and dangerous environment of the street.

5) THE NEED FOR AN INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH

However, research also shows that it is important not to oversimplify and generalise children's reactions. Effects can vary enormously depending on a child's age, gender, exact experience, personality, and external support factors –e.g. their relationships with extended family members and their peer group. Likewise, we should be wary of the limitations of research: "whilst it may be possible, in research terms, to separate out factors such as maternal stress, family disruption or direct abuse to the child, it is not always possible for the women and children to remove these difficulties from the equation of their own lives.....[I]f research is to be of relevance, it should take account of and respond to the complexity of women and children's experiences"¹⁶. An individual approach and analysis of each child's particular situation is therefore needed, both in terms of research and intervention.

¹³ Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁴ The effects of this are not limited to the direct psychological impact of witnessing violence against a loved one, but also extend to the indirect impact of how the violence affects the mother's parenting of the child (e.g. her emotional availability to the child). According to some research child witnesses appear to be more affected by levels of maternal stress than by levels of violence witnessed (Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p. 8).

¹⁵ Gill Hague, Liz Kelly, Ellen Malos, Audrey Mullender with Thangam Debbonaire, *Children, Domestic Violence and Refuges: A Study of Needs and Responses*, Women's Aid Federation of England, 1995, pp 31-32.

¹⁶ Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.7.

6) CAUTION IN RELATION TO THE ‘CYCLE OF VIOLENCE’ APPROACH

The dangers of generalising are particularly acute regarding the assumption that domestic violence automatically leads to a cycle of violence: “Whilst ‘cycle of abuse’ has continued to be a popular explanation of domestic violence (and various forms of child abuse), the range of diversity of responses which child workers witnessed led most of them to view this as far too simplistic”¹⁷. A ‘breaking the cycle’ approach “excludes more challenging explanations – those which question power relations between men and women, adults and children. ‘Breaking cycles’ is a much easier and safer goal to discuss than changing the structure of social relations”¹⁸.

7) CHILDREN’S RESILIENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES

An individualised approach will also reveal children’s resilience: “It is important not to infer from this [general pattern of reactions], however, that children or young people were ‘passive victims’. Rather they showed their own strengths and coping capacities...”¹⁹. Likewise, referring to the same piece of research: “Much of the literature on children’s experiences of domestic violence has focused on the negative impacts. We asked respondents if they thought there was anything positive that children could gain from understanding domestic violence. Just over 50% thought there was another side to experience, and the most frequently mentioned areas here were understanding that violence is wrong (64%) and gaining survival skills (30%)”²⁰. “Children are, then – or try very hard to be - social actors in, not just witnesses of, complex social situations”²¹.

Ruth Aitken, also speaking in the context of the UK (and Finland), considers the possibilities of emerging from a difficult childhood into a positive adulthood: “Whilst there are children who cope with and survive such experiences, we should acknowledge that witnessing and or experiencing violence at home may represent one of the most serious risks to children in our society, a risk for which protective factors are often difficult to provide. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that it may be possible to promote protective mechanisms within high risk children through the development of self-esteem, mentoring and social support networks within the educational system”²². This obviously has implications for recommendations for mainstream services, although it should be remembered that children at risk of taking to street life in the developing world often have very limited access to the infrastructures through which these mainstream services might operate (i.e. schools). The refore attention must also be paid to supporting alternative support structures for marginalised children that offer more flexible access (i.e. civil society organisations with experience in targeted interventions to assist such children).

¹⁷ Hague et al, *Children, Domestic Violence and Refuges*, p.32.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.76. See also p. 75 on the dangers of perpetuating the generalised assumption that abused adults cannot be trusted around children as they will be likely to abuse themselves.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.44, referring to research carried out in the UK from 1994-1995.

²⁰ Ibid, p.33.

²¹ Ibid, p.45.

²² Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.8.

8) GENDER

Violence within the home between adult partners is most often perpetrated by men against women, as the product of ingrained economic, structural and cultural hierarchies that perpetuate the societal subordination of women to men. The effects on children of witnessing this kind of violence have already been touched upon.

However, in the context of adult violence against children within the home - where corporal punishment is (unfortunately) regarded as a legitimate aspect of child-rearing - physical and psychological violence can be perpetrated by both male and female adults (although beatings by male family members are often cited as being more severe). Evidence suggests that, in general, boys are more likely to experience physical violence at home whilst girls experience more psychological and sexual violence (the perpetrators in the latter being overwhelmingly male). One organisation in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, states: “our work with low-income families confirms that men’s violence against women is often associated with the use of violence by mothers against children, and specifically against their sons. Limited research in Brazil shows that boys are more likely to be victims of family violence (excluding sexual violence) than are girls. This in turn is related to young men’s later use of violence against their female partners”²³.

Likewise, a study in Peru revealed that 61% of Lima’s poor school age population had been physically mistreated at home, and that child mistreatment was positively correlated with the lower class status and male gender of the victim²⁴. [This finding also reinforces once again the links between violence and socio-economic disadvantage].

These distinct gender patterns of violence in the home have implications for trends in the phenomenon of street migration. Globally, girls make up a small percentage of street-living children (estimates range from 3 – 30%, depending on the country²⁵). Some of the reasons for this are: girls who have left home are very likely to become victims of organised commercial sexual exploitation, making them less visible actually on the streets; also, cultural taboos against unaccompanied girls on the street are, in many countries, stronger than for boys. This latter reason, combined with girls’ strong cultural and psychological ties to their family (once again relating to unequal economic and cultural power relations in society and their value for domestic work) means that girls may attempt to cope for longer than boys in the home, even when they feel themselves abused²⁶.

Research has shown that the move to the street for girls is more traumatic and the rupture more permanent than for boys. Programmes in Kenya, Senegal, Bolivia, Brazil and Guatemala report that girls on the street display more psychological damage than boys – a combination of both sexual abuse and

²³ Gary Barker, Instituto PROMUNDO, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 2001.

²⁴ Dr Dwight Ordoñez Bustamante, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.34.

²⁵ *Urban Girls: Empowerment in Especially Difficult Circumstances*, Gary Barker and Felicia Knaul, with Neide Cassaniga and Anita Schrader, 2000, p.8, citing a 1991 study.

²⁶ Clare Moberly, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.37. To illustrate this, she also mentions that of 173 street children interviewed in a survey in Angola in 1997, only 16% were girls.

rupture in the family²⁷. This internalisation by girls of the effects of domestic violence, sexual abuse and family break-up has been described as “psychological death”– which finds expression in violent behaviour, depression, withdrawal and self-mutilation²⁸. Experience in this field has shown that gender-specific strategies are required, emphasising once again the need for individualised approaches.

9) OBSTACLES IN ADDRESSING STREET CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

· Street Children Fall Through The Nets

The main obstacles in addressing violence against children at risk of leaving home are visibility and access. In an evaluation of the initial failure of their community programme to reach this specific group of vulnerable children, JUCONI (Junto Con los Niños), a street children organisation working in Mexico and Ecuador states: “They [street children] generally lack the emotional, cognitive and economic resources to access services and do not participate in their local community. This therefore puts them beyond the reach of government programmes and the majority of NGO community programmes – indeed, they remain the poorest of the poor precisely because they slip through – and continue to slip through – all safety nets”²⁹. JUCONI’s analysis of this problem led to the realisation that the children most at risk of leaving home are the younger siblings of children who are already living on the streets. These younger children share the same (usually violent) household environment that initially precipitated their older sibling to leave, plus they have the added factor of that brother or sister acting as a role model for street life. This approach ensures that the target group (children ‘genuinely’ at high risk of taking to street life, rather than the much wider constituency of poor children in general) is identified and accessed effectively through their older siblings, thereby also constituting an effective use of limited programme resources.

b) Difficulties Of Selecting Beneficiary / Target Families For Intervention

This question of how programmes can be assured to reach families with dysfunctional relationships where there is a high risk of children leaving home for the street also throws up other difficulties. For example, how is it possible to address the potentially counter-productive stigma of labelling people ‘bad parents’? Programmes that rely on self-selection tend only to identify individuals already committed and motivated to exploring new parenting skills. Furthermore, “another scenario is that families, motivated to co-operate in expectation of receiving material aid from the project, will engage in socially desirable behaviour in the presence of project staff without initiating any qualitative change in their home or community environment”³⁰.

In addition to JUCONI’s ‘younger sibling’ approach, another example of effective targeting can be seen with a Save the Children UK programme in Jamaica which identified ‘at risk’ children and families

²⁷ *Urban Girls*, Gary Barker and Felicia Knaul, p.9.

²⁸ This is born out by reports from Guatemala, Bolivia and the USA. Ibid, p.9.

²⁹ Alison Lane, ‘Identifying and responding to the High Risk Population: JUCONI’s Prevention Programme’, in *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.22.

³⁰ Angela Veale, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.17. See also p.14.

through the probation system, working with parents of young offenders. The ‘stigmatisation’ problem was addressed by promoting the initiative as a national programme, thereby not singling out particular families³¹.

c) The Problem Of Evaluation

“Evaluation is a common stumbling block in prevention work – how do you prove that you have stopped something from happening?”³² This highlights one of the greatest challenges of working with children in violent households. Although prevention is undoubtedly the most effective and desirable strategy, it is also the hardest to implement and evaluate. A strong recommendation for all projects working in this field is therefore the development (and incorporation into programmes) of evaluation mechanisms that are sufficiently long term and creative enough to give reliable information, particularly given the complexity and importance of prevention work³³.

10) PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Prevention is obviously the most desirable and effective strategy in combating violence against children. Having touched on the difficulties involved in targeting prevention to where it is most needed, and the significant gaps in the evaluation of such work, it is useful to consider two broad strands on prevention strategy. Although they apply particularly to the prevention of street migration, they are also relevant to wider prevention work concerning violence in the home.

i) Developmental prevention: “ ‘to provide a range of facilities or services which support families, enhance the quality of life for children, families and communities, and serve to create the social conditions in which the likelihood of family stress and breakdown is diminished.’ When applied to street children, the main objective of developmental prevention may not be to prevent a very specific outcome, such as the movement of children to street life, but to support the material or psychological resources of the community or family so that their ability to provide for the best welfare of their children is enhanced”.

ii) Responsive prevention: “refers to more focused strategies which aim to influence the circumstances of specific families identified as at risk”. This can also refer to ‘follow-up’ support to ex-street children who have been reintegrated with their family in order to ‘address the conflicts which may precipitate children back into street life’³⁴.

Prevention strategies of the first type could therefore include general public awareness campaigns, and non-violent conflict resolution education aimed at children within the school system. An example of the second type of strategy would include a targeted programme tailored to the individual needs of particular at-risk families. The success of any prevention strategy will ultimately depend on how well it

³¹ Ibid, p.14.

³² Alison Lane, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.23.

³³ Angela Veale, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.17.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

reaches its target (as discussed above), and the extent to which it tackles the root causes of the problem.

a) Addressing The Root Causes Of Violence

Prevention work presupposes “that it is possible to eliminate gender specific violence targeting women and children; that violence against women [and children] is not inherent in human nature but is learned behaviour sustained through socialisation processes and other structures...”³⁵. If this is the case, then it would therefore follow that “an anti-violence message would be ultimately unsuccessful unless delivered in a context that challenged the cultural beliefs promoting violence against women [and children]”³⁶. Furthermore, “An inaccurate understanding of the issue can lead to the development of remedies which not only perpetuate the problem, but may also result in dangerous forms of intervention”³⁷.

“In brief, preventative measures must include strategies to achieve both structural and institutional change. For example, we must ensure an appropriate response to perpetrators of abuse from the police and the courts, we must allocate sufficient levels of funding to provide safe accommodation and specialist services for survivors and we must establish coherent and integrated strategies for prevention, particularly within the context of schools”³⁸.

In highlighting the need for such a holistic approach to the prevention of violence in the home, Aitken stresses: “If we focus only on reducing environmental stressors, drug or alcohol addiction or on the provision of individual or group therapy, the issue of global sexism and human rights abuses against women (and their children) will continue unaddressed and unceasing”³⁹.

In the same way that cultural and economic patterns of gender inequality underpin and perpetuate domestic violence against women and girls, societal and cultural attitudes to child-rearing need to be addressed in order to combat violence against children in the home. According to research in Peru, “Initial studies on the attitudes and beliefs of the adult population of these communities revealed the very high incidence of physical punishment (mainly flagellation and child-battering with objects), part of a complex cultural pattern of child raising”⁴⁰. “It was obvious by this time the child-battering phenomenon was larger and affected far more than street children, and that having touched the problem of Peruvian cultural patterns of child raising it deserved attention itself”⁴¹. This realisation led to the extension of this project from a specific focus on street children to a wider public campaign.

³⁵ Taken from a presentation by Mrs Maryse Roberts, Chief Programme Officer, Gender Affairs Department, Commonwealth Secretariat November 2000 and quoted in Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.4.

³⁶ Gamache and Snapp 1995, quoted in Ibid, p.9.

³⁷ Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.3.

³⁸ Ibid, p.9.

³⁹ Ibid, p.4.

⁴⁰ Dr Dwight Ordoñez Bustamante, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p.34.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.35.

b) Public Education Strategies

“By 1995 the programme had implemented a mass media strategy (TV, radio, written press) and developed links with the Ministries of Education and of Health. It was also developing similar preventive networks at public schools, with the help of teachers, and was contributing to the establishment of a child mistreatment and abuse surveillance system for a network of public hospitals and health centres”⁴². The success of this particular programme led to it being replicated in six other Peruvian cities by mid-1995.

This particular example of a public education campaign grew out of a targeted intervention, but it is worth noting in general that the value of wider public education campaigns in challenging societal acceptance of violence also needs to be weighed against the need to simultaneously conduct targeted educational work. Evaluation must address questions such as: are prevention campaigns genuinely accessible to marginalised communities? Is the means of dissemination appropriate for these groups? (i.e. does it take into account illiteracy, local languages etc).

In addition to addressing this issue of access during the planning stages of a campaign, there also needs to be better evaluation of the effects of such campaigns – both short and long term - especially given the hidden nature of violence in the home: “While this suggests that public education strategies would be useful in terms of modifying publicly observable behaviours, we must acknowledge that violence against women [and children] most frequently occurs within a private context”⁴³.

c) Education In Schools

“[T]here is, for all children, an urgent need for awareness raising and preventative work about the use of violence within intimate relationships. Learning about domestic violence should be integrated within the curriculum. Issues of gender inequality as well as non-violent conflict resolution, power/control and discrimination (which affect all oppressed groups in society) should run through the ethos and curriculum of all school teaching and activity. This work is of value to all members of our society – to both men and women. It challenges myths and seeks to eradicate the stereotypes which force us all into rigid forms of behaviour. It endeavours to expose and reform the damaging attitudes and behaviours within society (which allow us to oppress and dominate others) by promoting respect, equality and empowerment. Today’s children are tomorrow’s adults – preventative work of this type allows them to learn from our mistakes so they can play a part in creating a more equal and harmonious society for themselves and for us all”⁴⁴.

The preventive value of this type of work is self-evident, not only for the way children will grow up and treat their own children in the future, but also for addressing a culture of violence actually within schools. However, once again attention must also be paid to those who fall outside the reach of mainstream educational initiatives.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.9.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.48.

11) PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AT RISK OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It goes without saying that the state bears the responsibility for protecting children against violence through the legal system and through the provision of child-friendly support services. It is now a well-established legal norm that failure to protect through the domestic criminal justice system engages a state's responsibility to uphold its international human rights commitments. However, in practice, protection through the justice system is often woefully inadequate and much work needs to be done to break down the taboo of interfering in private affairs where children are at risk.

In addition to the specific recommendations set out below concerning legislation, the judiciary, police and social services etc, it is also important to remember the role of families, communities and children in protecting themselves. Empowerment at an individual and group level, alongside public campaigns that challenge the acceptance in society of a culture of violence, is essential to an integrated approach towards prevention, protection and 'rehabilitation'.

12) REHABILITATION / THERAPY

The need for an individualised, gender specific approach has already been highlighted and programmes working with child victim-survivors of violence in the home need to take into account that rehabilitation processes can be long and labour-intensive, and thus expensive, with lots of investment needed into the training of those dealing with traumatised children. In addition to the direct costs involved in dealing with the consequences of violence against children (medical and psychological treatment, police, justice and social services etc) there are also indirect costs involved (children performing badly at school and having to repeat education, the likelihood that children who actually leave home to live on the streets will become involved in criminal activity in order to survive etc). "Calculating the costs of violence is a strategic intervention to make policy-makers more aware about the importance and effectiveness of prevention"⁴⁵.

Aitken highlights the current gaps in impact assessment tools specific to children (e.g. the diagnostic criteria for post traumatic stress disorder⁴⁶) and the need for children to have adequate 'space': "If we are to enable more children to break the silence, we must offer them a safe, non-judgemental space to disclose this information and we must have clear responsive policies and procedures which prioritise safety for both the woman and the child"⁴⁷.

13) EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS

⁴⁵ 'Calculating the Socio-Economic Costs of Violence', in *Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls*, UNICEF Innocenti Digest No. 6, June 2000, pp 12-13.

⁴⁶ Ruth Aitken, *A Review of Children's Service Development (1995-1998) at 'Refuge'*, 1998, p.12.

⁴⁷ Aitken, *Domestic Violence and the Impacts on Children*, p.45.

The following projects offer a few examples of different types of programmes to combat violence against children in the home. Although they deal specifically with the context of violence as a precipitating factor in street migration, they are also of relevance to wider groups of at-risk children.

- **“Pathways to Parenting”, Jamaica (Save the Children UK):** a parenting education programme with the overall aim “to develop positive, open, communicative relationships within the family”⁴⁸.
- **Liyavo Project, Kenya (International Childcare Trust).** “The objective is to provide temporary refuge to children in situations of family crisis [not necessarily violence] in order ‘to avoid children going to the city to wander the streets begging’”. The length of stay depends on the available housing and the particular crisis suffered (e.g. AIDS, prison, alcoholism, abuse, poverty, unemployment). Social workers etc ensure that contact is maintained with the child’s family or relatives, and reunification is encouraged where appropriate and with the child’s consent⁴⁹.
- **Prevention programme for younger siblings of street children, Mexico and Ecuador (JUCONI)** (see above)⁵⁰.
- **Lima, Peru: 1992 programme for the prevention of, and early social intervention in, child mistreatment and abuse cases in 22 urban-marginal communities.** Existing grass-roots organisations in each community (geographically identified as at risk) were linked into anti child mistreatment networks, supported by trained community workers, to develop awareness campaigns among the local population with a view to detection and referral. ‘School for parents’ courses were established in each community, leaflets were distributed and a hotline set up. With the backing of the juvenile justice system, family therapy and legal counselling was offered to families with serious ‘delinquency’ problems. By 1995 the programme had implemented a mass media strategy (TV, radio, written press) and developed links with the Ministries of Education and of Health. It was also developing similar preventive networks at public schools, with the help of teachers, and was contributing to the establishment of a child mistreatment and abuse surveillance system for a network of public hospitals and health centres.” It was replicated in 6 other Peruvian cities by mid 1995⁵¹.
- **Prevention of parental violence course, Peru (CEDRO).** The course consists of five 2-hour sessions. Techniques include short talks, role play, group work, drama and videos followed by discussion. It covers the following subjects: importance of the family; formation of the family; family communication; alternative forms of discipline; risk factors that can lead to child mistreatment; resolution⁵².

14) RECOMMENDATIONS

⁴⁸ *Prevention of Street Migration*, pp 12-14.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp 16-17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp 19-26.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, pp 27-35.

⁵² *Ibid*, pp 65-76.

The Consortium for Street Children supports the specific recommendations made by OMCT in its submission to this discussion day and repeats: “that different forms of violence against children are very seldom sporadic and isolated acts. Rather, they have often proved to form part of a systematic phenomenon, where violence is widespread within the family, the community and within state institutions. [...] [A]ll states have the duty, and therefore the responsibility, to protect children from any form of violence, including violence at home which is neither a part of normal family life nor a private matter. This is even more so for the states parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child”⁵³.

There is a need to acknowledge the interrelationship between socio-economic and cultural factors and violence in the family. The international human rights community must therefore adopt a holistic approach based on the framework of the CRC and it is within this framework that the following recommendations are set out. Furthermore, two principles must be born in mind during policy-making:

- **Each child is unique.** Research has shown that children’s reactions to domestic violence, both experienced and witnessed, can vary dramatically depending on a whole range of complex factors unique to each individual’s situation. Therefore “...if help is to be effective, it must be offered through services flexible enough to be personalised and to respond to the individual needs of each child and her or his individual family members”⁵⁴.
- **Families are diverse:** “In most cases families provide a secure and caring environment; however, they can also be a place where some of their members, notably women and children, are abused, and where children’s rights are violated by parental decisions. Therefore it is essential that policymakers recognise three important points:
 1. Families are diverse.
 2. Abuse and violations can occur within families.
 3. Many children grow up or spend part of their childhood outside of a family unit.”“Relying on ‘The Family’ as the only unit for policymaking fundamentally ignores these children and their specific vulnerabilities”⁵⁵.

International level:

- Committee on the Rights of the Child to prioritise the issue of violence against children (in all circumstances) in the consideration of state reports and to issue a General Comment on CRC Article 37 based on the combined recommendations from the two days of discussion in Sept 2000 and Sept 2001, with particular emphasis on marginalised children.

⁵³ OMCT, ‘Violence Against Children in the Family’, contribution to the Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion on ‘Violence Against Children within the Family and in Schools’, 28 Sept 2001.

⁵⁴ Referring specifically to street children, the quotation continues: “The problems of low self-esteem, poor communication skills, inertia etc. that prevent the most vulnerable and excluded from accessing educational and employment opportunities in the community, and keeping them on the margins of society, will also prevent them from successfully integrating into a group – even if the group plans to tackle those very same problems. Systematic, intensive and personalised attention is needed to empower them to build the emotional strength and the cognitive and communication skills necessary first to be able to identify new opportunities for themselves and go on to take these up successfully”. Alison Lane, *Prevention of Street Migration*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ ‘Families Worldwide’, fact sheet by the International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition, June 2001.

- Strengthening of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in terms of both human and financial resources so as to enhance its capacity to monitor effectively states' compliance with the CRC, to develop a more proactive role in following up recommendations made to individual states, and to take a stronger lead in coordinating efforts to mainstream children's rights across all UN mechanisms and agencies.
- Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Children as an outcome of the proposed in-depth international study.

National level:

- States to ratify all international and regional human rights treaties without reservations and to adopt all Optional Protocols. Those states that have already conditionally ratified treaties to withdraw immediately all reservations (particularly in relation to the CRC and CEDAW).
- States to ensure that their domestic legislation is compatible with the provisions of such treaties, particularly the CRC.
- States specifically to enact *and enforce* legislation prohibiting all forms of violence against children and to establish child-friendly complaints systems and support services for children at risk of violence.
- States to ensure that marginalised children (e.g. street children, working children, refugee children, child domestic workers etc) have access to these services, and that such services are appropriate to their specific needs and circumstances.

In addition to these general recommendations, the Consortium for Street Children also supports the recommendations made by OMCT and Save the Children (UK, Spain and Sweden).