Committee on the Rights of the Child : Day of General Discussion

Violence Against Children within the Family and in Schools

Violence Within the Family

Submission from World Vision International

This year, World Vision will release a publication, which documents the systematic abuse of children around the world. Based on first hand research by World Vision the publication looks at violence and abuse in the home, at violence against girls and at the sexual exploitation of children in tourism. Below is a summary of the learnings of the report, in particular as it reflects the Theme Day Focus of the Committee on the CRC for 2001 – violence in the home and school. Particularly relevant aspects of the overall study are included in some detail.

A copy of the full report will be forwarded to the Committee when it is available.

The devastating statistics about violence perpetrated against children on the streets, in conflict zones, at school or when working are somehow made worse by the knowledge that most children face their greatest threats of violence in their own homes and from the adults closest to them.[i] Research also indicates that those children who witness violence in the home, even when they are not the direct targets, may display similar reactions to those children who have been directly violated themselves. Indeed rather than being the manifestation of caring, families can reflect the wider social realities where the stronger dominate the weaker.

World Vision's global experience and study of the problem of violence against children gives us a remarkable opportunity to identify those common themes that cut across different forms of abuse and violence. World Vision has used four case studies and research projects to review those common problem areas that lead to situations in which violence and abuse can remain hidden and ignored. Summarised in individual chapters through a summary report *Imagine a World Safe for Children: Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation*, the four key studies point to seven recommended areas for action. If national governments and the international community are willing to act in each of these seven areas then it will be possible to show progress towards a world that is safe for children.

World Vision's work as a relief, development and advocacy organisation has brought us into contact with violence against children in many different forms. Although this current report addresses only some types of violence against children we do not undertake this analysis in isolation. This report draws on World Vision's experience from 2,000 projects assisting children and their families around world, including in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America.

World Vision acknowledges that in seeking to tackle some types of violence against children we must asses the external environment in which these children find themselves. This requires an awareness of social and economic conditions and a recognition of the crucial role of governments in establishing a framework of protection for children.[ii] This report addresses violence against children that takes place at a very personal level within the home, more systematically as part of pervading cultural mores and also as a result of simple greed. In every aspect the violence involved can not be fully addressed with out constructive involvement of efficient and properly resourced state structures that are dedicated to the realisation of children's rights.

Breadth of Review

The research involved has often been groundbreaking and innovative. Before undertaking its five country study of child abuse, World Vision worked with the University of Chicago and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, to develop an original research methodology suitable for a range of developing contexts.

Recognising the Issue of Context

In calling on governments and development institutions to act against child abuse and all violence against children World Vision recognises that dealing with the immediate problem of establishing at least a basic minimum standard of protection is not enough. The sustainability of action against child abuse rests on working to complement immediate and targeted steps with initiatives to eradicate the causes of violence, including poverty itself.

Structural violence, bred by unfair distributions of wealth, the political violence of autocratic regimes and the economic and social violence which denies people access to education and health, are abuses played out daily in many of the communities with whom we work. To categorise these exploitations as expressions of violence is valid. The consequences of these violations are explicit, and in their most extreme, can lead to death.

The additional complexity of these forms of violence however, are that they can compound and inflame displays of physical, emotional and psychological violence. Poverty can be both an expression of violence and a trigger for violence. Extra-familial forms of violence such as armed conflict and economic depravity can place high levels of stress on families and impact intra-familial violence.

Meeting Existing Commitments: The Convention on the Rights of the Child

States have a responsibility to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse – wherever they occur. Article 39 of the Convention clearly articulates the States' obligations to ensure that child survivors of violence receive appropriate treatment for their recovery and social

reintegration, in "…an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child."

The Convention is clearly much more than a set of lofty principles, it is a practical guide to standards for the rights of children.

In addition, whilst States do have obligations to children, all of us have responsibilities. An aspect of States' obligations is to enable people to realise those responsibilities. Parents and communities can be hindered from protecting children against violence because the State does not provide a supportive environment. Access to good quality education, economic security, a peaceful and healthy society is a fundamental basis for preventing violence and protecting children.

Measures to strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the CRC at the local, national and international levels are urgently needed. As a starting point, greater training on the CRC should be undertaken by States' most especially amongst those responsible for the care of children including parents, teachers, welfare offices and law enforcement agents. The CRC should be incorporated into the domestic law of States,' children should be actively engaged in monitoring compliance with the CRC through their own networks. At the international level we must build on the monitoring system for the CRC which is already in place, including the elaboration of elements for a petition procedure under the CRC by the Commission on Human Rights.

For organisations such as World Vision, the importance of the CRC is multifaceted. It is an advocacy tool, a measuring stick and policy and programme frameworks. Each of the World Vision studies has stressed the significance of the CRC as a tool for the prevention, protection and recovery of children from violence. In addition, each of the seven core recommendations of this report fit within this framework, and are an obvious concrete application of the Convention.

<u>**Child Abuse in the Home**</u>

1.   Introduction
"The heart locked up can't open to other people". **The voice of an 11year old Brazilian boy who took part in a World Vision study last year captures the struggle and challenges of a world faced with an age old problem that is demanding more and more to be recognised and addressed: child abuse and neglect.**

Over the past year World Vision has sought to gain a deeper understanding of this perplexing issue. It has forced us to look beyond the obvious. As a Christian Humanitarian Relief and Development organisation we have traditionally focussed much of our attention on children in particularly difficult circumstances such as street children, children involved in exploitative labour situations (including sex work) and children in armed conflict. Children in all of these situations cry out to be heard and there is no denying the ongoing need to further understand and respond

to these issues on a global scale. Yet there is a quieter, more subdued voice that we must not ignore. It is the voice of many millions of children around the world living in situations of abuse and neglect, in what we might label "normal" households. Children with parents and families, children though poor who, unlike many street children or children involved in armed conflict, have the opportunity to attend school and the comparative luxury of being able to think and dream beyond their day to day need for survival. Over the course of the past year in five different countries around the world, we have sought to listen to those voices, to hear the story that they have to tell. To unlock the hearts of both children and parents whose daily struggle to come to terms with parenthood and growing up is being consistently battered by a world in which human dignity, compassion and love seems to be increasingly ignored.

2.   Background

Child abuse is not limited to any one country, economic system or culture. Throughout the world, children, particularly very young children, are subjected to physical and emotional violence at the hands of their parents and often at the hands of the social institutions and cultural norms that govern inter-personal and social relationships. While the vast majority of cultures maintain taboos against extreme physical violence and father-daughter incest, acceptable parenting standards can include beatings, emotional neglect and questionable sexual contact. Preventing child abuse and insuring healthy child development has long been a public policy objective around the world. Concern for children's rights and safety has been most visible in recent years in the development and rapid ratification of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite this, relatively few cross-national, empirical efforts have been undertaken to document the incidence of maltreatment, the public's awareness of the issue and the scope and capacity of treatment and prevention services. Midway through 1999 in an effort to address these shortcomings and to discover more about the reality of life for the many children around the world that World Vision supports, we began discussions with a number of internationally recognized child abuse researchers and practitioners representing the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and the Chapin hall Centre for Children at the University of Chicago. The study that resulted from this partnership (implemented in Ghana, Kenya, Romania, Brazil and Thailand) was not aimed at documenting incidence but sought primarily to:

1   Understand community perceptions surrounding issues of child abuse and neglect
2   Identify gaps in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to children and abuse and neglect
3   Make recommendations at programmatic and policy level for organisations (particularly those that focus on children) for responding to the situation of abuse and neglect.

3.   Study Outline

A full report of this study will soon be published and this chapter will not go into comprehensive detail about the methodology or analysis of the data. The aim will be to give an overview of the process we undertook and the main findings, trends and recommendations that emerged. The countries chosen for the study represented a cross section of regions and cultures. They were all countries that were experiencing relative political stability and an absence of armed conflict.

The Study was divided into two main phases:

1   Collection of background information:

This showed that mandatory reporting for local professionals who suspect a child has been a victim of maltreatment is quite common within this sample of countries. As in most communities around the world, official definitions of child abuse in these countries place greater emphasis on intervention in cases of serious physical abuse and most forms of child sexual abuse. While gross inattention to a child's well-being (e.g., failure to feed or provide any ongoing supervision in the case of very young children) also results in public intervention, it is equally common for children living in rural areas or in conditions of extreme poverty to go unnoticed and un-served. In fact, some statutes (e.g., Kenya's Children and Young Persons Act) explicitly omit families living in areas of severe poverty from compliance with the legislation's guidelines of care.

Each sample country has at least one public agency responsible for responding to reports of maltreatment and/or monitoring child welfare practices and compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite this organizational structure, only two of the countries report the existence of child abuse central registries or comparable systems for documenting the number and characteristics of child abuse reports. Even in those cases where such a system does exist, the differential application of the law across regions and populations suggest any projections regarding incidence or scope of the maltreatment problem based upon official reporting data would seriously undercount and misrepresent the true levels of abuse and neglect. No reliable, national estimates of abuse and neglect were found for any of the six countries. All countries contained non-government organizations, some of which were committed to children's issues but not particularly focussed on abuse and neglect.

2   The primary phase of the study involved the development of study tools and the collection of data in each of countries.

In each case, the research would need to examine the community's current belief systems and behaviours regarding abuse and neglect and assess the degree to which there was an interest in and a willingness to change. In developing the research protocols, specific attention was given to the following principles:

- The study would be based within a specific geographic location as defined by the existing World Vision Area Development Projects (ADPs)[1].
- The study would be committed to providing children and parents an explicit opportunity to voice their opinions and to provide input into the development of specific reform strategies.
- The study would be committed to allowing each country and project site the flexibility necessary for insuring cultural relevance and sensitivity in how questions were stated and data collected.
- The research would be committed to establishing clear and acceptable standards within a community regarding those behaviours that are viewed as abusive as well as supportive of healthy child development.

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[1] Comprehensive community development programs

- The research would be committed to clarifying the existing government laws and systems available to improve child protection efforts within each country both from the perspective of prevention as well as effective intervention with child victims.

The data collection tools were then developed to elicit information from each of the identified respondent groups:

Focus Groups with Community Leaders

Local research teams would solicit input from a number of both formal and informal community leaders including health care providers, church and religious leaders, school teachers, law enforcement officials, social welfare or child protection workers, community development workers, and cultural custodians or tribal leaders. Specific questions explored during these session would include:

- What are the main problems facing children/adolescents and their families in the community?
- What do you understand about the term "child abuse"?
- Can you give some examples of child abuse in your community and what was done about them?
- What do you think are acceptable and unacceptable ways of treating children and adolescents?
- What more do you think can be done in your community about the problems associated with abuse?
- What are the hopes and aspirations you have for children and adolescents in your community?

Household Survey

Individual interviews would be conducted with up to 100 adults from a randomly selected group of households within the target communities. To the extent possible, participants were to be selected to represent a range of socio-economic and cultural groups living within the target communities. In each household, an attempt would be made to talk with all adults in the household regarding the care of children.

The central areas questions covered in this survey included:

- Major responsibilities within the household including the care and disciplining of children.
- How often parents engage in various activities with their children that involve teaching or guiding their development.
- How often parents use specific discipline practices.
- Parents' attitudes or beliefs with respect to child development and child management.
- How parents feel about certain discipline practices.

Children's Activities

Activities to elicit information from children were slightly more complex. Participative strategies were devised to seek information from two age cohorts, children 9 to 12 and children 13 to 16, to address the following questions:

- How do children spend the majority of their time during a typical day?
- What do children view the relationships among members of their family?
- What happens when someone breaks a rule or does something bad?
- How do children view physical punishment and what do they see as some alternatives to physical punishment?
- What do children define as child abuse and what do that think should happen if an adult abuses a child?

Overview of Results

The study found a good level of knowledge amongst parents and adults regarding the forms of behaviour that might be considered abusive.   Although some form of physical disciplining was the norm the adults considered more extreme forms of physical punishment to be unacceptable. Even so in some countries there was an acceptance that some members of the community did use extreme forms of punishment.   Adults also commented that the sexual abuse of children was present within their societies to a degree.

One of the major insights provided by the study was the level of discrepancy found between the results for adults and those that emerged from the activities with children.   The children from Brazil, for example, were frequent witnesses to violence and were clearly emotionally impacted by this situation. Most of the children could also related instances of sexual abuse within their own communities or school.   In all the communities (except Romania) somewhere between 61% and 81% of those questioned stated that child abuse was a serious problem.

4.   Results and Trends
4.1   Household Survey: The Story Adults Tell
A. Roles and responsibilities within the household
Families responding to the survey from different countries reported similar levels of responsibilities among men and women for completing common household and child care tasks. With rare exception, at least two-thirds of the respondents in each community identified women as having the primary responsibility for such tasks as preparing the meals, cleaning the house, managing the money, caring for the children, determining the family's religious affiliations, buying or collecting food, determining how to address health care needs, and insuring that children receive health care. In contrast, the only two items that were that were more frequently identified as primarily a male responsibility were earning the money and constructing shelter or securing a place to live. On balance, responsibilities were more evenly distributed across both men and women in the areas of disciplining children, determining if a child would attend or remain in school, planting or tending the crops, and paying the bills. In terms of country differences, respondents in both of the Thai communities and the more urban of the Romanian communities indicated more equal distribution across the sexes in terms of household functions.

Contrary to our expectations, older children were not viewed as having significant responsibility for any of the tasks outlined on the form. Indeed, the only tasks in which at least half of the respondents felt older children had any responsibility for completing were preparing the meals, cleaning the house, tending the crops and purchasing food. In general, respondents in Kenya, Ghana and Cluj, Romania were more likely to identify older children as having specific responsibilities in the household then were the respondents in Brazil, Thailand and the other two Romanian communities.

B. Daily activities among adults and with children

A series of questions were included in the survey in order to build up a picture of the sort of activities families do together. Religion played a reasonably significant role in the lives of most people in all countries with over 50% of people attending some form of worship either occasionally or frequently. Both Kenya and Ghana showed frequent attendance at worship for over 70% of respondents. In other studies (for example Human rights Watch Report September 1999) strong links have been drawn between discipline practices and religious beliefs, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" being the common adage. Trips outside the community to attend festivals or to visit relatives or to attend family gatherings were occasionally or frequently undertaken in all of the study countries. Similarly sharing meals with friends though not of high frequency was not unusual.

C. Specific parent-child interactions

A further series of questions sought to ascertain the frequency of selected parent-child interactions. On the whole, relationships between children and their caregivers appeared to be a functional one where skills were frequently taught and explanations given. Time to play or simply time spent together was minimal. Contrary to our expectations, however, it appeared that children were included in making decisions about the family with some regularity. The data did not tell us what this entailed. On the whole the picture that emerged was one in which time for social interaction with children through activities such as play or shared reading experiences for example, were minimal. The following section on child autonomy suggested that most parents felt children should take on some economic responsibility for the family (i.e. begin earning money) from as early an age as possible. This belief could well have an impact on the kinds of interaction between parent and child. A further aspect of this dynamic that came out very strongly in Romania was the lack of skills parents had in relating to children in more than a functional way.

D. Attitudes toward child development and child autonomy

These questions focussed caregiver's attitudes towards:
1 The importance of education (both in general and in terms of gender);
2 Neighbours and teachers disciplining their children;
3 Play, work and who decides how children should spend their time;
4 Gender differences within the home;
5 Child abuse as a community concern.

Once again, commonalities appeared across countries. As could be expected there was almost unanimous agreement over the importance of education. Though some countries, notably Thailand maintained that it was slightly more important for boys to receive an education than girls, this was not widespread. Also gaining almost universal agreement was the opinion that every child should have the opportunity to play everyday. The notable exception to this was the community in Ghana where only 64% of those questioned agreed with this. This was perhaps due to the fact that the Ghanaian community was rural and children were expected to help with numerous tasks around the home and the farm. In terms of work, apart from Kenya, more than half of the caregivers interviewed felt that it was important for children to begin earning money for the family as soon as they were able. All countries predominantly agreed that girl children should help their parents care for heir younger siblings. One of the limitations of the study was the absence of a similar question relating to boys.

Regarding the right of others (neighbours and teachers) to discipline children, Brazil, Thailand, Kenya and Ghana were all in strong agreement (though not as strongly felt in Brazil). Romania on the other hand showed more difference of opinion over this particularly in regards to teachers. Caregivers predominantly agreed that they felt comfortable correcting other people's children.

Finally, in most countries half or more than half of the caregivers interviewed felt that child abuse was a big problem in their community. Mixed opinion was recorded over whether or not it was possible for an abusive parent to receive help in the community though both communities in Thailand strongly felt that this was possible. There was also general agreement across the board that abusive parents could learn to cope with their problem.

E. Parental discipline practices and attitudes toward discipline

In looking at physical abuse, questions sought the frequency with which parents used different forms of discipline with their children. It is important to note that some extreme forms of punishment (burning and cutting the fingers) were included in the questionnaire primarily due to the request of the World Vision team members from Ghana and Kenya who had noted that punishment of this type was not uncommon in many communities in Africa. Indeed, this has been supported by a number of other studies into the issue [2].

Despite these and other such studies, the World Vision study identified that parents and children had a firm idea of what was and was not acceptable in terms of discipline and punishment of children. Focus group discussions in Romania with parents and community leaders for example identified child abuse to consist of:

    1   Physical abuse

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[2] See for example, Human Rights Watch Report, Vol.11, No 6 (A) – September 1999, **Spare the Child: Corporal Punishment in Kenyan Schools.** Also Oburu, Paul (1999), **Parental Discipline Strategies and the Dilemma Grandparents Face When Rearing their Orphaned Grandchildren**. Paper presented at the Third African Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Nairobi, September 1999.

2	An evil crime
3	Psychological/emotional abuse
4	Imposing power on children
5	Neglect

The questionnaire revealed that many parents still physically hit their children using their hand. This was the case in over 60% of those questioned in all of the study countries apart from Thailand, which was much lower (27% and 21% in each of the two communities studied). Hitting with a stick or a belt however was much higher in both the Thai communities (70% and 65%). All other communities, apart from one in Romania still registered around 50% for this form of punishment. This data would suggest that many caregivers saw the use of corporal punishment as acceptable forms of discipline and not as abusive behaviour.

Yelling at children was common in all countries as was restraining them. In all countries that answered the question, counselling scored very high (between 65 and 91%) as a means of discipline. Interestingly enough, severe forms of discipline, which we had expected, were not evident in but a few isolated cases in Brazil and Romania. Neither of the African countries (where such practices are apparently quite common[3]) recorded any instances of either children being burned or having their fingers cut. his may have been due to the fact that these were communities in which World Vision had already advocated on behaviour change that had had an impact on decreasing some of the more extreme forms of punishment or that parents had an awareness of the issue and though they still used such discipline measures were not about to have this known to a World Vision study team. Interestingly enough, however, children when asked the same questions held similar perceptions on the type and frequency of punishment. There was, however, some slight difference in the use of severe forms of punishment (burning and cutting fingers). Both Ghanaian and Kenyan children reported low percentages of these practices being used with some frequency. Children in Brazil also reported the limited use of such practices.

F.   Attitudes to sexual abuse

As with excessive physical abuse, sexual abuse was treated with disdain in all communities studied. In a series of vignettes presented to caregivers for comment, the following one was unanimous[4] in being seen as inappropriate behaviour:

> *"A 14-year-old girl is visiting her uncle for the weekend. During her visit, he goes into her bedroom and asks to sleep with her."*

Communities defined sexual abuse in a number of ways, perhaps best summarised by the Ghanaian study as:

| 1 | Rape/sexual intercourse/penetration |

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[3] According to World Vision staff from these countries.

[4] There were a number of responses that marked this appropriate. The numbers were so small however, that we must assume this to be either a very isolated case or a misunderstanding of the question.

2   Sexual conversation with a child

3   Touching of sensitive parts of a child

4   Exposure of a child to adult relationship

5   Indecent exposure of adult sexual organs to the child

6   Exposure of child's sexual organs to others

7   Any combination of the above.

The results relating to attitudes towards discipline practices and sexual abuse of children in families were, in some ways surprising. That severe disciplinary action by parents and caregivers was little used was encouraging. However, considering the anecdotal information reported by World Vision project staff and other studies that have been completed into abuse thus far, the picture painted by the household survey was not altogether complete. It did present us with an understanding of the community perception of the issues but perhaps not an accurate indication of what was going on in terms of actual behaviour.

4.2   Focus Group Discussions with Community Leaders

One of the innovative aspects of this study was the number of tools used to gather information that enabled us to "triangulate" and crosscheck information for inconsistencies. Focus group discussions and participatory activities conducted with community leaders and children respectively, helped to clarify some of the uncertainty around the household survey. They showed quite a different situation. In each of the communities formal and informal leaders were interviewed. They reported unanimously three major issues:

1   That children and young people were being brought up in often challenging social and economic conditions which had a direct impact over the way they were treated;

2   That physical abuse and, to a lesser extent sexual abuse of children was commonplace.

3   That there was very little from a legal or policing perspective that was being done about the situation.

Community leaders were incisive in their understandings of the complexity of underlying causal factors of abuse. They cited a range of factors ranging from poverty (a major theme) to alcohol and drug abuse in the community to poor parenting skills. Interestingly enough, there was not one comment that associated children's behaviour as a causal factor for abuse.

Definitions of abuse amongst the community leaders had a wide range. Many thought that modest smacking or hitting with a cane was appropriate. Others thought far more broadly on the issue:

> *"Many people think that child abuse is to beat, to molest. But I think those are all consequences. The real abuse is everything that doesn't provide the children a healthy growth. And this comes from parents, from the lack of money. It's not only about violence but also about realising that children need school, leisure, to be true children. All this lack of*

psychological support from parents, this lack of comprehension, of school and of space is an abuse against children."

Community leaders in all countries voiced their concern about the amount of abuse that took place in their communities. They did not, however, blame this situation primarily on parents. As seen above, they cited many causal factors of abuse that were beyond the control of parents. In addition, it was common that where abuse had been brought to the notice of local authorities that almost without exception, nothing had been done about it.

Community leaders were also very constructive in their suggestions on how to respond to the issues of neglect and abuse. These suggestions focussed around four main areas:

1. The need for communities to have programs and places for children and young people that encourage the development of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well being.
2. The need for awareness-raising in the community to issues of abuse and neglect and the provision of support services for parents.
3. Economic development of communities including the creation of job opportunities for parents and young people who are not in school.
4. The development of safety nets for abused children in the community that *work*.

4.3   Children's Activities

The activities conducted with children were most revealing. Activities included focus group discussions, art and drama and more formal questionnaires. Findings related to the following areas:

A.   Use of corporal punishment

In general, children in all countries disagreed with the use of corporal punishment although in both Ghana and Kenya there was greater acceptance of this as part of "the culture". Children from all countries, however, had alternative suggestions to the use of corporal punishment, which they thought would be far more effective in the changing of behaviour. Most did not see that hitting a child would produce behavioural change for the better as displayed in the comments from Romanian children regarding the scenario above:

> *"Beatings don't help; after mom or dad beats the child, he is shutting down and developing hate against his parents."*

B.   Children's experience of physical abuse and violence

Children in most countries answered the same questionnaire that was given to the parents regarding the use of physical punishment. Answers given confirmed parents responses in most instances. Physical punishment (either being hit with the hand or with a belt or stick) was the most common form of punishment. Children did not report many instances of extremely violent punishment though in most countries, they acknowledged that it was not uncommon.

The communities in Brazil stood out in this area. The communities in which the study was conducted were all extremely poor and very much influenced by the drug trade and associated violence. Children commonly reported witnessing violent crime and even murder. In fact, the researchers had to postpone data collection on more than two occasions due to armed gang warfare in the streets. Parents reported this as common place and noted the effect that it had on their children. One mother mentioning to the researchers that she was trying to get psychological assistance for her daughter who, after witnessing a murder was too afraid to leave the house.

The violence on the streets in Brazil seemed often to be reflected in the home. Out of all of the interview records[5] there was only a handful that had some positive note. Children noted an absence of fathers or domestic violence as a regular occurrence.

C. Children's experience of sexual abuse

Children in all countries noted sexual abuse as an area of concern. Though we did not try to ascertain how many of the children themselves had experienced sexual abuse, most could relate instances in their own community or school. Through the field notes from Brazil, we were able to ascertain that sexual abuse, like physical violence was indeed not unusual. A number of mothers related n stories from their own childhood. One 45 yr old mother in answering the questions related the story of her own childhood where her parent divorced when she was six. She was raised by "strangers", sexually abused by her uncle and cousin and neglected to the point where she had to search for scraps of food in the rubbish. Another openly talked about her experience of being abused by her uncle. This was the first time she had spoken to anyone about this.

5. Trends and Implications

Findings of the study alerted us to numerous trends and implications. They can be summarised as follows:

1. *The definition or scope of the problem*

1. In all communities (apart from Romania) over 60% and up to 81% of respondents said child abuse was a serious problem.
2. Over 70% of respondents regularly use hitting with the hand or a stick or belt as a primary means of discipline. More severe methods in some of the study countries were used with great frequency.
3. In some countries, notably Brazil, Men were often abusive to both their wives and their children. Alcohol was seen to have a major effect on their behaviour.
4. A majority of respondents also reported the use of counselling as a means of resolving discipline problems.
   4.4 Focus group discussions with all community leaders indicated that sexual abuse of children was a major problem. In some communities, notably Ghana and

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[5] The Brazilian researchers documented their interviews

urban Thailand, it was felt that there were locally available resources to assist abusive parents.

5   The responsibility of child raising primarily rests with women.
6   Over 75% of caregiver respondents in all countries stated that girls had a greater responsibility in the home than boys.
7   In most countries there was a great pressure on children to become active economic supporters of the family with over 50% of caregivers feeling that it was important for children to begin to earn income for the family at as early an age as possible
8   Economic circumstances, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, family disintegration, lack of recreational time and space, were all seen to be major causative factors towards abuse of children.
9   Despite a number of countries having legal frameworks for dealing with abuse and neglect, only two of the countries report the existence of child abuse central registries or comparable systems for documenting the number and characteristics of child abuse reports
10 Strategies for effective action at community level were non-existent or ineffectual.

2.   *The attitudes, beliefs and knowledge systems influencing child well-being*
1   Corporal punishment was seen as a primary discipline strategy in all countries
2   In all countries apart from Romania, caregivers felt strongly that teachers should have the authority to physically punish their children
3   Caregivers in some countries felt that physical punishment was justified as this is how they were brought up
4   Sexual abuse of children was seen as unacceptable in all countries
5   The notion that children should decide how to spend their time was strongly felt in some of the study communities
1   All communities felt that children should have the opportunity to play every day.
2   Girls had more responsibility in the home than boys.
3   There was a general feeling amongst caregivers that children should contribute economically to the family as soon as possible.
4   Though there were instances of children participating in making decisions about the family, this was not common.

Underlying these, there are a number of major themes that the data demonstrated. It is these major themes that must be seen as underpinning any future response to the issue of child abuse and neglect and that will form the major recommendations emanating from this study.

1   *Resilience of the family and children themselves.*
Despite the many struggles and challenges that were voiced in every country, there was hope and there was resilience. Families struggled on despite harsh economic situations, despite unemployment, despite the daily reality of violence and poverty. One statement put to care givers in the household survey, "The family is able and is committed to providing for the basic needs of the child", received unanimous agreement. Any response to the issues of abuse and

neglect, therefore, must affirm the strength of the family and their commitment to provide for their children. In addition, it was clear too that children had well considered opinions about the dynamics of abuse and neglect as it affected them as individuals and the community in general. Children and young people must be given a greater voice in the development of any initiatives that seek to abate the situation.

2   *The relationship between abuse and other factors.*
The commitment to the family must be firmly grounded in an understanding of the realities in which many families around the world find themselves. It was clear that many saw a direct relationship between factors such as economic circumstances, alcohol and drug abuse, lack of recreational outlets and, more generally, poverty. We need to discover more about how those links function and where interventions to change such factors will have the most impact.

3   *The lack of legal frameworks.*
Despite a number of countries having legal frameworks for dealing with abuse and neglect, only two of the countries report the existence of child abuse central registries or comparable systems for documenting the number and characteristics of child abuse reports. There is an urgent need for countries to review their legal infrastructure as it relates to the protection and to the well being of children and families.

4   *Non-existent or ineffectual strategies for effective action at community level.*
Finally, any legal structure becomes ineffectual if there is no local structure to enable its realisation where it matters most: in the family and the community. Time and again our study showed that abuse of children was acknowledged but that people felt almost totally powerless to affect any change and that there were no effective legal structures to provide support.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from World Vision's studies that there is an urgent need for action. Based on the research World Vision can point to seven recommended areas for action. If national governments and the international community are willing act in each of these seven areas then it will be possible to show progress towards a world that is safe for children. The first step in bringing safe environments closer is the provision of the basic level of protection for children that these seven recommendations represent. These seven areas are neither conclusive, nor static. They seek to find ways to prevent violence against children, to protect children from the violence around them and to provide support and reintegration services for those children who are survivors of violence. Governments are urged to:

1   Enact laws that protect all children from sexual abuse, violence and exploitation.

The study revealed the inadequacy of national legislation to protect children from violence. In some countries laws were non-existent, in others they are openly discriminatory, in still others

the laws treated the children as criminals rather than victims. It is clear that in many countries around the world, laws to protect children from sexual abuse, violence and exploitation are deeply flawed. Indeed rather than protecting children, some laws openly condone violence against children, this is particularly true for girls.

An adequate legislative framework on abuse issues must have some basic core components, particularly:

1.1 Laws clearly defining abuse and making abuse and sexual exploitation illegal with specified minimum punishments.   Such legislation should be premised on enhancing protection and must therefore aim to create a clear criminalisation of abuse. Although individual national legislation will differ markedly it should be based on international best practice and reflect the guidance offered by the CRC.
1.2 The creation of a legal reporting requirement for governments on progress made in addressing issues of abuse and in producing and updating national strategies for child protection.
1.3 The creation of national independent child rights monitors (children's commissioners/ ombudsperson).

Clearly a legislative framework alone is not sufficient, implementation must also be an important consideration as shown in World Vision's remaining recommendations.   Nevertheless without the underlying foundation of legislation any attempts to systematically and sustainably protect children from abuse are likely to fail.

At present while only a handful of countries have enacted legislation to give children the same protection from physical assault as adults enjoy,[iii] only about 44 countries have adopted specific legislation to address domestic violence, [iv] and many others lack the legislative provisions required to invoke sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence.

World Vision is also concerned that for those children who do not have a loving and nurturing family environment an independent external advocate for child protection should be available. World Vision therefore recommends that a national independent monitor of children's rights be created where none exist. An example of this could be a Children's Commissioner (such as exists in Sweden, Norway and New Zealand) or a Children's Ombudsperson. The position should be linked to the formulation of public policy and the complete implementation of the CRC.

However, even if countries create the most protective and progressive laws to protect children from violence they are meaningless without enforcement. Advocating for the enactment of legislation must be done in tandem with monitoring its enforcement.

2. Train welfare and law enforcement agencies about child abuse issues and promote effective child-sensitive policies based on international standards. No child who has suffered violence should be re-traumatised by the welfare or legal process.

The role of welfare and law enforcement agencies in the protection of children from violence is two-fold. They can be instrumental in identifying situations of child abuse, and therefore removing children, or the perpetrator from that situation and they also take a role in listening to children and prosecuting adult offenders.

Too often, World Viaion's research indicated that welfare and law enforcement agencies were ill-informed and inadequately trained to deal with child victims appropriately. Too frequently children's cries for assistance are ignored, disbelieved or the children themselves were treated as criminals.

All countries should undertake national training provisions for welfare and law enforcement agencies.

It is essential that states have effective referral systems in operation to deal with situations of abuse. For example if law enforcement agencies are the first to be involved they must be able to draw on trained welfare workers and vice versa. Equally some form of provision must exist for the care of children who need to be removed from the family for their own safety. Again this provision should be safe, necessitating that the staff themselves are properly vetted, trained and monitored.

The creation of effective referral systems for child abuse is dependent upon expertise and resources, but it does mark a significant investment in the long term human and social capital of the country involved. In the past some donors have engaged with specific parts of the law enforcement system of a developing state to help build the complex technical capacity needed to deal with issues of abuse. This training needs to reach more widely so that law enforcement and welfare workers receiving a grounding in abuse issues from national capitals through to remote districts.

Children must be supported and must not be re-traumatised by the very system that is supposed to protect and promote their rights. Training, education and resources are urgently required by many welfare and law enforcement agencies. In line with this, governments should be encouraged to develop child protection systems that promote obligations to report instances or suspicions of violence against children and to ensure formal obligations for investigation.

3. Raise awareness of violence against children by educating the public. Helplines, where feasible, and support, should be provided to abused and at-risk children.
Creating a legislative framework provides the foundations for a strategy against child abuse, training welfare and law enforcement workers increases the capability for action. Neither, however, will have sufficient impact if children feel unable to voice their concerns and communities themselves discount the possibility of abuse. The child abuse and neglect study carried out across five countries indicates that whilst children in communities report being abused, adults routinely deny that abuse does or could occur. A cycle of hidden abuse

becomes possible in such situation in which children feel unable to speak. It is an unfortunate but perfect example of why the general public must be educated about violence against children.

Until it is acceptable and encouraged to talk about and openly address issues of abuse, children will continue to suffer in silence. The public must recognise its role in sustaining and creating an environment in which violence against children is able to flourish – or not. Children must feel able to speak and adults need the awareness that would lead them to listen.

It is clear that public education campaigns informing people that child abuse is a violation of children's human rights are required. Passive perpetrators – those who see and know that violence is occurring but do nothing about it – should not be tolerated.

Governments should develop national plans of action to tackle violence against children and these plans should contain key provisions for public education and specific provisions to support abused and at risk children.

One of the most effective interventions that works to support public knowledge is the use of helplines. These helplines can work in a dual capacity, to enable access for people to report situations of child violence and also for the children themselves to seek assistance. Although helplines are often seen as a luxury of the rich world they are increasingly feasible in environments in which communications systems are rapidly changing. India and South Africa, for example, have both seen the development of NGO run helplines.

In Brazil, World Vision has established effective helplines as a direct response to increases in family violence. Called "Campaign Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents", World Vision Brazil aims to raise public awareness and visibility of the problem in the Minas Gerais State.

State TV networks have broadcast a toll free number to encourage people to report cases of child abuse. Within the initial three months, World Vision had received over 600 calls.

Building on this campaign, the organisation has undertaken to create a childrens' rights network in co-ordination with government bodies and members of the community. The intention of the network is to facilitate identification of child abuse and to determine concrete strategies to address the problem. The network is also being utilised to teach children about their right's and what they should do if those rights are violated by violence.

Helplines should not be looked at in isolation, but rather, should be viewed as one aspect of an overall protection plan that offers children and the general public, access to options for support. In addition, helplines and other support programmes organised and run by NGOs does not negate the responsibility of the State to finance and operate help programmes. Governments must be urged to increase their commitment to deliberate strategies for public education and victim support.

4. Work with community groups, churches and civil society organisations to promote prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children from violence.

UNICEF research has overwhelmingly indicated that governments often lack the expertise required to develop and implement policies and strategies required to tackle violence against women and children.[v] Reflecting this, governments should be encouraged to work more co-operatively with community groups, churches and others to address violence issues.

Often it is civil society organisations that have the strongest links and relationships within communities. Often trust has developed between these groups and the communities, which government agencies are unable to emulate. Channelling government resources through civil society organisations can be an extremely effective way in which to reach the grassroots and localise action.

Effective prevention strategies have proved to be community based, focused on education that is gender aware and culturally sensitive. Community protection measures such as hotlines, crisis centres, safe houses and experiential counsellors can prove immediate support to children in situations of violence at the local level. In this way government policies can seek to support localised interventions.

Whilst it is often true that civil society organisations are most in touch with community realities it is good to remind ourselves that development initiatives themselves can in fact lead to or exacerbate the problem of violence, in particular domestic violence. Cultural norms, such as gender roles can be questioned, while people can be required to compete for resources.

NGOs need to understand the complexity of the environment in which they plan to work and by nature, intervene. Successful community interventions supported by government policy have included school prevention strategies against violence. Interventions by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) in school based violence prevention programmes have found positive results. Surveys by ISPCAN indicate that those children involved in the programme were more likely to use self-protection strategies, to talk more openly and be more knowledgeable about abuse, they are also more likely to report abuse after it has been attempted.[vi]

NGOs and civil society more broadly have a fundamental role to play in holding governments accountable in meeting their obligations to children. Governments should be lobbied to support advocacy and awareness raising, legal reform, direct service provision (for survivors and perpetrators), training, monitoring of interventions and to ensure adequate resources are diverted into child protection measures.

Governments, with community based civil society support, need to build societies in which children are secure, respected and appreciated. Deliberate and systematic programmes to reduce and prevent violence against children must be part of every States' plan.

5. Seek and commit the resources -- whether national or international -- to protect children from violence. For example, poverty reduction strategy papers produced by poor nations should include a plan for child protection.
Governments from around the world must commit the resources to protect children from violence and to provide support to those children who are the survivors of violence. This means focusing both within their own communities but also on co-operating on policy formation and resource flows between governments.

In addition, as research suggests, poverty and other extra familial expressions of violence can place an inordinate amount of stress on intra-familial relationships. This can trigger violent responses and reactions. Wealthy nations and lending institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, should consider child protection policies and strategies a fundamental part of the way in which they conduct their own work and the way in which they work with governments.

Existing agreements such as the 20:20 compact would provide a framework in which resources could be channelled towards realising children's rights, although sadly these commitments are not sufficiently implemented. The continued stagnation (and long term decline) of ODA levels also denies to developing countries the resources they need to establish government infrastructure for ensuring children's right to protection. World Vision believes that all available mechanisms of development finance should be made compatible with child protection priorities.

Mechanisms such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers can play a positive role in ensuring the allocation of resources to this area. Other mechanisms should at least be assessed to make sure that they do not exacerbate and worsen child protection problems. Child Protection Impact Assessments should be a standard aspect of development related loans and major donor grants. They should also form part of the strategy process in times of crisis, hopefully helping to avoid the significant rise in child exploitation problems that followed the implementation of IMF adjustment advice during the Asian economic crisis.

Whilst all countries should develop individual and contextualised child protection strategies there are lessons to be learned amongst countries and significant information to share. Standardised definitions, disaggregated data, child impact analysis of government policies, all could form aspects of shared understanding about violence against children. In addition, increased awareness of effective interventions, including youth participation is required.

Currently, only a limited number of countries maintain records of child abuse and all countries struggle with the implementation of effective prevention programmes against child abuse, violence and exploitation.[vii]

A reassessment of government spending priorities is required if children are to be protected from the violence that they currently endure.

6. Support comprehensive efforts, including those by the UN, to study and address violence against children.

Whilst there has been a substantial amount of research undertaken on the issue of violence against children, there remains little comprehensive understanding of the extent and complexity of the problem. In addition, links between various forms of violence against children have only more recently been developed and there remain substantial gaps.

It has already been noted that definitional difficulties between countries has limited some attempts to tackle the problem, whilst silence around issues such as incest make effective programming responses difficult. This is compounded by government inaction and public ignorance.

Increasingly, advocates for children's rights are joining with the CRC Committee's calls for an "…in-depth international study on the issue of violence against children, as thorough and influential as the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report…"[viii]

The call for such a report comes amidst the realisation that children continue to be the victims of extreme and systematic violence, at times resulting in death. It is not acceptable that this persist and that the international community do nothing. The Machel Report, as the children and armed conflict report has become known, was instrumental in forcing the international community and national governments to address the abuse of children in conflict. What is now required is the same level of action for children suffering from other forms of violence.

World Vision supports calls for an international study on violence against children, supported by a global campaign to end the abuse.

As this report has already noted, the definition of violence against children could be extremely broad and include such categories as structural violence, political violence or environmental violence. However, making the report too wide would most likely result in scant attention being paid to all sectors, confused messages and ineffective responses. World Vision recommends that a more narrow report be undertaken. However, even within this narrow report we believe it is important that a section that acknowledges various forms of violence and establishes a context be included.

World Vision believes that the Committee on the CRC's recommendations provide solid directions for developing the international study. We suggest however that the scope will need to be further narrowed. State responsibilities under international treaties, to protect children in particular from physical and psychological violence, could form an appropriate guide.

In addition, we continue to promote the role of other international human rights mechanisms and instruments as a valid framework for child protection, to be used in conjunction with the CRC.

Whilst the international study on violence against children will no doubt take some time to conduct, at least 12 months perhaps longer, this should not restrict immediate action by national governments and others to protect children from violence. Children have already waited for too long for words on paper to become realised actions.

7. Invite children to be full participants in establishing measures that offer protection, foster development and guarantee human rights.
Research on child abuse has indicated that involving children is an essential element in ending the violence. Children can be resilient, resourceful and responsive.

Findings from World Vision's own research also bear this out. In addition, enabling children to have the confidence to speak out and to identify adults and peers to trust is essential.

Domestic abuse in particular is especially insidious because of its often hidden and very private nature. If children are not encouraged to speak out the problem will never be adequately addressed. Previous research by World Vision and others has also shown that generally children do not lie about sexual abuse and violence. We must learn to trust children and to listen to them. We must also find ways to help them adequately and appropriately express themselves in secure environments.

In 1998 some 55 sexually exploited youth gathered in Canada for the International Summit of Sexually Exploited Youth. At this Summit the children developed a Declaration and Agenda for Action. One of the core components of the Agenda for Action, written by the youth is,

…that the voices and experiences of sexually exploited children and youth must be heard and be central to the development and implementation of action. We must be empowered to help ourselves.[ix]

There are a number of ways in which children can be empowered to participate in ending violence and in assisting those children who continue to suffer from violence. Children have actively been using their own experience to help and benefit other youth, to play a role in public education, to create peer support groups, to staff crisis hotlines, to establish and run drop in centres and to build and staff peer networks.[x] Children must be participants in their own development.

In addition, by involving children directly in our understanding of violence, resources can be better targeted and more effectively monitored. By choosing not to consult children, adults continue to cement the kinds of attitudes that condone violence against children and to perpetuate the cycle of silence and abuse.

A Challenge to Each of Us
In situations of violence, children are inevitably the most vulnerable. Most tragically, millions of children today are physically and mentally abused, exploited and violated by the very families

that are supposed to offer love and security. Compounding this is the external violence that is often beyond the family's control – war, economic depravation and discrimination.

The seven cross cutting recommendations that evolve from World Vision's research form the basis for our on-going lobbying of national governments, but they need not be restricted to national governments. Many of the recommendations are equally relevant to UN agencies and mechanisms and to regional bodies.

In addition, individuals, families and communities have a distinct and imperative role to play in combating violence against children. Part of this role is about advocating to our governments for policies and resources to fight this abuse at the national and international level. It is also about admitting individual responsibility to child protection. Supporting children themselves to speak out, to listen to the lessons and advice of children and to be guided by their insights is also essential. Each of us must be challenged not just to imagine a world where children are safe – but to build one.

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[i] Statistics on domestic violence against children are difficult to determine precisely given the often hidden nature of the abuse. However, available research across a number if countries clearly indicates that outside an active war zone, children are most at risk of violence in their own homes. UNICEF, Children and Violence, Innocenti Digest, No. 2, 2000, p 1.

[ii] Examples of this work can be found in Kathy Vandergrift, Melanie Gow and Randini Wanduragala, Right to Peace: Children in Armed Conflict, Working Paper No. 2, World Vision International, March 2000.

[iii] UNICEF, op.cit., p 2.

[iv] UNICEF, Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls, Innocenti Digest, No. 6, June 2000, p 1.

[v] UNICEF, op.cit. Digest June 6, p 6

[vi] L.E.Gibson and H.Leitenberg, *Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programmes: do they Decrease the Occurrence of Sexual Abuse?* Child Abuse and Neglect, the International Journal, ISPCAN, Pergamon, Vol.24, No.9, 2000, p 1116.

[vii] Kempe Children's Centre and ISPCAN, World Perspectives on Child Abuse, 4th International Resource Book, Kempe Children's Centre, University of Colorado, School of Medicine, Denver, Co., USA, 2000, p 2.

[viii] Committee on the CRC, CRC: Day of General Discussion, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/dd25re.htm

[ix] Save the Children Canada, Speaking Out Together: Declaration and Agenda for Action of Sexually Exploited Children and Youth, Save the Children Canada, Canada, 1998, p 15.

[x] Save the Children Canada, Sacred Lives: Canadian Aboriginal Children and Youth Speak out about Sexual Exploitation, Toronto, 2000 p 4.