

Knowledge for Change

Data and research to inform policy making and strengthen children's protection from violence

High-Level Expert Meeting

Sweden, 19 – 21 June 2012

CONCEPT PAPER

Background

The 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children underlined that “violence exists in every country of the world cutting across culture, class, education, income and ethnic origin” and concluded that protection of children is a matter of urgency. The Study recognized that one factor limiting the impact of protection efforts by States is the “lack of knowledge or understanding of violence against children and its root causes, to which the dearth of data and statistics on the issue contribute”. The Study stressed the gap between the need for evidence-based policy measures to protect children against violence and the limited data and research available on this topic. One of the overarching recommendations of the UN Study is therefore that “States should improve data collection and information systems in order to identify vulnerable groups, inform policy and programming at all levels and track progress towards the goal of preventing violence against children. States should create and maintain data on children without parental care and children in criminal justice system. States should also develop and implement a national research agenda on violence against children across settings where violence occurs with particular attention to vulnerable groups of boys and girls.”

The Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children (SRSG) is a high-profile global advocate promoting follow up to the recommendations of the UN Study and mobilizing political action and social support for the prevention and elimination of violence against children. The mandate of the SRSG builds upon public health issues and child protection initiatives, and envisages the protection of children from violence as a human rights imperative.

From 30 November to 2 December 2009, UNICEF, the Childwatch International Research Network, and the African Child Policy Forum organized a global conference on research and child rights in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with the participation of the SRSG. The meeting, “Child Rights at a Crossroads” aimed to identify key dimensions of a global research agenda for the realization of children's rights; to establish a framework for collaboration between policy makers, practitioners and academics for the improved use of research, and to develop models of collaboration with children and young people in participatory research. In the adopted Call for Action, the participants called upon the research community, in partnership with governments, international and regional organizations, policy makers, practitioners, civil society, youth and children, to collaborate in the appraisal of existing knowledge and the development of new research on violence against children, to identify areas that are currently underdeveloped or neglected by research, to support the collection of real-time, disaggregated, comparable and

gender-sensitive data to monitor key trends affecting children's lives, and to develop good practice guidelines and conduct training in child participatory methods with stakeholders.

The challenges

Sound research and relevant, objective and disaggregated child related data are indispensable to understand the environment within which children grow and develop; to assess the impact on children of planned or adopted decisions; to acknowledge and address risks compromising their fundamental rights; and to identify opportunities for change. Data and research enable governments to take the right decisions at the right time and are crucial for the transparent and accurate assessment of progress in the protection of children's rights. When violence against children is at stake, sound data and analysis gain particular importance to capture the magnitude and incidence of this phenomenon, to understand prevailing attitudes and perceptions, and to provide care and protection to children at risk.

Unfortunately, many gaps prevail. Widely perceived as a social taboo, an accepted practice or a needed form of discipline, violence against children remains hidden and is seldom reported or captured in official statistics. As a result, information on violence against children is scarce and inconsistent, only representing the tip of the iceberg, and opportunities to consolidate children's protection and invest in violence prevention are seriously constrained.

There are often both legal and practical obstacles for gathering, analyzing and disseminating data on violence against children. Although there is consensus on the need to adopt a broad definition of violence, including its different manifestations (physical, psychological and sexual), there is no standard categorization of the different forms of abuse. Due to the absence of internationally agreed methodologies on the collection of data on violence against children, different standards and practices have been followed for ensuring protection of respondents and interviewers, and regarding the need to provide follow-up support to victims.

Limited evidence exists on the extent, impact, risks of violence and on the underlying social norms and attitudes that perpetuate its existence. Robust data (both quantitative and qualitative) are needed to inform evidence-based programmes and policies that can prevent and respond to violence, to establish baselines and to monitor and advance progress in children's protection.

Too often, collected data remain unanalyzed and fails to be disseminated or used when policy and action are shaped and implemented. Moreover, insights in what works in violence prevention and response are often not taken into consideration when it comes to allocation resources and efforts to address violence. This "translation deficit" and its underlying causes need to be addressed, and efforts are equally needed in the communication of evidence and research.

Significant developments

The last six years have witnessed a proliferation of different measurement efforts aimed at filling existing gaps, primarily using large-scale population-based surveys. Initiatives have been undertaken by or with the support of international agencies, government institutions and research actors, as well as international and local NGOs.

The growing number of initiatives offers new opportunities to break the invisibility of violence and mobilize action and support towards its prevention and elimination. In this regard, important work has been carried out within the UN system, as illustrated by the 2010 UNICEF study on

Child disciplinary Practices at Home, by WHO in the framework of its violence prevention programme and the Violence Prevention Alliance and by UNODC, including through its Global Study on Homicide.

Interagency and multi-stakeholder collaboration has also been pursued through the establishment of the Child Protection Monitoring and Evaluation Reference Group (CP MERG) and the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Data Collection on Violence against Children, designed to provide guidance in this area and assist countries in their efforts to gather reliable, useful and ethically sensitive data.

National surveys on violence against children conducted by governments over the recent past also constitute an important reference in this regard. A national survey was conducted in the United Republic of Tanzania by a National Multi-Sector Task Force chaired by the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, and associating UN, civil society and research partners. In the United States, a national survey on children's exposure to violence was carried out by the office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Similarly, as a result of government initiatives, an index study on homicides was conducted in Brazil, a survey in France on bullying in schools, and in Spain a study on violence in the family. In a significant number of other countries there are encouraging steps towards conducting research and comprehensive national surveys on violence against children.

Ombuds institutions for children in different countries, academics and researchers have initiated numerous studies and surveys on this topic, including on building capacity for ethical research with children and young people. Civil society has also been an important actor in data collection and research on violence against children. In 2011 the NGO Advisory Council for Follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children published its report *Five Years On* – bringing together important studies and resources on violence against children in different settings, among others in the home and family, in schools, in care and justice institutions.

Expert Consultation on Data and Research on Violence against Children

In order to build on this growing body of knowledge and experience, and to address the above-mentioned challenges, the SRSG will join the Government of Sweden in the organization of an Expert Consultation on strengthening data and research to protect children from violence. The Consultation will provide a strategic platform to learn from and build upon initiatives promoted by a wide range of partners, including governments, UN agencies, international organizations, academia, independent children's rights institutions and civil society organizations.

The expert meeting will be hosted by Sweden, which introduced a legal ban on all forms of violent and emotionally abusive treatment of children more than 30 years ago and has regularly surveyed the impact of this measure on upbringing practices and public perceptions.

What the Expert Consultation will address

The Expert Consultation will assess progress in the implementation of the recommendation of the UN Study on data and research on violence against children. The meeting will aim at bridging efforts between statistical offices, research institutions and governmental departments responsible for children and violence-related activities, and promoting evidence-based advocacy, policy and mobilization of resources. The consultation will be an important forum to reflect on

ethical approaches to take into account the experience and perceptions of violence by children in surveys and research.

Specifically, the meeting will:

- Assess progress and reflect on key findings from initiatives by strategic partners, including UN agencies, governments, independent children's rights institutions, statistical offices, research institutions and NGOs, on children's exposure to violence in different settings.
- Identify knowledge gaps, emerging challenges and factors that limit the promotion of evidence-based policies and the mobilization of resources and advocacy to prevent and address violence against children.
- Consider ways of promoting the use of knowledge and research in policy and action, and in supporting political decision-making and policy formulation to protect children from violence.
- Reflect on ethical aspects of capturing the experience and perceptions of violence by children and on minimum standards to promote young people's involvement.
- Identify strategic recommendations to assist Member States and other stakeholders in the strengthening of data systems on violence against children and in the development of a national research agenda.

Expected outcomes

- A thematic report on the key dimensions addressed by the expert consultation.
- Conclusions and recommendations from the meeting included in the annual report of SRSG to UN General Assembly in 2012.
- A strategy for a follow up process for assisting Member States and promoting alliances among researchers and institutions on violence against children, relying on existing networks (e.g., the regional cooperation mechanisms on violence against children, Violence Prevention Alliance, Childwatch International).

Suggested Participants

The Expert Consultation will gather scientists and researchers, government officials, Ombuds for Children, and representatives from UN agencies and international governmental organisations, as well as from civil society.

Time and Venue

The meeting will be held from 19 to 21 June 2012 at the Conference Centre in Satra Bruk (near Stockholm)..