

World Vision



A Safe  
World

for  
**Children**

Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation

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# A Safe World for Children

Ending Abuse, Violence and Exploitation

Edited by **Melanie Gow**



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# Foreword

As international president of World Vision, an organisation that focuses on the poor and vulnerable, I have spoken with many suffering children.

I have talked with children taken from their homes and forced to bear arms. I have comforted children who have lost their parents, their siblings and other loved ones to AIDS. I have had children tell me of the great joy they experienced escaping from forced labour or molestation or prostitution.

This World Vision report documents the appalling scale of violence against and abuse and exploitation of children. The report contains original research compiled from area development programmes and projects in some of the 90 countries in which World Vision works. Sadly, much of this documented violence occurs in the home. All too often, children are the first to be abused and exploited, often by the very parents whom we would expect to keep them safe.

The report compels us to take action. It offers specific recommendations on influencing our respective governments so that public awareness is heightened, community resources are mobilised and children are protected. It also urges communities to invite children to be full participants in establishing measures that offer prevention, foster development and guarantee human rights, especially children's rights.

I encourage you to study this report. I invite you to join World Vision's global campaign to "Imagine a World Where Children Are Safe." I urge you to support the Global Movement for Children, an international effort by UNICEF, World Vision and other international organisations seeking to protect children and prevent violence against them.

Finally, I implore you to take action to help create a world where children are safe. God loves the children of this world; let's be instruments of that love.

Dean R. Hirsch  
President, World Vision International

# Building a Safer World for Children



Children in El Salvador sing at a ceremony for World Vision's Youth Ambassadors, who brought a message of hope and unity.

Two years ago, when travelling to Northern Uganda to research the abduction of children by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), I met with a number of young girls aged between 7 and 17. The girls were at World Vision Uganda's rehabilitation centre in Gulu. All had

been victims of abduction by the LRA and had either escaped or been rescued. One by one the girls shared with me their stories of violence and terror. Every girl had been raped – including the youngest, who was just seven – many of them by gangs. The violence and abuse were horrifying.

Around the world, children are being beaten, abused, raped, exploited, tortured, mutilated and emotionally traumatised. Some 1 million children are estimated to work in the Asian sex trade;<sup>1</sup> some 300,000 are child soldiers;<sup>2</sup> another 2 million girls between 4 and 12 undergo genital mutilation every year;<sup>3</sup> in at least 11 countries there is clear evidence that children are being

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<sup>1</sup> Boes, *Multilingual Child Rights*, [www.boes.org](http://www.boes.org)

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, *State of the World's Children, 1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Boes, *Multilingual Child Rights*.

tortured by the state authorities; in too many countries the death penalty for those under 18 remains a legitimised state practice.<sup>4</sup> The ongoing violence against children is a social pattern found in every country; it is both systematic and widespread, constituting a direct violation of their fundamental rights.

These devastating statistics 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 give us a remarkable opportunity to identify common themes that cut across different forms of abuse and violence. World Vision has used four case studies and research projects to review common problem areas that lead to situations in which violence and abuse can remain hidden and ignored. Summarised in individual chapters in this report, 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.

## Definitions of Violence and the Scope of the Report

A conclusive definition of violence seems almost as elusive as gathering the solid statistics and data required to analyse this phenomenon in any depth.

Some forms of violence against children seem obvious and are easy to identify; others are hidden; still other forms may be less direct and are not often identified as violence.

Categories of violence can range from political, structural and economic to physical, psychological and emotional. Violence against children takes place on the streets, in institutions, in homes and in the workplace. Different types of violence are performed by different violators, including the state, parents, even children themselves.

World Vision's work as a relief, development and advocacy organisation has brought it into contact with violence against children in many different forms. Although this report addresses only some types of violence against children, the analysis is not undertaken in isolation. This report draws on World Vision's experience from 2,000 projects assisting children and their families around the world, including in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America. It also reflects a wider breadth of concern that inevitably cannot be captured in a single document. In writing about the sexual exploitation of children, for example, World Vision is also conscious that many other exploitative labour practices (including domestic service) routinely involve the use of beatings as punishments.

World Vision acknowledges that, in seeking to tackle some types of violence against children, we must assess 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.<sup>6</sup> This report addresses a range of violence against children – violence that takes place at a very personal level within the home and also violence that is more systematically part of

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> 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 of 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 2* (2000): 1.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of this work can be found in Melanie Gow, Kathy Vandergrift and Randini Wanduragala, *The Right to Peace: Children and Armed Conflict*, Working Paper No. 2, World Vision International, March 2000.

pervading cultural mores or the result of simple greed. In every instance, the violence cannot be fully addressed without the constructive involvement of efficient and properly supported state structures that are dedicated to the realisation of children's rights.

## Breadth of Review

The analysis of violence against children offered in this report is drawn from extensive community-level research carried out around the world. This work forms the background to a four-volume set of studies published by World Vision (see appendix on page 53 for availability), the subjects of which are: the abuse and neglect of children within their families and communities in five developing countries, the sexual exploitation of children in Cambodia as an expression of violence, the extent and impact of family and community violence in Latin America and the often extreme violence to which girls are exposed.

The research involved has often been groundbreaking and innovative. For example, 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. In addition, the picture presented of the disproportionate burden of violence carried by girls is the product of qualitative data collected in 34 visits to 15 countries and survey data collected from 234 communities from 51 countries. The scale of effort involved has produced a unique picture of a global problem but has also pointed to the critical steps that must be taken if children are to be offered a safer environment within which to grow.

The first step towards taking constructive action against the global problem of violence against children is to recognise the complexity of the issue. Child abuse can mean different things in different countries and contexts, and neglect can be either deliberate or non-deliberate. Although the emotional impact can not be ignored, the forms of violence analysed in this

report are predominately physical. They include sexual violence and abuse, deliberate neglect, beatings and mutilation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has attempted to broker some agreement on a common definition of physical violence against children, developing a protocol that it hopes will be utilised by health practitioners. Such a protocol should help in formulating national legislation around abuse as well as in collecting statistics and other disaggregated data.

In a recent *Innocenti Digest* report on children and violence, UNICEF defined violence as "deliberate behaviour by people against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm."<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this report, the UNICEF definition of violence provides a helpful guide, but World Vision's report also includes instances where non-deliberate behaviour has also resulted in violence against children.

But the purpose of this report is not merely to define violence or analyse its prevalence. In bringing the research on and stories of these children to you, World Vision hopes to motivate individuals, parents, communities, religious groups, children and, most specifically, national governments and the international community. It is hoped that with this knowledge people will act to end violence, provide significant assistance to child survivors of violence and focus on constructive prevention strategies.

In this report, World Vision enumerates concrete actions for change. Each chapter contains recommendations – some are issue specific; others are broad. The combined insights that these individual studies have brought to the current report have resulted in seven interrelated recommendations for action. World Vision believes that, together, these seven steps will help to provide at least a minimum standard of protection for all the world's children.

An essential building block in this process of protecting children is the creation of a proper legal framework on child abuse in all countries; thus, this is the starting point for World Vision's recommendations. Legislation must be implemented, and for most devel-

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, "Children and Violence," 2.

oping countries this will require better training and more resources. Awareness must also be raised so that, when children do report abuse, people listen and act. If adopted by governments in developing countries, and donor states from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Vision's recommendations would help to create a protective context within a rights-based framework.

World Vision's recommendations are discussed in detail towards the end of this introduction, but it is important to recognise at the start of this report that, for many governments and other institutions, an important step has already been taken through acceptance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 19 of the convention states that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse." Governments and development donors such as the World Bank now need to move into a phase of implementation, making Article 19 a reality across the developed and developing world.

## 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 the unfair distribution of wealth, the political violence of autocratic regimes, and the economic and social violence that denies people access to education and health – is abuse played out daily in many of the communities with which World Vision works. To categorise such exploitation as expressions of violence is valid. The

consequences of these violations are explicit, and can, at their most extreme, lead to death.

The additional complexity of these forms of violence, however, is 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. Extrafamilial forms of violence such as armed conflict and economic deprivation can place high levels of stress on families and have an impact on intrafamilial violence.

Working to combat a range of expressions of violence against children has clearly shown World Vision that all human rights are interdependent and all social problems are interconnected – no single issue can be addressed in isolation. The international community should therefore see the very tangible and real problems of violence against children as a key benchmark of progress in dealing with development challenges.

Such a decision would also help to demonstrate the potential that can be achieved through unified and co-operative action for children. Proving that we can guarantee the rights of every child is instrumental to the success of the Global Movement for Children, launched in 2001 by UNICEF and a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including World Vision. The Global Movement calls on the international community to take seriously their many promises on issues such as education, child mortality and the provision of clean water.<sup>8</sup> It is the hope of all those involved that a new momentum will be generated to encourage action. Achieving real change for children will require clear aims and specific areas of focus for the global community.

There are few issues for which the need for urgent action is as compelling as the creation of a basic level of security for every child. Governments already have a standard to aim for in the form of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which outlines what each child should be able to expect. World Vision believes that governments must give priority to meeting their obligations under the convention with regard to the protection of their young citizens.

<sup>8</sup> See the Global Movement for Children website [www.gmfc.org](http://www.gmfc.org) for further details.

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

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified of all UN agreements, although sadly (due to its weak monitoring mechanisms) it is also one of the least implemented. Formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, the CRC became the first international human rights instrument to address the protection of children from violence.<sup>9</sup> It places particular emphasis on the dignity of children, their right to protection, their need for special care and their right to physical integrity.

Although it is no longer the only international human rights mechanism that deals with violence against children, the CRC remains the most holistic in its approach. This aspect makes the CRC an extremely powerful framework under which to develop policies and programmes for the protection of children, the prevention of violence and the reintegration of children who are victims of violence.

In addition to Article 19, quoted above, the CRC contains a number of other provisions relevant to violence. Article 2 states that all the rights contained in the convention – including the right of protection from violence – shall be respected without discrimination. This is a very significant protection article. World Vision's research cements earlier studies that have shown that marginalised children, such as children with disabilities, refugee children, girls, children from minorities and street children, have been subjected to violence simply because of their vulnerable status.

States have a responsibility to protect children from sexual exploitation, trafficking, economic exploitation, torture, armed conflict, harmful traditional practices and domestic abuse, and to promote

children's right to political, civil, economic, social and cultural security. Article 39 of the CRC clearly articulates 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 CRC is clearly much more than a set of lofty principles; it is a practical guide to standards for the rights of children. The problem, not surprisingly, lies in the non-enforcement of the convention. Although signatories have official obligations under the CRC, these are often openly ignored and even actively violated. This problem is compounded because the CRC has the weakest enforcement mechanisms of all the human rights instruments and weaker mechanisms than any international economic agreements.<sup>10</sup> Add to this the excessive derogations reserved by some signatories during ratification of the CRC, and the practical limitations are evident.

It is important to recognise that, while states have obligations to children, all of us partake in these responsibilities. Thus, an aspect of states' obligations is to enable people to realise their responsibilities. Parents and communities can be hindered from protecting children against violence when the state does not provide a supportive environment. Economic security, a peaceful and healthy society and access to quality education provide a fundamental basis for preventing violence and protecting children. For developing countries in particular, attempts to create such an environment can be undermined by entrenched poverty. The CRC recognises these limitations and promotes international co-operation and financial support.

Given the many frustrations with the CRC, non-governmental organisations, including World Vision, have pushed for tighter enforcement procedures. Under the current arrangement, states report to a ten-

<sup>9</sup> Peter Newell and Barbro Holmberg, "A Watchdog for Children's Rights," in *Children's Rights: Turning Principles into Practice* (Save the Children, UNICEF, 2000), 124. Since 1948 there have been several UN documents that have sought to protect children caught in war, but not to protect children more widely from violence.

<sup>10</sup> Kathy Vandergrift, "Monitoring and Accountability under the CRC: An Integrated Approach," draft position paper, World Vision, May 2001, p. 1.

member expert committee every five years. This has had some impact on compliance, but the committee is greatly underfunded, and its recommendations to states are not enforceable.

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

In addition, the CRC should not be isolated from the wider human rights system. Other UN mechanisms, particularly those with stronger enforcement potential, should be used in conjunction with the CRC in order to better protect children from violence. Examples of such mechanisms include special rapporteurs and independent experts as well as UN human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its First Optional Protocol.

For organisations such as World Vision, the importance of the CRC is multifaceted. It is an advocacy tool, a measuring stick and a policy and programme framework. Each of the World Vision studies summarised here has stressed the significance of the CRC as a tool for the protection of children, the prevention of violence and the recovery of children who have been subject to violence. In addition, each of the seven core recommendations of this report fits within this framework and is an obvious concrete application of the convention.

World Vision will continue to lobby for stronger compliance with the CRC and better enforcement mechanisms for this important treaty. If fulfilled, the CRC promises so much for the security of children.

## Illustrating the Problem: Four Studies on Violence against Children

Identifying the problems that create contexts in which abuse and violence can happen is a critically important step in finding solutions to this global problem. 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. Those studies are summarised in the four chapters that follow, but it is useful to draw out some striking elements of the picture that emerges.

### *Chapter One: Child Abuse and Neglect*

“Child abuse is not limited to any one country, economic system or culture,” so notes Karl Dorning in his chapter on child abuse and neglect across five countries. In Ghana, Kenya, Thailand, Brazil and Romania, World Vision undertook extensive community- and household-level studies to analyse community perceptions on child abuse and neglect and to identify key strategies for positive change.

In partnership with the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, World Vision designed a five-country research programme, interviewing children, parents and other caregivers, and community leaders. The study also took the time to analyse legal and policy frameworks in the countries to determine the impact of these in preventing child abuse and in assisting those children who are survivors of abuse.

Ranges of methodologies were used to collect the information, from focus-group discussions to drama, art, questionnaires and household surveys. Despite some cultural differences, many of the results were disturbingly similar. Overwhelmingly, more than half of the caregivers interviewed felt that child abuse was

a big problem in their community, while community leaders indicated that physical abuse and, to a lesser extent, sexual abuse of children were commonplace. Interestingly, children expressed firm ideas about abuse and the way in which it affected them and their communities.

As with the other three studies, the child abuse and neglect project, co-ordinated internationally by Dorning, showed distinct weaknesses and inadequacies in the legal structures available to deal with child abuse and neglect, most especially at the local level.

Two points are strikingly evident from the study: the family is seen as a key resource in fighting against abuse, and within the family unit there is both hope and resilience. Clearly, any response to issues of abuse and neglect must affirm the strength of the family and its commitment to provide for children.

### **Chapter Two: Sexual Exploitation and Violence in Cambodia**

The sexual exploitation of children can be defined as the act of exploiting boys and girls under the age of 18 for the purposes of sex in exchange for money or in-kind gifts. When such exploitation takes place in an organised or commercial manner, the abuse also involves financial or in-kind profit for the exploiter.

It is impossible to say precisely how many children around the world are the victims of this criminal activity. Yet estimates place the number well into the millions

In Cambodia, it is estimated that 30% of commercial sex workers are exploited children. At least half of these children are said to be forced into this work, either by being tricked with promises of high-paying jobs or by being sold into the trade.<sup>11</sup>

World Vision has worked with exploited children in Cambodia for many years. Working with street children, child labourers and children affected by armed conflict, the organisation has witnessed first-hand the abuse of children. World Vision has also

worked to undermine the commercial sexual exploitation of children and to address the public and private forms of sexual violence against children

In 2000, World Vision, in consultation with the Cambodian Ministry for Tourism and Cambodia National Council for Children, undertook a study on sexual violence and the exploitation of children within the tourism industry. The results are devastating. The data show a picture of official complicity, active promotion of the problem by the industry, and systematic and accepted sexual violence against boys and girls. In his chapter, Laurence Gray discusses the prevalence of the violence and its impact on the children; he examines the players involved and the impact on the wider community. Gray also presents options for change, involving the Cambodian government, law enforcement officers, the tourism industry and the children themselves.

Gray highlights the need for adequate and enforced legislation, for international co-operation and for thoughtful prevention strategies that engage children and their communities and are focused on long-term goals such as poverty eradication and alternative economic solutions for the children and their parents.

### **Chapter Three: Because They Are Girls**

In the late 1980s, in the release of a ground-breaking report, economist Amartya Sen (winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, 1998) first articulated the concept of the “missing women.” Through a comparative analysis of census data, Sen surmised in this study that some 100 million women, who, according to natural sex ratios, should have been alive, were “missing.”<sup>12</sup> Sen’s work in general focused on the neglect of women and their resulting deaths.

Others have taken Sen’s research further, studying the correlation between the missing women syndrome and violence against and abuse of women. Although there is continuing debate on this issue, links have been established.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that girls, by

<sup>11</sup> ECPAT International, *A Step Forward* (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Finney Hayward, *Breaking the Earthenware Jar: Lessons from South Asia to End Violence against Women and Girls*, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (Kathmandu: Jagadamba Press, 2000), 94.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

virtue of their gender, are singled out for abuse, violence and exploitation. Widespread discrimination against girls is evident in the home, school, workplace and elsewhere.

In 2000, World Vision conducted a year-long review of its programme and advocacy services for girls around the world. World Vision staff and external consultants made 34 field visits to talk to girls and their communities, and to World Vision staff, government officials and other NGOs, about the issues most affecting girls' lives. In addition to the site visits, the team gathered 234 survey responses in 51 countries. They analysed the results of the research and, where required, recommended developing appropriate and additional responses.

The study identified 12 key issues affecting girls. Although only 2 of these clearly articulated an overall theme of violence – violence in the family and community, and the sexual exploitation and trafficking of girls – violence and the threat of violence was articulated as a concern for the girls across all 12 issues.

The study highlights extreme discrimination against girls, creating the environment for violence against them. In addition, societal responses were found to be vastly inadequate: flawed laws enable rapists to be acquitted if they marry their victims, and girls are accused on inviting violence against themselves.

In her chapter, Linda Hawkins, a major contributor to the report, challenges the cultural assumptions that devalue girls, the community responses that make discussion of incest near impossible and the inequitable access of girls to education and health. Hawkins does, however, note some signs of positive change. The report finds that in communities where girls in particular, and children more generally, have greater participation, strategies to address violence are more deliberate and are openly discussed. Further, there is an increasing trend in some parts of the world to recognise that sexual violence is a crime.

Hawkins highlights some concrete and effective programmes that are seeking to address gender violence in communities as diverse as Palestine and Mali.

Again, concrete recommendations for action are suggested, and all of us are challenged to lead by example and value girls' voices.

#### ***Chapter Four: Faces of Violence in Latin America***

Over the years, Latin America, like so many other regions in the world, has been wracked by violence. Civil unrest, ethnic conflict, armed hostilities, drug wars, gang fights and state torture, as well as structural violence exemplified by poverty, have had devastating personal and developmental effects on the people in that region.

In a single decade, homicide rates in the region have soared by 44%. Brazil has a murder rate comparable to a country mired in civil war. In Chile more than 70% of children are the object of some physical or psychological violence from their parents.

For over six months, World Vision offices throughout Latin America documented the various faces of violence against children in that region. All of them are ugly. From abuse in the home, on the street and at work, children are subjected to extreme degradation.

In his chapter, David Westwood gives space to the voices and stories of the many children that World Vision has worked with, interviewed, supported and learned from since the organisation undertook the study. With all the statistics and data collected in Latin America, none are as compelling as the children's stories. Using these stories as a beginning, Westwood has utilised the research from the regional study to highlight the various forms of violence affecting children's lives, including violence in the home, sexual violence, poverty as violence and violence on the streets.

World Vision has worked in Latin America for over 25 years. During that time, the organisation has seen the levels of violence against children increase and intensify. While World Vision has worked to support a culture of peace and tolerance, it seeks, through this new study, to develop a renewed commitment and to face the new challenges in the region.

Westwood outlines three fundamental ways in which violence against children must be tackled. First, we must respond to the most immediate effects of violence, helping the survivors to move forward through recovery and rehabilitation. Second, the structures that sustain violence against children in Latin America must be transformed, breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality. Finally, people's perceptions, values and behaviours must be challenged, and we must work to create a community that does not accept violence as an appropriate response.

Westwood's chapter makes it clear that there are no easy ways to eradicate violence against children. It will take a concerted family, community and government response to prevent violence against children and to provide ongoing protection and recovery for those children who are already its victims.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

It is clear from World Vision's studies that there is an urgent need for action in the area of violence against children. While each study has developed its own strategies and action points, there are also a number of overlapping and fundamental changes that have been discovered. These themes point to the underlying factors that allow situations of violence and abuse to continue. They invariably include weak legislative provisions and ineffective enforcement structures. Another crucial factor is a common thread of low levels of awareness, which leads to abuse and violence remaining hidden and undiscussed. Raising awareness levels is essential if children suffering abuse are to be heard, but each child must be given opportunities to speak.

Based on these interwoven themes, World Vision can 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. The first step in working to ensure safe environments is the provision of the basic level of protection for children that is represented by these seven recommendations. These seven areas are neither conclusive nor static. They seek to find ways to prevent violence against children, to pro-

tect 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.**

Each of the four studies reveals the inadequacy of national legislation to protect children from violence. In some countries, laws are non-existent; in others, they are openly discriminatory; in still others, they treat 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:

- 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 legislation in individual states will differ markedly, all such laws should be based on international best practice and reflect the guidance offered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The enactment of extraterritorial legislation that allows the prosecution of citizens for abuse committed while overseas.
- The establishment of a national register of sexual offenders.
- The creation of a legal requirement whereby governments must report on progress made in addressing issues of abuse and in producing and updating national strategies for child protection.
- The creation of national independent child rights monitors (children's commissioners or ombudsperson).

Clearly a legislative framework alone is not sufficient; implementation must also be an important consideration, as is shown in World Vision's remaining recommendations. Nevertheless without the underlying foundation of legislation, any attempts to protect children systematically and sustainably from abuse are likely to fail. At present, only a handful of countries have enacted legislation to give children the same protection from physical assault as adults enjoy;<sup>14</sup> about 44 countries have adopted specific legislation to address domestic violence;<sup>15</sup> and many states lack the legislative provisions required to invoke sanctions against perpetrators of sexual violence.

In developing and refining their legislative framework, states should give consideration to the relevant statements of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The committee has made constructive comments on a number of articles of the CRC, including articles 19 (protection from violence), 2 (non-discrimination) and 3 (best interests of the child).

National laws should seek to protect all children from violence, abuse and exploitation wherever these may occur. In line with this view, World Vision advocates the universal application of extraterritorial legislation. These laws enable the prosecution of child sex abusers for offences committed overseas. A number of countries, including some within Europe and Asia, have passed such legislation, and it has successfully resulted in the arrest, prosecution and punishment of a number of child sex abusers.

The establishment of national registers of child sex abusers is one way in which to protect children from direct contact with convicted abusers. An example of this is the Protection of Children Act, passed in the United Kingdom in October 2000, which requires all public bodies to check a national register of offenders before offering employment that might bring individuals into contact with children.<sup>16</sup> The register, known as the Consultancy Service Index, is also available for voluntary organisations to check before employing people. Individuals can apply to be

struck from the list. The limitations of the act are that it does not extend to compulsory use by private organisations.

World Vision also believes that an independent external advocate for child protection should be available for those children who do not have a loving and nurturing family environment. World Vision therefore recommends that a national independent monitor of children's rights be created in those countries where such a position does not 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.

Even if countries create the most protective and progressive legislation to protect children from violence, it is 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 retraumatised by the welfare or legal process.***

Welfare and law-enforcement agencies have a dual role in the protection of children from violence. They can be instrumental in identifying situations of child abuse – and removing children or the perpetrators from those situations – and they also have a role in listening to children and prosecuting adult offenders.

Too often, our research indicated that welfare and law-enforcement agencies cannot deal with child victims appropriately because the agencies themselves are ill-informed and inadequately trained. With appalling frequency, children's cries for assistance are ignored or disbelieved, or the children themselves are treated as criminals.

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF, "Children and Violence," 2.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, "Domestic Violence against Women and Girls," *Innocenti Digest* 6 (June 2000): 1.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, 2 October 2000. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid\\_953000](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/health/newsid_953000)

All countries should undertake national training provisions for welfare and law-enforcement agencies. The CRC Committee has called for a minimum set of standards to be established “for the professional qualification and training of individuals working in institutions caring for children, in alternate systems, in the police and in juvenile penal institutions, including the condition that they not have a prior record of violence.”<sup>17</sup>

It is essential that states have effective referral systems 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, provisions must exist for the care of children who need to be removed from the family for their own safety. Any such provisions need to 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 from national capitals through to remote districts receive a grounding in abuse issues.

Interestingly, the CRC Committee has also recommended that special training attention be given to promote direct and constructive dialogue between police and children living or working on the streets and for welfare officers.<sup>18</sup> World Vision’s Cambodian study indicates that, in some instances, rather than being protectors, law-enforcement officers can be part of the violence perpetrated against children. In addition, the report on Cambodia finds that law-enforcement officers are limited in the action they can take against brothel owners and those who violate children because a number of the owners receive protection from high-ranking government officials. World

Vision’s work in Cambodia indicates that training and education is required in all areas of the government, particularly those with direct contact with children. This also has implications in those cases where children are witnesses in child abuse and exploitation cases. World Vision’s first-hand experience in the justice system has shown that children are inadequately cared for and protected by this system.

Children must be supported and must not be retraumatised 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 that ensure investigation of these reports.

**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 their capability. Neither, however, will have sufficient impact if children feel unable to voice their concerns and if communities discount the possibility of abuse. The child abuse and neglect study carried out across five countries indicates that while children in communities report being abused, adults routinely deny that abuse does or could occur. A cycle of hidden abuse becomes possible in situations 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 to talk about and openly address issues of abuse – indeed, until people are encouraged to do so – children will continue to suffer in silence. The public must recognise its role in creating and sustaining an environment in which violence against children is able to flourish, or can be

<sup>17</sup> CRC Committee.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

combated. Children must feel that they are able to speak, and adults need the awareness that would compel them to listen.

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.

As Defence for Children International noted in their submission to the CRC Committee theme day in 2000, “we are not just seeking to end violence, but to replace the attitudes and practices that produce violence with alternatives that will foster respect for human dignity and promote healthy development. So much of the work that needs to be done in stopping violence is in awareness raising, education and conflict resolution.”<sup>19</sup>

Governments should develop national plans of action to tackle violence against children. 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 in supporting public knowledge is the use of helplines. These helplines work in a dual capacity: they provide access for people to report situations of child violence and also enable 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. Through the 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 television 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 children's 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 rights and what they should do if those rights are violated through 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 do 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 protection of children, prevention of violence and rehabilitation of those who have been victims of violence.***

UNICEF research has overwhelmingly indicated that governments often lack the expertise to develop and implement policies and strategies to tackle violence against women and children.<sup>20</sup> Thus, governments should be encouraged to work more co-operatively with community groups, churches and other organisations to address violence issues.

Often it is civil society organisations that have the strongest links to and relationships within communities. These groups and communities have often developed a level of trust that government agencies are unable to replicate. Channelling government resources through civil society organisations can be an

<sup>19</sup> Defence for Children International, “Guiding Considerations with Respect to State Violence,” CRC Committee Theme Day, Geneva, September 2000.

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF, “Domestic Violence against Women and Girls,” 6.

extremely effective way in which to reach the grass-roots and to localise action.

Effective prevention strategies are 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 provide immediate support to children in situations of violence at the local level. In this way, government policies can support localised interventions.

Although it is often true that civil society organisations are most in touch with community realities, it is important to remind ourselves that development initiatives themselves can lead to or exacerbate the problem of violence, particularly domestic violence. For example, cultural norms, such as gender roles, may be questioned, or people may feel the need to compete for resources; both of these instances could increase the possibility of violence.

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-based 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 had positive results. Surveys by ISPCAN indicate that those children involved in the programme were increasingly likely to use self-protection strategies and to talk more openly and be more knowledgeable about abuse; they are also more likely to report abuse after it has been attempted.<sup>21</sup>

Each of us needs to become an advocate for the rights of children. We need to challenge ourselves, our communities and our governments to be accountable to children and to protect their right to security.

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 awareness

raising and advocacy, legal reform, monitoring of interventions, direct service provision (for survivors and perpetrators) and training, and to ensure that 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 state's plan.

**5. Seek and commit 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 survivors of violence. This means not only focusing on their own communities but also co-operating on policy formation and resource flows between governments. Issues such as commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking can not be dealt with in isolation, but rather require an intergovernmental response at both the regional and the international level.

In addition, as research suggests, poverty and other extrafamilial expressions of violence can place an inordinate amount of stress on familial relationships. This can trigger violent responses and reactions. Wealthy nations and lending institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (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 (an agreement on the use of aid and national budgets for basic social provision) would provide a framework in which resources could be channelled towards realising children's rights, although sadly these commit-

<sup>21</sup> 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* 24, no. 9 (2000): 1116.

ments are not well implemented. The continued stagnation (and long-term decline) of Official Development Assistance (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 the area of child protection. Other mechanisms should at least be assessed to make sure that they do not exacerbate 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, thus helping to avoid the significant rise in child exploitation problems that followed the implementation of IMF adjustment advice during the Asian economic crisis.

Although all countries should develop individual and contextualised child-protection strategies, lessons can be learned from other countries and significant information can be shared. Standardised definitions, disaggregated data and child-impact analysis of government policies could all 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.<sup>22</sup>

There are, however, some examples of positive government responses. In 2000, the European Union (EU) gave US\$5 million to the Daphne project to help finance 47 projects in 15 EU countries, aimed at combating violence against women and children. The Daphne project, which brings together both governments and non-governmental organisations, focuses

on human trafficking, sexual exploitation, all forms of domestic violence and abuse as well as violence in schools and violence against minority groups and migrants. Daphne was established in 1997 by a joint decision of the Council for Europe and the European Parliament on a proposal from the European Commission.<sup>23</sup> The Daphne project is a clear example of a contextualised country response within a regional and lessons-learned approach.

Much more of the kind of approach undertaken by the Daphne project should be encouraged between governments. In addition, under obligations to a number of human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, governments have committed to co-operate with financial and in-kind resources to solve problems such as sexual exploitation and trafficking of children and violence and abuse directed against them. Governments should be urged to meet these international obligations.

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.**

Although a substantial amount of research has been undertaken on the issue of violence against children, there is 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 established, and substantial gaps remain.

It has already been noted that definitional difficulties between countries have limited some attempts to tackle the problem of violence against children. At the same time, silence around issues such as incest make effective programming responses difficult. These considerations are compounded by government inaction and public ignorance.

<sup>22</sup> Kempe Children's Center and ISPCAN, *World Perspectives on Child Abuse*, Fourth International Resource Book, Kempe Children's Center (University of Colorado, School of Medicine, Denver, CO, USA, 2000). 2.

<sup>23</sup> European Union, "Press Release," Brussels, 20 December 2000.

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."<sup>24</sup> 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 persists and that the international community does 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 the current 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. Yet, making the proposed study too wide would most likely result in scant attention being paid to all sectors and in confused messages and ineffective responses. World Vision recommends that a more narrow study be undertaken. However, it is important that even this narrow report include a section that acknowledges various forms of violence and establishes a context.

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

In addition, World Vision continues 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.

Although an international study on violence against children will no doubt take at least 12 months to conduct, 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 meaningful action.

***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. A recent UNICEF publication (referring to a study undertaken by four universities in the UK) reports that "Children of all ages were quite active in their responses to and methods of coping with violence, sometimes with understanding and initiative well beyond their age. The study concluded that the perspectives and understanding of children and young people should inform the development of appropriate policy and practice."<sup>25</sup>

Findings from World Vision's own research bear this out. In the chapter by Hawkins on violence against girls, it is noted that violence is reduced where children are directly involved in prevention and protection strategies. In addition, enabling children to have the confidence to speak out and to identify adults and peers to trust is essential.

Domestic abuse 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. Earlier research by World Vision and others has shown that, generally, children do not lie about sexual abuse and violence. We must learn to trust children and to listen to them.

<sup>24</sup> Committee on the CRC, "CRC: Day of General Discussion," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/dd25re.htm>

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, "Domestic Violence against Women and Girls," 15.

We must also find ways to help them to express themselves adequately and appropriately 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 this agenda 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.”<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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 deprivation and discrimination.

This report by World Vision brings together evidence from the field that children are suffering around the globe, that their right to security is being violated on a daily basis and that not enough is being done by governments and others to address this crisis. World Vision hopes that, through this report, each of us is challenged to consider the role we must play to prevent violence against children, to protect children from the violence around them and to offer support to those children who have survived abuse, exploitation and violence.

World Vision encourages those interested in a more in-depth analysis of the issues covered here to contact us through the address in this report, and to seek full copies of the more detailed reports upon which the chapters in this report are based.

The seven interrelated 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 this. 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 pressuring our governments for policies and resources to fight this abuse at the national and international level. It is also about admitting individual responsibility for child protection. Supporting children themselves to speak out, listening to the lessons and advice of children and being guided by their insights are also essential. Each of us must be challenged not just to imagine a world where children are safe, but to build one.

<sup>26</sup> Save the Children Canada, *Speaking Out Together: Declaration and Agenda for Action of Sexually Exploited Children and Youth* (Save the Children Canada, 1998), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Save the Children Canada, *Sacred Lives: Canadian Aboriginal Children and Youth Speak out about Sexual Exploitation* (Toronto, 2000), 4.

# Child Abuse and Neglect



A child in Romania grasps a hand at an orphanage where many youngsters had been abandoned by their parents.

## Introduction

“The heart locked up can’t open to other people.”

The voice of an 11-year-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.

World Vision has been working to gain a deeper understanding of this perplexing issue. It has forced our organisation to look beyond the obvious. As a Christian development, relief and advocacy organisation, we have traditionally focused much of our attention on children in particularly difficult circumstances – 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 for further understanding and response 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

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of abuse and neglect, in what we might label “normal” households. These are children with parents and families, children who, although poor, have the opportunity – unlike many street children or children involved in armed conflict – 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 last year, in five different countries around the world, we have sought to listen to those voices, to hear the stories 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.

## 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 interpersonal and social relationships. Although 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 ensuring 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 that World Vision supports around the world, we began discussions with a number of internationally recognised child abuse researchers and practitioners representing the International Society for the

Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and the Chapin Hall Center 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:

- understand community perceptions surrounding issues of child abuse and neglect
- identify gaps in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours relating to children and abuse and neglect
- make recommendations at the programme and policy levels for organisations (particularly those that focus on children) for responding to the situation of abuse and neglect.

## Study Outline

A full report of this study is available, so 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: the collection of background information, and the development of study tools and collection of data in each country.

The collection of background information showed that, within this sample of countries, mandatory reporting for local professionals who suspect a child has been a victim of maltreatment is quite common. 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 unserved. 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 organisational 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 suggests that 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 countries. All the countries contained non-government organisations, some of which were committed to children's issues but not particularly focused on abuse and neglect.

The primary phase of the study involved the development of study tools and the collection of data in each of the 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).<sup>28</sup>
- The study would be committed to providing children and parents with 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 ensuring 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 those that are seen as supportive of healthy child development.
- 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 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 sessions 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?

<sup>28</sup> Comprehensive community development programmes.

- 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 regarding the care of children.

The central areas covered in this survey would include:

- 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
- parents' attitudes towards 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?
- How 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 they think should happen if an adult abuses a child?

### **Overview of Results**

The study found a good level of knowledge among 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 it was accepted that some members of the community did use extreme forms of punishment. Adults also commented that the sexual abuse of children was present to a degree within their societies.

A major insight provided by the study was the level of discrepancy found between the results for adults and those that emerged from activities with children. The children from Brazil, for example, were frequent witnesses to violence, and this clearly had emotional consequences. Most of the children could also relate instances of sexual abuse within their own communities or schools. In all the communities except Romania, somewhere between 61% and 81% of those questioned stated that child abuse was a serious problem.

## **Results and Trends**

### **Household Survey: The Story Adults Tell**

#### *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 exceptions, 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 ensuring that children receive health care. The only two items that

were more frequently identified as primarily a male responsibility were earning 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 for which at least half of the respondents felt older children had any responsibility 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 than were the respondents in Brazil, Thailand and the other two Romanian communities.

#### *Daily Activities among Adults and with Children*

A series of questions was included in the survey to build 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. In both Kenya and Ghana, frequent attendance at worship was indicated by over 70% of respondents. In other studies, strong links have been drawn between discipline practices and religious beliefs, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" being the common adage.<sup>29</sup> 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.

#### *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 functional: skills were frequently taught and explanations given. Time to play or simply time spent together was minimal. Contrary to our expectations, it appeared that children were included with some regularity in making decisions about the family. 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, was minimal. The following section on child autonomy suggests that most parents felt that children should take on some economic responsibility for the family – that is, 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.

#### *Attitudes towards Child Development and Child Autonomy*

These questions focused on caregivers' attitudes towards:

- the importance of education (both in general and in terms of gender)
- neighbours and teachers disciplining their children
- play and work, and who decides how children should spend their time
- gender differences within the home
- 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. Although some countries, notably Thailand,

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *Spare the Child: Corporal Punishment in Kenyan Schools*, Human Rights Watch Report 11, no. 6 (A), September 1999.

maintained that it was slightly more important for boys to receive an education than girls, this attitude was not widespread. Also gaining almost universal agreement was the opinion that every child should have the opportunity to play every day. The notable exception to this was a community in Ghana where only 64% of those questioned agreed with this statement. 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 agreed that girls should help their parents care for their 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 this was not held as strongly in Brazil). Romania, on the other hand, showed more difference of opinion over this question, particularly in regard 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, although 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.

#### *Parental Discipline Practices and Attitudes towards 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 (e.g., cutting

fingers or burning) 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 observation has been supported by a number of other studies on the issue.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these and other such studies, the World Vision study found 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 as consisting of:

- physical abuse
- an evil crime
- psychological/emotional abuse
- imposing power on children
- neglect.

The questionnaire revealed that many parents still use their hands to physically hit their children. Apart from Thailand, this was the case for over 60% of those questioned in all of the study countries. In Thailand the proportion who admitted hitting with their hands was much lower (27% and 21% in the two communities studied). Hitting with a stick or a belt was high in both the Thai communities (70% and 65%). All other communities, apart from one in Romania, registered around 50% for this form of punishment. These data suggest that many caregivers saw corporal punishment as an acceptable form 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 evident in but a few isolated cases in Brazil and Romania. Neither of the African countries

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. See also Paul Oburu, "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.

(where such practices are apparently quite common<sup>31</sup>) recorded any instances of children either being burned or having their fingers cut. This may have been due to the fact that the survey was conducted in communities in which World Vision had already advocated behaviour change. This work may have had an impact on decreasing some of the more extreme forms of punishment; alternatively, it may have made parents sufficiently aware of the issue that they would not admit the behaviour to a World Vision study team, even though they still used such measures. Interestingly, 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 (cutting fingers and burning). 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.

#### *Attitudes towards Sexual Abuse*

As with excessive physical abuse, all the communities studied regarded sexual abuse as unacceptable. In a series of vignettes presented to caregivers for comment, the following one was unanimously<sup>32</sup> 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:

- rape, sexual intercourse, penetration
- sexual conversation with a child
- touching sensitive parts of a child
- exposing a child to an adult relationship
- indecent exposure of adult sexual organs to the child
- exposing the child's sexual organs to others
- 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 by other studies of abuse, 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.

#### *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 cross-check information for inconsistencies. Focus group discussions and participatory activities conducted, respectively, with community leaders and children 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 unanimously reported three major issues:

- that children and young people were being brought up in often challenging social and economic conditions that had a direct impact over the way they were treated;
- that physical abuse and, to a lesser extent, sexual abuse of children were commonplace;
- that very little was being done about the situation from a legal or policing perspective.

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

<sup>31</sup> According to World Vision staff from these countries.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

The community leaders' definitions of abuse had a wide range. Many thought that modest slapping 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, where abuse had been brought to the notice of local authorities, these authorities, almost without exception, did nothing about it.

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

1. The need for communities to have programmes and places for children and young people that encourage the development of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well-being.
2. The need for community awareness-raising on 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 *effective* safety nets for abused children in the community.

### ***Children's Activities***

The activities conducted with children in this study were most revealing. Activities included focus-group discussions, art and drama, and more formal questionnaires. Findings related to the use of corporal punishment, children's experience of physical abuse and violence, and their experience of sexual abuse.

### ***Use of Corporal Punishment***

In general, children in all countries disagreed with the use of corporal punishment, although in both Ghana and Kenya children were more likely to accept this as part of "the culture." Children from all countries, however, had suggestions for alternatives to corporal punishment, which they thought would be far more effective in changing behaviour. Most did not believe that hitting a child would produce behavioural change for the better. As Romanian children noted, "Beatings don't help; after mom or dad beats the child, he is shutting down and developing hate against his parents."

### ***Children's Experience of Physical Abuse and Violence***

In most of the countries studied, children answered the same questionnaire that was given to the parents regarding the use of physical punishment. Their answers confirmed parents responses in most instances. Physical punishment (being hit either 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 although, in most countries, they acknowledged that this was not uncommon.

In terms of physical abuse and violence, the communities in Brazil stood out. In this country, 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, 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 commonplace and noted the effect that it had on their children. One mother mentioned 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.

Often, the violence on the streets in Brazil seemed to be reflected in the home. Out of all the interview records from that country,<sup>33</sup> there was only a handful that had a positive note. Children noted an absence of fathers or the presence of domestic violence as a regular occurrence.

### *Children's Experience of Sexual Abuse*

Children in all countries noted sexual abuse as an area of concern. Although 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 stories from their own childhood. In answering the questions, one 45-year-old mother related the story of her own childhood. Her parents divorced when she was six, and 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 talked openly about her experience of being abused by her uncle. This was the first time she had spoken to anyone about this.

## Trends and Implications

The study's findings alerted us to numerous trends and implications, which are summarised in this section.

### *Definition or Scope of the Problem*

- In all communities, apart from Romania, between 60 and 81% of respondents said child abuse was a serious problem. Over 70% of respondents regularly use hitting with the hand or a stick or belt as a primary means of discipline. In some of the study countries, more severe methods were used with great frequency.
- In some countries, notably Brazil, men were often abusive to both their wives and their chil-

dren. Alcohol was seen to have a major effect on their behaviour.

- A majority of respondents reported the use of counselling as a means of resolving discipline problems.
- Focus-group discussions with all community leaders indicated that sexual abuse of children was a major problem. In some communities, notably Ghana and urban Thailand, leaders felt that there were locally available resources to assist abusive parents. The responsibility for raising children rests primarily with women.
- Over 75% of caregiver respondents in all countries stated that girls had a greater responsibility in the home than boys.
- In most countries, there was great pressure on children to become active economic supporters of the family. Over 50% of caregivers felt that it was important for children to begin to earn income for the family at as early an age as possible.
- Economic circumstances, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, family disintegration, lack of recreational time and space, were all seen to be major causal factors in the abuse of children.
- 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.
- Strategies for effective action at the community level were non-existent or ineffectual.

### *Attitudes, Beliefs and Knowledge Systems Influencing Child Well-being*

- Corporal punishment was seen as a primary discipline strategy in all countries.
- In all countries apart from Romania, caregivers felt strongly that teachers should have the authority to punish their children physically.

<sup>33</sup> The Brazilian researchers documented their interviews.

- Caregivers in some countries felt that physical punishment was justified because this was how they were brought up.
- Sexual abuse of children was seen as unacceptable in all countries.
- The notion that children should decide how to spend their time was strongly held in some of the study communities. All communities felt that children should have the opportunity to play every day.
- Girls had a greater responsibility in the home than boys.
- There was a general feeling amongst caregivers that children should contribute economically to the family as soon as possible.
- Although there were instances of children participating in making decisions about the family, this was not common.

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

### ***Resilience of the Family and Children Themselves***

Despite the many struggles and challenges that were voiced in every country, hope and resilience were still present. Families struggled on in the face of harsh economic situations, unemployment and the daily reality of violence and poverty. One statement put to caregivers 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 families and their commitment to provide for children. It was clear, too, that children had well-considered opinions about the dynamics of abuse and neglect and the ways these affected not only them as individuals but also the community in general. Children and young people must be given a greater voice in the development of any initiatives that seek to ameliorate the situation.

### ***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. Clearly, many respondents saw a direct relationship between abuse and factors such as poverty, lack of recreational outlets and abuse of alcohol and drugs. We need to discover more about how those links function and where interventions to change such factors will have the most impact.

### ***The Lack of Legal Frameworks***

Although a number of countries have legal frameworks for dealing with abuse and neglect, only two of the countries under study reported 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 well-being of children and families.

### ***Non-existent or Ineffectual Strategies for Action at the Community Level***

Finally, any legal structure becomes ineffectual if there are no local mechanisms to implement it 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 effect any change and that there were no effective legal structures to provide support.

## **Conclusion**

The first decade of the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child ends in 2001. Much has been achieved for children over this time, but much more needs to be done. The findings of this study call us to recognise the strength and commitment of families to their children. It acknowledges that many families, while strong in their belief in this commitment, struggle to meet their daily survival needs, and that some families, tragically, have lost the will or the capacity to provide adequate care for their children. As we face the next decade of working to

realise the rights of children worldwide, the messages of this study are both sobering and challenging. Governments must develop policies that provide solid legal frameworks for both the acknowledgment of abuse and neglect and the development and implementation of effective strategies for response at the national and, more importantly, community level. Factors that have a direct relationship to abuse and

neglect (such as economic conditions, unemployment and alcohol abuse) must be better understood through the development of research strategies that result in targeted interventions. Lastly, any intervention must seek to support the family as the prime caregiver for children, and, above all, it must give voice to children, not merely as objects of our emotions, but as social actors in their own right.

# Sexual Exploitation and Violence in Cambodia

## Introduction

Children of every country are victims of sexual violence. Like other crimes against people or property, sexual violence is publicly rejected as unacceptable.

In many cases, however, the priority given to

addressing this issue at a policy level is not adequately translated into action.

This is particularly evident in southern countries, where capacity for such action is low. Yet, northern countries can also do more, through extraterritorial legislation, by sharing information about travel patterns of known sex offenders and by linking social-sector reform more clearly to bilateral aid.

Freedom from exploitation is upheld through such international instruments as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Countries where rule of law is strong have mechanisms to address such crimes. These mechanisms include not only the legal system but also medical and human services. Public debate allows the need for change to be expressed, and holds police, judiciary and government to account. The United Kingdom, Belgium and Australia (to name but three



This girl looks forward to returning home. She is staying at a World Vision recovery centre after her rescue from a brothel.

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countries) have gone through such public processes in the last five years, all strengthening their domestic provisions to address sexual crime against children. Public outcry prompted these measures, after horrific cases of children being killed by paedophiles wanting to escape detection or the weight of public inquiry into cover-ups. Change was possible through mechanisms of good governance and appropriate resources accompanying commitment. Southern countries such as Cambodia do not have the same capacity or resources as these governments. They face many barriers in achieving the aim of freeing children from the violence of sexual exploitation. As a consequence, in such countries, the scale and nature of exploitation remain unacceptably high.

*Lee is a 15-year-old girl who was lured into prostitution by her aunt. She was sold to an American man for US\$400 for four days. He was about 50 years old. After that, she was forced to go with a 25-year-old Japanese man at the cost of US\$50. Then her pimp brought her to sleep with a Chinese man for US\$30. Finally, she slept with a 40-year-old Frenchman who kept her for a month at his rented house. After that she went to stay in an "entertainment establishment." Two days later, she was freed during a police raid and sent to a welfare organisation.*

If these events happened in the home countries of the offenders, domestic laws would provide avenue for redress. Child exploitation that crosses borders requires international co-operation among law enforcement agencies. While this is now more possible through extraterritorial legislation, gaps in capacity and differing legal process are barriers to due process. One area that is often overlooked in the quest for increased international co-operation on the issue of child sexual exploitation is tourism.

## Tourism

Tourism is a multibillion-dollar globalised industry that is an important source of foreign exchange and employment. An emerging sex industry has paralleled the growth of tourism in many parts of the world.

While local men usually constitute the largest numbers involved in sexual exploitation of children, tourism attracts sex tourists and paedophiles from many countries.

Cambodia attracted 270,000 visitors in 1999 and anticipated tripling this figure over the next four years. With its proud history and famous temples of the Angkor era, Cambodia has much to offer travellers. The recent turbulent history of the Khmer Rouge and other conflicts also attract visitors, attracted by a new frontier with more excitement and mystery than some neighbouring countries that have been on the tourist trail for decades.

Tourism provides easy access to vulnerable children and to the power/economic disparities fundamental to the notion of a "cheap third-world holiday – sun, surf and sex," promoted through word of mouth, Internet chat rooms and sometimes in publications. Thailand and the Philippines share a legacy as popular destinations for sex tourists and have increased their legal response to protect children. As these locations become less attractive to sex tourists, attention will shift to newer locations. Sex tourists are attracted to economically poor countries by factors that include low-cost prostitution, wide availability and perceived impunity from prosecution. Recent prosecutions and the jailing of an English schoolteacher in Cambodia have served notice that impunity is not assured. However, in recent years Cambodia has been increasingly linked to child prostitution. At present, the country risks this association overshadowing its publicly promoted cultural heritage.

### *Who Is Involved?*

Research on tourism-linked child sexual exploitation was conducted in 2000 by World Vision in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and the Cambodian National Council for Children (CNCC). (The focus on Cambodia is not to suggest that this problem does not exist in many countries.) The ministry's own figures show that 65% of tourists to Cambodia in 2000 were men. Research conducted with MOT and the CNCC in three

prime tourist locations revealed considerable information about sex tourism.<sup>34</sup>

Interviews conducted in the three tourist areas included 68 children, whose average age was 15 years. Of these children, 88% had been involved in providing sexual services for tourists. The nationalities of foreigners who approached these children were 28% French, 26% Chinese, 19% Japanese, 12% American, 8% Cambodian, 5% Thai and 3% unknown.<sup>35</sup>

Information from 20 members of the general public who live close to the “entertainment establishments” estimated that 42% of the girls were taken away from the facility by clients, 47% were not chosen as sex partners and 9% were taken by pimps. Nationalities of foreigners identified as taking young girls for sexual relations were 28% Chinese, 18% French, 13% Japanese, 5% American and 3% Korean. The remaining 30% could not be identified. Of the children who had contact with tourists, 60% were estimated to be 14–18 years old, and 40% 18–22 years old. While boys are also at risk from sexual abuse by tourists, men having boys as sexual partners is not as acceptable or common in Cambodia; thus, boys are not as greatly affected as girls.

Travel agents, MOT officers, and hotel/guesthouse owners were also interviewed about the issue of sex tourism. Twenty-two travel agents and tour operators in the three locations estimated that the primary purposes of tourist groups were cultural tourism (33%), business (26%), official visits (19%) and sex tourism (22%). According to these interviewees, the following percentages of children from the sample had been contacted over the period for sexual intercourse by visitors from these countries: 45% by visitors from

China, 22% France, 18% America, 4% Australia and 36% unknown Westerners.<sup>36</sup> Among the 28 Ministry of Tourism officers interviewed, 78% said they saw children going with male foreigners. The interviewees identified the major groups of foreigners that the children went with as European white-skinned men (32%), Americans (18%), Japanese (18%), Chinese (14%) and French (9%).<sup>37</sup> As identified by hotel and guesthouse owners, the nationalities of tourists involved with child sex tourism were, in order of frequency, Chinese, Japanese, French, American, German and English. Thus, most of the groups interviewed said that Chinese, Japanese and white Western men were most frequently observed as sex tourists. Cambodians themselves are involved both through domestic tourism and by profiteering as pimps and facility owners.

Although nationalities may differ, sex tourism patrons share some common features of sexual offenders against children. There are two distinct types of such sexual offenders: situational offenders and preferential offenders.<sup>38</sup>

The *situational offender* does not have a true sexual preference for children, but engages in sex with children for varied and sometimes complex reasons. For such a person, sex with children may range from a once-in-a-lifetime act to a longer-term pattern of behaviour. This type of person, who may be more prevalent in a transient tourist population than is the preferential offender, exhibits one of two patterns of behaviour: morally indiscriminate and sexually indiscriminate.

For the *morally indiscriminate* person, the sexual abuse of children is simply part of the general pattern

<sup>34</sup> These data are taken from *Children's Work, Adult's Play: Child Sex Tourism a Problem in Cambodia* (World Vision Cambodia, Phnom Penh, 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Due to rounding, percentages do not always add up to 100.

<sup>36</sup> The percentages are based on the number of answers, not the number of interviews. Thus, percentages totalling over 100% reflect multiple answers given by interviewees.

<sup>37</sup> Percentages that total under 100% reflect the fact that some interviewees responded ‘not sure.’

<sup>38</sup> All the definitions in this section are from the National Police of Cambodia, *Understanding and Investigating Child Sexual Exploitation – Trainers Manual*. This is a joint project of the Ministry of Interior with the International Organisation for Migration, the Office of the High Commissioner-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, Save the Children Norway and World Vision.

of his life. He is a user and abuser of people. He abuses, lies, cheats or steals whenever he can get away with it. He molests children because he has no moral answer to the question “why not?” His criteria for selecting his victims are vulnerability and opportunity – he has the urge, the child is there, so he acts.

The pattern of *sexually indiscriminate* behaviour is difficult to define. The person appears to be discriminating in his behaviour except when it comes to sex. He is willing to try anything sexual. While he has no real sexual preference for children, his basic motivation is experimentation. He appears to have sex with a child out of boredom. Of all situational offenders, he is most likely to be from a relatively high socio-economic background and to collect child pornography.

The *preferential offender* has a definite sexual preference for children. He has sex with children not because of some situational stress or insecurity, but because he is sexually attracted to and prefers children. He usually specifies age and gender preference for his victims. Members of higher socio-economic groups tend to be overrepresented among preferential offenders. According to international policing sources, more preferential offenders seem to prefer boy, rather than girl victims.

Preferential and situational offenders both feature in anecdotal evidence collected from children, tour guides and taxi drivers during World Vision's research, as well as from several years of direct work with children. What offenders have in common is disregard for the identity of the child as a person. To them a child is a commodity, a means to an end, something to be used. Theories abound regarding how adults are able to act out against children in this way. It is not possible to explore them in this chapter. Suffice it to say that it is important to explore the psychological, medical and spiritual perspectives of the offences and offender.

## The Context of the Child

If we are to understand the vulnerability of children to tourism-linked exploitation, we need to better understand their socio-economic position and the consequences of their exposure to traumatic events. Children's bright smiles are used in the marketing of many a country's attractions, and Cambodia is no exception. Adorable children are part of the local colour, adding a human perspective to the monuments of past greatness that tourists come to see. Children represent the future of any country, embodying its human and social capital. In Cambodia, more than 52% of the population is less than 18 years old.<sup>39</sup> Per capita income in their country is one of the lowest in the region. Cambodia is a regional leader in infant mortality (115 per thousand), mortality of children under five (181 per thousand), the percentage of income spent on food and low access to education, especially among girls. Family separation, a high incidence of domestic violence and low accountability to the rule of law contribute to dislocation of children from their communities. An estimated 42% of children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in some form of work.<sup>40</sup> It is widely accepted that poverty is a primary factor contributing to the entry of children into hazardous or exploitative labour. Children's work brings them into contact with tourists to earn income in a variety of ways. One way is begging; another is as vendors, selling drinks and food at locations where tourists congregate. The tourist is able, if he chooses, to arrange a later meeting in a less public setting with children who may view prostitution as a way to supplement other income. Children still living with their family contribute earnings that may represent a significant addition to the household income. Children are sometimes involved in prostitution after a crisis affects family income or expenses, such as when a parent's business fails or medical emergencies occur.

### Experience of Violence

Many southern counties experience low-level internal conflict that reduces development and protection rights of children. Exposure to and acceptance of violence are

<sup>39</sup> National Institute of Statistics, Phnom Penh, 1998 estimate.

<sup>40</sup> *Cambodia Human Development Report* (Phnom Penh: National Institute of Statistics, 2000).

other hindrances. Cambodia has emerged from 30 years of conflict. Parents of today's children experienced the horrors of Pol Pot. In 1999, Raghda Saba, a clinical psychologist in partnership with the psychology department at the University of Phnom Penh, conducted a study on the mental health of children in Cambodia. Her research provides insight into children's experience of violence. It reveals a "push" factor other than economic need among children who involve themselves in hazardous occupations. Saba surveyed 400 10- to 12-year-old students in Phnom Penh and a rural location. Table 1 reflects some of her findings.

**Table 1**  
**Children's Experience**  
**of Traumatic Events**

Event	Percentage
Witnessed domestic violence at home	41
Witnessed the beating of a close relative	56
Witnessed killing of close relative	3
Heard of killing of close relative	20
Were beaten yourself	58
Witnessed robbery of neighbour or stranger	42
Witnessed robbery of your home	11
Witnessed car/motorcycle accident	71
Involved in car/motorcycle accident	23
Witnessed a rape	8
Experienced rape	1
Heard of an event of rape	49
Witnessed a kidnapping	11
Exposed to an event of kidnapping	2
Heard of an event of kidnapping	65

The sample group comprised school children of both sexes from randomly selected schools. They were not at special risk, unlike children from single-headed households or those living on the street. These results indicate that extreme experiences commonly touch the lives of children, shaping expectations for their own safety and life choices.

### **Effect of Sexual Violence on Children**

The intrusion of sexual violence can have devastating effects on young lives, as is illustrated in the following story of a 17-year-old recalling what happened when she was 13. World Vision has worked with her since 1999.

*The three soldiers met me walking along the road. They forced me to go with them. We all arrived at a temple and asked villagers living near that temple for a one-night stay there. The soldiers and I were allowed to stay under the house for the night. At about 9:00 p.m. one of the soldiers rushed to embrace me. The other two were watching. I did my best to shout for help, but one of the soldiers threatened and pointed his gun to my head. I was afraid because of their threat so I dared not shout. One of the soldiers continued to pull at my clothes and forced me to have sexual relations with him while the other soldiers watched. I felt suffering and humiliation. Then all three soldiers raped me. This event was the most painful in my life.*

*The morning came; the soldiers took me to Phnom Penh. When we arrived in Phnom Penh, the soldiers took me to a brothel and sold me for US\$200. The brothel owner forced me to stay in a room where I was locked up for three days. One night an old man came to bring me to sleep in a guesthouse in Phnom Penh. That old man, who was my father's age, raped me. This old man made me suffer and I was further injured, as my wounds from the soldiers had not healed yet. I was horrified when blood came out of my vagina. I was crying loudly, but the old man was very happy because he thought that I really was a virgin.*

The powerlessness experienced by the victim, the abuse of power by the offenders, repeated rape, humiliation, physical assault, fear of being killed – the effects of such experiences can broadly be described as trauma. Dr Wendy Freed (Physicians for Human Rights) summarises the impact such violence has on the personhood of a young woman.

*Trauma:* Sexual trauma is the violation of the most intimate and personal aspects of the self. One's own body becomes the setting in which the atrocities are perpetrated. For the young women living in a brothel, the sexual violations take place inside the tiny cubical that is their only private living space. There is no safe haven for them.

*Shame:* This is a powerful psychological reaction that is linked to the sexual nature of the trauma. The victim's sense of personal value falls, sometimes to the point of seeing no other option because she is worthless.

*Betrayal of trust:* Approximately half the young women are sold to brothels by people they know. This betrayal has long-lasting effects, and relationships develop slowly with children in recovery. Information is precious and sharing in it is earned.

*Layers of truth:* The meaning of personal stories and their accuracy is not constant and reveals some of the coping mechanisms that the girls may have used. Some girls need to reinvent themselves, having been given a new name and history every week by brothel owners wanting to control them and evade detection for missing girls.

*Self-blame:* Many girls blame their fate on themselves and have an exaggerated sense of their part in the interaction that led to such circumstances.

*Disruption in normal development:* Young women are forced into a role that separates them from their community. They are not able to take part in many informal activities that are important in socialisation for future roles as income earner, wife and mother.

*Separation from family:* Important relationships suffer, and many young women grieve the loss of contact, particularly with siblings.

*Grief and depression:* These young women can develop a sense of hopelessness at the loss of freedoms, relationships and innocence.

*Fear:* Beatings and other punishment from brothel owners are common. Young women are also fearful of contracting AIDS; yet they cannot refuse clients.

*Captivity:* Young women have been held in captivity for weeks, months and sometimes years. Initially they often fight the brothel owners' demands for them to service clients. This has resulted in being locked in a room for a week or being beaten until they modify their response to their circumstances. Control over one's fate has gone.

*Being a good daughter:* In the Cambodian context, this crucial consideration allows many young women to give meaning to their circumstances. They see themselves as being in a position to help their family survive, and this gives context for their personal sacrifice.

## Community Attitude

Children are part of the community and are affected by its mores and beliefs. Unfortunately, their identity as people with inalienable rights, as described in Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is not always apparent. This is true with regard to protection under the law and family/community response to a serious event, such as the rape of a child. In some cases, community members are outraged and beat the offender. In many other cases, arrangements focus on the issue of compensation to the family rather than justice for the child. According to a recent report by the local NGO Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO), 49% of cases of child rape reported to the police in 1999–2000 resulted in either the accused being released with no consequences or the case being prolonged inexorably without result.<sup>41</sup> The

<sup>41</sup> *Rape and Indecent Assault: Crime in the Community* (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights [LICADHO]).

other 51% of cases were resolved via payments to the victims. One way of dealing with the violation was to have the victim marry the offender. Of 126 cases reported between January and November 2000, 57 victims were 11 to 15 years of age, while 28 were 6 to 10 years of age. The LICADHO report states, "The law does not protect children because the law fails to define a minor with respect to crime; it fails to define the legal age for sex and fails to provide even a statutory rape law."<sup>42</sup> Families have little respect for the application of the law, and the village chief will often be approached to broker a deal intended to regain harmony in the community.

### What Can Be Done?

The circumstances outlined in this chapter are not exceptional in many countries. World Vision works in different ways with a variety of actors, in hopes of achieving the best interests of children. Some strategies are outlined below.

#### *Prevention*

Following the First World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation, the Royal Cambodian Government (RCG) developed a five-year plan, providing an operational framework. World Vision contributed to this and is active in prevention through building awareness of children's rights as well as issues of gender and domestic violence. This is accompanied by World Vision's efforts to increase food security among families and communities and to advance community development. Children themselves are involved in promoting change, through establishment of children's club activities, child-to-child events, street education, and advocacy at the local, regional and international level.

#### *Legal Protection*

Improved protection for children who are sexually exploited and prosecution of offenders are two aims of an interagency project by World Vision Cambodia, the International Organisation for Migration, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Save the Children Norway and UNICEF. The project is implemented through the RCG Ministry of Interior. Under this project, the ministry has been supported to develop police operating procedures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Royal Cambodian Police in investigation of child sexual exploitation cases. Police officials receive training in relevant legislation, basic investigation techniques and psychosocial aspects of the problem.

The overall goal of this project is to improve capabilities among police, investigating judges and prosecutors to investigate cases of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children (including rescue of victims), to develop referral systems to bring about arrest of offenders and to initiate court proceedings. At the time of writing, 240 middle-ranked police officers had been trained using the new curriculum. More than 140 children have been freed by police acting on information received via a public hotline. Prosecutions have been launched against offenders.

#### *Direct Support*

World Vision runs a centre working with more than 200 girls (and, where possible, their families and communities) per year. In 2000, the average age of these girls was 14 years 2 months; 58% had sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and 18% were HIV positive. Common indications of trauma include disrupted sleeping patterns, poor concentration, low communication skills, low energy and incidence of seizures and epilepsy. A Khmer psychologist who has been practising psychology in the United States for many years provided an external evaluation of this direct service and described the impact for children positively.

Data were collected on a sample of 40 young women who had experienced sexual exploitation and have been reintegrated back with their family and/or community. Questions were selected from the *Child Behavior Checklist* developed by T.M. Achenbach.<sup>43</sup> The questions measured the young women's behaviour both before and after they received services from the centre. Overall, the data show patterns of improvement in behaviour in most areas. In general,

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> University of Vermont, 1991.

the young women are reported to have an increase in what is considered good, culturally and socially appropriate behaviour, as described below. The increase in what is considered improvement in pattern of behaviour ranges from 2% to 40% compared to when they first accessed the programme.

### **Changes in Behaviour Patterns**

Case reviews and case discussion revealed that the girls typically enter the centre with low self-esteem, poor eye contact, constricted posture, sad facial expression, poor manners, inappropriate social skills, general distrust, problems with lying, poor hygiene, poor health and poor overall adaptive functioning. They are usually illiterate.

The centre provides services including health care, vocational training, recreational activities, psychosocial counselling and much more. Observed behaviour changes include better hygiene as well as better social skills in interacting appropriately with peers and elders and with male staff. The young women learn to read and write. They learn vocational skills such as food preparation, weaving, sewing and knitting. Counsellors use laughter, creative activities and outings to lighten the load. Over time, the young women's demeanour is characterised by better eye contact, less constricted posture, more positive mood, less hopelessness and less downcast expression. Many of the young women (48%) return to their immediate or extended family when this is in their interest. A further 23% go on to vocational training or employment, living in small group homes or independently in the community.

This change occurs in a context where young women who have been raped or involved in prostitution are regarded as bad women. In the eyes of the community they have forfeited opportunities for a favourable marriage and can be rejected by their family or forced to re-engage in prostitution, as other options are not apparent.

### **Advocating for Change**

The link between tourism and sexual violence against children is one example of the need to promoting

positive development in an emerging sector. The research objective is twofold: to promote action from government, non-government and industry sectors to address issues of tourist-linked child sexual exploitation, and to highlight gaps in existing strategies of the Ministry of Tourism and Cambodian National Council for Children that focus on child protection, advocacy and monitoring. A full report from this initiative of the MOT, CNCC and World Vision (*Children's Work, Adult's Play: Child Sex Tourism a Problem in Cambodia*) is available from the CNCC and World Vision Cambodia.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Sexual violence directed at children is unacceptable and requires action at many levels. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to recommend action on all aspects. Tourism is a growing avenue whereby sexual violence invades Cambodia and afflicts the children of that country. Industry standards are clearly needed and prosecution required, regardless of the nationality of the offender. The world's governments, with the support of United Nations agencies and international organisations, have the responsibility to ensure that children are protected from such crimes. Further, the tourist sector has an opportunity and obligation to move away from practices that allow the exploitation of children.

This type of violence against children is contrary to Cambodia's constitution and laws and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Studies have demonstrated that sexually exploited children may grow into adults who continue to be exploited or who become offenders themselves. As voluminous research, including World Vision's, shows, violence, exploitation and child sex tourism are not problems that can be explained or solved in isolation. Many wider concerns – socio-economic stability, the emergence of civil society, good governance, legal protection, gender, race, discrimination, health considerations such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic – need to be taken into account in terms of long-term strategy development. In the short term, indicators clearly link progress to addressing regulatory and monitoring measures. Government, industry and NGOs can con-

tribute to this process in both the immediate and long-term interests of children.

The following are recommendations gleaned from the study. These were identified for the various groups involved in the study to consider in their various capacities of ending the sexual exploitation of children and bringing about greater penalties for offenders.

### **Prevention**

- The Ministry of Tourism actively link with NGOs to implement regular workshops for Tourism Industry Department personnel on their role in combating sexual exploitation of children.
- NGOs and government explore training or employment opportunities that increase positive options for children in locations where tourism is a significant economic presence.
- Local tourist associations and businesses commit themselves to child-safe tourism and promote a code of conduct among members.
- International tourist networks such as the Pacific Asia Tourist Association (PATA) and World Tourism Organisation (WTO) promote observance of the Tourism Bill of Rights and tourist code among local and international tour operators linked to Cambodia.

### **Protection**

- The Royal Cambodian Government, with support from NGOs, address child-protection issues

requiring investigation and prosecution by Cambodia's law enforcers.

- Foreign embassies in Cambodia review child-protection measures of their own countries, which address crimes against children by their nationals in another country and travel of known sex offenders to Cambodia. Signatories of the Convention on the Rights of the Child have made a commitment to act in the best interest of children within their capacity. Child protection commitments extend beyond national boundaries.
- Tourism networks such as PATA and WTO recommend that international tour operators not use facilities that have been linked to sexual exploitation of children.

### **Monitoring**

- The MOT link with local authorities to check registration of hotels and guesthouses regarding their legal approval to operate and compliance with child-protection standards.
- NGOs co-ordinate to monitor change quarterly in the three locations studied and report trends to government, industry, embassies and regional forums on child labour and sexual exploitation.
- Tourism networks such as PATA and WTO include information from NGO monitoring reports, in liaison with the Cambodian government.

# Because They Are Girls



This girl reads and studies at night by lamp-light. Education is important for creating opportunities for girls and women.

World Vision has served children for more than a half-century. In the last decade, it has developed programmes and advocacy initiatives to meet the specific needs of girls worldwide. A year-long review of those programmes for girls revealed quite concretely the destructive effects of the violence

that shapes girls' lives. Starting with the reality of violence towards girls, the study was able to describe – in the context of real lives – how this violence affects development practice and outcomes.

This review recognised the magnitude, complexity and pervasiveness of violence around the globe. It highlighted the success of many initiatives in improving the ability to incorporate the needs of girls into programming and planning. It also revealed the ways in which girls' low status in many communities escalates the violence and increases its impact. Lessons learned from this review serve as a call to action on behalf of girls and children everywhere, and also provide a way forward, suggesting how development practices might better protect girls and their communities.

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For the World Vision Review Project, 12 key issues affecting girls were identified to organise research questions and findings. Throughout the 1990s, World Vision's Girl Child Initiative brought focused attention to research, advocacy and literally hundreds of special projects addressing girls' vulnerabilities and strengths in the context of ongoing community development. The year-long review in 2000 included 34 participatory focus groups of girls and community members, a survey of 234 large community-development programmes across west, east and south Africa, Asia Pacific, Middle and Eastern Europe and Latin America, as well as extensive interviews with key staff and document analysis.

The review team anticipated that violence would be a significant issue worldwide. The strength and breadth of the effects of violence were confirmed by girls and by staff; indeed, these effects recurred as a theme within all other issues, including education, health care, HIV/AIDS and harmful practices. Violence often had an impact on the success of programmes addressing other sectors, clearly affecting girls' access to services. The pervasiveness of violence was such that girls experienced its effects in their families and communities, and also in commercial and sexual exploitation through trafficking and the sex trade. Thus, while girls can be commercially and sexually exploited by family members, they can also be vulnerable to this exploitation when escaping violence in their homes or communities.

The results of this research show that a more complex approach is needed by NGOs and government bodies designing services and interventions for communities. Without specific attention to the prevention of violence and the protection of girls' rights as human beings, programmes may fail to acknowledge, plan for or address violent events that blunt or prevent real effectiveness. In this way, they may actually encourage continued harm to girls' and communities' development.

### **Gender-based Violence and Girls' Status**

It is not by chance that girls are the victims of violence. Their ascribed status is the lowest in the family

or community, and violence is often intricately entwined with the cultural devaluing of girls. This devaluing is expressed in discrimination that includes a preference for sons, a lack of voice for girls and limited entitlement to family and community resources. Gender-based violence against girls is often trivialised or normalised, excused by custom and practice.

The undervaluing of girls is arguably universal. For girls, lower status means that violence against them is less visible and considered less noteworthy. It means less access to the judicial and political systems, and fewer, if any, opportunities to give voice to their needs and concerns. In many countries, rapists are still able to avoid prosecution if they marry their victims. Girls who are victims of violence are often characterised as participants in their own demise, causing or inviting the violence against them.

Gender-based violence is also minimised by the inability to talk about the violence, which is often sexual and traditionally is not discussed. Moreover, the domestic violence that occurs in families may be defined as "private" business, occurring in "private" space. The categorisation of gendered violence as "private" serves to condone inactivity, minimise the importance and perpetuate the violence.

Development programmes can work to illuminate and address this so-called private violence. World Vision and many other NGOs work to protect children and promote child rights in community-development programmes. Projects that focus directly on domestic violence as well as commercial exploitation, street children and reunification of families have the staff and programmatic expertise to identify and address distinctive issues within the family and communities. This expertise may not always be present in broader programmes, which focus on relief, providing services or building infrastructure.

Indeed, when the main focus of NGOs is on poverty alleviation through provision of food, housing and potable water, violence against girls can be construed as an "extra" – and not one that can always be addressed within project priorities and goals. Working for the rights of girls can be seen as impossible or impractical, due to lack of resources or com-

munity support. Alternatively, it may be viewed as regrettably less important or as somehow opportunistic and neglectful of overall community needs.

Yet, there is a new shift in consciousness, one in which the protection of the rights of children and the illumination of many violent and harmful practices around them are becoming more important. Increasingly, gender-based violence is recognised as a serious offence. For example, rape in armed conflict, once cast as an inevitable – and largely unnamed – consequence of war, is now categorised as a war crime.

### From the Focus Groups

Research conducted on programmes for girls included visits to World Vision projects in 15 countries. Focus groups were held with girls, family and community members, and World Vision staff. Facilitators used a participatory approach, where individuals could identify key issues for the community and for girls, and then the group could indicate overall issues of importance. Typically, girls, community members and WV staff were placed into separate focus groups and asked to name events and main issues for themselves and for their communities. Girls had opportunities both as individuals and as members of a group to identify which issues were “improving” or were “getting worse.” Where separate focus groups could not be held, facilitators augmented the process with interviews.

Two important points should be noted about the focus groups:

- Participants included girls and community members in WV programmes and also those who were not in these programmes but who lived in the community development area.
- Girls and community members were not specifically asked about violence unless they had identified it as a “main” issue in their lives.

In 33 out of 34 sites visited, girls raised the issue of violence or threats of violence. Girls across projects described violence as a “main” issue for them. Instances ranged from the fear of violence in the streets of their communities and an increase in rape of

local girls to a fear of using community latrines or going to school in the day or evening. Girls described enduring sexual “teasing.” At many sites, girls suggested that violence against girls was difficult to address because of community or parental attitudes. Several girls related family violence to alcohol consumption and to poverty and lack of access to resources. Girls described their situation as different from that of boys, who were seen as relatively free in their mobility. Girls spoke about the impact of the level of community violence on their lives in terms of restricted movement: leaving school earlier than boys, being unable to go out after dark, fear of being perceived as dishonourable by neighbours.

In focus groups, families and community members also saw the violence and threats of violence as main issues for girls, but expressed powerlessness against the weight of community attitudes. For example, although adults wanted girls to be better educated, they were concerned both about an increase in dowry for girls with more education and for girls’ safety when going to and coming from school. Some parents would have liked fewer restrictions on their daughters’ mobility, but they worried that neighbours would speak ill of this, thus jeopardizing the possibility of finding suitable husbands for the girls. While some parents would work to prevent female circumcision, others worried that their daughters would not be respected as women without the procedure. Finally, many clearly indicated that they simply could not guarantee a girl’s safety beyond puberty unless she was in their home or married in someone else’s.

In their focus groups, community members across many sites described a web of rules around girls, who must not be seen to have been “compromised” by men or boys. These people had real fear for their daughters’ physical safety, and for their futures.

### Staff Fear Community Alienation

World Vision staff described violence in girls’ lives as pervasive and difficult to measure and address. As part of the year-long study, development staff were asked about local social practices that harm girls. Female infanticide continues in 7% of the communi-

ties where World Vision programmes operate. Female genital mutilation is practised in 13%, and son preference occurs in 42%. Early marriage occurs across all the surveyed regions – ranging from 55% of communities in Latin America to 87% of communities in East Africa.

Community attitudes about gender roles carry enormous weight. Consequently, staff must exercise considerable patience and sensitivity in the discussion of these issues so as not to alienate community members. Success in changing harmful attitudes often comes with the assistance of gender and development (GAD) programmes and through the work of established women's groups or co-operative programmes with both boys and girls in leadership positions. Staff noted that, without long-term commitment, attempts to change attitudes around practices such as infanticide, genital mutilation, early marriage or domestic work are naive.

Clearly, success in mitigating violence requires attention to gender issues. Development initiatives and projects that incorporated a GAD strategy proved significantly more likely to provide services addressing violence against girls than did programmes that had no such strategy. Compared to programmes with no gender policy yet in place, projects with a GAD policy were more likely to intervene on behalf of girls who are victims of violence and were more likely to provide girls with assistance and legal aid to address violence.

## Successful Projects

In communities where girls and, more generally, children have greater participation, addressing violence was more evident and was clearly discussed, and specific strategies were apparent. Where child participation is high and includes girls, programming is better able to take children's needs, experiences and ideas for change into account. In one World Vision programme, children decided to use their initial earnings from a children's co-operative to address alcoholism and violence in the communities – well ahead of development staff's agenda. In another, girls and staff spoke of the value of having girls as leaders in some

aspect of community life and the effect that this had on boys and parents. When girls are prevented from participating, not only is violence less visible, but girls' and boys' voices about how to prevent violence are silenced.

According to the review, 57% of World Vision's large-scale community-development programmes now include training on the Convention on the Rights of the Child for community members, and 45% provide this training for children. Advocacy work to address violence against girls is now occurring in 37% of the development programmes surveyed, at community and national levels.

Over the years, programmes that provide attention to girls' status have had a reported impact on status and responsibility, and on the resulting respect from parents, siblings and communities. Successful projects work to sensitise community members to the value of girls. Community sensitisation is a complex process. It involves measuring initial attitudes, approaching key political, religious and educational leaders, and developing a series of workshops or events around child rights, including the rights of girls. Valuing and promoting the status of girls can also include recognition of girls' current contribution to families – as income earners, as caretaker of younger siblings so parents can work and, when they go to school, as teacher of siblings and of parent literacy. Increasing respect for girls can lower violence against them and strengthen their voice in the family and community around other issues.

## Addressing Girls, Violence and Status

### *Palestine*

In countries where honour killings are practised, girls who have been raped are physically isolated, abandoned and more – the perceived honour of the family comes before the life of the girl. As in several other countries across the world, a man is able to kill his sister or daughter if she is raped or has sexual relations with a man. Thus, in addition to the trauma of the rape, girls must hide from their families. A safe house run by World Vision shelters girls who are under

death threats from their families; it is the only available place in the community where the girls can stay alive. Staff indicate that changing community attitudes will take decades, but they are hopeful that pressure from outside will lead to new valuing of the lives of girls and women, and a reinterpretation of the meaning of “honour.”

### ***Bamako, Mali***

Because they are often away from their families when working, girls who work as domestics are extremely vulnerable. World Vision and a partner agency, l'Appui à la Promotion et à la Protection des Aides-Familiales, work with adolescent girls who have left rural communities to become maids in Bamako, Mali. While attempting to reduce the out-migration from rural communities, the project also improves conditions and safety for girls in the city. Girls are provided with literacy classes, human rights awareness and access to health services, and they can lodge formal complaints when maltreated. As girls who participate in the programme have better skills and are placed by the agency, employers have had changes in attitudes and are more respectful of the girls. Both employers and girls have had positive results from the programme, and incidences of abuse have declined.

### ***Usilampatty, India***

World Vision projects addressing infanticide promote the contribution of girls to the household and community. In Usilampatty, women and girls experience strong pressure to kill their female infants. Tradition means that the financial burden for weddings and ceremonies (at birth, puberty, marriage, etc.) rests on the girl's extended family, many of whom provide additional pressure for female infanticide. Women's organisations support pregnant girls and women by keeping them isolated for several days after birth to increase bonding; the reasoning is that it is more difficult for a woman to kill a child with whom she has bonded. World Vision assists by paying families, providing additional money for health care and food for children, and offering a nutrition programme. Thus far, it has contributed to saving 683 girls. Many men still support female infanticide, so work through the women's organisations also

involves work with community leaders, men and boys on attitudes, which have been identified as slowly changing.

### ***Senegal***

The importance of changing community attitudes towards girls is a central theme in World Vision's Girl Child Centres. For several years, centres in Senegal have successfully provided alternative education for girls. The government responded to low literacy levels by initiating an extensive community-education drive for primary-school-aged girls; this left older girls with extremely limited access to education. Girl Child Centres provide literacy classes, health information and skills training. Before the centres started operating, the community had little esteem for girls. Now, a dramatic change in the way girls are treated is ascribed to the existence of the centres and the contribution girls make to their communities. Community members and girls credit the programme with decreasing out-migration – thus lowering girls' vulnerability to violence – as well as improving environment and food hygiene in communities. Because girls from several villages attend one centre, links among those villages have been established, and lowered violence between and among villages is attributed to the work of the centres. Other changes include immunisation programmes and better family relations. Girls are able to help their siblings with formal school and their mothers with literacy.

## **Lessons Learned**

Best practices, as reported and analysed during the year-long review of development programmes, suggest that much can be done to improve girls' lives and mitigate violence against them. (“Best practices” represent the most effective model strategies currently implemented in some programmes, but not yet integrated fully in most communities.)

### ***Protection and Prevention Make for Better Provision of Services***

Provision of services such as education and health care must be matched by attending to the violence that prevents or limits girls' access. Attending to girls' low

status is critical. To protect girls and prevent violence against them:

- Low status must be examined, acknowledged and addressed.
- Resources must be available to address negative attitudes and behaviours towards girls over the long term.
- Alternative ways of valuing girls must be embraced, in turn leading to alternative models of “manhood” that do not tolerate sexual abuse and violence.
- It must be recognised that pressure to maintain honour by protecting girls from violence can lead to further human rights abuses. For example, in many countries girls are denied access to education after puberty.
- Best practices must be integrated into technical projects, and links made among specialised and general programmes. Addressing, and sometimes merely talking about, gender relations can be more difficult than building a dam.
- Organisations should look into partnerships that improve their capacities to address violence.

### ***Make Violence and Girls Visible***

- Governments and NGOs must measure and document key factors that affect girls’ lives, including the incidence of girls dropping out of school, receiving health care and migrating as domestic workers or slaves. In addition, childbearing and the relationship of maternal and child health to age of marriage should be tracked. We need to measure disparities directly, including those around violence, and provide remedies in programme planning, monitoring and evaluation. Including girls and women in the count is not a new issue, nor is recognising that girls and women have different experiences than boys and men.
- Violence against girls cuts across all sectors. NGOs must find and address the implications in their own sector.
- As an immediate, essential and low-cost intervention, governments and NGOs must include girls’ participation in planning, measuring and evaluating community programmes. These groups need to find out what’s really going on, and improve programming integrity.
- Staff and programmes must lead by example in valuing girls’ voices.

## Emerging Issues Regarding Violence against Girls



### ***Harmful Social and Traditional Practices***

Cultural practices may be beneficial to all members, or may be harmful to a specific group. Practices that harm girls include early marriage (leading to early pregnancy and associated health and nutrition implications for mothers and children, and to early widowhood), female infanticide, genital mutilation, dowry or bride price, and exploitative labour as domestic workers (paid or unpaid). Despite their extraordinarily harmful nature and their violation of international human rights law, these practices persist. Often such practices are not questioned; in the eyes of those carrying them out, they may even take on an aura of morality in preserving tradition. Communities and national governments perpetuate practices through laws that discriminate, or when laws are not enforced to protect girls.

World Vision addresses harmful traditional and social practices through community sensitisation and long-term work in communities. While some practices are relatively specific to regions, early marriage and the exploitive use of girls' labour as domestics are adopted worldwide.

### ***HIV/AIDS***

The impact of HIV/AIDS on children in Africa and Asia is overwhelming. Adolescent girls are at extreme risk, due to sexual abuse and exploitation, lack of knowledge, and physical vulnerabilities during unprotected vaginal intercourse (their immature vaginal tracts face greater risk of tearing). Most disturbing is the emerging trend of younger girls being raped by men who are HIV positive – virgins are being mythologised as a “cure” for HIV/AIDS. An increase in rape of girl children for this reason was referred to by girls and community members in one of our series of focus groups.

### ***Armed Conflict***

World Vision focuses on separated children in foster and transit centres, and increasingly on meeting psychosocial needs in areas such as Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Kosovo. Interviews with World Vision staff who work in child protection and family reunification indicate that the needs of girls before, during and after conflict are often the last to be considered or met. Relief workers in all NGO and government organisations need training to take the safety and health of girls into consideration in the design of camps, feeding centres and other programmes. Relief workers from all NGOs need resources to address violence against and sexual abuse of girls in camps; to provide health care, including the treatment of STDs; to provide legal remedies; and, after the conflict, to address the ongoing domestic violence against and rape of girls.

# Faces of Violence in Latin America

## Introduction

*It's six o'clock in the morning and people are boarding the subway train to go to work. Three children board one of the carriages, and in the two minutes it takes for the train to reach the next station, they do their work. The*

*oldest one, about 13 years old, starts singing an old ranchera song. The girl, maybe nine years old, walks back and forth in the carriage with a small can in her hands asking for a few pennies. Some people give a little, while others ignore her, and a few more look at her with visible annoyance. In the meantime, the smallest child, 5 or 6 years old at the most, holding a small piece of cloth in one hand, kneels down and starts to polish the shoes of one of the passengers.*

*"Get away, you filthy scoundrel," reacts the man, kicking the child. "Don't touch my shoes! Can't you see that they are clean?" And he rants on, swearing loudly at the child.*

*The child looks at the woman sitting in the next seat and asks, "Would you allow me, lady? We need to earn some money so that we can buy a taco to eat." The woman agrees and lets him polish her shoes. She gives him one peso. The train*



A child in El Salvador reads from a book about children's rights, with help from a World Vision psychologist.

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*stops, the children say thank you and run away to climb aboard the next carriage. They have just started their working day.*

*In an alley between stairwells at another subway station, three boys between 13 and 16 years of age sleep on the floor, covered only with newspapers. Another boy is preparing his mona (a piece of cloth, cotton or paper that is soaked in activo, a mixture of substances – thinner, petrol and turpentine – to inhale). Another boy has already started to inhale from his mona, his eyes already lost, seeming to forget; he may be dreaming of a world where he and his friends have their own space, some affection and decent shelter.*

*In a street near the bus station in the northern part of the city, two girls, a boy and three very small children are returning to their “home,” a sewer that welcomes a number of children, their city of refuge, the meeting place of the forgotten, the excluded, of those who want to be family – or simply just to be.*

*At the subway station in Hidalgo, the Alameda, where many walk about on Saturdays and Sundays, young boys wait for customers to sell themselves for sex. Candelaria and La Merced are old parts of the city, where the first migrants from the provinces settled in the big capital. There, women parade, offering their bodies to the highest bidder. The faces of young girls, 11 to 14 years old, blend in among those of the older women. Violence came into their lives early and in different ways: through hunger, poverty, indifference, neglect, mistreatment or sexual abuse. They were used without their permission and received no benefit from it; now they use their own bodies and, in return, they*

*receive police protection, what they think is “love,” money, favours, a warm bath, perhaps a clean bed.<sup>44</sup>*

These are images from Mexico City, where many people continue to come to look for a better future, only to discover social rejection, exploitation and violence in many forms. The picture is similar right across Latin America and the Caribbean, where levels of all forms of violence are spiralling and constitute a major and complex problem facing the region.

According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB/BID), homicide rates in the region were up 44% between 1984 and 1994;<sup>45</sup> they are currently the second highest in the world after sub-Saharan Africa. To give but some examples, violent crime in Mexico tripled between 1990 and 1996, and Brazil has a murder rate comparable to that of a country embroiled in civil war.<sup>46</sup> In the region, out of 185 million children, 6 million suffer “severe aggression every year, and 80,000 die due to violence in the home.”<sup>47</sup> Between 10 and 35% of women suffer physical violence, and between 30 and 50% are victims of psychological violence.<sup>48</sup>

The reasons behind these growing levels of violence are complex. Among them are: an economic and social system that leads many families to situations of poverty, extreme poverty and exploitation; an authoritarian education system that excludes a significant portion of the population; public authorities, middlemen and family members who are willing to take advantage of children’s vulnerability in order to make a profit, seemingly without conscience or qualms. All of these are compounded by the inadequate exercise of public authority and by continuing social inequalities that help to generate this social crisis.

The impact of the growing violence is frightening, especially where children are concerned. The

<sup>44</sup> Excerpt from chapter on urban violence, written by World Vision Mexico for *Rostros de Violencia en América Latina* (World Vision LAC, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> M. Buvinic, A.R. Morrison and M. Shifter, “Violence in the Americas: A Framework for Action,” in A.R. Morrison and M.L. Biehl, eds, *Too Close to Home: Domestic Violence in the Americas* (IADB, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Alex Bellos, “The Heavy Toll of Brazil’s Violent Streets,” *Guardian* (London), 24 October 1999.

<sup>47</sup> UNICEF, *Stop Violence against Women and Girls*, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Morrison and Biehl, eds, *Too Close to Home*.

challenging reality of violence against girls and boys is revealed in figures, data, images and anonymous faces; it is also made up of a multitude of people, each of them with a name, a unique face and a life history. Each is a dignified human being who is entitled to benefit from all of the fundamental human rights.

Where the impact of violence hits the most is within the family.

### World Vision's Response

World Vision has been working in the Latin America and Caribbean region for over 25 years, carrying out both emergency preparedness and relief projects as well as long-term child-focused community development. Needless to say, the escalating violence is having a significant impact on World Vision's work within the region. High levels of domestic violence, ethnic tensions, protest and civil conflict take their toll on the communities we work with, on our Area Development Programme activities, and on staff and community workers.

In response to this, 12 World Vision offices across Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>49</sup> are taking part in a study on the various faces of violence within the region and the impact on the people with whom we work. In addition, we have sought to identify programmatic and policy responses to build upon the

work that is already being undertaken and to increase the effectiveness of our response.

World Vision is already responding to the violence in a number of ways. These include running workshops on abuse in the family, emphasising the importance of child participation in building communities for peace, and establishing and maintaining telephone hotlines. Through the information learned from current studies, further actions are being developed.

The "Faces of Violence in Latin America" study reflects the disturbing trends in the region. The children's stories woven into this chapter have been captured by World Vision offices throughout the region.<sup>50</sup> They speak of abuse, neglect and extreme violence. The stories also provide a very real window into these children's worlds in a way that statistics and studies cannot.

### Violence in the Home

In many families, girls and boys live the pain of indirect violence – violence exercised in their presence against their mothers, other adults or brothers and sisters. The violence against the mother, other women and other family members is itself a warning, sent out by the aggressor, that terrifies the child.

A study carried out in 1992 found that, in Chile, women were beaten by their partners in one

<sup>49</sup> Within the broader theme of violence, the following subthemes have been identified as significant for the region. Alongside each theme is the WV office undertaking the study:

- Armed conflict – WV Colombia
- The legacy of armed conflict in the region – WV El Salvador
- The terrorist legacy – WV Peru
- Violence as a response to poverty (drug related, criminal gangs, etc.) – WV Guatemala
- Domestic violence – WV Chile
- Violence against women – WV Honduras
- Sexual exploitation of children – WV Dominican Republic
- Interracial violence – WV Bolivia
- Urban violence – WV Mexico
- Rural violence – WV Nicaragua
- State violence – WV Haiti
- Structural violence – WV Brazil

<sup>50</sup> All of the quotes from children included in this study are taken from interviews conducted by World Vision staff in the region over the last two months.

out of every four homes, and that women were psychologically attacked in at least one out of every three homes.<sup>51</sup> In Chile, violence in the home has become a very serious social problem, one that happens within a cultural context that legitimates and reinforces violence as a customary way of conflict resolution.

Most of the studies in Chile show that women are the main victims of violence inside families, but Chile is not alone in this respect. The impact of such violence on the family and upon children is great.

*I was living with her... I took the street because once he [my stepfather] tied my feet and hands to beat me, and when he released me, I took the streets... Afterwards my mother came to bring me back... When I arrived with her, my stepfather looked at me and beat my mother because she went to bring me back. He was furious because I was there in the house with my mother.* (Maria, 14 years old, Honduras)

Violence within the family affects other areas of the children's lives. Educational attainment offers but one example: a study in Nicaragua showed that 63% of the children of violence-affected families repeat school years and abandon school at an average age of 9, in contrast to the national average of age 12.<sup>52</sup>

Often, violence within the family is also directed at children. According to UNICEF data, 73.6% of Chilean girls and boys are the object of some physical or psychological violence from their parents.<sup>53</sup> The violence that develops within the family grows in a spiral: girls and boys who are mistreated become mothers and fathers who mistreat. A high percentage of street girls and boys talk about neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse in their homes as the reasons they chose the street.

*I hate her. Because she was not good to me, and her duty was to take care of me, to take care of us. I am a young girl and she had the obligation to take an interest in us because my stepfather could take care of himself. For me it is not to have a family when your mother and father treat you badly and throw you into the street... To me, she is not my mother.* (Maria, 14 years old, Honduras)

## The Violence of Poverty

The problem of violence within the family is exacerbated by increasing levels of poverty and by the growing gap between the rich and the poor. There is a visible link between levels of physical abuse and issues related to poverty: a study carried out in Chile in 1992 showed that physical abuse is five times more likely in low-income families and that serious physical abuse is seven times more likely.<sup>54</sup>

The situation in the region in this respect does not look promising. In Brazil, for example, between October 1998 and January 1999, close to 50% of the people who had risen out of poverty since 1994 fell back below the poverty line. Unemployment in Chile rose to 8.7% of the economically active population between February and April 2000, its highest level in eight years. Argentina and Mexico both have unemployment rates twice the size of those at the beginning of the 1990s. In Nicaragua, a staggering 85% of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>55</sup> Over 70% of families are classified as poor in Bolivia, Guatemala and Haiti.<sup>56</sup> In the region as a whole, 37% of the population lives below the poverty line; this represents some 185 million people.<sup>57</sup>

Studies have shown that inequality in income distribution has increased levels of poverty in the

<sup>51</sup> Larrain, *Family Violence: The Situation of Women in Chile* (Pan American Health Organization, 1994).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> UNICEF Chile, August 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Larrain, *Family Violence*.

<sup>55</sup> Central American Commission on Human Rights "The Situation of Human Rights in Central America, July–December 1999."

<sup>56</sup> That is, below the poverty line and unable to meet basic needs.

<sup>57</sup> Based on 1998 UNPF/FNUAP total population figures.

region.<sup>58</sup> Income distribution disparity in the region continues to be the worst in the world,<sup>59</sup> furthermore, it is greatest in the countries that have done the best economically, such as Mexico and Brazil.

The results of rising levels of poverty and marginalisation are felt in many ways, one of which is in the breakdown of the family. The increasing number of families without employment and relying on the informal economy has contributed to family decay and a rising number of girls, boys and adolescents that work and live on the streets. In 1995, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC/CEPAL) found that without the income brought in by the children, the incidence of poverty in the household would rise by 10–15% and the incidence of indigence by 5–15%. In Nicaragua, the percentage of working children in the economically active population has doubled in the last four years alone.<sup>60</sup>

*I have friends who left school to go and work in Managua as servants, and others who work picking coffee and selling sweets in the market. They try to find work rather than become delinquents.* (Maribel, 14 years old, Nicaragua)

According to UNICEF's Progress of Nations 2000 report, more than half the children in the region – over 95 million – live in conditions of poverty and risk, and the number of children living in poverty grows by 850,000 each year.<sup>61</sup> In this way, more and more children become vulnerable and are exposed to other forms of violence.

## The Violence of the Streets

The street, for many children, becomes a serious option, a place where it is possible to find work and

company of some sort in order to survive, both economically and emotionally. The street then sweeps these children into an alternative network of circumstances that conspire to make them leave school and to turn them increasingly into objects of negligence, mistreatment and exploitation. Violence against street children by police bodies has increased. Extortion, illegal deprivation of liberty, physical injuries, threats, sexual harassment and abuse, and torture are some of the forms this violence takes. Death is another.

*I say, but well, who knows, I say that we are all equal. It is not because they are clean that they are better than us. We all eat alike, we all eat the same. If we do not have, it is because we did not have the support they had. It is because we did not have the opportunity, the family that they did have and who supported them. They call us words, like dirty, drug addicts, scoundrels, and similar things. When we are eating, for example, they come by and throw us trash, they spit at us, and I think that this is not fair. I do not think this fair.* (Flor, 17 years old, Mexico)

Statistics on street children in the region are notoriously unreliable, partly because it is difficult to survey a mobile population, but also because it is very hard to reach a common definition of what is a street child – street working versus street living, for example.<sup>62</sup> Figures are therefore imprecise.

In Mexico, it is estimated that approximately 140,000 working girls, boys and adolescents use the streets and the public spaces to meet their basic needs. Of those, it is estimated that 30,000 are street children. In Mexico City alone there are 15,000, ranging from infants to 17-year-olds.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Bridall and Londono, "Asset Inequality Matters: An Assessment of the World Bank's Approach to Poverty," *American Economic Review* (May 1997).

<sup>59</sup> Gini coefficient 0.57 against a world average of 0.4

<sup>60</sup> UN Wire, 7 June 2000.

<sup>61</sup> IADB/BID, quoted in "Miseria Infantil, Maldición a Plazo Fijo," *Tiempos del Mundo* (Costa Rica), 8 June 2000.

<sup>62</sup> G. Barker and F. Knaul, *Urban Girls: Empowerment in Especially Difficult Circumstances* (Intermediate Technology Publications, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Second Mexican Report on the application of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998).

## Sexual Violence

Two research exercises conducted recently in the Dominican Republic came to the conclusion that the road that leads to the commercial sexual exploitation of children is built on lack of affection, cultural deficiency and conditions of extreme poverty. The main factors are permanent exposure to physical and moral risk, mistreatment and sexual abuse, family instability and breakdown, lack of affection and security, and unmet basic needs.<sup>64</sup>

A survey of 422 victims of sexual exploitation in the Dominican Republic showed that 44% of the children's fathers and stepfathers were working on the streets as vendors, and that 48% of the parents had separated. Marital break up was not a sufficient condition in and of itself; rather, the decisive factor seemed to be a new marital union, introducing into the family the presence of a stepfather or stepmother.

In Latin America and the Caribbean over the last ten years, there has been a noticeable increase in the sexual exploitation of children.<sup>65</sup> The exact number of children involved is impossible to determine, as accurate information is non-existent. The isolated facts we have are thought to reveal only "the tips of an iceberg."<sup>66</sup>

The Dominican Republic stands fourth in the world in the ranking of commercial sexual exploitation of children, according to statistics compiled for the World Congress on this issue that took place in Stockholm, Sweden, in August 1996. A study jointly sponsored by the National Planning Office (ONAPLAN) and UNICEF found that, in 1994, the commercial sexual exploitation in that country directly affected over 25,000 children. This incredible figure indicates that 2.5% of the population between 6 and 18 years of age have been victims of this kind of violence.

*One day, when I was sent to fetch water to be used in the house, he drew my attention and invited me to come into his house, and he told me he was going to buy me the ring, he put me in bed and started fondling my whole body. I screamed but he covered my mouth. That same day he bought me the ring.*

*The next day, when I went to fetch water, he forced me into the house and gave me 10 pesos (US\$1.20), he told me to undress and then he fondled me, covering my mouth so that nobody could hear me when I screamed; he took his pants off, he was touching my whole body and when I screamed he pressed me hard.*

*I was very small, only 10 years old and could not defend myself against that man so big. I said nothing to my mother, but I always expected that she would ask me something when I felt sad, but she never said a thing. This made me feel worst, like trash. All the money I gave to my mother and she never asked me how I got it. (Josefina, 12 years old, Dominican Republic)*

## Violence as a Response

One of the consequences of the combination of poverty and violence in the region is that children and young people have very low expectations about the future. One-third of those interviewed in the UNICEF research "Voz de los Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes de America Latina y el Caribe" felt that their country would be a worse place to live in the near future.<sup>67</sup> The main reasons they identified were unemployment, violence and the inability of the authorities to govern. It is hard to fault their analysis; their response, thereby, becomes entirely understandable.

*I say, why did my father never give me what I needed? He had enough for his drinks, for his*

<sup>64</sup> *La Neo-Prostitución Infantil en la Republica Dominicana* (UNICEF, 1994); C. Baez, *Boca Chica: el Impacto del Turismo en la Vida de la Comunidad, las Mujeres y sus Familias* (2000).

<sup>65</sup> G. Leal, *La Explotación Sexual de Niños* (Instituto Interamericano de los Niños, 1997)

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> June 1999.

*vices, for his women, but not for me, who was his daughter. Why did my mother have enough for her luxuries and for her son? Why did she never have it for me? Why did my brother have material things to give me but never the time to sit down and talk and tell me, "Listen, how are you doing at school? I am going to help you study and I am going to teach you adding and subtracting." But he did have time to beat me, to mistreat me, and to tell me that I was a stupid girl. (Flor, 17 years old, Mexico)*

According to the reports of the Civil Police Force in El Salvador, in the metropolitan area of San Salvador alone, there are approximately 20,000 young people, mostly between 15 and 21 years of age, who are part of street gangs or *maras*. In the *maras*, the young people band together in the face of social decay to create an identity and meaning as part of a group. Stigma, exclusion, poverty and lack of hope lead the young people to engage in criminal activities and violence.

Research carried out in Guatemala with 290 members of gangs in 1997 and 1998 claimed that the presence of women in the gangs increased from 20 to 44% in that short time,<sup>68</sup> which is surprising, if true.

*I have two sisters; there were five of us, but now we are four.... The other one was killed. She was the older. I was five years old when they killed her; they have never told me if the gang members killed her. Also my two brothers were killed; we are five brothers and five sisters; only one sister and two brothers are dead.... I do not know either who killed my brothers; I only know that it was some 25 years ago when they were killed, before I was born.*

*When I started in the gang, it was nice because I felt I had many friends, brothers, sisters. I told them everything. I felt happy, but when I saw*

*that they raped a girl in my presence, I felt, I do not know, I felt like crying because it seemed that they were doing this to me.*

*Two years ago I killed an old woman because in the gang they told me that I had to kill someone and this blood was the one I was going to sacrifice.... I pushed her, and all in a sudden I realized she was not breathing. She was old, like 60 years old, and lived with her children. The children were members of the gang "break-era." I killed the grandmother of members of the gang. I felt a very deep pain because I felt I was killing my own grandmother. (Rosa, 12 years old, Guatemala)*

The consequences of cases such as these go beyond the immediate impact of violence and crime. "At stake is the adequate construction of citizenship, a process which is deeply rooted in the experiences of the individual during childhood and adolescence,"<sup>69</sup> and which is reflected in the increasing problems of social cohesion across the region.<sup>70</sup>

## A Spiralling Culture of Violence

The *maras* are a product of a society that has used violence as the only means to exercise power and to negotiate. Violence is now always present, in homes and on the streets. It has become part of daily life and is crossing over into the very culture of the region. Thus, violence is reflected in language and behaviour, in the way of doing things and of solving conflicts. This is true even in rural areas, which traditionally are more peaceful.

*My community has lost its peacefulness, mostly during the night, because delinquents are assaulting houses to steal. One day, Doña Flor, my neighbor, was stolen the corn for next day's tortillas. The worst thing is that the people from the community itself are the ones becoming*

<sup>68</sup> *Por sí Mismos: Un Estudio Preliminar de las Maras en la Ciudad de Guatemala*, AVANCSO, Cuaderno de Investigación 4, 4th ed. (1998); *Aquí Corre la Bola: Organización y Relaciones Sociales en una Comunidad Popular Urbana*, AVANCSO, Cuaderno de Investigación 9 (1993).

<sup>69</sup> Instituto Interamericano de los Niños, "Child Labour: A Global Issue – A Briefing Paper," IIN website.

<sup>70</sup> J.A. Ocampo, "El Desarrollo Regional en los Albores del Siglo XXI," *Notas de la CEPAL*, May 2000.

*delinquents. I think it is because of the unemployment situation even if maybe this is not a good reason enough.* (Maribel, 14 years old, Nicaragua)

In El Salvador, after 12 years of civil war, it was felt that the signing of the Peace Agreements in 1992 heralded the end of violence. But, on the contrary, levels of violence have been increasing ever since. Furthermore, many aggressors do not reflect the typical criminal profile but, rather, appear to be common, normal citizens under 30 years of age, who had not reached beyond the sixth grade and who are manual workers or *campesinos*. These acts of violence, therefore, cannot be described as common delinquency; they are indicators of a culture of violence that now permeates social relations.

*That night we went to my grandmother's house, to help her to fetch firewood. When coming back, I was talking with my father, while he was indulging me. I remember that we went into a coffee plantation and there he let me down because he was tired. All was dark, but I had a lamp in my hand. Suddenly we heard a noise and he ask me for the lamp. When I passing it to him, I heard some shots and my father stopped talking to me. Then I saw two men with their eyes covered and my father laying on the floor. They approached him, turned him around, and beat him. I saw them searching him and taking a few things from him. Then, they went away. I remained there alone, not knowing what to do. I talked to my father and told him: "Dad, let us go home." I approached him to touch his head, but he had not it no more. My hands were full of blood and I got very scared. I started crying and ran away to my house and told my mother everything.* (Ruth, 8 years old, El Salvador)

## Breaking the Cycle of Violence

It is within this highly challenging context that World Vision, along with other NGOs in Latin America, are

working towards the long-term construction of a culture of peace as an alternative to the current culture of violence. This is a complex task, to be undertaken on at least three fundamental levels:

- The first and most superficial level involves responding to the immediate effects of violence. Armed conflict, crime, and the exploitation and abuse of children are among the many manifestations of this culture of violence that require an immediate response.
- The second, and more substantive, level involves the transformation of structures that sustain and reinforce the violence. Because violence is rooted in poverty and social inequity, the goals of poverty eradication and social justice are directly linked with the mitigation of violence and construction of peace.
- The third level involves nothing less than a transformation of people's perceptions, values and behaviours. It requires, among other things, that children and youth, as principal victims and future perpetrators of violence, are free to develop and dream while staying out of harm's way, nurtured and mentored in positive and peaceful directions within their families, schools, churches and communities.<sup>71</sup>

In light of the above, World Vision calls for:

- A much greater level of investment in care, psychosocial treatment and rehabilitation for the victims of violence, particularly for the children.
- The effective implementation of existing legislation and a speeding up of the justice system in order to facilitate people's access to justice. This should include suitable and child-friendly procedures for children and young people in conflict with the law.
- A greater degree of involvement of affected communities and the victims of violence – including children and youth – in the search for effective solutions and in monitoring human rights at the local level.

<sup>71</sup> The three levels are taken from *Constructing a Culture of Peace in Colombia: Responses to One of the World's Most Complex Humanitarian Emergencies* (World Vision Colombia, 2000).

- Training programmes aimed at the police, the judiciary and other state services, such as the health system, to ensure that they are aware of the issues and equipped to contribute to the care and protection of children rather than to the violence being perpetrated against them. There also needs to be a greater emphasis on holding these actors accountable for their actions.
- A far greater investment by governments in providing a social safety net for impoverished families and ensuring that basic needs of health and education are met, as well as the creation of employment opportunities, especially ones aimed at youth. Particular attention also needs to be given to rural areas, which are so often neglected.
- Massive awareness-raising campaigns to increase people's understanding of the issues involved, of the legislation that exists to protect them and of the mechanisms they can access to ensure they benefit from the protection of the law.
- The forging of a broad alliance between government and civil society to build a culture of peace in the region, one that promotes the rights of children and the values of solidarity and mutual respect and that rejects the use of violence as a valid means of conflict resolution.
- An increase in the level of support received from international donors to tackle the root causes of poverty and social exclusion, as well as to invest in specific initiatives aimed at curbing the growing levels of violence in the region.

# Sources

The chapters in this report are summaries of case studies and research projects conducted and published by World Vision. You may obtain the full reports from the following offices:

*Chapter 1: Crying Out: Children and Communities Speak on Abuse and Neglect*

Available from: International Policy and Advocacy Office

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**WORLD VISION** is a Christian relief and development partnership which serves more than 70 million people in nearly 100 countries. World Vision seeks to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in the pursuit of justice and human transformation.

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. World Vision works with each partner community to ensure that children are able to enjoy improved nutrition, health and education. Where children live in especially difficult circumstances, surviving on the streets, suffering in exploitative labour, or exposed to the abuse and trauma of conflict, World Vision works to restore hope and to bring justice.

World Vision recognises that poverty is not inevitable. Our Mission Statement calls us to challenge those unjust structures, which constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision desires that all people are able to reach their God-given potential, and thus works for a world which no longer tolerates poverty.



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