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**Violence and Children
the UN Study
on
Violence Against Children and Some UNICEF Research**

“In our view, violence committed against a single child is one instance of violence too many.”
West and Central Africa – regional consultation (Children’s Declaration)

This Presentation

- Overview of lead-up to the UN Study on Violence Against Children
- Review of recommendations of the Study on home and family and violence
- Exploration of an aspect of home-based violence against children – corporal punishment

The UN Study on Violence Against Children

- 2000 and 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child devotes its two Days of General Discussion to violence against children
- Committee recommends a UN Study on the subject
- 2001, the UN General Assembly requests UN Secretary- General to conduct in-depth study on violence against children
- 2003, the UN Secretary-General appoints an independent expert, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, to lead the Study, with OHCHR, UNICEF, and WHO

The UN Study on Violence Against Children

- 2005, UNICEF supports 9 regional consultations as part of the study process with the active participation of governments, UN agencies, NGOs, children and young people
- 2006, Professor Paulo Pinheiro presents the key findings and recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children – Official Report presented to the 61st UN General Assembly
- World Report on Violence against Children –details and recommendations on violence against children in different settings, including home and family

Violence and Children – their own voices

"We feel that primary prevention begins in the home – with proper communication between parents and children – and with proper implementation on a personal, direct and engaging level in schools. With proper education and preparation, children will be less likely to react violently to situations as they grow."

Regional Consultation North America, Children's Declaration

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Violence Against Children in the Family – from the UN Study

Families, widely, hold the greatest potential for protecting children from all forms of violence. Families can also empower children to protect themselves

The prevalence of violence against children by parents and other close family members – physical, sexual and psychological violence, as well as deliberate neglect – has only begun to be acknowledged and documented

Challenging violence against children is most difficult in the context of the family in all its forms. There is a reluctance to intervene in what is still perceived in most societies as a ‘private’ sphere

But human rights to full respect for human dignity and physical integrity– children’s and adults’ equal rights – and State obligations to uphold these rights do not stop at the door of the family home

The Consequences of Violence Against Children – from the UN Study

- The consequences of violence against children include both the immediate personal impacts and the damage that they carry forward into later childhood, adolescence and adult life
- The violence that children experience in the context of home and family can lead to lifelong consequences for their health and development. They may lose the trust in other human beings essential to normal human development
- Learning to trust from infancy onwards through attachments in the family is an essential task of childhood, and closely related to the capacity for love, empathy and the development of future relationships
- At a broader level, violence can stunt the potential for personal development and achievement in life, and present heavy costs to society as a whole

Recommendations from the UN Study on VAC - violence in the home

Prioritize prevention

Ensure that comprehensive systems to prevent violence and protect children are implemented at scale, in ways that respect the whole child and their family, their dignity and privacy, and the developmental needs of girls and boys

Societal level action

- Assess the impact of public policies on children and their families.
- Increase economic and social safety nets for families
- Implement evidence-based advocacy programmes on violence prevention

Legal measures

- Develop an explicit framework of law and policy in which all forms of violence against children within the family are prohibited
- Ensure that society, family courts and other parts of the justice system are sensitive to the needs of children and their families

Strengthen coordinated responses

- Provide pre-natal and post-natal care and home visitation programmes for optimizing early childhood development
- Implement culturally-appropriate and gender-sensitive parenting programmes and programmes that support families to provide a violence-free home
- Protect especially families at risk, vulnerable children in the family, and address gender issues

Build capacity

Build capacity among those who work with children and their families

Build information systems

- Implement civil registration universally, including the registration of births, deaths, and marriages
- Develop a national research agenda on violence against children

Corporal punishment

“Addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States parties under the Convention. It is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.”

While all physical punishment is degrading, there are other cruel and degrading and potentially equally damaging non-physical forms of violence which children suffer within the family

These include enduring persistent threats, insults, name-calling or other forms of verbal abuse, belittling, isolation or rejection. In addition to the direct violence, many children witness violence between adult family members, which in itself has serious consequences, only very recently recognized

In a survey undertaken by UNICEF in Europe and Central Asia, over 75% of children said that 'hitting' was 'never' a good solution to problems at home

In regional consultations for the Study, children repeatedly called for other methods of discipline, including being offered a proper explanation of what they had done wrong; they underlined how hurtful it was to be hit and humiliated by those who professed to love and care for them

States with full prohibition in legislation

The following 23 states have prohibited corporal punishment in all settings, including the home:

Austria (1989); Bulgaria (2000); Costa Rica (2008); Croatia (1998); Cyprus (1994); Denmark (1997); Finland (1983); Germany (2000); Greece (2006); Hungary (2004); Iceland (2003); Israel (2000); Latvia (1998); Netherlands (2007); New Zealand (2007); Norway (1987); Portugal (2007); Romania (2004); Spain (2007); Sweden (1979); Ukraine (2003); Uruguay (2007); Venezuela (2007)

Prohibition by Supreme Court ruling

In the following states, corporal punishment is prohibited in all settings, including the home, by Supreme Court ruling, not yet reflected in legislation: Italy (1996); Nepal (2005)

The Italian Court decision has generated public debate, indicating the power of the legal system has to influence public discourse and social change

Recommendations for ending corporal punishment

- Explicitly prohibit all violence against children, including all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment or treatment, in the family and in all other settings; this is required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and by other international and regional human rights instruments
- Law reform is required to repeal any existing defence that can be used to justify violent punishment and any laws that authorize it in any setting, explicit prohibition in sectoral laws applying within the family and to schools, the penal system, alternative care settings and situations of employment is required to send a clear message

Recommendations

- Ensure that awareness-raising of children's right to protection, promotion of non-violent childrearing and education and the principles of non-violent conflict resolution are built into all the points of contact with future parents and parents and into the training of all those working with or for children and families
- Encourage political, community and faith leaders and educators to support this awareness-raising and public education
- Involve children in the development of effective and appropriate action to eliminate corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment or treatment
- Review the extent of violent victimization of children, including in the family, through confidential interview studies with children themselves and with parents and other care givers
- Review safeguards to protect children from all forms of violence in the full range of residential institutions and other forms of alternative care, state and private, and implement any necessary improvements

