

UN Report Finds Violence Against Children Pervasive

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"No violence against children is justifiable; all violence against children is preventable." Those are the opening words of the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children, which finds that much violence against children remains hidden and is often socially approved. Released to a committee of the General Assembly on October 11, the new report offers a comprehensive global view of this violence.

Violence against children includes physical and psychological violence, discrimination, neglect and maltreatment ranging from sexual abuse in the home to corporal and humiliating punishment at school; from the use of physical restraints in homes to brutality at the hands of law enforcement officers; from abuse and neglect in institutions to gang warfare; from infanticide to so-called "honour" killing.

"The best way to deal with violence against children is to stop it before it happens," said Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, the independent expert who led the Study. "States must take the primary responsibility. That means prohibiting all kinds of violence against children, wherever it occurs and whoever is the perpetrator, and investing in prevention programs to address the underlying causes. People must be held accountable for their actions but a strong legal framework is not only about sanctions, it is about sending a robust, unequivocal signal that society just will not accept violence against children."

Focusing on five settings where violence occurs (the home and family, schools and educational settings, care and judicial institutions, the workplace and the community), the Study combines human rights, public health and child protection perspectives. It concludes that, for many children, violence is a daily reality. Among the findings:

- In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that some 53,000 children age 17 or younger died as a result of homicide.
- According to the International Labour Office, 5.7 million children were in forced or bonded labour, 1.8 million in prostitution and pornography, and 1.2 million were victims of trafficking in 2000.
- Boys are at greater risk of physical violence than girls, while girls face greater risk of sexual violence, neglect and forced prostitution.
- Absence of legally established minimum ages for sexual consent and marriage in some countries may expose children to partner violence. Up to 82 million girls may marry before age 18.

"No matter whether it occurs in the family, school, community, institution or workplace, health workers are the front line for responding to violence against children," said Dr. Anders Nordström, WHO Acting Director-General. "We must make our contribution to ensuring that such violence is prevented from occurring in the first place, and that where it does occur children receive the best possible services to reduce its harmful effects. States should pursue evidence-based policies and programs which address factors that give rise to such violence, and ensure that resources are allocated to address its underlying causes and monitor the response to these efforts."

"Violence has a lasting affect not just on children and their families, but also on communities and nations," added UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman.

The report calls for a series of actions to prevent and address violence against children. Twelve overarching recommendations address areas such as national strategies and systems,

data collection and ensuring accountability. One recommendation urges States to address the gender dimension of violence against children, to protect the human rights of women and girls, and to address all forms of gender discrimination as part of a comprehensive violence prevention strategy.

The Study calls for the appointment of a Special Representative on Violence against Children, with an initial mandate of four years, to act as a high-profile global advocate to promote prevention and elimination of all violence against children and to encourage cooperation and follow-up.

The news release on the UN Secretary-General's Study is available at www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20225&Cr=child&Cr1=, to read the Study click on the link in the text and choose your language preference.