



Preventing violence against and between children in schools in Afghanistan: Risk factors for corporal punishment and peer violence. November 2017



Globally, 17% of children are subjected to extreme forms of corporal punishment (UNICEF 2014). National level data in Afghanistan suggests that 78% of children aged 5 to 14 have experienced any violent psychological or physical discipline, and more than a third of children are subjected to extreme physical violence (UNICEF 2014). Based on the baseline study of a project implemented in Afghanistan by Help the Afghan Children, this brief describes the factors associated with violence at school, including children's experience of corporal punishment by teachers and their experiences of peer violence victimisation or perpetration. The brief is intended for those working in governmental and non-governmental organisations, and donors, interested in working to prevent violence against children.

Background

In Afghanistan there is growing data to suggest that children continue to be exposed to high levels of violence. The Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2010-2011) suggested that 74% of children aged 2 to 14 years experienced physical or psychological punishment at home in the past month (CSO & UNICEF 2012). At the school level, children are also exposed to high levels of corporal punishment by teachers (Samoon et al. 2011) and peer violence perpetrated by other children (WHO 2014).

The Issue

Although there is data available on the prevalence of corporal punishment of children at home, far less is known about the prevalence of violence in schools, including of corporal punishment by teachers and peer violence victimisation and perpetration among children. Even less is known about the risk factors associated with violence against and between children at the school level.

This brief begins to fill in some of these gaps and makes recommendations on effective strategies to prevent violence against children.

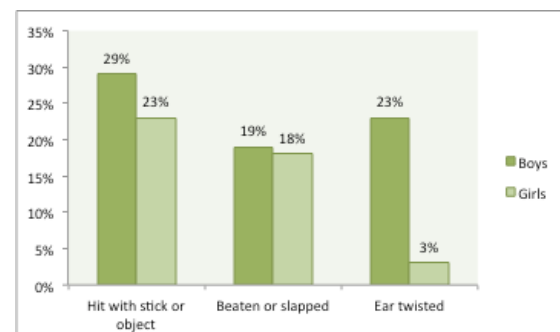
Methodology

In October and November 2016, Help the Afghan Children (HTAC) conducted a baseline study in Jawzjan province, consisting of survey interviews with 770 students (350 boys and 420 girls) and 400 teachers (85 male and 315 female) in 11 schools receiving HTAC peace education training. Students were asked about their demographic characteristics, psychosocial wellbeing, gender attitudes, and experience of peer violence, family violence and corporal punishment by teachers. Teachers were asked about their demographic characteristics, psychosocial wellbeing, teaching experience, gender attitudes, positive and negative classroom practices, and the use of corporal punishment against children at school.

Findings

We found that 44% of boys and 35% of girls had experienced any corporal punishment at school in the past month. Children reported more extreme forms of corporal punishment, such as being beaten or having ones ear twisted (Table 1), more frequently than less extreme forms of punishment such as being made to kneel or run around.

Table 1: Most common forms of teacher corporal punishment in the past month (reported by children)



A large proportion of teachers (35%) also reported using corporal punishment against students in the last month; however, unlike reports from children, teachers claimed to mainly use verbal punishment. Less experienced teachers and those who

frequently missed school, arrived late, or were unprepared for lessons were more likely to use corporal punishment than teachers with more years of experience and fewer negative teaching practices.

We also found that 50% of boys and 43% of girls reported having experienced peer violence victimization in the past month, and 32% of boys and 18% of girls disclosed perpetration of peer violence. Boys are more likely to perpetrate violence against peers if they are food insecure, and are more likely to have experienced either peer victimisation or perpetration if they have also experienced corporal punishment by teachers. Girls' peer violence victimisation and perpetration are associated with food insecurity, having been beaten at home and more depressive symptoms. Disabled girls are significantly more likely to be victimized than non-disabled girls, and girls who experienced corporal punishment by teachers and who had witnessed their fathers fighting with another man were more likely to perpetrate violence against other children.

Key messages

- 1) Less experienced teachers and those with negative classroom and school behaviours are more likely to use corporal punishment with students.
- 2) Children are more likely to perpetrate violence against other children if they have observed or experienced family violence or corporal punishment at school.
- 3) School-based violence prevention interventions should be complemented with activities at the community and household levels to shift violent norms and practices.

Conclusion

Implications

Children's exposure to family violence in the home and corporal punishment at school are strongly linked to children's perpetration of violence against their peers, suggesting that violence is multigenerational in nature and that children learn and reproduce violent norms and practices from adults.

Recommendations

Violence against and between children at school is

preventable. Interventions working to reduce corporal punishment in schools should build the capacity of teachers to use non-violent disciplinary methods and should pay particular attention to teachers with less experience and those exhibiting challenges with class preparation and regular school attendance.

Given that children's experiences of peer violence are strongly influenced by their observation of and experience of family violence, school-based interventions to prevent peer violence must also target violence at the household and community levels in order to shift broader violence-supportive norms and practices. Peer violence interventions also need to ensure that violence prevention messaging and awareness raising is inclusive of children with disabilities.

Next steps

This baseline research is part of a larger global program evaluating the impact of HTAC's peace education and violence prevention project on children's experiences of peer violence and corporal punishment at school. The endline results of the research will be available in mid-2018.

Programme team

The research is led by Prof Rachel Jewkes and Dr Julienne Corboz from the South African Medical Research Council, and Hemat Osman and Wahid Siddiq from Help the Afghan Children.

References

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