

Providing evidence on violence affecting children

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- Violence affecting children and youth is a widespread global problem, and poorer children appear to be particularly affected.
- Young Lives provides one of the few sources of longitudinal data on violence affecting children, and it is able to generate high-quality research examining the causes and consequences of violence affecting children and youth.
- Young Lives' collaboration with UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti (OoR) has led to significant impacts, including contributing to the passing of a new law in Peru prohibiting physical and humiliating punishment of children in all settings.

Setting the scene

Violence remains a feature of many children's lives, despite national and international attempts to reduce it. Violence manifests itself differently in each society and comes in many forms: beating, bullying, corporal punishment at home and at school, sexual violence and even murder. Estimates generated by the Know Violence in Childhood Global Learning Initiative suggest that in 2015 at least three out of every four of the world's children – 1.7 billion in total – had experienced some form of violence in a previous year, including 1.3 billion boys and girls who experienced corporal punishment at home, 261 million schoolchildren who experienced peer violence, and 100,000 children who were victims of homicide in the past year. In addition, it includes 18 million adolescent girls aged 15–19 who had experienced sexual abuse at some point in their childhood. The growing recognition of violence affecting children is recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals, setting a global bar requiring countries to end all forms of violence against children. That objective requires an actionable research base.

What does Young Lives research show?

Given that Young Lives is not a study of the prevalence of violence, it is all the more notable how violence has emerged as an important theme, especially from the qualitative work. Following the same children over time enables us to explore how children's experiences of and responses to violence change with age, and how past experiences shape later experiences, outcomes and trajectories. Our qualitative research offers a powerful way to explore what children say about the various forms of violence they experience, and how and why violence manifests in their lives. It generates an in-depth understanding not only of the emotional impact of violence, but also how children respond. We can capture the everyday, routinized and often hidden forms of violence affecting children that more specific studies may miss.

Young Lives' key findings are that:

- **Violence in the lives of many children is pervasive, often routinized and normalised.** Children experience multiple forms of violence across different settings, and it is a part of everyday life for many of them. Despite formal prohibition, corporal punishment is common and this shapes cultures of violence within schools. Children often

experience both violence at school and violence in the home (violence is more likely to be reported within the home than inflicted by strangers), and this undermines children's wellbeing, engagement with schooling and learning.

- **Children's experiences of and responses to violence are shaped by age and gender.** The types of violence experienced vary by age and gender. Overall boys report physical violence, whereas girls report emotional violence and gender-based violence. Gender norms may preclude children from seeking support when they become affected by violence.
- **Violence reflects and reinforces discriminatory social and gender norms.** When teachers normalise violence, it becomes replicated by pupils. Domestic violence and gender-based violence normalise and maintain existing patriarchal norms. Children from ethnic minorities or other marginalised social groups experience violence in schools because of their status.
- **Violence is a manifestation of a lack of respect for rights and is widely normalised.** Children frequently experience violence in ways which would be considered unacceptable for adults.
- **Poverty is a driver of violence affecting children.** Poverty increases stresses and strains, including on relationships in families, schools and communities. Poor children are the most likely to report corporal punishment and bullying, and may be beaten by teachers for lacking school materials and uniforms, and for being absent because of the need to work.

The impact of Young Lives research

In 2015, UNICEF OoR Multi-Country Study on Drivers of Violence Affecting Children commissioned Young Lives to produce a series of working papers on this topic, aimed at strengthening violence prevention initiatives at national, regional and international levels. Through this commission, UNICEF recognised the contribution the study could make to this global endeavour. Four papers analysing Young Lives data on children's experiences of violence were produced, one for each study country, and published in November 2016. A series of films were produced in Peru by UNICEF that cite Young Lives findings on ending violence against children.

In October 2016 UNICEF OoR and Young Lives also published a discussion paper on 'Experiences of Peer Bullying'. Efforts to tackle bullying have lagged behind those directed at other forms of violence affecting children, and far less is known about children's experiences of bullying in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries. However, in recent years the issue of bullying has started to move up the international policy agenda (as evidenced, for example, by the 2014 UN Resolution on protecting children from bullying).

UNICEF's OoR acts as an 'amplifier' of Young Lives research, enabling findings on violence in childhood to be developed into policy recommendations and disseminated very widely, and facilitating the building of relationships with larger organisations. The research and data has had a powerful effect: discourse among policy makers is shifting from "this does not happen here" to "what is driving this?" and "how can we address it?".

1. Impact on laws outlawing corporal punishment

In Peru, a preliminary version of the OoR paper on children's experiences of corporal punishment was influential as part of moves to encourage Peru to formally outlaw corporal punishment. The approval of Law 30403 in late 2015, banning corporal punishment in all settings, was a product of a long-term effort on the part of international, national, and governmental organisations, part of which consisted of producing research evidence on the persistence of violence against children and the impact this had on their lives. Young Lives research, together with research conducted by Dr Deborah Fry at the University of Edinburgh, formed part of this evidence. An independent impact assessment found that the multi-partner, relationships-driven approach of the Multi-Country Study helped to maximise impact in Peru. It was also important that the Study was nationally-led. By focusing on capacity-building and awareness raising activities, the Study also helped to give violence against children a higher political priority.

Overall, the Multi-Country Study on drivers of violence has informed National Action Plans for Children in four countries (Italy, Peru, Vietnam and Zimbabwe). The change of law in Peru was swiftly followed by a change of law in Paraguay which prohibited the use of corporal punishment and any kind of cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of children. In Vietnam, the Child Protection Creed – a new sub-law of the Child Protection Law – has enacted multi-sectoral action against violence (for example in Health, Education and Justice). Young Lives research has therefore made a significant contribution to the global understanding of this issue and helped to create the space for new discovery around the drivers and effects of violence, dictated by national players.

2. Impact in Ethiopia

The working paper on children's experiences of violence in Ethiopia has also had important influence. During 2016 draft versions were presented at: the Ethiopian Ministry of Justice to the inter-ministerial committee on preventing violence affecting women and children; at the African Child Policy Forum to the Civil Society Working group on Child Protection; at a workshop organised by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, and at the Child Research and Practice Forum for policy, civil society and researchers. In addition the paper impressed the Oak Foundation, helping to secure funding for an additional qualitative sub-study to build on the findings and to collect data on violence affecting children in Ethiopia. This new study started in 2017; literature and policy context analyses have already been presented to the Child Research and Practice Forum at UNICEF, and a stakeholder analysis has also been conducted. Young Lives is holding a regional workshop in Addis Ababa in May 2018 in conjunction with UCL, the GAGE programme (Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence) and the Ethiopian Centre for Child Research to share findings and bring together researchers, policy makers and practitioners from different African countries to explore the implications for policy and practice. This endeavour is important in itself but is also helping build stronger regional links in the use of research to focus attention on violence against children.

3. Efforts to tackle bullying

Young Lives work has helped increase global attention to bullying. In May 2016, an earlier version of the OoR paper ‘Experiences of Peer Bullying’ was presented by Dr Kirrily Pells, by invitation, at an Expert Consultation on Bullying and Cyberbullying hosted by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Violence against Children. Young Lives research was specifically cited as evidence in the UN Secretary General’s report ‘Protecting Children from Bullying’, issued in July 2016. The report was accompanied by a new publication ‘Ending the Torment: tackling bullying from the schoolyard to cyberspace’, to which Young Lives contributed a chapter. This resulted in an invitation to a UNESCO conference in South Korea; we were unable to attend, but Young Lives findings were included in the report that accompanied the event.

“The collaboration with Young Lives Oxford as well as the on-the-ground research teams, notably in Vietnam and Peru, has given UNICEF OoR an enormous amount of traction nationally and internationally. At the national level, we have strengthened the relationship with Governments and we are really making visible the strength of the national data to explain issues around violence and risk or protective factors. ... At the global level we have had almost immediate traction; the results from our first (of many) papers with YL was able to produce a sub-study on bullying so that when Marta Santos Pais [UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children] visited the OoR we had data and results ready to go. That was a significant moment.”

Catherine Maternowska, Senior Research and Evaluation Specialist at UNICEF Office of Research

4. Know Violence in Childhood

The research emerging from Young Lives’ collaboration with UNICEF is also informing the work of the Know Violence in Childhood Global Learning Initiative.

Launched in November 2014, the Initiative is a collective response by multilateral institutions, non-governmental organisations and funding agencies concerned about the global impact of violence in childhood and the lack of investment in effective violence prevention strategies. Young Lives was commissioned by Know Violence to prepare a background paper on children and violence, and this provided a thematic synthesis of Young Lives qualitative data, drawing on the series of papers commissioned by UNICEF OoR as well as on other Young Lives research. The paper forms part of the Know Violence in Childhood ‘Ending Violence in Childhood: Global Report 2017’, launched in October 2017. This flagship publication is one of the most comprehensive analyses of childhood violence ever undertaken and documents the scale of violence experienced by many of the world’s children. The report finds that nearly 3 out of 4 children worldwide experience violence (1.7 billion children) each year, but that proven strategies exist which can keep children safe. This flagship product was intended to serve as a reference point on the causes and consequences of violence in childhood and will provide a roadmap for implementing global prevention strategies. Young Lives developed a number of communication outputs to support the launch of the report and the subsequent Global End Violence Solutions Summit in February 2018, including an infographic (see below). We are now planning future collaboration to develop this research agenda further and explore the implications for policy and practice.



“ One of the things we wanted to come through strongly in the Know Violence in Childhood ‘Ending Violence in Childhood: Global Report 2017’ was the reflection of children’s descriptions of the experience of violence, in their own words. We wanted to weave into the narrative the kinds of things children say when they talk about violence which bring the corresponding data on violence to life. This was a difficult piece to get right, to reflect honestly children’s accounts of their experiences without making it sound tokenistic.

We commissioned the background paper by Young Lives because we also knew that the voices of children emerged

from ethical research and long-term work with communities and children. Longitudinal research is a very important source of credible evidence about the impacts of often intangible issues like violence on people’s lives. We found the sections on poverty and on children’s responses to violence the most helpful and valuable additions to our text. The Young Lives material really lifts the report substantially and perfectly illustrates points we are making, so the integration has been seamless. Quite fantastic. ”

Ramya Subrahmanian, Executive Director, Know Violence in Childhood