

Factsheet on Justice for child victims of violence

To celebrate the 11th Anniversary of the International Children's Peace Prize, the KidsRights Foundation has prepared a KidsRights Report, in association with Leiden University, Law School. The report 'The Silent Majority: Justice for child victims of violence, with a focus on Liberia', focuses on the rights of children as victims of violence, and how justice can be achieved to offer these children opportunities to recover and reintegrate into society, and to prevent violence against children in the future.

Justice for child victims of violence - globally

Facts and figures

Children worldwide become victims of violence far too often. Numbers of violence against children can only be estimated; violence remains largely hidden due to numerous reasons including social norms, shame and fear of reprisal. Existing numbers are most likely the tip of the iceberg, and already very alarming:

- About **6 in 10 children** between the ages of 2 and 14 are subjected to physical punishment by their caregivers on a regular basis;
- **One quarter of girls** aged 15 to 19 report being victims of some form of physical violence since age 15;
- About **3 in 10 adults** believe that physical punishment is necessary for educating and raising children;
- Around **1 in 3 students** between the ages of 13 and 15 reports involvement in physical fights;
- Around **126 million girls** between the ages of 15 and 19 think a husband is in some cases justified in hitting or beating his wife;
- Close to **84 million girls** aged 15 to 19 have been the victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners at some point in their lives;
- Around **120 million girls** - about 1 in 10 - have experience forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts under the age of 20.

Justice for children who are victims of violence is rarely served, because children are often unable to speak up for themselves, keeping their abuse secret and failing to seek help. They may not even be recognised as victims because of prevailing attitudes towards violence. And even when they do report violence, **children are often faced with barriers** when accessing the justice system, and all of this results in the perpetrators not being held accountable, reinforcing a culture of impunity.

Justice for child victims of violence is more than the punishment of the perpetrator. True justice also includes physical and **psychological recovery** and **social reintegration**.

Physical and psychological recovery is the process to sooth the impact of violence, both physically and psychologically. It includes support for the child through care and victim assistance services, family support and child protection units. **Social reintegration** is the process of helping child victims of violence to become a full and active member of society again and consists of:

- The **recognition of victimhood**: acknowledge that all children are bearers of rights, breaking down cultural norms that condone or normalise violence against children;
- The **accountability of the perpetrator**: successful prosecution of those responsible for violence against children
- **Access to justice**: allowing child victims of violence to feel legally empowered
- **Reparation for the victim**: compensation, including cash payments, providing access to education, health care and accommodation

Justice for child victims of violence - Liberia

Facts and figures

The current generation of Liberian girls and boys is particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation:

- Almost half of adolescents have experienced **physical violence by the age of 15**.
- The form of violence that occurs most in Liberia is **sexual violence against girls: 13% of adolescents girls aged 15 to 19** experience sexual violence. Rape is the most frequently reported crime in Liberia. **Teenage prostitution** also affects girls and young woman in Liberia: **almost 50% of all girls** have taken part at least once in their lives.
- Liberia is also struggling with the consequences of the recent **Ebola crisis** in West Africa. **More than 4,500 children lost one or both parents or primary caregivers**, and many more children were affected in other ways. In addition to the impact on children's health and basic needs, Ebola also affected their safety. Violence against children was aggravated by the outbreak.

- Another challenge underlying sexual violence is **poverty**. Liberia is one of the poorest countries in the world; **around 80% of its population lives below the poverty line**, unemployment rates are high, and there is massive corruption. Food insecurity is high: 41% of Liberians don't have enough food, and of those, 13% eat only rice, roots and cereals. Many children do not have access to a sufficient and balanced diet, and only one in four has access to safe drinking water.

In Liberia violence against children, especially sexual violence against girls, is an everyday reality. **Liberia has a strong legal framework** addressing the recovery and social reintegration of child victims, but it is not reflected in real life as such. Ongoing poverty, the impact of the recent deadly Ebola crisis, and years of political instability following a 14-year civil war complicate the implementation of the legal framework and **justice remains out of reach for most children who are victims of violence**.

Global Recommendations:

- Governments should **prohibit all violence against children** in their legal frameworks, at all times and in all settings.
- Governments should ensure that appropriate measures are taken to **promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration** of all children who are victims of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts.
- States should **recognise children who are victims of violence as victims** and therefore acknowledge that all children are bearers of rights, ensuring that this is also understood by children themselves.
- Governments should **ensure that perpetrators are held accountable** through the criminal justice system, but, if appropriate, also through civil and administrative proceedings and sanctions, including, for example, restorative justice.
- Governments should **ensure that victims of violence have access to justice** including the right to relevant information, to an effective remedy, to a fair trial and to be heard. While accessing the justice system, child victims of violence should be treated with dignity and compassion, protected from discrimination, informed, and given opportunities to express views and concerns; in addition, they should be given effective (legal) assistance and privacy, and be protected from hardship or secondary victimisation.
- Governments should take appropriate measures to **ensure that compensation is available** for child victims.

- Governments should **review the environment** in which such recovery and reintegration takes place to ensure that it fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child. This includes addressing attitudes towards violence against children, girls and other stigmatised or disadvantaged groups of children.
- Governments should **plan and implement programmes** for recovery and reintegration, without discrimination against child victims; the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration; the maximum survival and development of the child must be ensured; and the views of the child should be respected.

Recommendations for Liberia on victims of (sexual) violence

- The Government of Liberia needs to continue its efforts, to respond to the commitments it made in their legal framework, when signing and ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional human rights instruments. In close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, (I)NGOs, lawyers, communities, families and children themselves, it needs to improve the effective implementation of the right to **physical and psychological recovery** and **social reintegration** of victims of (sexual) violence.
- The Government of Liberia should **ratify the relevant Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child** on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.
- The Government of Liberia should **ensure a strong prevention effort** that focuses on changing societal norms and increasing awareness of views on sexual violence against children, especially girls.
- The Government of Liberia should **meaningfully involve children** themselves in all aspects of decision-making and policy development in tackling the issue of (sexual) violence against children.

From KidsRights Report 2015 'The Silent Majority - Justice for child victims of violence, with a focus on Liberia'
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