

Addressing violence against children in schools in the United Republic of Tanzania

Rachel Pounds and Martha Hewison

Researching the extent of the problem

Following on from the United Nations Secretary-General's *World Report on Violence against Children* (Pinheiro, 2006), the United Republic of Tanzania became the second African country to undertake a national study on violence against children (Swaziland was the first), and for the first time a survey in Africa looked at all forms of violence (sexual, physical and emotional) against both girls and boys (see Box 1). The study took place in 2009, led by the government and supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a national multi-sector task force.

The task force, chaired by the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, included government representatives from different sectors (health and social welfare, education, justice, police, Tanzanian Commission for AIDS and Prime Minister's office) plus civil society, and the UN and development partners. It played a critical role in guiding the research, implementation and development of the final report and in building national ownership to move from research to action. The survey interviewed 3,739 children in 21 regions in Tanzania and the 10 districts in Zanzibar.

The overall results show that sexual, physical and emotional violence against children is highly prevalent in the country (UNICEF et al., 2011). Prior to the age of 18 years, three in ten girls (28 per cent) and one in seven boys (13 per cent) were exposed to sexual

violence; almost three out of four (over 70 per cent) girls and boys were exposed to physical violence; and one in four girls and three in ten boys (over a quarter) experienced emotional violence. There is a significant overlap, with some of these children experiencing multiple violations.

Sexual violence included unwanted touching in a sexual way, attempted unwanted intercourse, physically forced unwanted intercourse, and coerced intercourse using pressure or threats. Punching, whipping and kicking were the most common form of physical violence reported by children.

Schools are often not safe places for children

Great strides have been made to increase access to education in the country – net enrolment rose from 59 per cent in 2000 to 97 per cent in 2008 (USAID/Tanzania, n.d.) – but drop-out rates also remain high. Moreover, looking at attendance rates rather than enrolment rates reveals that a large number of children who are officially enrolled do not attend school for a variety of reasons. First and foremost among them is the fact that schools are often not safe places for children, as shown by the shocking evidence from the violence against children study.

The research identified that incidents of sexual violence commonly took place at school and on the way to and from school. This is particularly an issue for girls; approximately 95 per cent of girls enrolled in primary one do not make it to the end of lower secondary (Holmes, 1997). According to Ministry of Education statistics, 28,600 girls left school between 2004 and 2008 because they were pregnant; one in five girls at secondary level became pregnant in 2007 and did not finish school (Bebien, 2010). The violence against children study reported that approximately one in ten girls said teachers were the perpetrators of a least one incident of sexual violence against them; 17 per cent of girls experienced at least one incident of unwanted touching or attempted sex on school grounds and 26 per cent on their way to or from school. In addition, 29 per cent of boys reported that unwanted touching or attempted sex happened at school.

Corporal punishment – supported by official government policy – has also emerged as a key contributing factor to children dropping out of school. Despite instigating the Law of the Child Act in 2009 in Tanzania and in 2011 in Zanzibar as a national legal and regulatory framework to protect children, parents and teachers are still legally permitted to physically punish children. The National

Box 1

The objectives of the violence against children survey

The survey was intended to:

- Describe the magnitude of the problem of violence against children under the age of 18 in the United Republic of Tanzania with a special emphasis on sexual violence.
- Identify potential risk and protective factors for violence against children.
- Identify health consequences of violence against children.
- Assess the use of social, criminal justice and health services available by children who experience sexual violence.
- Use the data to guide policies and programmes to prevent and protect children from violence.

Corporal Punishment Regulations 1979 allow 'the head of school or someone designated to administer lashes for serious offences to a maximum of four strokes'. The study results show that levels of abuse from teachers go well beyond what is permitted. A staggering one out of two children – 52.6 per cent of girls and 50.8 per cent of boys – reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of teachers. Of those abused, 78 per cent of girls and 67 per cent of boys say they were punched, kicked or whipped more than five times by a teacher.

The majority of teachers in the country are not trained in any other form of discipline apart from corporal punishment, and many parents also support children being physically punished at school. Working with teachers to influence and change teaching and learning in schools is critical; teachers must have an understanding of positive discipline and children's rights, including their right to participation. The right of children to participate in making decisions that affect them has recently received statutory recognition in Tanzania with the passing of the Law of the Child in 2009 and is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Pan African Charter. Advocacy is now needed to change the law permitting corporal punishment in schools as well as the Marriage Act of 1971 allowing girls to be married at 15 years.

Box 2

Child protection in Zanzibar

Over the last three and a half years, Save the Children has been working with the Government of Zanzibar on a multi-sectoral child protection system to respond to and prevent violence against children. This has included the establishment of a Child Protection Unit, run by the police and Department of Social Welfare, which provides a safe space for dealing with specific cases of abuse against children and is responsible for co-ordinating national child protection services, and the finalisation of national guidelines for the protection and welfare of children. Save the Children has also carried out extensive awareness-raising activities with children, parents, teachers, local government and community members on recognition and reporting of abuse; trained the police, magistrates, lawyers and social workers on how to respond to child abuse; and, in collaboration with Zanzibar University, developed a 12-month Diploma course in Child Protection.

Child-friendly desks have been established in police stations and there is now a 'One Stop Centre', housed as a separate clinic within the central hospital in Stonetown, with a specially trained health worker, counsellor and police officer in residence 24 hours a day in order to respond to any incidents of abuse. Sexual abuse incidents are now reported more frequently to the police, who now follow up and where possible prosecute instead of dismissing them as 'domestic issues'. Members of the judiciary are also moving towards giving more serious sentences to those found guilty. There are still challenges, but people in Zanzibar are starting to change the way they look at the abuse of children and it is no longer pushed under the carpet. In addition, the President of Zanzibar has set up a committee on child abuse to demonstrate the government's commitment to addressing the issue.

Promoting positive discipline

Positive discipline is a set of approaches – including negotiation and a system of rewards rather than punishment through verbal, physical or emotional abuse – that creates an active, positive learning environment for students. In Zanzibar, Save the Children is working with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training to promote alternative positive discipline in 20 pilot schools. Key elements of the project include awareness-raising with community members and parents through meetings and use of different media, training of teachers on alternative forms of discipline, development of training manuals and teachers' handbooks, feedback boxes and meetings at pilot schools to collect children's views.

Teacher-parent-student conferences were held in the schools to develop a Safe School contract in which each group committed to what they had to do to promote and sustain the use of positive discipline. The children each have an individual 'discipline book'; if a child misbehaves, it is recorded in the book, discussed by the teacher and student and then an agreement is reached that is signed by both parties. If necessary, the teacher will call in the parents (for a repeat offender or very serious offence). This increases communication between all parties and helps identify students having problems at school. The punishments given include time outs, removal of privileges, litter collection, etc. It was initially challenging to design appropriate punishments as some children who were punished by cleaning the school latrines said they would rather be beaten!

Overall the impact has been very positive: child protection training has been conducted for teachers, students, parents' committee and *shhias* (village communities). It has been reported that attitudes have improved between teachers and students, and the learning environment has become what children and teachers described as 'peaceful', which has had a positive effect on students' learning and increased girls' attendance. All primary schools on the islands now have at least one teacher who has been trained in positive discipline. Several children who do not attend the pilot schools but have been severely beaten in their own schools have reported this to the Ministry, and investigations by the Child Protection Unit have resulted in the dismissal of some particularly violent teachers. Save the Children hopes to expand the project, including to secondary schools, and is also currently engaging with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training on the mainland to start the process there. Zanzibar has also established a multi-sectoral child protection system (see Box 2).

Education sector priorities to end violence

Child protection, child rights and child participation are high on the national agenda. The Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children has stated that violence against children is a major threat to development and that the country will not achieve quality primary and secondary education unless children are safe in schools. On 9 August 2011, the Government of Tanzania launched a five-year plan (2011–2015) to eliminate all forms of violence against children, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse. The plan requires a multi-sector response based on co-operation

between key government stakeholders, development partners and civil society. Each government sector member of the task force has developed a priority response on how that sector is planning to stop violence against children and has developed a joint monitoring and evaluation plan with sectoral indicators to evaluate progress.

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training's planned priority responses include the following:

1. Ensure all teachers are trained and adhere to the national code of conduct for professional ethics. Disciplinary action for crimes and/or professional misconduct, especially sexual violence, will be taken against all offending teachers through the Teacher Service Commission as well as working closely with the police and justice sector for swift action.
2. Establish effective child abuse complaint, reporting and referral mechanisms within the school environment, with a designated role for all guidance and counselling teachers, ensuring co-ordination through school management committees, the police, social welfare and other key actors for the proper care, treatment and follow-up of abuse cases.
3. Roll out life skills training and peer education programmes in all schools to empower children, especially girls, to speak out against violations of their rights and report cases of sexual and physical violence and abuse.
4. Promote alternative forms of discipline for teachers and develop non-violent teaching and learning methods to reduce the high levels of physical violence in schools.
5. Ensure adherence to the 2002 Guidance and Counselling Circular in all schools and that designated teachers are fully trained in guidance and counselling skills and services to promote the protective environment in all schools.

These are encouraging steps forward. With the implementation of these responses supported by the government, teachers, parents and students themselves, children in the United Republic of Tanzania can claim their right to a truly quality education: one that is relevant, appropriate, participatory, flexible, inclusive and protective¹.

Endnote

- ¹ Save the Children's definition of quality education.

References

- Bebien, A. (2010). 'Education – Tanzania: Pregnant teens forced out of school'. IPS News Service, 10 March. Available at: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/03/education-tanzania-pregnant-teens-forced-out-of-school/>
- Holmes, K. (1997). 'Spare the Rod and Save a Child's Education'. Gemini News Service, 2 September. Available at: <http://www.corpun.com/tzsc9709.htm>
- Pinheiro, P. S. (2006). *World Report on Violence against Children: Secretary-General's study on violence against children*. Geneva: United Nations.
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (2011). *Violence against Children in Tanzania: Findings of a national survey 2009*. Dar es Salaam: UNICEF and CDC. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/media/files/VIOLENCE_AGAINST_CHILDREN_IN_TANZANIA_REPORT.pdf
- USAID/Tanzania (n.d.). 'USAID/Tanzania Education Strategy for Improving the Quality of Education: FY 2009–2013'. Available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACP706.pdf

Rachel Pounds is the Country Director of Save the Children in Tanzania and **Martha Hewison** is Regional Education Advisor, East and Southern Africa. Save the Children is the world's leading independent organisation for children and works to ensure children have access to a safe, protective and gender-sensitive learning environment, free from violence and abuse and where their health and well-being are ensured. It is also part of the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.