

Preventing violence against children: Attitudes, perceptions and priorities



Introduction

As countries in every region of the world strive to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the human rights of more children than ever before are being fulfilled. Poverty rates, child and maternal death rates, access to clean water, access to health services, and enrolment in primary school for both girls and boys, have all seen unprecedented improvements at the global level, when compared with 1990 rates. Yet progress has not been the same for all. Millions of the world's most vulnerable and marginalized children are still in harm's way, left behind facing discrimination, violence and exploitation. If the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is to build on and finish the job started by the MDGs, the next set of goals needs to prioritize the prevention of violence against and exploitation of children. Unless this is ensured, millions of children will continue to be denied their rights to fully live up to their potential, denying their communities and societies of the intellectual, social and economic benefits that follow when the rights of all children are protected.

As the MDGs did for other human rights issues, the post-2015 sustainable development agenda has the potential to galvanize the development community to work together to ensure that all children will be safe and able to live free from all forms of violence, be protected in conflicts and disasters and be able to thrive in a safe, caring family environment. Reinforcing the fact that violence can be stopped; the agenda should build on the solutions that have proven effective and affordable.

In July 2014, a historical milestone was reached with the release of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Outcome Document. The introductory text of the outcome document acknowledges the need to ensure the protection, survival and development of children to their full potential as key to sustainable development, in accordance with the Rio+20 outcome document, and that sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection must benefit all, in particular the children, youth and future generations of the world.

Significantly, the prevention of and response to violence against children was prioritized across the proposed goals of the Open Working Group, through targets on safe and non-violent learning environments; on violence against women and girls, and harmful practices; on child labour; on safe public spaces; and on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

Considering that violence against children takes place in every country, every region and at every socio-economic level, it is vital that the prevention of violence against children remains a priority for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. To show that there is widespread support for this to happen, ChildFund Alliance and World Vision commissioned Ipsos Reid to ask a question on the need to prioritize the prevention of violence against children at the global level –in the context of a wider survey commissioned by World Vision on awareness and attitudes towards violence against children¹.

This briefing shares the public perceptions on the importance of addressing violence against children as a global priority. Public perceptions often shape the understanding of the problem, the urgency to solve it as well as the extent of measures applied to address it. Perceptions that violence against children is less important than other issues, or that it is intractable or impossible to solve, can result in limited political commitment to meaningfully address it. However, the findings of this survey paint a different picture: **there is a political dividend to prioritizing violence against children, with 93% of respondents stating that addressing violence against children should be a global priority.**

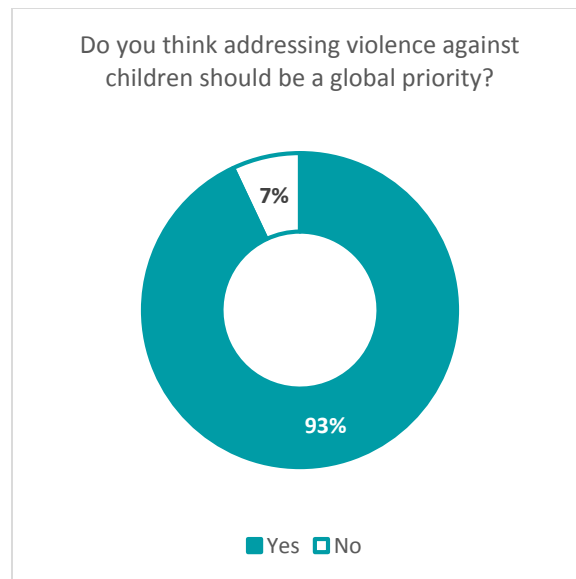
¹ For more information on this survey, please visit <http://www.wvi.org/fearingwrong>.

Methodology

The survey was implemented in 28 countries, and in total, 11,331 interviews were conducted. Research was conducted primarily online, drawing from large and diversely sourced panel samples. Six markets, where no acceptable panel samples were available, were conducted through in-person interviewing. The survey required between 15 and 20 minutes on average to complete. The data were weighted within countries to reflect the respective distributions by region, age and gender. The global results put each country on an equal footing regardless of population size.

Results

The survey results reveal that people around the world think violence against children is a common and growing problem that can and should urgently be solved. For example, 76% of people globally know of a child victim of violence, and 65% of all people surveyed noted that the problem is on the rise². In stark contrast, only 13 % think enough is being done to address the problem, while 41% believe that nothing or nothing much is being done³.

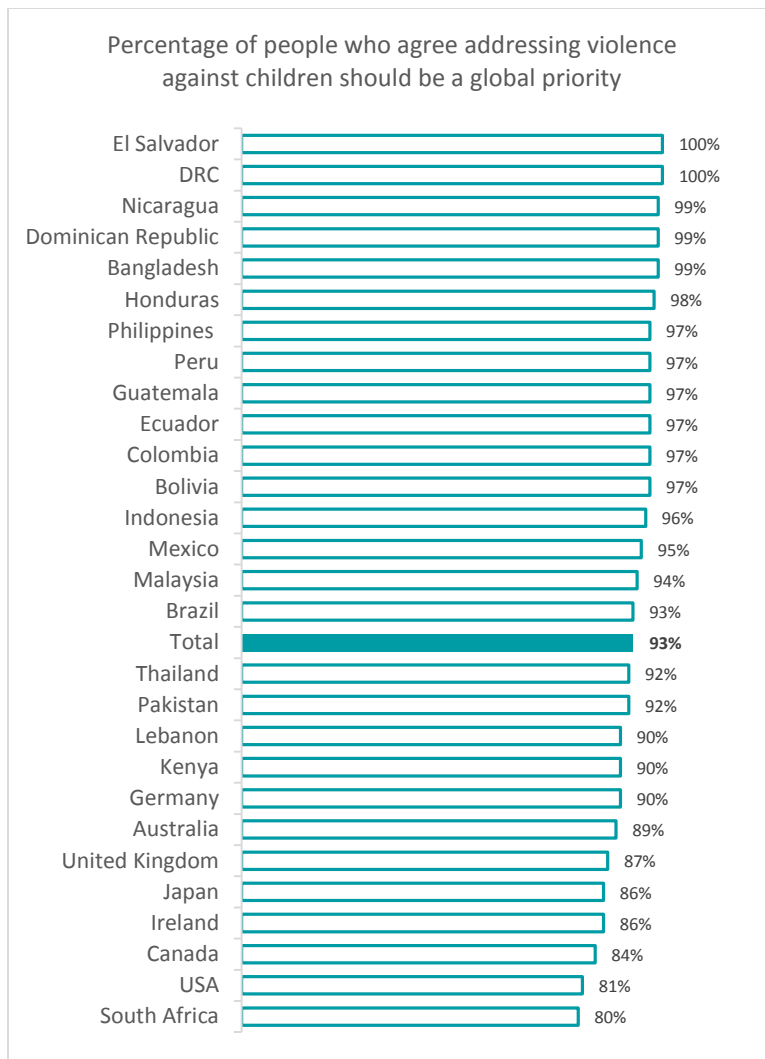


Consequently, it is not surprising that a strong majority of the respondents (93%) think that addressing violence against children should be a global priority. Respondents from developed countries prioritized the need for global actions slightly less (86%) than those from developing countries (97%), due to their general perception that violence against children is an issue that is engrained in human nature and therefore difficult to be eradicate⁴.

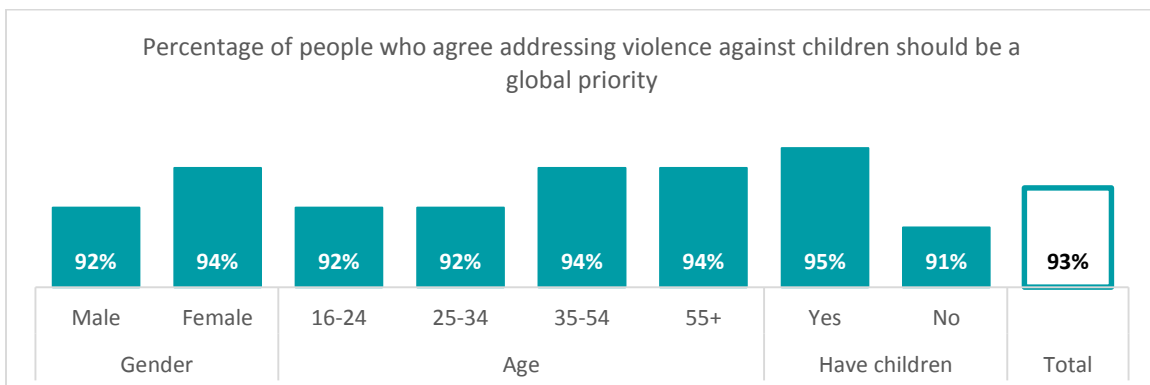
² World Vision International (2014), *Fearing Wrong: Why What Doesn't Scare Us Should*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



Disaggregation on the basis of gender, age, location, and education level shows insignificant differences among respondents. In short, there is overwhelming support for prioritizing the prevention of and response to violence against children as a global development issue. The same conclusion stands whether or not respondents personally knew victims of violence, or whether or not they believed violence against children is increasing at the global level.

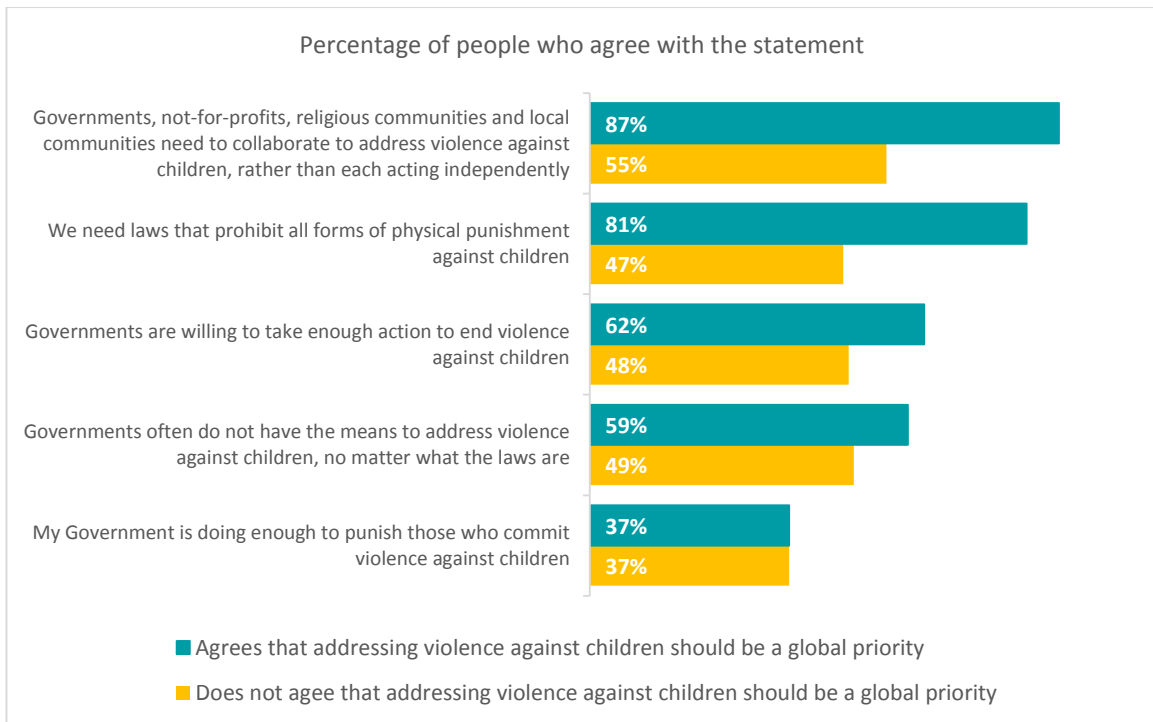




Respondents who think addressing violence against children should be a global priority are also more likely to be optimistic regarding our ability to do so in our lifetime (95%). Further, 87% of these respondents also agree that all actors, including governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities need to work together to address violence against children⁵.

When it comes to the role of government, only 37% of respondents in favour of violence against children being a global priority think that governments are doing enough to punish perpetrators of violence against children. However, the survey suggests that people believe governments can do something to solve the problem, but also recognise that they cannot do it alone.

Sixty two percent of people think that governments are willing to do something while 59% think they just do not have the means to do so.



⁵Ibid.

Conclusions

Understanding public perceptions helps us identify where and how to increase public and political commitments to address violence against children globally, nationally, and locally. This global survey confirms the seriousness and universality of the problem of violence against children, and calls for greater recognition by policy-makers that violence against children is a global development problem requiring urgent action. The perceptions, when it comes to solving the problem, were not too far from reality⁶.

As evidence shows, violence against children, in development and emergency contexts, entails enormous economic costs for economies and societies⁷. Yet not enough is done to address it, in spite of a political dividend to be gained from prioritizing the prevention of violence against children. As this survey shows, public opinion throughout the world –in developed and developing nations, in emerging economies and fragile contexts, and across regions– is unambiguously in favour of governments prioritising action to ensure that children grow in safe and non-violent environments. Defining the post-2015 sustainable development agenda is a unique opportunity to ensure stronger institutional and political commitment and response.

As child-focused organisations we therefore call upon governments and United Nations entities to ensure that the prevention of violence against children, as advanced by the Open Working Group, remains a priority for the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

⁶ A recent survey from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children recognizes that in spite of the progress made since the UN global study, it has also “been too slow, too uneven and too fragmented to bring violence to an end.” The report calls upon governments to re-double their efforts to address violence against children, including by recognizing it as a global development issue that needs be included in the post-2015 agenda. (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (2013), *Toward a World Free from Violence: Global Survey on Violence against Children*.)

⁷ ChildFund Alliance and Overseas Development Institute (2014), *The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children*.