

New UNICEF report shows high levels of violence against children

by Ashlee Betteridge
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A *new report* by UNICEF, *Hidden in plain sight: a statistical analysis of violence against children*, shows that there is still much work to do to protect children worldwide and in the region from violence and abuse.

According to the report, around two thirds of children worldwide between ages 2 and 14 are subjected to physical punishment by their caregivers on a regular basis. One in ten girls under the age of 20 have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts. Close to half of all girls worldwide aged 15-19 think that a husband is sometimes justified in hitting or beating his wife.

In addition to the shocking stats, the report also highlights the impact that violence against children can have on their education, future financial stability and employment.

While the report largely looks at the global picture, the numbers from our region add to the troubling tale (though data is incomplete for many Pacific countries, notably PNG, as well as for developed countries such as Australia where UNICEF does not operate). For example, more than 70 per cent of children aged 2 to 14 in Vanuatu, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Fiji had experienced violent discipline in the home. In contrast, in the United States, around a third of children aged 7-10 had experienced mild corporal punishment, with 4-5 per cent experiencing more severe corporal punishment.

In Vanuatu, 37 per cent of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 reported incidents of being beaten or physically mistreated by someone other than a husband or partner since age 15. Among countries with complete data, Marshall Islands and Timor-Leste had the highest reported prevalence of physical violence towards adolescent girls (in the past 12 months) outside of Sub-Saharan Africa, at 30 per cent and 25 per cent respectively.

Sexual violence rates in the Pacific were high. The report notes that “in Kiribati and Solomon Islands, respectively, 19 per cent and 37 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 reported that they were touched sexually or made to do something sexual that they did not want to do by someone other than a husband or partner before age 15”. In Vanuatu, among girls aged 15-19, the figure was 29 per cent. For comparison, a similar question surveying adolescents in the US found 17 per cent of

girls and four per cent of boys reported sexual assault at some point in their lives.

Author/s:

Ashlee Betteridge

Ashlee Betteridge was the Manager of the Development Policy Centre until April 2021. She was previously a Research Officer at the centre from 2013-2017. A former journalist, she holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from ANU and has development experience in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. She now has her own consultancy, Better Things Consulting, and works across several large projects with managing contractors.

Link:

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