



World Vision



# OUR research, OUR rights

Ending violence against children through the lens of  
child researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil,  
Indonesia, Nicaragua, Romania and Sierra Leone

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## Child and adult safeguarding considerations

World Vision ensured safe and ethical participation of children when they shared their stories, adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols. Names of children and staff have been anonymised, changed, or presented in a simplified way to ensure confidentiality. All photos were taken with informed consent.

**Cover photo** © World Vision / Jon Warren. Children at a rural primary school in Uganda.

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World Vision is a global Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Its 37,000 staff members in nearly 100 countries are committed to working with the world's most vulnerable people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

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# Foreword

# Ajlin

Age 14, child researcher from Bosnia and Herzegovina

*Many adults think that children are not capable of finding a real problem and doing something to solve it. They always say how children cannot make a difference in society because of their lack of experience, and they neglect children's voices.*

*On this long road, we, as children and young people, have learnt to put aside our mutual differences and work as a team. We have learnt how to correctly explore a problem in our society and work towards its extermination. Maybe the most important thing that we learnt was how to connect with our peers, gain their trust, and encourage them to fight for their rights and grow as great people.*

*We also realised that there is a huge number of us facing the same issues, so we realised that we are strong because of that. Children's voices should not be ignored when it comes to bringing decisions that affect our future as well as our present.*

*Some of our peers claim to see violence as an everyday occurrence, but they are in the minority. Our research showed that there are many more children who say that they do not see violence at all, which brings us to the conclusion that many of them do not actually know what is considered violence. In the communities in which we did the research, we concluded that violence is an everyday thing and that the victim often does not know they are a victim of violence.*

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a white button-down shirt over a dark t-shirt, is smiling and speaking into a microphone. The name 'Carlos' is overlaid in large white text on the image.

# Carlos

Age 15, child researcher from Brazil

*Our research served as a high level of interaction and understanding for us, and we recommend that this 'child researcher' methodology be shared around the world as we realised that teenagers interviewing other teenagers feels more comfortable.*

*It is interesting to see young people as researchers interviewing other young people because we have a more direct connection, we speak the same language, we go through the same things, and we know what it is like to live it. So, it is safe for them to talk about the things that hurt them, affect their lives, and share their perceived consequences.*

*For us, it was very important to elaborate and carry out the research project. This helped us have a deeper*

*knowledge on the topic we wanted to explore, and we were able to see what reality is like and listen to what other children and young people have to say. It is important to share what hurts us, but many times we do not have the space to share our experiences, and we are not heard.*

*We consider it to be vital to share the things that affect us so that we can change the reality of these issues. With the information we collected, we can do something to put an end to these problems. For that to happen, it is necessary that government officials create public policies to change this reality, showing that the differences exist and acknowledging that diversity must be respected and protected.*



**Dana Buzducea**

Vice-President, Advocacy and  
External Engagement

World Vision International

## Recommendations

This is what we are hearing loud and clear from children and young people speaking about the importance of their participation. It is this young generation's plea to be listened to that we see driving growing numbers of decision-makers to recognise and listen to children and young people, to support their participation. However, what has been lacking are answers to the questions of 'how' to support the youngest members of our societies to address the issues that affect their lives. This report demonstrates that equipping children with appropriate tools allows them to represent the concerns of their peers, to act as a common voice. By creating space for children's perspectives through formal research of this kind, children have identified the issues that are most important to them, thus opening up avenues for all to better address those.

The importance of hearing their viewpoints of the realities that affect their lives cannot be overstated. Research of this type sets out solid ground where genuine intergenerational dialogue can happen. A dialogue that is essential in changing the status quo of decisions taken "for children" into a more inclusive world. A world where policy makers, academics, INGOs and governments are involving children and young people in decision-making processes. The leadership of this research by children and young people shows clearly the significant contribution that child-led research can make to address what has been lacking in decision-making.

Each of us can amplify those voices and create those spaces for inter-generational dialogue. I call on all reading this report to show their commitment to hearing children's voices by supporting the recommendations. Each of us has our own responsibility to act on the recommendations below and bring to the forefront the next generation's views.

# “Nothing for us without us!”

Based on the findings and learning from this research project, we would like to outline the following recommendations:



## **All engaging parties should:**

- Enhance child-led research as a mechanism to recognise children’s participation rights within research itself and provide promising opportunities to engage children and young people in shaping policies and practices, ultimately creating changes that lead to better lives for them.



## **European policy and decision-makers should:**

- Create space for children to be part of decision-making processes, including through child-led research as well as participation.
- Use child led research to identify issues that are affecting children’s lives. Use evidence from child-led research to direct interventions.
- Make funding available for this methodology in programming funded by European multilaterals and national overseas development.



## **National decision-makers (the countries included and beyond) should:**

- Create space for children to be part of decision-making processes, including through child-led research as well as through meaningful participation.
- Use their findings to identify issues that are affecting children’s lives and ensure accountability to children by giving them feedback on the use and impact of their research projects.



## **INGOs, UN agencies, academia, key stakeholders and practitioners should:**

- Use evidence from child-led research for direct interventions and scaling up of child-led initiatives.
- Devote resources to participatory approaches, explore new methodologies to improve learning, and increase collaboration.
- Use the child-led research’s findings as core messages for awareness-raising, social media plans to inform the public, and seek to influence mindsets and decision-making.
- Develop projects and programmes that embed child-led research as an integral component supporting children and young people to bring their views and insights on issues that matter to them.

# Background

We conducted this child-led research initiative under the umbrella of World Vision's DEAR project (Development Education and Awareness Raising)<sup>1</sup> and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. We worked together to raise children's voices to the highest levels possible in order to have an impact on decisions and processes that affect us, especially the work around the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. We, as child researchers, were invited to choose one of the issues covered by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each country team discussed these issues, and we decided to explore SDG 16.2, the goal that focuses on the issue of 'abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children'.<sup>2</sup>

We used a methodology that was developed to make research projects

easy for children and young people. When we say that this was a child-led research study, we mean the following:

**Child-led research is a participatory process where children and young people lead their own research process, including designing questionnaires, collecting information, analysing results, and writing and disseminating a report.<sup>3</sup>**

Here is some important information that we also learnt from the manual:<sup>4</sup>

- Child researchers come together and work collectively over time, creating increasingly child-led spaces that are facilitated, but not managed, by adults.

- Child researchers bring their own expertise to a project, which arguably has particular advantages for identifying issues, improving fieldwork design and access, and analysing data, over adult researchers.
- The child researchers' expertise is not limited to only their lived experiences but, increasingly, through skills development, includes their ability to carry out research thoroughly and reach their peers.
- Child-led research is a mechanism to recognise children's participation rights within research itself and provides promising opportunities to engage children and young people in shaping policies and practices, ultimately creating changes that lead to better lives for them.

<sup>1</sup> This study has been financed under the "Make Europe Sustainable for All" project, which is funded by the European Commission's Development Education Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR). It is a three-year project implemented by a large consortium of European NGOs. The aim of the project is to contribute the promotion of an ambitious implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the EU, and the achievement of a substantial increase in the awareness of EU citizens and policy makers of their roles and responsibilities in working for a sustainable future in the context of an increasingly interdependent world in which issues of inequalities and environmental degradation, including gender inequality, climate change, food security and migration require urgent action. This child-led research is a project activity of World Vision EU Representation, in collaboration with World Vision International Child Participation team.

<sup>2</sup> 'SDG Indicators'. United Nations. Available from: <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/?Text=&Goal=16&Target=16.2>>.

<sup>3</sup> This guide was written to support children and young people, ages 12 to 18, to conduct their own research projects. Cuevas-Parra, P. (2017) *Becoming researchers: A simple guide for children and young people who want to carry out social research* (pp8-9). World Vision. Available from: <<https://www.wvi.org/child-participation/publication/becoming-researchers-simple-guide-children-and-young-people-who-want>>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



# Our research projects

A child researcher in Sierra Leone prepares  
the questions for the fieldwork



## Our aims

The aim of these child-led research projects was to understand children and young people's perceptions about violence against children as described within the SDG (16.2) that seeks to end violence towards us. We wanted to understand how violence is happening in our schools and communities and its effects on children's lives. This objective was selected by us, the child researchers, in a collective way, and we found a way to agree on which topic to focus. We wished to explore issues concerning violence against children and young people because these are important for us and we feel like sometimes our views or priorities are not always taken into account by adults' research projects.



## Our child-led research teams

The child-led research project was carried out by 96 child researchers, ages 12 to 17, in six countries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there were 21 child researchers, 11 in Brazil, 28 in Indonesia, 10 in Nicaragua, 12 in Romania, and 14 in Sierra Leone. We volunteered to participate in this research and were selected by community volunteers to be a part of the project. The first day we met the other children and young people in our respective countries, we did not all know each other, but later on, we all became friends. On the first day, our in-country adult facilitators taught us about child-led research. We learnt many things about research tools, skills, and ethics. The sessions were helpful to provide us with the information needed to make decisions about methods, ethics, and how to interview children when undertaking our projects. The second day we selected the research topic and designed the research questions. We also tested the questions by roleplaying an interview with each other to see if the questions were good. To collect the data, we divided ourselves into different roles, some were interviewers and others were notetakers.



## Our methodology

To get the information we needed, we used interviews, focus group discussions, and online surveys. We recorded information from the children and young people interviewed with pen and paper. In some countries, the child researchers utilised the Internet to collect responses. Once we compiled all the information, each research group met to discuss the responses and see what was happening in our communities. To analyse our data, we drew a circle and divided it into the major themes that we heard about most when we conducted the interviews. These themes were further divided into subtopics. The interviewers were asked to read their notes from the interviews to the whole group, and we wrote all the ideas related to each major topic on sticky notes. We put the sticky notes in the circle to organise the ideas and see what was coming out from the interviews.



## Our participants

In total, we interviewed 1,869 children and young people and 36 adults across six countries. The number of participants per country were:

- Bosnia and Herzegovina: 73 children
- Brazil: 120 children
- Indonesia: 28 children and 28 adults
- Nicaragua: 8 children and 8 adults
- Romania: 1,594 children
- Sierra Leone: 46 children.



## Ethics

We learnt that ethics are very important when conducting research, specifically consent and confidentiality. We were aware that the topics we were investigating were very sensitive, so we were very careful with the ethics of our study. Before we interviewed any child or young person, we read the consent form to them to make sure they understood it and then asked them to sign the form to confirm that they were willing to give us information for our research. We never used the real names of the children we interviewed, and we kept the information discussed amongst us, the child researchers. We also worked closely with our adult facilitators to get help in case an incident happened.

# Case study findings

## Brazil

Child researchers in Brazil found that the risk factors underlying discrimination-based violence in their community were racism against black and native people, socioeconomic inequalities, homophobia, gender inequality, and prejudiced attitudes. They found that the children and young people who are more likely to experience violence are mostly black.

## Indonesia

Evidence from Indonesia found that a victim of violence acts differently; they isolate themselves from others, change their looks, withdraw, and some even self-harm.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Child researchers in Bosnia and Herzegovina found that many teachers at school validate corporal punishment or they passively react to violence against children.

## Sierra Leone

Child researchers in Sierra Leone found that interviewees believed a lack of parental involvement and extreme poverty were the top variables leading to child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

## Romania

The results from child researchers in Romania indicated that children did not know all forms of sexual abuse, which is extremely important for victims to be able to report a case.

## Nicaragua

The child researchers in Nicaragua realised that parents continue to use violence to educate and discipline their children.





Two girl researchers in Brazil want to raise awareness on the discrimination-based violence affecting children and young people.

# Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Background

We are a group of 21 young people who asked ourselves, what are the biggest problems that affect our peers in our country. We participated in several workshops where we discussed these issues. Then, we agreed that one issue was violence, in general, and physical peer violence and psychological violence, in particular. During our first meeting, we created a questionnaire, which enabled us to ask our peers questions on the existence of these problems and hear their thoughts and experiences. We split into groups and surveyed our peers from six communities. We interviewed a total of 73 children and young people about two types of violence: physical and psychological. Through the results of our surveys, we saw that the problem was far worse than we initially thought.

A child researcher in Bosnia and Herzegovina points to some of the questions devised by their research team.



## Our findings

Based on our research, out of the 73 respondents, 36% said they were exposed to violence while 64% said they were not. Out of the 36% of respondents that were exposed to violence, 42% reported the violence they experienced and 58% did not.

One of our respondents said, "I wanted to get back at the aggressors by mistreating them". From this response, we can conclude that people who cause violence are likely a victim of violence themselves and want to return that bad feeling. People who are happy with themselves do not have the need to mistreat others.

During the research, we heard the following answers from two respondents:

“ I was a victim of physical violence. I often had nightmares because I dreamt of re-experiencing it every night. I would sweat, cry, and rarely be aggressive. I sometimes wanted to find myself in the skin of an aggressor to see what it feels like.”

Boy, 13 years old

“ I was psychologically abused by my parents. Before that I used to be quiet, calm, and introverted, but later I became aggressive and asked a psychiatrist for help.”

Girl, 14 years old

To the question of 'what is the cause of violent behaviour', the answers we received from our peers included the following: fights, provocations, proving a point, and the way they were raised.

To the question 'did you ever cause violence to someone', one boy said, "Others made fun of me, so I wanted to do the same to them". This shows us that the victim can become the aggressor.

Our respondents told us that there are a number of teachers in the communities where we conducted our research in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who react passively to violence because they think it is a way to teach the victim some manners. One teacher, while witnessing physical violence, said, "Someone should've already beaten him up, so he can come to his senses".

Through the interviews with our peers, we learnt that some of the causes of violence include: over-employment of parents, social and economic status, and outdated and unadjusted parenting styles for today's generations.

During our research, we realised that violence is actually a serious problem and has sadly become an everyday thing for some of our peers. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, violence is not often talked about as a problem that many children and young people face daily. A massive problem reported was the lack of communication between parents and children. Respondents said that they do not talk to their parents about the problems they face every day. It was also not talked about at school. In 'class community' classes, teachers presented the things they prepared and did not pay attention to violence unless there was a fight. Violence was mostly ignored due to fear; the sense of inferiority, because people avoid talking to professionals (e.g. educators, social workers), and some people protect their friends who are oppressors. The problem of not reporting violence exists because people were scared to report it but also because some people think it is not that damaging.

The most common type of violence reported was psychological violence, which is a big problem because there are no visible signs of violence on a victim, but the consequences are harmful. When it comes to physical violence, we have visible traces of violence that can be spotted so we can

try and help the victim. We can help them by talking to them or even by talking to the aggressor. It is necessary to have educational classes for young people and improve the security in schools. Teachers, pedagogues, and principals need to pay more attention to this problem. Adults can help children way more than children can help themselves. They have a higher authority and more possibilities through which they can solve different problems, such as violence. Adults can organise educational lectures, interesting workshops, and make classes in which we could talk about violence. Children we interviewed had different ideas on how to stop violence, some of them included: educational classes for parents and children, more interactions with people who are victims, more security and control in schools, and heavier punishments for aggressors (for instance, community service work). Parents should talk more with their children about violence, control their children, and be more nurturing.

## Conclusion

With this research we have concluded that ignoring violence is not solving the problem, but it is actually making it worse. One child said, "If violence starts being ignored, and if we go over things that are seemingly harmless, we will start ignoring much more serious problems". Most of our peers had a strong wish to help the victim; however, they felt like they could not do much. Also, they thought that adults were more capable to help, but they did not do much to do so. Violence is not the answer! We will not solve our problems by giving other people problems. We want to live happily in a country without violence.

# Brazil

## Background

We are members of the Young People Monitoring Public Policy (MJPOP), which is a movement that aims to open spaces for children, young people, and youth to engage in social accountability mechanisms and participate in public policy debates. We are particularly interested in addressing the issues of violence and discrimination that affect us. We, as young researchers, discussed and prioritised different issues to study. We identified violence and discrimination as key issues that were closely connected to and, in most cases, perpetrated with impunity against marginalised children and young people. We considered how discrimination and violence disproportionately affected children and young people from impoverished, Black, and vulnerable families. Through this research, we explored how inequality based on various identities perpetuated violence against children in our community.

## Our findings

Once we finished the interviews, the data was accounted for and analysed by us. The thing that most caught our attention was the fact that many children feel discriminated against due to different issues.

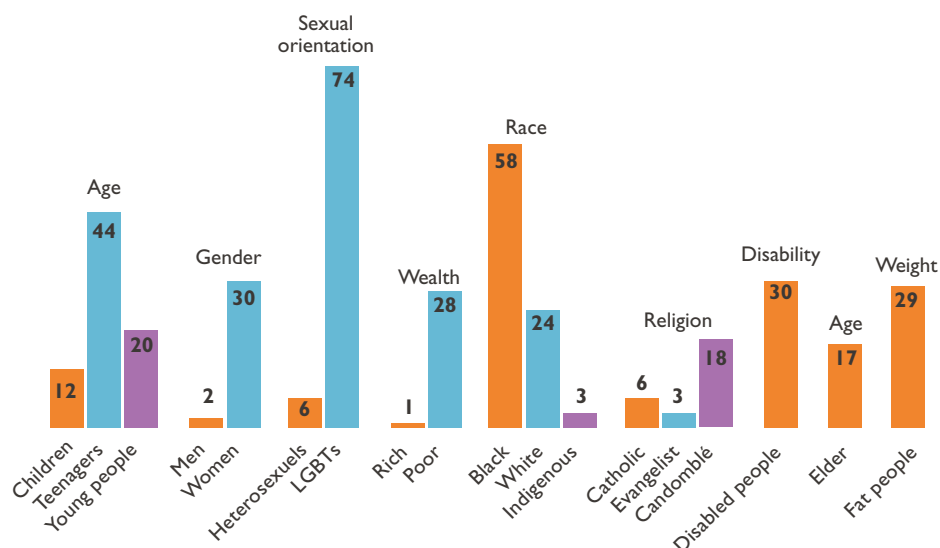
The graphic below shows all the answers.

The top six reasons they identified included:

- sexuality (being LGBT)
- race (i.e. skin colour or physical characteristics associated with certain races e.g. Black person)
- age (adolescence)
- gender (female)
- disability (a person with special needs)
- body shaming (a fat person).

While ranking discrimination by categories, children named groups of people they believed were marginalised and voted for multiple issues at the same time. These results are somewhat frightening, and we should be concerned with these findings.

**Graph 1. Responses from interviewees ranking discrimination by marginalised group (% of total responses)**







Child researchers in Brazil wrote down their observations on sticky notes and organised their thoughts on a flipchart.

These responses show that many children and young people suffered from or witnessed discrimination at school, and this is intolerable. Moreover, our research showed that the main target of discriminatory attitudes were the LGBT children who could not exercise their freedom, their rights, or express themselves as they were being increasingly deprived of respect and protection.

If teenagers are LGBT, poor, and Black, then things only get worse as they suffer twice as much because of the discrimination against their skin colour as well as their sexuality, as LGBT people are often despised. In our society, there is still a lot of toxic masculinity, and often, families do not

accept children and young people's choices as they fear that society will mistreat them. There have been many cases where LGBT people have been beaten, and there is still a saying that, "When he is beaten, he becomes a man".

Our research found that many children and young people suffered from or witnessed discrimination based on racism. For example, young people on our research team have suffered heavily from racial discrimination, and through these interviews we saw that many other children and young people in our community experienced the same type of discrimination, mainly due to their skin colour or because they have Afro-characteristics, such as a black,

curly hair or dreads. We discovered that racism also affected children's ability to participate as the opportunities were not the same for everyone. For instance, our analysis showed that inequality was very high, and, as a result, a child, who is poor and Black, will not have the same opportunities as a white, wealthy child, as they will be discriminated against and judged.

When interviewing girls, we found that they suffered from gender inequality. One of the reasons was due to the notion that the female gender is 'fragile'. There was also a perception that girls could not do the same things as boys or that girls should not do the same things as boys because it is less 'feminine'. Machismo is still very present in Brazil as the simple fact of saying that playing football is for boys or tidying up the house is a girl's job. Girls also felt insecure about going out alone at night or wearing tight clothes for fear of being harassed by boys. These attitudes end up affecting girls' right to participate. Moreover, we found that inequality increased when girls were poor, Black, and LGBT as they suffered a lot of discrimination and isolation.

Another factor that affected children and young people on a daily basis was the stereotype of beauty and societal imposition of physical standards, which made people who do not fit those ideals feel low self-esteem and excluded, especially those who were overweight or had a disability.

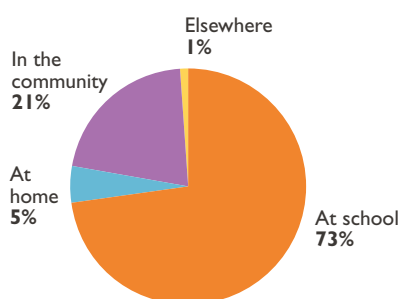
When we asked children where discrimination occurred, they reported that nearly three-quarters of cases happened at school. This is appalling as school is a place where everyone should feel comfortable, safe, and welcomed. See the graph below for other places where children and young people reported feeling discrimination. The children and young people we interviewed told us that 31% of the violence they experienced was



Child researchers in Brazil meet to analyse the data collected from interviews.

triggered by racism, and, in some cases, started at home. Nearly 40% of the children said that they had suffered discrimination in their own home or witnessed situations of discrimination.

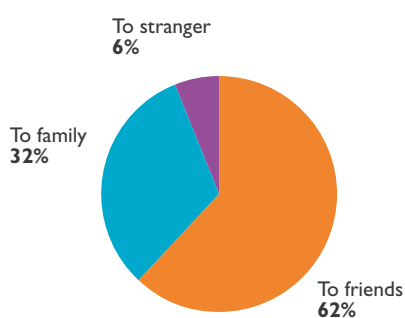
**Graph 2. Responses from interviewees ranking discrimination by location**



Our research found that almost half of the interviewees were victims of discrimination. They reported that they were unable to share their emotions or situations with anyone, which could lead to bad psychological consequences

or negative feelings of revenge. This is a worrying fact as many children and young people had no one to go to or people to talk to about their problems. The data revealed that when children or young people experienced discrimination, they were twice as likely to speak to a friend instead of a family member.

**Graph 3. Responses from interviewees of reporting acts of discrimination**



## Conclusion

We found that the key factors underlying discrimination and violence in our community were racism against Black people, socioeconomic inequalities, homophobia, gender inequality, and prejudiced attitudes towards people who were perceived to be different, including those who had a disability or were overweight. We found that LGBT and Black children and young people were more likely to experience violence because they were harassed based on their skin colour, hair texture, or facial features.

This data is very important to us and can be used as a foundation to work, fight, and pursue a better situation for all children and young people, so that we do not have to report acts of discrimination and violence because there will be no more.

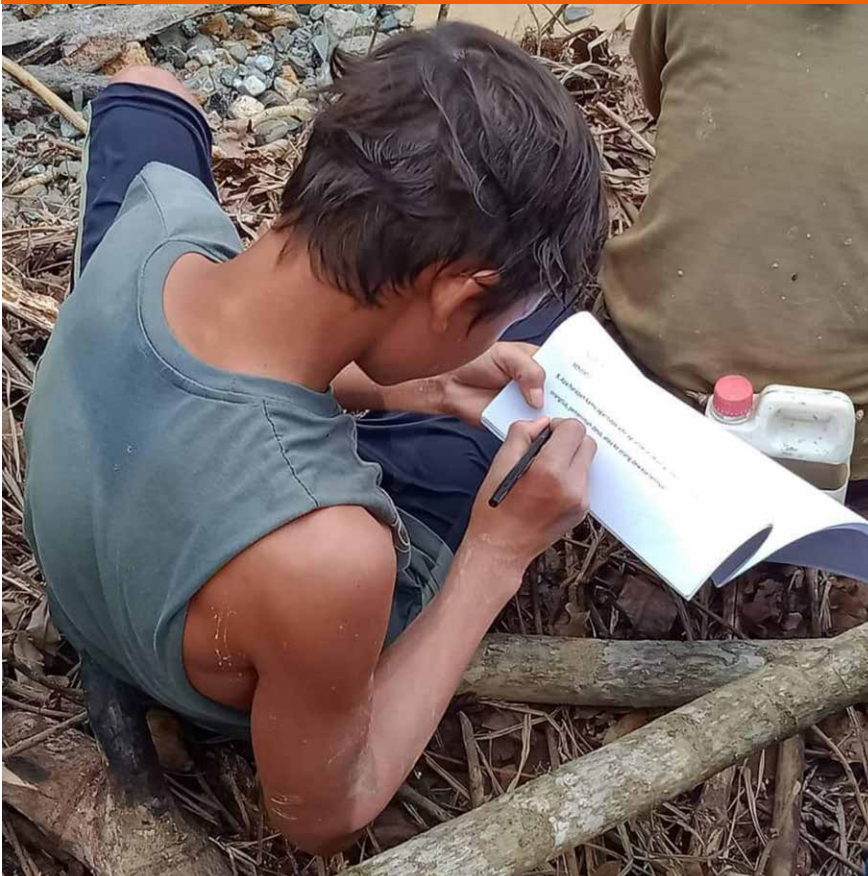


# Indonesia

## Background

We decided to research on the issue of violence against children. The reason we chose this topic was because many parents from our village are angry, and they often yell and curse at children. These reactions can disturb children and being yelled at has a negative impact on children's mentality. Due to this, children may become shy and insecure with their friends and their environment, be afraid or doubtful, and some may not respect their parents. Sometimes children may reciprocate these responses because they feel unappreciated.

We conducted interviews with participants in their homes. After we interviewed them, we wrote down their responses in an information book. Our experience doing field interviews was good, and we felt happy because our friends were people who were not easily discouraged, even though the obstacles were heavy, and they remained enthusiastic. The information we received was that violence is still perpetrated by parents. We also learnt that sometimes children also like to make parents angry. We plan to share our findings with other people, including the village government, the community, and the school.



A child respondent fills out a questionnaire in Indonesia

## Our findings

Our first finding was that emotional violence made children and young people feel worthless. The respondents from our village who reported experiencing emotional violence told us that it made them feel:

- sad
- hurt
- shy
- unhappy
- worthless
- upset
- guilty
- angry
- annoyed
- emotional/tearful.

All the children we interviewed felt sad, and some of them felt annoyed, hurt, embarrassed, guilty, or unworthy because they experienced an emotional shock to the violence committed. After the parents cursed and shouted at them, the majority of the children reported that they would first apologise, keep quiet, and/or cry, then they followed their parent's instructions, and afterwards they would do homework that had not been completed.



Child researchers in Indonesia conduct an interview with a mother as part of their fieldwork.

Our second finding was that children were scolded and insulted mostly for not obeying their parents' orders. The most frequent curse words children heard from their parents were:

- lawless child
- useless future
- you lazy child
- only knows about eating
- monkey's kid
- just like monkey
- lazy child
- what a joke
- stupid.

Children said their parents got angry enough to curse and yell for:

- resisting parents' orders
- getting home late in the evening
- not listening to parents' advice
- being lazy
- not doing homework
- not studying.

When we asked the parents the same question, they said they only cursed or yelled:

- when their child did not answer calls from them
- when their child played without considering the time and came home late at night

- to educate their child so that they would not be naughty and would be afraid and respectful of their parents
- for disobedience or naughtiness.

Interviews revealed that parents usually cursed and shouted at their biological children, boys, and other naughty children. Only one parent reportedly did not curse or yell at their child when angry.

When we talked to the village government and parents, they said:

“It's a tradition that parents [are] often angry and say rude things. For example, I'm high-pitched, and it is my habit, but I mean good. We will try to no longer be high-pitched; children will also learn not to be high-pitched.”

Acting head of Wologai village

“It's natural to be angry, as long as you don't say something dirty. Our children often do things that are not very important. [Being] loud [is a] means to remind. Thank you to the children who have done the research so we are reminded and should be reciprocated.”

Parent

Our third finding was that parents felt sad, guilty, and sorry after cursing and yelling at children. They said they talked to the children and motivated them so that it [the activity that made the parents angry] would not happen again. When we asked parents how they could react when angry, rather than by cursing and yelling at the child, they said they could:

- give advice
- be more understanding
- invite children to change their behaviour
- call and give advice and examples of good behaviours
- use a personal approach
- embrace and persuade them to do positive activities
- encourage them to follow the will of parents and not be stubborn.

After making a mistake, children hoped to:

- be forgiven
- be hugged by parents
- do good to parents
- not be scolded by parents
- not be beaten.

## Recommendations

For parents:

- Reduce the cursing and yelling at children in anger.
- Forgive children when they make mistakes, so no events happen that cause their children to be sad, hurt, emotional, tearful, embarrassed, upset, or feel worthless.

For children:

- Reduce harsh words to friends, for example, cursing and yelling.
- Obey your parents when asked to do positive activities (e.g. homework, spiritual, school).



# Nicaragua

## Background

Our research team reflected on the problems and types of violence that children and young people face in our community and how they can be resolved so it does not continue. Our research team consisted of six young people in one community and four in another. During the training on 'Becoming Researchers' methodology, we learnt the key steps required to carry out research. Oratory, writing, and photography techniques were also addressed, and from the beginning, we were motivated to feel like a real research team. After the workshop, we prepared our work plan, organised what we had to do, set dates of when we were going to do it, and assigned responsibilities for each activity and what we needed to finish the project. We prepared a set of questions, five for mothers and five for teenagers. The people we interviewed shared their opinions and recommendations so that this violence does not continue. They supported us a lot because they were willing to answer what we asked them.

## Our findings

We conducted two investigations, one on family abuse towards young people between the ages 14 of 17, in Las Gavetas community, and the second research focused on girls and boys ages 2 to 8 years in Las Tablas community.

The main objective of the research conducted in Las Gavetas was to know the reasons why mothers and fathers use violence as a way to 'correct' their daughters and sons. We were also interested in:

- identifying the causes of this violence
- knowing the opinions of mothers, fathers, and children regarding abuse
- presenting proposals on how to harmonise relationships in families to stop violence against children and young people.

We asked mothers the question, **“As a mother, why do you think parents mistreat their teenage children?”**

Most of the answers said this happened because children were disobedient; they did not like going to school; they always had the cell phone in their hand; they left without permission; they arrived home at dawn; and they used vices, such as smoking, alcohol, or even drugs. They also said that this happened when there is not good communication, when the children did not accept the advice, due to the bad company of lazy friends, or because they did not help at home at all.

When we asked them, “Do you think the use of abuse is a way to correct a teenage son?” Several respondents said no because abuse only leads to violence, and there are ways to correct

a child without the need for abuse, such as applying rules at home. Then, when we asked the mothers about the consequences of abuse on adolescents, most respondents gave the following examples:

- loss of love and/or respect
- loss of child (e.g. the teenager leaves the house to get away from the abuse)
- the child turns to bad habits/vices (e.g. drinking, smoking, drugs)
- the child experiences low self-esteem
- loss of communication between parents and children
- the child feels fear, rejection, or can even take their own lives.

When we asked, **“What ways do you use to correct your teenage children?”** Answers included:

- punishing them
- taking away their motorcycle keys or cell phones
- talking to them and providing examples of the bad things that happened to someone else so that it doesn't happen to them
- disciplining them without shouting
- communicating with confidence
- calling attention to the issue in private
- speaking civilly when correcting the child
- listening to the child and encouraging good communication.

As for the question, **“How should your teenager behave to avoid abuse?”** They answered:

- be obedient
- be a studious worker
- only use their cell phone when necessary
- be responsible outside the home
- act well educated
- do not respond rudely
- live Christian values
- behave well in society.

After interviewing the mothers, we spoke with their children. Our first question was **“What are the reasons parents mistreat their teenage children?”** Most responded that this happened:

- when they disobeyed or did what they wanted
- because their parents always wanted them to stay home and not go out (e.g. to have fun at a party or play baseball or soccer)
- because their parents did not like them spending money on their mobile plans
- because they did not want them to have friends

- because they sometimes made decisions that they knew they should not
- when they used vices (e.g. alcohol, smoking, or excessive phone use)
- when there was a bad relationship between the parents and the child
- when they misbehaved
- when they did not take advice
- when love is lacking towards their parents.

Young people responded to, **“How should this form of treatment be corrected?”** with the following suggestions:

- through communication
- through trust
- through love and respect
- by providing love
- by giving positive verbal advice that makes the child feel good to receive
- by correcting bad habits
- by the children not getting together with bad company.

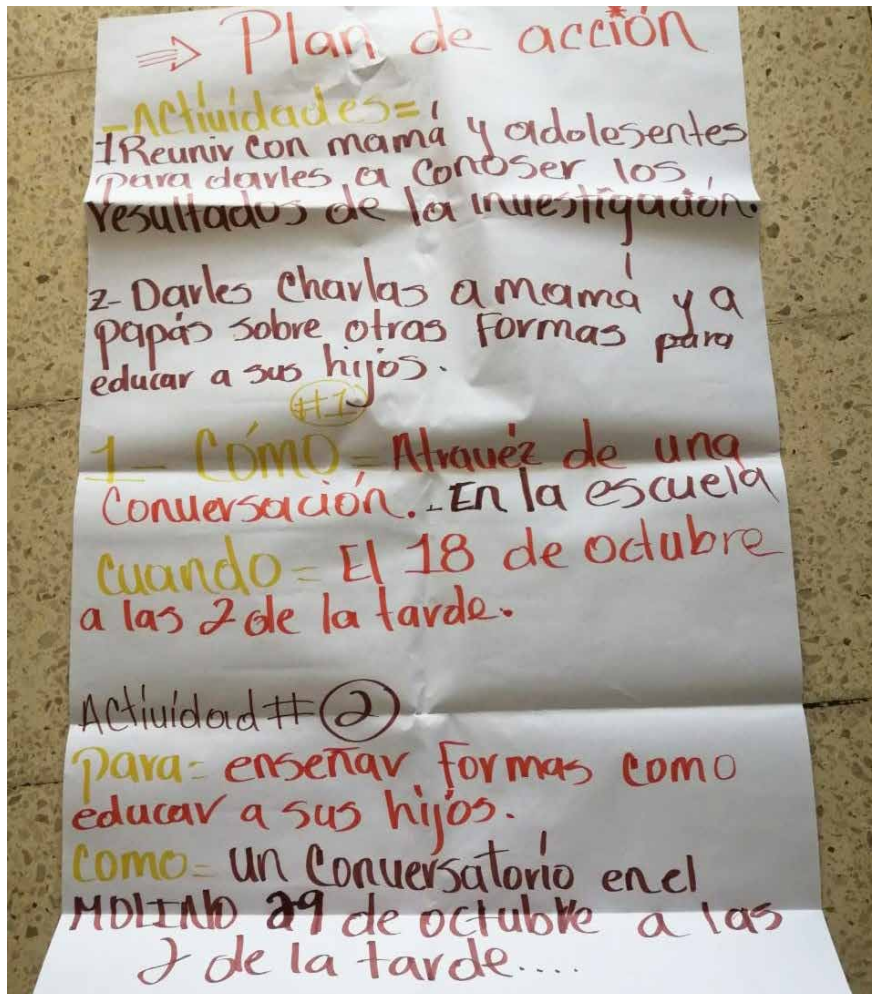
When we asked, **“What are the consequences of the abuse?”** The interviewees reported that:

- the love they felt for their parents goes away because they do not want to be around someone who mistreats them
- family division happens
- they seek refuge or love in the streets
- there was a loss of trust and respect
- they lost interest in things
- they run away from home
- they take the wrong path
- they find refuge in vices/gangs and
- some even commit suicide.

**The majority** responded that it was because the parents had suffered abuse in their childhood and they only knew how to educate their children in the same violent way.



Child researchers in Nicaragua prepare the questions to be asked to the research participants.



Child researchers in Nicaragua use a flip-chart to outline their action plan.

In terms of our second investigation in Las Tablas community, we focused on family abuse towards younger children between 2 to 8 years old. We wanted to learn more about why parents who care for their children beat them to correct them. Our main objective was to analyse the causes and consequences of this violence, so we were aware of what actions must be done to stop parents from mistreating their children. We interviewed three mothers in the community.

When we asked the interviewees, "Why do fathers and mothers mistreat their children?" The majority responded that it was because the parents had suffered abuse in their childhood and they only knew how to educate their children in the same violent way. They agreed that 'parenting with tenderness', which is a

World Vision initiative, is the best way to educate children, but that not all parents know how to do that. Parents also mentioned that when a child suffer from violence and abuse, there is a noticeable shift towards aggressive behaviour by the young abuse victims, major changes in their behaviour, as well as changes in the children's relationships with others.

As the mothers we spoke to were aware of the negative consequences of using violence towards children, we asked them, "What advice would you give to mothers who beat or yell at their children?" They said that it is important for parents to discipline and educate their children without hitting or shouting, and that when children are raised to be confident, loved, feel

secure, then we can stop the cycle of violence.

## Conclusion

Our research team concluded that child abuse is a reality that we live with and see every day, so there are very serious, precise, and concise decisions, with the aim of protecting the happiness of and ensuring a satisfactory life for all children, that need to be made. It is clear that both groups we interviewed, parents and children, knew that being abusive was not good. We could see from their responses that they were aware that by not using hurtful words to talk to each other and making commitments (e.g. obeying their parents, not keeping bad company), they could avoid unfortunate situations, such as those mentioned by the teenaged interviewees, of 'grabbing the wrong path', 'running away from home', etc. Although neither group recognised the abuse occurring in their own homes, their answers showed that the subjects' parents were abusive. However, both the teenagers and mothers interviewed were apparently willing to change in order to improve their relationships.

Through the interviews we conducted in Las Tablas, we realised that parents continue to use violence to educate and discipline their children, despite the fact there are different techniques and activities that have been promoted to end abuse and protect Nicaraguan children. This shows that other techniques are needed to eliminate violence against children. Parents recognised the importance of 'parenting with tenderness' but did not use it in their homes with their children. We must all support this initiative to better prepare parents to raise their children and propose new activities that will reach the mind and heart of parents.

# Romania

## Background

We are 12 children from WV Romania's Children's Consultative Council who organised an online child-led survey on sexual violence against children. This survey was filled out by 1,594 children between the ages of 8 to 18 years old, but most responses came from high school age students. Respondents included both girls (1,083) and boys (511). The questionnaire was completed between December 2019 and January 2020 by children originating from 27 (of the 41) counties in Romania, including the capital, Bucharest. Respondents originated predominantly from Dolj, Valcea, Vaslui, Cluj, Iasi, Buzau, and Ialomita. Our survey had 14 questions aiming to collect information about children and young people's level of awareness on child sexual abuse and assess their knowledge.

## Our findings

We found that children did not know all the forms of sexual abuse:



**4 out of 5** children did not know that sexual intercourse without actual penetration is a form of sexual abuse.



**7 out of 10** children did not consider an abuser partially or totally removing their clothes in front of a child to be a form of sexual abuse.



**7 out of 10** children did not know that forcing children to look at images and/or films with sexually explicit content is a form of sexual abuse.



**3 out of 5** children did not know that making a child pretend to touch an abuser's intimate body parts is a form of sexual abuse.



**3 out of 5** children did not know that making a child pretend to take his/her clothes off (partially or completely) is a form of sexual abuse.



**3 out of 5** children did not know that pressing a child to have sexual intercourse, even without penetration, is a form of sexual abuse.



**1 out of 2** children did not know that an abuser touching intimate parts of their own body in front of the child is a form of sexual abuse.



**2 out of 5** children did not know that touching a child's intimate parts is a form of sexual abuse.



The younger children had a lower level of awareness and were less aware of forms of violence. This is an issue because if children are not aware of what violence is, they are vulnerable to it and might not understand what is happening to them. Therefore, they may not report these cases.

When we asked where children learnt about sexual violence and abuse, they answered:

- 80% of the child participants talked to their parents about sexual abuse.
- Parents talked to their children about sexual violence only after children turn 11.
- Children also acquired information from other sources: 1/3 on the Internet, including porn sites, and 1/7 from mass-media (TV, printing, radio).
- The Internet was the second source of information for children over 11, while children ages 8 to 10 years old were informed by friends.

Children said that when abuse happened (i.e. they were cognisant of a sexual abuse situation)

- only 3 in 5 children would talk to their parents
- only 1 in 2 children would call the police
- only 1 in 5 children would call Child Welfare Services.

The survey found that the frequency of sexual abuse amongst children was:

- 1 in 6 children knew friends or peers who were sexually abused
- over 80% were girls
- 46% were between the ages of 14 to 18 years old, with 35% of the abused children below the age 14.

Survey respondents reported that after the abuse:

- only 2 in 5 children told their parents
- only 3 in 10 abused children reported the case to police
- 1 in 5 only told their friends.



Child researchers in Romania sit together as they work to analyse the key emerging issues from their interviews.

## Conclusion

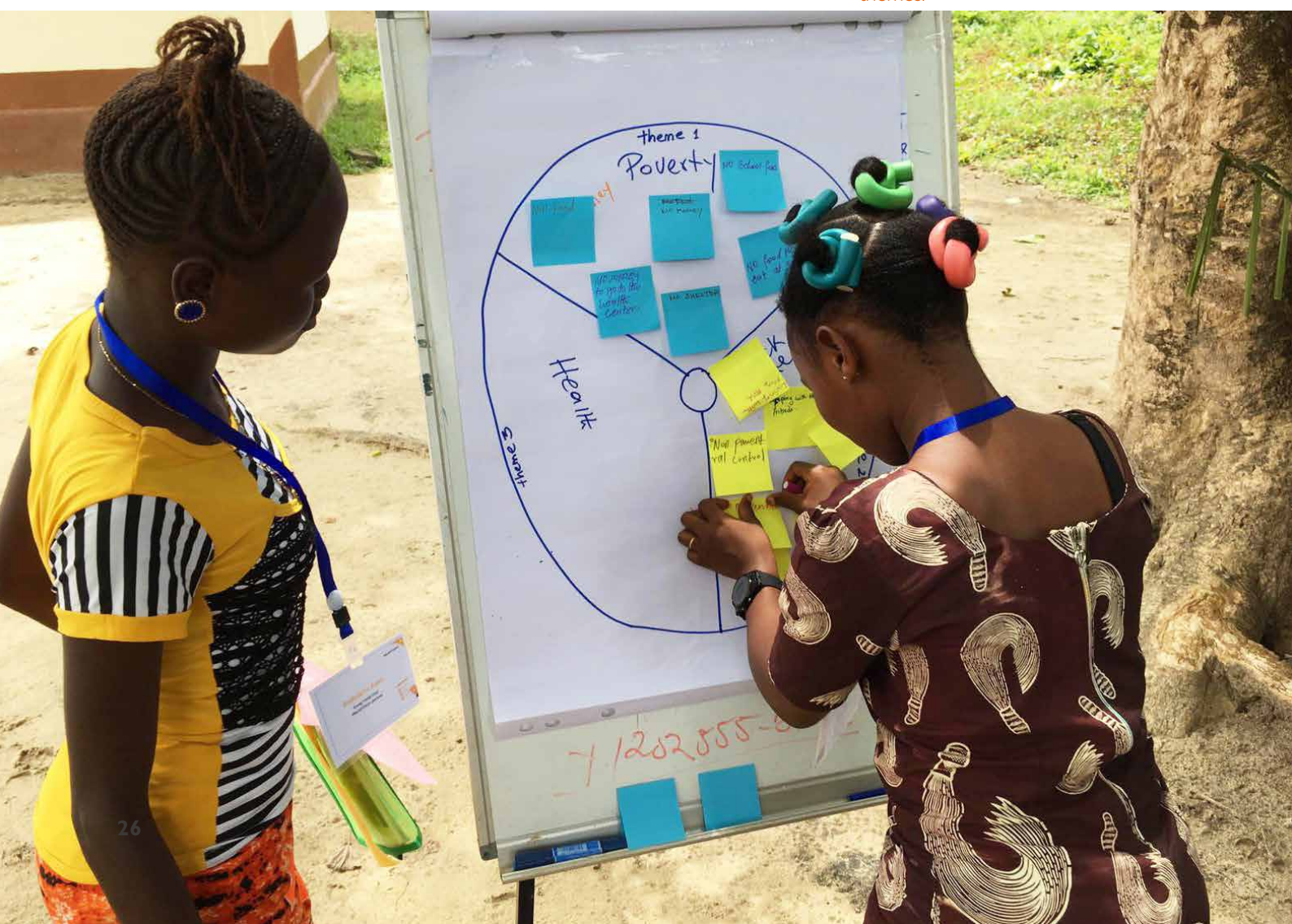
These results indicated that children did not know all forms of sexual abuse, which is extremely important for victims to be able to report a case. Also, children were reluctant to talk to parents and report the case to police or child welfare authorities. Based on the children's responses, we concluded:

- Talking about sexual violence is taboo: parents do not talk to children, and children do not report cases to parents, authorities, or police.
- Children do not know all forms of sexual abuse or what is considered sexual abuse.
- The sources of information children used provide incomplete or incorrect information, making children vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- When abused, children were reluctant to tell their parents about the abuse, call child welfare services, or report the case to police.
- 1 in 6 children knew friends or peers who were sexually abused.



**The younger children had a lower level of awareness and were less aware of forms of violence. This is an issue because if children are not aware of what violence is, they are vulnerable to it and might not understand what is happening to them. Therefore, they may not report these cases.**

A child researcher in Sierra Leone organises their data on stick notes into themes.





## Our findings

We interviewed 18 pregnant girls and one girl who recently gave birth. They reported that their parents did not treat them well because they became pregnant, and 13 of them told us that they were socially isolated by family and friends. They said they got pregnant because their parents/caregivers did not give them enough food, good clothes, drove them from the family house, and/or sang songs for them, like 'before I marry Okada man (commercial bike rider) let me marry teacher'. Of our interviewees, 16 reported that their health was not good as they experienced body pain, headache, vomiting, and loss of appetite. Seventeen of them believed teenage pregnancy was a problem because it led to them dropping out of school, exposed them to surgical operations, and made them unhappy or ashamed in their community. Only five of the girls were married. Our findings from these interviews are divided into the three main themes: lack of parental care, health, and poverty.

### Lack of parental care

Many of the interviewees said that their caregivers, such as aunts, uncles, and other relatives they stayed with, could not provide for their basic needs, including adequate food to eat at home, school fees, giving them lunch or transport to take to school, learning materials, decent clothes, and/or a place to sleep.

Therefore, they decided to fall in love with a man who could afford to take care of some of those basic needs, which their caregivers were not meeting. According to six of the young people interviewed, money sent to their caregivers by other family members for their maintenance was not spent on them. Most of the children who narrated these stories had either lost one or both parents and were staying with stepparents or other relatives.

According to one of the teenage girls, her aunt used starvation as a weapon of punishment whenever she did something that made her aunt angry.

“With no other relative around to feed me, I was forced to find a boyfriend to provide food for me so that I would not starve to death. The way my aunt treated me could be attributed to my present status (i.e. pregnancy).”

Girl, 17 years old

One of the pregnant teenage girls we interviewed said that her parents abandoned her after she had to repeat Junior Secondary School twice.

“My parents said that they did not have the money for my education, and therefore, I struggled to find money for myself and to take care of my schooling. The only option I had was to find a boyfriend who could support me to continue my education. As the boyfriend was supporting my schooling, he always asked me to sleep with him. Sleeping with my boyfriend caused my early pregnancy.”

Girl, 16 years old

Lack of control and supervision by parents were partially responsible for these teenage pregnancies. According to the teenage girls we interviewed, nine of them said their parents/caretakers never monitored their movements or the friends they had, “As young and inexperienced girls with no proper guidance from the parents/relatives, we just followed our peers wherever they asked us to go and did whatever they asked us to do”, said one of the girls we interviewed. They thought they were enjoying their lives, not knowing that they were destroying their futures. Today most of the girls regretted their actions because their boyfriends abandoned them after impregnating them.



Child researchers in Sierra Leone gather to start analysing the data from the interviews.

## Health

Data from our interviews told us that teenage pregnancy in our town also resulted from the lack of medical facilities. This is because most of the community health centres have limited or no medicine, and untrained health personnel manage some centres. Contraceptive services are not always available, and when they are, they are often done poorly, which can result in negative side effects. One teenage girl said:

“When I go to the health centre the doctor / nurse tell me that there is not enough medicine in the hospital. In addition, when I tell my parents to give me money to go and take the family planning, both of them refuse.”

Girl, 17 years old

Again, most of the teenagers we interviewed said they were not willing to take contraceptives, mainly because they feared the bad side effects of the treatment, but five of the interviewees reported that they were completely unaware of contraceptive services before their pregnancies. Limited availability of health services and a lack of knowledge about potential contraception also played a role in these girls' pregnancies.

## Poverty

Poverty stood out as another major root cause for teenage pregnancy in our town. Most of the children interviewed said that their parents could not afford basic household necessities for them. For instance, some families could not afford to provide adequate food for their children every day. Because of hunger, children were forced to make bad decisions (e.g. sleeping with their boyfriend) just to survive. Five of the children interviewed said sometimes their households would not cook meals for two or three days

because of a lack of money and/or food.

In addition, 12 of the teenagers reported that their parents could not afford breakfasts, transport, lunches, schoolbooks, uniforms, and/or shoes for school. Also, parents did not have money to pay medical bills or buy their children new clothes. In a bid to satisfy some of these basic needs, teenage girls were encouraged to get boyfriends who could fully or partially satisfy their needs. In the process of satisfying the boyfriend in return for providing these necessities, they got pregnant. One teenage girl noted:

“Every morning I go to school without money to buy food at school, and I always saw my peers buying food and eating during lunch. Therefore, I heard no option but to find a boyfriend who could give me some money to buy food at school during lunch. Visiting my boyfriend every day to give me money to buy food at school resulted in my pregnancy.”

Girl, 15 years old

From the data we collected and analysed, we concluded that teenage pregnancy is destroying our community as it leads to high teenage mortality, increased health issues, and community poverty. It was also clear that teenage pregnancy could reduce respect and increase school dropout rate amongst teenage girls. For girl children to attain their full potential, we concluded that it is important to give more support to girl children and not discriminate or isolate them from boys.

## Recommendations

- Community people, especially parents, should always advise girl children on healthy behaviours and good decisions.
- Community people need to encourage their children by providing basic needs for them.
- Community people should properly care for their girls by encouraging them to use contraceptives and preventives.
- Community people should be trained on the importance of girls.
- Chiefs and/or local authorities in the community should formulate and enforce bylaws to reduce teenage pregnancy.
- World Vision can support girls with school materials, like books, uniforms, shoes, and other learning materials.
- World Vision can also support teenage girls with food, shelter, and clothes.
- Teenage pregnancy must be prevented by the government health sector.
- The government should give greater attention to girls.
- The government should provide free affordable medicines and contraceptives services for all girls.
- Trained and qualified nurses should be motivated to deliver quality service for young girls.

**For girl children to attain their full potential, we concluded that it is important to give more support to girl children and not discriminate or isolate them from boys.**

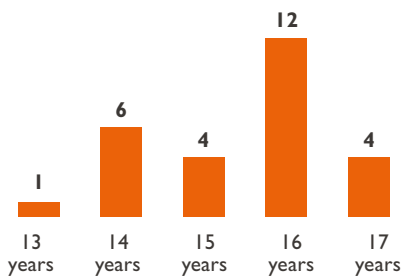




## Our findings: Child marriage in Koribondo

We conducted a second study on the topic of child marriage. We asked 27 child wives, between 13 to 17 years old, five key research questions. All the girls interviewed had one or more child.

**Graph 4. Age range of respondents in the child marriage research study**



Our first objective was to discover the causes of child marriage. Interviewees told us that the main reasons were:

- family and community pressure
- child labour (too much domestic work at home and on farm)
- poverty (no food, clothes, money to pay school fees, medical facilities)
- to take care of parents
- death of a parent
- pregnancy
- thinking that marriage was the only solution to the future.

Our second objective was to explore whether the girls were forced to get married. More than half the girls we interviewed (15) said they were forced to marry by parents or relatives. We also wanted to understand girls' perceptions on child marriage. Our research found that girls believed that child marriage was a problem because it could cause early death, fistulas, poor health, lack of respect, and increased poverty. Only three girls said that child marriage was not a problem. Less than half of the child wives (12) said their husbands took good care of them by providing food, helping with domestic work, buying clothes, encouraging them with words, and/or providing for their parents. The rest reported that their husbands did not care for them.

Lastly we wanted to know the girls' feelings about getting married and stopping going to school. Nearly all (26) of them were unhappy and sad to be married and staying at home. Our interviews showed that they were gloomy because:

- they were not going to get to go back to school again
- they did not have enough food to eat
- their husband cared little for them
- they felt ashamed to have child at early age
- many other domestic reasons had made them unhappy.

Only one of the married girls was happy as she thought her marriage was the only solution to her life's problems.



Child researchers in Sierra Leone select their research topic using photographs to debate and agree on the main issues.

# Annexes



## Toolkit: Becoming Researchers: A simple guide for children and young people who want to carry out social research

This guide has been written to support children and young people, aged 12 to 18, to conduct their own research projects. To download it, please click the link below

<https://www.wvi.org/child-participation/publication/becoming-researchers-simple-guide-children-and-young-people-who-want>

## Consent form

**Information and consent form**

Dear Participant

We are doing a research project to explore children's thoughts about violence against children. We would like to talk to you, so we can learn from your ideas and experiences and how we can improve children's lives and stop violence against children.

The participation in this research is voluntary and you are free not to take part. You are also free to withdraw from the interview at any time if you don't feel comfortable. We promise you to keep the information confidential and we will include any names in our report.

If you want to participate in this research project, please fill out and sign this form.

☐ I understand the information given about this research

☐ I agree to participate and to share my experiences and views

☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary

☐ I understand that I am free to opt out at any time

☐ I am OK to have the conversation recorded

☐ I understand that my name and contact details will not be mentioned in any report

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

My age is \_\_\_\_\_

My signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## To-do-list Action Plan tool

OUR ACTION PLAN			
ACTION	WHAT	HOW	WHEN
1-			
2-			
3-			







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