Violence Against Children in Schools and Communities

Voices of Ugandan Children and Caregivers
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the children of Uganda whose experience of childhood depends on what you and I do today, tomorrow and the day after. They are waiting to hold our hand, to show us what it could be like, if only we will listen and learn.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, our gratitude goes to the children and care givers who were the subjects for this report. Courageously, they chose to speak-out, to articulate controversial points of view, to put themselves on the line. Their generosity and their willingness to share painful experiences made this work possible. To them and countless unheard voices, we owe action.

Edwin Agaba – Team Leader- Children Reachout
This report examines the stories and opinions of 1500 children and 600 caregivers from two districts in Uganda. We used questionnaires, focus group discussions, narrative role plays, interviews of children and caregivers in sharing their experiences and perspectives on violence against children. Children were asked about their experiences of the violence used against them: how the violence manifests, how often it occurs, who commit it, how it makes them feel, how they react, and what they believe should be done to prevent it. Caregivers were asked about their perspective of violence against children: how they understand the term “violence against children,” how caregivers in their communities punish children, how they themselves punish children, how they rationalize the types of punishment they use, and what they believe should be done to prevent violence against children.

In overwhelming numbers, children described the rampant use of violence against them. More than 98 percent of children reported experiencing physical or emotional violence. For each form of violence, a significant percentage of children reported experiencing the violence at least once a week or more.

Children described violence occurring at home, as well as at school. At home, the father and stepmother perpetrated the violence most often, whereas at school older students and teachers were named most frequently. While almost all children experienced common forms of violence (e.g., caning and slapping), the predominant manifestation of the violence depended on the sex, age, and social status of the child. For example, of all the children consulted in this study, older boys were more likely to experience severe physical violence, and older girls were more likely to experience sexual violence.
Children expressed feeling intense anger (66.7 percent), fear (65.9 percent), and shame (56.6 percent) when violence was committed against them. A considerable number of children shared transitional thoughts of suicide and revenge, or admitted to displacing their anger on younger children. Many children reported that their experiences of violence shaped their beliefs about themselves and some children discussed how experiencing violence undermined their trust in adults and confidence in themselves. However, these feelings did not render children passive, as many became active protagonists seeking a resolution to their situation. For example, 62.3 percent of the children explained that when they experienced violence they sought help from other adults, and 54.7 percent described crying loudly to attract attention or hiding to avoid the immediate violence. Only one in five, mostly younger children, said they did nothing when violence was committed against them.

When asked what should be done to prevent violence against children, most children preferred caution and sensitivity. They urged for a non-punitive response, such as engaging parents (79.4 percent) and teachers (73.9 percent) in a dialogue about how to relate more equitably with children. They suggested engaging a broad cross section of adults in a similar dialogue through community-wide actions. They recommended the creation of local response mechanisms that would meet the needs of children when violence was perpetrated against them. Relatively fewer children suggested the involvement of police (56.9 percent).

Most caregivers (90 percent) agreed that in their communities, children were deliberately beaten, shouted at, and denied food or basic needs, yet they hesitated to label these acts as “violence.” They preferred the word “punishment,” explaining how caregivers use these acts to guide children. The adults conceptualized punishment as moderate and acceptable acts and described violence as excessive and inappropriate punishments, which they preferred calling “mistreatment.” Although many adults insisted that they knew the difference between punishing a child and mistreating a child, almost half (46.8 percent) said they would withdraw basic needs from a child as a form of punishment. Thirty-seven percent of caregivers said that children in their communities were “frequently mistreated,” and a further 55.1 percent said that children were “sometimes mistreated.”

Most caregivers (91.3 percent) described using a combination of physical and emotional punishment to control children, most commonly caning, shouting, and assigning physical work (above and beyond normal chores). When compared to reports from children, caregivers consistently under-reported the extent of punishment they inflicted on children (with the exception of caning and glaring). Many caregivers discounted any incidents of shouting, pinching, or slapping, not even considering them punishment.

When asked why they punished children, many caregivers claimed that they did it to make children compliant, obedient, and respectful of traditions. However, many caregivers doubted whether their current methods of punishment would ensure this outcome. Although 87.9 percent of adults said they punished children to guide them on how to behave, only 32.6 percent firmly believed that the punishment would change the child’s behavior.
When asked why they punished children, many caregivers claimed that they did it to make children compliant, obedient, and respectful of traditions. However, many caregivers doubted whether their current methods of punishment would ensure this outcome. Although 87.9 percent of adults said they punished children to guide them on how to behave, only 32.6 percent firmly believed that the punishment would change the child’s behavior.

Many caregivers disapproved of holding adults accountable for their actions against children, believing that this accountability cultivated uncontrollable behavior in children. They resented the dialogue on children’s rights especially about “prohibition of corporal punishment” and complained that it was preventing them from discharging their duty as caregivers. However despite these sentiments, 81.7 percent of these caregivers said they punished their own children, and 57.9 percent said they felt comfortable punishing other children in the community. Clearly, caregivers have reached a critical juncture regarding their relationship with children. The rhetoric of children’s rights as perceived by adults, particularly discussions about the usage of corporal punishment, has introduced a new dimension to the caregiver-child relationship. It has provoked anxiety and misunderstanding among caregivers at the expense of children who bear the brunt of the backlash.

Cumulatively, the findings from this report point to an urgent need for a multi-layered response in Uganda. Firstly there is a need to develop a comprehensive policy framework that addresses within all policy initiatives, the detriment of the current power-based model of the caregiver-child relationship and its manifestations within homes, schools, and communities. While several child-centric policy initiatives are already in place, none of them address the fundamental issue of children’s lack of power in their relationships with caregivers. Secondly there is a need to develop non-punitive, practical, and creative outreach programs that skillfully dispel the antagonism gathering momentum within the caregiver-child relationship. These programs would promote an alternative model for the caregiver-child relationship; one that fosters mutual respect and encourages child engagement rather than mere compliance within the relationship. Finally there is a need to establish community-based mechanisms that proactively respond to children experiencing violence. Subsequent layers of response would build on these foundational layers to consolidate a long-term strategy of promoting equity in the caregiver-child relationship.

This report’s central aim is to present the voices of children and caregivers as they were captured in the report. The presentation and layout is aimed at bringing as many of those voices to a wider audience as possible in their clarity and unanimity. It also aims to draw attention to the disconnection between actions and intentions, experiences and perceptions.
INTRODUCTION

Background

Although the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) clearly articulates, in Article 19, the state’s responsibility to protect children from all forms of violence, it is widely acknowledged that globally little of that obligation has been translated into practice. Furthermore, until recently, there was no coordinated global effort to consolidate the information on children’s experiences of violence against them. However as a result of the discussions during the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session (UNGASS) in 2000 and 2001, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) appointed a special rapporteur to investigate this situation in early 2003. A multi-country study to define and measure the extent of the problem is currently underway.

In Uganda, the situation is not much different. Little is known about children’s perspectives on the nature and extent of the violence used against them. Even less is known about who perpetrates the violence, where children most commonly experience it, and what children believe ought to be done about it. Consequently, many of the responses to violence against children tend to be ad hoc and sometimes even counterproductive. It was in response to this situation, Children Reachout and Partners undertook this report. It will, we hope contribute to generating momentum for discussion of how to respond to the dearth of information and infrastructure and inspire action.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to generate credible information that will enable the creation of effective interventions for the prevention of violence against children. The report aims to understand how and why violence against children continues to occur, so that the information generated can be used to design programs, develop policies, and inspire further similar research towards creating a meaningful response to the problem.

What are children’s experiences of violence against them?

The exploration of this question begins with an investigation of how children conceptualize the violence against them, the nature of that violence, how often it happens, who perpetrates it, where it occurs, and what they think should be done about it.

Why do caregivers perpetrate violence against children?

The exploration to this question begins with an investigation of how caregivers conceptualize violence against children; the nature of the violence they perpetrate against children, how often they perpetrate it, who they perpetrate it against, and what they think should be done about it.
PARTICIPANTS

A total of 1500 children (800 girls and 700 boys) and 600 adults (400 women and 200 men) participated in this report. These participants represent a broad range of backgrounds, including children 5 to 18 years old, children in school and out of school, parents, teachers, and various community leaders.

At the time of the report, participants lived in one of two districts in Uganda: Kampala and Wakiso. These districts represent a variety of perspectives and priorities. They were selected primarily based on their geographic diversity, and for the existing infrastructure that could support implementation of the project, accessibility to participants, and safety of the researchers. These districts represent cultural diversity, and a combination of urban, semi-urban, and rural perspectives.
FRAME OF REFERENCE

Forms of Violence

For the purposes of this report, the acts of violence against children are organized under four broad forms: physical, emotional, sexual, and economic. While this may oversimplify the reality of children’s experience (most acts of violence are multifaceted), it does facilitate a meaningful discussion and allows responses to become more specific. However, the study will not propose a false hierarchy of importance within the four forms.

Causes of Violence

This report assumes that most violence against children, within the domestic realm, is the consequence of children’s low status in the social hierarchy of power. In other words, violence is inflicted on children mainly because they are children, and less so because of their actions. For example, an adult male who commits the same mistake as a child would not be beaten, but the child would. Thus, this report analyses violence within the context of this power-based caregiver-child relationship. It avoids simple cause-and-effect linkages, such as alcohol, jealousy, misbehavior, and poverty as the causes of violence, although it recognizes that they can act as triggers for violence.

VIOLENCE AS CONTEXT

This report conceptualizes the violence that children experience as a context of the caregiver-child relationship rather than an event within that relationship. The experience of violence goes well beyond the slap or the insult. The adult uses the slap or the insult to instigate and reinforce a belief system in children regarding their abilities, their worth as individuals, and their possibilities for the future. Thus, within this study, the attention centers on the nature of the adult-child relationship, and the analysis focuses on children’s experiences of navigating that relationship.

CHILDREN FIRST

In this study, children’s best interests take precedence. Children’s participation is perceived as a crucial source of information, interviewers use child-centric consultation methods, and children’s input carries as much weight as that of caregiver. This report makes every effort to ensure that children’s voices are heard.
Violence is when they treat you badly so you feel bad all the time. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

Locking children up in the house. 7-year-old girl, Kampala

Excessive beating, for example, caning child 10 to 20 strokes, and the child runs mad because of fear of the stick or even runs away from home. 10-year-old boy, Kampala

Child neglect by mothers who go to drink without caring to prepare meals for the children, 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

Some young girls are forced to marry a 50-year-old man who has so many wives already. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

Violence is when they look at you with bad eyes to scare you. 9-year-old boy, Kampala

Giving children hard labour, although we must do labour, it should be according to age. For example, a child of 6 years should not fetch firewood or a 20 or 10-liter jerry can of water. Children should not be treated like this. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

Tying children with a rope and the child sleeps there for three or more days without eating. 12-year-old boy, Kampala

Burning them even when a child does a small thing like fighting with his friend or stealing 100/=. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

I think it is the discrimination of children especially by stepmothers. Some children are not given food, school fees, and not allowed to express themselves freely. They are always put down and always sad and not allowed to mix with their stepbrothers and sisters. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso
DEFINING "VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN"

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. World Report on Violence and Health 2002, WHO
Children’s Conception of Violence

In almost every discussion it was apparent that children conceptualized violence as a way in which many caregivers related to them and something that made them feel bad about themselves. They tended to use examples to illustrate the meaning of violence rather than a conceptual definition. When the concept of violence was explored through different methods, the following ideas consistently emerged.

1. Violence is about how caregivers make you feel bad. In a variety of contributions, when probed to clarify what made an act violent, children talked about residual feelings of anger, fear, shame, and humiliation?

2. Violence against children is when big people make you feel bad by doing bad things to you. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

3. Violence is about what caregivers don’t do. Children also gave examples of omissions and neglect as acts of violence, such as being ignored or excluded from the family. My stepmother never talks to me or teaches me anything. She ignores me as if she doesn’t notice me at all and gives me sharp looks if I do something that she doesn’t like. 8-year-old girl, Kampala

4. Violence is wrong. Children expressed a clear judgment of violence as wrong. Each story of sustained violence carried indignation and the belief that the adult ought to have known better. It is not right to make a child walk four kilometers with a heavy load to sell things at the market, especially on a school day. 15-year-old boy, Kampala
CAREGIVERS’ CONCEPTION OF VIOLENCE

The topic of violence against children aroused controversy among many adults. They understood violence as an occasional act and described it as an incident (rather than within the nature of the adult-child relationship). They did not emphasize the impact of violence on their relationships with children or to the resultant feelings for the child or adult. When the concept of violence was explored through different methods, the following ideas consistently emerged:

1. **Violence is an excess of otherwise acceptable acts.** Many adults described violence as excessive punishment rather than the punishment itself. Two strokes [of the cane] for a child who is misbehaving is not bad. Twenty strokes however for a simple mistake is mistreatment of the child. Female, parent, Wakiso.

2. **Caregivers feel reluctant to use the word “violence”.** Many caregivers felt reluctant to describe any adult interaction with a child as violence. For obviously egregious acts, many chose the description “mistreatment” to imply a temporary aberration and discount the seriousness of the act. For other contentious transactions, many adults preferred the term “punishment” to imply an intention to guide children rather than abuse power. Sometimes I see a mother hit her child badly. She doesn’t mean harm. Yes she is mistreating, but with a good heart. Female, community leader, Wakiso.

3. **Punishment must involve physical or emotional pain.** Many caregivers felt that for punishment to be effective it was necessary to inflict physical or emotional pain. Caregivers considered a moderate amount of pain, or severe pain over a short period of time, a useful tool for training children to avoid the perceived misbehavior. They did not categorize the infliction of this pain as violence. If the child feels no pain, he will just laugh and learn nothing. Male, community leader, Kampala.

4. **Caregivers know the difference between punishment and mistreatment.** Adults asserted that, by virtue of being immersed in the Ugandan culture and cognizant of local sensibility, most adults developed a reliable sense of the boundary between the legitimate punishment of children and the mistreatment of children. We all grew up here. We know what is right and wrong when it comes to punishing children. Female, community leader, Kampala.

5. **Punishing children is a duty.** Many caregivers felt it their duty to punish children in order to guide them on how to behave. If you as a parent don’t punish your children, you are not their real parent. Male, parent, Kampala.
END VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
QUESTION 1

Have you experienced violence against you?

When we asked children, “Have you experienced violence against you?” children responded with a virtually unanimous and unambiguous “Yes.”

Almost every child indicated without hesitation that they had experienced violence. Children of all ages, girls and boys, readily gave examples of the violence they had experienced, from the caregivers in their homes, schools, and communities.

**Physical violence** was reported as the most common form of violence experienced by children. Caning was reported most frequently, followed by slapping and pinching. Children reported denigration of their physical integrity, from being shoved and kicked, to the constant threat of a raised arm, even for minor offences.

**Emotional violence** against children was also common. Two thirds of the children reported being shouted at, and more than half reported

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A Boy at Boarding School

We are at a boarding school where they torture us. They beat us all the time. The nurse shouts at you and doesn’t give you any treatment if you are sick. The teachers beat you for no reason. The food is terrible. It is what we call ‘transparent posho.’ It is so light there is no calories in it.

One day me and my friends, we were so hungry. One of our friends had some money so we decided to go to the hotel near our school for some meat. We got there and ordered our food and were so excited. But before the food arrived, the headmaster walked in. When he saw us, he exploded! He shouted at us and gave us two slaps each in front of everyone. Then he made us hold our earlobes and hop back to school frog-style. Everyone was laughing at us. When we got to the school he said, ‘You wait, I am going to teach you a lesson tomorrow.’
QUESTION 2

Have you experienced physical violence?

Physical Violence: Any act or interaction in which the adult aims to inflict physical pain on the child.

Children talked most readily about physical violence and could offer immediate examples of how it happened and how often it happened. Usually, no elaboration or probing questions were required to elicit a detailed response or a story about when they had last experienced physical violence.

Everyone gets a slap or cane here. Sometimes you even get it twice a day, even from different people. 8-year-old boy, Wakiso

Of the children consulted in this study, 98.3 percent reported having experienced physical violence, such as caning, slapping, pinching, locking up, or burning. In regard to frequency, 31.1 percent of children said they experienced physical violence at least once a week, and 15 percent said it happened “every day.”

As to where the violence occurred, 38.8 percent of the children said they experienced physical violence mainly at home; 28.6 percent said mainly at school; and 31.8 percent said at school as well as at home.

Both girls and boys experienced with comparable frequency the common forms of physical violence, such as caning and slapping. However, girls tended to experience more of the subtle forms of physical violence, such as pinching or twisting of the ears, while boys (especially older boys) experienced more of the extreme forms of physical violence, such as burning, tying up, or severe beatings. While this difference may be an expected consequence of gender-based stereotypes, when explored in focus group discussions and interviews many parents linked it to the issue of bride-price.

I do not want to cause scars. Who will pay cattle if there are scars all over her body? Female, parent, Kampala

Out-of-school children were more likely to be locked up or tied up compared to in-school children, although the latter were more likely to experience other forms of violence than those specifically explored in this report (such as kneeling, slashing grass, and cleaning latrines).

Despite the many teachers who repeated the “official policy” that they do not beat children, 60.4 percent of in-school children reported routinely being beaten and humiliated. Most damaging to children’s sense-of-self were the random and unjust beatings. For example, the entire class would be beaten when some children were “making noise” or children would be beaten for coming late to school because of excessive work assigned at home.

Most children, especially those consulted through focus group discussions and interviews, tended to expect physical violence as a normal part of their relationship with adults. In journals, many children wrote about experiencing or witnessing physical violence several times a day. Narrative role plays based on children’s own experiences and depicting children being caned mercilessly regularly elicited a nervous laughter of recognition.
**Children’s Voices**

Have you experienced physical violence?

You see this scar? She burnt my right hand with a red-hot knife, because she sent me for tomatoes and I delayed to come back. She also burnt my brother’s back with a flat iron and burnt his legs with hot water. She gave my young brother of 4 years his urine to drink, because he used to wet the bed. 16-year-old boy, Wakiso

I forgot to untie goats and I was beaten and made to sleep outside. 9-year-old boy, Wakiso

Teachers beat us badly when we are late, and yet we come from far. 10-year-old girl, Wakiso

Our neighbor burnt her daughter with hot water in the back, because she had refused to wash dishes. Other neighbors threatened to report the mother to police if she burnt her daughter again, but for this particular act she was not reported. 13-year-old boy, Wakiso

My father beat me like an animal on every part of my body while saying that I am a lazy useless boy. 12-year-old boy, Kampala

One day I went to put the cows to graze and one cow got lost. When I returned home, my father beat me almost to death, and I sustained wounds all over my body. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

I was accused falsely for stealing money from my neighbor’s wife, and her husband gave me seven very painful strokes. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

Teachers call students’ buttocks “government meat.” 12-year-old boy, Wakiso

On the way, sometimes community members meet you and slap you over small things. For example, he can say that you have not greeted him so you are a bad mannered boy. 12-year-old boy, Wakiso

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I went back home late from school, because the teacher kept us late. They beat me for it and told me to go and fetch water as a punishment. I went and still delayed, because there were many people at the well. When I reached home I was beaten again. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

I live in a drunkard’s home [father] who canes me regularly without any reason. 15-year-old boy, Wakiso

The teacher slapped and kicked me, because I was watching my friends solve mathematics problems on the blackboard during lunchtime without his permission. The teacher was drunk. 12-year-old boy, Wakiso

My father tied me up and locked me up for two days without food, because I ate a piece of fish that was supposed to be his. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

I was beaten severely by my stepmother for wetting the bed. 10-year-old girl, Kampala

Immediately I stepped home, he held me, beat every part of my body and mostly the head. From that time my eyes started paining up to now. By then I was 10 years, but I have never forgotten. 17-year-old boy, Kampala

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On the way, sometimes community members meet you and slap you over small things. For example, he can say that you have not greeted him so you are a bad mannered boy. 12-year-old boy, Wakiso
My stepmother abuses me with harsh words when she is angry with my father. “Look at this prostitute; she is just like her father, useless and lazy.” 14-year-old girl, Kampala

Emotional violence was closely linked with children’s assessment of their self-worth, and many children reported a sustained reaction to this form of violence. It severely damaged their sense of belonging within their families and their attachment to the perpetrator of the violence. In discussions and interviews, memories of emotional violence evoked profound feelings of loss, and many children articulated bitterness and resignation at the powerlessness of their situation.

What is left for me here? No one cares about me. They torture me with words, and my heart is sick. It is better that I die than live this way. 15-year-old girl, Kampala

Have you experienced emotional violence?

Emotional Violence: Any act or interaction in which the caregiver intentionally attacks children’s feelings, withholds affection from children, or undermines children’s opinions of themselves, and, as a result, adversely affects children’s self-confidence.

Of all the forms of violence reported, children talked most emphatically about the impact of emotional violence. They talked about the rage and intense sense of injustice it provoked within them. Many children declared in indignation that physical pain would be preferable to a constant assault of threats, insults, and humiliation.

It is better that he gives me two canes, instead of letting me sit in fear all the time and by looking at me with fire in his eyes. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

Of the children consulted in this report, 98.2 percent reported having experienced emotional violence, such as shouting, insulting, threatening, glaring, or embarrassment. In regard to frequency, 36.5 percent of the children reported experiencing emotional violence at least once a week, and 16.7 percent said they experienced it “every day. As to where the violence occurred, 42.6 percent of the children said they experienced emotional violence mainly at home; 21.2 percent said mainly at school; and 35.5 percent said at home and at school

My stepmother abuses me with harsh words when she is angry with my father. “Look at this prostitute; she is just like her father, useless and lazy.” 14-year-old girl, Kampala

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Have you experienced emotional violence?

He says I am useless and lazy and ugly. He says I am worthless. 9-year-old girl, Kampala

For me, I am violated so much. I am being harassed by my maternal uncles such that even if an old sick woman tempts me and gives me somewhere to stay I would go with her! 17-year-old boy, Wakiso

My mother said I am bewitched by a community member and have bones in my stomach. 11-year-old girl, Wakiso

Even when I try to do my best and please my father, he finds fault with me and shouts. I do not know if he just hates me or what! 17-year-old boy, Kampala

My father says to me that I look like a dog. 10-year-old boy, Kampala

They say I am so stupid; I can’t even tie my shoe-laces without falling over. I can! It’s not true! 6-year-old boy, Kampala

There is no peace. She shouts, embarrasses me, and then says she will throw me out if I don’t do what she says. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

Who I to eat in his house am, he asks. “You are not even my daughter!” 12-year-old girl, Kampala

They jeer and laugh at me because I am crippled. They hold their nose and say I smell bad. 15-year-old girl, Kampala

I am so tired of him [father] insulting me all the time. ‘Look that, I smell, my teeth are rotten...’ All the time he keeps laughing at me and says I am stupid. 12-year-old boy, Kampala
QUESTION 4

Who commits violence against you?

Children reported that a wide range of caregivers committed violence against them. They felt vulnerable in the presence of caregivers, because the violence could manifest at any time and from any caregivers. Most of the time, children would be expected to tolerate the violence and would be considered impertinent if they tried to respond in any way other than submission.

Any big person can punish you, even if you are doing nothing wrong. There is nothing you can do about it. 8-year-old boy, Wakiso

AT HOME

At home, girls were most vulnerable to violence from relatives. For older girls, this often meant sexual violence, while younger girls mostly described emotional violence. Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to experience violence from others beyond the family, such as neighbors, community leaders, and strangers.

Girls reported comparable amounts of violence from stepmother, mother, and father. However, boys, particularly older out-of-school boys, named their father as the person who committed the most violence against them.

As a group, schoolchildren reported the highest level of violation from relatives and were more than twice as likely to be violated by others beyond the family. These numbers could suggest that the school system cultivates submission in children.

AT SCHOOL

Older children and teachers were the most commonly cited perpetrators of violence at school. Many older children seemed to mimic the behavior of adults, and, as a result, victimized younger children. Bullying was reported as a major problem, especially by girls and younger children. When children grow up they keep what was done to them in mind and in the end they also do the same to those younger than them, especially at school. Some people become mentally disturbed. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

Boys and older children reported teachers as the most likely perpetrators of violence. Many older boys reported that male teachers appeared to be targeting them, often humiliating them. When these statements were explored in discussions and interviews, many boys claimed that the male teachers were competing for the attention of older girls. It is also likely that teachers feel reluctant to beat older boys due to fear of retaliation and thus resort to an alternative that exploits their positions of power.

He [teacher] punished me with five strokes in front of the whole class and then sentenced me to fill a five-litre jerry can with water from the well, with a 100 milliliter test tube. It took me more than 50 trips to the well! All of this because he thought I was too friendly with the girl he likes. Everyone calls me the “test tube boy” now. 17-year-old boy, Wakiso
**Children’s Voices**

**Children’s Interview**

A young person with a disability

Q: How did you come to be here at this boarding school?

A: I was brought here from my village by the priest, and I started staying with the nuns because at home no one was taking care of me, and I was denied education, and yet all the other normal children were taken to school [cries while speaking]. I came here, that was June 2000, then I started schooling in P1 [Primary one].

Q: Why were they not taking care of you at home?

A: I don’t know. Maybe they think I am useless.

Q: What kind of violence did you experience as a child who has a disability?

A: I underwent so many problems. For example, when I excreted near the home, I would be thoroughly beaten. All people would leave me home alone with no one to help me with even water to drink. My stepfather would abuse my disability saying, “You are crippled, am I the one who crippled you?” My stepfather would hurl many abuses over me and my disability, and when he would buy something good like fish or meat and people are eating, I would not be given. For example, one day my stepfather bought fish and my other sisters cooked, and while I was still eating beans, he started beating me, without any fault, saying to me that my father died without feeding any of his children. He collected millet from the compound into a big saucepan, placed it on my head, then the saucepan fell down and I also fell down, then he continued to beat me until blood started flowing from my head.

My mother came back and went to the local council leader, and they said he should be imprisoned, but he asked for forgiveness saying he did it because he was drunk, yet he used to beat me daily. Then he was told to take me to hospital, which he did twice and stopped even before the wound healed. From then on whenever I would see him I would crawl to the bush near home, and when he goes away or sleeps in the night my mother would come and carry me and bring me in the house.

My elder sisters and brothers who were normal would abuse me and refuse to bathe me. They only used to call me the “lame one who is crippled and cannot walk.” The final blow was when someone had set the house on fire while I was sleeping inside. One of the neighbors came and braved the fire and carried me out of the house, and after that I was brought to the mission where I started studying up to P7 in 2002, and now am a store keeper with the school, and I do not miss home because here I am loved and taken care of.

Q: How did you feel when all the violence was committed against you?

A: I felt bad. I felt like committing suicide. In fact one day I tried suicide on a tree but failed as I could not climb high enough on the tree.

Q: What thoughts do you have about the way the community treats children with disabilities?

A: The normal people in the community take crippled people as useless. For example in our village there was a lame child who was dumb as well, and she was mistreated, denied food until she died. These children are thoroughly beaten with big sticks or even thrown away into the bush because they want you to die. I personally was thrown away into a sisal plantation and then my brother came back from school and carried me back home. People should stop this kind of violence against disabled children so that they do not suffer, because we were also born by blood like the other children. 18-year-old girl, Wakiso
How do you feel when violence is committed against you?

Children’s response to this question was overwhelming. The question elicited powerful and animated responses and revealed reactions to violence that spanned a broad spectrum of emotions including fury, rage, bitterness and resignation. Many children felt that caregivers did not give due weight to the depth of their feelings and felt frustrated by how seldom anyone would understand their reaction. Most of the time, children seemed unresolved about what to do with their feelings.

I feel like my heart will explode if I start saying how I feel about her. She treats me worse than an animal and there is nothing I can do about it. I feel like running away and becoming a prostitute. 14-year-old girl, Kampala

Sometimes I think about joining my parents in paradise where they are waiting for me. What is left for me here? 16-year-old boy, Wakiso
Children’s Voices

I feel like growing up quickly so that I can revenge. 15-year-old boy, Kampala

I feel like going to hang myself. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

I get regrets why I was born. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel like going in the middle of the road to be crushed by a car. 10-year-old boy, Kampala

I feel like taking poison. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

I feel like I am useless. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

I feel threatened and feel like I am in jail not school. 18-year-old boy, Wakiso

I get very worried. I have attempted to kill myself. I swallowed a watch cell and did not die. 9-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel like revenging, but I do not because these parents are big. I can do nothing. 12-year-old boy, Kampala

I feel like killing that person. I want to get murdering lessons from murderers. 16-year-old boy, Kampala

I wish I were a baby again, just suckling the breast with no problems in this world. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel like cutting up the person with a machete. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso
Children’s Voices

Feel like joining the army so that when I come back with a gun I can make them pay. 15-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel so bad and think that my brothers who died have rested. I joined the army to put my mind at rest at 15 years, but again there was a lot of beating and I came back home. Sometimes I feel like dying. 17-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel like burning them in the house or getting a spear and stabbing them to death. 16-year-old boy, Wakiso

When I over think, it reached to a point of madness, but what has helped is being born again Christian. Otherwise I would be mad. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

I feel like doing anything so I can go to prison and have peace there or suffer in the hands of the strangers. 15-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel like revenging or killing him, but feel powerless. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel like it’s a mistake for me to have been born. 8-year-old boy, Kampala

Feeling of frustration, hopelessness, but what to do -10-year-old boy, Kampala

I wish I could be a big person and not suffer. 12-year-old boy, Kampala

I wonder if there is anyone who suffers like me. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel my heart is swollen. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

You regret why you were born and realize that your life is very hard and you are unlucky. 10-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel so worried and so lonely. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

I get so annoyed and feel if any boy just comes to propose to me I will just go and be married to him. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

I just say that “oh, it’s because I am a child that’s why they are beating me and I have nothing to do.” 12-year-old girl, Kampala

It’s unfair, but I do not want any revenge for my aunt, because she is the only one caring about me. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I always forgive those who beat me, because the Bible instructs me to forgive whoever offends me. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel pain but accept it, because my father is training me to become a strong man and one who can look after myself even when he is dead, so I forgive my father. 12-year-old boy, Kampala
I feel very angry but do nothing about it, because they are stronger than me and older. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel like a curse. 12-year-old girl, Wakiso

I feel like getting a gun and I shoot the person, but I don’t have the capacity of getting one. 15-year-old boy, Kasese

I feel like revenging, but I see that if I do that I will lose the chance of staying with him even though he does not take care of me very well. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

I feel very sad and ashamed especially when I see my friends going to school and am just digging all the time. Sometimes I hide from them so that they can think that maybe I also once in a while go to school. This hurts me a lot, because tomorrow these very people I am growing up with will be driving and call me to wash their cars, simply because my father has refused to give me school fees. God will pay him one day, because he has money but he says that he also never went to school. 12-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel like going to become somebody’s housegirl. 10-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel like maybe God does not like me. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

I feel like I will revenge when I finish my education. I will go and stay somewhere then come back home later and ask them about the bad things they used to do to me, then start helping them and tell them never to do such things to their children. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

I cry a lot when I am beaten. I normally forget and forgive, because I love my parents and sometimes they beat me with a reason, when I have committed a mistake. 11-year-old girl, Kampala

I feel very bad when people go unpunished, like the father who raped his daughter was not punished yet he is also a teacher. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

I feel as if instead of insulting and shouting at me you would rather beat me. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso
This question revealed the resourcefulness of many children and how they actively tried to find a solution to their situation. While many children expressed despair that caregivers did not take their concerns seriously, they often took the responsibility of becoming protagonists for their own causes.

If you don’t try to do something, you can end up just suffering without end! 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

Of the children consulted in this report, 62.3 percent said they would try to find someone that they trusted for help, although in discussions they often felt that this would only produce a short-term solution. In comparison, 54.7 percent said they would cry and hide so that at least they would attract attention and deflect further immediate pain; and 42.5 percent said that in serious cases they would run away for a short or prolonged period of time, to stay at a relative’s house and temporarily diffuse the situation. Only 20.7 percent of the children said they would do nothing.

Girls reported with higher frequency that they would cry and hide, while a greater number of boys would go to someone for help. Younger children and in-school children reported with higher frequency that they would do nothing. This difference suggests that the more dependent a child is on the perpetrator, the less likely they are to seek help.
Children’s Voices

What do you do when violence is committed against you?

I just keep quiet so that they can feel ashamed of what they have done. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

I run to my mother. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

I run to our neighbour who is also my auntie. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

I hide and pray to God to forgive n who has beaten me. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

Do nothing at all because there is no solution. 10-year-old boy, Kampala

I beat any child who is passing by. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

When they deny me food, I steal it. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

I do not turn to anyone I just run to the street. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

I would not run to anyone, because if I did, that would get more problems at home. Instead, I just protect myself from what is raining on me while screaming. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

I try as much as possible to tolerate it. I have nowhere to run to, otherwise I would have run away. I do not tell anyone, because the people I tell might spread it around that that’s how my parents treat me, and I do not want others to know this. 12-year-old boy, Wakiso

After crying, I just keep quiet and just bear it, waiting for when I will grow up and leave home. 14-year-old girl, Wakiso

I just pray, because when I go and tell anyone what has happened it is like the situation worsens. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso
Many children reported fearing the caregivers around them. Their level of anxiety increased in the presence of adults, and many of them became shy and unable to express themselves. They felt that caregivers were not willing to listen to their concerns and those caregivers saw children as needing to be controlled rather than understood. They did not expect fairness, only critical judgment, regarding their shortcomings. Through narrative role plays as well as journals, children described feeling vulnerable when an adult interacted with them, expecting the adult to embarrass or humiliate them. These children craved a different kind of relationship, within a context of love and affection, rather than fear and shame.

When caregivers were asked what kind of a relationship they wanted to create with children, their overriding concern appeared to be their responsibility to guide children on how to behave and create a value system that reflected the traditions of their community. Despite contrary experience, many persisted in believing that fear and shame were the most potent tools for achieving this and that it was in the best interests of children to be subjected to this form of discipline to create cohesive communities.

I wish he would listen to me before beating me all the time. A small mistake - slap! Laugh too loud - a cane! Many times I don’t even know why he is beating me. 14-year-old girl, Wakiso

What kind of relationships do we want to create with children?
What, if anything, should be done about violence against children?

Children found themselves in a dilemma when this question was discussed. On the one hand, they wanted the violence to stop, yet they also knew that the adult might respond to an intervention by becoming entrenched in their anger. There was a genuine fear of reprisal, since they had to live with these caregivers or see them at school the following day. If I say something to anyone, he will say, “Go let him keep you!” He may even start beating me more. 10-year-old girl, Kampala

When asked broadly, “Should something be done,” 70 percent of children said something should be done; 15.2 percent said nothing should be done; and 11.5 percent said nothing should be done because it would make things worse for children. When this last statement was explored, many children related stories of how the violence got worse when other caregivers approached the issue insensitively. It is likely that these children, who were usually dependent on the perpetrator, were making a delicate calculation regarding the potentially positive outcomes and the potentially adverse economic or emotional consequences of an intervention. When the question was asked more specifically with options attached (i.e., “What should be done...”) more than 98 percent of children chose an option that indicated their desire for action.

Children’s suggestions focused on raising awareness of children’s rights and increasing support for children: 79.4 percent of the children said other adults should talk to parents about children’s rights; 73.9 percent said teachers should be sensitized to understand children’s rights; 73.5 percent said that communities needed places that responded to children’s needs and assisted them when they reported violence. A comparatively lower percentage of children suggested intervention by the police (56.9 percent).

Girls preferred the options of sensitizing teachers and developing community-based responses, with slightly higher frequency than boys. Boys suggested police intervention with slightly higher frequency than girls. This difference could be related to the finding that boys experienced more severe forms of physical violence compared to girls.

Older children suggested more frequently that teachers and parents should be engaged in a dialogue, while younger children proposed more frequently that there should be local response mechanisms in place. This difference would suggest that older children were less hopeful of any response mechanism actually resolving the issue to their satisfaction. In discussions, many older children expressed doubt about whether an adult would side with them against another adult.

Most children urged caution and sensitivity when addressing cases of violence against children. Beyond reprisal, they also feared losing their teacher’s approval or their parent’s love and affection. They emphasized the need for broader community awareness-raising approaches that addressed the attitudes of adults towards children, rather than singling out individuals for punitive action.
**Children’s Voices**

**What, if anything, should be done about violence against children?**

The government should teach parents how to treat children. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

Parents should handle children well and should talk to children when they do something wrong instead of beating them. 15-year-old girl, Kampala

Not all parents are bad and not all parents are good. Some are bad because they don’t know about children’s rights. 15-year-old boy, Kampala

Counseling for both children and parents should be done by grandparents or clan members. 15-year-old boy, Kampala

Sensitize the leaders such as LCs, teachers, parents, and students on how to handle children. 11-year-old girl, Wakiso

Government should pass a strict law to make sure parents don’t mistreat children. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

Government should develop policies that protect children. If a drunken teacher punishes children, he should also be punished. 13-year-old boy, Wakiso

There should be by-laws to handle those who violate children. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

Counseling services be made available in schools. 15-year-old girl, Wakiso

Parents should stop forcing young girls from marrying, because some of them end up committing suicide. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

Local councils should come up with strict laws on how the children should be treated by adults. 13-year-old girl, Kampala

People should turn to God. 11-year-old boy, Kampala

Carry out campaigns against child abuse. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso

Children should be taken to boarding schools to help them survive the daily violence at home, because sometimes at home you are punished for nothing. At least there is no burning at school. 12-year-old girl, Wakiso

The government should not employ corrupt officials, because they would take bribes and let the perpetrators free. 17-year-old girl, Wakiso
The government should know about the existence of all schools and find out whether the children’s rights are protected. For example, some teachers only care about making money and treating the children the way they want. 13-year-old boy, Wakiso

Teachers should organize a day and call parents and sensitize them on children’s rights. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

Community should also be responsible for the development of children in their area. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

They should guide teachers to give only 2 strokes, not 40. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

We should be put in boarding schools or live elsewhere so that we are not at home. 9-year-old boy, Kampala

The perpetrators of child violence should be imprisoned and have the same acts done on them so they feel how it hurts. 15-year-old boy, Kampala

The local councils should be involved in advising parents not to cause pain or violence against their children. 12-year-old girl, Wakiso

Advise children to report people who do bad things to them other than keeping quiet, and also teach children to report their fellow children who do bad things to them to elders so that they do not fight one another. 13-year-old boy, Wakiso

Counselors should be invited regularly to schools to counsel and guide children so that children can know how to prevent violence against them and grow up as people. 13-year-old boy, Kampala

Take photos of bad acts that happen to children and those who do them to the children, and advise children how to avoid falling victims of such acts. Take them round in different schools to make children aware that those acts are wrong and should not be done to them. 13-year-old girl, Wakiso

The local leaders should intervene in families and schools and warn those that do such acts. 14-year-old boy, Wakiso

Children should study and learn their parents’ characters and moods in order to tell whether the parents are annoyed or not and react to what the parents want immediately and escape beatings or falling into trouble. 14-year-old boy, Kampala

Parents should show love to their children and not shout at them when they make a mistake, because children fear their parents when they shout at them all the time. 12-year-old girl, Kampala

Badly beaten children should be provided with alternative homes. 15-year-old boy, Kampala

Government should put laws convicting men who harass young girls and lure them into sex, especially old men and the boda-boda men. 15-year-old girl, Kampala

Policemen and local leaders should be put on the way to stop all children carrying heavy loads and later punish their parents so that parents can stop mistreating children. 14-year-old boy, Kampala

Parents should guide their children and help them to learn how to do certain things in a friendly way, without using a stick. 11-year-old boy, Kampala

Teachers should treat all children in school equally and stop hurting and punishing some particular children all the time, because we are all children. 15-year-old boy, Wakiso

The school should put the money for lunch on school fees, not to be paid separately. 16-year-old girl, Wakiso
The concept of violence against children generated much debate amongst caregivers. It led to heated discussions about what it meant, its implications for the adult-child relationship, and how it has challenged deep-seated, traditional values. The discussions consistently came back to caregivers’ belief that any concessions around the issue could lead to erosion of the absolute authority caregivers claimed over the actions of children.

During formative research, many members of the caregivers’ advisory group asserted that adults had a duty to guide children, and that physical and emotional pain served as useful tools in enabling caregivers to fulfill their duties. They insisted that these interventions should be understood as “punishment” to correct children’s behavior and that excessive punishment should be seen as “mistreatment,” not violence. These adults believed it should be taken for granted that they had the best interests of children at heart, and that lapses in adults’ judgment should be seen as an aberration rather than a way of interacting with children. They further asserted that the majority of caregivers intuitively knew the difference between guiding children through punishment and mistreating them. They were suspicious of what they perceived as an external value system (i.e., the rhetoric of children’s rights) undermining the status quo.
QUESTION 8

Are children punished in your community?

Punishing children has become normalized. Many adults use it as their primary method for teaching children how to behave. Most adults consulted in this study talked with pride about how the adults within their communities punished children to control their behaviour. You are not a serious [responsible] adult if you don’t punish children. Male, community leader, Wakiso

Of the adults consulted through questionnaires, 90 percent said that children were being punished in their communities. More than one third of them (35.2 percent) said “many” children were being punished, and very few (8 percent) said that children were “rarely” punished in their communities. More women (38.7 percent) than men (31.7 percent) said that “many” children were punished, while more men (58.4 percent) than women (49.9 percent) said that “some” children were being punished. This difference suggests that men are not aware of or discount punishment that is meted out to children on an ad hoc basis.

As a group, 45.9 percent of the community leaders reported that “many” children were being punished in their communities, and 44.7 percent said “some” children were being punished. In discussions, many adults talked with pride, especially community leaders and parents, about how they were contributing to upholding the values of the community by ensuring that children obeyed their elders. If community leaders are assumed to represent the values of the community, then these numbers suggest that the punishment of children is common and is seen as a good thing for the community. It reflects well on adults of the community if they publicly demonstrate that they are “controlling” children.
Children’s Voices

Are children punished in your community?

Yes. We get children from all types of homes in this school. We must put them right [by punishing]. Female, teacher, Wakiso

Yes, many are punished, especially stepchildren. In this school we have many children who are tortured at home by their stepmothers. Female, teacher, Kampala

Culturally, we watch the girls and punish them most keenly. If we do not punish her then we ruin the whole nation. Female, community leader, Wakiso

It [punishment] is common in schools. Children come here when they are wild! Male, teacher, Wakiso

Children are undisciplined and have to be punished. Male, community leader, Kampala

Children today are very stubborn and have to be punished. Female, community leader, Kampala

Yes, all children are punished because that is what is expected from all responsible parents. Female, community leader, Wakiso

Spare the rod, spoil the child. Even the Bible says punish your child to make him a good child. We punish every day. Male, parent, Kampala

Every child needs punishment to grow. Yes, I beat. The harder you beat, the better he will learn what you are teaching. Female, teacher, Kampala

Punishment is as old as man, because even God punished Adam, so we will not hesitate to punish. We punish regularly. Male, community leader, Kampala

Yes. We get children from all types of homes in this school. We must put them right [by punishing]. Female, teacher, Wakiso

Parents don’t like to beat, but sometimes you have no choice. Female, parent, Wakiso

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Yes. We beat them. How else will they learn respect for elders? Female, parent, Wakiso

Parents don’t like to beat, but sometimes you have no choice. Female, parent, Wakiso

There are two groups [of children]. Those for whom a look is enough and those who have to be beaten senseless to put some sense in them! Male, community leader, Kampala

Yes, many. Some parents even bring their children when they are tired of beating them and ask us to put some manners in them. “Don’t have mercy until he changes his ways,” they say. Male, teacher, Wakiso

Yes, most children are punished in this community if and when they commit misbehavior. Although some people do it excessively, but others give normal punishment in order to teach their children good behavior and set them on the right path. Male, community leader, Wakiso

A few people spoil their children and do not punish them at all, but these are few. Female, parent, Kampala

It is common. All children are punished. The boys need more punishment because they are unruly. Girls are always obedient. Male, teacher, Kampala

It’s every day. That is normal and right; otherwise there would be no discipline in our houses. Female, parent, Wakiso

Yes. We get children from all types of homes in this school. We must put them right [by punishing]. Female, teacher, Wakiso

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In what ways do you punish children?

Physical Punishment

Physical pain is a good teacher. It burns lessons in your head in a way that soft-soft words never can. I make sure the child feels the pain when I slap him. Male, teacher, Wakiso

I give them 10 strokes of the cane. Male, teacher, Kampala

I tie him to a tree for a whole day without food or water and cane him once or twice during the day. Male, parent, Wakiso

I twist his earlobe so that he will feel the pain. Male, teacher, Kampala

If I want to punish him quietly, I press his finger near the nails really tight. Female, teacher, Kampala

I use my finger nails to squeeze her earlobe until it can even bleed. Male, parent, Wakiso

If he becomes wild and I can’t manage, I invite mob justice. I call his age-mates and ask them to beat him up. Male, parent, Wakiso

I make them slash the grass on a large area of land in the hot sun. Female, teacher, Wakiso

Me as a teacher, I don’t punish, but as a parent I give strokes, I shout, and I even deny her food if she fails her tests. Female, teacher, Wakiso

I don’t joke around. When I slap, the child knows he has been slapped. I don’t believe in this soft approach of staring at your child or giving warnings. Male, parent, Wakiso
In what ways do you punish children?

Emotional Punishment

I lock her in the kraal with the animals, so she will know that if she behaves like an animal, I will treat her like that. Male, parent, Wakiso

I threaten to throw her down the latrine. Male, parent, Wakiso

I send him away saying he is no longer my son. Male, parent, Kampala

I threaten to burn him with a hot knife. Female, parent, Wakiso

If I walk into a class, they know that I have to be able to hear a pin drop. If not, they know what will happen. Male, teacher, Wakiso

I insult them publicly, and then if they continue, I administer several strokes. Male, teacher, Kampala

It depends on my mood. If she is annoying me, I can say poisonous things, I can pinch her, or I can refuse to give her food. As I said, it all depends. Female, parent, Kampala

I believe a tongue is more powerful than the cane. I make her feel bad by my words, and she will be so ashamed that she dare not repeat the mistake. Female, parent, Wakiso
Interview

Female Community Leader

Q: What is commonly done when people punish children in your community?

A: Beating is commonly used, glaring, quarrelling with children, shouting, insulting, neglecting, refusing to take children to school even when parents are able.

Q: Are many children punished in your community?

A: Yes, most children are punished regularly, both boys and girls.

Q: Do you punish your children or other children you come in contact with?

A: I punish all children, whether mine or not, who are doing wrong and they are within my community, because it is our responsibility as elders to guide our children. I don’t discriminate between boys and girls. It only depends on who has done wrong.

Q: How do you punish them?

A: I always use a stick for boys. I also take them to school and ask teachers to beat them so hard, because me as their mother, even if I beat, they only cry and repeat the same mistakes. But when a stranger beats them, they fear and change. I sometimes shout at them, but I so much believe in the stick. For girls, I send them to fetch water because girls have to be protected against getting scars, so that in future many cattle can be paid for bride price.

Q: In your opinion, does punishing children in this way help them learn what they have done wrong?

A: Yes, because when you beat a child, she rarely does the same mistake or takes long to repeat it, because they fear the pain of the stick or feel ashamed.

Q: How does punishing children make them feel?

A: They feel very scared of the parent and don’t do any wrong in the parent’s presence. They don’t feel happy, some feel sorry for the wrongs they have done and come and apologize. Even though the child feels hated and always avoids the mother or the person who punishes them, the good ones in their heart know that they are being punished for their own good.
Q: Can you share with us how you feel or what you are thinking when you are punishing children?

A: I feel pain and sometimes cry after beating my children, but I do it for their own good. Sometimes I am not happy and regret when I realize that I have beaten the child so hard and she is swollen or has small wounds. At times, I feel happy when I punish and my children change and even apologize to me, because then I know I punished them for a right cause.

Q: In your opinion, do children have a right not to be punished in a way that hurts them physically or makes them feel bad about themselves?

A: No, children don’t have that right. It is their parents to show them what is good and bad, and they cannot see this on their own.

Q: Are there ways in which adults mistreat children in your community?

A: Making children of 8 years carry heavy 20-liter jerry cans of water, excessive beating, most children are neglected because parents don’t take care of them and just go and drink alcohol. Children are not given medical care. You see them walking around with sores and nobody cares. Girls of 12 years are forced to marry old men, because they offer cattle to their fathers.

Q: What should be done when adults mistreat children?

A: You reason with the adult, because often they just want what is good for the child. You should not be too quick to take them to higher authority, even if they sometimes beat badly.

Q: Do you have any other thoughts or feelings about how children are treated in your community?

A: Many, too many, children are abused in our community, but it is hard for adults too. We need help to find better ways of solving our problems instead of just beating. Government should reach out to us. Female, community leader, Wakiso
A Teacher Against Violence

A testimony I was born in a village in a family where my father had two wives. He was a respected man because he had land. He provided for both families, but I and my brothers and sisters were afraid of him. He was so harsh. He would beat you for any small mistake. He beat me and shouted at me all the time. If I didn’t do the housework or did not do my homework or did not greet somebody properly, he would beat and he would shout. He was terrible to all my siblings and me. He gave our mother money for food and expenses and said that it was no business of hers how he chose to discipline his children. My mother tried to help us but what can she do?

All through my school years, I feared everyone and remained quiet and obedient. I tried to avoid troubles. I thought men were just like that and there is nothing I can do. But then when I was 22, I met my now husband. He is kind and never shouts. At first I thought he was just trying to tempt me, but till now he has remained like that. Perhaps violence is not about being a man or a woman but what kind of person you are.

We now have two children and at first I used to beat them and shout at them just like my father used to do to me. One day I saw how afraid my daughter was about everything and I thought of how I was when my father used to beat me. I talked to my friend about it and she helped me see what I was doing to my daughter. I felt sorry and apologized to her. Then I attended a workshop about children’s rights and learned that it does not have to be like that. My husband and I talked about it and have decided that we will never beat our children the way we were beaten by our parents. I do not want my children to be afraid of everything, the way I was. We even try to help our neighbor’s children when they beat them too much.

I don’t know if it was the workshop that changed me. I knew in my heart that violence was wrong because I know what it feels like. The workshop helped me understand what was in my heart. Now I work at this school where the headmistress has made a rule that corporal punishment is not allowed. Sometimes it is hard, but I also think it is right. I wish all schools were like ours... female, teacher, Wakiso
Caregivers’ Voices

What should be done when adults mistreat children?

I think a parent should be cautioned but not arrested. After all you can’t arrest a father for beating his child. It is his right to do what he wants. Male, parent, Kampala

Look, anyone can lose his temper sometimes. We should not take occasional abuses too seriously. Even if the child bleeds, he knows that the parent was trying to teach him something. Male, parent, Wakiso

I think a parent should be held accountable if they mistreat children. First you talk with them and if they don’t reform, then we have to take more serious steps. Female, teacher, Kampala

A parent always knows what is right even if they sometimes don’t show it correctly. Female, parent, Kampala

I think we should not be so quick to take a child’s side against the parent. This talk of children’s rights is a curse on parents. Male, parent, Kampala

People who don’t understand what it is like to correct children should not try to tell us what to do. Male, parent, Kampala

I think that if the child does not bleed we should just finish it there; otherwise we have to open a case. Male, community leader, Kampala

Children have feelings too. I think older people should know how to treat children well or else they should face the law. Male, teacher, Kampala

Five strokes are fine. Beyond that, the teacher is not teaching but injuring. Female, teacher, Wakiso

I think people who sexually abuse young children should be arrested and locked away for seven years. Male, community leader, Wakiso

We elders should talk to the abuser. We should counsel them about how to properly guide children. Female, community leader, Wakiso
RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN?

Violence against children manifests in many forms. It has become normalized and entrenched in how we relate with children and therefore a holistic, multifaceted, long-term, and a comprehensive response is required to address this problem.

What does this mean in practice?

First, we must insist that children play a central and a meaningful role in all the efforts aimed at addressing violence against them. They must be protagonists for their own cause and their experience, views and ideas must form an integral part of any intervention aimed at preventing violence against them. We must learn new ways of listening to them and learning from them.

Second, we must recognize that adults are not the enemy. It would be a profound mistake to develop interventions based on divisive models that cast adults as retrograde individuals with little or no sympathy for children. Many caregivers are operating under intense pressures, immersed in a belief system that propagates the status quo. They need to be convinced that creating alternative models of the adult-child relationship is in their best interests as much as children’s, and that the current model is serving neither.

Third, we need to focus attention on preventing violence against children rather than simply responding with palliative or punitive action. A focus on prevention involves working with a broad cross section of the community and using practical and pragmatic programs to reassess children’s social status and value as human beings.

Fourth, we need to develop the infrastructure that will allow alternative models of the caregiver-child relationship to flourish. Developing this infrastructure requires the establishment of community-based responses and support mechanisms and the development of local capacity to promote alternatives and provoke discussions.

Fifth, we need long-term strategies that address the problem on many fronts and in gradation. Our responses should recognize that influencing deep-seated perspectives requires a progressive ongoing engagement that promotes dialogue rather than a series of random, fragmented interventions that prescribe solutions and attack adults. Adults need long-term support to resolve their conflicted beliefs about how best to relate with the children they care about.

Any action based on the following recommendations must embody these central principles. The following recommendations reflect the observations of the report and the analysis of the findings. These recommendations target six groups of duty-bearers: policy makers, school administrators, civil society organizations, children, local government officials and community members, and development partners.
1. Policy Makers

1.1 COMPREHENSIVE CHILD-CENTRIC LEGISLATION
Develop comprehensive child-centric legislation that would legally protect children from all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, and economic violence, as well as many forms of emotional violence. The legislation should include all provisions of the UNCRC and prescribe clear action when these rights are denied to children. It should ensure that sufficient resources and mechanisms are in place to respond to children who need to access the protection provided in this legislation.

1.2 ACCOUNTABILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Ensure resources are allocated and mechanisms are established to train, on an ongoing basis, Local Council 1 leaders (LC1) and the Secretary for Children’s Affairs (SCA) on how to fulfill their roles as promoters of children's rights, including taking a proactive interest in children’s welfare, exercising the full power vested in them by the law to respond to children’s concerns, and reporting on all actions they have taken to protect children.

1.3 INVEST IN PROBATION OFFICERS
Ensure that there is sufficient investment in the District Probation Officers so that they are able to meaningfully respond to children’s needs. Apart from building skills, it is crucial that budgetary allocations are sufficient to enable them to undertake meaningful outreach in their districts.

1.4 POLICY DIRECTIVES FOR SCHOOLS
send each school a binding policy statement that articulates the responsibility of the administration to ensure that all children are protected from violence. This statement should outline the steps the administration is required to take in the case of a staff member contravening the policy. It should outline a mandatory child-friendly process in which children learn about the policy and it should request an annual progress report from each school regarding compliance with the policy.

1.5 AN OMBUDSPERSON DEDICATED TO TAKE ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
establish an independent ombudsperson who is mandated by the Government of Uganda to reach out to children regarding their experiences of violence, and who reports to the civil society as well as a parliamentary committee regarding compliance with established policy as well as hold various duty-bearers accountable through the power of the law.

1.6 GUIDELINES ON CHILDREN AND LABOUR
Commission a study on how children’s labour is used by their schools and families, including an analysis of how children are involved in making water accessible to their families and the health consequences for children who are made to carry heavy loads. Develop guidelines on children and labour based on the results of the report.

1.7 FREE LUNCH AND REDUCED COSTS AT SCHOOLS
amend the policy around Universal Primary Education to make provisions for all students to have access to free lunch at school. In addition, uniforms and shoes should be encouraged, but lack of these amenities should not disqualify a child from attending school. No child should be required to make an additional contribution to be able to remain in school.

2. School Administrators

2.1 CODE OF CONDUCT
Develop a Code of Conduct at your school to which all staff and the administration are required to adhere, including a written directive on what happens when a staff member contravenes the code.

2.2 STUDENT COUNCIL
Establish a Student Council in your school that represents all students, reports students’ concerns to the administration, and advocates on students’ behalf. The Student Council should consist of elected students trained to discharge their duties as representatives.
2.3 POLICY AGAINST VIOLENCE Create a written policy against violence in school that emphasizes the responsibility of administrators and teachers regarding adult-to-student violence, inappropriate disciplining, and violence between students (bullying). Post the policy on public notice boards within the school. Write an annual report regarding the implementation of the policy, and submit it to the Student Council for comment.

2.4 TEACHER TRAINING Ensure teachers receive training on the alternatives to corporal punishment, the consequences for disobeying the school’s policy against violence, and how to protect students from older children or other teacher’s inflicting violence.

2.5 SUPPORT TO CHILDREN Keep at least one teacher on staff at all times who has training in how to respond to and support children who are experiencing violence. Children should be assured that this service is confidential and will respect their wishes regarding action to be taken.

3. Civil Society Organizations (NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, etc.)

3.1 CHILDREN’S CAPACITY Develop children’s capacity to assume a meaningful role in preventing violence against them. This could be done by sponsoring training, creating forums within which children’s views are solicited, or developing communication materials that impart knowledge and skills.

3.2 ADVOCACY Advocate for child-centric policies and policy frameworks at a national and local level that address prevention of violence against children.

3.3 CHILD-CENTRIC COALITION Assemble a coalition of child-centric organizations to focus attention on the issue of violence against children. This coalition could develop a long-term strategic plan to comprehensively address the issue.

3.4 BUDGET ANALYSIS Analyze resource allocation in the national budget through the lens of the prevention of violence against children.

3.5 NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGN Mount a national awareness-raising campaign through the media as well as through existing infrastructure.

3.6 RESEARCH Commission research that collects child-centric information on violence against children, with specific implications for policy and practice.

3.7 LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE Invest in developing local infrastructure to respond to children experiencing violence. This work includes developing capacity at a local level and encouraging local mechanisms to respond to children’s needs regarding violence against them.

3.8 SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS Develop a conceptual framework for child-friendly schools that could be widely implemented, including a model policy against violence. Support a selected number of schools in demonstrating the implementation of this framework.

3.9 NATIONAL EXPERTISE Establish a national pool of trained resource persons who could support violence prevention initiatives in various parts of the country.

3.10 ANNUAL EVENT Implement an annual event to increase support nationwide for the elimination of violence against children, at which an annual report on the nation’s progress would be made public.

3.11 TOOL DEVELOPMENT Develop programmatic tools that enable a wide range of practitioners to work efficiently to prevent violence against children.

3.12 NATIONAL VOICE FOR CHILDREN Strengthen the status and capacity of a national body such as National Children’s Council, that speaks-out with a credible voice on the issue of violence against children.
4. Children

4.1 CHILDREN SUPPORT EACH OTHER
Respect all children and listen to them. Help your friends, fellow students or your neighbors who are experiencing violence.

4.2 WORK WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS
Approach a local organization (NGO or CBO) to help you work with your teachers to develop rules about how corporal punishment is used in your school.

4.3 TEACH OTHERS
Learn from local child friendly organizations about ways to avoid violence at home and at school and teach other children about it.

4.4 BECOME INVOLVED
Learn about the consequences of violence on children and talk to adults, teachers and other children about how it is hurting everyone.

4.5 DISCUSSION CLUBS
Start a discussion club of children at school or in your neighborhood about violence against children. Discuss how it happens, who commits it, how it makes children feel, how you can support each other and what action can you take as children to prevent it.

4.6 CHILDREN’S COMMITTEE
Organize a committee of children in your school or neighborhood that will hold children who bully other children accountable. Involve teachers or LC1 leaders to help you set it up.

4.7 SPEAK OUT
Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or probation officers drawing attention to violence that may be occurring in your community.

4.8 LEARN MORE
Ask your teacher to talk to your class about violence and how it affects children and what can be done to prevent it.

4.9 SAFETY FIRST
Remember in all these actions, your safety must come first. Seek help from others if you feel you are in danger.

5. Local Government Officials and Community Members

5.1 AWARENESS GROUP
Lead the local community in establishing an awareness group that advocates on behalf of children experiencing violence.

5.2 MONITORING BY PROBATION OFFICERS
Ensure the probation officer meets regularly with the LC1 and the SCA to ascertain the status of children within their area and to remain vigilant for vulnerable children.

5.3 REFERRAL MECHANISM
Establish a referral mechanism at a local level, to be led by the probation officer, to ensure that children who want to report violence have options.

5.4 COMMUNITY DIALOGUES
Ensure the probation officer, in collaboration with the SCA and the LC1, holds regular community dialogues during which violence against children is discussed, including the exploitation of children’s labour at home and at school.
5.5 SUPPORT TO PARENTS Encourage neighbors and elders to counsel parents who are violent towards their children and to discuss with these parents the alternatives to violence.

5.6 RELIGIOUS INTERVENTION Involve religious leaders in preventing violence against children.

5.7 PROTESTS In cases of egregious violence, organize a protest with leadership from the SCA, and implore police to take action.

5.8 SEXUAL HARASSMENT ZERO TOLERANCE CAMPAIGN In collaboration with the police and school administration, mount a zero tolerance campaign against sexual harassment in the streets, schools, and homes.

5.9 COMMUNITY SENSITISATION Introduce outreach projects through which the police, probation officers, LC1 and SCA proactively sensitize the community about violence against children.

6. Development Partners (donors, cooperating agencies, etc.)

6.1 POLICY FRAMEWORK Sponsor a multi-agency collaborative process that develops a holistic policy framework for preventing violence against children.

6.2 10-YEAR PLAN Sponsor development of a comprehensive 10-year national plan to address violence against children.

6.3 FORUMS Create regular forums for broader discussion of violence against children.

6.4 POLICY INITIATIVES Encourage policy initiatives that address violence against children. Work closely with the Ministry of Education and Sports to develop a comprehensive policy and action plan to address violence against children in schools. Work with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to address violence against children within the home.

6.5 CAPACITY FOR BUDGET ANALYSIS Develop the capacity of the government as well as the civil society to analyze the national budget and resource allocation for the prevention of violence against children.

6.6 SUPPORT FOR DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH Support initiatives to collect, analyze, and disseminate information regarding violence against children and its consequences. Encourage academic institutions to undertake research on violence against children.

6.7 ENABLE LOCAL ACTIVISM Support community based initiatives that respond directly to children as well as work at the local level to prevent violence against children.
No other form of violence has the social legitimacy or tacit consent associated with violence against children. In every strata of society, within every political view, from the educated and the affluent to the illiterate and the impoverished, the tolerance of violence against children is pervasive. A large section of the adult population sees children as instruments of their elders’ will, as right holders in waiting, as having to pay the price of obedience and subservience for their reliance on adult support. This power-based construction of the adult-child relationship has become the engine that perpetuates violence against children.

We live in a society where more than 90 percent of the children consulted from diverse backgrounds said they have experienced violence at the hands of people who are supposed to be the guardians of their rights. A third of these children reported that they experience violence at least once a week, and a half of those said they experience it regularly. Yet there is no public outcry or a clearly organized movement to change this reality. Parents and teachers continue to violate children despite deep in their hearts knowing that it is not teaching the child anything except fear and shame.

Can we continue operating within the status quo, oppressing a vast number of human beings on a daily basis and yet ignore its potential consequences? Does it not stand to reason that these children will learn that aggression is normal and that violence is an acceptable way of getting your way? Uganda, and indeed the world, has had a history of violent conflicts in which individuals have too quickly decided that violence is an acceptable way of resolving differences and imposing ones’ will on others.

We are at a critical moment. Worldwide momentum is gathering and political will is being generated to address violence against children. We have an historic opportunity to truly influence the experience of childhood for all the children of Uganda. The question is, will we respond to this challenge?