

## Social Protection and Childhood Violence: Sectoral Roundtable

---

### 1. Background and motivation: Childhood Violence

Every year, as many as one billion children experience physical, sexual, or emotional violence<sup>1,2</sup>. The impact of this violence can be felt beyond the epicentre of the individual victim, with childhood violence having wide-reaching social and economic consequences.

The existence of childhood violence stands in direct conflict with the principles of social justice and human dignity. Childhood violence in schools and at home is one of the most common causes of school drop-out and absenteeism<sup>2</sup>, meaning that victims are deprived of a full, quality education. Childhood violence contributes to lifelong ill health—many leading causes of death such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and HIV/AIDS through increased stress and as a result of victims adopting adverse risk behaviours such as smoking, alcohol and drug misuse, or unsafe sex in an effort to cope with the psychological effects of violence<sup>2</sup>. Victims of childhood violence are more likely to themselves become violent, meaning there is a higher risk of them engaging in criminal acts and perpetuating the negative cycle of perpetration and victimization.

Childhood violence is a collective failure. There is no country in the world that is free from violence. Therefore, ending childhood violence has to be a priority for the global community and a marker of human progress, social justice and commitment to dignity.

The current global approach to childhood violence, however, is to invest in responding to and attempting to fix the damage caused when violence occurs. Despite there being a growing body of evidence to support the economic, social and moral justifications for taking a prevention-based approach to childhood violence, few governments invest in tackling this problem at its root. Further, even if secondary responses are effective in mitigating the adverse effects of violence, they are unlikely to reach most children victims, because violence most often goes underreported to formal sources of support such as medical, legal or social services<sup>3,4</sup>. Therefore, without addressing primary prevention, most childhood violence is left uncouned and unaddressed.

### 2. Social Protection: Definitions and potential for impacts on childhood violence

There is increasing interest in understanding how social protection can mitigate the risk of violence against children. Social protection programming is on the rise globally and is broadly defined by UNICEF as the set of public and private policies and programs aimed at preventing, reducing and

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A & Kress, H. (2016). "Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: a systematic review and minimum estimates." *Pediatrics*, 137(3): e20154079.

<sup>3</sup> Sumner, S., Mercy, J. A., Saul, J., Motsa-Nzuza, N., Kwesigabo, G., Buluma, R., . . . Hillis, S. (2015). Prevalence of Sexual Violence Against Children and Use of Social Services — Seven Countries, 2007–2013. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, 64(21), 565-569.

<sup>4</sup> Palermo, T., Bleck, J., & Peterman, A. (2014). Tip of the iceberg: Reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 179(5), 602-612.

eliminating economic and social vulnerabilities to poverty and deprivation<sup>5</sup>. The World Bank defines a similar but more focused concept, social safety nets, as noncontributory measures designed to provide regular and predictable support to poor and vulnerable people<sup>6</sup>. The World Bank's State of Social Safety Nets (2015) identifies six main types of programming: 1) conditional cash transfers (CCTs), 2) unconditional cash transfers (UCTs), 3) school feeding programs, 4) unconditional in-kind transfers, 5) public works, and 6) fee waivers. According to the State of Social Safety Nets (2015), 1.9 billion people worldwide are enrolled in some form of social safety net, with cash transfers and school feeding present in nearly every country and with approximately 20 programs operating in the average developing country. Cash transfers in particular are rapidly expanding. For example in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); in 2010 about half of countries in the region had some form of UCT programming, and this had doubled to 40 in 2014.

A key feature of social safety nets is that large-scale programming nearly always has household poverty at the heart of its stated objectives and guiding program design and objectives. Therefore, they often do not explicitly target children, or violence, however aim to address upstream determinants of violence related to poverty and deprivation. However, because of this, small changes in the manner in which they are designed and delivered, have the potential to make a significant difference for individual children.

There are nearly 180 rigorous published impact evaluations demonstrating impacts of safety nets, with more than half of them focus on SSA<sup>8</sup>. Studies show positive and significant impacts of cash transfers on school enrollment and attendance; increased live births in safer facilities; improved prenatal and postnatal care; regular growth monitoring of children and enhanced food security, reductions in poverty, among others. The evidence also shows the productive impacts, particularly of UCTs in SSA, and how increases in investment generates agricultural and nonagricultural income and positive spillover effects on local economies.

Therefore, cash transfers, which arguably represent the largest body of rigorous evidence among social protection programs, have demonstrated impacts on several risk factors for childhood violence (e.g. household economic insecurity, child labour, and education-related outcomes)<sup>7</sup>. To date, there exists very little evidence on the ability of cash transfers to reduce actual experience of childhood violence, but this is largely due to a lack of measurement and examination in impact evaluations. Despite this lack of evidence, the potential of cash transfer programs to reduce childhood violence is promising. Cash transfers have been found to reduce violence among adults and adolescent girls, particularly intimate partner violence<sup>8,9,10</sup>. However, a study of Mexico's CCT programme examined VAC as a

---

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF prioritizes four types of programming: 1) Social transfers: Including cash, in-kind, public works and child disability grants; 2) Programmes to ensure access to services: Including removal of user fees and health insurance; 3) Social support and care services: Including family support counselling and referrals; and 4) Legislation and policy reform: To ensure equity and non-discrimination in access to services and economic opportunities. UNICEF (2016). UNICEF's Approach to Social Protection. Social Inclusion summaries, January 2016.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2015). State of Social Safety Nets. World Bank: Washington, DC. Available online: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2015/07/24741765/state-social-safety-nets-2015>

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF-ESARO/Transfer Project (2015), 'Social Cash Transfer and Children's Outcomes: A Review of Evidence from Africa'.

<sup>8</sup> Pettifor, A., Selin, A., K Kahn, C. M., & Gomez-Olive..(2015, September 14-17). *The impact of a Conditional Cash Transfer study (HPTN 068) and a Community Mobilization intervention on experiences of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from Mpumalanga, South Africa*

Paper presented at the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Forum, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Hidrobo, M., Peterman, A., & Heise, L. (2016). The effect of cash, vouchers and food transfers on intimate partner violence: Evidence from a randomized experiment in Northern Ecuador. *American Economic Review: Applied Economics* (in press).

<sup>10</sup> Hidrobo, M., & Fernald, L. (2013). Cash transfers and domestic violence. *Journal of health economics*, 32(1), 304-319.

secondary outcome and found no reductions in corporal punishment as a result of the programme<sup>11</sup>. Further, sexual exploitation is a form of childhood violence, and studies have shown cash transfers reduce the risk of transactional sex<sup>12,13</sup>, age-disparate sex, and early sexual debut<sup>14,15</sup>—all which may be motivated in part by economic insecurity. Importantly, and in line with objectives of social transfer programs, none of these interventions were designed with objectives of having impacts on violence related outcomes. In addition, the majority of examples mentioned come from evaluations of large-scale government programming, representing findings with high generalizability.

Evidence is particularly lacking on the ability of other types of social protection instruments to reduce the risk of childhood violence, and there exists very little evidence on this topic from outside SSA. In addition to expanding regional evidence, there is growing interest in the ability of social protection to reduce violence in urban as well as humanitarian settings, which may distinct due to both levels of community level violence as well as in the unique design of social protection for these areas.

### 3. The Roundtable on Social Protection and Childhood Violence

As part of the Know Violence initiative<sup>16</sup>, the Office of Research--Innocenti will convene and host a roundtable on social protection to examine the ways in which key social protection instruments have potential to reduce childhood violence. The roundtable is will be chaired and hosted at the UNICEF Office of Research--Innocenti, in Florence, Italy, under the leadership of Dr. Sarah Cook, Director of the Institute. The proposed dates for the roundtable are May 12-13<sup>th</sup>, with associated outputs produced by third quarter 2016. This roundtable is part of a larger Know Violence strategy to convene sectoral expert roundtables to bring together global leaders on key topical issues to review the evidence on the importance and possibility of integrated actions to prevent childhood violence.

Participation in this roundtable will include approximately 10-15 experts, including policy makers and researchers. As the lessons and outputs of the roundtable are desired to influence thinking and operations of social safety nets globally, participation of influential international agencies working on social protection, such as the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), would be ensured. Recognizing the focus of Know Violence on learning, priority will be given to individuals who have recently or are in the process of producing new knowledge through rigorous primary quantitative and qualitative research. Experts will be invited to present forthcoming or published research linking social protection to childhood violence outcomes, as well as input on a review paper (see details below) in advance of and prior to the roundtable meeting.

In order to provide some cumulative guidance on understanding the links between social protection and childhood violence, the roundtable will focus on the broad category of household economic strengthening categories of social transfers in line with the World Bank's definition of social safety nets: 1) CCTs, 2) UCTs, 3) unconditional in-kind transfers, 4) public works and 5) vouchers or fee waivers. As cash 'plus' interventions are increasingly common, the group will also consider evidence

---

<sup>11</sup> Bobonis, G. J., González-Brenes, M., & Castro, R. (2013). Public transfers and domestic violence: The roles of private information and spousal control. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 5(1), 179-205.

<sup>12</sup> Cluver, L., Boyes, M., Orkin, M., Pantelic, M., Molwena, T., & Sherr, L. (2013). Child-focused state cash transfers and adolescent risk of HIV infection in South Africa: a propensity-score-matched case-control study. *The Lancet Global Health*, 1(6), e362-e370.

<sup>13</sup> Ranganathan, M., & Lagarde, M. Promoting healthy behaviours and improving health outcomes in low and middle income countries: a review of the impact of conditional cash transfer programmes. *Prev Med*, 55 Suppl, S95-S105.

<sup>14</sup> Handa, S., Halpern, C. T., Pettifor, A., & Thirumurthy, H. (2014). The government of Kenya's cash transfer program reduces the risk of sexual debut among young people age 15-25. *PLoS One*, 9(1), e85473-e85473.

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich, C., Hodidinott, J., Samson, M., Mac Quene, K., van Nierkerk, I., & Renaud, B. (2012). THE South African Child Support Grant Impact Assessment. South Africa: Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency, UNICEF.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/>

emerging around the importance of bundled services. While all forms of childhood violence are important, the group will consider the following: physical (including homicide and suicide), sexual, mental, emotional abuse among children aged 0-18, while understanding that some studies may extend past, but include this age group. Therefore, the group will not focus on other (equally important) forms of violence including FGM/C, child marriage or neglect. In addition, since a similar realist review of cash transfers and IPV is currently underway by partners, the scoping will include this learning, but focus on other forms of violence, rather than exposure to IPV.<sup>17</sup>

Any one type of social protection and childhood violence outcome above could be the topic of its own review. However, assessments from experts in the field indicate that there is not yet critical mass from published rigorous studies specifically of economic strengthening social safety nets to warrant undertaking a systematic or other formal review. Most published work thus far has examined the role of social protection on related child protection outcomes<sup>18,19</sup>, however these have not explicitly examined violence as defined here. Therefore, in advance of the roundtable, an initial scoping paper will be drafted by experts at Innocenti, in consultation with the roundtable expert group, to both catalogue existing and ongoing work, and build a draft framework for understanding pathways between social protection and childhood violence. The framework will focus on mechanisms, and by doing so, review the state of evidence on key intermediate pathways (e.g. social protection and education or poverty). The roundtable will be a venue to vet and modify the framework. Following the roundtable, Innocenti, in collaboration with a selection of experts, will finalize the framework and review of key studies to input into the Know Violence outputs.

Examples of key questions to be asked and coming out of the evidence review will be:

- What are the key pathways through which broad-based social protection (as defined above) has the potential to affect childhood violence (*e.g. building a framework*)?
- What rigorous evidence exists on the impact of social protection programmes on childhood violence within the home? Through which mechanisms are impacts realized, or in the cases where no impacts were found, what hypotheses exist as to mechanisms which could strengthen impacts (*e.g. review of existing rigorous literature*)?
- What is the current state of ongoing or planned research linking social protection and childhood violence? What questions are being asked, and what might we know in 1-3 years on the linkages (*e.g. knowledge frontier looking forward*)?
- Where social protection, or social protection plus, programmes have actively tried to address issues related to childhood violence, and what program modifications or strategies have been pursued (*e.g. program design implications and opportunities*)?
- What are some of the key research questions and gaps looking forward (*where do we go from here*)?

This work complements other Know Violence activities, including a social protection response and prevention panel being organized as part of the East Asia and Pacific Know Violence Symposium being organized this year.

## Key partners

### UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti

---

<sup>17</sup> Buller AM, Bleile A, Peterman A, Hidrobo M, Ranganathan M & L Heise (2015). “Intimate partner violence and cash transfers: A realist review (*in progress*).”

<sup>18</sup> Barrientos, A., Byrne, J., Peña, P., & Villa, J. M. (2014). Social transfers and child protection in the South. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 47, 105-112.

<sup>19</sup> Roelen, K. (2014). Sticks or carrots? Conditional cash transfers and their effect on child abuse and neglect: Researchers observe both benefits and harms of CCT programs. *Child abuse & neglect*, 38(3), 372-382.

The UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti is UNICEF’s dedicated research arm. Innocenti uses its strategic geographic location as a meeting place to bring academic and program specialists together. Innocenti is staffed by a small, multidisciplinary team of experts with diverse academic, professional and cultural backgrounds—including over 50 individuals, led by Director Dr. Sarah Cook and Associate Director Dr. Goran Holmqvist. Innocenti has expertise on a cross cutting set of themes relevant to the research proposed here, including social protection and violence. In particular, the office is a key partner of the Transfer Project, a consortium of researchers, donors and national governments evaluating large-scale government cash transfers in Africa. Additionally, Innocenti is leading the Multi-country Study on Violence Against Children (focus countries: Italy, Peru, Vietnam and Zimbabwe). UNICEF is supporting governments and civil society to work on violence prevention and social protection systems in more than 150 countries.

### **Know Violence Initiative**

Know Violence is a learning initiative established as a collective response by governments, INGO’s and funders concerned about the global impact of childhood violence and the lack of investment in effective violence prevention strategies. It has been created as an independent, time-limited Global Learning Initiative to fill the gaps in the global understanding of violence prevention strategies. By end 2016, Know Violence will provide the knowledge and evidence required to support implementation efforts for the SDGs, harnessing the opportunity that these Goals present to end violence against children. Know Violence will then ensure that the evidence generated informs, equips and influences policymakers to implement and invest in violence prevention beyond the life of this Initiative.

The Initiative will deliver five strands of work to achieve its objectives:

1. A flagship report to be published in 2016 that will lay out the evidence and recommendations for violence prevention policies and their core elements;
2. Expert papers on preventing violence in childhood across settings of homes and families; schools and institutions of alternative care and detention; and communities, workplaces and public spaces;
3. Up to seven regional roundtables on violence prevention strategies;
4. Cross-disciplinary sectoral roundtables to consider how integrated approaches can be developed; and
5. An advocacy strategy focused on national government leadership and policy-makers, influencers in international development agencies, high-level advocates, opinion-leader media and youth networks.