

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

UNICEF IN SRI LANKA FACT SHEET

- Over 1500 cases related to children reported per year.
- Close to one third of cases in high court relate to a child victim.
- Over half of all crimes reported against children committed by known persons including parents and other relatives

THE ISSUE

The Government of Sri Lanka has given high priority to the protection of children and women from physical and sexual abuse and has undertaken a number of initiatives in this regard, including enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in 2005. It also leads South Asia in terms of women's indicators on education and health, and made commendable efforts to promote gender equality. Yet, challenges remain.

Reports of increasing child abuse, neglect and exploitation are on the rise. Out of about 15,000 legal trials pending nationwide, more than 4,000 (27 per cent) involve some form of violence toward a child. Moreover, out of 1,126 abuse cases for which the Ministry of Child Development had detailed information in 2013, 206 victims were younger than age 10 and 878 were between 10 and 16 years old.

According to figures tabled in Parliament in April 2013, there were 1,750 cases of child rape, 330 cases of rape, 5,475 cases of child molestation and 1,194 cases of child abuse in 2012 .

There is also evidence that in 96% of cases of sexual abuse, the abuser is a person known to the victim. In addition, a recent study involving 194 parents in Colombo, found that 40.7 per cent of parents had kicked, choked, beaten, burned, threatened with a weapon, thrown, knocked down, punched or hit their child with an object anywhere other than their bottom during the previous month .

Sadly, the lack of data – disaggregated or otherwise, remains one of the biggest challenges in tackling child abuse and exploitation, along with a culture of impunity that has been exacerbated by the long delays in the processing of child abuse cases. In addition, there is no one stop “place” for survivors of abuse to get the medical, psych-social, legal or police support they require. Service provision is fragmented and standards differ.



UNICEF IN ACTION

Under its current country programme (2013-2017), UNICEF supports national efforts to end violence against children through the Ministry of Child Development and other partners to build child protection systems and integrate service provision so the focus remains on the child. Efforts are also underway to raise awareness around issues of violence, to improve service delivery, to strengthen reporting and data gathering systems and to work with the Ministry of Justice to expedite cases of child abuse.

As a result of this support, three safe houses exist in Ampara, Batticaloa and Jaffna districts (east and the north of the country) that provide interim care services for women or child survivors. UNICEF has also strengthened five Women and Children's Desks in police stations in the Eastern Province to provide adequate and timely responses to victims, as well as supported the establishment of GBV Desks in hospitals in Jaffna, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara to enable early detection and referral of victims of GBV and those at risk.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, more than 900 police officers and other authorities (judiciary, health staff, Probation Officers, Child Rights Promotion Officers, Women Development Officers, and Social Services Officers) have been trained on domestic violence, including the Domestic Violence Act, and on their role in timely processing cases.

UNICEF has supported both policy development, capacity building, integration of service delivery of over-all child protection systems in the country. This included the promotion of a community-based child protection systems, through the establishment of divisional- and village-level Child Protection Committees, as well as the development and implementation of a case management policy and protocol for child abuse cases, particularly those involving girls. More than 22,000 vulnerable community members have received coordinated, multidisciplinary care through integrated case management and case conferencing practices.

Technical support has also been provided to revise legislation on the Protection of Children such as the Orphanage Bill, Children and Young Persons Ordinance and to promote an increase of the Criminal Age of Responsibility from 8 to 12 years of age.

For more information on how UNICEF support to child protection for the most marginalized in Sri Lanka, please contact:

Ms. Una McCauley
UNICEF Sri Lanka Representative
Tel: +94112768555
Cell: +94777237030
Email: umcauley@unicef.org

Ms. Caroline Bakker
Chief, Child Protection
Tel: +94112768555
Cell: +94773733783
Email: cbakker@unicef.org