# Life Stage 2:

## Children and young adolescents

## 6-14 years old

# Our focus on preventing violence in schools and communities

As children grow up and begin to interact more with the world outside their families, they face new types of opportunities and risks. For the vast majority of children between the ages of 6 and 14 years, schools play a critical role in their educational and social development.

School should be a safe environment where girls and boys learn, socialize and realize their potential. Unfortunately, for many children, school is where they feel least safe. Far from being protected, they are exposed to different kinds of violence in the classroom and on the playground. Students may also have to navigate a series of dangers just getting to and from school, from busy roads and environmental hazards to adults who deliberately harm them.[i]

**Violence at school** can lead to decreased attendance rates, poor academic performance and higher dropout rates.[ii] Around the world, studies show that children who feel unsafe or scared at school are less likely to attend and, if they do, may have more problems learning. And because school violence compromises children's educational achievement, they are less likely to meet other developmental goals and to become integrated members of society. As such, experiencing violence at school may have a lifelong detrimental impact on children's well-being.[iii]

## School violence includes:

• Physical and humiliating punishments inflicted by teachers

• Sexual harassment and assault, including trading sex for good grades

• Peer-to-peer bullying

All pupils are potentially at risk. However, children who are seen as 'different,' may be particularly vulnerable to bullying and violence.

For example:

• Children with disabilities

• Children from ethnic or religious minorities

• Children affected by HIV and AIDS

• Children who identify with a non-traditional sexual orientation or gender identity

**ChildFund's Domains of Change and Core Outcome for Life Stage 2: Children and Young Adolescents 6-14 Years Old**

✓ Positive Relationships in Supportive Homes and Communities

✓ Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills to Make Healthy Decisions

✓ Healthy and Actively Participating in Community Life

**Educated and Confident Children**

At ChildFund, we know that we need to address violence at school if we want children ages 6 to 14 years to become educated and confident. This means supporting students, teachers and parents to create a **safe learning environment** that keeps children protected from harm, and promotes their emotional, physical, and psychological well-being.

We know too that positive attitudes and behaviors learned at school are likely to be replicated by children in their homes and communities. In the same way, children raised by parents who do not physically punish their children or allow sibling bullying are more likely to have the confidence to challenge these forms of violence at school.

Our programs for Life Stage 2 aim to:

A **safe learning environment** is one that is free from all forms of violence against children, including physical, psychological, and emotional violence. The risks of violence and harm are reduced through changes to student, parent and teacher skills, attitudes and behaviors, as well as through appropriate school infrastructure and policies/codes of conduct, among other interventions.

- Promote high-quality academic teaching and child literacy, as well as enhance essential life skills for children.

- Educate children, parents, teachers and community members to recognize and speak out on violence in all of its forms.

- Empower communities to question cultural norms that perpetuate, justify, and normalize violence against children.

- Establish systems in schools for reporting violence against children and access to social services.

- Provide safe places to learn and play in humanitarian emergencies.

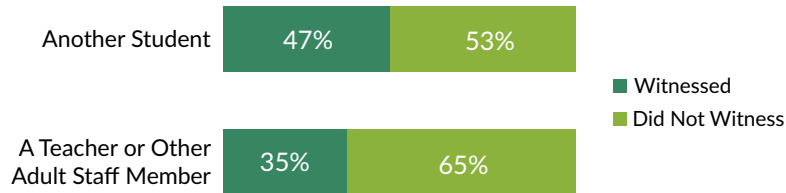## Our learning about protecting children and young adolescents

In order to design effective programs for children ages 6 to 14 years, ChildFund has been collecting data about children's experience's in educational settings around the world. In this section, we present our findings regarding the types of violence children face as they try to navigate their learning environment:

**1** **Children are frequently exposed to violence at school.** We asked 18,626 children in 13 countries about their experience of witnessing violence at school [iv] as part of our 2017 global monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data collection. We learned that:

- **Over half of all children (55%) ages 6 to 14 years had been exposed to violence in their school**. Children in **Sri Lanka** (81%), **India** (74%) and **Indonesia** (62%) had witnessed violence in their schools at particularly high rates.

- **Peer-to-peer violence was more commonly witnessed than adult-to-student violence.** 47% of children reported witnessing their peers being hit or humiliated by other students, while only 35% reported witnessing adults such as teachers hitting or humiliating students. These data seem to confirm other findings and anecdotal accounts regarding the pervasiveness of peer bullying in schools.

**Percent of Students Who Reported Witnessing a Child in Their School or Community Being Hit or Humiliated by....**

| | Witnessed | Did Not Witness |
|---|---|---|
| Another Student | 47% | 53% |
| A Teacher or Other Adult Staff Member | 35% | 65% |

- Our analysis of the relationship between exposure to violence and learning outcomes revealed that, overall, **fewer children who witnessed adult-to-student violence at school met academic benchmarks** than children who had not witnessed such violence.

This finding points to the importance of positive teacher-pupil relationships and safe learning environments for promoting academic achievement. However, there is a need for further exploration of these data and research in this area, as this global finding may not be reflective of the full picture at the country and community levels.

Our research studies and surveys below corroborate these global M&E findings and document the prevalence of school violence across the countries where we work:

- Child protection mappings of communities in **Bolivia,**[v] **Honduras,**[vi] **Guatemala**[vii] and the **USA**[viii] and baseline studies in **Ethiopia**[ix] and **Uganda**[x] reveal that children experience **bullying by classmates at school and physical and humiliating punishment at the hands of teachers.** In Honduras, violence was cited as a primary reason for children dropping out or not attending school.

- In **Uganda**, a *National Survey of Violence Against Children (VAC)*[1] revealed that **male teachers were the most frequent perpetrators of physical violence against children** ages 13 to 17 years.[xi] In this same age group, 33% of boys and 16% of girls who had been abused sexually in the preceding 12 months reported that school was where the incident of sexual violence had taken place.

- In **Sri Lanka**, a national study of child disciplinary practices indicated **high rates and acceptance of corporal punishment and psychological aggression by teachers** and revealed a punishment-based culture in schools.[xii]

**2** **The majority of children and young adolescents know where to report harm to children and would take action to report it.** As part of our global M&E data collection in 2017, we asked 163,509 children and young adolescents ages 6 to 14 years from 16 countries about their knowledge of child protection reporting mechanisms and willingness to report violence against children.[xiii]

We learned that:

- **59% of children and young adolescents said that they knew where to report protection issues and that, if a child was being harmed, they would report it.**

However, there is still more work to be done in countries where children revealed less knowledge and likelihood of reporting violence. Some of our more focused inquiries also tell us that these M&E data may not be reflective of the full picture, demonstrating the need for continuing research in this area, particularly among school-aged children.

**3** **Children and young adolescents experience risks during the school day, as well as on their way to and from school.** We piloted USAID's *Safe Learning Environment (SLE) Qualitative Assessment Toolkit*[xiv] in a small number of schools In **Honduras**[xv] and the **Philippines.**[xvi] Focused on communities with a high incidence of poverty and violence, we undertook participatory research with students, teachers, parents, and community leaders to document and analyze the risks that children face during the school day, as well as on their way to and from school. The study considered a broad range of risks, including: school-related gender-based violence, gang violence, a negative and unsupportive school climate, the impact of armed conflict, and environmental risks such as natural disasters and health epidemics.

The toolkit allowed us to look at the learning environment from a child's perspective, and to identify risks that were sometimes unknown to, or considered insignificant by, adults.

Children reported that:

- Peer bullying and violence by teachers (in the form of physical punishment and verbal/emotional abuse) was widespread.

- In the Philippines, hazards on the way to school included vehicular accidents, animal bites and "spirits."

- In one school in Honduras, gang violence created a "scary atmosphere" of intimidation. Some children claimed that fear or trauma prevented them from being able to learn, reporting lack of attention in class, difficulty in establishing interpersonal relationships with peers and poor academic performance.

In both countries, the findings from the assessments will be used to develop targeted school interventions that address the risks that children have identified.

# What is our research telling us?

We expect school to be a safe place, one that promotes children's academic achievement and allows them to develop their social and emotional learning skills.  However, our data show that violence manifests itself in many different and harmful ways within the education system.  In the following section, we explore some examples of what we are doing to protect children's right to learn by supporting safe learning environments – even during times of crisis – and preventing and responding to the violence that children face in and out of school.

# Our response

At ChildFund, we see our work to address violence at school as the interface between our child protection and education programming.  Our aim is to ensure that children ages 6 to 14 years can learn and grow at school – an aim that is significantly impeded by the violence they face.  Therefore, our interventions must ensure that children feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe in their learning environments, and must serve as an entry point for reducing violence at home and in the community.

To this end, in recent years ChildFund has increased its efforts to:

- Train teachers about the benefits of positive, non-violent methods of discipline.

- Encourage and support schools to develop child-friendly, inclusive cultures with policies and codes of conduct that prohibit bullying and corporal punishment.

- Establish parent and student committees and empower students to speak out on violence and other violations of their rights.

- Support schools and teachers to develop violence prevention plans.

- Build the capacity of caregivers to prevent, mitigate and respond to violence.

During **emergencies and humanitarian crises**, we protect children by providing safe learning and play environments.  This helps children to continue their education and provides a routine during times of instability.  In some countries, we are directing our efforts towards broader societal change through advocacy and policy reform at the national level, as well as raising awareness at the community level. [xvii]

We are starting to see positive outcomes from our school and community-based programs for children and young adolescents in Life Stage 2.  For example:

- In **Sri Lanka**, ChildFund's partners started a two-year project implementing child-centered education in primary schools in 2017. [xviii] Observations showed the teachers were displaying better teaching techniques, more positive behavior and less aggression toward students. **Student engagement showed an average 23% increase from the baseline evaluation.**

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These improvements were accompanied by an increase in improvements in children's learning, with **reading at age-appropriate fluency and comprehension increasing from 51% of students at the baseline to 81% at the midline evaluation.**

- In **Ethiopia**, we have created safer school environments by establishing girls' clubs and enabling members to speak up on harmful traditional practices and gender-based violence.[xix]

- In **Senegal**, we partnered with the Ministry of Education on a project[2] to train teachers in religious schools and enlisted local community groups to feed and care for students so that they were no longer forced to beg for money or food.[xx] We also advocated for a law to regulate and improve students' living and learning conditions by working with our partners to facilitate an open dialogue and consultation process between government and religious actors.

## Advocating for change

Across **Senegal**, an estimated 50,000 boys (talibé) live in traditional Koranic boarding schools (daaras), often in squalid, overcrowded conditions. They are commonly forced to beg on the streets for money or food.

Children in these daaras are often beaten, chained, bound and subjected to other forms of physical or psychological abuse amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment.

## CASE STUDY: Building bridges between teachers and parents to combat violence in Honduras

In Honduras, ChildFund has piloted an innovative method to prevent violence in schools as part of the *PUENTES ("Bridges")* project[3].[xxi] Working in 36 schools in high-crime cities over a period of 18 months, the project tested *Miles de Manos ("Thousands of Hands")*, an approach that brings together teachers and parents to reduce violent behavior at home and at school. Intensive training workshops were conducted with parents (mostly mothers) and teachers to enhance parenting and teaching skills, teach positive discipline techniques, and facilitate the development of better communication and relationships with children.[xxii]

Honduras has been classified as one of the most violent countries in the world, with many children facing huge **challenges accessing safe education.** In our own studies we have found that students in Honduras are exposed to gang violence, peer bullying, and verbal/emotional abuse from teachers at school.

A quasi-experimental study evaluation found encouraging results, including:

- A reported 62% reduction in acts of physical violence and a 59% reduction in acts of psychological and emotional violence in classrooms – with teachers and students relating to each other in more positive ways.

- An increase in students who report feeling safe and protected in their classroom and at home, from 70% to 90% by the project's end.

- An increase in reported use of positive discipline techniques by parents, from 60% to 65%.

- A better understanding among parents and teachers about how their own behavior (hitting, yelling, and verbal abuse) constitutes violence and can negatively affect their children.

- A sense of increased duty among parents to protect children, who have learned strategies for building more positive and caring relationships.

### *"Milos de Manos* helped us to relate to our children."

-Mother participant in the *PUENTES* project

For many teachers, parents and children, the *PUENTES* project provided a welcome safe space to speak about the violence endemic to their communities –  a space that had not been offered to them before.   Despite some of the challenges of the project, such as low participation of fathers and the demands of working in dangerous school environments, the results from this initial pilot are promising.

Moving forward, *Milos de Manos* will be used as the foundation for ChildFund's *School-Based Violence Prevention Model*, which will be piloted over a two-year period in different regions around the world.

## CASE STUDY: Child protection is everyone's responsibility in the Philippines

In the **Philippines**, ChildFund piloted a community-based program to address violence against children in schools, homes and communities through its two-year project *Not in Our Community*. [4] Advocating that "child protection is everyone's responsibility," the project focused on nine schools where a baseline study had identified peer bullying and violent discipline by teachers and parents as protection concerns.

Working alongside partners, ChildFund trained teachers, parents, and students on issues such as positive discipline methods, anti-bullying, and child rights, and enlisted children to speak out about violence using community radio broadcasts, school newspaper articles, and posters.
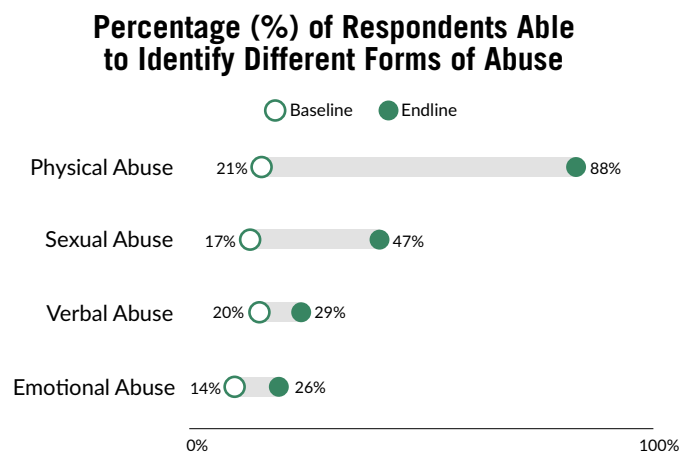
One of the major contributions of the Not in Our Community project was to help stakeholders, particularly children and teachers, to develop a much **broader and more intimate knowledge of child abuse and protection** including forms and sources of violence, risk factors and where to go for assistance.

The project also set up **zero-tolerance child protection committees** at the schools, where children could report cases of violence and abuse.  These in turn were linked to local government child protection committees and provincial level Child Protection Units (established through the project), to ensure that, where necessary, children received additional support and services.

<span style="color:green">**"Linking community-based mechanisms to the formal child protection system is one of the best practices from this project that can be replicated in other countries."**</span>

<div align="right">-ChildFund Philippines Staff</div>

A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study at the end of the project indicated that teachers showed positive changes in attitude toward protecting the rights and welfare of children, and that students were more aware of their rights and responsibilities.[xxiii]   Participants also demonstrated a better understanding that violence against children most often occurs at the hands of family members or friends.

**Percentage (%) of Respondents Able to Identify Different Forms of Abuse**

○ Baseline ● Endline

| Physical Abuse | 21% ○————————● 88% |
| Sexual Abuse | 17% ○————● 47% |
| Verbal Abuse | 20% ○—● 29% |
| Emotional Abuse | 14% ○● 26% |

0%                          100%

However, the survey also found that local officials continued to have gray areas in the ways that they viewed physical and verbal violence, neglect and even sexual abuse of children. Parents seemed unconvinced of their ability to protect or guide their children, with a few continuing to resort to corporal punishment.  This is symptomatic of the broader challenge of shifting deep-rooted attitudes and harmful behaviors over a short period of time, especially in the private realm of the household.

# CASE STUDY: Creating safe places for children to learn and play during crisis in Ethiopia

In 2016, ChildFund set up a one-year emergency project to strengthen community-based child protection in the districts of Siraro and Fentale in the Oromia region of **Ethiopia**.  Severely affected by one of the worst droughts in decades, these remote pastoralist communities were experiencing a rise in school absenteeism and child labor, with heightened rates of anxiety and psychological distress among children as their families struggled with food and water insecurity.

One of the principal aims of the *Strengthening Community-Based Protection in Severely Drought-Affected Districts in Oromia Region* project [5] was to strengthen psychosocial support for children by setting up 30 **Child-Friendly Spaces** where girls and boys of mixed ages could play, learn to read and write, engage in fun activities, and develop important life skills.  Significant effort was also made to include **children with disabilities,** who were often stigmatized or kept at home by families with project staff visiting households to identify children with physical and developmental impairments who could benefit from activities.

In a final evaluation, children and adults identified the Child-Friendly Spaces as the most beneficial and successful component of the project.[xxiv]  By providing children with a hub for learning, entertainment and socializing during a time of emergency, the spaces were found to:

- Reduce children's drought-related stress.

- Contribute to children's informal learning.

- Increase community awareness about the importance of formal education for children and young adolescents ages 6 to 14 years old.

- Provide a safe place for children to take a break from daily hardship.

Enthusiastic volunteers from the community managed the Child-Friendly Spaces and played an important role in their success. Running activities appropriate to the local culture, they engaged children (many of whom had never attended school) in sessions that included reading, counting, drawing, games, drama, singing and story-telling. Simple measures such as situating the Child-Friendly Spaces close to households, providing children with shade in the very hot climate, and giving them snacks and drinks also contributed to their success.

Finally, community participation in building and managing the Child-Friendly Spaces helped to develop local ownership of the initiative. This enabled the communities in Siraro and Fentale to keep the Child-Friendly Spaces running even after the end of the program so that children continued to benefit from a safe learning and play environment.

While the project clearly gave much-needed relief to families and children during a time of hardship, sustainable change for these communities will need to include addressing the chronic nature of drought-related stress. A longer-term perspective would include the development of water sources – including water tanks at schools – and building permanent, rather than temporary, facilities for children.

# Our future commitment

Our studies and programs reveal the importance of building safe learning environments for children and young adolescents in Life Stage 2, and creating opportunities for girls and boys to learn, play, and grow even during times of crisis. Through this work, we not only increase the likelihood that children will attend school and achieve their educational goals, but we also encourage social change and establish norms of behavior that permeate the home and community.

As ChildFund continues to put its Theory of Change for children and young adolescents into action, we will use our learning to:

- **Listen to the priorities of children.** Our research and data collection must reflect children's daily realities and not be limited by our own interpretations of their lives. In all of our research we must take opportunities to learn more about children's vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

- **Continue to support parents and families**, even as children begin to spend more time at school than at home during this stage of their development. Parents continue to play critical roles in their children's emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development; our emphasis on parenting therefore remains relevant as children grow older. We must support families through stress and financial pressure as they seek to meet the evolving needs of children: buying books and uniforms, providing more food for growing children, and dealing with children's emerging sexuality.

- **Ensure that children have access to safe learning and play environments**, such as Child-Friendly Spaces, during times of crisis. For children whose schools may not be operating, these spaces provide them with psychological relief and equip them with the resilience and skills needed to navigate their changing and often precarious circumstances.

- **Eliminate tolerance for peer-to-peer bullying and violence.** If the cycle of violence is to end with this generation, we must work with the education system at community, district and national levels. Through our programs, we will promote standards of behavior that encourage all children to attend school and actively participate in their own learning and development.

- **Ensure that our messaging and advocacy efforts are consistent across our programs.** For example, our research tells us that corporal punishment by parents and teachers is still widespread in the communities where we work. In response, our programs must work across sectors and at all levels of the community to encourage nonviolent disciplinary measures in all settings.

**Endnotes**

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