

What About The Children?



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RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Global Challenge of the neglect of children.

Kobulsky, J.M., Dubowitz, H. and Xu, Y.
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The objective of this paper was to assess the current state of child neglect through much of the world, including its prevalence and efforts to address it. The reason this work was done was because the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (called here CRC) was a major international achievement in 1989, spurring on national efforts to prevent and address neglect. However, the scope of neglect worldwide and the progress in addressing it in the last 30 years have been unclear.

Method: The scope of neglect was assessed through

- a literature review or recent peer-reviewed research (18 studies were available), and
- analysis of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) child protective services (CPS) and early childhood development data (from 2005 to 2016),
- National responses to neglect (in 73 countries) as described in "World Perspectives 2016", written by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN). This data was used to assess the progress in addressing child neglect worldwide,
- The analysis of case studies for Australia, China, India and Mozambique, from recent CRC country reports.

Results: The 73 countries were grouped into their region (Africa (13), Americas (8), Asia (21) and Europe (29)), and also separately into three income levels (high, middle, low income countries). There were quite big differences in responses to the survey across the regions and income levels. Behaviours viewed as child neglect or maltreatment in general were listed as

- Behaviours involving parent or caregiver toward a child such as abandonment, failure to provide adequate food, clothing or shelter, a child witnessing violence in the home, failure to seek medical care (for any reason) or on religious beliefs, psychological neglect (as failure to provide emotional support or attention) and parental substance abuse affecting the child.
- Social conditions and behaviours affecting child safety, health and development such as prostituting a child, slavery, child labour under 12, children serving as soldiers, forcing a child to beg, children living on the street, child marriage, making a child responsible for adult crime to lessen the risk of prosecution.

There is only room in this short summary to include a few examples. In Europe, the highest percentage of countries (93%) believed that, failure to provide adequate food, clothing or shelter, prostituting a child, child labour under 12 and forcing a child to beg, were of greatest concern. In contrast, in the 8 lowest income countries across the world, the behaviours which were of most concern, were child labour under age 12, child slavery, children serving as soldiers, and children living on the streets (100% for each behaviour). They saw these behaviours as the worst which could happen (and did happen). Looking at regions, 83% of

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European countries put psychological neglect as one of the behaviours generally viewed as child neglect (Africa 62%, America 63% Asia 76 %). When comparing all countries by income level, 86% of high income countries put psychological neglect as one of the behaviours generally viewed as child neglect (medium income 66%, low income 63%). This means that for people of low and middle income countries across the world, child psychological neglect was one of the behaviours of **least** concern.

The most widely provided general preventative service was if a country provided universal free medical care for children (average across all countries 71%, High income 91%, medium income 54% and low income 29%). Unfortunately, only half of the countries reported having supportive services to meet families' basic needs and free medical care for all citizens. Only a quarter offered centres for parents to share experiences and concerns.

The four most common prevention strategies were media campaigns, advocacy for children's rights, services for victims of inter-partner violence (child witnessing violence between parent to parent) and prosecution (to prevent re-occurrence).

Countries were asked what the most important barriers to preventing child maltreatment were. The responses were strongest for:

- limited resources for improving the government's response to child maltreatment,
- lack of trained professionals (especially in lower income countries),
- decline in family life and informal support systems,
- strong sense of family privacy and parental rights to raise children as they choose,
- little commitment to children's rights.

The most eye-opening results were in the case studies on the four countries Mozambique, India, China and Australia. India has 20% of the world's children (UNICEF data 2016) and China only 13%. This is because although China has the greater population, in India, children make up a third of the population and in China only a fifth. In Mozambique the percent is 52% of their population. The list of types of neglect affecting children is markedly different between the four countries studied. It is sobering to think of how many at risk children there are in total across the world. Neglect is directly related to the poverty of a country and can be alleviated by reducing poverty and targeting prevention and intervention.

Conclusions of the report:

- There is a need to improve prevention services including early childhood education, education for girls and parenting education, as well as programs to address basic needs for nutrition and healthcare to prevent neglect, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.
- Progress has been made in establishing child protection policies and other safeguards for neglect in most countries.
- Implementation of the convention on the rights of the child has been uneven and there are large gaps in needed services.
- Tackling poverty has had the biggest effect on reducing child maltreatment and neglect. Rosling et al (2018) believe that the wellbeing of many children has been improved by halving the number of people living in extreme poverty in the last two decades.

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