

Strengthening Social Protection Systems: The Role of Prevention and Coordination among Key Actors

Workshop objectives

The aim of the workshop is to discuss how countries can accelerate action to meet SDG target 16.2 and other violence related targets. Participants will:

- Review and exchange experiences between social protection systems – including cash transfer programmes – and child protection systems that are helping to prevent and respond to Violence Against Children (VAC).
- Discuss how to accelerate co-investments in social protection systems, complementary programmes (e.g. parenting programmes, strengthening of social service workforce aimed at reducing VAC) and improved coordination among responsible sectors.

Using participatory methods we will break into small working groups and collectively decide on key actions moving forward. Within your small group work, and during the larger conversation, please consider the following questions:

- ✓ What are the most effective combinations of social protection and child protection services and programmes to reduce violence against children?
- ✓ How can we gather more, and better, evidence about policies or programmes to effectively promote complementarity and coordination between social protection and child protection systems?
- ✓ What are additional ways to accelerate integration between social protection and child protection systems in order to reduce violence against children?

Background

Family economic security and support programmes, including social protection systems, are widely recognized as an important strategy to enable vulnerable and at-risk families. Economic pressures can leave children at an increased risk of abuse and violence.¹ There is growing evidence that strengthening the economic welfare of families can reduce these risk factors.

Social protection – defined broadly as “a set of public actions that address poverty, vulnerability and exclusion as well as provide means to cope with life’s major risks throughout the life cycle”² – is seen as an important policy tool to contribute to violence-reduction by addressing household and individual-level economic risks and stressors.³ The potential is strongest for ending forms of violence that are driven by economic insecurity, such as sexual or economic exploitation.

However, social protection systems alone, such as social safety nets in the form of cash transfers, are not sufficient to significantly reduce violence against children, nor are they often designed to do so. They must be complemented by other proven prevention strategies, including support for parents and caregivers, social norms change and a robust child protection system that seeks to address the full range of risk factors in the lives of children and their families. For such a system to be effective, a functioning social service system, with trained social workers, is vital to provide referrals, counselling and therapeutic services for children who have experienced violence. Similarly, coordination among key sectors and actors – including social welfare, education, health and justice – is essential.

To be truly transformative for children, there is need for social protection systems that directly address children’s specific vulnerabilities to be integrated with a functional child protection system. SDG Goal 1 on poverty reduction, and SDG target 16.2 and other violence-related targets, provide important opportunities to strengthen and ensure greater integration between these systems.

Key facts

- While VAC transcends social and economic status, and direct and causal links between physical VAC and poverty have not been found, household and community-level poverty are among the accepted risk factors for VAC.⁴
- Evidence shows that strategies for alleviating economic and psychological stress through economic support programmes can reduce VAC.⁵ For example, cash transfers in certain countries have been shown to reduce child maltreatment by 10%, reduce aggressive symptoms in children by 10%, and increase pro-social behavior, particularly among adolescent boys.⁶

Gaps

- While social protection programmes have expanded in many countries, there is opportunity for further investment to expand the social service worker cadre beyond the delivery of cash.
- In many countries, access to quality support services for children who have experienced violence continues to be a challenge. Available services often do not provide comprehensive support to victims, or are not easily accessible to all children.
- Although 'cash plus' programmes are known to have greater impact than cash alone, social protection systems rarely have the kind of complementary programmes that can increase their specific effectiveness in tackling VAC. Moreover, coordination between Ministries and Agencies responsible for social protection and economic empowerment, and those responsible for social welfare and child protection, is often limited, impacting effectiveness in tackling VAC.

Action

INSPIRE identifies 'Income and economic strengthening' and 'Response and support services' as two of the seven INSPIRE strategies, and 'multi-sectoral actions and coordination' as a cross cutting strategy. Evidence shows that together these strategies – i.e. the improvement of families' economic security and stability, and the provision of comprehensive quality support services for families and children, across health, social welfare, justice and education sectors, as well as parent and caregiver support - are critical to help reduce the long-term impact of violence.

Notes

¹ Peterman, A., Cook, S., Neijhoft, A., Palermo, T., UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Understanding the linkages between social safety nets and childhood violence: a review of evidence from low- and middle- income countries, Health and Policy Planning, 2017, Vol 32, No. 7

² DFID, et.al (2010) Advancing Child-Sensitive Social Protection

³ See for example Armando Barrientos et al Social transfers and child protection in the South Children and Youth Services Review 47 (2014) 105–112 and Keetie Roelen et al *Improving child wellbeing and care in Sub-Saharan Africa: The role of social protection* Children and Youth Services Review Volume 73, February 2017, Pages 309-318

⁴ Peterman, A., et. al op. cit.

⁵ Know Violence in Childhood. 2017. *Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India and Peterman, A., et.al. op.cit.

⁶ World Health Organization 2016. INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children. World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.

