

The Working Group on Violence against Children, of
International Action for Child Rights (formerly the NGO Group for the Convention
on the Rights of the Child), and the NGO Advisory Council for the follow-up to the
UN Study on Violence against Children

*Human Rights Council
20th session*

Thank you Mr/Madam Chairperson,

We thank Ms. Manjoo for her third report to the Human Rights Council. We welcome the issues addressed and invite her to continue realizing her task with such diligence and dedication.

As a coalition of NGOs dedicated to the eradication of violence against children, we are fully aware of the need to follow a holistic approach when tackling violence: we would like to raise awareness on the issue of children, as indirect victims of violence against women.

Gender-based violence as a form of discrimination against women has become increasingly visible and acknowledged internationally. However, far less is known about the impact on children who witness a parent or caregiver being subjected to violence. These children remain all too often the 'forgotten' victims of violence. Specific examination on the effects on children, assisting and growing in an environment where violence is practiced is lacking.

Children who are exposed but not direct victims of violence demonstrate similar behavioral and psychological problems to children who have themselves been physically abused. Several studies reveal that children who witness violence are more likely to be affected by violence as adults – either as victims or perpetrators.¹ In fact, the impact on children assisting the practice of violence includes a range of behavioral and emotional disturbances that can be associated with the perpetration or experiencing of violence later in life.² In addition, studies show that children whose mothers are exposed to violence grow less and are sick more often than other children.³

To witness violence is a primary risk factor for the intergenerational transmission of violence: generally, girl children will tend to imitate their mother's passive – victimized behavior; whereas boy children will tend to imitate the violent behavior of their father. The situation of children witnessing violence must be comprehensively addressed, as exposure to violence increases risk for emotional, behavior, academic, and social problems. Children may face long-term problems with anxiety, depression, anger, self-esteem, aggression, delinquency, interpersonal relationships, and substance abuse. Furthermore, children who are exposed to domestic violence may react in ways which jeopardize their well-being. For example, some children run away from violent homes, which increases the risk of substance use, prostitution, homelessness, physical illness or injury, and victimization.⁴

¹ Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, 'World Report on Violence against Children' (October 2006)

² WHO, 'Violence against Women'- Fact sheet N°239 (September 2011)

³ ScienceDaily, 'Violence Against Women Impairs Children's Health' (September 2008)

⁴ Joanne Davis, Ph.D. and Ernestine Briggs, Ph.D, 'Witnessing Violence Fact Sheet' (2000)

It must also be noted that women can be abused and subjected to violence in non-family contexts such as armed conflicts or gender-based aggressions (i.e. gang rapes). Children can be affected by such situations in various ways:

- as direct “consequences” of such aggressions (which often exposes them to be discriminated against and even rejected by their own mothers and communities, or contaminated by the diseases transmitted to the mother);
- as orphans;
- as beneficiaries of services affected by the lack of women (for instance lack of nurses, midwives, etc. in countries where women are frequently taken as targets for femicides).

Violence against women has many serious repercussions on the social and economic status of women, potentially affecting employment, income, reduction of poverty and access to education. These repercussions affect the welfare and education of children – boys and girls, in the family and in the community. This impact must not be ignored by all of the States parties in their deliberations on policies and actions to be taken.

Dear Chairperson,

International standards and national normative frameworks remain divided. Action on the ground is desperately needed.

Aware of the many issues concerning violence against women, and its effects on children, we wish to stress the following:

- Child rights are being violated when children are exposed to violence against women (article 3, 8 and 27 of the UN CRC);
- Witnessing violence against women has short – and long – term consequences on children;
- The State must take measures to both prevent and cure children from being exposed to violence; providing, inter alia, consultation and training for adults.

We encourage the Special Representative to:

- Gather specific information and data on the relationship between violence against women and child behaviour, and consider presenting a thematic report thereof;
- Consistently address the issue of the indirect consequences of violence against women on children, with national authorities and within her reports;
- Work more closely with civil society, including child rights organizations, in order to address the issue holistically.

We call on the Human Rights Council to:

- Invite all States to introduce aggravating factors into their judicial systems so perpetrators of violence, who carried out the offence in the presence of a child, are subject to an aggravated sentence.
- Press all governments to adopt concrete measures to assist children witnessing violence against women;
- Ensure that States, whenever dealing with the issue of violence against women, always take into account the best interests of the child.

We invite NGOs and other civil society actors to:

- Take measures to ensure and strengthen the collaboration with all concerned partners on the issue - men and women included - in order to better prevent children from being exposed to gender-based violence, but also educate children not to consider such violence as normal.

Thank you Mr/Madam Chairperson