



THE STUDY ON

# Violence Against Children in South Africa

SPECIAL SUMMARY  
FOR TEENS



women, children &  
people with disabilities

Department:  
Women, Children and People with Disabilities  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

unicef 

unite for children

# WORDS AND MEANINGS



Some words used in this summary may be new to you or have specific meanings. Some of these new words are explained here. Use a dictionary to look up the meanings of any other new words, or ask your teacher or a parent for help.

**Assault with grievous bodily harm:** A violent physical attack with the intention to hurt or cause serious injury to another person's body.

**Bullying:** Includes teasing, spreading rumours, leaving children out of games, etc. on purpose, attacking someone by hitting or pinching them, or yelling at them.

**Child:** Anyone who is younger than 18 years. In other words, if you have not turned 18 yet, you are still a child.

**Children's Act:** A special law that has specific provisions for the care and protection of children, especially the protection of children from abuse, harm and violence, as well as provision of the support that children need.

**Child Justice Act:** A special law for children under the age of 18 years who are suspected of having committed a crime which describes to the police and courts how they should treat these children.

**Child abuse:** Any kind of harm done to children, including neglect, physical, sexual or mental violence, by someone who is

responsible for them, or has power or control over them, who they should be able to trust.

**Common assault:** A violent physical or verbal attack.

**Corporal punishment:** Any deliberate act that causes pain or physical discomfort in order to punish someone. It can take many forms such as hitting with a hand or an object such as a cane, ruler or whip; or slapping, pinching or pulling hair.

**Cyberbullying:** Cyberbullying is when someone or a group uses the Internet, cellphones, online games, Facebook or anything similar to threaten, tease, humiliate or upset someone else.

**Offence:** The act of breaking a law or rule or doing something wrong. Also known as a crime.

**Perpetrator:** A person who has committed a crime.

**Sexual offence:** Crimes such as rape, sexual abuse, forced sex on another person, or adults having sex with children.



# INTRODUCTION

The report on Violence against Children in South Africa was put together by the Department of Social Development, the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities and UNICEF in 2012. It looks at various types of violence or abuse that children experience in different places such as their homes, schools and communities.

This is a summary of that report written especially for young people 10 years and older. In this summary we highlight some of the important things we found when the report was written and that we think will be useful for young people to know.

If you would like to read the full report, look on our website [www.unicef.org/southafrica](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica) or you can send an email to [aviviers@unicef.org](mailto:aviviers@unicef.org) and we will email you a copy.





## WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT?

All children in the country have the right to be protected from abuse, violence and things that could harm them. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa makes this very clear and so do the laws of the country, such as the Children's Act and Child Justice Act.

The Government is very serious about the protection of all children in the country, and that is why they wrote this report on why children experience violence and abuse. When we know why children are victims of abuse and violence, we will be able to make better plans to ensure it stops.

## Violence against children

# IN SOUTH AFRICA

There are many reasons for the high levels of violence in South Africa. The violence is partly due to the years of apartheid which caused big differences between people living in the country. We also know that alcohol and drug abuse cause people to behave violently and hurt others, especially children.

Police statistics show that in 2011/2012 (a period of one year) a total of 50,688 children were victims of violent crimes in South Africa. Below are some details on the kinds of violent crimes committed against children for this period:

- \* **793 children were murdered.**
- \* **758 children were victims of attempted murder.**
- \* **25,862 children were victims of sexual offences against them.**
- \* **12,645 children were victims of common assault.**
- \* **10,630 children were victims of assault with grievous bodily harm.**

We also know that many crimes against children, especially violent crimes, are not always reported to the police. There are many reasons for violent crime not being reported but often it is because:

- \* **The child is too young to report the crime (or tell someone what happened).**
- \* **Children are afraid to speak up because they fear the criminal.**
- \* **Children are unsure of what will happen when they report the crime (or tell someone what happened).**
- \* **Children don't know where to report the crime.**

It is important that the Government and other organisations working with children have up-to-date numbers of children who are victims of abuse and violence to help them:

- \* **Plan better for the future.**
- \* **Introduce the right services to support children.**
- \* **Start projects to stop the high levels of violence in particular areas.**

## Violence against children

# IN THE HOME AND FAMILY

Many violent acts against children happen in their own homes and families by people they know well. These acts include:

- \* Sexual abuse
- \* Physical abuse
- \* Corporal punishment (including spanking)
- \* Emotional abuse
- \* Neglect

The exact numbers of children who are victims of physical abuse in their own homes is unknown as these incidents are not always reported to the police or social workers. However, in 2008 Childline (an organisation that provides a free support to children) received 3,428 calls from children who said they were physically abused. Approximately 1 in every 4 children had experienced some form of physical punishment (smacking/corporal punishment).

Children also experience emotional abuse or neglect by parents and caregivers. In 2008, Childline received 4,827 calls from children who were victims of emotional abuse and 3,883 calls from children who had been neglected.



These numbers give us some idea of the violence that many children experience, but they are not the correct figures because many incidents go unreported.

Every home and the family should be a safe place for children, but the statistics show us that this is not the case for all children. Some of the reasons for the abuse and violence experienced by children are families living in overcrowded houses, alcohol abuse by parents, drug abuse and stress experienced by parents.

## Violence against children

# IN SCHOOL

Children spend a lot of time in school; some can spend up to 12 years of their childhood in school. Therefore, adults (such as teachers) working in schools have a duty to ensure that children are safe and protected during the school day. Unfortunately, many children do not feel safe in their schools and may experience some form of violence. A 2008 study showed that about 1,8 million children (15 percent of all learners) experienced some form of violence while at school.

This violence is usually carried out by:

- \* Other children in the school of the same age (peers) or older children
- \* Adults in the school, for example teachers.

There are three major types of violence that children experience in schools, namely:

- \* Sexual violence
- \* Corporal punishment
- \* Bullying



No one has the right to touch you or force him or herself upon you: it is against the law. If something like this happens to you, talk to someone you can trust or report the incident to the police.

There is a serious concern about sexual abuse in schools. It was found that:

- \* **1 in every 5 incidents of sexual abuse happened in schools.**
- \* **Children living in rural areas (countryside) are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than children living in urban areas (cities).**
- \* **One third of the people who raped children were teachers.**
- \* **In many incidents of sexual abuse amongst older children, the perpetrators were other children/peers.**
- \* **In high schools, more girls than boys are victims of sexual violence.**
- \* **In primary schools, more boys than girls were victims of sexual abuse.**

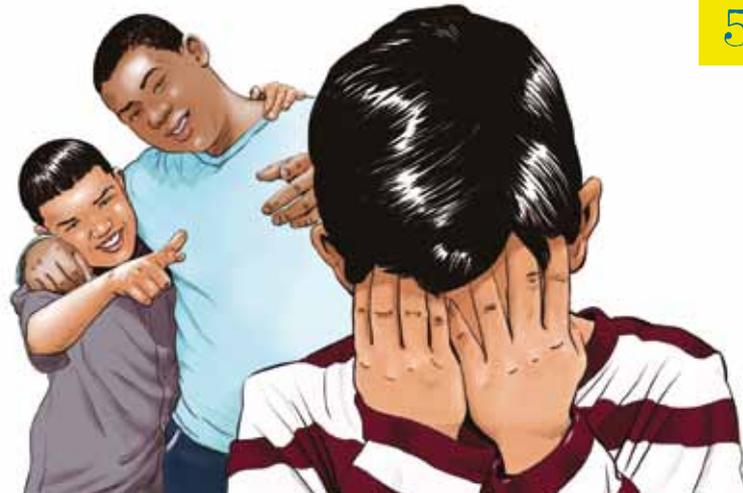
Corporal punishment in schools is against the law: no one is allowed to hit a child. Information collected by the Government in 2011 shows that:

- \* **More children experienced corporal punishment in schools in 2011 than in 2009. More than 1 in every 6 learners in schools (17.2%) received corporal punishment in 2011.**
- \* **Learners in the Eastern Cape (30.2%, or nearly 1 in every 3 children), KwaZulu-Natal (22.5%, or about 1 in every 4 children) and Free State (22.1%, or about 1 in every 4 children) are most likely to receive corporal punishment, whereas children in the Western Cape (3.7%, or 1 in every 27 children) are least likely to receive corporal punishment.**

Bullying is also a form of violence and abuse that children often experience in schools. The study done in 2008 showed that:

- \* **1 in every 5 boys was a victim of bullying**
- \* **1 in every 6 girls was a victim of bullying**

**No one has the right to bully someone else! It is wrong and when it happens to you or your friends you must tell a teacher or your parents, or another adult that you trust, so that it can be stopped.**



## FAST FACTS



**1 in every 4** children received some form of corporal punishment during their childhood at home



**1/3** of the perpetrators who raped children were teachers



**1 in 6** children received corporal punishment in school



**1 in 5** incidents of sexual abuse happens in schools



**1 in 5** boys is a victim of bullying



**1 in 6** girls is a victim of bullying

## Violence against children

### IN THE CARE OF SOMEONE ELSE



In South Africa, some children need special care away from their families. In such cases children are placed in foster care or in children's homes (also known as child and youth care centres) where they are provided with special support and care. The people who take care of these children are not allowed to smack or spank them, or expose them to any form of violence or emotional abuse.

## Violence against children

# IN THE COMMUNITY

Sometimes the communities or areas where children live are unsafe. Many children become victims of violence in places other than their homes or schools, such as the streets or parks they use. It was found that:

- \* **1 in every 5 cases of sexual assault took place in a residential street (in suburbs and townships).**
- \* **Boys are twice more likely to be murdered than girls (for every girl who is a victim of murder, two boys are victims of murder).**
- \* **Children younger than 5 years and children aged 15 to 17 years are most likely to be victims of murder.**
- \* **Children with disabilities are nearly twice more likely to become victims of violence, abuse or neglect than children who are not disabled.**
- \* **Children who are gay or lesbian are often victims of verbal abuse, teasing, violence and nasty comments.**



There is also concern in some areas that children are involved in gangs and becoming victims of violence because often gangs are violent towards their own members, other children and even adults living in the community.

The study also identified some harmful and violent cultural practices involving children, especially where children are physically forced to do things. There were also incidents reported where children were killed for their body parts, which were used for witchcraft, *muti* or other purposes. The exact numbers of these incidents are unknown, but they do occur in some parts of the country.

These days many children have access to cellphones, Mxit or the Internet. These are very convenient ways to find information or stay in contact with friends. However, many children also become victims of cyberbullying. More than one third of children are victims of cyber-aggression.

**There are many reasons why children experience violence in their communities. Studies have shown that the availability of alcohol, drugs and weapons are often causes for violence against children.**

## Violence against children

# IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

The Child Justice Act is a special law that deals with children who clash with the law (commit a crime). It provides protection for children who are alleged to have committed a crime, or who have been found guilty of committing a crime.

If you are younger than 18 years, you should be treated differently to adults who have committed a crime. Children may also not be held in cells with adults, and boys and girls must be kept separately. This helps to prevent abuse and violence against children.

8

Sometimes children who are detained are treated badly or become victims of violence, either caused by other children or adults who are the perpetrators. Special measures need to be put in place to ensure this does not happen, or when it happens children should be able to report incidents and get services to support them.

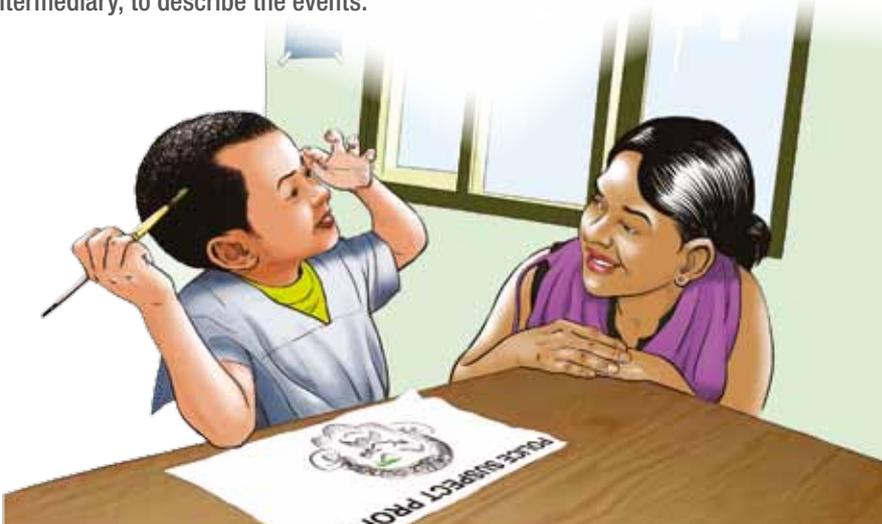


## Violence against children

# WHO TESTIFY IN COURT

Children who are victims of violence usually have to testify in court (tell the court what happened to them and who the perpetrator was). This can be very difficult for children, especially if children are scared of the perpetrator.

The courts have a special procedure (way) for when children testify: the child explains what happened to him or her (this is also called their testimony) while sitting in a separate room where they cannot see the perpetrator. They are assisted by a trained adult, who is called an intermediary, to describe the events.



## FAST FACTS



**1 in every 5** cases of sexual assault takes place in a street in a residential area (where we live)



For every girl who is a victim of murder, 2 boys are victims of murder



**1 in every 3** children is a victim of cyber bullying

## Violence against children

# IN PLACES OF WORK

There are laws forbidding children to work in South Africa. The law says that if you are 15 years or younger you may not do any work, but if you are 16 or 17 years old, you may do some work as long as it is not harmful to you and does not keep you away from school.



However, under certain circumstances the Minister of Labour can give permission for younger children to do some work (for example, child actors) under strict rules that aim to protect them.

Unfortunately, children are sometimes forced to do work that can be harmful to them. Information gathered by the Government in 2010 indicated that:

**116,000** children did work that they were not allowed to do according to the law.

**431,000** children were working for too many hours: children under 10 years worked more than 14 hours a week; children 10–15 years worked more than 21 hours a week; and children 16–17 years not attending school worked for more than 40 hours a week (children 16 and 17 years attending school may not work more than 21 hours a week).

**36,000** children were absent from school because they were working.

**290,000** children were injured at work or were exposed to dangerous conditions.

## Violence against children

# LIVING AND WORKING ON THE STREETS

Many children are living and working on the streets of South Africa. These children do various kinds of work such as car watching, selling of goods or begging. Children living and working on the streets have no protection against abuse and violence from their peers and adults because no grown-ups are taking care of them and they have to look after themselves.



# STOP violence against children today!

It is important that all forms of violence and abuse against children are stopped. This won't be easy to do, but it is possible. Here are some ideas:

- \* **Make sure everyone knows children should be protected and that violence against children is wrong.**
- \* **Make sure there are programmes and services to help stop people from abusing children.**
- \* **Make sure that schools are safe places where children can be free from violence and abuse.**
- \* **Make sure children who are victims of violence and abuse get services to support them while they recover (get over the pain and hurt that was caused by the violence and abuse).**
- \* **Perpetrators of abuse and violence against children should get help so that they do not do it again.**

Children should also share their ideas on how they think violence and abuse can be stopped. Discuss these ideas with your friends, arrange special projects at your school and in your community, or work with existing groups such as the GEM/BEM clubs, Representative Council of Learners (RCL), Soul Buddyz, Boys Scouts, Girl Guides, etc.

## Violence against children

# CAN DESTROY CHILDREN'S LIVES

Violence and abuse can cause the following behaviours and feelings in children:

- \* Sadness
- \* Bedwetting
- \* Fear of adults or other children
- \* Feeling ashamed
- \* Low self-esteem (not feeling good about oneself)
- \* Unable to pay attention
- \* Aggression or anger
- \* Self-harm (for example cutting oneself)
- \* Suicide (wanting to kill oneself)
- \* Being naughty at home or in the classroom

These are just a few examples of how violence and abuse affect children; behaviours and feelings may vary between different children, or between younger and older children.



It is important that all children who are victims of abuse and violence receive support and services to help them cope: good support can give children hope and encouragement while they put the pieces of their lives back together again.



# If you are a victim of abuse or violence

It is important to get help and support. Here are some suggestions:

- ★ Find an adult you can trust and tell her/him what happened.
- ★ Tell your best friend so that he or she can support you.
- ★ Go to the police or phone the police to report the abuse or violence. You can phone 10111 from wherever you are.
- ★ Contact a social worker.

You can also phone **Childline 08000 55 555** anytime of the day or night and there will be someone to listen to you, give you advice, and they will send someone out to help you.



REMEMBER, THE VIOLENCE OR  
ABUSE IS NOT YOUR FAULT.

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*UNICEF:* [www.unicef.org/southafrica](http://www.unicef.org/southafrica)

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