

# Using child helplines to protect children from school violence



**Learn**

**without fear.**



Child Helpline International

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## Introduction

*1 million children worldwide suffer from violence in school every day<sup>1</sup>.*

*Every year, more than 350,000,000 children suffer some type of violence in school<sup>2</sup>.*

All over the world, irrespective of income levels, class or culture, children are faced with violence and abuse in schools. Every day, 1 million children worldwide are directly affected. That comes out to more than 350 million children who are abused and physically harmed while at school every year. Instead of learning, enjoying school and preparing for the future, these children are faced with bullying, corporal punishment and sexual violence. Instead of flourishing, these children are beaten down and belittled in the worst kind of way.

Data collected on violence and abuse cases from child helplines worldwide shows that violence and abuse has consistently been the number one reason across the board why children contact a child helpline. In fact, child helplines worldwide receive an average of ten contacts per day, every day, about violence and abuse. This report corroborates those figures and helps to highlight the types of violence and abuse children face at school, the incidence of such abuse, who the victims are and who the main perpetrators are in each country.

**An average child helpline receives ten contacts per day- every day - about violence and abuse.**

This study also shows that the three main forms of violence and abuse children face at school are: **corporal punishment, bullying and sexual abuse**. The legislation in place in each country varies, as do the predominance of the different types of abuse, the gender and ages of the victims and the identities of the perpetrators, but one thing – the end result – is constant across the board: violence and abuse in schools seriously impacts a child's mental and physical well-being and has potentially long-term, detrimental effects on children's development.

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<sup>1</sup>Plan (2011) The Learn Without Fear campaign [Online] available from: <http://plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear> [Accessed 01.04.2011].

<sup>2</sup>Plan (2011) The Learn Without Fear campaign [Online] available from: <http://plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear> [Accessed 01.04.2011].

<sup>3</sup>Child Helpline International (2011) *Violence Against Children Report*. Amsterdam: CHI. Available from <http://www.childhelplineinternational.org/en/publications/VACreport> and Child Helpline International (2004-09) *Connecting to Children*. Amsterdam: CHI. Available from <http://www.childhelplineinternational.org/en/publications/CTC> [Accessed 01.04.2011]

## About This Report

A joint effort by Plan International and Child Helpline International (CHI), this study taps into the direct, unadulterated contacts<sup>4</sup> child helplines worldwide have with children to help produce a very real picture of the types and incidences of violence and abuse children face in schools, as reported by children themselves.

Specifically, to assist in the formation of a joint advocacy agenda to help reduce school violence, Plan International and CHI undertook a two month pilot study in four countries from different cultures and regions where both organisations are active: **Egypt, Paraguay, Sweden and Zimbabwe.**

In each of these countries there is a functioning, nation-wide child helpline, all members of the CHI global network. For this study, the four child helplines recorded all school violence-related contacts they received over the two-month period. This data was then analysed by Plan International. While some of the details do differ slightly from one country to the next, the same overall conclusion can be drawn in each: violence and abuse in schools is a very real problem which must be dealt with.

This study made use of the combined expertise and resources of CHI and Plan International and provides a unique, in-depth look at the issue at hand.

## Child Helplines

Child helplines are in a unique position to help deal with violence and abuse in schools. They are often a young person's first contact with any kind of child protection services, accessible gateways to a world of help and support. Child helplines allow children to reach out when they need it, in real time and directly, to speak with someone in a safe, trustworthy environment. Toll-free phone lines, online chat rooms, SMS text messages and letter boxes in remote areas – to name just a few methods – provide children with readily accessible, confidential means to reach out for help. In countries where the child protection system is porous, child helplines often also step up and provide direct interventions, shelter, mediation and rehabilitation services to children and young people reaching out for help.

Child helplines can thus report on cases of abuse, provide counselling to victims and if necessary also provide additional services, referrals and follow-up to make sure children receive the care, assistance and attention they are entitled to.

Additionally, child helplines can use the data from the contacts that they receive to inform, influence and create policy on children's rights issues at various levels<sup>5</sup>. This data is based on direct, unadulterated contact with children. In fact, child helplines are in the singular position of being privy to children's true voices, as they themselves choose to express them. This puts child helplines at the heart child protection and reporting.

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*'The State shall protect the child from all forms of maltreatment by parents or others responsible for the care of the child and establish appropriate social programmes for the prevention of abuse and the treatment of victims.'*

~ Convention On the Rights of the Child, Article 19

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**In 2010 child helplines in the CHI network received over 14 million contacts.**

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<sup>4</sup>CHI uses the term 'contacts' rather than 'calls' to reflect the different methods child helplines employ, from traditional phone lines to SMS and text messages, on-line chat rooms, letter boxes and more. Thus, the term 'contacts' is more accurate.

<sup>5</sup>BRIS (2010) The BRIS Report 2010. Stockholm: Barnens Rätt i Samhället

## Key Recommendations

Based on the data collected for the study and the analysis therefore, this report makes three recommendations which may help stop school violence:

1. Child helplines are a key element in any holistic child protection system and must be strengthened so that they are free, accessible and widely promoted to school children;
2. Child helpline data should be used to inform policy related to the well-being of children;
3. All members of the community, especially parents and school authorities, need to be trained on how to prevent school violence and how to support affected children. By not reporting or responding seriously to complaints of school violence, authorities collude with the notion that abuse is normal. This leads not only to more antisocial behaviour at school, but also helps perpetuate the intergenerational cycle of violence.

***School violence is not only cruel and unjust but also predictable and preventable. Plan and CHI are ready to play our part. We urge others to join us. Every child has the right to a safe school environment.***

## Country findings

### Egypt

#### Legislation:

Even though corporal punishment in schools is prohibited in Egypt under article 21 of Law No. 210 on primary education (1952) and article 48 of Law No. 211 on secondary education (1953),<sup>6</sup> there is no legal framework to protect school children from sexual abuse and bullying.<sup>7</sup>

#### The child helpline:

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) was launched in 2005 and operates the '16000' child helpline across Egypt. This 24/7 child helpline is toll-free for those calling in, has full coverage of the national territory and is well situated to report on school violence. The child helpline also receives contacts via email and outreach.

#### Contacts on violence and abuse in schools:

Egypt recorded the highest rate of separate incidents reported per individual contact, as well as the second largest number of school violence related contacts overall during the two-month period – 110 contacts total.

Contrary to the other countries in this study, in Egypt adults actually contacted the child helpline more than children themselves. Still, only a small proportion of violence incidents are reported, and even fewer are penalised: of the 72 cases of violence and abuse in schools reported to the child helpline, only two abusers were reprimanded.

The data collected by the Egyptian child helpline also shows that most cases of violence and abuse in schools in Egypt are carried out by a single perpetrator, acting alone. In four out of five cases that perpetrator is either a teacher or the head master.

### Paraguay

#### Legislation:

In Paraguay, there is no explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. A number of laws protect students' dignity [e.g. the Children and Adolescents Code (articles 21, 22 and 114) and the General Education Law (1998) (article 125)] but there is no prohibition of corporal punishment.<sup>8</sup> There are no laws protecting children from bullying either. However, articles 128 and 135 of the Penal Code prohibit sexual abuse and sexual coercion against children in all settings.<sup>9</sup>

#### The child helpline:

'Fono Ayuda' (559-200) operates in Paraguay under the direct supervision of both the National System for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights and the National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents. The child helpline has toll-free landline services (but not for mobile calls) and national coverage.

#### Contacts on violence and abuse in schools:

Paraguay proved to have a high rate of 're-victimisation' as 13 out 20 children

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*In 97% of reported cases of violence in Egypt, victims never found any kind of justice.*

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*Paraguay showed a high rate of 're-victimisation' - 13 out 20 children were affected multiple times by different types of violence and abuse in school.*

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<sup>6</sup>The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2009). Global Progress: Countdown to universal prohibition [online]. Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html). [Accessed 01.04.2011]

<sup>7</sup>Plan (2008). Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools. Woking, Plan.

<sup>8</sup>The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2009). Global Progress: Countdown to universal prohibition [online]. Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html). [Accessed 01.04.2011]

<sup>9</sup>Jones, N., Moore, K., Villar-Marquez, E., and Broadbent, E. (2008). Painful lessons: the politics of preventing sexual violence and bullying at school. London, Overseas Development Institute and Plan International Headquarters

reported being affected by different types of school violence more than once in the last year.

Most of the reported incidents of violence and abuse in schools in Paraguay took place in classrooms, followed by the headmaster's office as the second most common place where violence and abuse in schools occurred. In fact, in 19 out of those 20 cases the abuser was either the headmaster (14) or the teacher (5). Even though ten out of the 20 cases were reported, only two abusers were penalised.

***'In Paraguay you spend more time in jail for stealing a cow than for raping a girl'*** ~ Gloria Rubin, National Women's Secretary

## Sweden

### Legislation:

Corporal punishment has been unlawful in Swedish schools since 1958. Applicable law includes the Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students (2006).<sup>10</sup> Legislative provisions to protect children from sexual violence are found in the Social Services Act and in the Care of Young Persons Act. Even though the Swedish Penal Code may be applicable for assault, threat, molestation, defamation, insulting behaviour and sexual molestation of children, there is no specific legislation concerning bullying of children.<sup>11</sup>

### The child helpline:

BRIS, Children's Rights in Society ([www.bris.se](http://www.bris.se)), has been providing support to children and young people in distress through its child helpline (116 111) and offices in Malmö, Göteborg, Norrköping, Stockholm and Umeå since 1971. The child helpline has national coverage and is toll-free for those calling in from both landline and mobile phones. The child helpline also runs online chat rooms for counselling and uses email services to reach children in need.

### Contacts on violence and abuse in schools:

96.82% of all contacts to the Swedish child helpline were made by children, almost 70% of whom were girls. In terms of means of communication, 20.96% of all contacts were made either by email or a chat session.

In Sweden, 76.03% of all perpetrators of violence and abuse in schools are same-age students. Sweden showed the highest rate of abusers being reprimanded during the two-month study (46.15%). The main reasons given for abuse and violence in Swedish schools was bullying because of 'look and appearance' and 'body size' (40.82%); the second main reason for violence and abuse reported in Swedish schools concerned interpersonal skills ('Being lonely' and 'Problems with friends'); the third most reported factor was 'Sexual orientation' which explained almost one in 14 incidents.

***'My parents and family have begun to get worried, they think I have friends and stuff...But I don't... I just want to jump in front of the first train I see'*** ~ Boy, aged 13

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*In Sweden, 12% of all victims reported having been insulted by their peers more than 10 times in the last year.*

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<sup>10</sup>The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2009). Global Progress: Countdown to universal prohibition [online]. Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html). [Accessed 01.04.2011]

<sup>11</sup>Jones, N., Moore, K., Villar-Marquez, E., and Broadbent, E. (2008). Painful lessons: the politics of preventing sexual violence and bullying at school. London, Overseas Development Institute and Plan International Headquarters

## Zimbabwe

### Legislation:

Corporal punishment is lawful in schools, for boys, under section 241 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, article 15 of the Constitution, and article 66 of the Education Act (2004).<sup>12</sup> The Children's Protection and Adoption Act, Chapter 33, protects children from any form of neglect, exploitation, abuse, torture, cruelty, degrading treatment or punishment. Under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, it is an offence to have sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 16. Despite this, there is no legal protection for children from school bullying.<sup>13</sup>

### The child helpline:

Childline Zimbabwe ([www.childline.org.zw](http://www.childline.org.zw)) started operations in 1997 and since then has been providing unique services based on freepost, free phone and drop-in facility. At present, it reaches around 75% of the national territory.

### Contacts on violence and abuse in schools:

Among the 60 contacts received in Zimbabwe, 27 were made by the children affected by school violence and 15 were by teachers. In the majority of incidents, however, the perpetrator was also a teacher (31/60) and/or male (36/60).

Zimbabwe recorded the oldest average age for victims of abuse and violence in schools in the study (just over 14 years of age on average). Most of these children were reported to be female (32/60). In Zimbabwe the most incidents of violence and abuse in schools that were reported to the child helpline involved physical abuse: the top two most common incidents reported were slaps/kicks (24/60) and physical abuse, with a cane/belt/ruler (17/60).

Whilst children affected by school violence in Egypt, Paraguay and Sweden reported going to both parents and teachers for help, children in Zimbabwe said they most often seek the support of the headteacher (15/60) or a friend (11/60).

## Conclusion

The contacts with child helplines gathered in this study show once more that no country is immune from violence in schools. While the exact nature of the reported violence and abuse in schools somewhat varied in each country studied, the fact remains that violence and abuse in schools exists across all cultural and socio-economic regions.

Plan International and Child Helpline International work together in 25 countries worldwide, pooling expertise and resources to help fight violence and abuse against children in schools. Together, we hope to make schools a safe, enjoyable and quality experience for all children everywhere.

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*In Zimbabwe most incidents of violence and abuse in schools involve physical abuse.*

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<sup>12</sup>The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2009). Global Progress: Countdown to universal prohibition [online]. Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/countdown.html). [Accessed 01.04.2011]

<sup>13</sup>Jones, N., Moore, K., Villar-Marquez, E., and Broadbent, E. (2008). Painful lessons: the politics of preventing sexual violence and bullying at school. London, Overseas Development Institute and Plan International Headquarters.

## Annex

The following table lists key findings from a study where nation-wide child helplines in Egypt, Paraguay, Sweden and Zimbabwe recorded school violence-related contacts over a two-month period in 2010:

<b>WHO</b>	<b>Is the abuser?</b>	Same-age students	76.03% of the times in Sweden	
		Teachers and Head teachers	66.67-95% of the times in all other countries	
		Male	62.46% of all cases	
	<b>Is the victim?</b>	School girl	63.84% in Sweden	
		School boy	62.73% in Egypt	
	<b>Calls?</b>	A school child	96.82% of the times in Sweden	
		An adult	97.27% of the times in Egypt	
<b>Children seek support from?</b>	Parents	41.35% of all times		
	Teachers	23.22% in Sweden, but 0% in Egypt and in Paraguay		
<b>WHERE</b>	<b>This happened?</b>	Classroom	37.27% of all cases	
		Around the school	19.30% of all cases	
<b>WHAT</b>	<b>Happened?</b>	Criminal offences	Out of 481 calls, this study recorded 109 criminal offences	
		Sexual abuse	Affected one every 30 children 3 boys and 2 girls were raped, 4 of them in Zimbabwe	
		Physical abuse	31.59% of all incidents, including burning (2 children in Sweden) and 24 children being slapped/kicked in Zimbabwe	
		Verbal and emotional abuse	Added 54.50% of all incidents collected through this study	
		Fight	4.55% of all incidents, including 4 fights with knives in Egypt	
		Hospitalisations	12 children ended up at hospital, 10 of them in Zimbabwe	
	<b>Happened after?</b>	Fear and anxiety	Affected more than one in three affected children	
		School performance	Was compromised in 11% of all cases	
		Truancy	Affected 5.81% of all cases in Sweden	
		Suicide thoughts	4.56% of victims have thought of killing themselves in Sweden	
		Sexual abuse	2.73% of victims in Egypt sexually abused someone else	
		It happened again	For 13 out 20 cases in Paraguay, this was not the first episode	
	<b>We should do?</b>	Tackle	Nothing!	Sweden showed 80.40% of underreporting In 97.22% of reported cases in Egypt, victims never find justice
			<i>Unsupervised 'out of hours lessons'</i> (as they explain 25.40% of cases of school violence in Egypt)	
			<i>Gender imbalances</i> (sexual orientation explains one in 14 incidents in Sweden, and different legal provisions for boys and girls that help perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes in Zimbabwe)	
			<i>Social inequalities</i> (which proved to be the second largest cause of school violence in Zimbabwe).	
<b>WHY</b>	<b>This happened?</b>	School performance	Explains one in four cases in all Southern countries	
		Look, appearance and body size	Explains four out of six cases in Sweden	
	<b>We should stop violence?</b>	School violence prevention measures will not only reduce injuries and poor schooling but other emotional-related problems as eating disorders (top second consequence in Egypt)		
		Because we need to stop the vicious cycle of poor performance, ranked first as cause and consequence of all school violence incidents		

# Colophon

**Child Helpline International (CHI)** is the global network of child helplines, working to protect the rights of the child. We have members in 133 countries worldwide (Dec. 2010) and are founded on the belief that children and young people not only have rights, but that they alone are the best individuals to identify and express their problems if they are equipped with the proper tools. Child helplines are safe, confidential and accessible. They have direct, voluntary contact with children and are often children's first point of contact with child protection services. Child helplines should be an integral part of a country's national child protection system, so that every child can be heard and have their needs adequately met.

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**Plan International** was founded more than 70 years ago and is one of the largest child-centred development organisations in the world. Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations. Operational in 66 countries, we work together with communities in 48 developing countries, reaching a total population of 28.1 million children across Africa, Asia and the Americas. Core to our work is raising awareness of children's rights in order to tackle the root causes of poverty, and helping to build the capacity and commitment of those responsible for ensuring children's rights are met. We believe that when children and adults work together to find solutions, it is more likely that those solutions will be successful and sustainable. Our work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

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**Plan's Learn Without Fear campaign** aims to end violence against children in all schools, with a focus on the 60 developing countries in which Plan works. The campaign targets three of the most common and damaging forms of violence in schools: sexual violence, bullying and corporal punishment.

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