

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Western Regional Profile



Canada 



MINISTRY OF GENDER
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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for every child

This profile of the Western Region summarizes the situation regarding violence, abuse and exploitation of children. It draws mainly on findings from the Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014¹ and will be a useful tool for evidence-based advocacy to better target resources for child protection, inform policy decision-makers and guide future strategies for community action.

Contents

The regional context
Child-protection concerns
Mechanisms for protecting children
Recommendations for positive change
Conclusions



The regional context

Regional demographics²

TOTAL POPULATION:
2,376,021 (9.6 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
ON AN AREA OF 23,921 KM²
(10.0 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

**39.0 PER CENT
OF THE POPULATION
IS AGED 0–14 YEARS**



Resources

The Western Region is the largest producer of cocoa, rubber and coconut in the country, and a major producer of palm oil. It has a wide variety of mineral resources and there are many small- and large-scale gold mines.

¹ Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Accra, Ghana. The report also draws on information from the Regional Qualitative Reports, 2013, Government of Ghana/UNICEF; Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Ghana Statistical Service; and Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

² Ghana Statistical Service Census 2010

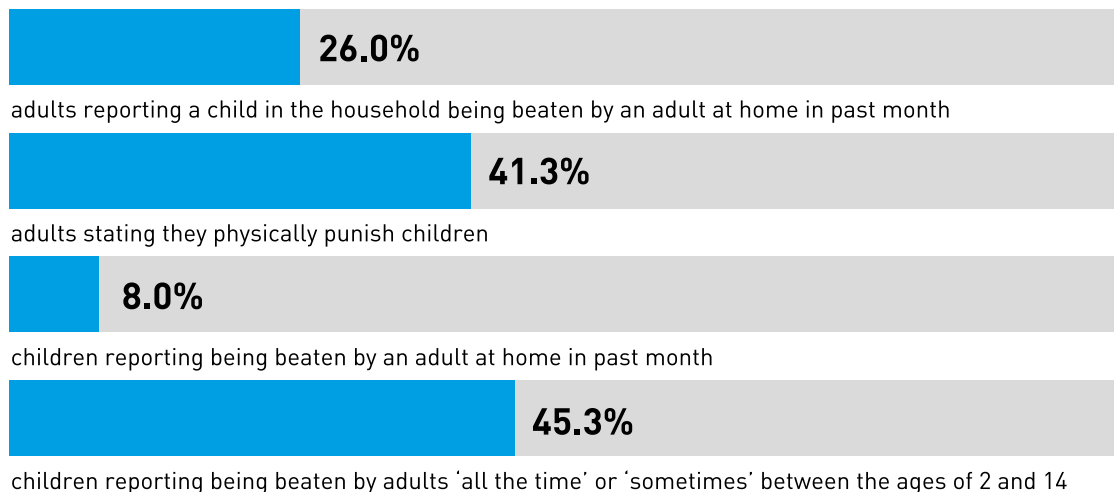
Child-protection concerns

The most prominent concerns in the Western Region are parental neglect, poor infrastructure, gold mining, child labour, work-related injuries and poor medical care. Compared with other regions in Ghana, the Western Region has the highest rate of child marriage for girls aged under 15.

Violence at home and at school

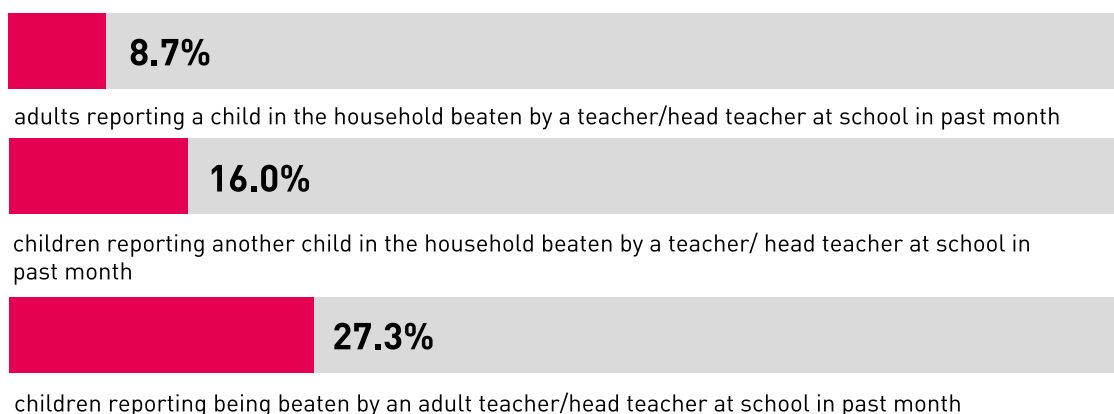
Violence at home

Children in the region reported the lowest level of physical violence at home. Less than half of the children (45.3 per cent) reported having been beaten by an adult at home between the ages of 2 and 14.



Violence at school

The region recorded below-average levels of physical punishment at school, with 27.3 per cent of children indicating that they had been beaten by a teacher or head teacher. The cane, sticks and hands are most commonly used to beat children. The survey showed that 16.7 per cent of children reported having been verbally abused by their teacher.



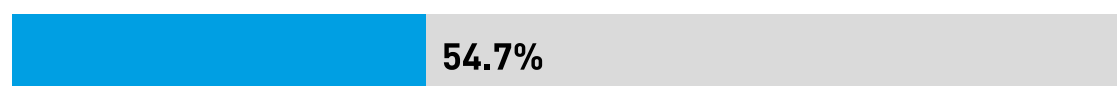
Children in the region reported the lowest level of physical violence at home

The Western Region has the highest rate of commercial sexual exploitation in the country

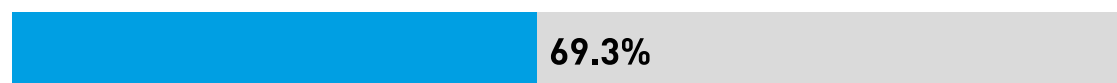
Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation of girls and, to a lesser extent, boys, mostly by middle-aged men and rich migrant mining workers, is a growing concern. It is very common in some areas, especially in the mining communities.



adult respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community



child respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community

The Western Region has the highest rate of commercial sexual exploitation in the country, with 69.3 per cent of children and 54.7 per cent of adults claiming that children are having sex in exchange for food, shelter, clothes and other items in their community.

Teenage pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy affects the schooling of girls, and when it results from sexual exploitation, most girls drop out of school to look after their babies and learn a trade to support their families.

Child labour

Children in the region contribute to their family income by taking on physically demanding jobs. They take an active part in planting, weeding, harvesting, carrying firewood, preparing cocoa, transporting water to farms and mining.

Children are hired as farm hands by the year, with the money for the first year paid to their parents or guardians at home. This practice was supposed to be in decline following the introduction of the 2009 National Programme for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Cocoa. However, the practice is still going on in secret.

Trafficking for child labour is also common in the region. Though trafficking of children is on the decline in some areas, children are still being brought in secret from the northern parts of Ghana to work in the region. These children work for long periods, even when ill, doing arduous jobs like pounding *fufu* at chop bars, crop farming, cocoa harvesting and other domestic chores.

Working in gold mines exposes children to a wide range of dangers. *Galamsey* is a corrupted version of 'gather them and sell' and refers to the often illegal, small-scale gold mining operations in Ghana. Extracting the gold ore requires the miners to dig out large, deep pits either manually or with excavators, which poses a risk of severe injury or death. Boys as young as 11 years are exposed to mercury fumes in the gold extraction process, which damages their health.



According to the GLSS 6³, the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 10 years, with 67.8 per cent of children aged between 5 and 17 engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing, while 0.4 per cent are involved in mining and quarrying in the region. Working in these industries exposes children to the risk of serious injury.

Up to 26.9 per cent of children aged 5–17 in the region are involved in an economic activity, with 20.5 per cent involved in child labour and almost one in every eight children (13.5 per cent) in a form of hazardous labour.

Hunting

Children engage in hunting for game and sell their catch to ‘chop bars’. They are exposed in the process to snake bites, insect stings, cuts from thorns and skin irritations from toxic plants. Children are also injured by hunting weapons when they fight among themselves.

Child marriage

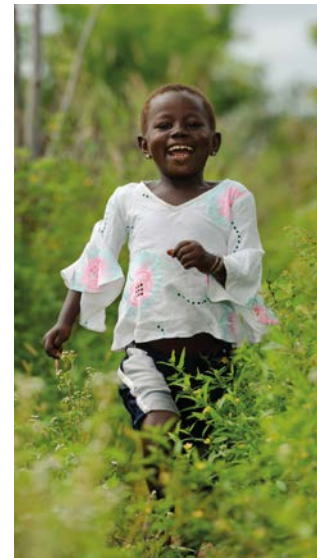
Child marriage was reported in the region. According to the MICS report (2011)⁴, the region has the highest rate of child marriage for girls aged under 15 years, with 9.0 per cent of women aged 20–49 having married before the age of 15. The region ranks second for girls marrying under the age of 18, at 36.7 per cent.

Separation from parents

The family is the surest and most important unit that ensures the welfare of children. Anecdotal evidence among sections of Ghanaian society indicates that children who are not living with their biological parents are likely to be subjected to conditions that may have adverse consequences for them. The death of the breadwinner or both parents often makes children vulnerable to mistreatment. Some relatives who foster children involve them in forced domestic labour, fail to provide for their basic needs and deny them education.

Orphaned children and children with inadequate parental care associated with poverty are often victims of substance abuse, gambling, stealing and sexual exploitation.

The region has one of the lowest levels of children being separated from their biological parents: 20.7 per cent of children lived away from their biological parents and 10.7 per cent of adults stated that their biological children were not living with them (Baseline Report). According to the MICS report (2011), 60.7 per cent of children aged 1–17 years were living with both parents while 16.9 per cent were with their mother only and 5.0 per cent with their father.



9.0%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 15



³ Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service
⁴ Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service



Mechanisms for protecting children

Birth registration

Birth registration protects against violations like child marriage and trafficking. However, children in the Western Region are the least likely in the country to have their births registered, with 48.9 per cent of children under 5 years registered.

48.9%

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)



Families

In the communities that were studied in the region, it was found that parents were the principal protectors of children. They are counted on for basic, school and health needs, and for discipline. In the absence of parents, other actors within the family system are drawn into the web of responsibility to ensure that younger ones are adequately cared for and put out of harm's way. The foremost protective system for children outside the nuclear family is the extended family, comprising uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, etc. Children often turn to their grandparents, especially grandmothers, for advice, and in times of wrongdoing are corrected by them.

Communities

Family members seek community assistance when their own methods fail. Community members also initiate protective measures. In addition, traditional leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders and the elderly generally correct children. Church and religious leaders advise children to be obedient and helpful. The chiefs and elders concern themselves with the welfare of the children.

Institutions

Despite the levels of corporal punishment identified in schools, children report that teachers are their main protectors within the school environment. The head teachers also serve as mediators between parents and teachers.

The Ghana Police Service, the courts, the Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development, and District Assemblies play key roles in child protection.

Health professionals

Apart from taking care of routine health matters, health professionals in the communities educate families and young patients in health-related issues such as the dangers of mercury poisoning and the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding. Doctors examine girls who have been sexually abused and act as witnesses in rape cases.

My mother
doesn't allow
me to do
anything in
the house
when I tell
her I am sick,
and she buys
drugs for me.

Boy, aged 7-10,
Western Region

Recommendations for positive change

Increase financial and other resources for child protection

Funds from the central government to regional institutions concerned with child protection are generally inadequate for the regional needs. Public/private partnerships should be explored to help provide resources for children and their families. However, apart from seeking funding, mechanisms should also be set up in all communities as well as in all districts and sub-districts to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Stakeholders should collaborate and coordinate their resources to deal with child protection issues such as rape, defilement, assault, child labour, teenage pregnancy, abortion, truancy and abandonment, and report such cases to the relevant authorities.

Capacity building

Existing social and public education programmes in the districts need to be strengthened to sensitize relevant groups about their roles in child protection. The district police departments should also be staffed with well-trained probation officers who have suitable knowledge on child protection. Many teachers in schools are unskilled. There is a need for more trained and experienced teachers in private schools.

Policies and laws

Apart from the fair and equitable application of established policies, some further policy decisions could benefit the region. Local chiefs should provide by-laws and the level of allowable punishment for children should be clearly defined.

Sensitization and awareness creation

Inadequate knowledge of child-related institutions, their focus areas and their location affects coordination and collaboration. Survivors of abuse often do not know where to report such abuse. It is therefore important for NGOs and community-based organizations that work in areas concerning child protection and development to intensify their public awareness programmes.

There is also the need to increase or strengthen alliances and partnerships with government and other community structures such as opinion leaders, traditional authorities and religious leaders in their engagements with the communities to address child protection.





Conclusions

Although there are continuing threats to the welfare of children in the Western Region, the family structure is strong, with traditional values still protecting children. With better funding, awareness-raising on child protection and coordinated participation from all stakeholders, the situation could be further improved.

References

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Acknowledgement

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