

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Brong Ahafo Regional Profile



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MINISTRY OF GENDER
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PROTECTION

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This profile of the Brong Ahafo 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:
2,310,983 (9.4 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
ON AN AREA OF 39,557 KM²
(16.6 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

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

Resources

Brong Ahafo is one of the three largest cocoa-producing regions in the country. It also grows a wide variety of cash crops such as cashew, coffee, rubber and tobacco in addition to agricultural products such as maize and yams.



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 child-protection concerns in the Brong Ahafo Region are children who no longer live with their parents (resulting from the death of one or both parents; or fostering of children), child marriage, and violence against children in schools and at home.

Brong Ahafo has above average rates of physical violence both at home and at school

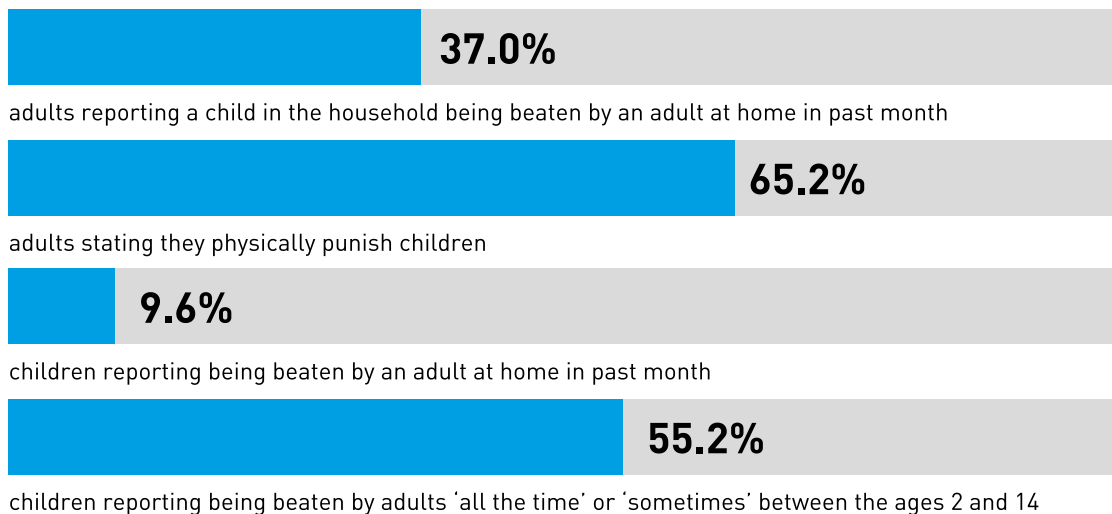
Violence at home and at school

Brong Ahafo is one of three regions with above average rates of physical violence both at home and at school.

Violence at home

Children between the ages of 6 and 14 years are the ones most at risk of physical harm from adults. The baseline study shows that it is women and not men who are the perpetrators of violence in the home.

The Brong Ahafo Region has the highest number of adults reporting the occurrence of a child beaten by an adult at home in the past month (37.0 per cent). Also in this region 65.2 per cent of adults admitted to physically punishing children at home, the second highest level among the regions.



Violence at school

Corporal punishment is only permitted under certain circumstances at school, but in fact it occurs frequently, with 51.9 per cent of children reported to have been beaten by a teacher/head teacher.



15.6%

adults reporting a child in the household being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month

28.9%

children reporting another child in the household being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month

51.9%

children reporting being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month

Juvenile justice

The baseline study revealed that community members deemed some cases such as petty theft, or stealing of fruits, foodstuffs and fowls less appropriate to be reported to the police. These offences were treated at community level, while others, such as defilement, were considered so offensive that they should be reported to the police. It was noted that severe physical punishment, such as being beaten with a bicycle chain, may be meted out to juvenile offenders because criminal cases are mostly handled at the community level. The study also noted cases where boys and girls were both kept in adult cells, because there was no remand facility to keep them.

Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

Sexual violence and abuse happens most frequently by people the victim knows, in the home or in the neighbourhood.

57.0%

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

58.5%

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

Sexual exploitation of girls and, to a lesser extent, boys, mostly by middle-aged men, is a growing phenomenon. It was identified in the baseline study to be an issue that was very common in some areas, affecting the protection of children. The study revealed that although sexual abuse is common, it is often not reported but handled at the community level because parents and family members are afraid of the stigmatization that comes with its exposure. It was also indicated that in some circumstances, the family of the victim requests the withdrawal of the case when it is reported.

The region has high rates of commercial sexual exploitation of children; 58.5 per cent of children and 57.0 per cent of adults, stated that children these days are having sex in exchange for food, shelter, clothes and other items.

Teenage pregnancy

It was found in the baseline study that girls are less privileged than boys in terms of resources for their development and a lower priority is given to their education. It was also revealed during community visits that lack of supervision and monitoring as a result of changes in sleeping arrangements, as well as fostering, permit girls to succumb to peer pressure, late night outings and truancy from school. These circumstances provide the enabling environment for the occurrence of teenage pregnancy in the region. Where pregnancy results from sexual exploitation, girls may drop out of school to look after their babies and learn a trade to support their families.

Child labour

The baseline research revealed that Brong Ahafo is one of the five regions in which children migrate for labour. In the rural parts of the region, children work on cocoa, oil palm, cotton and vegetable farms, particularly on the weekends and holidays. Children also work in places as diverse as abattoirs, saw mills, stone quarries, shallow mines, building sites, marketplaces, rivers and lakes.

It was also noted that schoolgirls aged 10–15 years in rural communities in the region carried water, firewood and foodstuffs to school to prepare food for teachers in the morning. According to the GLSS 6³, the region has one of the highest rates of child labour in the country and the average age at which a child starts to work is 9 years. The report indicated that 41.7 per cent of children aged 5–17 years in the region are involved in an economic activity, with 33.5 per cent working and about one in every four children (24.4 per cent) involved in hazardous labour.

Child marriage

The predominant cause of child marriage is pregnancy between the ages of 13 and 17 years. According to the MICS report (2011), almost one in three (29.1 per cent) women aged 20–49 married before their 18th birthday and about one in every fourteen (7.2 per cent) married before their 15th birthday. In some instances, the pregnant girl is not married but stays in the family home of the father of the child until the delivery of the baby. Then she can return to her own family house without the baby.

The region has one of the highest rates of polygynous marriages (where a husband has more than one wife), affecting 18.2 per cent of women aged 15–49. Both polygyny and a large spousal age gap are sources of discrimination against women. Girls' polygynous unions with older men leave them particularly vulnerable to child neglect and child labour. The practice may also create concerns about transmission of HIV and other health issues.

Separation from parents

The baseline study revealed that 23.0 per cent of children in the region were not living with their biological parents, either through fostering or changes in sleeping and living arrangements. While fostering is ostensibly meant to give the children better opportunities, a frequent result is that the children become house servants for the foster parents. Fostered children are treated much more harshly than biological children, and are often taken out of school to work for the foster family and are denied their basic needs such as adequate food.

41.7%

CHILDREN
AGED 5–17
INVOLVED IN AN
ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY



29.1%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 18



³ Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

52.6%

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)



On the other hand, when children reach puberty they are moved out of their parents' rooms. If a family can afford to rent rooms, preference is given to boys. If parents cannot afford to rent rooms, children start staying at homes of friends and are at risk of substance abuse, gambling, stealing and commercial sexual exploitation.

Mechanisms for protecting children

In the Ghanaian cultural context, there is a natural dedication of most caregivers and community members to protect children – a great strength and opportunity in child protection. Generally, the family and community are considered the primary protective elements, as there is not much faith in institutions as effective protection instruments. The 'informal' actions are preferred to 'formal' actions involving government services or structures.

Birth registration

Birth registration is an important step in securing child rights through the right to identity. However, Brong Ahafo Region has the second lowest birth registration in the country, with only 52.6 per cent of children under 5 years registered (MICS, 2011). Knowing the age of a child is central to protecting them from abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Families

Parents are 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, aunties, cousins, grandparents, etc.

The baseline study found that children in the region mostly go to their mother for their needs; this was particularly so where children are neglected by fathers and become the sole responsibility of mothers because of polygyny. Children often resort to their grandparents, especially grandmothers, for advice, and in times of wrongdoing, grandparents also discipline them. Boys and girls (7–10 years) indicated that older siblings protect younger siblings when they are beaten or bullied by peers or adults by confronting and fighting the perpetrators. Older siblings also provide basic needs like food, clothes, school accessories and gifts among others.

Communities

Family members seek community assistance when their own methods fail. Community members also initiate protective measures by enacting by-laws, and involving traditional, community and religious leaders, the elderly and teachers in correcting and disciplining children.

Institutions

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

If a boy is arrested, he is taken to the cells, while if a girl is arrested, they keep her up at the counter.

Young men, Brong Ahafo Region

Health professionals

Apart from taking care of routine health matters, the health professionals in the region educate families and young patients on health-related issues such as counselling parents on other alternatives than physically abusing children through discipline.

Recommendations for positive change

Increase financial and other resources for child protection

The regional institutions concerned with child protection receive little or no funds from the central government and so lack the means to fulfil their mandate. 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, truancy and abandonment, and report such cases to the relevant authorities.

There should also be a fund set up to finance expenses relating to child protection. This will enhance information gathering with which cases can be built as well as facilitate trips made by the complainants, key witnesses and institutions such as the police, Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) and the Department of Social Welfare.

Capacity building

Existing social and public education programmes in the districts need to be strengthened to sensitize relevant entities about their roles in child protection, for example training community members so that they can refer child protection cases to the DOVVSU for further action.

The district police departments should also be adequately staffed with well-trained probation officers who have suitable knowledge on child protection. There is a need for more trained and experienced teachers in schools. A monitoring system should be developed to enable schools to keep track of enrolment, transfers and drop outs, assigning reasons for these changes.

Sensitization and awareness creation

Inadequate knowledge of child-related institutions, their focus areas and their location affects coordination and collaboration. Victims of abuse often do not know where to report 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 engaging communities to address child protection.





Conclusions

Brong Ahafo has high levels of physical violence towards children at home, school and in the community. Though there are abuses from fostering with extended family networks, the family structure is strong, with traditional values still capable of protecting children. With better funding and coordinated participation from all stakeholders, the situation could be much improved.

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Acknowledgement

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