

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Central Regional Profile



Canada 



MINISTRY OF GENDER
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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This profile of the Central 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.

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The regional context

Regional demographics²

TOTAL POPULATION:
2,201,863 (8.9 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
ON AN AREA OF 9,826 KM²
(4.1 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

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

Resources

The Central Region has an economy based on mining, fishing and tourism. It also has some of the best schools and universities in Ghana.



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

In the Central Region, poverty and parental neglect are factors that put children in harm's way. Poverty negatively impacts upon education and leads to intense labour, poor nutrition, illiteracy and ill health.

- 43 infant deaths per 1,000 live births recorded in 2011
- Child mortality rate of 36 per 1,000 live births
- Under-five mortality rate of 88 deaths per 1,000 live births
- 4 births per 100 adolescents in the region

Separation from parents

The baseline study revealed that children who are being cared for by single parents face severe financial constraints that impact their lives and make them vulnerable to harm. Single parent homes are usually headed by single mothers who often have an irregular income that is insufficient to cater for the needs of their children. Single mothers are often out of the home for extended periods of time to work and support the home. This results in lack of supervision and makes parenting challenging.

The baseline study indicated that 25.9 per cent of children were living away from their biological parents, while 8.1 per cent of adult respondents said they were also living away from their biological children. The MICS report (2011)³ showed that 51.9 per cent of children in the region live with both parents and 15.3 per cent are not living with a biological parent although both parents are alive.

Sexual exploitation

The inability of families to provide for their children, especially girls, is said to be directly related to cases of sexual abuse and defilement. In addition, children who are not in school are easy prey for trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. Cases are reported of adolescent girls who are lured by money and as a result are sexually exploited by older men.

The Central Region has a below national average level of commercial sexual exploitation (reported by 59.3 per cent of children and 41.5 per cent of adult respondents). The region is also noted for the commercial sexual exploitation of children in urban areas in particular, with children as young as six involved.

25.9%

CHILDREN
LIVING AWAY
FROM THEIR
PARENTS

8.1%

ADULTS
LIVING AWAY
FROM THEIR
CHILDREN

The region has a below national average level of commercial sexual exploitation

41.5%

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

59.3%

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

³ Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service

57.8%

**CHILDREN
REPORTED BEING
BEATEN
BY ADULTS
AT HOME**

Parental neglect

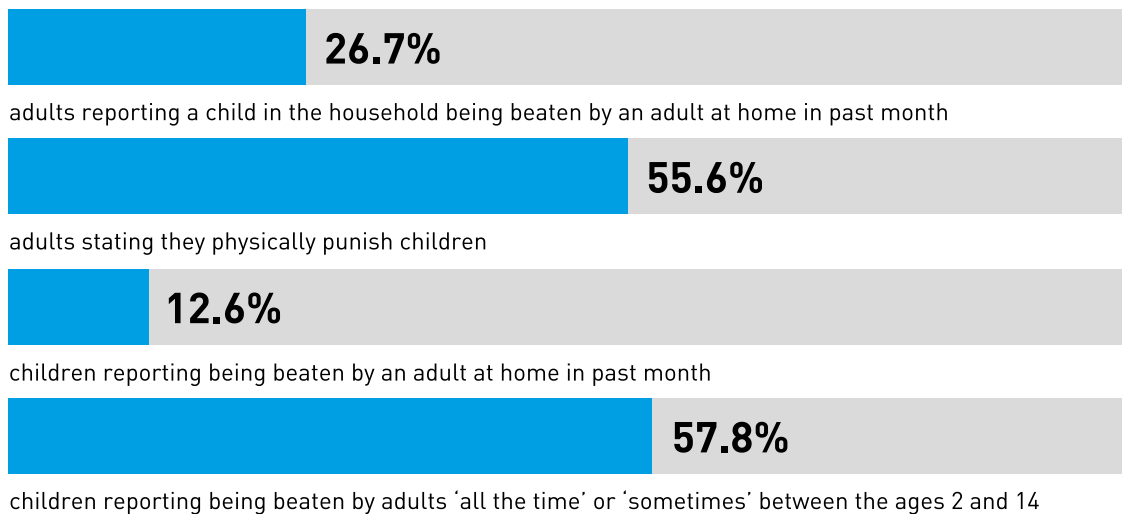
The baseline study indicated that parental neglect is a major threat to children’s well-being in the communities studied. Parents work for long hours (around 12 hours) each day and this prevents them from being able to properly supervise their children. Parents may lack the ability to cope with parenting and its constant demands. Mothers bear the heavier if not the entire burden of caring for the children and the lack of supervision has in some cases resulted in child labour and sexual exploitation of children. In addition, many families live well below the national poverty line and this makes catering for children’s physical needs difficult and sometimes impossible, making children vulnerable to various forms of abuse.

Violence at home and at school

Violence at home

Physical abuse/harm using methods such as caning, beating with bare hands or sticks or pouring water on children for something they have done or failed to do is mostly perpetrated under the guise of discipline, and occurs at home and in communities.

According to the baseline study 57.8 per cent of children reported that they were beaten between the ages of 2 and 14 by adults at home, compared with the national average of 57.5 per cent of children. That being said, many children feel that corporal punishment in their homes is often excessive.



Violence at school

Legally, corporal punishment is only allowed in second cycle schools in very rare cases and under certain circumstances. There are reports in the country of teachers beating pupils on a regular basis in both rural and urban communities. This was confirmed by the baseline study which indicated that 35.6 per cent of children aged 14–17 reported that they were beaten by a teacher or head teacher at school in the month before the study. This figure is slightly above the national average of 33.8 per cent.

22.2%

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

22.4%

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

35.6%

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



Child labour and hazardous labour

Poverty and dire living conditions are overwhelmingly factors that propel children to engage in economic activities. Children may also opt to work rather than attend school, especially in rural areas where teachers are often absent or inattentive, facilities are lacking, and the journey to and from class is arduous and time-consuming. Some may also choose to work out of ignorance, peer pressure or poor parental guidance.

The baseline study revealed that children who are cared for by single parents are often required to work to contribute to the family upkeep and to cater for their own needs. This compels them into various forms of labour such as farming, *galamsey* (illegal mining), hunting, rock quarrying, brick carrying, construction, fishing, hawking and commercial sexual exploitation where they are exposed to various harms including workplace accidents and diseases.

Children in the region work in abattoirs, saw mills, stone quarries, shallow mines, building sites, marketplaces, rivers and lakes, exposing them to injury, mercury poisoning, accidents and interrupted physical development.

The GLSS 6⁴ showed that the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 9 years. The survey revealed that 12.8 per cent of children aged 5–17 years are engaged in an economic activity with 8.9 per cent involved in child labour and 4.2 per cent in hazardous labour.

Teenage pregnancy

Teenagers who become pregnant through sexual exploitation are immediately put into harm's way. For instance, these girls come from poor homes and will not receive prenatal and antenatal care, further putting themselves and the unborn babies in harm's way. Teenage pregnancy also results in girls dropping out of school and many never return. This severely limits their career opportunities in the future. It was found that young teenage mothers lack the ability to cope with parenting and its constant demands and as a result tend to neglect their children, exposing them to physical harm.

Child marriage

Child marriage is illegal in Ghana. The 1992 Constitution and Children's Act state that the legal age for marriage is 18 for both boys and girls. The baseline study recorded few incidences of child marriages in the communities that were studied. However, child marriages in these

12.8%

**CHILDREN
AGED 5–17
INVOLVED IN AN
ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY**



31.2%

**WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 18**



⁴ Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service



67.4%

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)



communities occur as a result of abuse leading to teenage pregnancy; consequently, the families treat the issue as a family one, and marry off the teenage pregnant girl. The MICS report (2011) identified that the region has the fourth highest rate of child marriage in the country with 31.2 per cent of women aged 20–49 married before their 18th birthday and 6.8 per cent married before they were 15. The survey also identified that 3.8 per cent of women aged 15–19 years were currently married.

Mechanisms for protecting children

Birth registration

Birth registration protects against violations like child marriage and trafficking. In the Central Region 67.4 per cent of children under 5 are registered at birth. This is above the national average rate of 62.5 per cent. Knowing the age of a child is central to protecting them from abuse, exploitation and neglect.

Parents and relations

Parents protect their children from harm by providing them with food, shelter, clothing, educational needs, advice and discipline, when the need arises. Parenting is not limited to only biological parents but also includes other extended family members such as uncles, aunts and grandparents. Family members such as siblings and other relatives who foster children also provide them with food, shelter and some basic needs.

Neighbours

Neighbours within the community also protect children by providing them with some basic needs such as food and shelter. They also provide advice and guidance, and even discipline, depending on the relationship with the child's parents.

Traditional authorities

Traditional authorities help to protect children in various ways, such as resolving conflicts, enacting by-laws and adjudicating petty crimes that are committed by children. Only major crimes involving children such as murder or defilement are reported to the police. The authorities are the first point of contact whenever programmes relating to child protection are introduced into the community.

Schools

Teachers

In rural areas, teachers are seen as role models. The students tell their teachers about abuses they suffer from other members of the community. School staff may involve a guidance counsellor to assist the children with their emotional problems.

Parent-teacher associations and school management committees

Although the baseline study found that the parent-teacher associations and school management committees exclude the child in finding an amicable solution to cases pertaining

to the development and protection of children, they do work closely with the traditional authority on child protection issues related to education.

Parent-teacher associations and school management committees may mobilize financial support to complement existing funding from the Ministry of Education as well as civil society organizations. Their funding helps to provide teaching and learning logistics.

Police

The police protect children in various ways within the region. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units follow juvenile justice procedures when children come into contact with the law. In some instances, they use alternative conflict resolution methods to keep the peace and hold the family unit together. They also arrest and prosecute adults who sexually assault or defile children.

Religious bodies

Church and mosque leaders provide advice, counselling, moral and financial support to parents and children. Children join religious youth groups where they are taught good moral habits and how to live a chaste life. This helps save many girls from teenage pregnancy and from being victims of other forms of abuse. However, there are cases where the leaders have intervened when children are at risk of or are suffering abuse, to prevent the case from being reported to appropriate authorities.

Government agencies

The different government actors in child protection collaborate with each other in many instances. They rely on each other to accomplish their mutual objective of child protection.

Department of Social Welfare

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) works closely with other agencies to protect children, but it is poorly resourced in terms of staffing, logistics and finances. DSW staff help to resolve cases of child neglect, maintenance, custody, access, paternal parentage or denial of pregnancy and supervise the distribution of LEAP (Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty) funds to poor and disabled children and their families.

Ghana Health Service

The Ghana Health Service ensures that rural communities have Community Birth Assistants who are regularly visited by mobile postnatal services. The service offers guidance and assistance to parents with children with disabilities on how to give proper care and maintenance. The Ghana Health Service also follows up to ensure that criminal cases such as physical abuse, defilement, rape and assault concerning children are reported to the appropriate authorities.

Department of Children

The Department of Children works to protect children in the region but it has limited financial and logistical resources to carry out its mandate. The most difficult challenge faced by the department is staffing. In spite of these challenges, the Department collaborates with other child-focused institutions to address issues concerning children.



We have strong relationships with our religious leaders and we are guided by religious principles in our parenting. Parents complain and take challenging children to religious leaders for guidance, counselling and prayers.

Various adults,
Central Region



Civil society organizations

World Vision Ghana is active in running projects and programmes that positively affect children. UNICEF and World Vision International also work closely with the DSW and other government agencies. UNICEF assists in building the capacity of community members and promotes health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and child protection.

Recommendations for positive change

Government departments

In general, government departments and institutions are under-resourced and lack the necessary funding to carry out their mandate. Staff are generally passionate about their duties but are limited by the resources at their disposal.

School management committees need to be strengthened and resourced, especially those in the rural areas. There is also a need for safe accommodation for children at the district level where children in extreme situations can be housed temporarily pending resolution of their cases.

The Ghana Education Service needs to collaborate more with other stakeholders in child protection. More public schools are needed so that all children of school age receive education.

The LEAP programme is effective and benefits children with extremely poor parents. The government needs to expand the programme to more communities so as to increase the number of beneficiaries.

The capacities, skills and knowledge of staff involved in child protection should be enhanced to enable them to handle issues in the region.

Conclusions

Although the Central Region is relatively prosperous, child protection services in the region are badly under-funded. The central and local governments need to increase funds, at least to promised levels, to address the increasing challenges in child protection.

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