

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

# Greater Accra Regional Profile



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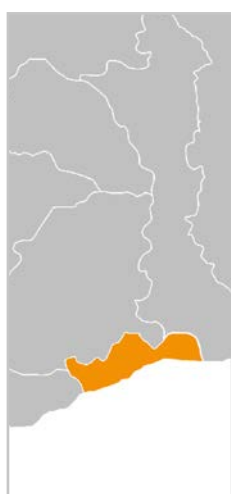
MINISTRY OF GENDER  
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION

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for every child

This profile of the Greater Accra Region summarizes the situation regarding violence, abuse and exploitation of children. It draws mainly on findings from the Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014<sup>1</sup> 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 demographics<sup>2</sup>

**TOTAL POPULATION:**  
4,010,054 (16.3 PER CENT) OF  
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,  
ON AN AREA OF 3,245 KM<sup>2</sup>  
(1.4 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL  
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM<sup>2</sup>)

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

### Resources

Greater Accra has few mineral resources; the soils have low organic content with shallow top soils, which limit the capacity for crop production. However, the region has a coastline of over 200 km, which means that tourism is a major industry.

Accra, the capital of Ghana, is located in the region, which is the wealthiest region in the country. Owing to in-migration and a high population growth rate, however, the region has the highest population density.

<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> Ghana Statistical Service Census 2010

## Child-protection concerns

Overall, the influence of a crowded capital city and limited employment opportunities in rural areas means that more children are exposed to the temptations and hazards of urban life. In the city, the traditional family model is breaking down.

### Separation from parents

Children in Ghana are sometimes separated from their parents as a result of work and access to education. Single parents can face severe financial constraints as a result of caring for their children. Therefore, most children are required to work to contribute to the family upkeep and to cater for their own needs.

Fostering is practised in both rural and urban communities. It is common to see fostered children engaged in excessive domestic work. In the city, children live with carers not necessarily related to them and are often involved in hawking in dangerous areas.

The baseline study indicated that 27.2 per cent of children indicated they were living away from their biological parents, while 11.3 per cent of adult respondents said they were also living away from their biological children.

It was noted during the baseline study that some biological parents of children migrated to other areas in search of greener pastures and children were left with grandparents who are sometimes too old to take up the task of proper supervision, thereby exposing them to harm and bad company.

### Violence at home and at school

#### Violence at home

Verbal abuse of children by adults reduces their confidence and self-esteem. In the Greater Accra Region, 42.7 per cent of children reported having been verbally humiliated at home in the month before the child protection survey.



**27.2%**

CHILDREN  
LIVING AWAY  
FROM THEIR  
PARENTS

**11.3%**

ADULTS  
LIVING AWAY  
FROM THEIR  
CHILDREN



adults reporting a child in the household being verbally insulted at home in past month



children reporting being verbally humiliated at home in past month



There is a traditional practice among the Dangme people in the region which involves naming children with derogatory or offensive names (*ahama*) in order to protect them from being taken away by spirits. These names are at times considered as curses. The practice of giving children these names is now discouraged because they attract teasing at school and during play.

Caning is the main form of corporal punishment used in both rural and urban communities. The baseline study revealed that 57.5 per cent of children in the country experienced physical violence; 61.6 per cent of children in Greater Accra reported that they were beaten by an adult when they were between the ages of 2 and 14, a rate above the national average level of physical violence.

**25.9%**

adults reporting a child in the household being beaten by an adult at home in past month

**53.3%**

adults stating they physically punish children

**18.5%**

children reporting being beaten by an adult at home in past month

**61.6%**

children reporting being beaten by adults 'all the time' or 'sometimes' between the ages of 2 and 14

### Violence in school

Verbal abuse in schools in the Greater Accra Region is experienced by one in four children (24.9 per cent of children reported being verbally humiliated by a teacher in communities that were studied in the region). This is the highest rate in the country.

Nearly a third of children (32.1 per cent) reported having been beaten by a teacher or head teacher in the month before the survey.

**7.5%**

adults reporting a child in the household being verbally insulted by a teacher at school in past month

**24.9%**

children reporting being verbally humiliated by a teacher at school in past month

**22.9%**

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

**20.2%**

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

**32.1%**

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

Parents sometimes hire 'contractors' who bargain on their behalf to procure settlements from culprits in cases where children are physically or sexually abused. In this way, parents undermine the rights of the child by seeking monetary compensation, while disregarding the need for justice or for recovery of the child.

**DOVVSU Officer,  
Greater Accra  
Region**

## Sexual exploitation and abuse

Sexual exploitation is most commonly perpetrated by people known to the child and happens more frequently in the child's home or neighbourhood. Children in both rural and urban areas of the country, especially boys, frequent internet cafes, movie centres and game centres, especially at night, to watch pornographic or action movies, and play video games in which violence is glorified. These activities can predispose children to promiscuity and violence.

**39.6%**

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

**60.3%**

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

In Greater Accra, 60.3 per cent of children were of the view that children in their community are commercially sexually exploited to make money to buy things they need. This is just above the national average of 59.5 per cent.

The region is noted for the commercial sexual exploitation of children in urban areas as a result of economic hardship combined with the lack of parental control as observed by the Ark Foundation in 2011<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Draft report on survey conducted in Accra on the exploitation of girls in commercial sex work in Ghana, August 2011, The Ark Foundation

6.9%

CHILDREN  
AGED 5–14  
ENGAGED IN AN  
ECONOMIC  
ACTIVITY



## Trafficking

Trafficking for child labour is a serious concern in the region. It occurs mainly in connection with children working in the fishing industry. Trafficking is condoned by parents as a response to poverty with parents taking a financial advance in exchange for the child, usually a boy, who goes and works for his new guardian for two years or more in exchange for an agreed amount paid by the guardian to the parents.

## Child labour

In the rural and urban communities, children are involved in various economic activities to help support the family or themselves. Some children hawked for long hours and sometimes deep into the night (see also 'Separation from parents'). Boys work as cattle herders, in stone quarrying, fishing and domestic work.

According to the GLSS 6<sup>4</sup>, the average age at which a child starts to work in the Greater Accra Region is 10 years. In total, 6.9 per cent of children aged 5–14 years are engaged in an economic activity; 5.2 per cent of this number are engaged in child labour while 1.9 per cent are engaged in hazardous labour.

The numbers of children living or working on the streets are relatively large. A 2011 survey in the Greater Accra Region identified 61,492 such children, of whom 59.0 per cent were girls (Department of Social Welfare, 2011<sup>5</sup>).

## Teenage pregnancy

Teenage girls who become pregnant are put in harm's way as their bodies are not developed enough to cope with pregnancy and delivery. Some pregnant girls also do not go for antenatal care because they want to hide the pregnancy, hence endangering themselves and the unborn child. Some also attempt unsafe abortions, which may have health complications that affect mother, child or both.

According to the MICS (2011) report<sup>6</sup>, the region has the lowest rate of teenage pregnancies in the country with 3.6 per cent of girls aged 15–19 having begun child bearing.

3.1%

WOMEN  
AGED 20–49  
MARRIED  
BEFORE  
AGE OF 15



## Child marriage

The baseline study revealed that child marriage was on the decline in the communities that were studied. This confirms findings in the MICS report (2011) indicating that the region ranks lowest in rates of child marriage with 3.1 per cent of women aged 20–49 being married before their 15th birthday and 12.2 per cent before their 18th birthday.

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

<sup>5</sup> Census on Street Children in the Greater Accra Region, 2011, Department of Social Welfare

<sup>6</sup> 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. In the Greater Accra Region, 76.7 per cent of children under 5 years are registered at birth, which is the highest rate in the country.

### Parents and relations

In spite of the weakening role of the extended family system in cities, parents and other members of the extended family continue to do various things to make sure children are protected and do not get in harm's way. While mothers play a vital role in providing children with security, food, clothes, shelter and health needs, fathers on the other hand provide money and shelter, and are seen as disciplinarians. Sometimes children are left in the care of grandparents while parents go out to work to provide for the family upkeep. Older siblings serve as confidants, protectors and advisers for younger children, and aunts, uncles, cousins, step-parents and non-blood relations play temporary or permanent parental roles depending on the child's situation.

### Schools

In this region, teachers play a vital role in child protection. Children confide in teachers and most children feel safer in school than at home or on the streets. Individual teachers try to handle issues with children informally, where possible.

# 76.7%

**BIRTH**  
REGISTRATION  
(UNDER 5 YEARS)





### Traditional authorities

Traditional leaders, the community and schools work closely with each other to implement child-protection programmes for the community. Queen mothers and community-based associations, for example, have education programmes on family life that are geared towards sensitizing families on child protection and upbringing.

### Police

The police work through the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit to protect children or deal with matters concerning children harmed or suffering injustice.

### The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice

The Commission handles child maintenance and child trafficking cases, about 100 on average in a year, and sometimes even more. Maintenance cases are usually resolved through mediation.

### Faith-based organizations

These organizations also help in the child-protection arena through counselling, sensitization, financial support, etc. Muslim children attend Arabic school on Fridays, where they are taught good morals. Some catechists and pastors also work on socialization, make home visits, run youth brigades, and act as mediators, arbiters and advocates for children.

### Department of Social Welfare

Social welfare offices receive referrals on child-protection issues from District Assemblies, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, hospitals and individuals. Staff from the Department also deal with child-related and maintenance cases, follow up on these cases, undertake outreach programmes, attend court sessions, etc.

### Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Some NGOs protect children in communities from harm through awareness creation and growing a volunteer force in their support. They design and implement programmes that protect children from harm through the provision of psychosocial services, clothing, shelter and reintegration of children to their family unit. These NGOs include Societas Socialis, the John Caring Foundation, the Brigitte & Bobby Sherman Children's Foundation, the Parent and Child Foundation, the Ark Foundation and Women in Law and Development.



## Recommendations for positive change

### Aiding the judicial process

When child abuse cases are taken to courts, family members should allow the courts to do their work so that the resulting punishment will serve as a deterrent and the survivor receives justice. There are often instances where cases are not reported, and some of the few that are reported are later withdrawn, denying survivors their justice.

### Sensitization

Parents and communities should be sensitized on child-protection issues especially child trafficking and child labour. Parents and adult relations should be prevented from allowing their children to be exploited or abused since this can have negative consequences for the development of the children.

### Collaborating with traditional authorities

There exists an effective but irregular collaboration between traditional authorities and other institutions working in the child-protection arena. There is the need to strengthen the coordination of child-protection activities at the district and community levels by thoroughly empowering and engaging traditional authorities in dealing with child-protection issues. District assemblies should also enact by-laws and other regulations through open consultation.

A child trafficking incident at Azizanya under investigation was aborted because the Assemblyman talked to people and convinced them to deny the incident in order to save the face of the community.

Rural community,  
Greater Accra





## Funding

Just as a percentage of the District Assembly Common Fund is allocated for persons with disabilities, there should also be a percentage allocation of funds for child protection in each District Assembly to support child-protection issues. Resources should be allocated openly, adequately and in a timely manner.

## Government departments

The Department of Social Welfare and other child-focused departments should be provided with the necessary financial and logistical support to provide effective and sustainable public education for parents on the dangers of child labour and the importance of education. The Departments of Community Development and Social Welfare should intensify awareness and advocacy on child-protection issues for organized groups.

## Government interventions

Government interventions such as school feeding and free exercise books should be extended to cover all basic schools. The government should also encourage alternative dispute resolution and build more shelters and reform homes where children who have come into contact with the law can be remanded and assisted with reintegration into family life. Social work should be treated as a specialized profession and people with the requisite knowledge and skills trained to handle child protection.

## Schools

Teachers play a vital role in child protection. Schools should mainstream parenting and reproductive health education in the syllabus from primary 1 to ensure teachers discuss and build greater understanding of these issues with children. Children are then able to report and discuss sexual challenges more openly with teachers and parents and gain their support.

Children also confide in teachers and most children in the communities studied during the baseline study indicated that they felt safer in school than at home or on the streets. There is therefore a need to build the capacities of teachers in guidance and counselling in order to meet the protective needs of children and identify potential victims of child abuse and exploitation.

## Corporal punishment

Legally, corporal punishment is only allowed under certain circumstances in schools. Teachers should be discouraged from beating as well as verbally abusing children as a means of correcting them.

## Conclusions

Despite being the most prosperous region in the country, child-protection services are poorly funded. In addition, the pressures of modern life in the city are exposing children to increased harm. The central and local governments need to work to meet the increasing challenges in child protection.

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