

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Northern Regional Profile



Canada 



MINISTRY OF GENDER
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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This profile of the Northern 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:
2,479,461 (10.0 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
THE REGION IS BY FAR THE LARGEST IN AREA, COMPRISING
70,384 KM² (29.5 PER CENT
OF GHANA'S TOTAL LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

44.7 PER CENT
OF THE POPULATION
IS AGED 0–14 YEARS

Resources

The Northern Region is one of the driest regions in Ghana, owing to its proximity to the Sahara Desert and the Sahel region. The climate is hot and dry, with one rainy season. Agriculture, hunting and forestry are the main economic activities.

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 Northern Region has the lowest level of school attendance of children of primary school age at just 59.4 per cent of children. It also has the lowest female literacy rate in the country at 44.3 per cent of young women aged 15–24 years (national average 61.4 per cent). The region has the highest rate of under-five mortality (124 probable deaths per 1,000 live births, double the rate of Greater Accra).

Violence at home and at school

Violence at school

While there are low levels of physical punishment reported by children in Northern Region schools (12.0 per cent) compared with other regions, punishments meted out to children in the schools are harsh. One punishment at school described in this region is kneeling in the sun with hands raised up, in addition to beating, caning, etc.

JUST 59.4%

OF CHILDREN
ATTEND PRIMARY
SCHOOL

At 44.3%, the region has the lowest female literacy rate in the country

16.7%

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

21.4%

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

Violence at home and in the community

Conflicts relating to land, ethnicity and chieftaincy in the Northern Region have a negative impact mostly on women and children who are directly affected by hostilities. The breeding of enmity among children of different ethnic tribes sometimes causes the children to fight among themselves in school. Children are also subjected to harsh punishment at home by parents, siblings and other members of their families.





Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

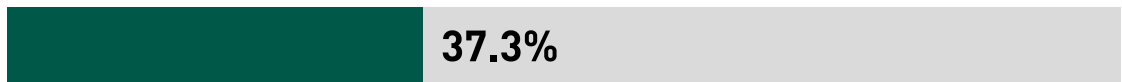
Teenage girls are sexually abused in schools and at home by their peers or older adults, and the girls are often blamed rather than the perpetrators.

Sexual exploitation

Children in the Northern Region report the lowest rates of commercial sexual exploitation in the country (37.3 per cent). That being said, this is still an unacceptably high percentage of children who have to submit themselves to sexual abuse in order to meet their basic material needs.



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

Pregnancy and abortion

While some girls access family planning services, there are many teenage pregnancies arising from peer-to-peer relationships or abuse such as defilement by school teachers. The baseline study revealed that girls sometimes die from complications in childbirth because their bodies are not developed enough to cope with the birthing process.

Child labour

31.2%

CHILDREN
AGED 5-17
INVOLVED IN AN
ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY



In the Northern Region, boys and girls migrate for labour (more girls than boys). Girls usually migrate to Kumasi and Accra after Junior High School to work as head porters. They try to earn money to prepare for their secondary education since their parents cannot meet their needs. However, their migrant status and the nature of their work make them vulnerable and many become pregnant or return home with sexually transmitted infections. Children are more vulnerable to migration during the dry season (July to September) when families are unable to adequately feed their children.

The primary forms of child labour in the Northern Region are in the agriculture and forestry sector. Children are vulnerable to snake and scorpion bites and suffer frequent accidents with poorly handled machetes while they are engaged in work in the bush. Boys tend cattle and girls collect water and firewood. Children take an active part in planting, weeding, harvesting, carrying firewood, acting as scarecrows, working in markets and street hawking. Children also work washing dishes in chop bars, selling water by the roadside, and whatever manual labour they can find in more populated areas. According to the GLSS 6³, the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 9 years: 31.2 per cent of children aged 5-17 in the region are involved in an economic activity with 22.8 per cent in child labour and one in every eight children (11.9 per cent) involved in hazardous work.

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

Child marriage

Although child marriages affect the education of children negatively, some communities in the region are of the view that marrying the girl child protects her from teenage pregnancy. The region has one of the lowest rates of child marriage in the country, with 4.4 per cent of women aged 20–49 years marrying before the age of 15 and 27.4 per cent marrying before the age of 18.

The Northern Region has the highest rate of polygynous unions in the country, affecting almost one in two women aged 15–49 years (44.9 per cent). Girls are often married into polygynous unions to older men. Both polygyny and a large spousal age gap are a source of discrimination against women.

Separation from parents

The MICS report (2011)⁴ showed that the Northern Region has the country's highest rate of children living with both parents (74.8 per cent). Just over one in ten children (9.2 per cent) do not live with a biological parent. The region has the tradition of *mpraba*, where fathers give at least one child, mostly females, to an older sister to look after. Although this system is meant to strengthen the bonds between families, most of the children become house workers, are not allowed to attend school, and may be physically abused.

Children under the care of step-parents or foster parents may have a status inferior to the biological children of the household and may be given excessive workloads. In the Northern Region, some children are reportedly maltreated by step-parents to the extent that it puts an end to their education.

As the *mpraba* tradition continues adults who were victims of the system also tend to transfer the maltreatment they received to the children of their brothers brought under their care.

Community Development Officer, Northern Region



27.4%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 18

4.4%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 15



61.9%

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)



Mechanisms for protecting children

Birth registration

Birth registration protects against violations like child marriage and trafficking. The Northern Region has one of the higher rates of birth registration of children under 5, with 61.9 per cent registered (MICS, 2011).

Families

In the communities studied in the Northern Region it is mothers who are the primary caregivers. Some fathers provide clothing, pay school fees, provide money for food, solve family disputes, name children, set the rules and regulations, and provide security for the family.

The foremost protective system for children outside the nuclear family is the extended family, comprising uncles, aunts and grandparents. Grandparents sometimes provide extra food, protect children from being beaten and provide guidance and counselling. Aunties on the other hand take on the role of substitute mothers when the parents are away and provide children with food and clothing.

Communities

Chiefs, elders and imams are the primary communal protectors of children, and also provide the primary judicial intervention when there is abuse.

Institutions

Schools in the Northern Region teach children moral, social and life skills, and discipline, advise and support children; they also educate parents on child rights.

The Ghana Police Service, courts, the Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development and the District Assembly are also government institutions that play key roles in child protection.

Health professionals

The Matron in the communities studied in the Northern Region treats children when they are sick, educates mothers on how to take good care of their children, helps deliver teenagers when they are pregnant, offers advice to teenage mothers, makes children feel at home, reports child abuse cases to the police, registers children at birth and vaccinates children against the nine childhood killer diseases.

Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice

The Commission sensitizes communities, mediates and resolves issues affecting children, refers cases to the police, and undertakes human rights monitoring at health and healing centres (bone setters) and annual monitoring of juvenile offenders in prisons.

Recommendations for positive change

Parenting education

There is a need to sensitize parents and community members on positive parenting approaches.

Child protection

The regional institutions concerned with child protection receive little or no funds from the central government and face challenges in providing child protection services. However, apart from seeking funding, mechanisms should be set up in all communities as well as in all districts and sub-districts to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation.

Stakeholders, which include community members, police, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), opinion leaders, religious bodies, representatives from Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies, the judiciary, and education and health/gender desk officers, should work together to deal with issues like rape, defilement, assault, child labour, teenage pregnancy, 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 entities about their roles in child protection. The problem starts at home, and so people feel that the education and outreach needs to start with the family.

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. Shelters should also be built to house trafficked and/or abused children.

Policies and laws

Apart from the fair and equitable application of 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. This also applies to the police. Respondents in the Northern Region mentioned that the laws for child abuse should be harsher, to have a greater deterrent effect.

Partnerships and alliances

Apart from the fair and equitable application of 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. This also applies to the police. Respondents in the Northern Region mentioned that the laws for child abuse should be harsher, to have a greater deterrent effect.





Conclusions

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

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