

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

# Upper West Regional Profile



Canada 



MINISTRY OF GENDER  
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL  
PROTECTION

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for every child

This profile of the Upper West 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:  
702,110 (2.8 PER CENT) OF  
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,  
ON AN AREA OF 18,476 KM<sup>2</sup>  
(7.7 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL  
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM<sup>2</sup>)**

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

### Resources

The major economic activity of the Upper West Region is agriculture, forestry and fishing, involving 72.0 per cent of the population. Crops grown include corn, millet, peanuts, okra, shea tree and rice. Livestock including sheep, goats, chickens, pigs and guinea fowl are raised for meat and eggs.

The region has a long dry season, extending roughly from October to May (eight months). As a result, many people leave the region to work in the southern part of the country for most of the year.

<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

Extended families and communal responsibility for children is fast giving way to nuclear families in the region. In these circumstances, hardship, divorce and separation reduce the care and protection the child receives at home, thereby making the child vulnerable to harm.

### Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)

All forms of FGM/C are illegal in Ghana under the Criminal Code. The baseline research could not identify the occurrence of this practice. The study revealed, however, that although the practice was stopped several years ago, it still persists, mainly among the Wala, Dagarba and Sisala ethnic groups.

According to the MICS report (2011)<sup>3</sup>, the region has the highest rate of FGM/C in the country with two in five women aged 15–49 (41.1 per cent) having some form of FGM/C, compared with around 4.0 per cent nationally. In the region, 91.7 per cent of women have heard of FGM/C and 87.2 per cent of these women are of the view that the practice must be discontinued.

### Violence at home and at school

The baseline study identified that children continue to suffer various kinds of corporal punishment in schools and at home with most parents and teachers in communities holding the view that the act of corporal punishment is a good way of disciplining children.

According to the MICS report (2011), the region experienced the lowest levels of violent discipline at home in the country with about nine in ten children (87.7 per cent) aged 2–14 years experiencing a violent discipline method. The baseline study also identified that 15.6 per cent of children reported being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school.

Verbal humiliation at home was reported by nearly half of children (44.4 per cent); the second highest level reported in the country. At school, 22.2 per cent were verbally humiliated by a teacher/head teacher for reasons such as coming late to school, speaking the local language and quarrelling.



# 41.1%

**WOMEN**  
AGED 15–49  
REPORTED HAVING  
SOME FORM  
OF FGM/C

## 35.6%

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

## 44.4%

children reporting being verbally humiliated at home in past month

<sup>3</sup> Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service



School environments cannot completely be considered a safe place for girls since they may be vulnerable to sexual abuse by teachers. In a senior high school a teacher recently defiled a girl. The case was reported to the police and an investigation is currently ongoing.

**Municipal Social Welfare Officer,  
Upper West Region**

**11.1%**

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

**13.3%**

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

**15.6%**

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

**13.3%**

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

**22.2%**

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

## Sexual abuse and exploitation

Sexual abuse is commonly reported in most communities in Ghana with married men, teachers and respected adults in communities being the most prevalent abusers of girls. The baseline study noted that in some rural communities, teachers consider adolescent girls as their 'bush allowance' and sexually abuse them. The study also noted that when these teachers defile and impregnate school girls, the teachers are simply transferred to another school or left unpunished. Such abuse often results in teenage pregnancies, abortions and sexually transmitted infections. Abused girls are often stigmatized in the community, which prevents families from obtaining community or institutional support and access to justice when they are dealing with such situations.

In some cases, parents know about the abuse but do little to protect the children, because of the culture of impunity where perpetrators go unpunished.

A new phenomenon is emerging in the region, known as 'girls' camping', where girls are lured away from their parents to live temporarily with men or boys for sexual purposes, or are abducted by a group of boys and used as a sex slave for several days. Many girls are defiled during this practice.

The baseline study revealed that children in some communities in the region have transactional sex in order to make money to buy things they need. Many of these children are orphans, abandoned, neglected or from poor homes.

The region recorded one of the highest rates of commercial sexual exploitation in the country with 66.7 per cent of children reporting the occurrence of this phenomenon.

64.4%

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

66.7%

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



## Child labour

The baseline study revealed that children who engage in child labour often drop out of school, and sometimes sustain injuries that maim them for life. According to the study, most children from low income families are engaged in child labour in various forms to support the upkeep of their families. Girls and boys sell sachet water in markets and lorry parks, wash bowls in chop bars, sell alcoholic drinks in drinking spots, carry firewood and charcoal for long distances to sell for money, and engage in hazardous work in illegal mining areas.

The GLSS 6<sup>4</sup> indicated that the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 9 years. According to the survey, the region has one of the highest rates of child labour in the country. One in three children (33.5 per cent) aged 5–17 is involved in child labour, while one in every six children (15.4 per cent) is engaged in hazardous labour. Two out of every five children (45.1 per cent) aged 5–17 years are engaged in an economic activity. However, of the children involved in child labour, 31.2 per cent were attending school while 13.5 per cent were engaged in other forms of hazardous labour. Among children who were not attending school, 47.2 per cent were involved in child labour, with 26.7 per cent in a hazardous form of child labour.

## Migration and child labour

Children are more vulnerable to migration during the dry season when families are unable to adequately feed their children. Boys and more especially girls migrate to Kumasi and Accra after completing Junior High School to work as head porters. The aim is to 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 to abuse and as a result many become pregnant or return home with sexually transmitted infections.

## Children of minority groups

In the Upper West Region, Fulani children are marginalized and discriminated against. They are denied access to education and basic services which, coupled with their nomadic and pastoralist lifestyles, increases their vulnerability.

45.1%

CHILDREN  
AGED 5–17  
INVOLVED IN AN  
ECONOMIC  
ACTIVITY

15.4%

CHILDREN  
AGED 5–17  
INVOLVED IN  
HAZARDOUS  
LABOUR



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

5.2%

WOMEN  
AGED 20-49  
MARRIED  
BEFORE  
AGE OF 15



## Child marriage

The Upper West Region is one of the regions in Ghana where girls are least likely to be married under the age of 15. The MICS report (2011) indicated that one in every 20 women (5.2 per cent) aged 20-49 were married before attaining 15 years, two in every five before reaching 18 years and one in every 18 (5.4 per cent) teenage girls aged 15-19 years is currently married.

Girls are often married in polygynous unions to older men. Both polygyny (where a husband has more than one wife) and a large spousal age gap are a source of discrimination against women. The practice may also create concerns about transmission of HIV and other health issues, while economic instability and vulnerability of women are especially aggravated by polygyny.

The region has the third highest rate of polygynous marriages, affecting over a third of women aged 15-49 (35.5 per cent).

17.8%

CHILDREN  
LIVING AWAY  
FROM THEIR  
PARENTS

## Separation from parents

The baseline study identified 17.8 per cent of children in the region who were not living with their biological mother or father. Most of the children living with neither parent were reported to be living with an extended family member. However, children who lose both of their parents face a bleak future. They are often neglected and end up destitute on the streets. They are at most need of protection throughout their childhood.

The Upper West Region has patrilineal ethnic groups in which customary practices dictate that the children of divorced parents stay with their fathers. Thus such children effectively lose their mothers and may come under the care of stepmothers or 'rival' wives in the case of polygynous households.



# Mechanisms for protecting children

## Birth registration

Birth registration is an important step in identity protection. It also protects against violations such as child marriages and trafficking. The Upper West Region has the second highest rate of birth registration in the country with 72.6 per cent of children under 5 registered (MICS, 2011).

## Families

In earlier days, marriage within the local communities was seen as a union between two families; children born were seen as communal 'assets' and therefore were protected by all members of the community. In more recent times, nuclear families have become solely responsible for the upbringing of their children. Nevertheless, most paternal aunts continue to be a source of support by paying school fees, buying books and pens for children, accommodating and caring for their brothers' children, especially girls, and protecting their well-being.

## Communities

Chiefs are seen as the lead protectors of children in the region. They settle most cases involving child abuse and their palace is the most preferred venue, according to most respondents, in settling violations against children in the region.

## Institutions

Most teachers help to discipline the child and create an environment in which children are happy and able to learn. Most children also prefer to confide in their teachers and trust them for protection.

The Ghana Police Service, the Juvenile and Family Tribunal courts, the Departments of Social Welfare (DSW) and Community Development and the District Assembly are government institutions that play key roles in child protection.

In the Upper West Region, the DSW plays a critical role in the juvenile justice probation panels/courts that sit to resolve cases involving children in conflict with the law by conducting background checks on accused children in order to assist in the effective resolution of cases.

## Health professionals

Apart from taking care of routine health matters, the health professionals in the communities are particularly important in educating families against female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). This role has helped in the eventual eradication of FGM/C in some local communities.

# 72.6%

## BIRTH REGISTRATION (UNDER 5 YEARS)



If you send  
your matter  
to the police,  
they will  
chop all your  
money, waste  
your time and  
at the end  
you will see  
nothing.

Middle-aged man,  
Upper West Region



# Recommendations for positive change

## Government and state agencies

It is necessary to clearly define the mandate/roles of the various government agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare, the Department of Children, and the Community Development Department. Collaboration is needed between state actors as well as guidelines on interdepartmental collaboration. Government and state agencies need increased resource allocations to enhance their coverage and output.

## Community

Community-based child protection systems need to be strengthened. There is a need to sensitize communities on their role in child protection and to increase children's participation in decision-making and child-protection programmes.

## Police

It is important to combat corruption and strengthen police relations with the communities to build the trust and confidence of the local people in the service.

# Conclusions

In the Upper West Region, the most effective actions for protecting children include maintaining peaceful homes and families, implementing free compulsory education for children, improving family incomes and enforcing laws. With proper government funding, the situation could be further improved.

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