



# Children's experiences of violence

Evidence from the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam

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The images throughout our publications are of children living in circumstances and communities similar to the children within our study sample. © Young Lives.

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# Introduction

Globally, increasing efforts in policy, programming and advocacy are focused on eliminating all forms of violence against children. While children are central to these initiatives, we rarely hear the views of those most affected, children themselves (Leach, 2006: 1129). Previous research has documented how violence makes children afraid, upset, not want to go to school, run away from home and so on (see for example, Beazley, et al., 2006). Qualitative research offers a powerful way to explore what children say about the various forms of violence they experience, how and why violence manifests in their lives and generates an in-depth understanding not only of the emotional impact of violence, but also how children respond (Overlien and Hyden, 2009). Children's views and experiences over time also offer insights into why and how change happens (Parkes, 2015). This in turn may enable better understanding of how to prevent violence affecting children, and how to support children who do experience violence.

However, there are significant gaps in research on children's experiences from the Global South. There has been a particular focus on extreme situations, such as conflict and crises (Boyden and de Berry, 2004; Hart, 2008; Pells 2011a; Seymour, 2012) or severe forms of violence, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere, 2013) and sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, particularly in relation to girls (Bania, 2009; Le Mat, 2016; Ouis, 2009). Typically, research has explored the experiences of "at-risk" groups of children, such as child soldiers, street connected children and orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) (Cheney, 2007; Kovats-Bernat, 2006; Shepler, 2014, Wessells, 2006). While such research provides important evidence on the ways in which children navigate violent contexts, what is often missing is the everyday, routinized, taken-for-granted and often hidden forms of violence affecting children (Parkes, 2015; Wells et al. 2014). One exception has been work on violence in schools, including corporal punishment in the home and school (Breen, et al. 2015; Horton, 2016; Mampane et al., 2014; Murali Proctor, 2015; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2013). Overall, what emerges from this growing literature is the need to better understand the interconnections between the individual, collective and structural roots of violence, which combine to affect different children in diverse ways (Korbin, 2003; Omolo, 2014). Parkes (2015: 4) emphasizes the need to attend to violence not just as "acts of physical, sexual and emotional force, but to the everyday interactions that surround these acts, and to their roots in "structural violence of inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions." Violence is therefore always linked to other vectors of inequality, such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality and so on (Parkes, 2015: 6).

In addition, there is also a lack of longitudinal data. Following the same children over time enables the exploration of how children's experiences of and responses to violence change with age and how past experiences shape later experiences, outcomes and trajectories. This brief paper highlights some of Young Lives key findings on violence affecting children, exploring what children say about violence, how it affects them and the key themes that emerges from a systematic analysis of the children's accounts.

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# About Young Lives

Young Lives is a unique 15-year longitudinal study of children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam. Young Lives research combines survey and qualitative methods, focused on the causes and consequences of childhood poverty for children's well-being (see Appendix for further details of Young Lives and methods). Young Lives is not a dedicated violence prevalence study. Therefore, it is notable that children's experiences of violence emerged as widespread in Young Lives qualitative research and a matter of grave concern to children themselves. In this brief paper, we explore selected themes that have emerged from Young Lives published papers (see references):

1. The ways in which children experience multiple forms of violence occur across different settings;
2. How children's experiences of and responses to violence are shaped by age and gender;
3. How violence reflects and reinforces discriminatory social and gender norms;
4. How violence is a manifestation of a lack of rights and is widely normalised; and finally,
5. How poverty is a driver of violence affecting children.

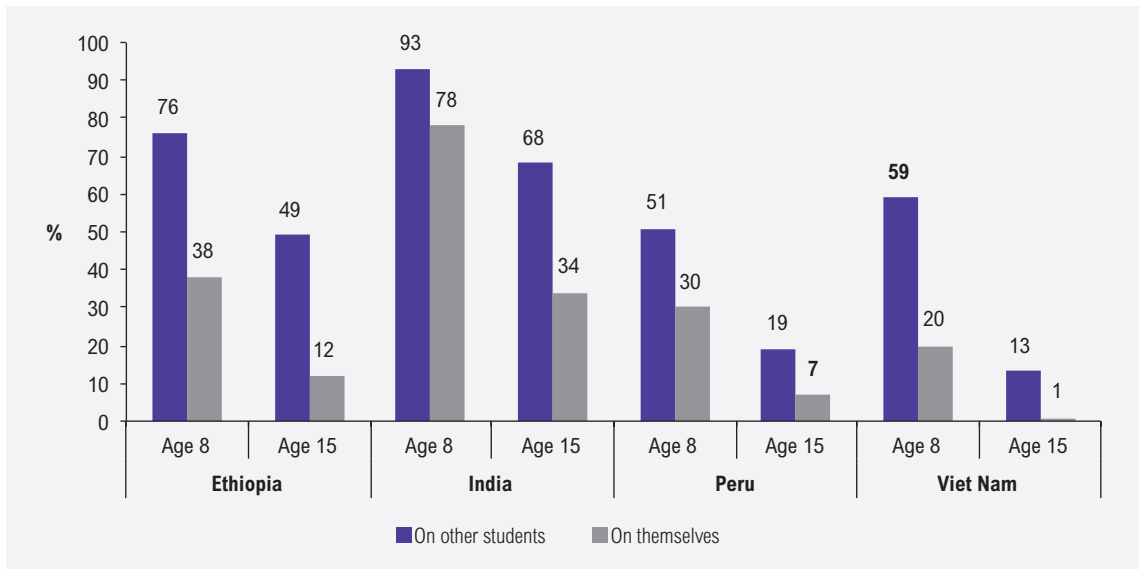


# Children experience multiple forms of violence across different settings

Research has often focused on specific types of violence, or violence occurring in specific places or settings. However, what emerges from children’s accounts are the interconnections between experiences of different types of violence, such as corporal punishment and bullying between peers, and between experiences of violence in different settings, such as the home and school.

Violence is part of everyday life for many children in their homes, schools and communities, such as on the way to school, or while working. Corporal punishment is widely used by teachers in schools in all four study countries. For example, among children aged eight: over half in Peru and Viet Nam, three quarters in Ethiopia and over nine in ten in India reported witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Children’s self-reports of teachers’ use of physical punishment in the past week at ages 8 and 15 (2009)



Source: Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015: 18

At age 15, over a third of girls and a quarter of boys in Peru and 11 per cent of girls and 15 per cent of boys in Vietnam reported being physically hurt by a family member. Children also experienced violence within the wider community, particularly in Peru (Pells and Woodhead, 2014: 68-69).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 2:** Fifteen-year-olds reporting being physically hurt by a family member or stranger (%)

		Girls	Boys
<b>Physically hurt by family member</b>	Peru	36	27
	Vietnam	12	15
<b>Physically hurt by stranger</b>	Peru	14	27
	Vietnam	3	12

<sup>1</sup> ‘Stranger’ is translated as ‘unknown person’ in the local languages. However, it is possible that different interpretations of ‘stranger’ exist in different cultures. For example, ‘strangers’ may not be people who are completely unknown, but outside the family and immediate social networks.

In all four countries, many children described being hit by parents and teachers, as well as experiencing fighting or bullying between peers. Within schools, bullying is often part of a wider violent environment, where harsh disciplinary practices such as corporal punishment serve to normalise violence. Violence is the foremost reason children give for disliking school. Students fighting, teachers beating, teachers discriminating against pupils, pupils teasing or bullying, and/or teachers shouting are reported as key problems in schools for 53 per cent of the children in Viet Nam, 42 per cent in Ethiopia, 38 per cent in Peru and 26 per cent in India (at age 8) (Ogando Portela and Pells 2015: 19-20).

The use of corporal punishment by teachers and violent behaviour between peers are linked as children describe how they use similar practices in interacting with peers. In Peru, children justified the use of physical violence against peers using the same argument made by teachers in relation to corporal punishment, namely the need to teach a lesson and change behaviour (Rojas, 2011). This is illustrated in the following extract from a group discussion:

*Diego: Killing people is wrong.*

*Interviewer: And lynching them?*

*Peter: Maybe a little whipping will do.*

*Interviewer: You share his opinion?*

*Javier: Yes, I'd beat him up, but not kill him.*

*Felipe: Almost kill him.*

*Peter: Leave him agonising. (ibid)*

Children also describe how experiencing violence in one setting increases the risk of experiencing violence in another. Corporal punishment at school means that children may be further punished at home by parents. In India for example, a 9-year-old boy explained:

*I do not like my school, since the teachers beat me badly. They beat with a stick on my back, even if we are sitting and talking.*

*Researcher: Do you not complain to your parents?*

*Boy: No, because they only beat because we must study well. My mother will thrash me very hard, if she knows I am not answering in class (Morrow and Singh, 2014).*

Similarly, in Peru, José, an urban boy aged 13, said: “*They hit me, my mom or my teacher. The teacher hits me if I do not do my homework; my mom does it if don't take care of my brothers or if I get bad grades*” (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016). In other circumstances, experiencing violence in the home renders children vulnerable to violence in other situations, such as having to work, as illustrated by the case of Ravi below.

## Summary

- Violence is a part of everyday life for many children at home, school, in the community and while working.
- Violence was more likely to be reported within the home, than inflicted by strangers.
- Despite formal prohibition, corporal punishment is common within schools in the four countries. This shapes cultures of violence within schools.



# Children's experiences of and responses to violence are shaped by age and gender

At younger ages children describe being more vulnerable to physical punishment from teachers and caregivers, particularly during what is sometimes termed 'middle childhood' between 8 and 12 years old. For example, in India, one child explained how in the first grade (age about six years), the teacher used to beat very little, but in second grade: *'they beat so that we learn and we are becoming big, but it hurts'* (Morrow and Singh, 2014). Likewise, in Ethiopia, Getu, an 11-year-old boy, said he was not punished when he was *'a small child'*, but now he *'might be beaten and insulted'* if he refused to obey his caregivers (Pankhurst, Negussie and Mulugeta, 2016). Kassaye, aged 17, said *'it has been long since I was beaten. Now, they just insult me'*. Figure 1 above illustrates how in school younger children are at greater risk of corporal punishment than adolescents, with the incidence of corporal punishment at age 8 more than double the rate reported by 15 year olds, in all four countries. Whereas boys are significantly more likely to experience corporal punishment than girls, girls often describe experiencing other forms of humiliating treatment (Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015). As the mother of a 15-year-old girl, Santhi (India) explained, when describing her daughter's school:

*'It is good. [The teachers] try to remove the fear from the students by constantly talking to them, ... teaching them how to behave. But when they are not able to do well, ... they get a scolding'. When asked whether 15 years are beaten by teachers, Santhi's mother said: 'not exactly beating. They say some harsh words.... Usually they don't beat girls. They are all grown-up children. They will not tolerate scoldings, let alone thrashings'* (Morrow and Singh, 2015: 79).

As children become older, other forms of violence become more common in their accounts, including domestic violence between parents, concerns over safety in public spaces and bullying between peers. At age 15 whereas boys are at greater risk than girls of being physically and verbally bullied and girls are more likely to be bullied by measures aimed to ridicule, humiliate or socially exclude (Pells, Ogando Portela and Espinoza Revollo, 2016a) (see section 3).

How children construct, experience and navigate violence changes with age across the early life course. This encompasses not just changes in the nature of violence which children may be at risk of, or actual experience of violence, but also children's understandings and interpretations of what constitutes violence. In other words, what is considered unacceptable at one point in the life course later becomes normalised and vice versa. The following case from India illustrates changing responses to domestic violence over time (Morrow and Singh, 2016):

Ravi, a Scheduled Caste boy from rural Andhra Pradesh, had stopped going to school age 9 to work as a bonded labourer to pay off family debt. At age 12, he said: *"When my Mum and Dad fight I feel very bad. When my Dad beats my Mum we go to try to stop him. Me and my brother go."* He was adamant aged 12 that in the future he would not beat his own wife like his father beat his mother. When he was 13 he described having left work as he was beaten by his employer. He was also beaten at home by his father. When interviewed for the third time, aged 16, Ravi no longer mentioned domestic violence between his parents. However, he described



how he was drawn into fighting his brother-in-law who was hitting his sister, to protect his sister and her son. Caught up in the violence, he said:

*“She [his sister] told me not get involved and to go inside. He pulled me out and started hitting my sister. I had to free her.”*

By age 20 Ravi was married and his wife was 4 months pregnant. He wanted to take care of his wife but said: *“she [his wife] gets a beating...I hit her when she tells anything...she won't keep quiet [after the quarrel], she keeps muttering to herself...she just nags, I get angry.”*

Ravi's case shows age and gender norms in relation to domestic violence intersect but also change over time. Violence in the form of fights and family quarrels, ran through Ravi's childhood accounts. His father's drinking led to domestic violence. The family's poverty led to Ravi taking on the family debt at an early age, but his employer beat him and treated him badly. He took action, by leaving the village, and found other work, as a response to how he had been treated. He also fought with his brother-in-law, to try to protect his sister. At the age of 12, he had said he would not hit his wife in the future, as a response to witnessing his father hitting his mother. But he readily admitted, 7 years later, to hitting his wife. The key message from Ravi's account is that gender norms – in the form of dominant masculinity – intersect with poverty, indebtedness, and age from middle childhood to young adulthood generating a cycle of violence towards women as well as reinforcing and connecting to cycles of violence toward children. Thus, violence affecting women is linked to violence against children, and gender inequalities and masculinities are a root of both.

However, in other cases while children accept violence as normal when they were younger, as they become older they start to raise questions (Morrow and Singh, 2016). Shanmuka Priya, described several forms of violence over the years. She said she hit other children to try to protect herself and her younger brother; in 2010 she talked about being beaten by teachers for being late and for not understanding the lessons, adding that teachers also beat children for being dirty. She said she was beaten by her parents if she cried or asked for money. She also said male teachers beat children more than female teachers. In 2014, she said she thought primary school teachers hit the children because the teachers were 'from the village' and did not know it's a crime to 'mishandle' children, whereas high school teachers were from further afield and are aware that the government would punish them if they beat the children:

*Those who are from the village feel that they can beat us because nobody would care. But those who come from other places are afraid of our background. ...I like the teachers who come from far...We've good teachers and they teach well. They don't beat us. They are jovial with us; they let us play during playtime. We have PET (Physical Education Teachers) and Drawing teachers now. It has changed like that, the environment is nice and cool in this place.*

Children are typically positioned as victims in research on violence. While not ignoring the profound impact of violence on lives, children's accounts reveal a more complex picture of how they respond to violence. Children's responses can be categorized as follows: They seemingly do nothing (or cry); complain; seek help individually; seek help as a group (rather than individually) which may be a safer way to respond, depending on the problem; avoidance - running away, leaving an abusive employer, refusing to go to school; and intervening: children (especially boys) may try to physically stop violence, sometimes using violence themselves against the instigators or adopt more indirect strategies to try and help.



These responses are illustrated by findings from research on domestic violence in Vietnam. Younger children described how they often distanced themselves from the violence physically, such as hiding away or going to another house, whereas older children tended to have more developed strategies, including helping their mothers. Adolescent boys intervened directly to try and protect their mother from abuse, whereas adolescent girls adopted indirect strategies, such as earning money to give to their mothers and so reducing her dependence on her husband (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015). Children also described the positive role that friendships and school can play in supporting with difficult home environments. However, children who felt different or stigmatised on account of their home situation struggled to learn and in some cases leave school (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015). For example, Nga lives in the town of Da Nang in Vietnam. When she was 15, Nga did not pass the exam to progress onto higher secondary school and so she went to a continuing education centre, but because of fighting between students as well as not feeling that her studies were progressing, she decided to *“stay at home to help out my parents.”* Since Nga left school, she has been staying up late and going to the bar where her father drinks: *“I go wake him up and tell him to come home.”* In this way she protected her mother by being the one to let her father back into the house when he was drunk. Nga also worked at her mother's café and gave her earnings to her mother. Nga explained that she had not had many school friends but instead socialised with *“a few good children who had to quit school because of their family situation.”* This group of friends supported one another *“because their situation is just as difficult as mine”*, including giving money (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015).

In contrast, in rural Ethiopia, Biritu (aged 15), described domestic violence between her parents. She received support from an older brother, which enabled her to continue at school despite ongoing domestic violence at home. She stayed with her brother in town as she believed the school there is a better quality. She described how on Saturdays there are *“makeup class[es] arranged by clever students. They help us with various subjects. Sometimes teachers also come and teach us.”* It also meant she could escape the ongoing domestic violence, as her father was repeatedly drunk and then beat her mother. Not only did her brother help her with school materials and studying English, but it is also socially unacceptable for a young woman to live alone: *“If girls live alone, gradually things will change and bad things begin to happen. Considering my case and brother's, it is very advantageous that we are living together. Our life is decent”*.

These case studies illustrate how experiences of violence are often cumulative, with impacts on children's lives over time, shaping not only their well-being but also their trajectories through schooling and to adulthood. This is particularly pronounced in the case of schooling. Children frequently describe not wanting to go to school because of fear of being beaten: in India, a mother of a 9-year-old explained how *“my daughter was small, she was frightened, and said she will not go to school”*. Violence at school undermines children's learning. At age 8 corporal punishment is negatively associated with children's maths scores, in all four countries, even after controlling for a range of child and household characteristics and when comparing children in the same community. The results also remain significant in Ethiopia, India and Vietnam after controlling for previous performance in maths at age 5. These negative effects persist when examining children's test scores at age 12. In India, Peru and Vietnam corporal punishment experienced at age 8 is negatively associated with maths scores at age 12 (Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015).

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## Summary

- Corporal punishment in schools is a common experience for children in 'middle childhood' (between about 8 and 12 years), particularly for boys.
- The types of violence experienced vary by age and gender, with boys reporting physical violence, whereas girls report emotional violence and gender-based violence.
- Children often experience both violence at school and violence in the home. Children are not only victims of violence, they seek strategies to combat it and to protect victimised family members.
- Violence undermines children's wellbeing, engagement with schooling and learning.



# Violence reflects and reinforces discriminatory social and gender norms

Violence affecting children takes place in the context of other discriminatory norms, particularly in relation to gender and caste or ethnicity. Girls' and boys' differential experiences and responses to violence are linked with notions of masculinity and femininity, especially in relation to physical punishment. This varies cross-culturally, but in India, for example, norms relating to femininity mean that girls are required to be docile and submissive, must not be 'naughty', while constructions of masculinity may mean that boys are supposed to be able to accept physical punishment and withstand pain (Morrow and Singh, 2014). In Vietnam, powerful patriarchal norms mean that men are entitled to discipline other household members, and this frames young people's understandings of violence as an appropriate mechanism for educating and controlling younger children and women. Girls often experience forms of violence which reflect unequal gender norms (Vu, 2016). In Peru, girls receive less frequent physical punishment than boys, reinforcing gender stereotypes that see men as strong, able to accept and endure pain – boys 'never show a submissive attitude while being physically punished; rather they strive to appear resilient and to hide pain' (Rojas 2011).

In India, boys are more likely to be physically punished than girls (Morrow and Singh, 2016):

*Vinay, a Scheduled Tribe boy aged 15, complained that his teacher 'beat one student very badly because he did not get good marks in an exam... other girls got less marks but he left them without punishment, but this boy got punished. The boy got 33 out of 100 but another girl got 8 marks but she did not get any punishment'.*

In Ethiopia, boys were more likely to report instances of corporal punishment at home, while girls reported insults and harassment by boys in their communities. There were differences in seeking help, linked to gender norms in different cultural contexts. For example, whereas boys in Peru being much less likely to seek support when facing difficulties, in India, girls were much less likely to seek support.

Violence from teachers was replicated by children in forms of violent bullying, with the use of violence justified as teaching a lesson, enforcing conformity with harmful gender norms to establish masculine identities for boys. As a headteacher in Peru said - (Rojas 2011) *"Boys have to be treated more roughly, while girls are more delicate and quiet. They cannot be disciplined in the same way."*

Once past puberty, older girls reported experiencing harassment from boys, especially in India (often termed 'eve-teasing', see Morrow and Singh, 2016) and in Ethiopia (Pells et al. 2016a). When interviewed at age 12 Haftey had described boys harassing her on the way home from school and explained: "We cannot study because we always worry about the boys' threat. We are frightened always." Later, when 17 Haftey described her relief at having moved closer to her school: "In the past, when I was in the village, children were beating us, waiting for us along the road to our school, but here thanks to God there is no one that beats me." Likewise, in India, Harika, living in rural Andhra Pradesh, described the difficulties that girls faced in the journey to and from school and the fear of bullying and harassment from boys. This has led to some girls dropping out of school and for others it has caused difficulties in studying (Pells et al. 2016a). She explained:

*Earlier we used to be in school [doing homework] but now no one stays back after school... we all decided now in 10th class we return home fast. ... [there are only four of us left] so we don't stay back... The [neighbouring village] girls used to come. They used to be there until their bus came at 6pm... Now they ... don't come to school....They used to be in the school until the bus came. Big boys used to come and sit there, at the school... Because other boys come to the school, so they [the girls] don't come now.*

In Ethiopia and India, girls described fear of using the toilets, which are often not gender-segregated and so the girls feel unsafe and concerned about bullying and harassment from boys (Pells, 2011b: 10). This is particularly problematic during menstruation, leading to girls being absent each month:

*We do not have bathrooms there. They have started but the construction is not yet completed and I don't like that aspect in the school. It is very difficult for us, particularly girls, and those who come from neighbouring villages. During the monthly cycles it is more difficult, so some girls don't come to school on those days. (Rural girl, aged 15, Andhra Pradesh)*

Ethnicity/caste is not straightforward to tease out of the Young Lives qualitative data. Children do not necessarily explicitly self-identify as from an ethnic group, particularly those children living in relatively homogenous communities and in Ethiopia the open discussion of ethnicity is very sensitive. However, we can surmise that in India, caste may be a factor in the following two examples, where teachers are of a higher caste than the children they teach. Verbal abuse from teachers were also described by boys aged 9–10 at a government school, in 2010 (Morrow and Singh, 2014):

*They abuse us, and use foul language: 'You look like bullocks and donkeys – the herdsman is better than you.' This makes us very sad.*

Chandani, age 12, from a Scheduled Tribe community, described how the physics teacher insulted the children (Morrow and Singh, 2016):

*[He] always used to tell that ours are "dumb-heads, your head is full of shit and if that is removed, then you will be able to study. God has given all promises to you but not education", like that he scolds us. He teaches us about space. But he beats severely. ... In 2nd year, he beat one senior boy. He bled from the ear.*

*Interviewer: Did he beat you too?*

*Chandani: No, ... but he threatens... he says that "by tomorrow, by this time, I will be here, be careful, if you don't solve the problems, then your back will be torn off".*

In Vietnam, children from ethnic minority groups reported being bullied because of being poor and from an ethnic minority group (Pells et al. 2016). This contributes to children dropping out of school.

Y Think is 16 years old and from the Cham H'roi minority ethnic group in Vietnam. At the end of seventh grade he got into many fights with other children who bullied him because of his ethnicity. Y Think said that another boy 'mocked me for being "an ethnic"' and then 'punched me with his fist'. He could not endure the continued bullying and added, 'I couldn't digest the lessons. So I felt tired of learning.' He left school and worked on the family farm.



## Summary

- In schools boys were more likely to say they were physically beaten than girls. Gender norms may preclude boys seeking support when they are affected by violence. When teachers normalise violence, it becomes replicated by pupils.
  - Domestic violence and gender-based violence was reported as a way in which existing patriarchal norms are normalised and maintained. Girls frequently reported fear of name calling, harassment and concerns over personal safety (e.g. on the way to school or in shared toilets).
  - Children from ethnic minorities or other marginalised social groups report experiencing violence in schools because of their status.
  - Violence consistently undermined access to school– for girls who felt unsafe to go to school or unable to study there; or for children from marginalised minority groups victimised for their ethnicity. Violence is a channel replicating existing discriminatory norms.
-

# Violence is a manifestation of a lack of respect for rights and is widely normalised

Children have low social status and use of violent discipline is widely accepted and normalised, and seen as supportive of children's learning and development. In Peru, Jose said: *"If we are punished it is because we deserve it, because we have done something wrong."* (José, 13, urban Peru) (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016). In some cases, children and caregivers perceived that corporal punishment by teachers was an acceptable way of shaping children's behaviour and values. The mother of a 9-year-old boy, India, said: *Nowadays, the teachers don't beat the students. ... but it should be necessary sometimes to keep them in control. So we ourselves ask them to be strict with the students* (Morrow and Singh, 2014). While children frequently reported how they did not like violence, this does not mean that they always oppose it, which illustrates how deeply engrained violence frequently is within societies. In Ethiopia, children expressed a sense that the punishment and beating from their parents was 'for their own good' (Pankhurst, Negussie and Mulugeta, 2016). Habib, an 11-year-old boy from Addis Ababa, said *"I feel that it [beating] is good for me."* Tufa, a 14 year old boy, had been beaten because the cattle he was herding strayed. He said *"I did not feel sorry for being beaten because I knew it was my fault."* In India, Triveni, aged 19, described a family quarrel in which she was badly beaten by her grandmother. She said people tell her: *'she raised you, doesn't she have the right to scold you?'*

In India, older siblings are often responsible for disciplining younger siblings (Morrow and Singh, 2016): Sarada's younger siblings did not attend school but worked as debt-bonded labourers. Despite being taught that teachers should not beat children, Sarada said she and her older sister beat their younger sister:

*...at work she keeps threatening the owners that she will leave in the afternoon and the sun gets hot, and she won't be working any more after the debt is cleared. Everybody says that she is a stubborn girl .... There is a slight change in her this month after we all scolded her. I even hit her on the head with a small bucket.*

Powerful 'intergenerational' dynamics operate, and violent practices may be reinforced (or challenged) over time. For example, in Peru, cycles of violence *may be* transmitted inter-generationally in the context of wider societal acceptance and normalisation of violence. Parents who themselves experienced violence in their childhoods may use violence as a way of controlling their children's behaviour (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016). One mother described how the whip her father had used on her had been passed down to her to use on her own children:

*Interviewer: And... Do you scare your children [with the possibility of hitting them]?*

*Isabel's mother: Yes I pull out my [whip] and they run. [Laughs]*

*Interviewer: They got scared?*

*Isabel's mother: I scared them but I also hit them too.*

*Interviewer: With the whip?*

*Isabel's mother: Yes (...)*



*Interviewer: Do you have one?*

*Isabel's mother: Yes*

*Interviewer: Where did you buy it?*

*Isabel's mother: I didn't. It is from my father.*

*Interviewer: Your dad gave you the whip?*

*Isabel's mother: Yes, it was his whip.*

*Interviewer: And when you were a child did he hit you with the whip?*

*Isabel's mother: Oh yes.*

(Urban mother, San Román, 2014)

## Summary

- Children frequently experience violence in ways which would be considered unacceptable for adults to experience.
  - Children sometimes subscribe to the view that violence is part of how children should be brought up and disciplined given the widespread normalisation of violence, while still often being upset and distressed by act of violence.
  - Corporal punishment within the home is still often seen as a private concern for the family and seen as part of the right way to bring up children.
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# Poverty is a driver of violence affecting children

Violence research often focuses on personal and interpersonal factors, and on specific settings or forms of violence (such as corporal punishment in schools, gender-based violence, child maltreatment at home and so on) with the effect that poverty is often overlooked as a factor. What emerges from analysis of children's accounts in Young Lives research are the ways in which violence is inextricably linked with structural and other contextual factors, such as poverty, inequality, ethnicity and community gender norms. Children's accounts of violence are set against a backdrop of lack of resources – from overcrowded classrooms, to lack of social protection measures that mean children's work is needed for family survival, lack of family resources to pay for school fees, exercise books, uniforms, and so on. Poverty puts great strain on relationships – in families, schools and communities.

Overall, Young Lives has found that poorer students and children from other disadvantaged groups tend to be disproportionately affected by corporal punishment and bullying (Morrow and Singh, 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells, 2015; Pells et al. 2016a&b). Structural disadvantages arising from poverty and inequity underpin discrimination that may put particular groups of children at risk of multiple intersecting forms of violence, but the form these markers of difference take are context-specific.

For example, financial hardship leads to stress on families, resulting in alcoholism or domestic violence; children need to work, and this may expose them to violence from employers, or they struggle with the challenges of balancing working and schooling; parental absence or long hours working mean that children are needed to do domestic or farm work, and are disciplined when they fail to undertake their tasks adequately, as the following examples show.

Poverty underpins the need for children to work, especially in small-scale subsistence agriculture, and children are needed especially at peak seasonal times of year. Often they miss school to work, but are physically punished when they do return to school (Morrow and Singh, 2015). Ranadeep, aged 13, explained how he missed school for family-based agricultural work, but when he went back to school, he was beaten: *'They hit us because I didn't go to school for one month, and ... I missed [the lessons].*

In Peru, rural children described how as they gained responsibilities in the fields they became more likely to be hit, as the following examples illustrates (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016).

*Interviewer: And what happens if you don't harvest?*

*Fabricio: We won't have potatoes.*

*Interviewer: Do you like to go to the fields?*

*Fabricio: Yes.*

*Interviewer: And your father, what happens if you don't want to go?*

*Fabricio: He hits me.*

*Interviewer: With what?*

*Fabricio: San Martín [whip].*



*Interviewer: What do you think about that? Is it right or wrong?*

*Fabricio: Wrong.*

*Interviewer: Why?*

*Fabricio: Because I cry. (Rural boy, age 13, Andahuaylas, 2014).*

**Figure 3: Children's drawings of physical punishment (Peru)**



Source: Guerrero and Rojas, 2016: 27

Poor children being more likely to be subject to corporal punishment in schools. Lack of materials for school meant that children are punished by teachers: as a boy, aged 7, India, said: "If we don't get [buy and bring] notebooks, then teachers will beat us." A mother of a 7 year old girl in India said the only thing her daughter said about school was that her teacher beat her:

*'She studies well, ... but when there is no uniform and when we delay the fee payments then she will not go, she refuses to go, and she hides behind that wall... and says 'sir will beat me, they will beat me'. (Morrow and Singh, 2014)*

Poverty featured heavily, both explicitly and implicitly, as a key factor in children's accounts of being bullied, particularly in Ethiopia and India. Children described verbal bullying that made direct reference to their impoverished circumstances, whether through name calling and insults such as 'child of a destitute' or through making fun of the poor quality of their clothing or their lack of shoes (Pells et al. 2016b).

In Ethiopia, clothes serve as an indicator of children's economic status and attract insults to the extent that children missed school rather than be bullied (Pells et al. 2016a). For instance, 12 year-old Kebenga, described being absent from school for three days because of not having clothes after having faced insults from his peers on a previous occasion:

*I went to school barefoot because my shoes were torn apart. Then students laughed at me, and some of them insulted me calling me a "poor boy". It was last year. I informed my parents of the problem I faced and they bought me new shoes the next day.*

This sense of being stigmatised can affect children's experiences of schooling and well-being:

*Bereket lives in a slum area in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, described missing school from five to seven days a month when he worked washing cars. Bereket is an orphan who lives with his grandmother. She feels angry when he is absent from school, but he does not listen to her. Bereket said: 'Learning enables you to have a vast knowledge and it helps you to think good things, and that makes me happy. But I hate sitting in a classroom where there are many students. It is hard for me to sit in a classroom for long hours.' He added: 'When the students come wearing better clothes, I don't like to feel inferior to them, so it is a must for me to work hard [earning money] to change my situation.'* (Pells, Dornan and Ogando Portela, 2013)

Children's interactions, including bullying, therefore do not take place in a vacuum but may be shaped by wider inequalities that discriminate against certain groups. For example, in India, children recounted how teachers beat children who were 'dirty' or irregular in attending school. Children adopted and used similar expressions, stating that they wanted to beat children who were not in school to teach them a lesson.

## Summary

- The understandable focus on personal and interpersonal factors in driving violence against children can mask the role played by poverty.
- Poverty increases stresses and strains, including on relationships in families, schools and communities. Poor children are the most likely to report corporal punishment and bullying.
- The lack of clothes and school materials, caused by poverty can result in bullying and violence within the school from peers and from teachers. Poverty can also lead to children missing school to work, and then also being physically punished for having done so.



# Conclusions

Violence in the lives of many children is pervasive, often routinized and normalised. Children's accounts reveal the multiple factors that shape their experiences of and responses to violence and the interconnections between types of violence and the multiple settings in which violence occurs. Forms of violence, such as emotional abuse, may be just as upsetting for children, and are often overlooked and under-researched. Children's experiences and responses change with age and are shaped by social inequalities related to gender and the discrimination and disadvantage experienced by other marginalised social groups. The distress caused by violence impacts negatively upon children, particularly in terms of their emotional well-being and also in relation to schooling. This is not to say that children are passive victims, rather children actively make meaning of their experiences and develop strategies for responding to violence. However, these are constrained by the economic, social and cultural contexts in which children are living.

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# Appendix: About Young Lives and our methods

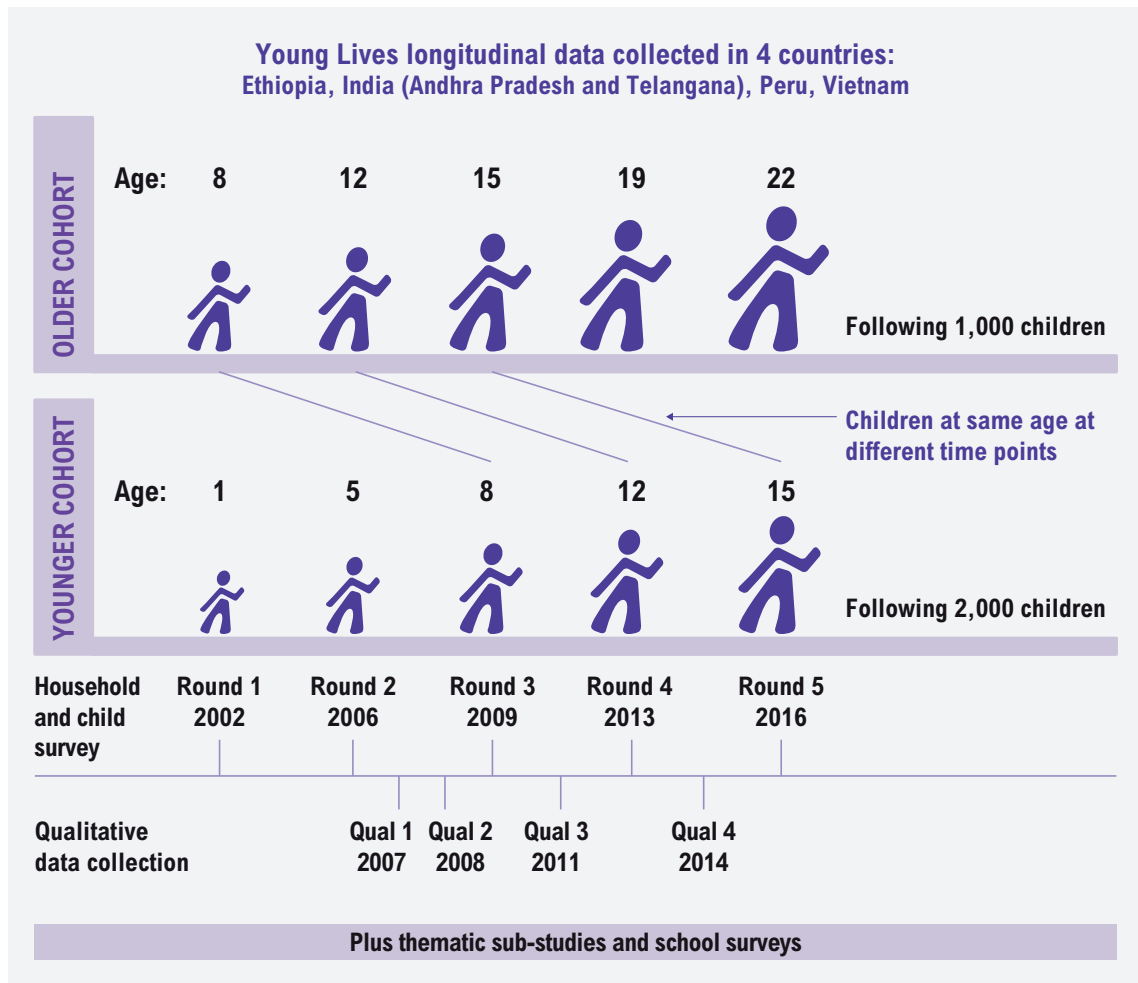
Young Lives is a study of childhood poverty in four low/middle-income countries, Ethiopia, India (the former state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Viet Nam, over a 15-year period, 2002–2017. 12,000 children are followed in two cohorts, 2,000 born in 2000/2001 (the Younger Cohort), and 1,000 born in 1994 (the Older Cohort) in each country. Young Lives views children as social actors/agents with a central role in determining the course of their lives, within constraints, and as competent co-producers of data in social research. Qualitative research is now widely accepted as systematic, rigorous, and trustworthy (Bryman 2004, Denzin and Lincoln 2005; for international development Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011); and there is a burgeoning body of published work that respects children's participation and emphasises that children's reports of their experiences are crucial in understanding aspects of their lives (see Beazley et al, 2009, Boyden & Ennew, 1997, Christensen & James, 2017, Frazer et al, 2004, Greene & Hogan, 2005; on qualitative longitudinal research with children and young people, see Neale & Flowerdew 2003, Thomson et al, 2003). All Young Lives working papers, book chapters, and journal articles are peer-reviewed to meet high publication standards.

Qualitative longitudinal research is used to:

- **explore children's experiences**, their agency, their priorities, and their interpretations and understandings of their situations, and how these change over time. This helps to explain the dynamics of childhood poverty;
- **capture the links** between differing aspects of children's lives. This enhances theory-building related to the life-course, showing the intersections between social determinants/ structural factors - such as availability of resources, including economic, educational, health, etc. – and individual lives over time, from children's point of view (Morrow and Crivello 2015);
- **explain** diverging experiences and trajectories.

Young Lives has collected four rounds of survey data from children, their households and their communities, in 2002, 2006, 2009 and 2013. Findings from the survey data are complemented by four rounds of qualitative data, gathered in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2014. The qualitative research was embedded within the collection of survey data, see Figure 4.



Figure 4. *Young Lives survey design*

## Sampling

The 2001 survey covered 20 sites each country, using sentinel-site sampling, with oversampling of sites in poor areas. The sites included urban and rural areas, representing a range of regions and contexts that reflect ethnic, geographic and political diversity. Within each sentinel site, 100 households with a child aged between 6 and 18 months (younger cohort) and 50 households with a child between 7 and 8 years (Older Cohort) were randomly selected (see Barnett et al. 2012).

For **qualitative research**, four study sites (five in Ethiopia) were selected from the 20 survey sites in order to provide insights from diverse contexts on the basis of location, ethnicity and socio-economic status, and to include sites from differing regions, reflecting the main ethnic or caste groups. In each country, 50 children (25 in each cohort; 60 children in Ethiopia, 30 in each cohort) and their caregivers were drawn from survey participants in the qualitative sites (in 2007) for qualitative longitudinal research. The same children and families were followed at each round.

Survey and qualitative research were conducted by local research teams fluent in local languages. Qualitative interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed, and translated. In all four countries, the same fieldworkers have been involved in each round, and a good rapport developed with children and families over time, as shown from the conversational style of some of the interview extracts. Research teams were rigorous in checking data quality and translation and in reflecting on data interpretation. The qualitative research was framed



around a broad set of topics, including children's well-being, their experiences of transitions (such as changing schools), and their time use and daily experiences. Research teams were encouraged to follow what children wanted to, or were willing to, talk about. A range of qualitative research methods were used, including one-to-one interviews, group discussions and creative activities (such as drawings of a child 'doing well' or 'doing badly', and body-mapping, see Crivello et al., 2013 for a description of methods and approach to data analysis). Violence, in many forms, was mentioned on many occasions and by all age groups, including during group discussions about what constitutes a child 'doing well', in children's descriptions of what they liked and disliked about school (during interviews), and so on.

For this paper, the approach we have taken has been to look systematically across all Young Lives violence papers to map the cases and findings, in order to explore the following themes: 1. how children experience multiple forms of violence across differing settings; 2. how age and gender shape children's experiences of and responses to violence; 3. how violence reflects and reinforces social and gender norms; how violence is a manifestation of a lack of respect for rights, and is normalised; and finally, how poverty is a driver of violence.

## **Research ethics**

Young Lives has ethics approval from University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee, and Instituto de Investigación Nutricional IRB Peru (since 2002); Social Science & Humanities Interdivisional REC (SSH IDREC) University of Oxford (since 2005); Hanoi School of Public Health Research Ethics Committee (2015); Partner organisation in Hyderabad - research ethics committee (2015), and Ethiopia College of Health Sciences (2015).

Young Lives has a collaborative approach to research ethics whereby fieldworkers receive training and then report back on the ethical challenges after each round of research. A shared Memorandum of Understanding has been developed across the study (Morrow, 2009). Asking children about potentially distressing experiences of violence, especially in contexts where corporal punishment is illegal, raises particular ethical challenges. At the same time, if done sensitively, research on such issues is essential to document the effects of violence against children, strengthen policy responses and design more appropriate and effective interventions (Ennew and Pierre-Plateau, 2004: 17; Clacherty and Clacherty, 2005a). Serious cases of abuse and exploitation uncovered by research teams are referred to relevant authorities and service providers, or, where these do not exist, local teams investigate informal support networks available to children and families.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of the approach taken are discussed at considerable length within the published papers. As noted, Young Lives surveys are not dedicated child-protection or violence prevalence surveys, but rather consist of a set of general questions and measures related to children's general well-being, experiences of poverty, and progress over time. Young Lives sample is pro-poor and while broadly representative, it cannot shed light on violence experienced by affluent children and young people. In Young Lives qualitative research, interviews were conducted in homes, fields, or in village community premises, occasionally schools, so the contexts of data gathering are likely to affect how violence is reported, as children may feel inhibited if they feel they can be overheard. As is widely acknowledged, it is not always appropriate or possible to achieve complete privacy in research with children and young people.



Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years.

Its aim is to shed light on the drivers and impacts of child poverty, and generate evidence to help policymakers design programmes that make a real difference to poor children and their families.