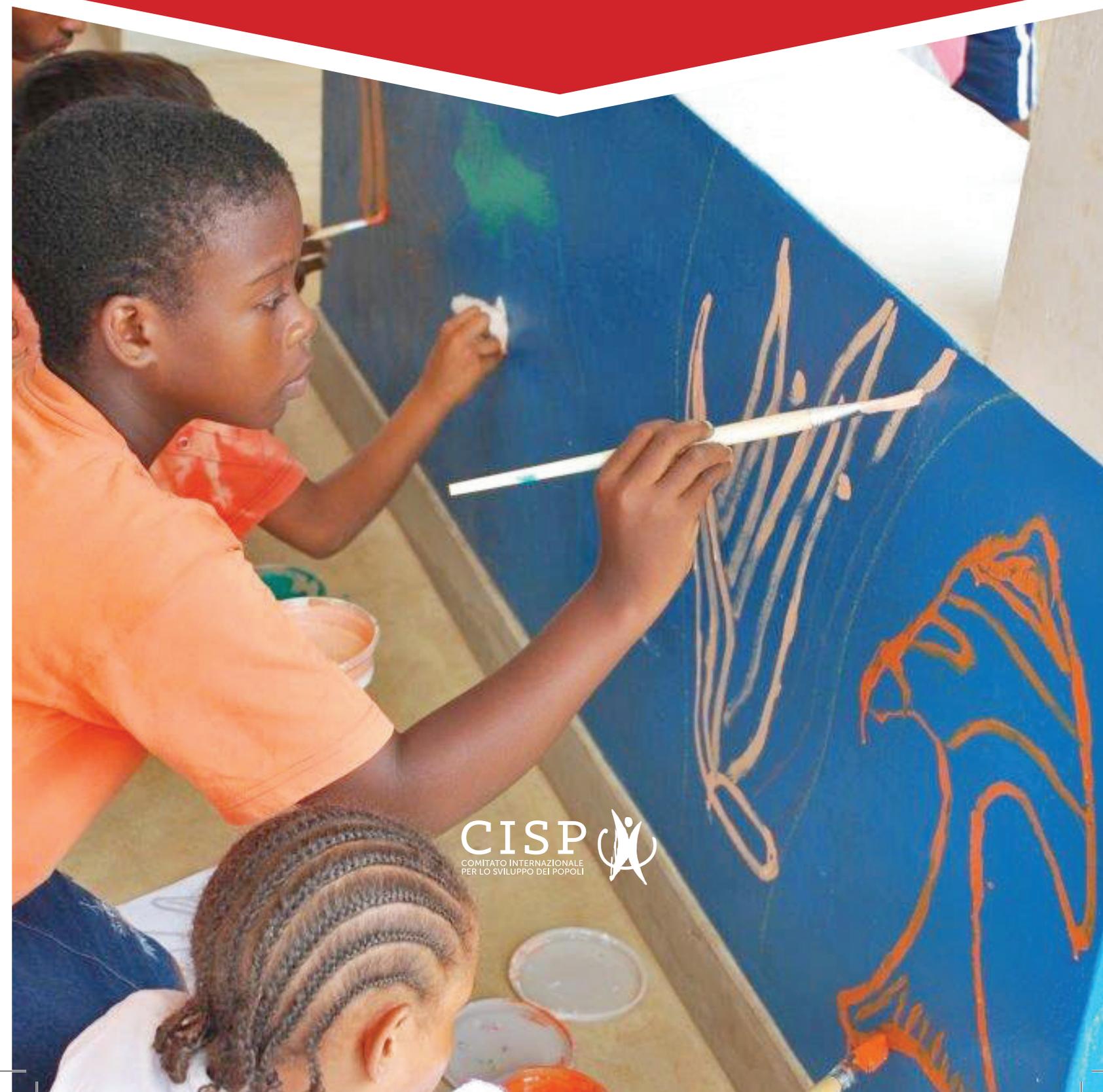


UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL NORMS AND CHILD ABUSE

A Case of Magarini Sub-County,
Kilifi County, Kenya



UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL NORMS AND CHILD ABUSE: THE CASE OF MAGARINI SUB COUNTY, KILIFI COUNTY, KENYA.

Project:

Closing the gap between communities and child protection services in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties

Published By:

CISP - Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli
(*International Committee for the Development of People*) - Nairobi

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CISP would like to thank the Department of Children's Services represented by Mr. Sebastian Muteti-Magarini Sub County Children's Officer and representatives of community based organizations from Magarini Sub County, for their valuable contribution to all aspects of the study that produced this report. It recognizes the financial support from UNICEF, without which this initiative would not have been possible.

CISP and its research team are also indebted to all local community members in Magarini Sub County of Kilifi County, where the study was conducted, for generously sharing their knowledge, experiences and opinions on social norms and their relationship to child abuse within their community.

The FGD (Focus Group Discussion) research team, led by Mr. Moses Wandera, Ms. Evelyn Rehema and all the Local Research Assistants is much appreciated for their valuable expertise and commitment. We are grateful to CISP field officers who took part in the study and provided logistical support and, not forgetting Ms. Rachel Litoroh, who compiled the report from the FGDs. Special thanks go to Ms. Magdalene Muoki and Valeria Costa for their guidance and input during the process. All those who played a role in the study and compilation of this report but have not been mentioned here are recognized.

ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community-based Organizations
CISP	International Committee for Development of People
CPC	Child Protection Centre
AACs	Area Advisory Council
CHW	Community Health Worker
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
SMC	School Management Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VCO	Volunteer Children Officer
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FPE	Free Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
VAC	Violence Against Children
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children

DEFINITIONS

Definitions for key terminologies as used in the report

Child	Any human being under the age of eighteen years
Child Marriage	Marriage of any person below eighteen years old
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
Child abuse	Any maltreatment of a child; includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, development or dignity
Child Sexual abuse	Engaging in sexual activities with a child with or without consent of the child
Defilement	A person who commits an act that causes penetration with a child is guilty of an offence termed defilement (Sexual Offences Act 2006, Kenya)
Incest	Sexual intercourse between close relatives
Norms	Part of a set of social, legal or personal rules that guide a group of people's lives.
Child labour	Any work performed by a child that is detrimental to his or her health, education, mental, spiritual, moral, physical or social development
Child Neglect	The failure of parents or caregivers to meet a child's physical and emotional needs when they have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so; or failure to protect him or her from exposure to danger

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report summarizes findings from 20 Focus Group Discussions conducted in Kilifi County by the International Committee for Development of Peoples (CISP) in March and April 2015 to understand which and how existing social norms contribute to child abuse. The discussions went further to find out from the participants which coping mechanisms and solutions they would propose to address protection concerns affecting children and families within the community. The focus groups targeted selected community members comprised of community based organizations, community health workers, nurses, government officials (chiefs and their assistants), the police, village elders, religious leaders, volunteer children's officers, school management committees, teachers, child rights clubs in schools, and youth (aged between 15-20 years); all from Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni Sub-Locations, Kilifi County. The information gathered is meant to assist CISP and partners in designing interventions to address child protection issues facing children in the target communities.

The series of focus group discussions held were designed to gather information from participants through sharing of information, opinions, thoughts and feelings by responding to specific questions based on the objectives of a project named: *Closing the gap between communities and child protection services in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties, funded by UNICEF and implemented in partnership with the Government of Kenya, Department of Children Services*. The issues facing children that were discussed during the focus groups include: sexual abuse, neglect, early pregnancies, child marriages, child labour, physical abuse, and school dropouts among others. Qualitative data analysis of the findings revealed critical themes across the 20 focus groups, as contributing factors to child abuse within the community. These include: rampant family structure breakdown, abject poverty, low level of awareness on children's rights amongst community members, lack of sexual reproductive health education, harmful cultural and religious practices, alcoholism and drug abuse, weak

law enforcement, night vigils especially funeral night activities, peer influence among youth, technology influence, and poor academic performance for children among others.

From the findings, it is evident that a dysfunctional family unit is the main cause of child abuse in the communities. The underlying risk factor is conflict between parents, and this includes domestic violence and divorce. Participants mentioned that if parents separate and the mother leaves her children behind, the girls are most likely to be sexually abused by their father or a close relative. If the father marries another wife, the children are neglected, physically abused and sometimes drop out of school. Parents should therefore be educated on their responsibilities and the importance of their roles in the family towards child protection.

Poverty is also a major cause of child abuse. The results show that girls from poor backgrounds seek basic needs from older men, especially motorbike riders, who in return ask for sexual favours from the girls. In most cases, this leads to child pregnancies, and the girls have to drop out of school so as to take care of their babies. In addition, cultural practices within the communities promote the marriage of girls as soon as they reach puberty, or immediately as they fall pregnant. According to the findings, marrying off girls is also seen as a source of income to the family since the girl's husband pays dowry to the parents.

Children are forced to drop out of school when parents cannot raise money for school fees. Girls are more affected than boys. Consequently, this leads to child labour since the children have no option but to seek employment in order to raise income for supporting the family. Families living in poor conditions need financial advice from well-informed citizens, as well as being linked to support programmes within the society that include: available sponsorships for children, loans for women and grants from the community development kitty.

In this framework, it transpired that the majority of families are unwilling to report sexual child offenders, especially if they are relatives. The offenders usually bribe their way out of prison and continue abusing children, thus traumatizing the survivors and the affected families. Home visits by community health workers and elders of the *Nyumba Kumi* initiative should be encouraged, in order to monitor household conditions and offer support and counseling to affected families.

Although all children are exposed to the risk of being abused, children with disabilities are at a greater risk of continuous forms of abuse since they are usually left alone, or may be physically impaired to report to an older person that they are being abused. It was reported that children with physical or mental disabilities are usually locked away from the public for years, since their parents are ashamed of them. Immediate action would be to identify these children with disabilities and assess their needs to be able to support them to access rights like other children within the community.

Lastly, some cultural practices are harmful and contribute to cases of child abuse within the community in which they are practiced. For instance, there is a cultural belief that promotes the education of boys and not girls, so if a family is poor the boys will have a higher chance of learning while girls stay at home to do household chores. This culture denies girls their right to education. Also, these communities believe in large family sizes and discourage family planning; this contributes to child neglect, school dropouts and child labour. Since these cultural practices are deeply rooted in rural communities in the coastal region, efforts aimed at promoting child protection in these areas should include all community members so they can have a consensus on what cultures to retain or change.

The community members proposed possible solutions to most common child abuses happening within the community. These included: increased awareness on child rights amongst parents, caregivers and communities; the community should be vigilant in reporting cases of violence against children; parents and caregivers should be educated on skillful parenting; all drinking dens that are near homesteads should be closed; harmful cultural and religious practices such as child marriages and FGM/C should be abandoned by all; boys and men should be actively involved in activities aimed at ending violence against girls and women and take an active role in child protection; change of behaviors and attitudes by law enforcers to achieve justice for survivors of abuse; the government should take responsibility of its mandate to ensure that there are adequate resources allocated towards child protection initiatives at County and National levels; among others.

From the study, it is evident that the different forms of child abuse are attributable but not limited to the following existing norms, beliefs and perceptions:

- Communities and parents shy away from discussing sexual reproductive health with their children, considered a taboo.
- Girls are seen as a source of income and young girls are given to old men as wives, and "sold out" to *boda boda* businessmen.
- Some parents suggestively call each other "in laws", i.e. "son in law", "daughter-in-law", "my wife" and this has encouraged child marriages. Traditionally, any parent with a daughter would call another with a son almost of the same age as the neighbour's or friend's daughter-in-law. In most cases, when these children hear this over time, they feel that their parents have agreed or are encouraging them to have a relationship leading to pregnancy and marriage.
- Role of fathers in providing for basic needs in the family is unclear or undefined.
- If a girl is impregnated she is married off in order not to bring shame to the family.
- Religious norms, for example Islam faithful believe that when a girl gets her first menses, she is ready for marriage, or some groups belonging to a particular Christian denomination from the region do not believe in taking their children for medical treatment and immunization.
- Parents and caregivers are neglecting their parental role, even if they had the capacity to meet the basic needs of their children.
- Communities shy away from reporting cases for fear that bad things might happen to them if they report.
- Preference for boys. For example, according to the community culture it is better to educate a boy than a girl.

- The strong community belief that children must work.
- Participation of children in night vigils. For example, "*disco matanga*," religious night prayers ("*kesha*").
- Most parents attach no value to education, as they are illiterate; hence they don't see the need of educating children.
- Alcoholism and drug abuse are very prevalent in the target areas.
- Negative beliefs/myths surrounding HIV and disability; these two conditions are believed to be a bad omen or a curse and children who are affected are discriminated against.
- Property ownership and inheritance practices do not give women and children opportunities when it comes to property inheritance related matters.
- Beating children is perceived as a necessary and acceptable way of instilling discipline.

While negative social norms stood out as a major causative factor of violence against children, the study identified some positive norms that need to be encouraged to enhance child protection. For example, the traditional way that was used to bring children together ("*dhome*") for storytelling to pass on messages and positive values, communal responsibility in bringing up children; all children belonged to the community and it was the responsibility of the community to take good care of them.

In addition, the study findings clearly show that one form of abuse could lead to another. Childcare and protection efforts are successfully implemented in an environment whereby all rights pertaining to the child are promoted. Therefore, intervention measures aimed at child protection in Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni locations should take on an integrated approach by including all stakeholders within the community set-up in order to be effective. Efforts aimed at changing the cultural norms and practices should not be compulsive or intimidating to the community members. It will be important to first understand and appreciate the role of existing social norms or traditional practices in these communities. It is only when one understands where these cultures and norms originated from, that they can be effective agents of change towards positive cultural practices and social norms, especially if partnership with the communities is embraced.

1 INTRODUCTION



1.1 Background of the Project

Child maltreatment is widely spread across all societies in the global world. Different forms of child abuse include emotional, sexual and physical abuse, exploitation and child neglect. Recent findings by UNICEF: Child Maltreatment: Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences in the East Asia and Pacific Region (2012) show that more than one in four children have experienced severe and continuous physical abuse, while sexual abuse has been experienced by nearly one in five females, and one in eleven males. If child abuse is not identified and addressed early enough, it can have extensive and harmful effects in the early stages of a child's life, and continue to affect the child even in later stages of life. Children who face one or more forms of abuse are usually deprived of their chance to live a normal life and participate, as well as contribute positively to the societies in which they live in. The more children abused in a given society, the greater chances of reducing that country's human capital in the future.

Violence against children is a serious problem in Kenya. According to the recent UNICEF – Government of Kenya Report 2012: Violence Against Children in Kenya, three out of every ten females and nearly two out of every ten males aged 18 to 24 reported at least one experience of sexual violence prior to age 18; Seven percent of females aged 18 to 24 reported experiencing physically forced sexual intercourse prior to age 18; Among 18 to 24 year olds, almost two-thirds of females and three-quarters of males reported experiencing physical violence prior to the age of 18. The report further revealed that during the year preceding the survey, approximately half of all females and males aged 13 to 17 experienced some type of physical violence and about one-quarter of females and one-third of males aged 18 to 24 years reported experiences of emotional violence prior to age 18. These disturbing statistics

call for urgent comprehensive and holistic actions; engaging all stakeholders at national, local, community and family levels in order to protect children from violence.

1.2 Project Information

The International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP), in partnership with the Department of Children Services with financial support from SIDA through UNICEF is implementing a child protection project entitled "Closing the gap between communities and child protection services in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties." The overall objective of the project is to enable children in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties to have access to services for prevention and response to violence, abuse and exploitation. The project is contributing to the achievement of *SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages; SGD 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.* However, this report only summarizes findings from research done through FGDs in Kilifi County.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Overall Objective

To identify the underlying norms and how they contribute to child abuse in Kilifi County and viable solutions in ensuring the prevention of child violence, abuse and exploitation.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- a. To establish existing norms, behaviours and practices within the communities and how they contribute to child abuse.
- b. To understand the community's opinions on various child abuses.
- c. To understand how the community plays a role in child protection concerns within the community.
- d. To identify community coping mechanisms/solutions to child abuse and their effects on children.

1.4 Expected Result

- a. Increased community knowledge/awareness on child protection issues at targeted communities within the Malindi Sub County of Kilifi County.
- b. Reduced child abuse cases and incidences within the targeted communities of Kilifi County.

2 METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The study was conducted through twenty focus group discussions between March 2015 and May 2015 in Ngomeni, Gongoni and Marereni Sub-Locations, Magarini Sub County of Kilifi County. The focus groups targeted various community members and groups that included: community based organizations, community health workers, nurses, government officials (chiefs and their assistants), the police, village elders, religious leaders, volunteer children officers, school management committees, teachers, child rights clubs in schools, and the youth (aged between 15-20 years). The sample size included 173 respondents, comprising of 108 males and 65 females.

Data collection was through the use of questionnaires that included guiding questions aimed at providing open-ended responses. The series of focus group discussions held were designed to gather information from participants through sharing of information, opinions, thoughts and feelings by responding to specific questions based on the study's objectives. The issues facing children that were discussed during the focus groups included: early pregnancies, child marriages, child labour, physical abuse and school dropouts. (See Appendix B)

The age of most respondents was between 40 – 49 years. The table below shows a summary of the sampling design:

Age Group of Respondent	Sample Size	% Total Respondents
40 – 49 years	59	34%
50 – 59 years	31	18%
15 – 20 years	26	15%
30 – 39 years	25	14%
20 – 29 years	23	13%
60 – 79 years	9	5%
Total Sample Size	173	100%

Being a qualitative method, FGDs give a picture of the situation at a given time and may lack systematic analysis. In order to reduce the bias of the study, the methodology included a respondent validation of the results.



3.1 Child Sexual Abuse, Early Pregnancies and Child Marriages

Early pregnancies and child marriages in any community is a manifestation of child sexual abuse of girls. Early pregnancies and child marriages were mentioned as one of the main child protection issues occurring in the communities of the respondents (it was mentioned 223 times in the 20 FGDs conducted).

Unfortunately, child sexual abuse was mentioned only half as much as child marriage or pregnancies (mentioned 119 times in 20 FGDs), which is striking. We could underline the hypothesis that the respondents interviewed often see the problem of early pregnancies and child marriages without seeing the problem behind the problem: child sexual abuse. The findings reveal that sexual abuse is a silent abuse happening within the community and mostly not perceived as an abuse for children.

Respondents mentioned that, most of the time, cases of child sexual abuse are reported only once the girl is pregnant. Cases in which perpetrators are strangers are more easily reported than when the perpetrator is a close family member or friend. Child sexual abuse cases are allegedly perpetrated by fathers, family members, teachers (promising better grades or school fees), boda boda operators and employers.

Society and family breakdown as contributing factors

According to the participants, the major contributing factor to sexual abuse is a dysfunctional community, where good values and practices are no longer seen as important by the society. For instance, in the past the child belonged to the community and whatever happened to the child was a concern for all community members. Respondents mentioned that people

have become more individualistic; therefore neighbors will keep quiet if they know a child is abused sexually, especially if the child does not belong to their family.

Because of community and family breakdown, participants felt that children also lack good values, since their parents are not good role models. Also, parents do not offer children proper guidance concerning reproductive health as soon as they reach puberty.



“Parents lack commitment; thereby children are free and just roam around, especially along the beaches, whereby they ask for money especially from the whites (tourists), and exchange money for sex because of lack at home and the parents’ failure to advise their children, provide good food and basics, thus contributing to sexual abuse.” **Headteacher – Midodoni Primary Teachers and School Management Committee FGD**

Furthermore, the participants mentioned that in the past, women and children dressed in decent clothing and were respected. There were night dances but cases of rape and early pregnancies were not common. The concept that indecent dressing or girls being undisciplined as contributing factor to sexual abuse is recurrent among the respondents; they mentioned that nowadays women wear transparent, skimpy clothes that arouse men who end up raping them.

There are also boys who refuse to go to school and have joined bad company. These boys influence each other and sometimes waylay young girls and defile them. On the other hand, there are girls who are undisciplined and run away from home to live with their boyfriends, despite being warned. Eventually, these girls become pregnant and are chased away by their boyfriends.

Participants also mentioned irresponsible parents exist who do not provide for their families or provide advice concerning reproductive health and the children turn out to be rebellious. Also, excessive freedom for children makes them do whatever they want and many cases exist whereby they run away from home to stay with their friends, only for the girls to be sexually abused, either by their peers or older men. In addition, the sleeping arrangements at home are such that parents sleep in the same room with their children. When the parents engage in sex, the children watch and may be tempted to try the same act with their friends.

There are also cases whereby parents separate and the father is left with the children. The fathers’ end up sexually abusing their daughters. In fact, they claim to have the right to decide what is best for their children so they should be left alone. In the event that these fathers are arrested, they bribe whoever is threatening to go to the police, or bribe the police officers to avoid being arrested. The outcome is a continuous silent abuse of girls by their fathers and close relatives.

Low-income, child labour and vulnerable families

Furthermore, there are children who come from poor families and have to drop out of school and seek employment, in order to raise income for the family. These children (both boys and girls) can be sexually abused by their employers and threatened with dismissal if they tell anyone. Sexual offenders also target vulnerable children who are easy targets, especially children with disabilities. Sexual tourism was also mentioned a few times.

sexual favours in return and eventually the girls fall pregnant.

“Parents utilize their children as projects, especially with the boda boda riders, whereby parents



“connect” their children to those who ride the bikes, for mutual benefit. Also leaders should take responsibility and bring to book any heinous act of abuse, as this will serve as a basis for others. But such abuses are tackled with questioning, with culprits not fully apprehended, but released to roam with arrogance in the villages.” **Participant No.3 – Uhai CBO FGD.**

There is a common cultural practice among the communities of Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni that when a girl is impregnated, she should be married off to the man who is responsible. This leads to child marriages, and in most cases the girls have to stop going to school so they can take care of the child.

In addition, when a family unit is broken due to conflict between parents, the spouses either separate temporarily or divorce. In most cases, the mother usually leaves the children behind with the father, who ends up sexually molesting his daughters. It is not only at home where the girl is sexually exploited, but also at school when the teachers promise to give girls good grades in return for sexual favours. This eventually leads to child pregnancies. Also, mothers send their daughters to look for work and do not ask where the money is from after which, the mother gets paid some money to support the family.

Harmful traditional practices, beliefs and practices

Social norms that view the girl child as a source of livelihood for the family contribute to child sexual abuse, exploitation or child marriage. When a girl reaches puberty, she is married off to an older man who in turn pays dowry to the girl's parents; these arrangements are sometimes made when the father is under the influence of drug or alcohol. The religious belief that a girl is ready for marriage once she receives her first period is quite strong among communities, leading to enforced early marriage. On the other hand, some mothers ask their daughters to go and get work to provide for the family and they will not ask where the money is from; some respondents even reported mothers actively engaging their daughter into prostitution.

There are misconceptions among people with HIV that they will be cured once they sleep with girls who are virgins. These men end up silently raping young girls and infecting them with HIV and this abuse might continue for long before they are realized and reported to the police.

Underreporting of cases and lack of justice

The group participants mentioned that cases of sexual abuse are not usually reported until a girl 'messes up' or, in other words, becomes pregnant. This is worse if the sexual offender is a close relative or a parent, because the family will bribe the police or their accuser to avoid being arrested. Community members feel that sexual offenders often receive lenient penalties and do not stay in jail for a long period, so they do not learn their lesson but instead continue to sexually abuse young girls. Sometimes sexual offenders are arrested but they are either given bail or released after bribing policemen. This leads to a vicious cycle of sexual abuse, leaving the victims traumatized.

Night vigils/events and substances abuse

Increased nighttime activities like funeral discos and night vigils were mentioned to give the youth an opportunity to engage in sexual activities. Girls sometimes lie to their parents that they are going for a sleepover at another girl's home, only for parents to discover the next day that the girl and her friends spent the night in the company of boys at either a funeral disco or a night vigil.

According to the group participants, alcohol and drug abuse also contribute to early pregnancies and child marriages. This is because when someone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they lose their self-control and are more prone to indulge in sexual behavior. Also, when youth listen to songs with lewd lyrics or view pornographic content on their phones, they are enticed to practice what they see or hear with their peers, and this will eventually lead to child pregnancies.

Below are a few quotes from the focus group discussion that illustrate cases of sexual abuse, early pregnancies and child marriage among the communities of Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni:

”

“Children are abused by their relatives or people they know within the community, and this happens because of alcohol and hard drugs. When one is high on either alcohol or drugs, they often have sexual urges and instead of having sex with adults, they end up with young children. They entice the children with sweets and snacks and boys are sodomized. The kind of clothes we give our children sometimes are so revealing to the extent of being half naked. We have aligned ourselves more to the western style than our African way. A child of 5 or 6 years may be dressed in such a way that almost all parts of her body are naked and such a way of dressing can sometimes arouse feelings. Parents send children out at late hours, and when such a female child meets with men whose minds are not right, then she may end up being assaulted.” **Participant No.8 – Ngomeni Chief and Village Elders FGD**

The following examples are quotes from the focus group discussions on early pregnancy and child marriage:

”

“A girl has different needs compared to a boy. If you don't provide for her needs then there are people willing to help the girl child but she will pay with her body and eventually this leads to pregnancy. Traditions... Most of us Bajuns believe once a girl receives her menstrual periods, then she is ready for marriage. The Kadhi is allowed to marry her off once she receives her first menses. There is a situation where a 16 year old has 2 children because of this tradition....” **Participant No.8 – Ngomeni Chief and Village Elders FGD**

”

“Parents are drunkards and don’t take any responsibility towards their children at home. Parents come home very late from a drinking spree; many parents in Marereni are either drunkards or sell liquor. Parents are not concerned if their children are fed or not. When a girl sees her friends well-dressed she desires to have the same but the family doesn’t have enough income to buy her whatever she wants, so she is pushed to have a boyfriend in order to be well dressed. She is involved in sexual activities earlier and this will lead to early pregnancy or marriage.” **Participant No.1 - Marereni Women FGD**

”

“...Young girls are married off in order to get dowry for their brothers who want to marry. Parents desire to get money. An example: A class 6 girl, whose father is a drunkard, one day came back home very late with another old man. The father demanded the young girl to accompany the old man to his home, the girl was surprised and asked her father why she should accompany the man at such hours. The father replied that the man was her husband, so she should go with him. The girl accompanied the man to his house, but escaped the following day and came back home. The father forced her back. This time the girl escaped to her aunt. Fortunately, the aunt was considerate and took her back to school.” **Participant No.1 – Gongoni Youth FGD**

”

“...There was a girl who slept with a teacher in order to get money to buy books, influenced by her mother.. Desperate youth who have dropped out of school also influence others who are still schooling, to join them in gambling or even in the boda boda business. Young, single mothers are sent by young men to influence girls and are given money, once they connect girls and men. There is also ignorance; once a girl is impregnated, the parents think it’s ok to marry them off. They don’t know the implications of young girls getting pregnant.” **Participant No.1 - Kanagoni Teachers & School Management Committee FGD**

”

“...The other cause is the night functions ... I’m also a victim of such functions. The girl is my niece, she was pregnant at 13 years. She started going to night functions at the age of 9; the mother gave her daughter too much freedom and would allow her to attend night functions. The child had low academic expectations so she went to several night functions and by the time she was in Class 3, she was pregnant.” **Participant No.7 – Gongoni Women FGD**

The graph below shows a summary of the causes of early pregnancies and child marriage as mentioned by participants of the focus groups held in various communities (for specific issues on early pregnancies and child marriages see Appendix A1):

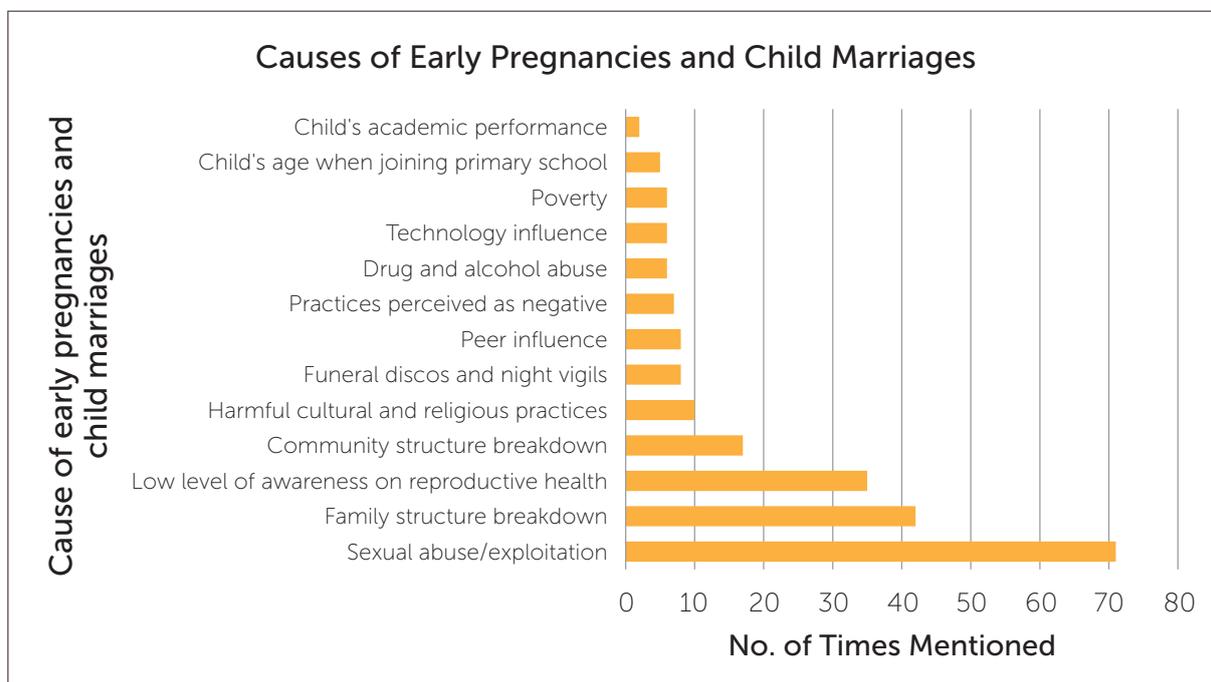


Figure 1: Summary of early pregnancies and child marriages causes in target communities

3.1.1 Community Solutions to Child Sexual Abuse, Early Pregnancies and Child Marriages

Based on the findings mentioned above, the participants gave the following solutions to help address the issue of sexual abuse, early pregnancies and child marriages in the community.

Family Level Interventions:

- a. Parents should not leave small children in the care of strangers who may sexually abuse the children. Instead, parents should take their children with them or leave them with a trusted friend to reduce cases of child sexual abuse.
- b. Parents should monitor what children are watching, either on television or on mobile phones; internet use should also be monitored. This is to ensure children are guided on the proper content to watch that will not mislead and lure them to engage in sexual activities at a young age.
- c. Parents should be educated on the sleeping arrangements at home. This is because if all family member sleep in the same room, children get to see their parents engaging in sex and they might want to try it with their peers.
- d. Parents should take full responsibility for their child's needs and work hard to ensure children do not lack anything that they will go to seek from older men outside the home. Girls have more needs than boys, like sanitary towels and personal grooming

requirements, so they should be given more attention than they are currently receiving.

- e. Parents should build strong family ties in which the children feel free to air their views and parents can offer proper guidance, especially when children reach puberty. This includes creating time for lessons on reproductive health as well as the consequences of indulging in sexual activities at an early age.
- f. Parents should seek proper role models for their children in order to get help in advising and guiding the children. Boys normally copy their fathers; therefore fathers should be a good example and not practicing polygamy or having extra-marital affairs because the boys will emulate these negative values. In the same regard, parents should also be made to understand that when someone comes to tell them about their child's bad behaviour, it is because the person wants to help their child. Parents should take it positively and work with that person to help the child. This will help to increase the bond between families and reduce the spread of adverse values among the youth.

Community Level Interventions:

- a. Village elders and decision-makers should be fully empowered on how to handle cases of sexual abuse, in order to help stop and not propagate such abuse.
- b. There should be open forums in schools and youth groups that give children a chance to voice their views or report incidents of sexual abuse they have suffered. These forums should also be used to educate children on the various forms of sexual abuse and their causes in order to avoid them. Education on their rights should also be emphasized.
- c. Child security should be increased within the community. For instance, teachers should escort children home to protect girls from associating with motorbike riders who end up exploiting them sexually.
- d. The community should be vigilant in reporting cases of sexual abuse, since the child belongs to the entire community. Early reporting of cases should be encouraged even if the offender is a relative to ensure justice is obtained for the victims.
- e. The communities should embrace positive religious values in order to promote sound life morals and peaceful homes.
- f. All drinking dens that are near homesteads should be closed so that youth and grown-ups have clear, sober minds as this will eventually lead to reduced cases of sexual abuse, as well as other forms of child abuse.
- g. The community should be educated on reproductive health as well as how HIV is transmitted, treated and prevented. This will shun the thinking that young girls cannot have HIV, and that one can be cured of HIV by sleeping with virgins.
- h. Community members should speak openly about issues facing children and always be willing to advise other children when they see them doing anything wrong.

- i. Existing groups like women and youth groups should be used for forums where peers can learn from each other. Women can learn from each other about good parenting and youth can share their challenges and come up with solutions on how to address the challenges.
- j. There needs to be a cultural change among community members, whereby girls are not seen as the source of livelihood for the family to provide material goods or dowry for the family, but also taken to school so they can have better lives and support the family in the future.
- k. The counselling sessions for boys by grandparents should be resumed. This will create quality time whereby old men talk to young on the responsibilities of a man at an early age, and hence instill positive values in boys from an early age.
- l. Funeral discos should be banned and churches to reduce the frequency of holding the night vigils. This is to protect the children from environments that encourage indulgence in sexual activities that could lead to early pregnancies.
- m. The community should embrace religion and raise children with sound moral and religious values.
- n. Teachers should be educated on child rights and the importance of protecting children in their schools.
- o. Many children who end up in early marriages are those who completed primary school but did not perform well, so they ended up staying at home. They are forgotten and end up engaging in many activities, and finally 'mess up' or get pregnant. The community should work together to mentor these children and enroll them in village polytechnics in order to improve their lives.

Leadership Level Interventions:

- a. The government, both national and county, should invest in child protection ventures, by allocating more funds for child protection in the budget.
- b. Families that report cases of sexual abuse, but do not have money to pay for a lawyer, need to be assisted by the government. Also, all cases that have stalled because families need money to pay the lawyer, should be re-opened and the offenders brought to justice.
- c. Law enforcement should be effective and the penalties for sexual offenders to be made stricter. This will discourage people from sexually abusing children.

3.2 School Dropouts

Children dropping out of school was mentioned quite a number of times as a child protection issue/concern (mentioned 120 times in the 20 FGDs conducted). Causes of school dropout cited included the following:

Low-income families and vulnerable children

The major cause of school dropouts is poverty. There are families in which parents are too poor to afford school fees, so children have to stay at home. Also, some children are orphaned at a young age and since no one has offered to support them, these children are forced to stop learning and stay at home. The participants mentioned alcoholic parents who go to the extent of taking alcohol on credit after spending all their money. This makes it harder for these families to break out of the poverty trap, and more difficult for children to resume their learning. A few parents have a decent source of income, but they do not plan well and end up using all the money meant for school fees on other expenses. On the other hand, there are children who come from well-off families, yet they drop out of school in order to work and get extra pocket money. These children influence their peers from poor families to join them at work if they also want to get money. Some of the children from poor households give in to pressure from their peers and drop out of school to seek employment.

Education especially for the girl child is not valued by parents

Furthermore, some parents and guardians do not see the importance of education. They feel their children will be of more value to them if they are employed and earning money rather than if they were going to school. The participants mentioned that children lack role models in the community since only a few people went to school and are leading 'good' lives.

In addition, there is a culture among the communities that promotes large family sizes, as well as education for boys and not girls. This means that a family with financial challenges is highly likely to give boys the first priority to go to school, while the girls remain at home to do household chores. Besides, there is also a culture that promotes child marriage, so if a girl does not go to school, she will end up getting married and if she gets pregnant, she will have to stay at home to take care of the baby.

Substance abuse

Alcoholism and drug abuse is another factor that contributes to children dropping out of school. If a child frequently takes alcohol or drugs, they become addicted after some time and since they cannot concentrate in class, they stop going to school. Also, children addicted to drugs stop learning so that they can work and raise money to purchase the drugs. The participants mentioned that there are children who join school later than their age mates and after some time, they feel too old for school and drop out. This is because they feel their peers will laugh at them for being in school at an older age.

Below are examples of quotes selected from various focus group discussions conducted by the project that illustrate why children drop out of school:

”

“Young women are married to jobless, elderly men. They have many children who won't be able to go to school because the father is very old. These young ladies are forced by their parents to marry older men so that the father can get dowry. I am an example of such arrangements; I have never known the love of a young man. I was forced by my father at a very young age to marry a very old man. I stayed with him, had all my children with him until he passed on, he left all the responsibilities of raising the children squarely on me. I never went to school, but I have put all my efforts into ensuring my children go to school. I am very bitter about my lack of education and I vowed never to let that happen to my child.” **Participant No.2 – Marereni Women FGD**

”

“Parents are icons for the children who grow up in a culture of drinking sprees. Children copy both good and bad, therefore society and family should be iconic. Also, there is a lack of giving direction to children. The situation has changed so much that it's now elders listening to young men and women who look down upon the elderly, assuming that they should not be listened to as their time is nearly over. Many elderly people are regarded to witch-hunt the younger generation, and many grey-haired elders fear for their lives as they are now targeted to be killed. There is a lack of mentors and parents are refusing to educate their children, so the entire family, including the children, are losing direction.” **Participant No.7 – Midodoni Primary Teachers and School Management Committee FGD**

”

“... I dropped out of school because my parents lacked enough resources due to unemployment, though I liked learning very much. I am from a big family, my father looked for bursaries, but it was a small amount, thus I was forced out of school. Also, there was a challenge of water, which is very scarce. I had to walk long distances in search of water; there were queues, thus I got home late, found no time to read and looked for day jobs like clearing shambas (farms), whereby I got some money, but this was still little to cater for needs. Therefore, at school my performance dropped, later on to drop even further because of discouragement from parents. I had to drop out of school and find a job.” **Participant No.7 – Marereni Youth FGD**

The graph below shows a summary of why children drop out of school in Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni communities (See Appendix A2 for specific issues related to school dropouts):

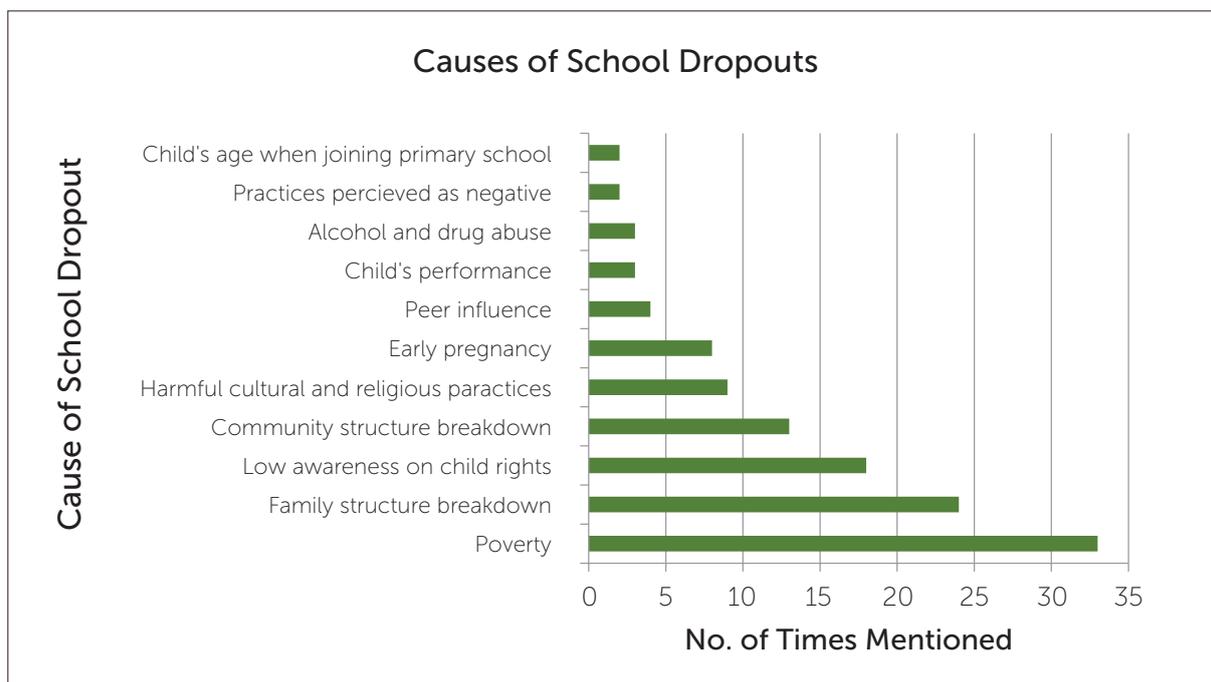


Figure 2: Summary of what causes school dropouts among children in Gongoni, Marereni and Ngomeni communities

3.2.1 Community Solutions to School Dropouts

Based on the reasons given above as to why children drop out of school, participants across the twenty focus group discussions came up with the following solutions:

Family Level Interventions:

- a. Parents should be strict and not allow children to attend night activities that will cause them to miss school. Parents should also limit the amount of money they give to children as this will cause them to get used to a certain kind of life and when the money is not available, children will seek employment in order to get money.
- b. Parents should be aware of who their child is socializing with so they can know where to look for help if their child is missing or be able to offer guidance to the children when necessary.
- c. Parents should try as much as possible to enroll their children in school at the same time as other children of their age to ensure they all learn at the same pace. This will ensure children do not feel intimidated by their old age and feel discouraged to continue learning.
- d. Parents should show interest in their children's education, so that the child can be motivated to continue working hard. In the same regard, parents should stop using demoralizing language, such as "so and so went to school but has nothing to show for it".

Community Level Interventions:

- a. There should be forums organized by community health workers to educate parents on family planning. This will help parents to plan and only have the number of children they can take care of comfortably. The culture that encourages large family sizes should be discouraged as it is not helping the community.
- b. The community should set up a fund whereby people can contribute towards raising funds for bright children whose parents cannot afford school fees. Likewise, organizations should visit schools and identify orphans or children from extremely needy families in order to sponsor their education.
- c. There should be rehabilitation centers for girls and boys who have been trapped in commercial sex or drug abuse, so that they too can be counselled and eventually resume their learning.
- d. Parents in the community should be educated on the importance of sending children to school, since some of them did not go to school and may not see the value of education as such. These educative *barazas* (meetings) should be continuous so as to reach all parents in the community. In the same manner, organizations can plan for road shows (*Ngonjera*) aimed at educating parents. The road shows usually include plays that depict the importance of education and this will motivate parents to send their children to school.
- e. There should be a community meeting whereby all parents record their children and their respective ages. This will help to identify which children are not going to school and the reason behind it, so as to intervene and send all children to school.
- f. Teachers and school heads should do a follow-up when a child misses school for a long time. This will make parents feel that someone cares for their child's education and be motivated to work hard and raise fees for the child to return to school.

Leadership Level Interventions:

- a. The Ministry of Education should upgrade the quality of education and schools should also raise the standards of learning. This will ensure children are well equipped with the right information to help them get good jobs and support their families in future. This will also ensure children do not travel far to access the best school in the area, but will be free to learn at any neighboring school since the quality of education at all schools will be the same.
- b. The local government should identify all parents who refuse to send their children to school and ensure these parents are advised/ supported to enroll their children in school.
- c. The department of ECD in the Ministry of Education should make sure that nursery school is free so that all children can join school at the same time and learn at the same pace as their peers.

- d. *Nyumba kumi* elders should be fully aware of what is going on at homes and report cases where children are not going to school. The elders should work with the local administration (chief, police) to ensure effective implementation of the law.

3.3 Child Neglect

According to the participants, the main factor contributing to child neglect is the breakdown of the family unit, followed by low awareness on child rights and poverty.

Family unit breakdown

When parents separate, it is the children who suffer. This is especially true if the man re-marries because in most cases step-parents mistreat the children. Some parents are also irresponsible and fail to recognize that children need to be supported emotionally and materially, as well given the right form of security. In some of the focus groups, it was mentioned that sometimes children are found sleeping on dirty bedding that has not been washed for a long period of time and they have gone without food for a few days, yet the parents are busy drinking alcohol away from home.

Also with the current economy, some parents are forced to look for work to earn extra income even if it means travelling long distances. Information from the focus groups shows that there are parents who work on farms far away from home and they leave their children unattended. This is especially in the month of May, where there is a lot of work to be done on the farms. Parents do not follow-up to know how the child spent their day and even though the child's material needs are met, the child will still not receive the emotional support and security they should from the family. However, some parents genuinely do not know of their responsibilities towards their children, and they feel like they are giving their child the best, while in reality, they do not spend quality time with their children to offer guidance on the issues of life. On the other hand, some parents are poor and lack the means to provide for the material needs of their children. This lack of support from the family often causes children to look for love or material needs outside the family unit, and in the event pose a risk to their well-being, especially if they fall into the hands of someone who will exploit them sexually or for child labour.

Harmful cultural practices

There are also cultural practices that are deeply rooted within the community and they contribute towards child neglect. For example, there are cultures that promote the education of boys and not girls, therefore leaving girls with the option of getting married early to provide dowry for the family. This denies the girl child the right to education.

Participants mentioned that the culture that promotes families to have many children could also turn out to be a disadvantage to poor families. This is because some of the children will drop out of school to seek employment, and parents will be busy working and miss out on spending quality time with each of the children. Another practice that is harmful to children is the religious belief against hospitalization. This means that when children fall sick and fail to get better from home remedies, their lives could be endangered simply because their parents do not believe in taking sick children to hospital.

In addition, early pregnancies could result to child neglect. For example, if a young girl falls pregnant and she is not psychologically prepared to have a baby, then the young mother ends up mistreating the newborn baby since they feel the baby is a burden to them. The situation is made worse if the girl was raped or forced into child marriage and yet she does not like the father of the children; the young mother will not have an attachment to her children and consequently neglect them.

The following quote is an example cited from a participant that depicts cases of child neglect in the communities of Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni:

”

“Us parents as human beings were given the mind to think, we are not animals. When you marry your expectation is to bring forth children who will be future builders of the nation, so when a parent gives forth children they cannot take care of, the child is often abused. As a village elder, there are many such cases in my area, there are two homes where the parents leave early for work to do business in Ngomeni centre, but very young children are left all by themselves. Sometimes you find young children lying down because of hunger or thirst and there is nobody at home. These are parents who gave birth to these children but can't take responsibility. There was a time within one of the homes when a house caught fire but thankfully the children were outside. In another case, there was a parent this morning as I was coming here, with four children who were all naked. When you see these children you pity them; the parents are there but not concerned, they don't even know that the children have rights..... We need to take that step so that such parents know that their neglect is wrong.” Participant No.6 - Ngomeni Chief and Village Elders FGD

The graph below shows a summary of the causes of child neglect as mentioned by participants of the focus groups discussions (See Annex A4 for a detailed description of the specific issues):

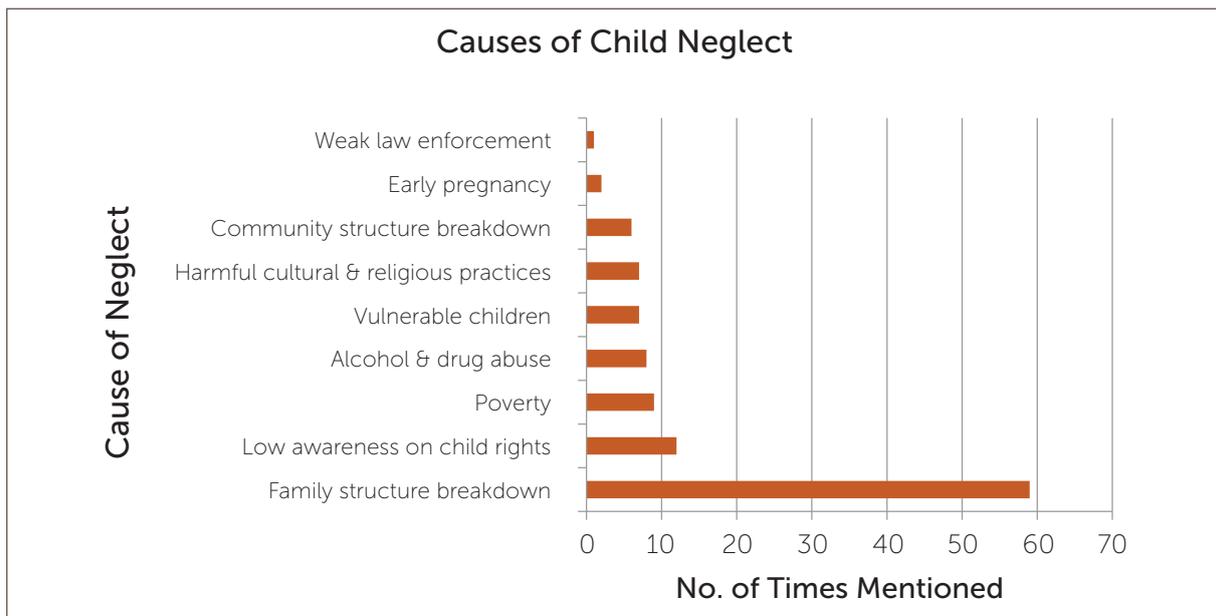


Figure 3: Graph showing a summary of the causes of child neglect in Gongoni, Marereni and Ngomeni communities.

3.3.1 Community Solutions to Child Neglect

Based on the causes of child neglect discussed above, the community came up with the following solutions:

Family Level Interventions:

- a. Parents should be committed to providing for the basic needs of their children since this is a right deserved by the child.
- b. When fathers choose to be polygamous, they should be informed of the responsibilities that await them to prevent them from neglecting some children while providing for others.
- c. Parents should be on the forefront of protecting the family and not transferring the care of their children to other people, like grandparents or wine tappers who misuse children for labour. Also, children wait when the grandparents are asleep then sneak out in the night. Parents should be made aware of the dangers they are exposing their children to by transferring their parental responsibilities to other people.
- d. In the month of May, many parents leave their children unattended and go to farm far from home. Parents should be warned about the dangers of leaving their children unattended since people can take advantage of the situation and abuse them.

Community Level Interventions:

- a. The community members should create a committee for education to ensure continuous education on child rights and to create awareness on the importance of child protection in communities. Emphasis should be put on early reporting of child neglect cases to the relevant authorities so that children do not continue to suffer in silence.
- b. Community elders and grandparents should resume the short stories they used to tell children during the counselling sessions commonly known to the community as *dhome*. These stories will create awareness on the positive social norms that were practised in years past, so the community can go back to practising good values.
- c. The community should work with non-governmental organizations as well as community-based organizations to identify neglected children and offer them help as needed. All stakeholders in the community should also work together to pull resources that will be used to help orphaned children.

Leadership Level Interventions:

- a. Parents who neglect children must be prosecuted.

- b. The police should ensure that the set drinking hours are adhered to, since some parents take local brew the whole day and forget that they have families to take care of.
- c. The Nyumba Kumi initiative should be enforced to ensure families check on each other and to report whether the neighbouring children go to school and if they are being supported by parents or neglected.

3.4 Child Labour

Child Labour was mentioned 103 times during the 20 FGDs, with poverty being the major cause.

Family Low-income as a contributing factor

This is because children from poor families lack basic needs and have to seek employment in order to raise additional income for the family. Some families are also irresponsible and instead of working hard to provide for their families, they make children work so as to raise their school fees or meet their basic needs, like food and clothing. In most communities, girls are usually viewed as a source of income for the family, and they are mainly employed as house-helpers. However, the little income they earn goes straight towards helping their siblings or parents back at home.

Family breakdown

Sometimes when parents separate and the spouse remaining with the children remarries, the step-parents exploit the children for labour. The step-parents either make the children work extra hard in the home so as to get food, or have the children employed so as to raise extra income for the family. The participants mentioned that majority of the people who employ children are rarely apprehended so they continue employing children and exploiting them for labour.

Harmful traditional practices

Furthermore, there are cultural practices that promote child labour and discourage education; many children therefore find themselves in situations where they are exploited for labour against their own will. On the other hand, there are children who envy their working peers because they have money to buy what they need. These children resolve to dropping out of school so that they too can earn their own money and purchase things they desire which are not being currently provided by the parents.

Cultural practices that encourage large family sizes also contribute to child labour to some extent. This is because if a family has many children, the older siblings are forced by the parents to drop out of school in order to raise money that will support their younger siblings. The situation is made worse if the children are orphaned, since most of them will have to work in order to meet their needs.

Most community members are not aware of child rights against child labour, so they engage children in different forms of employment without knowing it is wrong to do so.

The quotes below are citations from the focus group discussions that highlight instances where children are exploited for labour:

”

“Children are mostly employed by people they know in order to benefit the parent. An example: you employ the child of your brother if you are well off, to take care of the livestock, and pay 500 to the father not the child. Child labour affects the health of the child. Children have grown very old due to hard work.”

Participant No.4 – Marereni Religious Leaders and Police FGD

”

“This is caused by poverty. When a child does not get food or very little food, the child has no choice but to find ways to eat. And when the child leaves home to go and seek employment, it’s also a relief for the parents as they have less mouths to feed.”

Participant No.6 – Gongoni Women FGD

”

“It’s challenging since many parents have large families they can’t cater for, other have preference of children. Parents are capable but just don’t want to. When a boy makes friends, the friends will give him money; eventually, they will influence him to learn how to ride a motorbike to find his own money. Those boys who are not well-mannered influence others so that he may not be alone.”

Participant No.3 – Kanagoni

The graph below shows a summary of child labour, based on findings from the group discussions (See Annex A5 for a detailed description of the findings):

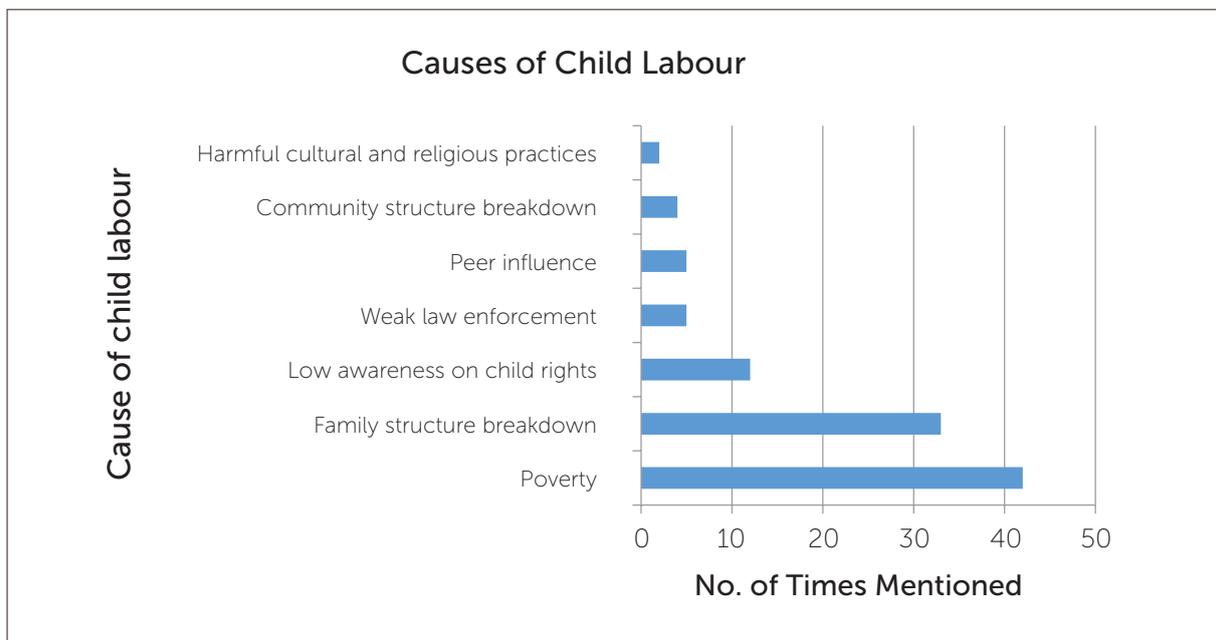


Figure 4: Graph showing different causes of child labour in Marereni, Ngomeni and Gongoni communities

3.4.1 Community Solutions to Child Labour

The participants came up with the following solutions to address issues of child labour in their communities:

Family Level Intervention:

- a. Parents should be sensitized on the roles of fathers and mothers because when one partner leaves, older children have to take up the responsibility of taking care of the young ones by seeking employment. There should be cooperation between parents, so as to strengthen the family unit.

Community Level Interventions:

- a. The community should involve women in decision-making. This is because current traditions oppress women with regards to property ownership. When the husband dies, the in-laws take everything leaving the widow and her children in poverty. This increases the chances of children seeking employment in order to provide for the family.
- b. There should be a community awareness campaign on the rights of children and parental responsibility to ensure children are left to continue learning while their parents work hard to provide for the family. The awareness can be through educational videos that are shown to parents at the local video centres.
- c. Organizations based in the communities should organize forums where there is sharing of information on how to diversify the sources of income. This is because currently the main source of income is salt farming, which is not enough, hence the need to venture into other income-generating activities like farming.

Leadership Level Intervention:

- a. The government should come up with poverty alleviation strategies that should be implemented at County level. This is through setting up industries that will hire locals and therefore increase the household income.

3.5 Physical Abuse

Physical abuse was mentioned 36 times during the 20 FGDs. Although the participants mentioned few causes for this form of abuse, there are greater repercussions to the child in terms of permanent body damage.

Breakdown of family units as a cause

According to the findings, the main cause of physical abuse is a breakdown of the family unit. Polygamy introduces step-parents to the family unit who abuse the step-children physically.

Also, some parents lack self-control and cane their children excessively, even if the child has committed small offences. In some cases, parents think that they are helping their children by giving them very harsh punishments, not knowing that some of these treatments could permanently damage the child’s brain or body organs. Parents also mentioned that there are some children who are rebellious and often anger them through mischievous acts. This provokes the parents to beat the child using so much force, because they feel the child lacks discipline and should be punished.

Child marriage

Furthermore, since the community encourages child marriages, young girls are married off to older men who do not see them as wives but as children. These men end up beating these girls in the name of disciplining them. The young wives suffer in silence because their parents will not receive them home since they have already received dowry from the old men.

”

“Physical abuse happens both at school and at home, this is mainly due to separation or divorce of parents. When parents divorce, the children remain with the father, who marries another wife. The step-mother sometimes goes overboard while disciplining children who don’t belong to her.” **Participant No.5**
- Marereni Community Health

The graph below shows the causes of child physical abuse summarized based on the emerging themes from the findings (See Annex A6):

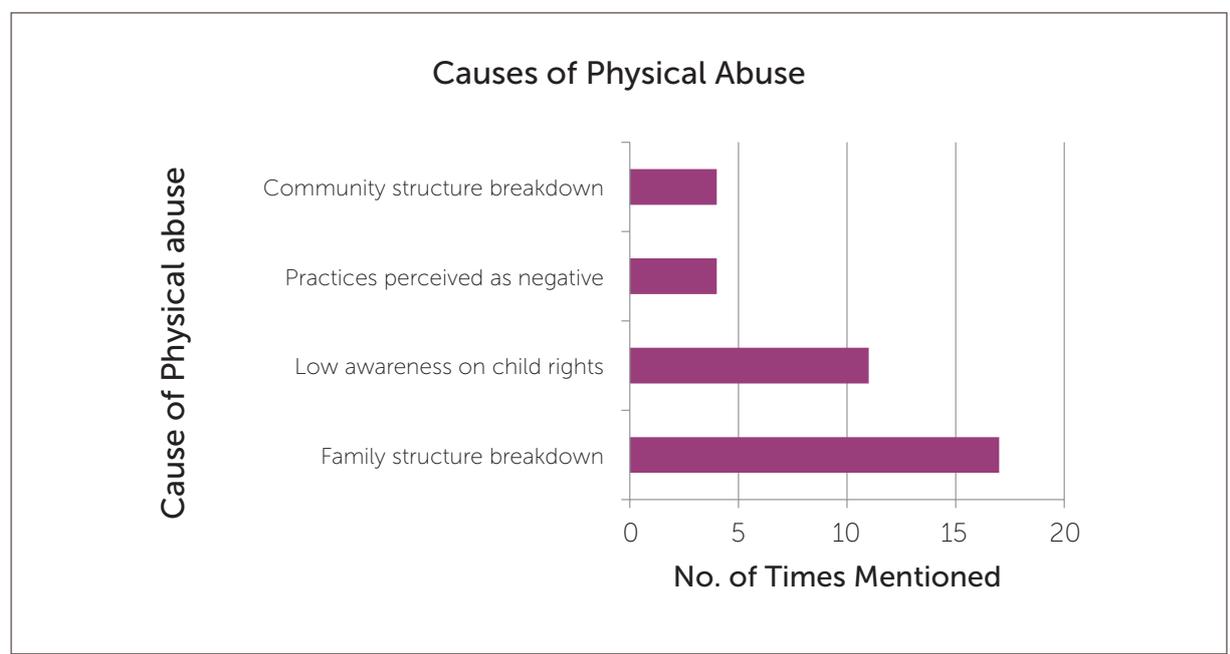


Figure 4: Graph showing the causes of child physical abuse in Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni communities

3.5.1 Community Solutions to Physical Abuse

Based on the causes of physical abuse mentioned above, the community came up with the following solutions:

Family Level Interventions:

- a. Families should adopt religious practices and guide their children to positive religious values. This will bring the children closer to their parents, and consequently help to create strong family ties.

Community Level Intervention:

- a. All parents or custodians of children in the community should be sensitized on the right forms of punishment for the children at different stages of life. This will reduce cases of physical abuse that result in serious bodily harm and violation of children's rights.
- b. Children should be educated on their rights and where to report any abuse happening at home or in the community, including at school.

Leadership Level Intervention:

- a. *Nyumba Kumi* elders should monitor household conditions and report any cases in which children are suspected to be victims of physical abuse. Those guardians who are found guilty should face legal action so as to warn those who might be doing the same to their children.

4 RISK FACTORS



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Qualitative analysis of the findings revealed seven risk factors associated with cases of child abuse within the communities of Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni.

The following risk factors are not stand alone but intrinsically related to each other. Through the finding of this research we found that there is a vicious cycle of accumulating risk factors for child protection concerns. Some of the factors identified include:

- i. Parental conflict
- ii. Poverty
- iii. Parental alcohol and drug abuse
- iv. Unwillingness to report child offenders
- v. Children with disabilities
- vi. Child's age
- vii. Harmful cultural practices.

4.1 Parental Conflict

The findings reveal that a breakdown of the family unit is the main cause of child abuse. The underlying risk factor is the conflict between parents that may include domestic violence and in extreme cases lead to divorce. Research has shown that women who are experiencing domestic violence may be affected physically and mentally. This may impact the mother's

capacity to take care of her children. Further research has shown that there is a high link between cases of child abuse and domestic violence, with a range of 30% to 60% depending on the country where the type of abuse has happened (Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook, 2011). Participants mentioned that this situation is made worse if the mother leaves her children behind, because they are likely to be sexually abused by the father, a close relative or a neighbor. If the father marries another wife, the children are neglected, physically abused and sometimes drop out of school. Children who are continually exposed to domestic violence and poor living conditions may be affected emotionally and may make decisions that affect their future life. For instance, the participants mentioned that girls who lack support from their families turn to older men, especially motorbike riders, for material and emotional support. In return, these men ask for sexual favours from the girls, and in most cases this leads to child pregnancies.

4.2 Poverty

Poor living conditions are risk factors associated with child abuse. Houses that are in a bad state; limited opportunities for employment; families living in prolonged poverty and the absence of a bread-winner in the home are all cases that depict poverty in the society. Even though children from middle and high-income families are also at risk of being abused, children living in poor conditions are more prone to being abused. This is because the prolonged state of poverty could lead to parents being depressed or turn to alcohol and drug abuse (UNICEF, 2012). As a result, the children suffer from neglect, physical abuse and, to some extent, sexual abuse. Also, the children may be forced to drop out of school if parents are completely unable to raise money for school fees. Consequently, this leads to child labour since the children have no option but to seek employment in order to raise income for supporting the family. Participants also mentioned that children sleep with their parents in the same room and are exposed to the sexual acts of their parents from an early age. This encourages the child to practise what they have seen at home with their friends and could lead to early pregnancies.

4.3 Parental Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Research conducted by UNICEF in 2012 has shown that there is a strong connection between substance abuse and child abuse. This is because substance use affects the capacity of parents to meet the physical, emotional and developmental needs of their children both in the short and long term. As a result, children living with alcoholic parents suffer from neglect, physical abuse and in some cases sexual abuse. Information from the focus group discussion shows that the youth are unhappy with their parents who are alcoholics, because some of these parents spend the whole day at the local pub drinking. Also, some parents drink all the money including that of school fees, and even take alcohol on credit when all the money is spent. Consequently, children have to drop out of school for lack of school fees and end up engaging in harmful activities that could lead to early pregnancies. Older children seek employment after dropping out of school in order to support their younger siblings.

4.4 Unwillingness to report child offenders

Participants mentioned that there are community members who are unwilling to report child sexual or physical offenders, because the person abusing the child is a family member and the spouse or children are scared to expose them. Families can also refuse to cooperate with those offering to help them, if they have other underlying family issues that they feel will be exposed if they talk to outsiders. This poses a risk to the children because the person responsible for child abuse is still free and chances of continuous forms of abuse are high.

4.5 Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities are also at a high risk of abuse and neglect. Although able-bodied children and those with disabilities are at the same risk of being abused, children with disabilities are at a greater risk of continuous forms of abuse since they are usually left alone, discriminated or may be physically impaired to report to an adult that they are being abused.

4.6 Child's Age

Another risk factor is the child's age at the time of abuse. According to a research conducted by UNICEF in 2012, children below the age of four years are more vulnerable to physical abuse and child neglect compared to older children, since they cannot defend themselves. The findings show that mothers go to work on farms that are very far from home and leave young children by themselves the whole day. The same research by UNICEF further indicates that children who experience either one or many forms of abuse when they are very young (below 4 years of age) are likely to manifest the impacts of the abuse at later stages of life, even though the parent reforms and offers the child protection later in life.

4.7 Harmful Cultural Practices

Lastly, harmful cultural practices affect the way community members will respond to interventions of child protection in their society. For instance, there is a strong cultural belief among the communities of Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni that a girl should be married off when she falls pregnant or as soon as she reaches puberty. Consequently, when the girls become pregnant, they drop out of school to take care of their children. Efforts that try to achieve equal education rights for both boys and girls could be hampered when a girl falls pregnant and her parents receive dowry and agree to marry her off.

5 CONCLUSION



The information gathered from the twenty focus group discussions conducted in Gongoni, Ngomeni and Marereni Sub Locations shows that community members have a gap in knowledge on child protection, including the existing legislative frameworks. Child protection in such a context is very complex; most of the contributing factors are related to each other and children victims of violations enter a vicious cycle of violence.

Such negative norms include communities and parents shying away from discussing sexual reproductive health with their children; seeing a female child as a source of income; marrying off young girls; religious norms - when a girl gets her first menses, she is ready for marriage; preference for boy child; beliefs/myths surrounding HIV and disability among others came out strongly as causative and contributing factors to child abuse.

A section of community members have expressed the willingness to change current practices and norms that are causing harm to children in their society. This is evident from solutions given by the participants on how to address each form of child abuse that was discussed in the focus groups.

Despite these disturbing findings, there are some positive developments in this area. For instance, the government and a few local and international organisations are working to provide responsive and preventive child protection services to children and the community at large. These services include assessment of child abuse cases and protection concerns at the Child Protection Centres, specialized legal and psychosocial services, referral to other services, and awareness creation on child rights in schools and communities. The Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) cash transfer continues to benefit a few most vulnerable families; the free and compulsory basic education, although with hidden levies, is a great initiative as well as the free access to health care to children under five years among others, provided by the government.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS



Generally, from the study it is evident that there is a huge gap in ensuring that children are supported and protected within the community. Despite these gaps, it was the purpose of the study to identify strengths existing among key stakeholders and within the child protection system that, if further supported and strengthened, can achieve protection for children. The following are some of the key recommendations for different stakeholders:

Children

Children are key stakeholders in their own wellbeing. They should be encouraged to contribute to family strengthening by being respectful to each other, their parents and caregivers and elders in the community. They need to be empowered through trainings in life skills, child rights, and substance abuse, to become resilient and play an active role in advocating for their rights at all levels.

Child-led participation initiatives such as the Children Assemblies and Child Rights Clubs in schools or communities should be supported to provide a platform for children to openly air their views in matters affecting them.

Reporting channels for child rights violation should be communicated to children and all other services available for them and where to access them when in need.

Parents and Caregivers

Parents and caregivers are the immediate duty bearers in child protection, they should love their children without discrimination. They should be encouraged to proudly take responsibility of taking care of their children, be trained on child rights, gender equality and

more importantly skillful parenting. In addition, caregivers and parents should strive to be familiar with the services available for children and families and when, where and how to access them. For example, the education bursaries provided for vulnerable children to access education will only benefit such children if the parents are aware and access them.

Finally, caregivers and parents should embrace the *nyumba kumi* initiative, endeavor to take account of each child within a household at any given time in the spirit of collective community effort in child protection.

Government of Kenya

The government and, more specifically, the Ministries directly responsible for children and family issues: Gender, security and social services, health, legal aid, education among others need to prioritize child protection and welfare. Resources and manpower should be increased to reach more families not targeted within the region and ensure proper monitoring of child protection services. Family strengthening programmes, especially skillful parenting and household economic strengthening should be initiated/increased to curb the family breaking and household vulnerabilities cited as a major contributing factor to child abuse, including neglect.

Poor law enforcement was mentioned several times by the respondents and hence the government should reinforce existing laws and take legal action on perpetrators of child abuse including parents, and caregivers who abandon their children. In addition, all government sectors at national and county levels should continue to work towards eradicating corruption and discrimination within all their systems, as this has a profound negative impact on the development of communities.

Regarding access to education, the Free Primary Education is a big step towards achieving education for all (EFA). However, "hidden" costs levied by schools are still a big challenge to many children and parents. There is a need to evaluate these costs and provide better for the education system in Kenya.

The Kilifi County Government should initiate programmes that aim to create awareness on child rights and family strengthening. Educational support to very vulnerable children who may not acquire the top grade due to unbearable family circumstances should be considered. The County government should either ban or strictly regulate disco matanga – night vigils within the county, which has been cited as a risk factor to children and young people.

Civil Society (NGOs, CBOs, Faith Based Organizations)

All civil society organizations working in Kilifi County should support and work closely with the government and communities to complement each other in a non-competing manner. Child protection should be a concern of everybody and interventions should be geared towards meeting the real needs and existing gaps within the communities. Capacity building to communities on child rights and child protection, skillful parenting as well household economic strengthening should be prioritized by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Media, Local Community Initiatives and Private Sector

The media (especially vernacular stations) needs to be actively engaged in child protection efforts since they can reach a wider audience of people in terms of creating awareness, and help to expose sexual offenders who are likely to go underground as a result of corruption or other reasons. This will help to reduce cases of child abuse within the communities.

Religious leaders, local leaders, community leaders and traditional elders (custodians of culture) need to play active roles due to their position of influence within the community as they form a crucial informal child protection system. There should be collaboration with them by all other actors to ensure positive values are reinforced and that negative norms and beliefs are eliminated. Chiefs' barazas, religious meetings/forums and cultural events need to be utilized to create awareness on children related issues.

The private sector within the region needs to join the call in supporting and protecting children. The findings revealed that children are abused in leisure places and the transport sector with the tourism industry and boda boda business sector blamed to a large extent. Private sector support may be directed to local organizations or government to meet such needs of the most vulnerable children of education, family strengthening and services delivery to children. Awareness creation on child rights to all members of the community, including the private community, needs to be emphasized and carried out.

7 MOVING FORWARD



CISP is in collaboration with the government; the Department of Children's Services is committed to closing the gap between communities and child protection services in Kilifi County. Informed by the findings, CISP will carry out the following intervention actions to address the concerns raised for children:

Provision of Child Protection Services

CISP will continue to provide technical support to the CPC located in Malindi, managed by the Department of Children Services and offering integrated services to children whose concerns have been reported to the centre, or through referrals by the collaborative stakeholders within the region. Mobile Child Protection Centres and community outreaches will also be conducted to create awareness about the services offered at the centre.

Community Dialogues

CISP believes that if the problems are within the community, then the solutions are also within the community. Therefore, CISP will:

- Put in place mechanisms that enable community dialogue about child protection issues and which will be centred on social norms and how they contribute to child abuse. The selected members will be taken through structured community dialogues, paying attention to the key child protection concerns identified in the study.

- Initiate dialogue on child abuse among various stakeholders in the community to understand how child abuse affects girls and boys, families and its impact on the wider community.
- Facilitate face-to-face dialogues on child abuses (early marriages, girl child preference, neglect, etc) between stakeholders – community elders, religious leaders, women’s groups, youth groups among others with the aim of arriving at a common ground on some of those negative religious and cultural practices that contribute to violence and the abuse of children.
- Develop action plans aimed towards long-term commitment by the community to end child abuse and support children to achieve their potentials.

Children empowerment

CISP will partner with children to empower them with skills and knowledge about their rights; life skills to enable them to make informed decisions and provide them with safe spaces to voice their concerns. Child Rights Clubs will be established in 4 schools within the region and talk boxes installed for children to drop in any concern. Children out of school will be reached through community youth groups existing in the locations and effort to create awareness on child rights, drug abuse, and peer education will be pursued. CISP will also support children’s events/celebrations such as Day of the African Child, Children’s Assemblies and fun days.

Capacity building of key stakeholders on child protection and child rights

Capacity building through trainings, seminars, and technical forums will be organized for targeted stakeholders such as community leaders, religious leaders, women’s groups, youth groups, teachers, AACs, police, traditional leaders, volunteer officers, CHWs.

Advocacy at National and County levels.

CISP will lobby and advocate with the relevant government ministries for:

- Increased budgetary allocation to the Child Protection Centre –Malindi to be able to handle the high demand for child protection services.
- Involvement of children and community members in development initiatives at county level to ensure needs are prioritized as expressed by the communities themselves.
- Promotion of accountability and transparency on issues of children.

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About the Child Protection Project

"Closing the gap between communities and child protection services in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties" is a project implemented by CISP in partnership with the Department of Children's Services (DCS) and UNICEF Kenya. The overall objective of the project is to enable children in Kilifi and Nakuru Counties to have access to integrated services for prevention and response to violence, abuse and exploitation through the child protection centres model. The Child Protection Centre model is "a one stop shop" where child protection services such as: individual assessment of children; child and family counseling and psychosocial support, legal assistance, tracing, reunification and reintegration of separated children; and referrals of children to other service providers are provided under one roof. The service delivery is complemented by awareness and capacity building activities on child rights and child protection to key duty bearers, as well as advocacy targeting diverse actors at community, county and national levels.

In addition, the project focuses on community engagement through an innovative "community led dialogues" approach, to trigger meaningful conversations on prevailing community social norms with aim of promoting positive norms and discouraging negative social norms that contribute to the violation of children rights.

CISP Profile



CISP Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (International Committee for the Development of the Peoples) - is a Non-Governmental Organization established in Rome in 1983 and currently active in over 30 countries worldwide.

CISP Kenya carries out projects in area of development by supporting National and county authorities to provide quality, equitable, transparent and accountable services in sectors of health and nutrition, education, child protection and renewable energy through capacity building, promoting active citizenship, shared accountability mechanisms at community, county authorities and National government level.

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**UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL NORMS
AND CHILD ABUSE**



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