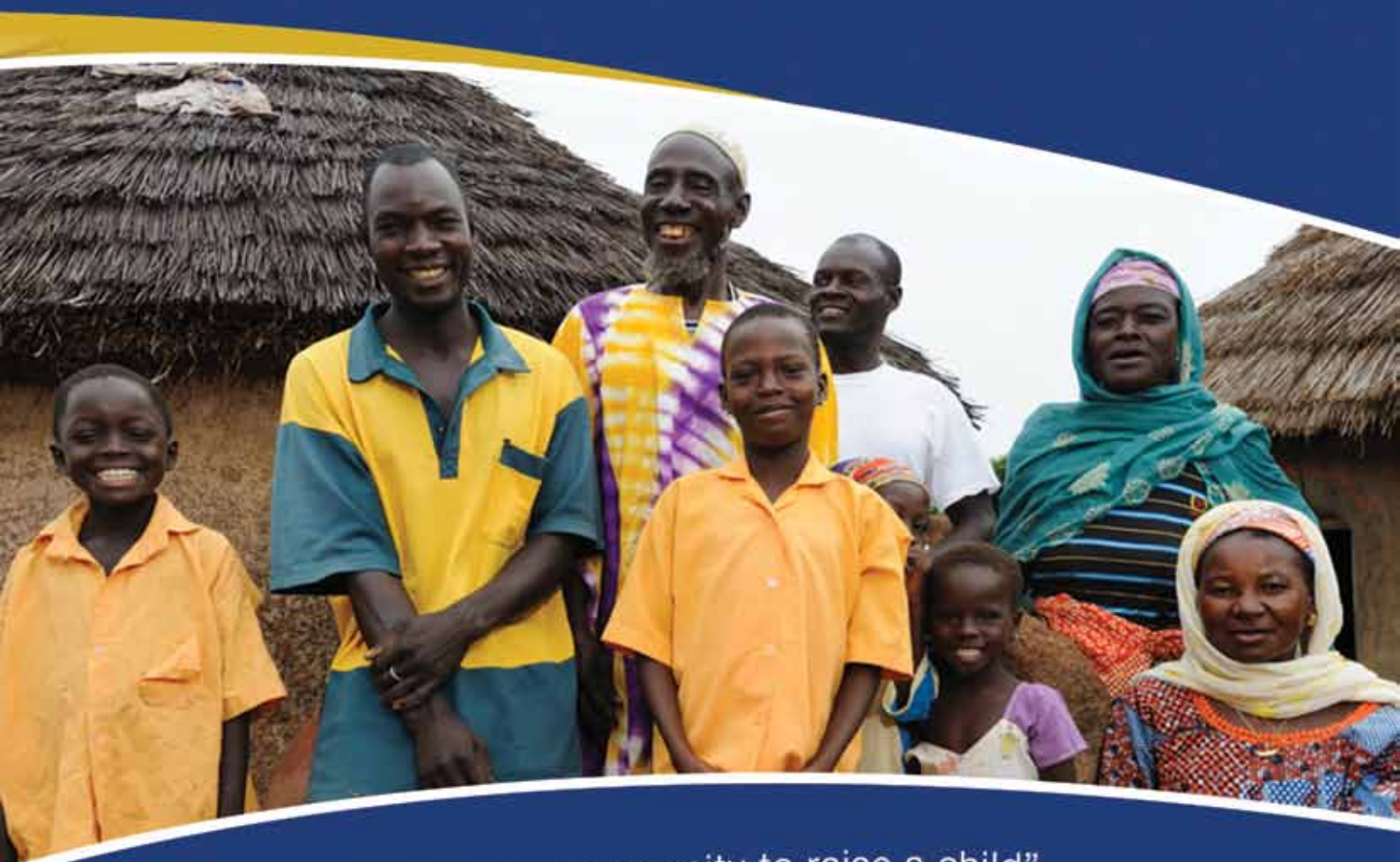# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH

"It takes a community to raise a child"

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

unicef

About the new child protection study

As part of the process of child protection system strengthening and reform, and the development of a new Child and Family Welfare Policy, the Government of Ghana and UNICEF commissioned a national baseline study on child protection.

The research process took place in all ten regions of Ghana over a one year period beginning in December 2012. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were applied, giving a nuanced understanding of child protection in relation to girls and boys of different ages, in different family and household contexts.

This leaflet gives a brief overview of the research. For detailed reports, please contact the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection / UNICEF Accra Office.

What the study revealed

The idea that "it takes a community to raise a child" stems from the fact that in Ghana, the sense of belonging to family and clan is very strong.

Parents are seen as the base unit of child protection across the country and the research revealed that around 80% of children live with at least one biological parent. Over 90% of children that do not currently live with a biological parent, are living with extended family or people with whom they have kinship ties.

Participants in the qualitative research describe a trend towards more individualistic, nuclear family systems and some attribute the harm that children suffer to this change. However, although the family system is weakening, the extended family system remains an important child protection measure and a positive cultural norm, with great potential to make positive change for children.

How children are affected

The child protection system is generally oriented towards rescue and removal of children, as opposed to working with families to address problems in the home.

Statistics from a variety of studies reveal that serious types of violence, abuse and exploitation affect children all over the country. These include child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), rape & defilement, children in street situations, child labour, and child trafficking.

Although most parents and caregivers are naturally inclined to protect children, awareness of children's rights, development and protection is generally limited and the impact of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect on children is often not recognized.

Why some children are more vulnerable

This study confirms what is well known by child protection actors: Harm is not experienced equally by all children in all circumstances. Factors which increase the vulnerability of

children include age, gender, poverty, parental neglect, and children spending significant amounts of time alone or without parental supervision. Other groups include:
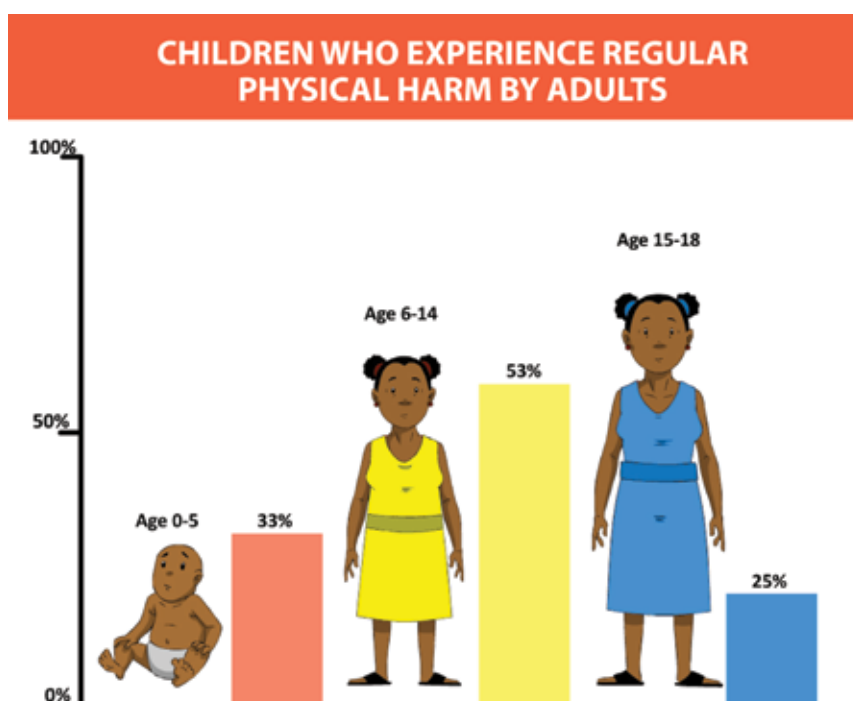
• Younger children who are more at risk of physical harm in the form of corporal punishment compared to older adolescents;

• Migrants and children of minority groups;

• Children who have been trafficked or who are involved in harmful forms of child labour;

• Children who have been orphaned or taken in by relatives or foster families, including as part of the traditional systems of kinship care.

• Girls, especially adolescent girls, are the most vulnerable group overall. Indeed, the harm and abuses faced by girls were found to be one of the most significant child protection issues of all in this research.

Violence against children

Children's experience of violence is rarely segregated into distinct categories of 'physical', 'emotional' or 'sexual' harm. All types of violence result in often significant and lasting emotional harm.
Key findings show that:

• Physical harm of children is mostly perpetrated under the guise of discipline, and corporal punishment even to abusive levels, is widely accepted at home and at school.

• The finding that corporal punishment is counter-productive to learning is supported by other research findings, including the fact that it makes children more likely to be absent from school.

• Although relatively small in number, some alarmingly violent and abusive practices were cited when asked what the worst way to discipline children was. These included burning and cutting child with sharp objects/ threaten with a knife.

• While children aged 6-14 are subjected to corporal punishment more than other age groups, one third of child survey respondents state that even very young children under the age of 5 are hit 'sometimes' or 'all the time'.

• Fifty eight per cent of responses identified positive discipline techniques as the best ways to discipline children in general, and nearly 90% of child responses revealed that parents or guardians usually react positively when children do something right at home.

CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE REGULAR PHYSICAL HARM BY ADULTS

Age 0-5 — 33%
Age 6-14 — 53%
Age 15-18 — 25%

Emotional violence, abuse and neglect

Children's reactions to verbal abuse are overwhelmingly negative:

- 87% of children who experienced it in the past month) and compared to the cane *"disturbs their mood for longer hours."*

- Excessive insults cause emotional and psychological problems in children, making them passive, reserved and withdrawn, reducing their confidence and self-esteem.

- One third of child and adult survey respondents indicate that verbal humiliation took place at home within the past month.

Sexual abuse and exploitation

The -study explored the extent of inappropriate touching, and the perceived extent of six different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation (ranked by level of concern to respondents).

- Nearly 6% of child and adult survey responses indicate incidents of 'inappropriate touching' (i.e. being touched in a way that made the child feel uncomfortable) in the past month.

- The inability of families to provide for their children is said to be directly related to cases of sexual abuse and defilement, especially girls. There were reports in seven of the ten regions that indicate sexual abuse of children by teachers at school, and in some cases of teachers impregnating female students.

Child marriage

Child marriage is illegal in Ghana. However, the proportion of women aged 15-49 years married before the age of 15 and 18 are respectively 6% and 27% according to MICS.

- Twenty two per cent of all adult and child survey respondents think it is acceptable for boys under 18 to get married compared to 31% who think it is acceptable for girls under 18 to get married. Furthermore, 9% of all respondents think it is acceptable for boys aged 15 and under to get married and 14% think the same for girls.

- More than 39% of respondents identified poverty and economic reasons as the major causes of child marriage under the age of 15.

- The role of child marriage in protecting girls from fatherless pregnancies was mentioned mostly by men, for example to "prevent her from sleeping around with irresponsible men". Most often the marrying of girls who become pregnant is reported to happen in the north and the girl can only return home if she leaves the child behind with the husband's family.

Female genital mutilation/cutting

FGM/C currently stands at 2% in Ghana and it is envisaged the practice will be eliminated before 2030. However, there are strong regional differences with much higher prevalence rates in the Upper West and Upper East Regions (41% and 28% of women respectively according to 2011 data).

The majority of respondents who report that FGM/C happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' are from the Upper West Region.

Child labour

Child labour in Ghana includes work on farms, cattle herding, street hawking, begging, fishing, paid child domestic work, labour exploitation by teachers, and work in abattoirs, saw mills, stone quarries, shallow mines, building sites, marketplaces, rivers and lakes.

- Child labour is highlighted as a concern by children and adults in all regions, in particular child labour outside the home which was mentioned as a form of 'harm' for children approximately six times more frequently than household work.

- Children are exposed to a large number of hazards, especially accidents and injuries but also hunger, exhaustion, neglect, illness, and verbal and physical abuse by caregivers and employers.

- Children can wake up at dawn to start work, and arrive at school exhausted and sometimes late.

- Child migration for labour occurs in five regions and there are accounts from all regions of children suffering at the hands of foster carers in different ways.

- Child labour was also identified in some children's focus groups as an important strategy for protecting themselves from harm i.e. allowing them independence and enabling them to buy food, medicines and school items.

Trafficking for child labour and sexual exploitation

Researchers heard accounts of some trafficked children working throughout the day, with little or insufficient break periods, even when ill. Some children reported being mistreated by mistresses or masters whose justification is usually that their services have been pre-paid and so they are entitled to treat the children as they please.

Over 29% of child and adult survey respondents indicate that trafficking for child labour happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes. Respondents mentioned that children are trafficked mostly into labour in the fishing industry, farming and domestic work.

Various respondents indicated that trafficking is condoned by parents as a response to poverty, some seeing it as an old practice of establishing friendship with other families or traditional fostering of children. Parents take a financial advance in exchange for the child, who then works for his or her new guardian for two years or more in exchange for additional payments by the new guardian.

Children and the justice system

The study revealed that:

- The household survey found that more children than adults state that children in their community sometimes commit crimes (defined as 'getting into trouble'): 54% of children compared to 34% of adults.

- Stealing and damaging property are the most common types of crimes identified, accounting for 36% of child and approximately 65% of adult responses.

- Juvenile justice is highly gendered, with many more boys coming into conflict with the law than girls, particularly in relation to serious offences.

- Girls are more likely to be criminalized for sex-related offences. In the focus group discussions, adults in particular said that girls are sexually abused due to them pursuing men for financial reasons, thus turning the girl from victim/survivor to co-perpetrator.

Responding to offences and crimes committed by children

Responses to offences and crimes committed by children vary significantly, depending on whether the case is considered serious or minor and whether it was committed by a boy or a girl:

- 'Formal' responses are much more common in relation to serious offences for both boys and girls. However, there are many obstacles to dealing with juvenile cases in the formal system. As a result, in almost every region police are said to inflate the child's age so they can be treated in the same way as adult offenders - the result is children receive longer sentences and harsher treatment.

- Most communities try to solve cases

without them reaching the courts. However, 'informal' processes may be unregulated and not applying human and child rights standards.

- Physical violence by community members or unofficially by police is common.
- There is a sexual element to a few of the punishments for girls.

How we can protect our children from violence, abuse and exploitation

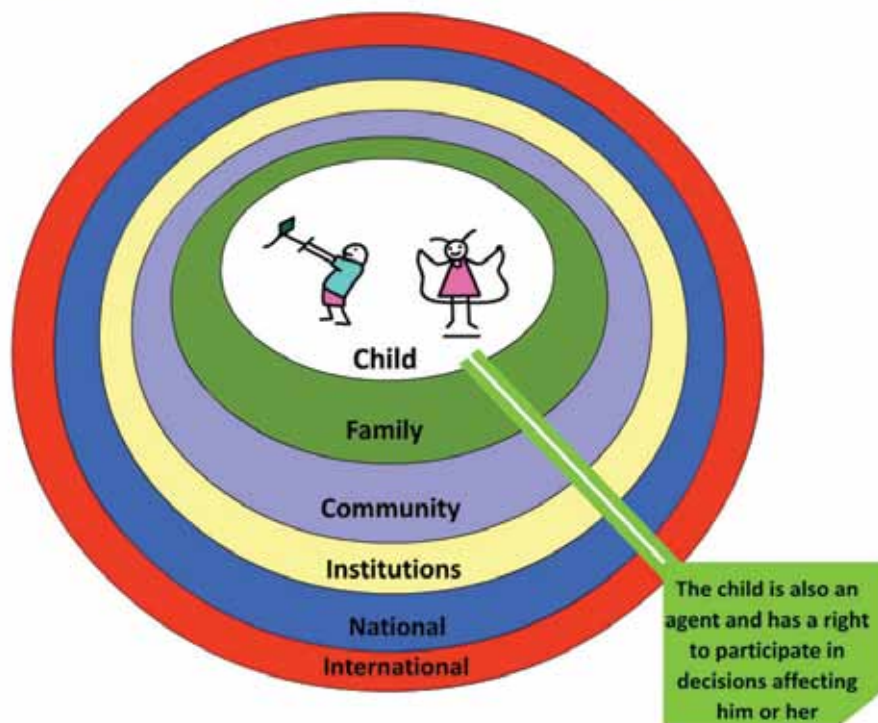The study presents a number of recommendations for addressing issues highlighted by the research, including:

- **Behaviour and social normative change** for the protection of children from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation;
- Stronger engagement with **churches, mosques, traditional leaders and Assembly persons;**
- Clearly defining the **mandate and roles of all government agencies and departments** working in child protection;
- Urgently addressing **gaps in legislation and policy.**

A shared responsibility - It takes a community to raise a child

Based on the new research findings, it is clear that protection of children from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation does not rest with one sole agency – it is a shared responsibility for families, communities, informal and formal actors at all levels and a task that also involves children themselves.

A NETWORK OF 5 BROAD GROUPS PROTECT THE CHILD

Child
Family
Community
Institutions
National
International

The child is also an agent and has a right to participate in decisions affecting him or her

For a full copy of the *Child Protection Baseline Research,* or if you have a child protection concern you would like to raise, please contact the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. P.O BOX MBO 186, Ministries. Accra, Ghana. Tel +233 302688181
Website: www.mogcsp.gov.gh   OR

Department of Children, P.O Box M.273, Ministries, Accra- Ghana, Tel. +233 302225297