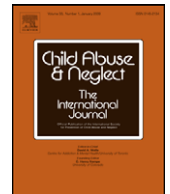




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Child Abuse & Neglect



Protecting children from violence and maltreatment: A qualitative comparative analysis assessing the implementation of U.N. CRC Article 19

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: (1) To identify which United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recommended child protection (CP) measures, such as policy, reporting systems, and services for child abuse and neglect (CAN) victims, individually or in combination, were most important in establishing a basic level of child protection in 42 countries; and (2) to assess whether these measures were necessary or sufficient to achieve basic child protection in developing and industrialized countries.

Method: Child protection and/or rights expert respondents from 42 countries completed a questionnaire on CRC Article 19 (CRC19) required CP measures implementation and rated their country's effectiveness in implementation, the current level of effectiveness of child protection, and the relevance of improvements in child protection since the CRC was adopted in 1989. Information from the Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations, as well as UNICEF and WHO indicators on child health and protection issues were used to check and supplement responses. Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) was used to identify child protection measure implementation effectiveness.

Results: Results indicate that child protection judged as comparatively more successful among study countries is a result of having the following measures in place from two types of social programs: a CP infrastructure (legislation plus services) and at least one information-based intervention support program.

Conclusions: Fourteen (33%) countries were determined to have established at least a basic CP system toward protection of children from violence and maltreatment. These countries reported having the three required elements described above. The study reinforces the need for governments to take a systems approach to child protection, including policy/legislation, information-based programs and social services, as well as professional training and public awareness raising. The top-ranked countries included: Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom.

Practice implications: Governments need to establish CP systems with multiple, well-integrated, effective CP measures as elaborated above, working with trained professionals and also raising public awareness to ensure successful protection for all children in every country. Partial measures are not effective. Further, in addition to establishing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of professional interventions, the actual outcomes for children, not studied or reported on here, need to be the priority focus for child protection going forward.

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Introduction/background

Global societal awareness of child abuse and neglect

The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that 40 million children are victims of child abuse and neglect by the age of 14 annually around the world (WHO, 2006), approximately 1.8% of 2,213,456,000 children under 18 in the world today (UNICEF, 2009). Studies in the USA and other western societies estimate between 1 in 5 and 1 in 12 girls and boys will experience some form of child maltreatment (Finkelhor et al., 2005; Finkelhor, 2008; Mash & Wolfe, 2009), and studies from other countries indicate that this could be higher, especially in developing countries (ACPF, 2008; Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007; Mulinge, 2002; Ramiro, Madrid, & Amarillo, 2004; Sague-Castillo, 2009). A conservative estimate would be that 1 in 15 of all children under 18 throughout the world, nearly 150 million children, are maltreated annually, far higher than the WHO estimate above. The issue of protecting children from maltreatment and other forms of violence is a critically important issue requiring the world's full attention.

Training of professionals on child maltreatment, improved identification of maltreatment cases, media attention and prevention campaigns over the past 30 years have contributed to raising public awareness and understanding about child maltreatment in many countries. These activities have resulted in an increased demand for child protection services, and the systems that support them. However, services and systems are still inadequate in nearly all countries, given the number of children who do not access services and those who still fail to report maltreatment (CRC Committee Concluding Observations, ongoing; United Nations, 2006; WHO, 2006). In fact, there is minimal information to document that such systems and services are adequate in any country. Further, adequacy and effectiveness of CP systems and services have not yet been defined as an objective toward a universal standard of care for the protection of children.

The World Report on Violence Against Children establishes that the situation of children in every country requires greater focused attention on children's rights and protection (United Nations, 2006). Further, the Report is aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, building on international human rights declarations which have come before (UN General Assembly, 1924, 1948, 1959), and ultimately establishing that "States bear primary responsibility for preventing and responding to violence against children, and for upholding the CRC and other treaties, which guarantee girls and boys everywhere the right to live their lives free from violence" (United Nations, 2006, p. xi).

According to the CRC, States Parties must implement required integrated measures to compose CP "systems." These required CP measures, identified in the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (CRC Committee) Concluding Observations, include CP legislation/social policy; human rights bodies for monitoring and evaluation of children's rights; data collection; research studies; reporting systems; intervention/care services (medical, mental health, legal, juvenile court, social); training of professionals; and public awareness raising/education, among other measures. Although CRC Article 4 states "there is no favored legislative or administrative model for implementation" (Hodgkin & Newell, 2007, p. 47), the CRC Committee, responsible for monitoring States Parties' CRC implementation, supports "a wide range of strategies to ensure Governments give appropriate priority and attention to children" (p. 47).

The CP measures can be organized into three major child protection areas of focus, highlighted here: (a) laws, regulations, and policies; (b) education, training, service programs and data management; and (c) the status and progress of the child's well-being, health and development. These have been conceptualized heuristically as the major domains of accountability in child rights work (Blanchet-Cohen, Hart, & Cook, 2009) and labeled mandates, mechanisms/interventions and child outcomes, respectively (see Fig. 1). This orientation brings some helpful rigor and structure to the consideration of CP effectiveness and will be applied here at several points to realize this value.

UNICEF perspectives

According to UNICEF's recent review of advances in child protection legislation, social change will only occur when high-level political commitment "has been matched by effective law enforcement, allocation of adequate resources and the engagement of all levels of society" (UNICEF, 2004, p. 1). Changes in CP effectiveness would thereby depend on changes taking place in the attitudes and behaviors of the populations in which CP systems and measures are developed and implemented. UNICEF reports (2004, 2007) suggest that high-level government commitment is necessary in order for countries to develop new laws to protect children's rights, but alone is not sufficient to ensure the social change required to protect children from violence and maltreatment.

Research and practice

Accountability in child protection work is weak to non-existent in most cases for mandates, interventions, and particularly for child outcomes. While professionals continue to work toward improving the effectiveness of clinical treatment and services for maltreated children, a systematic approach to evaluating and providing evidence-based practice/services to assure desired child outcomes is lacking. Further, there are not enough trained and skilled professionals, nor treatment and support services for maltreated and at-risk children, in most countries around the world (CRC Committee Concluding Observations, ongoing; United Nations, 2006; WHO, 2006). Services for maltreated children, especially clinical practice with children and their families, require particular data and information from each country. As identified by related global

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