



Protecting children from all forms of violence



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David Finkelhor and Patricia Lannen make an excellent and long-overdue contribution to the subject of international strategies to combat child abuse and neglect (CAN). The literature on international economic and social development has, for decades, been dominated by legitimate concerns for macro-economic progress in low-income and resource-poor countries and related issues of health, education, population dynamics, and nutrition. Larger multinational and bilateral assistance programs, including those of the World Bank and various

agencies, have only in recent years begun to address issues that reach beyond survival, physical well-being, and schooling in the “Global South.”

Protecting children from all forms of violence, including abuse and neglect, is a relative newcomer to the world of international development cooperation. It is arguable that the very terms *international development* and *cooperation* are ill-applied to child protection, violence, abuse, and neglect. These are truly global phenomena and are thus not limited to southern countries. Although poverty and inequity

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are factors in CAN, neither wealth nor equity alone necessarily lead to positive protection outcomes for children.

Indeed, one point addressed only superficially in Finkelhor's and Lannen's article is that protecting children from violence, abuse, and neglect requires *social change* research and practice. That is to say, much of what happens to children in the sphere of protection, or lack thereof, is *socially determined*. The economic development paradigm that shrouds – for better or worse – conversation about and support for efforts that prevent harm to children and respond to those affected is not particularly helpful. In this regard, Finkelhor and Lannen offer some meaningful suggestions to get beyond this paradigmatic divide. Among other important points the authors make, they question the *transferability* of successful models for protection children.

Child Protection as a Multidisciplinary Concern

As public and private organizations increasingly seek to expand or strengthen their child protection programs, they face numerous challenges. One of several challenges that Finkelhor and Lannen mention is the inherently multidisciplinary nature of child protection, which involves, at a minimum, social work, pediatrics, psychology, and law enforcement. International cooperation in other areas, such as health, education, and nutrition, has benefited (at least in terms of resource mobilization) from the relatively strong disciplinary bases underlying those efforts. Also, for advocacy and fundraising, the presentation of simple, and often technological, solutions has historically been attractive. In promoting and generating resources for child protection, simplicity

and technology are to some extent relevant. However, they fail to address the inherent complexities and level of social change needed to truly protect children from violence, abuse, and neglect.

Fortunately, the matter seems to be turning a corner in terms of the capacity of funders and programmers to embrace complexity. They are beginning to take a more systemic approach to child protection. Such an approach benefits children in real time, while also addressing underlying and multidisciplinary causes and vulnerabilities.

An example of a related effort is [Know Violence in Childhood](#) (KV), a time-bound global learning initiative led by an eminent economist and justice expert, respectively. Launched in New Delhi, India, in December 2014, KV is working to compile best practices, both in terms of information about the magnitude of the problem and about what works in protecting children. Though still in an early phase, this initiative has already determined that linguistic and terminology matter. *Child abuse*, *neglect*, *child protection*, and other terms, for example, take on widely different meanings and interpretations, depending on culture and context. As a result, a regional approach is being taken to capture linguistic and other cultural differences. The outputs of the work of KV will begin to circulate for a wide readership early in 2016.

Addressing the Complexity of Child Maltreatment

Related to the problem of multidisciplinary and multisector challenges is another issue perhaps not sufficiently stressed by Finkelhor and Lannen: the extremely broad and

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