THE WORST FORMS
OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN SIERRA LEONE

CONTACT:
Saji Prelis
sprelis@sfcg.org
Children and Youth Program Director
Search for Common Ground
1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW suite 2000,
Washington DC, 1035 USA

Joseph Jimmy Sankaituah
jjsankaituah@sf cg.org
Country Director
Search for Common Ground
9D Jamboria Drive, off Old Railway Line,
Tengbeh Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union
AUTHORS:

This study was conducted by the following young Sierra Leonean researchers, under the coordination of Hélène Delomez:


DISCLAIMER:

This document has been produced with financial assistance from the European Union. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
   1.1 About the Project  
   1.2 Research Methodology  
   1.3 Research results  
   1.4 Recommendations

2. **CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT**
   2.1 About the project  
   2.2 Violence against children in Sierra Leone  
   2.3 Structure of the report

3. **METHODOLOGY**
   3.1 Objectives and research questions  
   3.2 The “Listening and Learning” approach  
   3.3 Definitions  
      a. Children and youth  
      b. Violence  
   3.4 Research team  
   3.5 Data collection and research tools  
      a. Conversations  
      b. Key Informant Interviews  
      c. Desk Review  
   3.6 Research Targets  
      a. Research Areas  
      b. Target Population and Sample  
   3.7 Activities  
      a. Regional Training  
      b. Researchers’ Training  
      c. Data Collection  
      d. Data Analysis  
   3.8 Data Quality  
      a. Data Collection and Recording  
      b. Confidentiality and Informed Consent  
      c. Researchers’ Code of Conduct  
      d. Risk of Harm Protocol  
      e. Researchers’ Emotional Safety  
   3.9 Difficulties and Limitations  
      a. Geographical Limitations  
      b. Limitations extrapolating frequency of results  
      c. Limitations due to Ebola outbreak  
      d. Limitations of the Listening and Learning Approach  
      e. Limitations of data analysis techniques

4. **QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND CATEGORIZATION PROCESS OF VIOLENCE**
   4.1 Recurring terms used by children and youth to talk about violence
4.2 Categories of violence at the district level
4.3 Categories of violence at the national level

5. ANALYSIS OF THE SIX CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE

5.1 Violence at home
   A. Definition of violence at home 30
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 32
   c. Factors 33
   d. Protective Mechanisms and Existing Interventions 34
   e. Role of Children and Youth in Preventing Violence and Recommendations 35

5.2 Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage
   a. Definition 36
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 36
   c. Factors 38
   d. Protective Mechanisms and Existing Interventions 39
   e. Role of Children and Youth in Prevention and Recommendations 39

5.3 Violence against Women and Girls
   a. Definition 40
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 42
   c. Factors 43
   d. Protective Mechanisms and Existing Interventions 45
   e. Role of children and youth in prevention and recommendations 46

5.4 Child exploitation
   a. Definition 47
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 50
   c. Factors 50
   d. Protective Mechanisms and Existing Interventions 51
   e. Role of Children and Youth in Prevention and Recommendations 52

5.5 Violence at Schools and Universities
   a. Definition 53
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 54
   c. Factors 55
   d. Protective Mechanisms and Existing Interventions 56
   e. Role of Children and Youth in Prevention and Recommendations 56

5.6 Social Exclusion and Community Violence
   a. Definition 57
   b. Impacts on Victims and Communities 58
   c. Factors 59
   d. Role of Children and Youth in Prevention and Recommendations 59

6. CONCLUSION

7. RECOMMENDATIONS
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 About the Project

"Engaging Children and Youth as Partners in Preventing Violence against Children" is a regional project implemented in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia, three border-sharing post conflict countries in West Africa. In Sierra Leone, the project is implemented by Search for Common Ground in coalition with two youth empowerment partners: the Center for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) and the Society for Learning and Yearning for Equal Opportunities (SLYEO). The regional project is financially supported by the European Union.

The global objective is to contribute to the eradication of all sorts of violence against children. The project, implemented between 2014 and 2015, has three specific objectives:

1. Identify the worst forms of violence against children and understand the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them;
2. Utilize recommendations from children and youth to influence country-level programmatic and policy actions involving children and youth;
3. Mainstream findings at a societal level to enable communities to prevent worst forms of violence.

The cross-cutting objective is to build capacity of children and youth to advocate for their needs and prevent violence against their peers.

The 18 month project engages youth in identifying the worst forms of violence against children and youth and evaluating the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. To do this, youth in each of the three countries were engaged in the implementation of the three phases for the project. For the initial phase, youth led an action-based analysis, leading discussions directly with youth and children1 on their views of the worst forms of violence faced in their daily lives. These discussions led to the production of this report. For phase 2 and 3 of the project, youth, with Search for Common Ground and local partners, will utilize their findings to create concrete alternatives to violence and use communication tools, such as radio, to mainstream the findings at a societal level and engage a wider-audience in the discourse of the findings. The outcomes of this project will serve to influence country-level programmatic and policy actions to involve children and youth and to enable communities to prevent the worst forms of violence against children.

1.2 Research Methodology

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of violence against children and youth in Sierra Leone. Based on the youth and children’s perspective on violence, this research intends to build upon existing data and analysis. It also aims to offer new insights on the causes and consequences of violence by taking

1 Children are considered for this study as any child between 0 to 18 years old while the definition of youth is any individual from the age of 18 to 35.
into account children and young people’s understandings of violence. This research also sheds light on children and youth capacities to identify the causes of violence and to propose solutions to prevent violence.

Six research questions drove this study:

» What forms of violence affect children and youth in their communities?

» What meaning do children and youth ascribe to violence at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels?

» What are the consequences of violence at the individual, familial and community level?

» What are the risks and protective factors, including protection mechanisms, for violence against children?

» What role can children and youth play in mitigating violence against children?

» Who do children and youth feel most safe with to support them so they can advocate for themselves?

Participatory Action-Research and the Listening and Learning Approach

The research is based on an innovative methodology grounded in participatory action-research. The research was entirely conducted by young researchers aged from 18 to 30 years old, who were technically advised and supported by adults. The youth were fully engaged as genuine actors of the research. As such, they utilized their research findings to build a comprehensive analysis of violence against children and youth.

This project used the Listening and Learning (L&L) approach for qualitative research. Listening & Learning is based on conversations as a data collection tool. The conversation is a free verbal exchange based on trust and mutual comprehension. Conversations encouraged in the L&L approach are like everyday conversations between two or three people who are communicating with sincerity and respect. They are based on mutual comprehension and self-identification between the researcher and the child. That means researchers give child interviewees the opportunity to guide the conversation flow and to use their own words to explain a violent situation as they experience it. It creates a framework in which children and youth feel confident and secure to speak about sensitive issues. Consequently, the research is based on a qualitative approach in which children and young people’s perceptions of violence constitute the central argument.

1.3 Research results

The research has been conducted in 10 of the 14 districts representing the four regions of Sierra Leone. Six hundred and sixty-one (661) conversations were conducted with children and youth, both male and female, throughout the country.

The research identified six broad categories of violence, which were self-identified by the child interviewees as the worst forms of violence experienced by children and youth in Sierra Leone:

- Violence at home
- Teenage pregnancy and early marriage
• Violence against women and girls
• Child exploitation
• Violence at school and universities
• Social exclusion and youth unemployment

Violence at home was the most frequent form of violence mentioned by children. Beating and harsh punishments are very common at home and also at school in Sierra Leone. Children who don't live with their parents are highly vulnerable to violence, particularly to domestic violence and child exploitation. Women and girls are victims of multiple forms of violence: sexual violence, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. This violence occurs at school where teachers abuse girls in exchange for grades. Girls also experience violence in the home at the hands of their parents or husbands, or out in their communities.

Youth also suffer from social exclusion, and children perceive this as a form of violence enacted against them. They are excluded from decision making mechanisms and from community development, and have little chance to make decisions about their futures. The economic situation renders them extremely vulnerable to unemployment and exploitative forms of work. The high level of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone makes them feel more and more excluded from society.

In addition to the identification of the worst forms of violence, conversations allowed our research team to explore the leading factors responsible for violence, along with the consequences for victims and communities. Poverty is a major leading factor for violence against children and youth. Our research shows that the poorest children are commonly subjected to several forms of violence. Gender inequality renders women and girls particularly vulnerable to violence, and girls are more often barred from making decisions that impact their lives. Ignorance, lack of knowledge about children's rights, and lack of knowledge about alternative methods to violent discipline were commonly highlighted by children and young people to explain the high occurrence of violence in their communities.

Protective mechanisms for children exist at the community and national level. The state, as the primary holder of responsibility for child protection, has set up several institutions such as the Family Support Unit and the Child Welfare Committees. Nevertheless, law enforcement remains very weak and corruption is a strong obstacle to violence prevention.

Finally, in every village visited during the research field, children and youth expressed the wish to be more involved in prevention of violence. Particularly, they saw they could play a role in sensitizing their peers and the community to violence.

1.4 Recommendations

Eleven recommendations stem from this research. They are built on children and young people’s perspectives of violence in Sierra Leone:

To the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, CWCs, FSU, local councils and NGOs:

1. Governmental institutions, NGOs and CBOs working on child protection should consider
enhancing children’s participation in their own protection. Children and youth should be involved in raising awareness about the Child Rights Act through radio programs, TV shows and street theatre.

2. Child protection community mechanisms such as the Family Support Unit and Child Welfare Committees should be reinforced through training for their members to recognize all forms of violence against children. These community mechanisms must be child-friendly and gender sensitive when handling cases of violence against children.

3. Specific sensitization for parents, elders, and community members should be made to ensure enforcement of the law and to reduce the practices of handling sexual crimes within families and communities. Child Welfare Committees, as a community child protection mechanism, should play a leading role in sensitizing the community on violence against children. Collaboration between the Family Support Unit and Police must be strengthened in handling sexual offenses in order to ensure protection, medical, psychological and legal support to the victims.

To the Ministry of Youth Affairs and to the National Youth Commission

4. The youth parliament must be established and supervised by the National Youth Commission to handle youth-related issues in the country. The Youth Parliament should be comprised of youth representatives from all districts, and should include representatives from marginalized groups and other essential demographics in the country. Youth voices should be integrated into decision-making mechanisms at the local and national level.

5. Family planning and massive sensitization on teenage pregnancy should be available for girls and boys, including those living in remote areas. Youth clubs should be empowered to play a leading role on sensitization and peer-to-peer counseling.

To the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Child Labour Unit:

6. A special committee should be set up at the community level to monitor and properly look into cases of child labour in order to minimize, if not totally curtail, this form of exploitation. Monitoring of child displacement throughout the country should be put in place and be managed by this committee in order to avoid child exploitation within the “confi age” system (entrusting ones children to a wealthy family member).

To the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:

7. The Ministry of Education should ensure that every child, male and female, has access to basic education as enacted by the Education Act. Poor families should receive support so their children can attend school.

8. The Ministry of Education should engage in research efforts on violence at school in order to produce reliable data for combating all forms of violence taking place in public and private schools.

9. Each school should have Pupils’ Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA). The
committees should be sensitized and trained to recognize, report, and monitor violence at school. Pupils’ Committees should be supported and empowered to organize peer-to-peer sensitization and awareness, since raising awareness of non-violence could empower children and students to use peaceful conflict resolution methods. Students must be empowered to report on cases of violence, such as harassment and sex for grades, to the school authorities, especially to the disciplinary action committee in schools and universities or to the police.

10. All teachers and heads of school should have training and regular refresher courses on the code of conduct for teachers. The code of conduct should be displayed in visible areas of schools. The code of conduct for teachers must be clear, comprehensible, and enforceable.

11. Young people involved in early pregnancy should be supported to go back to school after the baby is delivered.
2. CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

2.1 About the project

“Engaging Children and Youth as Partners in Preventing Violence against Children” is a regional project implemented in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia, three border-sharing post conflict countries in West Africa. In Sierra Leone, the project is implemented by Search for Common Ground in coalition with two youth empowerment partners: the Center for Coordination of Youth Activities (CCYA) and the Society for Learning and Yearning for Equal Opportunities (SLYEO). The regional project is financially supported by the European Union.

The global objective is to contribute to the eradication of all sorts of violence against children. The project implemented between 2014 and 2015 has three specific objectives:

1. Identify the worst forms of violence against children and understand the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them.
2. Utilize children and young people’s recommendations to influence country-level programmatic and policy actions involving children and youth.
3. Mainstream findings at a societal level to enable communities to prevent the worst forms of violence.

The cross-cutting objective is to build capacity of children and young people to advocate for their needs and prevent violence against their peers.

This 18-month project engages youth in identifying the worst forms of violence against children and youth and evaluating the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. To do this, youth in each of the three countries were engaged in the implementation of the three phases of the project. For the initial phase, youth led an action-based analysis, discussing directly with other youth and children their views on the worst forms of violence faced in their daily lives, leading to the production of this report. For phase 2 and 3 of the project, youth, with Search for Common Ground and local partners, will utilize their findings to create concrete alternatives to violence and use communication tools, such as radio, to mainstream the findings at a societal level and engage a wider-audience in the discourse of the findings. The outcomes of this project will serve to influence country-level programmatic and policy actions to involve children and youth and to enable communities to prevent the worst forms of violence.

2.2 Violence against children in Sierra Leone

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA) has the primary responsibility for protecting children in Sierra Leone. The child protection system led by MSWGCA, supported by UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and the World Bank amongst others, comprises many strategic partners such as national and international NGOs and various government departments including the Sierra Leone
Police, the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour and Employment, and Ministry of Mineral Resources. However, MSWGCA is underfunded and understaffed. Sources suggest that MSWGCA technical staff are inadequately qualified and are marginalised from decision-making structures. As part of the decentralisation process, all Local Councils have established Gender and Social Welfare Committees but they, too, are underfunded and marginalised within Council operations.

The Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) is an important strategic partner with MSWGCA. Established in 2007, at its inception the FSU’s strength was 143 personnel including 61 female and 82 male officers. Twenty-four FSU’s were also established in various local police precincts countrywide. The vision of the FSU is to create a violence-free society by eradicating or minimising the incidences of sexual and domestic violence, child abuse, and child offences in Sierra Leone. It is reported that like the MSWGCA, the FSU is under-resourced and has major financial challenges. It lacks equipment to carry out DNA tests in rape cases, lacks vehicles to visit crime scenes, and the compromise of victims under pressure from parents has let many criminals off the hook.

At the chiefdom and village levels, significant authority for child protection has been given to Child Welfare Committees (CWC). The role of the Chiefdom CWCs is to monitor the functioning of the village CWCs and to deal with cases that cannot be dealt with at the village level. Chiefdom CWCs also have greater access to the district MSWGCA for support. According to UNICEF, in 2010 approximately 260 committees were functioning across the country at both chiefdom and village level.

Since early 2000, a number of important pieces of legislation have been passed in Sierra Leone as part of the post war reconstruction agenda. Beginning with the rights of women, the three gender acts in 2005 domesticated the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) commitments and criminalised rape. The youth act in 2003 sought to mainstream youth issues into the national development and post-conflict agenda. Specifically for children, the Child Rights Act, the Anti-trafficking Act, and the Sexual Offenses Act were passed to protect children from various forms of violence. These Acts have put into place a number of different structures by which the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) pursues its child protection mandate, which it has signed on to through ratification of international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. An important document on violence against women commissioned by the Overseas Development Institute examines the forms of redress for women subjected to violence in Sierra Leone. It highlights the challenges and difficulties in the justice sector value chain for women, and implies that children face similar, if not more difficult, obstacles in pursuing redress after being subjected to violence. A combination of poverty, culture, and limited governmental capacity will continue to undermine child rights in Sierra Leone and provide the space for the worst forms of violence against children.

The GOSL’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Agenda for Prosperity, commits to specific actions around child protection and welfare, including improving social protections through developing and implementing a child and family welfare policy. Though there is no specific mention of the worst forms of violence against children.

---

2 The following analysis has been provided by Patrick Masuba, through the desk review included in this project
3 Patrick Masuba, op.cit.
children, the social protections policy it proposes to adopt is expected to address the worst forms of violence against children.

According to UNICEF “the existing laws, structures and services for the protection of children are not achieving their intended impact on the lives of the youngest members of society. Although actors at several levels are committing considerable resources to child protection initiatives, indicators demonstrate that a large percentage of children still face abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation in their daily lives”. Local actors and mechanisms such as chiefs and Child Welfare Committees should be more empowered since it appears that in the majority of abuse, neglect or exploitation cases, communities are more likely to turn to local mediation structures.

2.3 Structure of the report

The first part of the report introduces the research methodology and the innovative “Listening and Learning” approach used for this youth-led research. Research questions and scope of the research will also be explained.

The second part presents the quantitative results of the research. It shows the data disaggregated by sex, age, and region. The data corresponding to different categories of violence against children and youth was collected during fieldwork through conversations. During the national analysis, a classification process was established, allowing this report to present six broad categories of violence.

The third part of the report proposes an explanation for these six categories: violence at home; violence against women and girls; teenage pregnancy and early marriage; child exploitation; violence at school and university; youth unemployment and social exclusion. Analysis of the six categories includes their different forms, the factors leading to violence, consequences of the violence, and the identified protective factors and recommendations made by children and youth during the conversations.

The fourth part of the report proposes a set of recommendations based on the results of the study and recommendations emanating from the field.

---

8 Wessells, Mike. An ethnographic study of community-based child protection mechanisms and their linkage with the national child protection system of Sierra Leone, Save the Children, 2011.
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives and research questions

The main objectives of the research are 1) to identify the worst forms of violence against children and young people, and 2) to gain an understanding of the self-identified factors leading to and consequences of violence against children and young people. For the purpose of the research project, “Engaging Children and Youth as Partners in Preventing Violence against Children,” the term, violence, will be defined entirely by the definitions given by the children. Thus, this study defines the term, violence as it is seen by youth and children in Sierra Leone.

Through the involvement of young people in the implementation of the project, youth are engaged not only as victims but as active stakeholders in the prevention of violence against young people. The study highlights the recommendations from the in-depth 661 conversations with youth and children across Sierra Leone during the research phase of the project. The cross-cutting theme that emerged through the various phases of the project was to build on the capacity of children and youth to advocate for their own needs and prevent violence against their peers.

Several research questions determined the scope of the research:

» What forms of violence affect children and youth in their communities?

» What meanings do children and youth ascribe to violence at the individual, familial, community, and societal levels?

» What are the consequences of violence at the individual, familial and community level?

» What are the risks and protective factors, including protection mechanisms, for violence against children?

» What role can children and youth play in mitigating violence against children?

» Who do children and youth feel most safe with to support them so they can advocate for themselves?

3.2 The “Listening and Learning” approach

This research is based on a unique and innovative method called “Listening and Learning”. The “Listening and Learning” (L&L) method is a youth-led, technically advised and adult supported approach utilizing conversations to capture individual perspectives and experiences.
Grounded in principles of Participatory Action Research⁹, L&L shifts the act of gathering information from a one-sided interview, where only subjects share intimate and private information, to an exchange of experiences where the researchers themselves participate in the sharing of personal views, experiences, and emotions in a non-adversarial manner. By allowing vulnerability to be mutual, this two-sided participatory dialogue alters power dynamics and induces a more sincere and fruitful conversation. The basis of this approach is founded on an activity performed in everyday life: conversations.

The L&L method equips youth researchers with the skills to transform the art of having conversations into a rigorous inquiry process that is easily adaptable to local contexts, especially in cultures with a deep oral tradition. Unlike an interview questionnaire, the uniqueness of holding conversations for gathering qualitative data is that it allows the researchers to delve deeper into the issues of violence against children and youth.

As the approach the project takes is based on trust and an empathic relationship, the conversation allowed children and youth to have time to speak their mind with a research team they can identify themselves. Therefore, the definition of the worst forms of violence is based on the meaning as it is viewed by children and youth. This approach doesn’t impose what violence is; instead children and youth can decide what they want to talk about when they are asked about their experience of violence.

This approach aims to faithfully transpose children’s words and to reach a comprehensive understanding of children’s perception of violence through the stories of their everyday experience of violence within their communities.

### 3.3 Definitions

**A. CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The Sierra Leone Child Rights Act as well as the International Child Rights Convention defines the child as any person below the age of 18. The definition of youth overlaps the definition of the child; the African charter defines youth as every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years¹⁰. For the purpose of this research, children are defined as every person below 18 and youth as every person between 18 to 35 years old.

**B. VIOLENCE**

In this research, the definition of violence relies on the way children and youth define violence. In other words, we consider as violence any act or phenomenon youth and children conceive or define as violence.

Children and youth were asked to define what violence is for them.

Here are some answers:

---

⁹ “Participatory Action Research is a process through which people investigate meaningful social topics, participate in research to understand the root causes of problems that directly impact, and then take action to influence policies through the dissemination of their findings to policy makers and stakeholders”. In Powers and Allaman, How Participatory Action Research Can Promote Social Change and Help Youth Development, 2012 http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/KBWParticipatoryActionResearch2012.pdf

“Violence is taking advantage of your age to destroy the future of young people”;

“Violence is when the elderly people think that they are always right, but do not listen to the young people”;

Violence is hurting someone willfully”;

“Bad things that are not good and are forcefully happening in our community that we are against”.

### 3.4 Research team

The research has been entirely conducted by a team of young researchers technically supported by Search for Common Ground Sierra Leone, and community partners CCYA and SLYEO. Therefore 25 young researchers, ages 18-30, were selected and trained to carry out the L&L method across 10 districts based on their past leadership experiences. The composition of the team also answered to criteria such as gender balance of the team and diversity of social, cultural and linguistic background of team members. For that reason, most of the provinces were represented through team members. The young researchers included 12 women and 13 men from the 4 regions of Sierra Leone (Western region, Southern region, Northern region and Eastern region). The age of the participants varied between 18 and 30 years old with an average age of 24.8 years old.

Young researchers were selected on several criteria described below:

1. **Age** (17 to 35 years old).

2. **Level of commitment**: Young participants were required to be active and engaged in a group at the time of selection, such as and association or a youth group, a club, an informal group of neighborhood kids or any other formal or informal structure.

3. **Traits of leadership**: The ability to mobilize other young people to engage in an activity, to be enthusiastic and motivated peers was required. Additionally, researchers were assessed on strong communication skills and being well organized.

4. **Ability to learn new skills**: The ability to learn new skills required for the execution of the research according to quality standards through the capacity building sessions.

### 3.5 Data collection and research tools

**A. CONVERSATIONS**

Conversations were the principal tool of data collection. A conversation is a free verbal exchange based on trust and mutual comprehension. Although researchers have in mind their research questions, conversations are not conducted like an interview because the conversations aim at building a trustful relationship in order for children to feel safe discussing sensitive issues. Conversations used in research are like everyday conversations between two or three persons who are engaged in speaking with sincerity and respect. Conversations are based on mutual comprehension and identification between the researcher and the child. That means researchers give child interviewees the opportunity to guide the conversation and to use their
own words to explain violent situations as they experience them.

Conversations were conducted by two-person teams during which one researcher was conducting the conversation while the other was taking notes. In order to allow for a systematization of data collection, the researchers filled out a conversation sheet\(^{11}\) after each conversation. This method permitted us to cross reference data collected and verify potential misinterpretation linked to translation with local languages.

**B. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

Semi-directed interviews were conducted by researchers with key informants from the child protection sector. Twenty-three (23) key informant interviews were conducted within specific government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) sectors that had in-depth knowledge about the research focus. International NGOs such as Defense for Children International and Street Child, as well as national NGOs or governmental department and ministries were interviewed to strengthen our knowledge of existing interventions and issues related to violence against children.

**C. DESK REVIEW**

In order to best inform the field research, an external consultant produced the desk review. The desk review provided background information on the worst forms of violence against children in Sierra Leone and the cumulative impact of current approaches addressing them.

**3.6 Research Targets**

**A. RESEARCH AREAS**

Ten (10) districts out of the 14 administrative districts of Sierra Leone were targeted by the research:

1. Western Area Rural
2. Western Area Urban
3. Port Loko
4. Kambia
5. Bombali
6. Tonkolili
7. Moyamba
8. Bo
9. Kono
10. Pujehun

\(^{11}\) See appendices for conversation sheet
B. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Research teams conducted a total of 661 conversations throughout the country following a “purposive sampling” technique as the study aimed to represent the cultural and social diversity with equal gender representation. The research teams also focused their efforts to engage with marginalized groups such as disabled youth or street children. The research was conducted in rural and remote area as well as urban settings. The target population was youth and children aged from 10 to 35, although there was a special focus on children and youth from age 10 to 25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Young Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyamba</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kambia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western area (rural &amp; urban)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonkolili</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombali</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pujehun</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>164</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of 304 women and girls were reached during conversation representing nearly 46% of the total of the sample. The “snowball” sampling technique was used for key informant interviews in order to target the principal actors in child protection in Sierra Leone. Therefore, 23 interviews were conducted with representatives from international and national NGOs, and representatives from ministries and the police.

3.7 Activities

A. REGIONAL TRAINING

The research phase started with a three-day training of trainers (ToT) organized at the SFCG office in Freetown, Sierra Leone, from June 9-11, 2014. The training brought together 17 people, including 3 SFCG project focal points, members of partner organizations, and young researchers selected for the project from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. The ToT informed participants on how to train their fellow teammates in their respective countries to apply the “Learning and Listening” methodology to engage youth and children in conversations on violence.

B. RESEARCHERS’ TRAINING

The ToT was replicated at the Community Center in Moyamba, Sierra Leone from July 22-26, 2014. Utilizing presentations, exercises, and discussions, 25 young researchers were trained on the L&L methodology and research objectives for the project. They also conducted a field test in Moyamba communities in order to pilot the L&L methodology.

C. DATA COLLECTION

After the training, the 25 trained researchers broke into five groups to spend two weeks (14 days) from July 28- August 11, 2014, conducting research. The five teams were deployed in the North, South, East and Western Rural and Urban regions. Each team went to different communities or villages, holding in total 661 conversations with children and youth on violence.

D. DATA ANALYSIS

The research methodology is based on a qualitative method of collecting field data. The data analysis fell within participatory action-research, which gives a prevailing place to the views of the children met during the fieldwork. The research is based on an inductive approach of data analysis by which analysis categories were built up on the data collected. This means that categories of violence were not designed before data collection but have been built based on what children and youth said during conversations. The analysis process followed two main steps: the regional analysis and the national analysis. The regional analysis took place in July 2014 after the data collection period; research teams in each county targeted by the research analyzed their data during three days in order to produce a regional analysis at the county level. National analysis took place in Monrovia in March 2015 and gathered all the county-based research teams. During national analysis data collected in the 6 counties were put together in order to produce an analysis at the national level. Both regional and national analysis followed the same data analysis process which involved four distinct steps:

1. Classification: identifying the forms and nature of violence from the children and youth stories

12 The national analysis was supposed to take place right after the regional analysis but the Ebola outbreak obliged us to postpone this step for security and sanitary reasons. This is further explained in the difficulties and limitations section.
collected from the field

2. Diagnostic: examining the reason for or causes of violence as well as identifying the protection mechanisms, based on the children and youth stories collected from the field.

3. Interpretation: defining concepts, linking diverse categories; examining data disaggregated by region, sex and age.

4. Recommendation: linking recommendations made by children and youth with the analysis produced by the researchers.

In the framework of this research, the classification process consisted of the researchers grouping together different themes or problems according to either the place of occurrence (i.e. violence at school), or an affiliation to the same component of violence (i.e. gender based violence). This process permitted the research team to group all the themes collected during the conversations into five broad categories mentioned below:

1. Domestic violence
2. Gender-based violence
3. Child exploitation
4. Violence at school
5. Social violence

Although the research methodology was designed to collect qualitative data, the research tool allowed us to produce quantitative data as well. Quantitative data were produced by counting the number of times categories and sub-categories of violence appear in each conversation. The data quantification was processed twice, once during regional analysis and then during national analysis. During the national analysis, the quantification was conducted after the regional teams agreed upon the definition of each category of violence. Each regional team recounted the categories and sub categories appearing in their conversation within the agreed-upon research analysis framework.

A writing committee was then assembled comprising researchers from each targeted area to write the report based on the national analysis, key informants interviews, and relevant literature and reports. The writing was supervised by the research coordinator.

3.8 Data Quality

Several mechanisms were put in place to ensure the quality of data. Dealing with children and youth on sensitive issues such as violence requires a rigorous do-no-harm approach during data collection

A. DATA COLLECTION AND RECORDING

In order to record the data collected during conversations, researchers were provided with a field note form where they wrote the transcription of the entire conversation. To do so, two researchers were appointed to conduct a conversation, one leading the conversation and the other taking notes. To ensure the data quality,
both researchers verified the accuracy of the notes after the conversation.

**B. CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT**

Every child or youth met during the field work was informed on the objective of the project and the purpose of the research. They were informed on how their story could be used in the research in order for them to be able to give an informed consent before agreeing to the conversation. Additionally, they were assured that their identity will remain confidential. To ensure the interviewees’ confidentiality, the researchers did not record any names. Instead, they recorded only the age and sex of the participant.

**C. RESEARCHERS’ CODE OF CONDUCT**

Conducting research requires setting principles which will ensure compliance with ethics. During the researchers’ training a code of conduct was set up including several mechanisms for ensuring compliance with ethics, security and the *do no harm* approach within the research. The code of conduct includes guidelines on dealing with conflict, situations where researchers should stop the conversations, situations where researchers should not start the conversation, cultural taboo management, traumatic experience management, and security and safety management.

**D. RISK OF HARM PROTOCOL**

In carrying out Listening & Learning conversations researchers may be exposed to events or disclosures that cause them to develop concerns relating to the safety of particular children or young people. A risk of harm protocol was put in place in order to safely manage situations where a child could be at risk of immediate harm. This protocol is binding where concerns arise during the course of research for the safety of direct research participants that researchers come into contact with in their work through this research study. Where a researcher may have had a reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk, particularly when a disclosure by a research participant activates such suspicion, research supervisors from partner organizations have been appointed as the most qualified and informed people to assess the need for referral. The protocol demands the researchers to refer any suspicious case to the research supervisor. Research supervisors have a wealth of experience in working with children and youth and are familiar with the service landscape in the context. Therefore, researchers were instructed to report any concern to the relevant research supervisor rather than act independently. Research supervisors will take action as soon as possible. Nevertheless the protocol has never been activated during the research.

**E. RESEARCHERS’ EMOTIONAL SAFETY**

Listening to children’s stories might be emotionally strenuous for researchers. During the training, researchers were trained to recognize feelings and reactions that might arise from listening to difficult stories. Additionally, a dedicated time was set up every night to discuss and share feelings from the day. Researchers also had the opportunity to contact the partner field coordinator and SFCG project coordinator at any time if they felt they needed emotional support.

### 3.9 Difficulties and Limitations

#### A. GEOGRAPHICAL LIMITATIONS

Despite targeting all four regions of Sierra Leone, the research was only conducted in 10 of the 14 districts as a result of preventive measures taken for extremely poor terrain and the Ebola virus outbreak during
the time of the research. Out of the 14 districts in the country, 4 districts, Bonthe, Kenema, Kailahun and Koinadugu, were not covered,

B. LIMITATIONS EXTRAPOLATING FREQUENCY OF RESULTS

The methodology is founded on collecting qualitative data through conversations. While the data have been analyzed and presented in a quantitative manner by disaggregating the responses by various categories, and presenting results in charts and graphs, it is important to note that this analysis is not statistically representative of the entire children and youth population. Hence, the analysis presented represents the prevalence of themes in the 661 conversations, but does not necessarily represent the prevalence of themes in the same frequency in the entire children and youth population. Therefore, while this study helps us to have a picture of the situation, it cannot be considered as statistically representative of the entire target population.

C. LIMITATIONS DUE TO EBOLA OUTBREAK

Due to the Ebola outbreak, we were unable to reach the number of KI interviews targeted; instead of 27 targeted we only interviewed 23 persons. This is due to the fact that we had restriction of movement and labour, as most of the actors were focusing their time on the Ebola response. Moreover, restrictions of movement were put in place for one day while we were collecting data in the field. For this reason, instead of having the 667 conversations originally targeted, we were able to conduct only 661 conversations.

D. LIMITATIONS OF THE LISTENING AND LEARNING APPROACH

The “Listening and learning” approach used for the research involves letting children address issues they wish to speak about. This implies that children might sometimes be victims of specific violence they won’t disclose during the conversations. This can be either because of social taboos around certain issues such as female genital mutilation or because the violence is normalized to such an extent that children do not consider certain acts to be violent, such as child labour.

The inductive approach also includes some limitations. Although research questions were defined before data collection, the main feature of the “Listening and Learning” approach is the construction of the theoretical framework through the research material. Researchers tried to apply axiological neutrality throughout the research process, letting children speak in an open framework. Hence, while specific questions were limited, even those were sometimes not answered by the children, occasionally making it difficult to systematize the data collected.

E. LIMITATIONS OF DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The categorization method also had certain limitations. For example, some violence fell into several categories. The classification was performed by each team independently during regional analysis, so that they made different choices depending on the region. This bias was rectified during the national analysis but some data may have been sorted in a different category depending on the district.

13 That can explain the FGM low prevalence of our study while the national prevalence is estimated to be 94% in 2006. http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/fgm/prevalence/en/
4. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS AND CATEGORIZATION PROCESS OF VIOLENCE

At the end of the 14 days in the field during which 25 researchers trained and deployed by Search for Common Ground and its partners CCYA and SLYEO collected data, 661 conversations with children and youth were collected in order to identify the worst forms of violence against children in Sierra Leone.

All four regions of Sierra Leone were targeted by the research, thus allowing a fair representation of social and cultural diversity in the country. As indicated in table number 1, the 661 conversations targeted 310 children (10-18) including 164 boys and 146 girls, and 351 youth (18-35) including 193 young men and 158 young women.

4.1 Recurring terms used by children and youth to talk about violence

The research methodology relied on using conversations as a free verbal exchange between the researcher and the child. Speech and words of children are the foundation of our research. Thus, it was important to transcribe the exact words used by children when they spoke about violence.

Among the most recurring terms, poverty was quoted in 240 conversations. Indeed, poverty is a structural factor in many situations of violence. Illiteracy and Ignorance were also recurrent terms in conversations. Children and youth also seemed very aware that some factors leading to violence were linked to cultural settings. For example, the use of physical violence as a form of discipline is widely spread within families in Sierra Leone. For these families, education and awareness on child rights could be a good trigger to decrease violence against children.

Corruption and Compromise were two other recurring terms that appeared in conversations. This stems from the fact that violent acts are rarely punished and most of the time these conflicts are settled within families and communities. The term wickedness shows how hard it is for children to live in violent environments; they experience it as an injustice. Dropout of school was also recurrent as a huge consequence of many forms of violence.

4.2 Categories of violence at the district level

The chart below (number 4) represents the frequency of categories of violence according to the different districts.

The following charts (5 to 12) disaggregate district data according to the gender and each category of violence.
FIGURE 3: Violence categories repartition by region

FIGURE 4: Categories of violence in Moyamba, disaggregated by gender
KONO

FIGURE 5: Categories of violence in Kono disaggregated by gender

KAMBIA

FIGURE 6: Categories of violence in Kambia disaggregated by gender
WESTERN AREA

FIGURE 7: Categories of violence in Western Area disaggregated by gender

PORT LOKO

FIGURE 8: Categories of violence in Port Loko disaggregated by gender
BOMBALI / TONKOLILI

FIGURE 9: Categories of violence in Bombali and Tonkolili disaggregated by gender

BO

FIGURE 10: Categories of violence in Bo disaggregated by gender
4.3 Categories of violence at the national level

Occurrences of violence are represented at the national level in the chart below (Figure 14). Each category of violence is disaggregated by gender in Figures 15 and 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Young women/ Girls</th>
<th>Young men/ Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence at home</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage pregnancy &amp; early marriage</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child exploitation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence at school</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion and community violence</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2: Frequency of occurrence of violence at the national level, disaggregated by gender
CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

FIGURE 12: Categories of violence at the national level

CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE FOR FEMALE

FIGURE 13: Repartition of violence for females

CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE FOR MALE

FIGURE 14: Categorization of violence for males
5. ANALYSIS OF THE SIX CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE

This section will present the six major categories of violence from our field data. This will include the demonstration of various forms of violence, an understanding of the factors and consequences of violence and a presentation of the recommendations made by children and youth during the fieldwork.

“Violence is when you take advantage of me just because you are bigger and stronger than me”. Young girl, 12. Kambia district

PICTURE 2: Research team conducting a conversation
5.1 Violence at home

A. DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE AT HOME

Violence at home was identified as the most frequent form of violence in Sierra Leone according to the 661 conversations conducted in the field. In total 226 children and youth talked about violence at home as the worst form of violence. Out of the 226 conversations, 131 boys talked about it and 95 girls. Those figures show a high prevalence of violence at home and that both boys and girls are victims of violence within their families. Despite the national legal framework punishing this kind of violence, the study shows that few recourse mechanisms are available for victims, and prevention work needs to be developed.

For the purpose of the research, we define violence at home as any kind of violence on children perpetrated by parents or guardians or any kind of violence happening within the family. That also includes domestic violence, that is to say, violence between wife and husband.

Children and youth explained the meaning they assigned to violence at home. According to them, violence at home is:

“When you take advantage over someone because you are older than him”.

“It's when you don't take care of your children”.

“Violence is when a child is beaten for something he has done but the matter has not been investigated”.

The research was able to capture the following types of violence at home.

VIOLENCE AT HOME

Physical abuse and child beating

This refers to the intentional use of physical force against a child, which results in harming the child’s health, survival, development, or rights. The physical maltreatment can be used by parents or guardians as a form of discipline and education. Physical abuse is often associated with other forms of maltreatment such as neglect or insults.

A 15 year-old girl from Bombali narrates this form of violence happening at home with her stepmother:

“I was sent to market to buy some food for the house to cook; unfortunately I misplaced the money, and returned...
home and reported the matter to my step mother. My step mother beat and starved me for a week without food at home that led me to go out and have sex for money so that I could buy food to eat.”

Child Neglect

This involves failing to meet the child’s basic needs and inadequate supervision by the parents or guardians who have responsibility to take care of the children.

A 10 year-old boy from Makeni said, “When my father died I was given to my father’s elder sister to take care of me; I was going to school before I lost my father. My aunt promised to take care of me. After the funeral I transferred to my aunt. My aunt sent her own children to school and deprive me. She did not let me go to school. This caused me to go out and work for other people for money so that I can pay my school fees.”

Child neglect can take several forms such as denying the right to education or denying the right to be well fed and properly dressed.

Insult/verbal

This type of violence in the home is the use of abusive words against children. Verbal abuse can be defined as the excessive use of language to undermine someone’s dignity and security through insults or humiliation in a sudden or repeated manner.

A 22 year-old woman from Tonkolili narrates: I was working for my aunt as a house girl because my parents are dead. She never appreciates anything I do for her. She shouts at me in front of her children, telling me all kind of words”.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence or violence between spouses is pervasive in Sierra Leone. According to an International Rescue Committee study in West Africa, six out of every 10 women who are seeking assistance after experiencing violence are reporting violence at the hands of their partner or spouse. The statistics reveal that partner abuse can take a variety of forms, and that often women suffer multiple types of violence over the course of a relationship. While physical assault is the most reported, women also come forward for help when abusive partners deprive them of economic resources for basic necessities. Men are often limiting women’s access to food or denying them control of money to buy medicine for a sick child or to pay school fees. Men often beat up their wives when they deny them sex.

In Moyamba, a 22 years old woman relates:

“I was driven out of my husband’s house because I was tired of sex for that day. I allowed him twice for that day and he wanted to go a third round. When I refused to go for the third time, I was beaten and driven out of the house. My husband said to me: I married you for sex, even if I want it a hundred times a day is my right.”

Domestic violence has been also reported by young women under 18 years old, already married or in premarital relationships.

---

A girl, 16 years old, in Bombali told us, “I was living with my husband. He always embarrassed me, beat me in front of my friends and said that I don’t know how to launder his clothes and also don’t know how to cook”.

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

Isolation

The stigma associated with living in an abusive partnership causes young people to isolate themselves even from friends and family, in effect barring themselves from their first and often only line of support.

“My friend is repeatedly beaten by her husband, she is more and more forced to stay at home, she cannot see her friends or her family. She is alone to face this problem.”

Physical injuries

Violence at home may cause physical injuries, some with long-term effects. Some women have a very bad situation directly due to the violence they experience from their husbands. Beating children can also lead to harmful impacts on health and development.

“My hand was burnt by my step mother because I stole her fish inside the pot. I did it because I was hungry. She took me outside of the house and went into the kitchen and put my right hand finger inside the fire and my finger was burnt down, then I lost it” (10 year old boy, Moyambamba district)

The Assistant Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police (AIG) Mustapha S. Kambeh also stated that “We (the police) have cases in which children are being beaten with scars on their body and some of their fingers are even burnt by their guardian”.

Drop out of school

Because of maltreatment or abuse at home, children may face difficulties in following their schooling. Main factors rely on lack of attention at school or parents depriving their children from going to school. “My step mother doesn’t treat me well. After school I had to go to the market and then go home and cook. After cooking, I had to go to the shop and work until midnight. I hadn’t time to study, so I failed to the exam, and I abandoned school because I had to work for my step mother.” (15 years old girl, Bo district)

Running away from home and Street children

Sometimes, children and youth have no other choice than to run away from the abusive relative. Female victims of domestic violence sometimes have no other alternatives than to go back to their families in order to escape from a husband’s violence.

“My father used to beat me all the time, for anything. I had a friend that has stayed out for long time in the street. He tempted me to go out and do odd job like washing plates, spoons and cups for cookery sellers in the town. I am a street boy now. But I face other violence in the street because of the street gang; they flogged us because we are younger than them” (16 years old boy from Tonkolili district)

15 Key Informant interview with Mustapha S. Kambeh
This can lead to extreme poverty and further health problems: “Now I am struggling with my health as you see me now, I have no food to eat. I am afraid to die in the street”

C. FACTORS

Factors leading to these types of violence at home are generally poverty and cultural traditions. Most parents are poor and cannot provide for the basic needs of their children. It appears also that in most cases parents do not realize the impact violence is having on the life of the children. Beating is normal discipline for many parents who react to anything a child does by beating him or her.

Ignorance and lack of knowledge about alternatives to violent discipline

It appears that parents and caregivers have poor knowledge of the impacts of violence on child development and wellbeing. Most of the parents use violent discipline as a way of educating their children. The violent discipline is hugely widespread all over the country. The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey for Sierra Leone in 2010 asserts that violent discipline is used by 81.7% of the parents or caregivers. This discipline includes physical punishment and psychological violence. The director of Defense for Children International said during an interview that “Corporal punishment is very common in the home or at school. It is no secret that almost all domestic relationships with children mostly end up in corporal punishment. Child beating, perhaps with a stick is another form of physical violence.” This statement has also been raised by Director of Youth and Child Advocacy Network, Mr. Hassan Fuad Kanu during the key informant interview: “I strongly do believe that domestic violence is particularly high because of our tradition. It is accepted from time immemorial that child beating or disciplining, better-still, is a way we use to punish or learn lessons in our society and is perceived as an African way of getting children to do the right thing.”

Adopted children and “confiage”

It appears that adopted children are very vulnerable to maltreatment and child neglect. It might be especially prevalent when their parents are dead or within the system of “confiage” in which parents send their children to extended family in order to give better opportunities for the children, especially in terms of education. The confiage system is a widespread tradition in which solidarity amongst extended family members is in the center. Nevertheless, the host families sometimes don’t keep their promises, use the children as labor force at home, neglect their needs, and maltreat them. A 10 year-old boy from Tonkolili said, “I am presently living with a neighbor who adopted me from my parent and promised to send me to school. I have spent three years with her. Up till now she did not send me to school. I am the one taking care of her children, washing their uniforms after school. I am not happy because I want to go to school like those children at home”.

Poverty

Poverty is also major factor contributing to child neglect and child maltreatment. The parents are financially bankrupt and cannot provide the basic amenities for their children, which might lead to child neglect and abusive child work.

Gender inequality

---


17 Director of Defense for Children International, Mr. Abdul Manaf Kemokai, Key informant interview.
In many communities women are not considered equal to men. This has a huge impact on violence against girls and women. Particularly in cases of domestic violence, for example men sometimes beat up their wife when the wife denies them sex. Men are not aware of women's rights and they often restrict women from the full enjoyment of their rights. Although marital rape is a criminal offense defined in the Sexual Offense Act, few people are aware that it constitutes a crime.

Gender inequality may also lead to making girls more vulnerable to child maltreatment and neglect:

*I want to go to school. I am seeing other girls going to school. My parents don’t want to send me to school because if I go to school nobody will assist them doing the work at home and also sell for them. I go out in the morning and sell till the evening and also buy food for the house. All my three brothers are going to school. My mother told me when I get married, my husband will take care of me, my brothers are going to take care of their home so they need to be educated and get money to take care of their own home*. (18 year-old female living in Kono district).

Money is often used as a tool of control within a relationship and women often cite lack of financial independence as a main reason that they cannot leave an abusive partner. The impact of economic abuse inflicted on women cannot be overstated. Often partners refuse to provide women money to cover basic expenses, and when women ask their partners for support to cover these household needs, the request can provoke dangerous disputes and many times is used as an excuse for physical violence.

**D. PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS AND EXISTING INTERVENTIONS**

Considering the view of children and youth towards violence at home, we discovered that victims are suffering in silence. Key informant interviews suggest that gender-based violence is significantly underreported by victims and as stated by Mr Woodie from the National Youth Commission, “In Sierra Leone violence is hinged on lawlessness with weak implementation of the law”\(^{18}\). Furthermore those who do disclose incidents tend to tell a close-knit circle of immediate family members and friends. Reporting the incident to the police is very rare because stigma, shame, and fear are the most frequently cited barriers that prevent young people from speaking out about violence they suffer.

According to Mohamed F. Konneh, from the National Commission for Children, “*Empowering children with life skills may be a preventive measure. It is infrequent that we see a child reporting such violence. Children themselves need to be equipped. Until they know, they will never talk about it because they are growing-up with the idea that violence is a form of corrective measures used by parents supporting them with life skills*”\(^ {19}\).

Since the violence is happening at home, few interventions are available for children suffering from neglect and maltreatment. Children have nevertheless highlighted that NGOs can sometimes help those victims by providing monthly feeding and medication. Some others help in supporting their schooling fees or helping them to go back to school when they drop out from school. Neighbors are sometimes helpful in making parents aware about the harm of beating children. Sometimes, in cases of neglect, especially when children are not fed properly, the community supports those children. In some cases, when the violence is reported to the police it can lead to prosecution as it has been the case for this 13 year-old child in Pujehun district:

*I was a victim of violence by my step-father. He usually punished me harshly (...) Once he punished me severely with a lot of wounds on my body. Eventually a man was passing by and saw that ugly incident. He rushed to the scene...*
to rescue me. That was how my stepfather was arrested and charged to court and he was arrested for three weeks. After his released he has never punished me again”.

The Family Support Unit (FSU), which is an institution depending on the Ministry of Social Welfare Gender and Children’s Affairs, can be helpful in some areas to protect children from violence at home. FSU seems very active in some areas of the country such as in Moyamba, where children often cited it as an institution they can rely on in case of serious violence. In some areas, child welfare committees are very active in discussing and taking measures in case of harmful practices at home. The action of these committees has been raised in Matotoka and Tonkolili and has been supported by the town chiefs.

Generally, intervention on domestic violence relies on community mechanisms and most of the time protection measures are taken when the violence level is alarming. That means that prevention and sensitization actions are mostly missing in many communities, especially with regard to the high level of domestic violence in the country.

E. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even if violence at home remains underreported and is gravely underestimated, it is important to underline that youth and children have been able to come up with many recommendations and they are prepared to take action. They explained said that the main obstacle hindering them from taking action is the place they have in the community. Most of them were afraid that parents and community members would never listen to them regarding violence happening at home. Some of the recommendations brought up by the children and youth are listed below:

1. Engage young people on radio talk and in drama presentations on children’s rights.

2. Organize child/parents conversations and human rights awareness campaigns at the community level, and involve youth groups in house-to-house sensitizations in local languages.

3. Reinforce the role of FSU and Child Welfare Committees in communities in order to render this institution more child friendly and gender sensitive (for example: an interviewer of the child’s same sex in cases of gender-based violence).

4. There should be a separate magistrate and a permanent judge for domestic violence and child maltreatment cases to prevent a delay in justice. The settlement of these cases at family level and among community people without any external body should be discouraged.

5. More facilities should be made available to the less privileged children in their communities such as providing education, food, and clothing since many situations of violence at home arise from poverty.

6. Solutions should be created for women victims of domestic violence, such as professional training and temporary shelters, since women often have no solution except staying with their violent husbands.
5.2 Teenage Pregnancy and Early Marriage

A. DEFINITION

According to our data, teenage pregnancy and early marriage were mentioned in 210 conversations, making this issue the second worst form of violence against children and youth in Sierra Leone. More girls and women have reported this violence as the worst form of violence in their community since 111 women and girls talked about this issue during the conversations compared to 99 boys and men.

The research shows that early marriage and teenage pregnancy have a huge impact on adolescents’ lives and in compromising their future and their health. Teenage pregnancy can sometimes be as a result of early or forceful marriage. Conversely, early marriage can also result from teenage pregnancy. Therefore teenage pregnancy and early marriage are closely related to one another.

For children and youth, early marriage and teenage pregnancy have been defined in these terms:

“Disappointment on an arrangement forcing someone to do something against his will”

“Taking advantage of young age to destroy the future of young people”

According to the Sierra Leone national strategy for the reduction of teenage pregnancy launched by the government in February 2013: “This issue is alarming: it is indicated that more than one third of all pregnancy involves teenage girls and up to 40% of maternal death occurs among them.” According to this strategy, 34% of all pregnancies occur amongst teenage girls, and 47% of girls reaching 18 years of age had already a child or were pregnant. In 2010, 16% of girls were married before 15 years of age and 50% were married before 18 years of age.

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

Teenage pregnancy and early marriage have many impacts on victims and communities.

Social and family exclusion

Firstly, teenage pregnancy and early marriage often result in girls losing their pride, value, respect, and dignity. This often leads to neglect and girls are frequently disowned by their community. Often, parents will drive out their pregnant daughter from their home. Pregnant teenagers also suffer from discrimination and exclusion from the community even when the pregnancy is a result of sexual violence.

A 16 year-old girl in Moyamba relates, “I got pregnant at the age of 14 by a man in my neighborhood who used to call me his wife. My parents were so annoyed and disappointed over the issue and had to disown me by driving me out of the house. I had no option but to stay with the man who impregnated me and was forced to marry him.”

Adolescent pregnancy leads to feelings of isolation and depression. They feel like they are trapped and helpless in their own community, as the story of this 17 year old girl from Moyamba district demonstrates. She got married at 14 because she had no parent to support her. Her husband was violent and eventually left her with two children. She said, “I barely survive on selling cassava in the village to support the kids at home.”

---

Look at my life now at this stage. I have two kids and there is nobody to take care of us, I am totally abandoned and suffering in this village. What future do I have?”

This stigmatization was underlined during our interviews: “In Sierra Leone when you are a teenager and you are pregnant and unmarried, you are a second-class citizen.”

Health problems

Another consequence of teenage pregnancy is complication at childbirth which sometimes leads to early death of both teenage mothers and their unborn babies. According to the government, teenage pregnancy accounts for about 8% of maternal death. It also leads to premature and malnourished babies and can also lead to girls contracting fistula while delivering. It also leads to unsafe abortions, which are estimated to be around 34,000 per year.

Dropout of school

In most cases, teenage pregnancy and early marriage result in dropping out of school for both boys and girls. Therefore, teenage pregnancies contribute to the low levels of girls attending secondary school in Sierra Leone. The former deputy education director called for more incentive on teenage pregnancy in Sierra Leone: “More girls would stay in school if they had more role models to look up to. We need to reward high-performing girls and hold them up as an example to others. Girls top the primary school tests, but then they disappear out of secondary school. It is such a loss for the community.” Social stigma pressures pregnant girls to leave school as soon as they become pregnant. “In Sierra Leone when you are a teenager and you are pregnant and unmarried, you are a second-class citizen.”

“I got pregnant from one of my teachers. My parents abandoned me, without taking any action against the teacher. There was no option for me to further my schooling or education. I decided to stay with the teacher. Later on I could not make it up to return to school again. I should have been a school girl but now I am a mother taking care of two children.” (16 year old girl from Port Loko District)

According to UNICEF, teenage pregnancy is one of the three most common reasons for dropout of school in Sierra Leone.

21 Interview with Mr. Bashiru Thullah, Social Service Officer at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, October 2014
22 National Strategy on teenage pregnancy
C. FACTORS

Rape and sexual violence

Some teachers are in the habit of exchanging grades or giving high grades to girls in exchange for sex. A 17 year old girl in the Kambia district relates, “Most of the teachers gave grades for sex; I was victim of this which has resulted for me to an early pregnancy and give birth at an early age.”

Sometimes girls get pregnant as a result of rape by elders, youth, or social workers in the community. Gender based violence and gender inequality appear to be one of the factors for teenage pregnancy and early marriage. For instance, a girl told us that she was raped by a social worker who was supposed to advocate for young girls against teenage pregnancy and early marriage.

“This was how I was a victim; the perpetrator got rid of me and ran away and left me with the pregnancy. I am now suffering as a single mother”.

Lack of knowledge about contraception and safe sex

Most parents and community members are not well informed about contraception. Public hospitals are available in the various districts in the country but most villages lack health centers, leading to lack of reliable information on contraception. It appears also that people may have misconceptions about contraception. For example some people think that contraception can result in illness and infection. These misconceptions and lack of information lead to failure to properly educate children on the risks of having unprotected sex. In the case of religious beliefs, most religious groups in Sierra Leone see the use of contraceptives like condoms and pills as a taboo. Some girls are influenced by their peers to engage in early sex or relationships without knowing the risks they might face. They do not have proper information about teenage pregnancy and contraception.

“I am a victim of teenage pregnancy because of my friend. When we were going to school she used to tell me to go and accompany her to her boyfriend after school. During that process she convinced me to be in love with her boyfriend’s friend which I did. During that process I had no idea about contraception. I eventually got impregnated by the boy and both of us suffer from not going to school anymore.” (14 year old girl in Moyamba district)

Poverty

Most of the parents whose children are victims of teenage pregnancy will force them to get married early to the man responsible for the pregnancy because they do not have the financial means to take care of their daughter and the child. Early marriage are also sometimes a way to gain favor within their community by giving their girl to man of power and ensuring a better future for their child.

“My family gave me in marriage at 13 to a chief in our own town, because of the expectation from my family that the chief is rich and he will support me for my schooling and protect my family. Not knowing that I am falling into a trap of danger, which has resulted to me missing my education and I have already given birth to two children and if you can see me now I am presently pregnant.”. (17 years old, Moyamba district)

Poverty plays a crucial role in teenage pregnancy because it is sometimes a way for the girl to obtain what their family cannot afford for them; it is a way to survive.
“When I was selling pure water for my parents, I came in contact with a man that is older than me. He proposed to me a relationship and will support for my schooling items. I was impressed about the man because he bought for me a mobile phone which I had never had access to. (...) I got pregnant but my parents drove me out of home. I have no option but to go stay with him, so that was why I dropped out of school.” (18 year old woman in Port Loko district)

D. PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS AND EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

According to the various conversations around teenage pregnancy, when the parents do not accept the early pregnancy of their girls and kick them out of the home, very few protective mechanism are available for the victims. Most of the time, the victim has no other option but marry the man responsible for the pregnancy whether or not it was a result of rape or abuse of power from elders, teachers or NGO workers.

Sometimes, in case of rape, parents together with some family members report violence cases to the chief or to the police through FSU. But rape cases are rarely prosecuted. According to our data, it happens that the police take bribe from the perpetrator and their family to compromise the rape case. Sometimes, files of victims are missing from reports, which results in injustice to girls. Most of the time, the resolution of the problem will be at the community level without any prosecution in cases of rape. Sometimes the girl is even forced to marry the perpetrator as a way for the family to resolve the issue.

Nevertheless, some NGOs such as Pikin to Pikin, Defense for Children International and some others, are working on this issue, especially in supporting adolescent girls to continue their schooling after giving birth. But this support is rarely available in remote areas. Also, PLAN Sierra Leone with other implementing partners put in place the girl power project which provides education for girls in vulnerable communities in order to reduce teenage pregnancy.

Through our research work, we have also been able to discover customary laws that elders have put in place in their community. The elders established a law that any boy who impregnates a schoolgirl will also dropout of school and other laws ensure protections for the girl to give birth safely. Both the boy and girl will return to school supported by the boy’s family. But this is not always possible, especially when the boy’s family is extremely poor.

E. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teenage pregnancy and early marriage is a serious problem for young girls in Sierra Leone but children and youth have been very keen to come with recommendations and ideas on how they can play a role in preventing this violence by organizing:

» Peer sensitization on sexuality, family planning and the dangers of teenage pregnancy.

» Raising awareness on negative effects of teenage pregnancy through radio discussion, drama production, street theatre, and songs within their communities.

» Elders, parents, and communities must be sensitized to the importance of both girls and boys in continuing their schooling in case of teenage pregnancy.

They also underlined some recommendations to several child protection actors in the country:

» Better availability of family planning methods, especially in remote areas.
» Local authorities and central government should ensure law enforcement to guarantee that sexual violence is prosecuted and early marriages are abolished.

» The issue of teacher’s code of conduct should be taken up with teachers and heads of schools by providing training and control over “sex for grades” practices. Teachers who commit rape or impregnate schoolgirls should be prosecuted and fired from schools.

## 5.3 Violence against Women and Girls

### A. DEFINITION

In Sierra Leone, one of the greatest barriers to women’s economic advancement and to the success of broader development efforts is the violence women face routinely. Not only does such violence impede women’s ability to live full and productive lives, it hampers their contributions to family, society and economic development26. Sexual violence prevents women from going to work, engaging in their communities, and accessing educational opportunities to create better lives for themselves and their children. The effect of sexual violence can be devastating to a women’s reproductive health as well as other aspects of her physical and mental wellbeing27.

Our data shows a high prevalence of violence against girls and women since it was mentioned in 135 conversations by 59 boys and 76 girls. From our study different kinds of gender-based violence have been highlighted by the children and youth, namely:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF TIMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual penetration</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Rape and sexual penetration

Rape and sexual penetration constitute a crime under the Sierra Leonean Law. A legal document called the Sierra Leone Sexual Offences Act 2012 is an act to consolidate with amendments the law dating to sexual offences. This law protects the right of women and girls from sexual abuses. The Sexual Offences Act generally states that “A person who intentionally commits any act of sexual penetration with another person without the consent of that person commits the offence of rape and is liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment not less than five years and not exceeding fifteen years28”.

According to the Sierra Leone Sexual Offences Act, **Sexual Penetration** is the rape of a child under the age of 18 years old. Glasgow, head of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) said, “We saw sexual violence

---

26 African development Bank Group, *Sierra Leone Country Gender Profile*, October 2011
used as a tool during the war and now it is morphing into the society’s culture as something that is understood and even accepted.\textsuperscript{29}

The issue of sexual violence as a serious public health and human rights problem has profound short- and long-term impacts on physical and mental health. Women and girls suffer disproportionately from these kinds of violence and it can occur to any female at any age. It can also be perpetrated by parents, care-givers, acquaintances, workers, intimate partners, and strangers. Sexual violence is not a crime of passion; it is rather an aggressive act that frequently aims to express power and dominance over the victim. Within the home and community settings, another set of perpetrators include community elders, bike riders, NGO workers, and elderly elite who are usually referred to as “Sugar Daddies”. These groups of perpetrators sexually exploit girls in exchange for money and access to costly entertainment facilities. According to the School related gender based violence study, “Sugar Daddies” contributed to about 15 percent of all sexual violence/exploitation cases making them the second most common perpetrators of such abuse only next to teachers in Sierra Leone\textsuperscript{30}.

From the research conducted by young researchers in Sierra Leone, the respondents (children and youth) defined sexual penetration/rape as “the penetration of the sexual organ of the man into the female organ against her wish”. It is also “forcefully having sexual intercourse with them”.

“I was sexually penetrated by my aunt’s husband whom I call my uncle when I was 13. One night my uncle entered the room and forcefully raped me, I cried out loudly but there was no one to help me. I reported the issue to the chief and elders in our community, and they called him and asked him if he is guilty. He denied it. My aunt came back and she said that I want to tarnish her husband’s character and she started maltreating me. I got fed-up and left their house to stay with my friend” (a 19 year old girl in New London Waterloo, Western Area).

**Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment was defined as “unlawful touching of a sensitive body parts of a woman”. Even sexual talks were considered to them as sexual harassment. Moreover, Sierra Leone sexual Offences Act of 2012 clearly states that a person who repeatedly makes unwanted sexual advances, repeatedly follows or pursues or accosts another person or makes persistent unwelcome communication with another person commits the offence of harassment and is liable on conviction of a fine not exceeding ten million Leones or a term of imprisonment not exceeding three years.

For example a 15 year old boy in Moyamba said, “My younger sister at the age of 10 is constantly been harassed by a man who always touches her buttocks and breast and calls her his wife, pretending to be a joke. I hate the behavior of that man and report him to my mother who takes no action but rather laughs at it and says that the man is only making fun of my sister. So what I normally do is to stone the man as a way of doing justice for my sister.”

Sexual harassment can lead to other forms of sexual violence such as rapes. As stated by the director of Defense for Children International, “There is also sexual violence perpetrated against children in the form of sexual penetration in which case the child in question ends up being defiled, or being harassed by an elderly person

\textsuperscript{29} IRIN, Sex crimes continues in Peacetime in Sierra Leone , 20\textsuperscript{th} of June 2008, http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=78853

\textsuperscript{30} School related gender based violence in Sierra Leone, op. cit.
Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation is another form of violence perpetrated against girls and women. Female genital mutilation (FGM) as the term implies, refers to the circumcision of women. The most widespread female cutting is the removal of the clitoris; other forms of female mutilation can also include the cutting the whole or part of the labia minora or labia majora. FGM represents an important part of the rites of passage ceremony for some communities in Sierra Leone, marking the coming of age of the female child. FGM imposes on women and girls a catalogue of health complications and untold psychological problems. The practice of FGM violates, among their traditional human rights laws, the right of the child to the “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health as laid down article 24” (pars, 1 and 3) of the convention of the rights of the child. The instruments used to perform the procedure for FGM are often re-used for FGM on numerous girls without proper instrument sterilization, thereby increasing the risk of blood-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

In our research, FGM was discussed as a form of violence in only four conversations. This is not because it has been reduced but essentially because it is perceived as taboo to speak about. This cultural norm has long been in existence and is passed from generation to generation. For this reason, most of our participants choose not to talk about it in the majority of districts we covered. While a few others did speak of it, some were stopped from continuing such discussions with our colleagues and researchers by their elders/parents. In 2010, it was considered that 88% of the women were subjected to FGM in Sierra Leone, which makes Sierra Leone one of the countries in the world where FGM is the most prevalent. Moreover this traditional practice still has great support in Sierra Leone since 75% of the women aged 45 to 49 years, and 53% of the women aged 15 to 19 years think the practice should continue.

“I will never forgive my parents what they did to me when I was 10 years of age. My parents forcefully took me out from school and wickedly initiated me into the bondo (secret) society. I was ill and so taken away from school by my mother who told me we were going to the hospital. Innocently I followed her unto a point where we met some elderly women who glare at me and whisper to my mother. I was handed over to them. These people forcefully initiated me and I almost bled to death. The act was painful and terrible so that I couldn’t withstand the pain; I went into a coma for about three days and also missed school for a whole term. It wasn’t my wish. So that is why I will never forgive my parents, especially my mother” (18 year old girl in Moyamba)

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

Stigmatization and discrimination

It seems that there is much more stigma towards being a victim of rape than being a rapist. Most girls and women who have been raped are afraid of taking part in any activity in the community because of the names given to them by community people. This makes victims isolate themselves from others and lack confidence in people. In some communities, survivors are ostracized and might be victims of discrimination while accessing services such as health or education.

---

31 Director of Defense for Children International, Mr. Abdul Manaf Kemokai, Key informants interview
32 UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/cutting, A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*, 2009
34 UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/cutting, A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*, 2009
I feel bad and sometimes I wish I am dead whenever I think of my status of being a victim of sexual violence by my own uncle in the same house. I was inside my room my uncle rushed into my room and forcefully made love with me and I got pregnant from him. Anywhere I go people gossip about me and I feel shy of going to school even to move around the community.” (16 years old living in Mofombo, Moyamba district)

Sexual perpetration, rape and sexual harassment lead to physical, emotional and psychological trauma for most victims. Their experience during the period of rape or sexual harassment stays in their mind and continues to disturb them whenever they think of it.

Another girl, 15 years of age, in Moyamba said, “I feel bad and sometimes wish I am dead whenever I think of my status of been a victim of sexual violence. My friends gossip about me and I feel shy of going to school.”

Medical issues

Sexual violence has many impacts on physical health of the victims. “Most of the victims experience bleeding, and find it difficult to give birth in the future”, said an 18 year old girl in Fakunya Chiefdom, Moyamba District. Sexual violence constitutes also a high risk for sexually transmitted disease, especially HIV/AIDS.

Teenage Pregnancy, early marriage and dropping out of school

Sexual perpetration leads to teenage pregnancy and in some cases to prostitution. Most girls are being deflowered during rape and they sometimes get pregnant, which forces them to drop out of school. When girls are being raped by stakeholders, office workers and investors they later take to prostitution with these same men because of money and fancy gifts. They become school dropouts to nurse the pregnancy or continue with the prostitution, which hinders their future opportunities.

Most victims of FGM get married just after the initiation/mutilation and drop out of school. This is a contributing factor to early and forced marriages. This puts an end to girls’ educational future and renders a child mother simply because tradition says so. FGM has also a lot of impacts on women’s health.

“One of the bad things about this female genital mutilation is that girls and women lose some component of their genital part in the process which reduces their sexual feeling and also most victims develop medical issues like infections on their private part from the use of unsterilized instruments during the circumcision”, explained a 25 year old lady in Bo District.

C. FACTORS

According to children and youth, multiple factors can explain the high prevalence of violence against girls and women.

Poverty and lack of parental care are two contributing factors that are responsible for high rates of rape and sexual harassment. Poverty tends to make girls and women more vulnerable to violence. Parents and guardians who are not able to provide the basic needs for their children render their girls more vulnerable to sexual violence. Most poor young girls have no option but to trade which can lead them to being raped by men who pretend to help them, but have an intention to rape them. Girls beg men for money and help and the men use this as an advantage to rape, as is the case with “Sugar Daddies”.

Persons of influence taking advantage of their positions: Teachers, Lecturers, NGO office workers,
investors, and civil servants take advantage of their position to rape young girls and youths in different communities in the country. They have sex with girls in exchange for grades, gifts, money and jobs. For example, some bosses in offices use their power of authority to influence girls or their female staff to have sex with them in return for a job offer. Also, we see in the case of violence at schools and universities wherein teachers and lecturers harass their pupils and students to have sex with them in exchange for grades. A 12 year old girl, living at Sahn Malen chiefdom in Pujehun District, explains her story. She said, “My father died when I was a baby and was brought up by my mother in a single parenthood. An NGO worker who was a friend to my mother was paying my fees and helping my family. My mother sometimes prepares food for him, which I normally bring to his home. One day when I took his food home for him, I was brutally and sexually harassed by this man thereby losing my virginity and getting pregnant. The matter was reported to the police and nothing was done by them. Instead the man’s organization took care of me and my baby. This was how the case was compromised. I lost my virginity and got pregnant in the name of securing help or favour for my family.”

**Negative peer influence and idleness among men** makes them more likely to rape women. This also leads to gang rape, where one female is being raped by more than one man. “A girl was raped by five men under a mango tree” said a lady in Pujehun district.

“Idleness makes men to sit around in groups and discuss about women and think of committing sexual violence”. – A 25 year old lady in Bo district.

For female genital mutilation the main contributing factor is tradition. Female genital mutilations are very enshrined in cultural and traditional practices in Sierra Leone. It is a social norm that is very difficult to change especially because it is a taboo within communities.

One of our interviewees said that peer influence can also be a factor for FGM, from girls age mates, discussing their experiences about the new dresses and jewelries bought for them after the process and the varieties of dishes prepared for them. All the pampering makes their mates choose to enter the initiation room even when their parents are not ready to initiate them. There is an established rule by the leaders of female genital mutilation that once you enter into the place where the circumcision is done; you don’t come out without being initiated willingly or unwillingly. “I was initiated last year. When they took my elder sisters for the initiation I cried and later I went and entered the “bondo bush” (room) unknowing to my parents, so I was initiated”.

**Lack of awareness about children and women’s rights in the country**

Men take advantage of the fact that girls and women don’t know their rights and are mostly afraid to report sexual perpetration / rape and sexual harassment cases. “Most of our youths are illiterate, they can’t read or write and they don’t listen to radio to know what is happening” said by a female youth in Tonkolili.

“The government should let the people of this country know that women and girls are not dogs to be treated in any manner” said a 22 year old man in Kambia.

**Corruption and compromise**

Parents and community leaders sometimes bribe the police to cover up sexual violence cases in order to avoid prosecution. In many cases, community members prefer to solve those issues within the community.
“The police are very quick to change blue to red” said a female youth in Bo about a rape case being compromised. Mrs Jane Bangura from the Forum for African Women Educationalists explained similar factors for sexual violence, “Perpetrators found guilty should be not only be fined but also sent to a correctional centre. There should also be the will of community leaders to fight against these forms of violence because they are very often very indulgent with perpetrators.”

Married men said their wives should not refuse them sex no matter the condition; they don’t need permission or consent to have sex with their wives, so they use force. “Sex should be an agreement and not by force” said a fifteen year-old girl in Kambia. “My sister was beaten to death by her husband when she refused to have sex with him one day because she was tired. No action was taken by our parents because they said he was her husband. My sister’s children are now suffering this really bad” said a 15 year old girl in Russels, Western Area.

According to the latest statistics for Sierra Leone, 927 cases of sexual abuse were reported in 2009. Many of these rape cases happen to girls at a young age, 65 percent of the victims at four different IRC clinics were under 15 years. However, despite the laws against these abuses, sexual violence and domestic abuse, offenders remain unpunished and impunity prevails. In fact, out of 927 sexual abuse cases reported in the country in 2009, there were no convictions. 460 cases were under investigation, 40 cases were pending while 122 were resolved or withdrawn and 2 cases were dismissed.

D. PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS AND EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

From our research work in all of the above districts, the FSU was mentioned as one of the actors intervening in sexual violence cases. They have been investigating cases reported by victims and they have a manual which guides them in handling different cases of sexual violence. The problem reported by children and youth with FSU is that they don’t ensure enforcement of the laws since judges are responsible for prosecution. FSU’s role is about protecting victims and building a judicial case for prosecution. If no judge prosecutes the case then the sexual offense remains unpunished.

Parents sometimes can play a role by asking their child (the victim) who the perpetrator is and finding ways of handling the matter. The problem is that in many cases they settle the problem within the family leaving the perpetrator out of prosecution. The role of neighbors and community members has sometimes been highlighted by children and youth as a factor of protection. They have been joining hands together to handle sexual violence cases and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to book to be prosecuted. Some of these communities do not have police stations, and the victims have to come to the chiefdom headquarters in town. In some cases the elders in the community do not want to report to the police in order not to cause trouble within the community. This brings about pitfalls because the perpetrators are sometimes left unpunished and send a message to the victim and to other would-be perpetrators that impunity for sexual crime is normal.

The work done by community based organizations (CBO’s), civil society organizations (CSO’s), Sierra Leone Red DADA-SL and some Human Right Organizations, in both sexual violence cases and FGM, has created much impact. Non-Governmental Organizations such as Pikin to Pikin Movement in Moyamba (which was mentioned by all the respondents in Moyamba) have been investigating cases and helping

35 Interview with Jane Bangura, Education manager, Forum for African Women Educationalists, April 2015
36 The data have been collected by IRC through the rainbo centers for victims of sexual violence in Sierra Leone, IRIN, Sex crimes continues in Peacetime in Sierra Leone, 20th of June 2008, http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=78853
37 Ibidem
victims. Defense for Children International (DCI), Save the Children, World Vision and NimiRight which were mentioned in Sewafe Chiefdom in Kono district, have been greatly involved in combating and preventing violence against women and girls.

All of these organizations have been investigating cases of sexual penetration/rape, sexual harassment and FGM, and they have provided lawyers where these cases are taken to court and have been supporting the victims both financially and materially. The youths in some districts have also been helping out in the fight against sexual violence and FGM in their communities even when some of them are the perpetrators.

In Pujehun, the youth formed a group called the vigilante group after one incident of gang rape (a girl had been raped by five male youth) under a mango tree a few months ago (other rape incidents had also occurred under this same mango tree). The youth created this group to keep the town under surveillance, help investigate rape cases, and bringing perpetrators to book. There is also another youth group in Moyamba, called “the one family group,” that is involved in helping the police with the investigation of these cases. However, assurance of perpetrators being brought to justice is still lacking in many cases. There is also some amount of intervention by the community hospitals that provide medical reports for these cases, which serve as tangible evidence needed for the issue to be investigated by the police.

E. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and youth targeted by this research raised some prevention activities they would be ready to take part of:

» Mass sensitization in communities on laws related to sexual offense as well as on raising awareness on gender equality and sexual violence against women.

» Specific sensitization of parents, elders and community members in order to ensure enforcement of the law and reduce the practices of handling sexual crimes within families and communities.

» Providing support, both technical and financial to local youth organizations and women groups in order for them to take a role in preventing violence against girls and women in their community.

They also have raised recommendations for child protection actors, including governmental and non-governmental actors:

» There should be a separate magistrate and a permanent judge for sexual violence cases to prevent delay in justice. The settlement of these cases at family level and among community people without any external body such as police should be discouraged and anyone court should be punished. Health centers must be made available in all communities, even the smallest village, to ensure proper medical service in relation to this sexual violence in the country.

» In some areas FSU must be more gender sensitive in dealing with sexual violence and gender based violence. Every FSU must have a woman trained to listen to sexual violence cases. Psychosocial support must be available for victims.

» The government should join hands with organizations that have been working on the fight against female genital mutilation in the country to ensure that as a form of violence against women and girls, this is eradicated and prevented.
5.4 Child exploitation

A. DEFINITION

Children’s experiences during the war left them acutely vulnerable to all forms of exploitation and deprivation. As the group that suffered the most from the worst atrocities of the conflict, children were prioritized for special support in the post-conflict reconstruction (GoSL, 2005). The government admitted that ‘various exploitative forms and practices of child labour are widespread and endemic. They must be curtailed as they significantly affect the growth and development of children. Child labour has many faces… and is often hidden by cultural perceptions and child rearing practices’\(^{38}\). It was estimated that thousands of children between the ages of 7 and 16 years were working in the mining town of Koidu in the Kono district where conditions were likened to slave labour. The number of children formerly associated with armed forces and groups and working in mines in 2003 was estimated at between 2,000 and 3,000. UNICEF’s Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone\(^{39}\) concluded that children were involved in a wide variety of activities stretching from domestic chores and family business, to labour that seriously damaged their health and development.

A further report by UNICEF, Out-of-school children in Sierra Leone highlighted the rising incidence of internal child trafficking where children ended up ‘working as child labourers, the majority of which are involved in petty trading, fishing, mining and other forms of hazardous work’(UNICEF, 2008)\(^{40}\).

According to MICS 2010 report 50% of the children are involved in child labor.\(^{41}\) According to our data, the issue of child exploitation was mentioned in 124 conversations including 73 boys and 51 girls.

---

38 University of Bradford, Department of peace studies The worst forms of Child labor in conflict and post-conflict setting, Sierra Leone, 2010 file:///C:/Users/H%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne.%20D/Downloads/5-4worst-forms-of-child-labour-country-reps-sierra-leone%20(1).pdf

39 University of Bradford, Department of peace studies, The worst forms of Child Labor, Sierra Leone country report, 2010 file:///C:/Users/H%C3%A9l%C3%A8ne.%20D/Downloads/5-4worst-forms-of-child-labour-country-reps-sierra-leone%20(1).pdf

40 (UNICEF, 2008)

41 (Gov 2010)MICS
Our data indicates that Pujehun District recorded the highest number of this form of violence, quite possibly due to the fact that the children in this part of the country are mostly engaged in either mining or working under hazardous conditions in the oil palm plantations owned by the SOCFIN Agricultural Company. Mining activities in Kono have also attracted a massive influx of young people from other regions of the country where economic opportunities are scarce, and the sector has been associated with child labour in various reports during the post-conflict era. In addition, the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Sierra Leone Report states that Kenema and Kailahun district record the highest occurrence of child labour, but we were unable to go there owing to the wide spread of the Ebola epidemic.

Children and youth who were our participants in our Listening and Learning conversation described child exploitation according to what is actually affecting them. This means that, if a particular child, for example, is being taken from her parents to the city (trafficking) for the purpose of schooling and being cared for, yet such a relative does contrary to caring and schooling her, that child would be vehement in defining child exploitation as a situation where, “my aunt takes me from the village and from my parents to the city to put me in school but uses me to work for her in order to find money.” (boy, 15 years old in Tombo, Freetown). In another case, a participant described child exploitation (financial and labour exploitation) to mean a situation where, “my aunt or guardian maltreats me and uses me as a source of income and there is no one to help me” (girl, 12, Sahn Malen, Pujehun). Or if it is a case of labour exploitation, against orphans, a child (boy, 14 years old, Gundama, Bo District) described this form of violence as, “when my step-mother beats me mercilessly and steps on my stomach for not being able to do the farm work due to my ill-health”. This clearly tells us that these children experience harm from exploitative guardians.

We came across different forms of exploitation that children in this country are going through, during our Listening and Learning conversations. Child exploitation is taking place in different contexts from homes to mines. Below is a short description of a few of the contexts.

Agriculture

According to children and youth, agriculture is one broad form of child exploitation and it involves children doing hazardous work in some farms, be it for the home or for some company. As we discovered, this can be categorized into two sub-forms:

*Domestic farm work*: this involves children doing some form of farm work beyond their capacity for their guardian or parents. If they refuse to comply, they are maltreated by these parents or guardian and are still coerced to work notwithstanding the health status of the child. One of our participants told us that he was mercilessly beaten by his step mother simply because he was sick and unable to do the farm work, as he related, “my step-mother beat me mercilessly and stepped on my stomach for not being able to do the farm work due to my ill-health.”

*Employed Farm Work*: this is a situation in which children are being employed to work for farm owners or a company and are either underpaid or overworked by these employers. A case we came across had to do with children being employed at the SOCFIN Agricultural Company in Sahn Malen Chiefdom, Pujehun...
District in the southern province of Sierra Leone were children about 14-17 years old are employed. They reported to work from 3AM when the trucks left to the field until 6PM. They are not allowed to eat during work hours and are paid 11,500 Leones daily instead of 25,000 as was agreed. Also, they were being sacked at will, and one of them told us that they needed to help their family so they do not have many options but to comply and work at this company and that they say to themselves, “employ me today and relieve me of duty today”. Another related to us that the abuse has become so much that there is no one to speak on their behalf and that, “instead of SOCFIN it’s SUFFERING” which is an indication that they are being labored under hazardous conditions and disposed of by their employer at will.

Mining

Mining also stands as a form of exploitation children are going through in this country and can be subdivided into diamond and sand mining as we were told from our research in the field. Diamond Mining: This includes the recruitment of underage children to work in the mines and despite the payment they receive in some instances, they are mostly working beyond their capacity. This is often done in Kono and some parts of Bo districts. One of our participants told us that they were asked by their license holder to pay a sum of Le 100,000 so that they could work for themselves but merely wanted to exploit them as he knew well that they were unable to raise such ‘exorbitant’ money as he did put.

Sand Mining: This, according to some of our participants, is another form of child exploitation mostly reported in Pujehun and Bo district.

Domestic Work

This form of child exploitation involves children working for the home in which they live, whether they are with their biological parents, step-parents, or guardians. As helpers in the home, they are left to do virtually all the work regardless of their age or physical capacity. For example, a child brought from the village to a bigger town to be taken care of starts by rendering assistance to the guardian in the home tentatively until school reopens, yet ends up being permanently being house help as one of our participants told us, “My aunt promised to school me but said I need to be helping her in the home to do the house work until school re-opens and then I may start... my friends were going to school each day and I saw them every morning while I sit at home and work” (girl, 12 years old, in Makeni, Bombali district).

Child Trafficking

Most children brought to bigger towns in the guise of caring for and schooling them end up being sources of income for their exploitative guardians as they are forced to work for their foster family. Trafficking has been defined by Palermo Protocol as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”. Moving a child from his family in order to make him work constitutes traffic in person. According to the conversations, this form of child exploitation is a common practice in Sierra Leone.

---

44 Le (Le) is the national money. 1US Dollar is equal to around 4500 Leones.
work exposes them to other forms of maltreatment. Most of the time children are too young to carry the responsibility to be a street seller, they sometimes lose the money they earned, and even get assaulted in the street.

“My guardian throws my belongings outside and says I should not return home because I lost part of the money I sold for the day” (Girl, 13 years old, Bayama Gbonda, Pujehun District).

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

The biggest impact of child exploitation is dropping out of school. This can be explained by the fact that a child who might have been taken away from his parent by a relative for the purpose of schooling, as in some of the conversations from our findings, would not be sent to school by that relative, yet will be used as either an income bringer (being given a particular trade to do) and ends up being a source of income or being used as a domestic slave (left to do all the house work).

Another child was stopped from going to school by his aunt in Pujehun district because she was sick and said that the child should sit at home to keep watch over her, should she need any assistance. Also, some children who do excessive work at home and are left in serious health conditions. According to one of our participants, he was mercilessly flogged for not being able to do all the farm work due to illness and this worsened his health conditions and he was rushed to the hospital. Other children end up performing poorly in school as they do not have the time to read their notes, for those kids who are opportune go to school even when they live with exploitative family members. According to the MICS data for Sierra Leone, 76% of child workers attend school.

In addition, a child undergoing this exploitation can also end up being stigmatized and/or psychologically tortured, as seen from most of the conversations we engaged in across the districts covered for this research. According to the child, this was so because she was used as a servant to her step-siblings and she was seen as an outcast.

Run-Away Children and Street Children

Some children have no option but to leave the home where they are exploited. This causes them to live on their own and most of the time they end up living on the street.

Abuses and maltreatments

Some children working for their family are also victims of other maltreatments such as physical violence or deprivation of food – especially when they lose the money they earned or didn’t sell enough. Laura Williams working at the Family Support Unit in Freetown explains: “There was a case a month ago when an aunty gave goods to her niece to sell. This girl lost two thousand Leones (less than one dollar). This aunt refused to give her food for five days.”

C. FACTORS

Poverty is one of the striking factors and it came up in almost all the districts as a factor leading to this form of violence. For most of the cases, the parents of the children being exploited are not financially good

---

46 Interview with Laura Williams, FSU Unit New England Police, Freetown
enough in order to take care of the kids and send them to school. Making children breadwinners for family is sometimes the only option for the family to live. According to World Bank data, 52.9% of the population lives under the national poverty line in Sierra Leone.47

The “confiage” tradition, the placement of children with extended family, is also a factor of child work and trafficking. This cultural practice constitutes a source of vulnerability for children and can turn into child trafficking. As stated by UNICEF, the circulation of children now takes place in a wider space where communal responsibilities for child protection are weakened and where the interests of the child are not always respected. The educational value of work is being replaced by economic considerations driven by survival strategies.48 Most of the time, trafficking and exploitation take place when children are being sent to relatives because parents cannot afford education for their children.

“My aunt took me from the village and from my parents to the city to put me in school but she uses me to work for her in order to find money” (boy, 15, Tombo, Freetown)

Orphans and/or children living with relatives are the most vulnerable with regards to child exploitation as we found out from the conversations. That is, a child would also be exploited only if the biological parents die and there is a guardian or relative who may have promised to care for the kid, but ends up exploiting the child. A 16 year old boy in Kono District said: “I was taken to Kono by my father’s younger brother shortly after my father died as my mother had died when I was only seven and it was only my father who took care of me. My uncle’s wife was very hostile to me and I was forced to do all the work at home even when I am not well and the worst part for me was the fact that my uncle was aware but did nothing to curtail the situation.”

According to the MICS Report of 2010 records the school attendance rate for orphans was 74 percent as opposed to non-orphans’ school attendance rate, which was 84 percent.49 This is a clear manifestation coupled with our findings to showcase the fact that orphan children are by far the most vulnerable to exploitations of this nature.

Corruption and compromise

When these cases, as we discovered during the fieldwork, are reported to the Family Support Unit (FSU) or the police, they are sometimes handled by way of either laying the case to rest or compromising it so the perpetrator is not incriminated. A young 18 year old woman, living in Bayama Gbonda in Pujahun district relates, “I had been living with my aunt in Kono and was maltreated by my aunt. I reported the matter to the FSU yet the FSU did nothing because the head of the unit had a daughter attending the primary school where my aunt was the Head Teacher. I was left in suffering from my aunt to the point that I had to enter into a relationship with an elderly man who took care of my needs but later impregnated me and I am now a teenage mother with a 3 year old daughter.”

D. PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS AND EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

From our conversations, it appears that there are several factors or interventions that appear to be helpful in reducing this form of violence against children and youth.

49 MICS4, Sierra Leone 2010, Final Report.
Parents and other family members

They sometime intervene in ending situations where children are exploited by their families. In the case where children are sent to relatives for education purpose but are used as a tool to generate income instead, the parents take back their children on finding out the truth.

Human Rights organizations also investigate most of these cases as was mentioned in Kono district. Nevertheless it appears that human rights organizations are more focused on child work in industries or farming but less in home-related exploitation.

Local authorities and FSU

Local authorities and the police also do intervene in settling such matters when it is reported to them. Their interventions have yielded very little or no fruit for most of the cases discussed in Pujehun but some success stories were brought up in Kambia and Tonkolili District. Local authorities and FSU have been able to incriminate the perpetrators and helped the victims to go back to school.

In Pujehun, most of the participants mentioned that the local authorities or the police (Family Support Unit - FSU) do end up compromising these issues or perverting justice to the disadvantage of the child or nothing comes of the matter, as in some other cases.

Most of the children said that the only persons they can talk to about their living conditions are their friends. They were highlighting the fact they often feel very sad not to go to school and not to have the time to play with their friends. But as reported by a 12 years old boy in Pujehun district, “I often tell my friends that I would prefer to play with them but I have to work. They listen and they have compassion but what can they do for me”?

E. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth and children met during the fieldwork have made a couple of recommendations regarding child exploitation:

» Support poor families for schooling.

» House-to-house sensitization should be done by authorities and youth.

» Involve children in decision making mechanisms at the community level to speak on behalf of their colleagues, especially to report cases of child exploitation.

» Punishment should be levied on those who exploit children and those who involve children in doing hazardous work.

» Conduct sensitization on the risks of placing children with relatives.

» A committee should be set up at the community level to monitor and properly look into cases of child exploitation in order to minimize, if not totally curtail this form of exploitation.
5.5 Violence at Schools and Universities

A. DEFINITION

According to our Listening and Learning research conducted by young researchers in Sierra Leone, children and youth suffered from physical, sexual, emotional and social violence committed by teachers and as well as by their peers in schools. For them, violence at school is “when someone is taking advantage of you because he has power”.

According to our data, violence at school was mentioned in 57 conversations, including by 30 females and 27 males. Diverse forms of violence occurring within schools and universities were highlighted.

The issue of school related violence was raised by the Assistant Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police (AIG) Mustapha S. Kambeh, during our interviews: “It has become a norm that teachers don't go to their supposed classes but ask the pupils to pay exorbitant fees for lessons and those who are mature are sexually exploited”.

Child beating

This is when the child is being tortured or flogged by teachers, which may cause physical pain or body harm and also sometimes leads to injury and psychological effects for the child. Children are sometimes beaten by their teachers in order to instill discipline in the class and on the other hand a child may be punished in school without any reason. Whatever the reason, it appears that the use of violent discipline is disproportionate and very harmful for children. For instance a 10 year old boy in Kambia District said, “I am a sickle cell patient. I was beaten with twelve strokes by my teacher.”

Sexual harassment in schools and universities (“Sex for Grades”)

Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and universities is quite widespread within schools and universities in Sierra Leone. This phenomenon is sometimes called “sex for grades”. It means that teachers harass girls and even sometimes rape them in exchange for good grades. A second year student in Makeni confessed, “I needed my lecturer to help me with some of his lecturing materials on campus and he keeps telling me that nothing goes for nothing - I must use what I have to get what I want. Meaning that if I want to be promoted to
the next class or excel in my academic work I must comply to sleep with him, which is very ridiculous”.

Labor for grades

This type of violence affects pupils and students in both schools and universities. Pupils are sent by their teachers to work on their farms. This is also done as a way of punishing the child. In some schools, if a child refuses to work or comply with their teachers they will fail their exams.

“I work for an hour every day on my teacher’s farm in order to make it in school and obtain favor from him” explained a class 6 boy in Moyamba.

Grades for money

Some teachers are in the habit of asking students to pay money for promotion or good grades at the end of each term in school. Those who refuse to pay the money or whose parent cannot afford the money will not be promoted to another class at the end of the school year. Most of the respondents said that teachers ask them to pay money for each subject at the end of every term in school. “I am a final year student at the University of Makeni during our final year examination. I was asked by one of my lecturers to give him some money if I want to pass his module as others were doing. I failed that module because I don’t have any money to pay.” (Makeni, 18 year old young man)

Student politics and cultism

A final year student at Njala University confessed that he belongs to one of the student groups while his younger brother is a member of the other group. Because of this, his brother is considered to be his enemy for life. “I don’t want to have anything to do with him” he said angrily. This often occurs at student elections on campus as a result of two groups known as the “black and white camps”. These two camps are involved in a cult wherein they initiate students to belong to their different camps. Black and White students’ opposition has existed for nearly 30 years in Sierra Leone. It is largely alleged than one camp is supported by the ruling government while the other is supported by the opposition party. Those two camps are sometimes involved in violent fights on campus. If this phenomenon was used to represent student involvement in politics, it appears today to be more a violent opposition than a political fight for students’ rights. “The violence, the anger, has been pitted against each other – it’s not against the system now. That is what the polarization is producing”.

Fighting/ Rioting

Students or pupils often fight when there is conflict or misunderstanding amongst themselves in schools, during their elections on campus, or at interschool sport meets in schools and universities. They can also fight as a result of grievances over an issue. Boys are usually the ones involved in this particular type of violence.

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

The biggest and most common impact of all these forms of violence is decrease in the education level and dropping out school for victims.

---

Fear and dropout of school

Violent discipline and sexual harassment cause fear to the victims and may lead them to drop out from school.

After being beaten by his teacher, this young boy said: “I don’t feel good; I get sick and stay away from school for almost a month. I am afraid to go to school now,” (10 year old, Kambia district). The violence occurring in university campus can also cause the failure of some students, generally the most vulnerable: “My family cannot afford to send me to the university so I had to sell some food stuff in the market in order to raise some money to pursue my studies in the university. I managed to save some money from selling and was able to pay my entrance fees and bought some school materials for my studies including some pocket money for my feeding on campus. I found joy in my career not until one day when we had student unrest on campus that all my properties, school materials and monies were burnt down by my colleagues who were into student politics. I lost all that I have. Because of this I had to drop out of the university in order to raise money to continue my studies. This was really disappointing and all hope was gone.”

Shame and exclusion

Victims of such violence are ashamed to participate in class and also perform poorly in class and loss of interest on their education. The future of these children is shattered and can lead to a high rate of failure, illiteracy, dropout, and unemployment in their youthful stage. “I am a class 6 pupil in Taiama. I was sexually abused by my teacher. I lost my virginity and got pregnant and dropped out of school. The case was compromised and the teacher only takes responsibility for my baby. I cannot continue my school because my parents are too poor. I am now a mother taking care of my child”

C. FACTORS

Schools and universities are violent spaces

The use of violent discipline by teachers is one of the factors explaining violence within schools and universities. It also contributes to allowing the massive use of violence between pupils. An educational institution is supposed to be a safe place for any scholar rather than a threat to students.

Poor training of teachers and insufficient funds allocated to schools

According to the respondents, most of the teachers in the community are not sufficiently trained and qualified to perform their duties in school. In some communities there is only one teacher who teaches all subjects in the school. Some teachers do not receive their salary on time which makes them want to use children to work on their farms or at home to achieve their needs. Most of the teachers are not fully aware of the teaching code of conduct for teachers, neglecting their roles and responsibilities and thereby violating the rights of the children in school.

Political intervention by politicians

According to the respondents, one of the factors of violence in schools and universities is the political influence by university authorities. Politicians are supporting students on campus to run their elections and are contributing to increase the violence on campus, especially during elections.
D. PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS AND EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

Children and youth have highlighted several existing mechanisms that play a positive role in reducing violence at school.

The Child Welfare Committees (CWC) look at the welfare of children in both schools and the communities. They are visible in almost all of the communities. In some areas the CWC in collaboration with the chief succeed in stopping some harmful teachers’ practices in school.

The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meets on a regular basis to discuss school affairs and issues; progress and conduct of pupils and their teachers or school authorities is also discussed at the PTA meetings. Parents, when well sensitized, play a great role in reducing such violence in schools.

The University Court, which seats and takes disciplinary actions against perpetrators of any violence and misconduct of students within the universities, is recourse. Student perpetrators are investigated, sometimes their degree or certificate is withheld, and sometimes they are even expelled from the University.

E. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and youth are very eager to take action on violence at school. During the conversations, children and youth were able to come up with six strong recommendations:

» Creation or empowerment of pupils' committees in each school. Those committees could organize peer-to-peer sensitization, awareness-raising campaigns, and debates on non-violence. This could empower children and students to use peaceful conflict resolution methods.

» All teachers and heads of school should have a refresher and proper training on the code of conduct for teachers. The code of conduct should be displayed in visible areas at schools. The code of conduct for teachers must be clear, comprehensible, and enforceable.

» Community-based structures like the Child Welfare Committee must be strengthened within the communities to support child victims of abuses and trained to be able to detect all forms of violence at school and take protection measure for victims.

» Students must be empowered to report cases of violence, such as harassment and sex for grades, to the school authorities - especially the disciplinary action committee in schools and universities or the police. Students and pupil committees should be put in place in every school to create safe space for children to talk about violence.

» Politicians should stop using students as a medium of violence in campaigning for their political parties, but rather build on their capacity for a better tomorrow. Student politics must be undertaken by students themselves and not by politicians.

» Government should reinforce the ban on cultism by students on campus.

» The laws on sexual abuses and children’s rights must be enforced. Perpetuators must face the full penalty of the law, especially teachers who are caught violating the rights of a child.
5.6 Social Exclusion and Community Violence

A. DEFINITION

Youth unemployment and exclusion constitute a major challenge in Sierra Leone and a global crisis as a whole. In Sierra Leone, most young people are engaged in unskilled jobs and only work to survive. They also face exclusion in their various communities by their leaders and families. Young people are less considered in decision-making processes, and are neglected by elders, families, and the society as a whole. The social exclusion and community violence have been explained in these terms by this 25 year old dissatisfied young man in Freetown, “We the youth need a job. We want to work, if there is no work to do how can we live or survive? How do the elders want us to survive when they are holding onto our spaces and depriving us of our rights? We are being neglected, suppressed, and marginalized in our communities”.

Another young man is Kono explained this form of violence as “when the elderly people think that they are always right, but do not listen to the young people”.

From our conversations, unemployment and social exclusion have been mentioned in 135 conversations, included 98 males and 37 females. Two main forms were highlighted during the conversations: neglect and suppression by elders, and youth unemployment.

Neglect and suppression by elders in the community

It was clearly seen from the listening and learning research that young people still suffer from neglect and suppression by elders in the community. They are left out of decision-making processes that affect their lives. Respondents from this research said youth are unemployed and suffer neglect and suppression by their elders. They strongly confessed that, “How can we be leaders of the future or leaders of today when we are not given the opportunity to contribute or take active role in decision making processes that affect our lives? We are being marginalized and victimized and it’s time we stand up for our rights.”

Young men and women in different communities said that elders and stakeholders do not show any form of concern towards them. Whenever there are activities for youth to benefit by learning skills or inclusion in decision-making in the community, elders do not give their support. They always create pictures of the youth that make them irrelevant and discouraged. Young people in Sierra Leone feel that elders always discuss the youth in meetings with the chief and stakeholders in a very negative manner. During the conversation, youth explained that when they decide to do any work or activity that will help themselves in the community, the elders find a way to kick against the idea or even to stop the work. The issue of neglect and suppression was particularly high in Kono and Freetown. A 21 year old man in Kono said, “We are neglected and excluded from meetings and developmental and decision making processes by the elders in our community.”

Youth unemployment

Strongly connected to social exclusion, youth unemployment has been raised as a major issue for youth in Sierra Leone. As a boy in Port Loko said “I am jobless and disgruntled.” While a 23 year-old youth in Moyamba said that “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.” Youth unemployment is a crisis in the country. In 2012, a report from the National Youth Commission and the Ministry of Youth and Employment and Sport, states that 60% of young women and men between the ages of 15 to 35 are unemployed in Sierra
Leone52. According to this report, Sierra Leone has among the fastest growing numbers of young workers living on less than one US dollar per day. About 80% of the country’s youth population is unable to earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the two dollars per day poverty level. In addition, less than 50% of young workers in Sierra Leone receive payment for their labor, compared with two thirds of adults. The report states moreover that women are particularly vulnerable when it comes to education and job opportunities. For instance, 9.5 percent of adult women have reached a secondary or higher level of education, compared with 20.4 per cent of their male counterparts. Only five percent of them participate in wage employment53. An estimated 800,000 youth below age 15-35 years are actually searching for employment. Some of these youth lack skills and education, but it is even more difficult for those with disabilities and only basic education to compete for the limited jobs that are available.

B. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND COMMUNITIES

Violence in the community and idleness

Most of the youth are idle as there is little or no job facility in the community. Most of them get into drinking alcohol and taking drugs. For instance a 22 year old man in Port Loko District said, “If a youth hasn’t got a job, his option is to steal, commit atrocities, and perpetuate violence”. A 26 year old student in Kambia district said, “Most of the youths have graduated from universities but are without a job; rather they are just passing around the street disgruntled”.

Some youth gangs fight each other in the communities, reinforcing youth social exclusion. For instance, an 18 year old boy in Kono district in the Gbense chiefdom said, “Since youths form gangs and fight against each other, they are been neglected by their elders in their respective communities and sometimes leave their home to stay with their friends were they learn all types of negative tricks”.

In fact, youth who are unemployed are more vulnerable and prone to violence. They always feel angry and disgruntled about their future whenever they are not employed. Some of them are also involved in gangs causing atrocities within their communities and this can also lead to conflict and under-development of the country. For instance, one of our respondents in the Kambia district in the northern region in Sierra Leone, a 22 year old stated that, “Unemployment of young people in the country can lead to many youth involved in thief groups and can lead to destruction and killing people for their property and also become drug addicts which has resulted in madness of young people across the country in Sierra Leone.”

According to our various conversations, most youth and children within the ages from 15 – 25 years are being neglected by elders when it comes to decision making or development. This is especially true for uneducated youth and children within their various communities and chiefdoms. Most of the elders look at youth and children as if they are not important in any terms of decision making in their respective communities. In regard to that, the issue of land has been raised in some communities by youth as a result of their exclusion from decision-making and elders’ power concentration. A young man in Kono said, “Land dispute issue have become a serious problem in Sierra Leone which has created negative consequences on family members, especially youth which makes them discouraged about life and lose hope. Most times they don’t get their

land back and this is what they use to generate income, build their houses and feed their families.”

C. FACTORS

Community governance

According to our respondents, neglect and suppression of youth by elderly people in the communities of Sierra Leone revolve around the way of life and standard of living of the people. This makes youth, both males and females who are not educated feel less important and never present in public to give their own ideas and opinions. This makes the community to be ruled by few people and the majority is left out discouraged and unhappy. According to a 20 year-old boy in Kono, “The chiefs and elders who are in front of the community are the ones who are neglecting the youth. They don’t allow them to take part in their meetings and are suppressed of their lands. This is because the elderly people are the ones that make and break laws in the community. They call on few people who are their family members from the community when it comes to development rather than the youths who deserve it”.

Moreover, nepotism and bribery of employers is perceived by young people to be widespread in the labor market.

Youth discrimination with regard to employment

Work market is not favorable for youth employment and tends to discriminate against young people compared to those above 35 years of age. Youth have fewer opportunities for salaried employment compared with those above the 35 age bracket. Furthermore, employment opportunities are significantly lower for youth, regardless of their qualifications. Public sector employment opportunities tend to exclude youth on the basis of age and experience.54

D. ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN PREVENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For youth, being better integrated would help to improve their quality of life within communities, especially in reducing youth violence. Most of the young people felt that nothing is done for youth in their communities and that youth NGO’s projects are not always well understood by community elders. A few recommendations that children and youth we interviewed came up with are listed below:

- Involving the youth to participate in decision-making and development processes within their various communities and at the country level. Youth must be seen as partners in development and must take an active role in decision making processes that affect their lives and communities.

- Providing skills training center for youth and creating awareness on youth discrimination in regards to job access.

- Creating more jobs and recreational facilities for youths within their communities in order to keep them busy and able to fend for their living.

- Elders in communities must be sensitized on the role of young people in community development.

- Form stronger youth coalitions that will be united and speak with one voice to advocate on the rights of young people within their various communities.

54 NAYCOM, Ibidem
PICTURE 3: Researchers conducting a conversation
6. CONCLUSION

According to our findings violence at home is the most frequent violence mentioned by children as it was pointed out in 226 out of the 661 conversations conducted throughout the country. Parents and guardians have, as guaranteed by the Child Rights Act, the primary responsibility in the care and upbringing of their children. It includes the obligation to protect children from all forms of neglect and maltreatment and to provide good guidance, care, assistance and maintenance for the child. Nevertheless, this form of violence is performed by those who are supposed to protect the children from violence, parents or foster parents and other relatives such as uncle, aunt and step-parents. Violent discipline and child maltreatment have a huge set of consequences: bad performance at school, dropping out, significant developmental delay and injuries. It can lead the children to leave their home and to decide to live on their own, most of the time in the street involving greater vulnerabilities to other forms of violence. Few protective mechanisms are available for children that are victims of violence at home; the role of the Child Welfare Committees (CWC) at the community level has been highlighted even if their action takes place only in the worst cases when children need to be placed under the protection of other guardians. To prevent this widespread form of violence, sensitization about the dreadful effects violent discipline can have on children and society as a whole is necessary. To do so, reinforcing the community’s protective mechanisms such as FSU and CWC, by prompting them to recognize and act upon violence against in their community, as well as engaging children and youth in mass sensitization on child rights were highlighted during the fieldwork as effective prevention measures against violence at home.

Teenage pregnancy and early marriage is the second most frequent category of violence emerging from this research. 210 children and youth spoke out this issue, both male and female. As a result of either rape by elder members of the community (such as teachers) or as a consequence of unsafe sexual intercourses, teenage pregnancy has significant impacts on victims’ life. Early pregnancy may entail health complications for girls who are too young to carry a baby. Social impacts can be dramatic, and encompass exclusion from the family and community and stigmatization of girls who get pregnant at early age. Because of this stigmatization most of the time teenage girls have no other option but to get married to the man whether the pregnancy was a result of rape or not, therefore contributing to impunity concerning sexual violence and increasing early marriages. Most adolescents, both girls and boys, are forced to abandon their schooling to take responsibilities and consequently endanger their future. The government of Sierra Leone has recognized teenage pregnancy as a major issue, but efforts need to be continued. Better access to family planning and contraceptive methods as well as peer sensitization on unsafe sexual intercourse may prevent this high level of teenage pregnancy. Rape perpetrators must be prosecuted and the victims supported, especially for continuing their schooling.

Violence against women and girls constitutes a part of the violence against children and youth identified in 135 conversations during the research. Violence against women and girls is multiple and pervasive in many communities in Sierra Leone. Rape and sexual harassment are perpetrated on girls and women by their relatives, peers or elder members of the community. Rape is the most common form of gender-based violence related by children and youth. This violence often means isolation for victims, discrimination and in some cases forced marriage. Many interventions exist to eradicate gender-based violence. In this, FSU appears to play a leading role in many communities. However, many cases of rape remain unpunished and the victims are sometimes forced to marry their rapist especially if they get pregnant. Community
sensitization on laws related to sexual offenses and on dreadful consequences for victims could therefore play a vital role in preventing such violence and reducing social consequences for the victims.

**Child exploitation** appears to be one of the worst forms of violence against children in Sierra Leone and has been mentioned in 124 conversations by both girls and boys. Children work in different areas such as agriculture, mining and domestic work. Most of the time, child workers do not have the chance to follow their schooling. Even if the legislation in Sierra Leone forbids child work, it is still a very common practice especially for very poor families. Children placed by parents with relatives for education purposes are very vulnerable to child work. For children, supporting the poorest families to send their children to school would prevent parents using child labour as an income for the family. According to our research, some regions of Sierra Leone such as Pujehun or Kono, mine and agriculture sectors frequently use children as a labor force despite the laws. Local authorities are for children the main actor who can play a role in reducing child work especially in ensuring law enforcement in their jurisdiction.

**Violence at school and universities** – places that are, by definition, supposed to guarantee the proper development of children – is prevalent and alarming in Sierra Leone. This form of violence was mentioned in 57 conversations. The analysis of this form of violence performed mostly by teachers sheds light on practices known as “labor for grades” or “sex for grades”. Therefore schools appear to be unsafe and violent spaces which hinder the level and quality of education provided in Sierra Leone and where girls are subjected to gender based violence. Because violence between pupils is also prevalent in Sierra Leone, children made the wish to be empowered through students’ councils within schools. Those councils could be in charge of peer education on conflict resolution and of reporting any form of violence happening in schools to the school administrations. Code of conduct for teachers should be emphasized in every community and respected by teachers.

It appears also from this study that youth from Sierra Leone are suffering from **social exclusion and unemployment**. Social exclusion and unemployment are a very common situation for youth in the country. Young people are excluded from community and national decision making mechanisms and are hardly involved in the development of their country. This social exclusion brings about a lot of pain, is sometimes a trigger for community violence, and therefore is a threat to the development and the peace in Sierra Leone. Involving the youth in decision-making and development processes within their various communities and at the country level would be a good step to prevent youth social exclusion. Youth must be seen as partners in development and must take active roles in decision making processes that affect their lives and communities.

The present research indicates that underlying poverty is a structural factor in violence against children and youth, but a social norm change is also needed to eradicate violence. This study also shows that children and youth are not only victims of violence, but are also important stakeholders in violence prevention. In all the villages where our research teams have gone, the children and young people proposed solutions and expressed their desire to get involved in positive social change. The recommendations of this report transcribe the words of 661 children and young people with whom we spoke. The right to participation is guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and it is urgent to hear what they have to say and engage children and youth in the prevention of violence.
7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Eleven recommendations stem from the research. These recommendations are built on the 661 conversations conducted. It reflects children and youth perspective on violence affecting them and the role they wished to play in mitigating violence.

To the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, CWCs, FSU, local councils and NGOs:

1. Governmental institutions, NGOs and CBOs working on child protection should consider enhancing children’s participation in their own protection. Children and youth should be involved in raising awareness about Child Rights Act through radio programs, TV shows, and street theatre.

2. Child protection community mechanisms such as the Family Support Unit and Child Welfare Committees should be reinforced by training their members to recognize all forms of violence against children. These community mechanisms must be child friendly and gender sensitive when handling cases of violence against children.

3. Specific sensitization to parents, elders and community members should be made to ensure enforcement of the law and to reduce the practices of handling sexual crimes within families and communities. Child Welfare Committees as a community child protection mechanism should play a leading role in sensitizing the community on violence against children. Collaboration between Family Support Unit and Police must be strengthened in handling sexual offense cases to ensure protection, medical, psychological, and legal support to the victims.

To the Ministry of Youth Affairs and to the National Youth Commission

4. The youth parliament must be established and supervised by the National Youth Commission to handle youth-related issues in the country. Youth Parliament should be comprised of youth representatives from all districts, marginalized group representatives, and representatives from other essential groups in the country. Their voices should be integrated into decision-making mechanisms at the local and national level.

5. Family planning and massive sensitization on teenage pregnancy should be available for girls and boys, including in remote areas. Youth clubs should be empowered to play a leading role on sensitization and peer-to-peer counseling.

To the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Child Labor Unit:

6. A special committee should be set up at the community level to monitor and properly look into cases of child labour in order to minimize if not totally curtail this form of exploitation. A monitoring of child displacement throughout the country should be put in place and be managed by this committee in order to avoid child exploitation within the confi age system.
7. To the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology:

8. Ministry of Education should ensure that every child, boy and girl, has access to basic education as enacted by the Education Act. Poor families should be supported for schooling.

9. Ministry of Education should engage in research efforts on violence at school in order to produce reliable data for combating all forms of violence taking place in public and private schools.

10. Each school should have Pupils Committees and Parents-teachers Associations (PTA). The committees should be sensitized and trained to recognize, report, and monitor violence at school. Pupils Committees should be supported and empowered to organize peer-to-peer sensitization, awareness raising campaigns, and debates on non-violence to empower children and students to use peaceful conflict resolution methods. Students must be empowered to report on cases of violence such as harassment and sex for grades to the school authorities especially to the disciplinary action committee in schools and universities or to the police.

11. All teachers and heads of school should have a refresher and proper training on the Code of Conduct for teachers. The code of conduct should be displayed in visible areas at schools. The code of conduct for teachers must be clear, comprehensible, and enforceable.

12. Young people involved in early pregnancy should be supported to go back to school after child delivery.