



UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti and the Know Violence in Childhood Initiative

Social Protection and Childhood Violence: Expert Roundtable

An expert roundtable was convened to examine the state of global knowledge around the potential for social protection to reduce childhood violence on May 12-13th 2016, in Florence, Italy by the [UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti](#) in collaboration with the [Know Violence in Childhood Initiative](#). Approximately 25 [experts](#) from research and implementing agencies attended the two-day meeting chaired by Dr Sarah Cook, Director of Innocenti. The meeting was motivated by the fact that household economic strengthening is often promoted as a strategy to reduce childhood violence (defined as physical, emotional and sexual violence experienced by children under the age of 18), but this has been a neglected area in research, and thus few empirical studies examine this intersection (see roundtable [Concept Note](#)).

Broadly the meeting objectives were as follows:

1. Review the *key pathways* through which non-contributory social protection has the potential to affect childhood violence
2. Review the *rigorous evidence* existing on the impact of social protection on childhood violence and *which mechanisms* help achieve potential impacts
3. Understand the current state of ongoing/planned research linking social protection and childhood violence
4. Understand where social protection has actively tried to address issues related to childhood violence, and which *design modifications* show promise
5. Brainstorm on the *policy and programme implications*, as well as the *key research questions and gaps*.

The agenda featured the following sessions and panels:

- **Opening presentation** – provided an overview of the prevalence, poverty-related drivers and landscape of priority prevention strategies for childhood violence
- **Overview presentation** – presented the possible linkages between social protection and forms of childhood violence based on a background paper reviewing evidence prepared specifically for the roundtable
- **Panel one** – featured case studies from evaluation research with insights on the links between cash transfer programmes and experiences of violence among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)
- **Panel two** – presented emerging evidence from emergency and humanitarian settings on the links between social protection and broader economic strengthening programmes and children's multiple vulnerabilities, including aspects of childhood violence
- **Panel three** – provided an overview of the linkages between social protection and forms of childhood violence from high-income settings
- **Panel four** – discussed how regional variation in social protection models and systems might interact, with potential to reduce aspects of childhood violence
- **Panel five** – presented case studies highlighting challenges and best practices in the design and implementation of social protection programmes from light-touch approaches to integrated systems
- **Panel six** – reflected on methodological and measurement challenges in researching links between social protection and childhood violence.

Can social protection reduce childhood violence? If so, what forms of violence can it reduce and through which pathways?

The [agenda](#) featured an [opening presentation](#) framing the issue of childhood violence globally and highlighting social protection as a possible tool to combat this problem. This was followed by a presentation summarizing the state of global evidence linking social protection and childhood violence, based on an evidence review conducted by Innocenti. The review catalogued 25 ongoing and completed studies which rigorously examined linkages between non-contributory social

safety nets and key childhood violence outcomes. A framework was presented that helps to conceptualize hypothesized pathways linking the two, particularly to unpack existing evidence and to guide future research.

The framework outlines pathways that span the household (e.g., economic security, labour force participation and time use, stress, intra-household power dynamics), caregiver/interpersonal (e.g., substance misuse, psychosocial well-being, caring behaviours) and child levels (e.g., schooling, mental health, problem and risk behaviours, time spent in high-risk settings). These pathways draw on mechanisms hypothesized in key papers identified in the evidence review, as well as from larger bodies of evidence (e.g., previously identified drivers of childhood violence).

Among the 25 studies reviewed, nearly 90 quantitative indicators of violence were analysed, of which approximately 20 per cent showed significant protective impacts of social protection on childhood violence. Therefore, while the evidence is mixed, it suggests that social protection has potential to reduce specific forms of childhood violence, particularly for sub-groups of children. Their potential is strongest for forms of violence driven, in part, by economic insecurity (e.g., sexual exploitation), as well as forms of violence (e.g., corporal punishment) triggered by poverty-related stressors following economic shocks.

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa is promising, particularly when it comes to cash transfers reducing sexual violence (i.e. transactional sex, age-disparate sex and forced sex). This was supported by presentations in [Panel 1](#), where forthcoming results from a conditional cash transfer trial aimed at reducing HIV incidence showed decreased levels of physical intimate partner violence (IPV) among young women (see Case Study 1), and where forthcoming results from the [Transfer Project](#) on government-led unconditional cash transfers in Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe show impacts on a range of violence-related outcomes, including forced sex and age-disparate sex. Most evidence from SSA shows impacts on sub-groups of children, in particular adolescent girls, and not on the entire study population. One hypothesis is that adolescent girls are at increased risk of these forms of violence when they or their households are faced with economic insecurity.

There is also some evidence from the United States (US) and Latin America (LAC) to suggest that social protection can reduce child physical abuse perpetrated by parents, including corporal punishment. However, in settings where corporal punishment is widely accepted and practiced, and hence an accepted social norm, the ability of social protection to reduce corporal punishment may be limited to frequency and severity, rather than prevalence (which is typically the indicator measured).

CASE STUDY 1

HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) 068: Impacts on HIV and IPV among young South African women (Audrey Pettifor)

Key research question: Does a conditional cash transfer to young women and their caregivers reduce the incidence of HIV and Herpes Simplex Virus 2 (HSV-2) incidence (primary outcomes) and decrease intimate partner violence (IPV) (secondary outcome)?

Programme: The cash transfer, conditional on ≥ 80 per cent monthly school attendance, was divided between the young woman (rands R100 or US\$10 per month) and her parent or guardian (R200 or US\$20 per month) between 2012 and 2015.

Main findings: Young women aged 13-20 at baseline receiving the cash transfer were 28 per cent less likely than girls in the control group to have experienced physical IPV at any visit (risk ratio = 0.72; CI 0.64-0.80), and the programme also reduced some sexual risk behaviours (unprotected sex and having had partner in the previous 12 months). There were no significant effects of the cash transfer on HIV, HSV-2, sexual IPV, school attendance, depression or anxiety, sexual relationship power, hope for the future, or alcohol use.

Discussion: The cash transfer reduced physical IPV experienced by young women receiving the cash transfer. Qualitative data suggests that young women who received the cash transfer valued being able to make their own decisions about spending money, not having to ask their family for money, or not relying on their partners to provide for them, all aspects that relate to self-esteem and increased empowerment. Since younger women who received cash reported having fewer partners within the previous 12 months, cash may have allowed them to not “need” a partner, or to not “need” or be able to leave risky partnerships. Another possibility is that cash reduced tension or stress in existing partnerships.

Conclusions: Although strong impacts are promising, further research is needed to unpack the pathways through which cash reduces IPV, and whether or not cash transfers reduce not only the likelihood, but also the severity, of IPV.

However, there were many instances where social protection programmes showed no impact on childhood violence. [Panel 2](#) highlighted this lack of impact through a review examining links between household economic strengthening (ES) interventions (not limited to social protection) implemented by non-governmental organizations in humanitarian settings and child well-being (only one study in the review measured childhood violence). Further, in that review, while most ES programmes reported one or more positive effects on child well-being (not limited to violence), about one in five also reported at least one adverse effect. No clear patterns emerged regarding these negative impacts, but they often included increased participation by children in work activities.

The only mixed methods study from the review (and the only study from an emergency setting fitting the inclusion criteria) evaluated the impact of Palestine's National Cash Transfer Programme on children's multiple vulnerabilities (see Case Study 2). Quantitative analysis found no statistically significant programme impacts, while qualitative impacts were mixed. One of the main lessons that emerged from the presentations in Panel 2 is that poor programme design and implementation infrastructure reduces programme effectiveness overall, limits potential for impacts on childhood violence, and may actually leave children at increased risk of harm. Such implementation and effectiveness issues are particularly acute in emergency and humanitarian settings. The round table experts highlighted that broad-based social protection is rarely designed or implemented with the objective of reducing childhood violence (nor should it be), but its potential effects on the protection of children should be more carefully considered in design decisions.

CASE STUDY 2

The Palestinian National Cash Transfer (PNCT): Potential to tackle children's multiple vulnerabilities synergistically (Paola Pereznieto)

Key research question: To what extent does the PNCT affect poverty and children's multiple vulnerabilities in the State of Palestine?

Programme: A Government-led unconditional cash transfer targeting extremely poor households. The benefit provided to a household representative (Palestinian currency-NIS 750-1800 or US\$ 195-468 per quarter). Households are also entitled to a range of other benefits, including health insurance, food support, school fee waivers, and one-off emergency cash grants.

Main findings: Quantitative findings indicated lower rates of violence in the home, school and community, yet none were statistically significant. Qualitative interviews highlighted reductions in intra-household conflict, in part resulting from lower stress levels. Qualitative findings also established a clear link between violence in schools and school dropout.

Discussion: Violence in the home, school, and community was found to be widely accepted and commonly practiced. In addition, the State of Palestine presents a conflict prone context, and in general levels of chronic psychological ill-health are high. Hence, no significant effects on violence in these different settings might be expected as a result of economic strengthening. The lack of significance might also follow from the way in which data was collected; the questionnaire was generally long, and violence-related questions were towards the very end, increasing the risk of enumerator and respondent fatigue.

Conclusions: While the PNCT carries great potential in terms of child protection and social protection system synergies, this potential has not been realized, in part due to the weak child protection infrastructure, but also as opportunities provided at the delivery end when there is contact between social worker and recipients are not tapped into. Results following the study encouraged first steps towards an integrated case management approach.

What can be learned from regional variations in social protection typologies and childhood violence?

Understanding regional variation in social protection models and systems is crucial in the identification of possible entry points for violence prevention. Regional differences in the focus and objectives of social protection also translate into large differences in terms of which outcomes researchers have measured.

The overview presentation showed considerable differences in terms of social protection typologies across regions, as well as the violence typologies and sub-groups (gender and age) researched. For example, research in SSA, often driven by the HIV agenda, focuses on sexual violence and risk behaviours, including from an intimate partner violence angle, and

mainly considers impacts on adolescent girls; whereas research in LAC, driven by the early childhood development agenda, focuses on violence in the home (including corporal punishment) and mainly considers impacts on young children.

Regional dialogue around these issues therefore appears paramount and as such were highlighted and discussed as part of [Panel 3](#) and [Panel 4](#).

- **Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)** – Social protection is considered a poverty reduction tool – though the agenda is evolving and increased importance is placed on graduation models and transformative aspects of social protection. In addition, social protection and most notably cash transfers, are often associated with the HIV or resilience agendas, the former of which addresses labour-constrained household models, while the latter places responsibility at the household level to respond to shocks.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)** – The social protection agenda in LAC has evolved to a rights-based approach, and states are capable of implementing complex harmonized social protection and child protection systems (e.g., Chile Solidario). Non-contributory social protection is but one pillar of the social protection system – with the dual objectives of reducing poverty and strengthening human development (though, in practice, programmes tend to focus on one of these). Important lessons are to be learned from the region in terms of long-term strategies focusing on human capacities, particularly when structural barriers emerge which do not allow the full realization of benefits resulting from human capital investments, and no clear mid-term or exit strategies have been identified. Given high levels of inequality across the region, it would be important to also consider linkages between inequality and childhood violence (including those related to social cohesion or social belonging).
- **South Asia** – While rapid progress is observed in terms of social protection schemes, this is still a relatively new concept in the region, which originally saw a focus on microfinance and livelihoods interventions. Discussions around social protection and childhood violence in the context of South Asia should consider variations in readiness resulting from differing levels of development of social protection systems, which are broadly categorized as emerging/basic, fragmented and, finally, large-scale developed schemes.
- **OECD (high-income settings)** – Social protection systems in high-income settings often comprise a complex web of programmes, not always working seamlessly together. For instance, most US programmes apply work requirements and there is a perception that no single programme is sufficient to pull a household out of poverty. Evidence from the US examining the relationship between income poverty, economic hardship and childhood violence shows that higher welfare benefits are associated with fewer out-of-home placements (indicating lower levels of child abuse), welfare sanctions (i.e., removal of benefits) are associated with increased levels of child abuse, and caps to family benefits are associated with increased levels of child physical abuse.

What can be learned from design modifications and implementation models?

[Panel 5](#) considered lessons learned from different implementation models and design variations. Common threads through discussions were implementation objectives and potential design modifications, including the following recommendations:

1. **Minimize harm** – applies to basic or emerging social protection systems, where programming is fundamentally a poverty reduction tool, and links into programme designs aimed at minimizing harm, and monitoring frameworks that do not verify adverse programme impacts. This risk of adverse impacts has been highlighted particularly in the case of the [Palestinian National Cash Transfer](#), but also discussed in several qualitative evaluations in the opening presentation ([China's Dibao and Peru's Juntos](#)).
2. **Light-touch complementary services** – considers the addition of information and services which can be provided in spaces frequented by beneficiaries, including during programme registration, pay points and monitoring activities (e.g. messaging, as done in the Kenya Cash-Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children). These additions may not present extensive and specialized programme add-ons, yet can reach large groups, and might be appropriate in the context of emerging or fragmented social protection systems.
3. **Intensive complementary services** – Dedicated programming layered onto basic economic resources. One example is the Philippines' *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)*, where a parenting programme is integrated into the national cash transfer programme (see Case Study 3).
4. **Integration and system linkages** – Builds on the view that to maximize the benefits of social protection, child protection and social protection services or systems should be harmonized or integrated, particularly when it comes to case management and the use of single registries to facilitate referral processes and ensure continuity of support (e.g., Chile Solidario). This model, while having the greatest potential to reduce violence, may require significant investment in building systems and a country's human resources to ensure proper functioning of linkages to leverage them for the well-being of children.

CASE STUDY 3

Achieving behaviour change through social protection in the Philippines – Pantawid Pamilyan Pilipino Program (4Ps) (Bernadette Madrid)

Programme: Government-led conditional cash transfer targeting extremely poor households. Benefits provided to household beneficiaries (max. Peso P1,400 or US\$ 30 a month) with conditions attached to health and education, including attendance at family development sessions (94.84% compliance rate).

Complementary intervention: Adaptation of the Sinuvuyo Parenting Program implemented in South Africa – an evidence-informed parenting programme. In its original form the programme involved 12 sessions with trained facilitators, each lasting three hours and delivered once a month at pay days. The adaptation process may take this down to eight sessions, delivered every two weeks, with use of text messaging in between to reinforce lessons learned. After the pilot phase, scale-up would mean that the programme would be delivered by less skilled facilitators (or core parents).

Discussion and conclusions: The process identified violence prevention opportunities within existing structures and therefore avoids overburdening the social protection system. Parents already attend family development sessions according to programme conditions; the process simply introduces an evidence-based parenting programme as part of it. Opportunities for system linkages include: case management using the system set-up to monitor compliance with programme conditions, and linking social workers to the 4Ps. It is not about 'cash plus', but linking of services – taking advantage of the strength of services and structures available in different sectors.

What are the gaps where more research is needed?

As reducing childhood violence is rarely an explicit objective of social protection, there is an underinvestment in both collection and analysis of rigorous measures of childhood violence. In many studies identified as part of the evidence review, violence indicators are analysed as a robustness check, are part of larger child development scales, or follow from a few questions integrated into extensive surveys collecting data on a range of issues. Unless evaluations are set up to examine impacts on childhood violence, and hence collect credible data, the evidence we have will not comprehensively describe the potential for social protection to reduce violence, or, conversely, the lack of its ability to affect this outcome.

Some of these methodological and measurement challenges were discussed as part of Panel 6.

- **Transactional sex** – where adolescents (particularly girls) themselves decide to engage in transactional sexual relationships, the link to economic insecurity does not always hold; rather the behaviour may be driven by desire to obtain luxury goods and not necessities. Current methods of implementing related questions in quantitative surveys does not allow us to see this important nuance.
- **Public works (PWs)** – thus far nothing can be said with confidence about the links between PWs and childhood violence, as these programmes are not designed with this objective in mind, and have therefore rarely been evaluated against it. More is known about PWs and children's time patterns: as adults are pulled into work, children are pulled into the household business or are needed to cover household chores, but we are uncertain how this may be linked to childhood violence. However, in theory, income at times of economic distress could reduce stress, and thus reduce childhood violence. Alternatively, as parents are pulled into work, and in particular stressful work, parental time supervision may decrease and/or stress may increase, which may in turn increase childhood violence.
- **Measurement** – with a few exceptions from SSA, we are not doing a good job measuring and analysing violence outcomes. Potential opportunities include: reach out to researchers of core studies and ask them to conduct further analysis on the violence indicators measured (low-hanging fruit), develop a set of recommendations around how to integrate light-touch childhood violence indicators into large-scale evaluations of social protection programmes (when the objective is not violence), and integrate social protection indicators into national violence surveys (though this may lead to difficulties in estimating causal impacts).

The recommendation is certainly not to include questions around childhood violence in each and every evaluation, but rather to develop recommendations as to when, where and how, while appreciating the fact that qualitative research is needed to further unpack mechanisms. Violence measures should not be introduced when referral information cannot be provided or when necessary ethical protocols cannot be followed.

Conclusions and next steps

Despite the fragmented evidence base, the meeting confirmed the sentiment that social protection has the potential to decrease childhood violence at the margin. Social protection will never be sufficient to tackle the myriad drivers of violence in any given setting; it may alleviate risk, but not necessarily address its underlying structural factors. However, through addressing poverty, and particularly mechanisms which allow adults and children to suffer less poverty-related stress, engage in fewer negative coping behaviours, and allow caregivers to spend more time with their children (in protective environments), the potential remains promising. Because social protection programming often reaches large segments of vulnerable populations, this means that reducing violence even at the margin among these groups may have large impacts on the incidence of violence at the population level.

The lack of evidence and real commitment for investment in understanding this intersection is something that organizations such as UNICEF and other multi-national bodies heavily invested in social protection, such as the World Bank, need to consider. The forthcoming background paper reviewing existing evidence and knowledge is a first step to recognizing the lack of information we have regarding the potential linkages between the two. Additional steps would entail further investment in evidence generation. These could include both prioritizing the measurement and inclusion of violence measures in ongoing or planned impact evaluations in social protection; including recommendations on which outcome and mediator (pathway) variables to measure; the development of a set of 'light' indicators which evaluators could include in surveys; and/or testing and evaluating complementary services and integrated models to understand the added impact and additional costs. With these efforts, researchers can identify the ingredients of scalable interventions.

In conclusion, the roundtable was a first step, highlighting the opportunity for cross-disciplinary and cross-divisional collaborations for the common goal of increasing the well-being of children and youth in the transition to adulthood, which would benefit all realms of society and help stop the intergenerational cycle of both poverty and violence.

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