

The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence against Children. [Summary]

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In addition to the human cost of sexual violence against children, there are also high economic costs in the form of a lack of productivity and strain on social services. At a global level, it is estimated that productivity losses due to sexual, physical and psychological violence against children are equivalent to between 3% and 8% of world GDP. This figure is calculated by estimating the prevalence of violence against children and the wage differential between workers who complete school and those who do not, and calculating productivity/income losses due to loss of schooling as a result of having experienced violence as a child. The range (between 3% and 8%) is determined through confidence intervals which result from correlations between the estimated cost of violence against children on the one hand, and related variables such as primary school drop-out rates, output per worker, percentage of children who experience violence and percentage of children at work on the other hand. Given these costs, scaling up violence prevention programmes is not only desirable from a child welfare perspective, but also cost-effective.

Sexual, physical and psychological violence against children often has lifelong and intergenerational effects on children's health, education and quality of life. At a global level, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 are believed to have experienced sexual violence. 50% of the victims of all sexual assaults world-wide are female children, and around one million children are forced into commercial sexual exploitation every year. Effects of this can include physical injuries, sexually transmitted diseases and infections, mental health disorders, and pregnancy in children. These factors often interfere with children's schooling, directly resulting in lower levels of future income, both for the individuals affected and the economy as a whole. This effect is compounded by the experience of sexual violence at schools, which in low-income countries is one of the most important explanations for why girls drop out of school. Estimates for the economic costs of pregnancy in children in low-income countries vary from 1% to 30% of GDP over a girl's lifetime.

Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of preventing violence against children, levels of government spending in this area remain low or undocumented. However, case studies illustrate that prevention programmes can be both successful and cost-effective given the high economic costs incurred by violence against children. Examples include interventions providing life skills training and sexual education to vulnerable girls in poverty as a means of preventing sexual abuse. This suggests that prevention programmes should be scaled up to reach a larger share of the population. More research is needed, especially on violence against children in low- and middle-income countries, in order to assist governments in prioritizing funding in this area.