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UNITED NATIONS

United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children

Methodology Note

Regional Estimates of the Number of Children witnessing Domestic Violence

There are very few studies that directly estimate the proportion or number of children who witness domestic violence. Even though previously published data may fail to highlight this, children all over the world are witnessing domestic violence and suffering from the consequences of these experiences.

The methodology was developed and the associated results were compiled in the context of the United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children. For the Study's report it was important to use methodology that enabled the development of estimates for all regions to highlight the global scope of the issue. A limited number of countries have published figures that show large variations in their findings. The approach to assessing the number of children witnessing violence used here combines estimates of women exposed to violence in the household with an estimate of the proportion of children who witness this violence.

An online search was conducted in the period October to December 2005 for studies measuring the proportion of women experiencing physical violence in the home over a 12-month period. The selection of studies was verified by UNICEF Country Offices or National Committees. Based on the percentage of women experiencing domestic violence in a 12-month period, the number of children who were likely to be exposed to domestic violence was estimated.

Where countries had more than one study estimating the proportion of women experiencing physical violence in the home, the lowest and highest values were used. Because of the large variability between studies measuring the prevalence of domestic violence among women, it was decided to derive estimates of children affected in the form of ranges, as opposed to point estimates. The use of ranges is a reflection of the often very diverse data that exists on domestic violence. However, if a single figure is to be used, it would be most accurate to simply calculate the midpoint of the range.

Based on available evidence, it could be concluded that 60% of domestic violence is witnessed by children. In other words, the proportion of 0.6 was used to convert published 12 month prevalence figures of domestic violence for each country to the prevalence of children witnessing such violence. Based on this estimated prevalence of children witnessing domestic violence, the number of affected children was calculated using the total number of under-18 year-olds in the country as estimated by the UN Population Division for the year 2000.

Regional estimates of the prevalence of children witnessing violence were calculated as a weighted average of the ranges of the individual country prevalence values (of children witnessing violence). If the total population of under-18s in countries with prevalence data was less than half of the total regional under-18 population, regional estimates were not calculated as in the case of North Africa and South Eastern Asia.