

Because it's about children

LIGHT FOR THE WORLD works through partner organisations for and with children with disabilities. As organisations involved with children it is necessary to have an understanding of the risk of violence against a child and have a policy describing how violence against children can be prevented and dealt with when it happens.

Types of violence

- Physical violence
- Psychological violence
- Sexual violence
- Neglect
- Child labour

Vulnerability to violence

It is estimated that violence against children with disabilities occurs 1,7 to 5 times more than against their nondisabled peers. The higher prevalence of violence against children with a disability is not caused by the disability itself but by social, cultural and economic issues. There are very specific forms of violence which children with disabilities – and especially girls – are more vulnerable to than their non-disabled peers, e.g.: unregistered birth, corporal punishment, intimidation, sterilization, sexual exploitation, being forced to beg on the street, the withholding of medical treatment or assistive devices, denial of food or water, refusal of caregivers to assist in daily living,...

Children with disabilities are often marginalised within families and communities. This results in them being less connected to people and the governmental and non-governmental services that could protect them from violence. By taking children with disabilities into account when making and implementing policies (including child protection policies), violence against

children with disabilities could be significantly reduced. Activities involving child protection should be developed and planned together with children with disabilities. Child participation will both empower children with disabilities to not tolerate violence and will create more appropriate measures to stop violence against them.

Child protection at home

- Shame, disappointment, financial consequences, not understanding the disability and the support needs of the child can result in parents hiding their child, neglecting their child or committing violence towards the child psychologically or physically.
- When a child with a disability is regarded as less important by the family or has difficulty of communicating, violence has a higher chance of remaining unnoticed for a longer time.

Protection in their communities

- Social judgement can be strong in communities where much prejudice exists around disability. For fear of violence from the community – for example on the way to school where there is lack of accessible transportation and peer support – parents often choose to keep their children locked inside. This exacerbates social isolation and vulnerability to violence, next to limiting their opportunities for development.
- Most families depend on their immediate community in their daily lives for financial and social reasons. The response of a family to their child is therefore also strongly linked to the ideas about disability that exist within the community. Where a child with a disability is accepted as part of the community, the community will often help to protect the child from harm.

Protection in schools

- Violence against children is more likely to happen in boarding schools.
- In regular schools where children with disabilities are included, teachers are often not prepared to include children with disabilities into their classes. In quite a few cases teachers pass on frustrations to the most vulnerable: children with disabilities.

Protection from child labour

- Children with disabilities – who physically or mentally are not able to voice their concerns – may be exploited
- in child labour, especially in situations of extreme poverty.
- In many countries people with disabilities are found begging on the street.
- Sexual exploitation and/or trafficking of girls with intellectual disabilities is reported more often than that of boys.

Child protection in the justice system, through law and policies

Various conventions, laws and treaties protect the rights of all children and of children with disabilities specifically. In the implementation children with disabilities are often forgotten. Courts are not accessible for children with disabilities. When families try to fight for justice on behalf of their children they often face more resistance from society.

Organisations that could work on protecting children with disabilities

- CBR projects take place in the community and the field workers are often the first outsiders to find out about violence against children with disabilities in the communities where they work.
- The DPOs would ideally be the key partners in fighting violence against children with disabilities. However – especially in developing countries – they often lack the capacity to be main players in fighting violence against children with disabilities.
- Mainstream organisations that work on children's rights need to be better informed about the need to protect children with disabilities and increase their awareness on the reasons why children with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence than their non-disabled peers.
- Policy makers need to be aware of the vulnerability of children with disabilities. When

developing policies, children with disabilities should be included. Policies should be evaluated on their protection of these children against violence.

The role of LIGHT FOR THE WORLD in child protection

Creating an environment through child protection systems where violence is not tolerated and openly discussed, can significantly help to break the cycle of violence. In addition, children with disabilities need to be supported in such a way that they can move out of a position of dependency and vulnerability. LIGHT FOR THE WORLD is committed to facilitating active participation of children in the processes affecting their development, to protect them from acts of violence, and to support access to justice, through the implementation of this policy.

- The staff of LIGHT FOR THE WORLD should be aware of the vulnerability of children with disabilities to violence and commit themselves to not get involved in any form of violence against children. All staff of LIGHT FOR THE WORLD should take knowledge of and sign the code of conduct on child protection.
- LIGHT FOR THE WORLD will encourage and help partners to develop their own child protection policies and implement them.
- Any incidence of violence against a child will be reported to childprotection@light-for-the-world.org and followed up by the child protection team in collaboration with the staff responsible within LIGHT FOR THE WORLD. The interest of the child will always be the main concern when following up cases of violence.
- Partner organisations will be supported to developing child protection policies and activities that are inclusive of children with disabilities and takes their specific needs into account. We advocate for children to be protected within their communities (schools, family, community, rehabilitation workers, police, members of justice system).
- In a biannual report, all partner organisations will be asked if they have faced any problems with violence against children, our project assessment process includes questions on child protection.
- LIGHT FOR THE WORLD is committed to contributing – at all levels of its lobby and advocacy work – to child protection that is inclusive of children with disabilities.