Positive situations do not emerge automatically, and teachers have to develop facilitative skills. A fourth-grade student once asked for the responsibility of distributing bread at lunch break to his class, but then announced that he would keep the sack of bread for himself. When reasoning failed, the teacher snatched the sack from him and he ran out of class, humiliated. Teachers analysed this incident at a workshop, in terms of possible alternative behaviour for the teacher, for example sending another child to the neighbouring class for additional bread that could be distributed to the hungry children and then talking to the errant boy without the pressure of immediate action.

### When children go home

Encouraging the adults in the children's school environment to behave respectfully towards them is an important part of the Human Dignity project, but adults in the home environment need to do the same to reinforce the message of positive behaviour.

Although the project has no direct involvement with the home environment, the changed attitudes at school can sometimes exert a change at home. For example:

- A father was telephoned by the school to say that his son was behaving badly. His response was: "So hit the kid and he'll get the message". Teachers sometimes hesitate to contact parents whose children are in trouble for fear of such a response. However, in another school, a child reported that after a classroom discussion of human dignity, he went home and told his father what he had learned, and the father then said that he would never hit the child again.
- Even before the Human Dignity project, schools had made efforts to deal better with parents, for example by encouraging home visits by teachers and appointments for parents with staff. One school had a standard letter of praise to parents whose children did well. Generally, however, where such positive mechanisms for interaction existed, their use was not sufficient to generate any strong momentum.
- At a parents' evening in one school, the staff decided to go beyond the conventional presenting of children's grades. Instead, they tried to empathise with parents who came in feeling defensive about their parenting, and to use the meetings to foster personal contact. Staff reported considerable improvement in the quality of the meetings.

### The struggle continues

This description of the project focuses on the positive processes of organisational change that have occurred in schools. However, such change is often not achieved easily. Consultants' reports from all nine schools emphasise the considerable challenges associated with their efforts to bring about change. Project assessments are expected from the nine schools at the end of the project period in late 2007 and a subsequent analysis will be reported a year later. The ensuing documents will present the lessons learned concerning what has worked under certain conditions, and what has not worked. It will be interesting to see what happens when the children aged 5–8 years at the beginning of the project reach the higher grades and begin to set the tone through their behaviour to younger children.



## *A view from the Oak Foundation*

# *Protecting children from violence and abuse*

**Florence Bruce, Senior Programme Officer, and Fassil Marriam, Regional Programme Coordinator, East Africa; Child Abuse Programme, Oak Foundation**

The term 'child protection' is used in various ways. In some parts of the world it has been used in a narrow sense to identify the action taken by the state to remove children from environments that are violent, abusive and exploitative. Today, however, the term is being expanded. For example, in contexts of war or natural disasters, it can include programmes that offer education, play and recreation, providing structures and activities that help children regain a sense of normal life. The notion of 'protection' thus takes a much wider meaning than simply protection from harm or abuse.

In some countries (e.g., the UK), the term 'child protection' is being used in a more positive way "to place it alongside approaches which emphasise childhood resilience and strength" (Parton 2006). Early intervention programmes are an example. This changing context places protection much closer to the notion of prevention.

Oak's programme on child abuse is targeted specifically at sexual abuse (a cross-cutting form of violence to children that excludes no sector of the population) and sexual exploitation of children in exchange for cash or in kind (goods, benefits, advantages, etc.). The two are linked intimately in the lives of many children around the world and in many programmes they are considered together. For example, a child domestic worker who is sexually abused by her employer's family may have no option when thrown out of the home but to sell sex on the streets.

"Sexually abused children do not stand out in a crowd", Oak was told[1] and there is no easily recognisable target group needing support. Nor are the sexual abusers of children easily identifiable. They are mainly men but, as we are now finding out, a large percentage of them are children under 18. Many of the victims of sexual abuse go undetected for years or even forever, if they do not seek help. This is why primary prevention programmes are still necessary and why the Oak Foundation aims to mainstream a concern for sexual abuse into existing agencies' work in a number of fields (such as education, domestic work, children about to leave care and community development). However, for mainstreaming to be successful, good preliminary data on the issue is needed, as well as relevant training programmes for agencies that may be willing to mainstream child protection concerns but may not necessarily have the appropriate skills to do so.

The problem of sexual exploitation of children is more visible, but the children may not be accessible to the services trying to help them. Where they are accessible, it is very difficult to help them to leave prostitution and to find alternatives. All too often, they simply 'graduate' into adult prostitution or die of AIDS.

The phenomenon of child sexual abuse images on the internet is one of the most abject forms of child abuse and exploitation. The legal framework across countries is currently piecemeal and serious data is in short supply. While police in some countries are becoming more efficient in tracking down consumers and suppliers, in many places little is known about the culprits and how they operate. Similarly, the motivation that makes men seek out young girls is little understood, although some work is being done in this area (e.g., ILO/IPEC 2004).

Statistics about the extent of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation vary enormously from country to country. Indeed, research in the UK suggests that a very small percentage of cases actually come to the attention of the statutory services and this is likely to be the case in many countries. Many programmes are working unknowingly with children who are sexually abused. While this is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, it does mean that professionals and programmes need to be alert to the possibility of abuse as a factor in any unusual or difficult behaviour on the part of the child.

Worldwide, there are very few professionals or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with sufficient capacity to address sexual abuse of children. It was reported to Oak, for example, that the nursing training curriculum in one area of Switzerland gives the issue a low level of priority. In addition, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, nurses, midwives, teachers and police officers have limited knowledge of identifying and treating child abuse and there are few policies and protocols to guide them in handling such cases.

As a result, the programme of support offered to NGOs in Oak's priority countries (see box) includes a wide range of prevention and recovery programmes. These include telephone help-lines, piloting multidisciplinary casework, data collection at local level, short-term shelters for child victims, school clubs, campaigns to prevent child abuse and programmes to support adolescents leaving care. The Oak Foundation also provides exposure and training in new approaches, particularly the area of child resilience (see box).

There are many tragic stories of children being abused by development agency staff in refugee or displaced-person camps, NGO projects and children's institutions. These remind us of children's vulnerability, even when they are supposedly in a place of safety. In the past two years, the Oak Foundation has helped fund standards relating to the protection of children from abuse while in the care of private or state agencies. There is a clear need for training of staff in this area and a formal process for agencies to report staff members who are accused of abusing children. The "Keeping Children Safe" materials developed by a coalition of development and child rights agencies is a set of 11 standards and a training pack to accompany them. The materials provide a framework for agencies and institutions to establish effective measures to prevent and respond to violence and abuse against children (see <www.keepingchildrensafe.org.uk>).

### Identifying what makes children vulnerable

Many agencies do not recognise that the children in their programmes could be at additional risk of sexual abuse. It is therefore important to identify the situations that make children vulnerable. These include situations where children are abused at home, by neighbours or friends; in schools and childcare institutions; and in more extreme circumstances such as war zones, on the streets, child trafficking routes, children caring for their siblings because their parents have died of AIDS, and in high-risk jobs such as domestic work.

Many of these extreme situations occur when children are deprived of parental care. Others, however, arise where families are still apparently complete but may include stepmothers who discriminate against stepdaughters, leaving them to leave home and roam the streets; or stepfathers who seek out an isolated mother to have access to her daughters or sons; or even mothers working abroad, who may leave their daughters vulnerable to the male members of the family. There are many situations that make children vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation and further research is needed to identify and prioritise them.

### Integrating child protection into communities

Because the issues of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation will need to be closely integrated within emerging **official** child protection systems, they will also need to find their place within child programmes at **community** level. Figure 1 shows how programmes to promote child protection – and advocacy on child protection – need to be integrated alongside normal child development programmes in the community. The overarching concern to promote children's rights and child resilience should form the guiding framework for all work with children (see the workshop organised by the International Catholic Child Bureau, June 2005, in this respect).

Several steps need to be undertaken when designing a community-level programme to counter sexual abuse and exploitation to:

1. understand risk and protection in the context of the community;
2. build community action;
3. promote child resilience and protection;
4. create a sense of ownership.

**1. Understanding risk and protection.** Before a programme can begin, there needs to be some understanding of the forms of abuse and exploitation prevalent within the target community. The type of questions that need to be asked include the following:

a) How do communities currently protect their children from abuse and exploitation?

## The Oak Foundation

Based in Geneva, the Oak Foundation has offices in London, Zimbabwe, Belize, Sofia and (since May 2006) Portland, USA. It commits its resources to address issues of global social and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantaged. The resources of the Oak Foundation originated from an interest in the Duty Free Shoppers business which Alan M. Parker helped build up. Since 1998 when the Foundation was reorganised and began to hire new staff, it has developed eight thematic and two country (Denmark and Zimbabwe) grant-making programmes <www.oakfnd.org>. The child abuse programme is run out of the Geneva office with five staff, two of which are in Sofia and Addis Ababa.

**Where does the Oak Foundation work?**
Bulgaria, Switzerland and Ethiopia are the primary targets and Latvia, Uganda and Tanzania are secondary. Support is targeted to prevention, recognition, recovery and advocacy projects run by NGOs plus support to the groups spearheading international research, training and political action. Emphasis is currently on encouraging partners to develop joint NGO programmes that will develop joined-up thinking on services for children.

**The Oak Foundation in East Africa**
In East Africa, children are still largely considered as the property of their families/communities and are rarely allowed to express ideas on issues affecting their future. Oak has helped develop school-based and community-focused children's clubs to empower children. It is believed that empowered children will be less exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation.

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, a joint programme between Oak and five local organisations aims to provide integrated services for child survivors of child sexual abuse and to protect and rehabilitate children trafficked from rural areas. Another two programmes in Nazareth, Ethiopia, and Kampala, Uganda, are bringing together relevant governmental, non-governmental and community organisations to address the problem in a coordinated manner.

A partnership with the African Child Policy Forum, a regional organisation, is developing child-protection policies for NGOs and other child-oriented organisations. It is hoped that formal policies will greatly reduce child sexual abuse in care institutions by the staff and visitors.

Assessment of child trafficking in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda is being achieved by working with the African Network for Prevention and Protection Against Children (ANPPCAN). The study focuses on the scale of the problem, the profile of the traffickers and the impact of trafficking on child development. A protection, prevention and rehabilitation programme for child victims will be implemented based on the assessment findings.

A number of prevention and recovery programmes in high-risk areas are attempting to attract children away from prostitution. Provision of micro-finance to families and young adults thought to be at risk of prostitution may be one way forward.

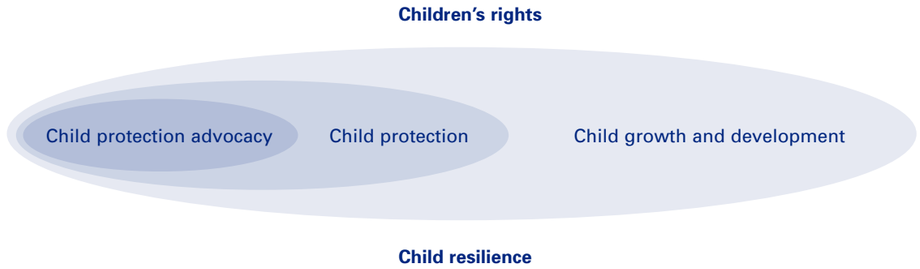


Figure 1. Integrating child protection/advocacy within programmes

b) How do they define abuse? (Important to ask children separately from adults and girls separately from boys.)
c) What makes children vulnerable to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (factors in the child's personality, family or environment)?
d) What can, or does, protect them?
e) What negative non-intentional side effects of action can be anticipated?

Poverty is only one factor and, indeed, many poor people do not perpetrate or suffer from sexual abuse and exploitation. Can anything be learned from them? Other factors include parenting patterns, social exclusion, family violence, disability, access by traffickers and presence (or lack of) community action networks. Ongoing studies at a very local level are needed to pinpoint the main factors that protect children.

Once baseline data is available, a programme to protect children can be built. A recent baseline developed for the Emmanuel Development Association of Ethiopia provided the first study on child abuse in the town of Debre Birhan. It included both girls and boys as respondents, a fact that added significantly to the quality of the study (Emmanuel 2005). It is to be noted that UNICEF is currently developing a child-friendly tool to measure and assess violence against children that will also be helpful in conducting assessments of this type (in preparation).

**2. Build community action.** Community action should be mainstreamed within other community work on education, health, economics, social work, etc. Activities to promote child protection might include:

- information/education to children;
- outreach to children at risk;
- developing ways for children to be heard and believed;
- a place of safety within the community for children who cannot stay at home;
- support from positive reference figures, such as 'aunts';
- children's groups for peer support, listening and action.

For advocacy on protection at local level, activities could include:

- children's groups and youth groups to collect data, identify gaps and speak up about abuse and exploitation;
- community action groups;
- a readiness to challenge practices that lead to child abuse and to promote those that strengthen and protect children;
- accessible, formal, child-friendly protection systems and, where these are lacking, action with local government to provide them.

Communities must also take an uncompromising stance with regard to abusers, who have to get the message that abusing is a crime for which they will be punished. Communities must stand up for their weakest members and community elders should speak out in favour of protecting children. However, many countries have long-held taboos about sexual abuse and there have been very few successful convictions. Happily this situation is starting to change and penalties have become extremely high in some countries. While successful convictions may have an enormous deterrent effect, it is unrealistic to expect that all offenders will be caught and brought to justice. This is why there will always be a need for ongoing prevention activities.



Community action needs to be backed up by state child protection mechanisms (social workers, the police and the judiciary). Further investment in police and judicial training are needed as well as training on conducting child-friendly investigations for gaining evidence for court.

**3. Promote child resilience and protection.** It is important for fieldworkers to know that, on the one hand, it makes a difference if we can eliminate just one or two risk factors from a child's environment even if other greater risks may remain e.g., poverty, local drug-dealing environment. While on the other hand, promoting behaviours, events and attitudes which foster child resilience may have very positive impacts for a child's wellbeing.
For example:

- an adult who takes an ongoing and caring interest in a child;
- a caring network of people around the child;
- linking an isolated child or mother into a wider network of care;
- identifying what brings meaning to a child's life and providing opportunities to nurture this;
- identifying the abilities of the child and giving scope for these to be expressed; and
- providing the child with opportunities to experience beauty, nature, art, etc.

Positive experiences, events, people or simply words are also invaluable; some children have never heard the words 'well done'. A recent workshop run for Oak's Ugandan partners made a recommendation to add some positive posters to a campaign on the dangers of child abuse and exploitation. Many campaigns put too much emphasis on negative ideas (such as depicting 101 abusive ways to discipline a child – which could give parents ideas!). Presenting a positive image of a child and a helping community can begin to change the way people consider children. It is also important to provide opportunities for study and recreation, especially in a violent environment.

**4. Create a sense of ownership.** Promoting the growth and resilience of children in community settings needs to raise the levels of concern – and action – by the community itself, including children. While Oak has supported NGOs working within communities where prevention and recovery programmes are mainstreamed, there is so much more to do particularly in achieving community ownership of programmes to ensure their sustainability over time.

## Learning from the past

The Oak child abuse programme has developed its own learning programme and this will be developed with key partners. It will look for evidence about the impact of taking the child's perspective into account, it will seek to understand more about the motivations of the negative actors involved in abuse and exploitation, and it will seek to identify how communities develop their own child protection strategies where formal systems are non-existent.

At an international level, the UN Study on Violence against Children, a welcome and timely initiative by the UN Secretary General, may well lead to a range of new studies and programmes, even legislation. It has certainly galvanised a wide range of actors around this fundamental violation of children's rights and may well prove in retrospect to be the turning point for greater awareness and political will, at least in some countries, to combat violence to children.

It is over 80 years since Eglantyne Jebb put the right to protection from exploitation into the first international declaration of children's rights. Let us hope that it will take far less time for communities and governments to act to ensure future generations are protected from all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence.

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## Notes

1. By Jane Warburton, Technical Advisor to the programme 1999–2002.