

Children and Violence

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INTRODUCTION

Globally the lives of millions of children are blighted by violence. News reports are frequently full of the horrors experienced by children ranging from the actions of armed forces or groups to interpersonal violence including child maltreatment, homicide and abuse. Moving from the so called “problems of children” or “children at risk” there is also a lurid fascination with “problem children” or children who are deemed to be “the risk” with notorious cases of children who have harmed and even murdered others (Rosier, 2009). Missing from the more sensationalist coverage is a consideration of ‘everyday’ forms of violence affecting children (Parkes, 2015; Wells, Burman, Montgomery and Watson, 2014; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). Everyday violence is often a routine and normalised part of children’s interactions with others, whether physical punishment from parents or teachers or harassment on the way to school. Such forms of violence are often unquestioned, accepted or hidden from view.

This chapter focus on these everyday forms of violence affecting children. I use the term violence 'affecting' rather than 'against' children' as children may not only be the direct 'target' of violent acts, such as corporal punishment or sexual abuse, but also navigate other violent contexts, where others may be the principal 'target', such as in the case of intimate partner violence. Moreover, children also act violently, whether towards peers or adults, while at the same time being subject to violence. Violence affecting children recognizes that children occupy multiple positionings in contexts of violence, beyond the victim/perpetrator binary and as will be explored throughout the chapter, often experience multiple forms of violence across different settings.

Violence affecting children is a global phenomenon, but the forms violence takes and the ways in which it is understood and responded to are shaped by specific political, economic, social and cultural contexts (Parkes, 2015). In this chapter I explore how and why violence manifests in the lives of children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam and how children experience and respond to such acts. However, in doing so I am not suggesting that violence affecting children is a problem confined to the Global South or reifying distinctions between the Global North and South.

The chapter starts by drawing on the sociology of childhood to offer some critiques of the dominant ways in which childhood and violence are constructed in research, highlighting the focus on individual characteristics and interpersonal dynamics with less consideration of how these might be shaped by wider inequalities of power and resources. After providing a brief overview of the Young Lives study I draw on qualitative data generated with children, their caregivers and teachers to illustrate how structural and symbolic forms of violence shape interpersonal everyday violence; how such acts of everyday violence reflect and reinforce power relations between adults and children and between other social groups, particularly in school settings; and how children respond to and navigate everyday violence in the context of wider social inequalities.

CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD AND VIOLENCE

The majority of research on children and violence has taken place in the Global North, particularly focused on child abuse and neglect (Wessells, 2015). A number of disciplines have contributed to this field (see for instance, Dowd, Singer and Wilson, 2006) particularly psychologists (including developmental, critical and feminist psychologists, as well as psychologists working across therapeutic fields such as psychodynamic theory), public health researchers, sociologists and childhood studies theorists drawing on social work practice (Beckett, 2011; Waterhouse and McGhee, 2015). Much of this research has sought to demonstrate the adverse consequences of violence for children's health, well-being and longer-term development and life chances (for a review of global evidence see Know Violence in Childhood, 2017). Another strand of research has focused on identifying which groups of children may be at risk of becoming either victims or perpetrators of violence, such as Dan Olweus' (1993) work on the characteristics of children who bully, are bullied, or experience both. While such research is important for understanding the terrible impact of violence on children's lives, this provides a narrow perspective on both violence and on childhood.

First, there is a misplaced emphasis on children's innate vulnerability. It is assumed that children's physical and emotional immaturity puts them at greater risk of experiencing violence, rather than considering the ways in which societies are organized which place children in positions of vulnerability. A central concern of sociologists of childhood has been to explore the relations of power between children as a marginalised social group, with adults as the dominant social group (Mayall, 2002). Adults and children are viewed as occupying unequal positioning in the social order, which enables adults to act in certain ways, such as the socially sanctioned use of violence to discipline children and constrain children's opportunities to act (Alanen, 2001). Writing on the sexual abuse of children Kitzinger (1990: 177) argues that child abuse is "part of the structural oppression of children". As adults exercise unquestioned power over children, this not only enables such acts to take place but also places children in a position of dependency, limiting the resources and power with which children have to respond.

Generational inequalities between adults and children intersect with other "multiple axes of differentiation" and disadvantage based on gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation and so on (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 76). For example, in the US, young, black men, aged 15-34 are nine times more likely to be killed by police than other Americans (The Counted, 2016). Horton (2016: 211) suggests that understanding violence requires understanding of how power operates as "the ability of individuals to exercise power, and hence to engage in [violence], depends on how they are positioned and position themselves according to wider societal norms regarding race, gender, size, bodily shape, social class and so on...". Hence children are situated in multiple configurations of power relations which not only shape the violence to which children are subject (Ennew, 1986) but also the ways in which children may enact violent practices, such as bullying. Horton (2016: 212) challenges discourses which either ignore or blame individual children for seemingly pathological or abnormal behaviour. He argues instead that children's acts of aggression are an everyday feature of childhood as children attempt to "navigate a range of power relations in social, institutional and societal contexts over which they have little control" such as in school settings.

This requires a shift in the way in which violence is conceptualised, from an emphasis on an individual's behaviour or characteristics to the factors that shape relations between individuals and between social groups. Writing on research into gender violence (but a critique equally applicable to violence in childhood) the anthropologist Sally Engle Merry (2009) notes how the causes of such violence are frequently located within family dynamics or past experiences. She argues that while psychological and interpersonal factors are part of the picture, there has been far less consideration of wider inequalities related to class, race, gender and histories of colonialism, conflict and poverty and how these take root in particular social contexts.

Second, children are typically represented as either victims or perpetrators of violence. Victimhood is closely associated with assumptions of childhood innocence and helplessness whereas children who enact violence are demonized (Kehily, 2004). Children are either seen as passive, or if they do act this is seen as deviant behaviour. Few studies have explored children's own perspectives, experiences and responses to violence (Boyden and de Berry, 2004). Korbin (2003: 441) notes that "despite increasing calls for the child's perspective, less is understood about how meaning and agency act as mediating forces between violence and its impact".

In contrast, sociological approaches to childhood have sought to foreground the notion of children as social agents with a central role in determining the course of their lives, within constraints shaped by unequal and multiple intersecting inequalities of power (James and Prout, 1990). Research from the UK and Sweden explored how although most children are adversely affected by domestic violence, children also develop a range of coping strategies (McGee, 2000; Mullender et al., 2002; Overlien and Hyden, 2009). Children ranging in age from 5-17 years old described adopting strategies including: physical or emotional removal from the situation (such as pretending that the violence is not taking place); looking after, or being looked after, by siblings; creating networks of social support; and finding ways to protect their mother, including intervening in the violence by fetching help (Mullender et al., 2002). Labelling children as victims therefore obscures the strategies that children do undertake to navigate everyday violence, potentially further disempowering and marginalizing these young people (Kitzinger, 1990; Parkes, 2015).

A sociological approach to the study of childhood and violence therefore questions assumptions about the nature of children as vulnerable or passive and how the status of childhood as subordinate to adulthood gives rise to everyday forms of violence affecting children. As the case studies from Young Lives will discuss, understanding violence affecting children from this approach means exploring the connections between the everyday contexts of children's lives with wider structural factors and looking beyond purely behavioural or cultural explanations. This also challenges more conventional conceptions of violence, as the following section demonstrates.

VIOLENCE: A "SLIPPERY CONCEPT"

Violence has been described as a "slippery concept" as what constitutes violence and the causes and consequences of violent acts are frequently contested, both between academic disciplines and within and between different contexts across the globe (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1). Internationally, most definitions of violence have centred on "the

intentional use of physical force or power” whether “threatened or actual” encompassing four forms: physical, psychological, sexual and deprivation (Krug et al. 2002). However, critics have observed that there has been a greater focus on physical acts, with less attention to understanding and addressing the “non-physical and/or non-intentional forms of harm (such as, inter alia, neglect and psychological maltreatment)” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011: 4). As anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1) argue:

Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence as what gives violence its power and meaning.

The authors emphasize not only the imperative to conceive of violence more broadly, beyond the physical, but also to shift the focus from attempting to categorize forms of violence or to measure force or severity, to understanding how violence is experienced by the survivor and how this is shaped by the social and cultural context in which people are living. For example, as we will see later in the chapter, the physical punishment of children is often justified with reference to ideas concerning the appropriate socialisation of the young into accepted ways of behaving within society. Yet children often experience such punishment as shameful and stigmatizing, especially when it arises from impoverishment, such as not being able to bring the correct materials to school.

Understanding violence therefore necessitates not only exploring the actual act of violence but also the “everyday interactions that surround these acts, and to their roots in structural violence of inequitable and unjust socio-economic and political systems and institutions” (Parkes, 2015: 4). The term structural violence, is most closely associated with sociologist Johan Galtung (1969) and medical anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004). Structural violence refers to the ways in which societies are organized politically and economically that mean certain social groups experience greater harm, such as poverty, hunger and sickness, inability to access services and political marginalisation. Poverty, social exclusion and other forms of discrimination and social injustice are considered as forms of violence through the harm caused to the body (e.g. illness and hunger) and mind (e.g. stress), to social relations (through stigma, humiliation and exclusion) and reduction in the overall quality of life and life chances. At the same time, structural violence also gives rise to greater vulnerability to direct or interpersonal forms of violence, like domestic violence, bullying and physical punishment (Merry, 2009).

Accompanying structural violence is often forms of symbolic violence. The concept of symbolic violence stems from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to account for the ways in which structural violence acts upon individuals “with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004: 272). Bourdieu argues that as individuals are emmeshed in unequal relations of power they often do not recognize the source of their oppression and so do not challenge symbolic violence as it is normalised and is not recognized as violence. Forms of symbolic violence include oppression on the grounds of gender, race or class, which often goes unquestioned, such as certain jobs being more suitable for men rather than women, or poor people needing to work harder to change their circumstances.

Moreover, feelings of inferiority and blame can come to be internalised by individuals and social groups and indeed unconsciously reinforced through actions which can reproduce the dominance of certain social groups over others. As Connolly and Healy (2004: 15) explain:

It is an act of *violence* precisely because it leads to the constraint and subordination of individuals, but it is also *symbolic* in the sense that this is achieved indirectly and without the overt and explicit acts of force or coercion

This is illustrated by the authors research on how the social inequality experienced by working-class boys in Belfast and the lack of relevance of schooling to their lives shapes the way they see the world and limits their future education and career aspirations.

As we will explore through the Young Lives research, structural and symbolic violence are intertwined in everyday violent acts or practices. In contrast with the focus on the extreme or to exceptional cases with which we started this chapter, everyday violence refers to the routinized, normalised and often hidden forms of violence affecting children, and how these forms of violence interconnect in a myriad of ways (Parkes, 2015; Wells, et al. 2014; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). In a parallel with work on gender violence, the task then of childhood sociologists is to make visible “forms of violence that had previously been unseen, buried, disguised and otherwise denied, which are directed from the more powerful to the less powerful” in particular by attending to the experiences of less powerful, in this case children (Walby, 2012: 98). In the sections that follow, after giving a brief overview of the Young Lives study, I draw on children’s accounts of surrounding everyday violence, at home, school and in the community to trace the links between wider structural inequalities of resources and power and how these manifest in different contexts.

YOUNG LIVES

Young Lives is a two-cohort longitudinal study of childhood poverty, which has been following approximately 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Viet Nam since 2002. Young Lives research combines survey and qualitative methods, focused on the causes and consequences of childhood poverty for children’s well-being. This chapter draws on the qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted with children, their caregivers and teachers conducted over time between 2007 and 2014. The interviews were semi-structured around key themes, such as: well-being, risk and resilience; education, work, and time-use; and access to services and social support (see Crivello, Morrow and Wilson, 2013). Children were not asked specific questions on violence but discussions arose spontaneously when talking about their daily lives and relationships with others.

LINKING STRUCTURAL, SYMBOLIC AND INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

As noted earlier in the chapter, violence research often focuses on personal risk factors and interpersonal dynamics with the result that poverty as both a form of violence, as well as a contributory factor is often overlooked. Instead, as the case studies from Young Lives illustrate, everyday violent practices, such as physical punishment or harassment between peers are rooted in the structural violence of poverty and inequality and often mediated through symbolic violence.

The structural violence of poverty runs throughout children's accounts of their lives "from overcrowded classrooms, to lack of social protection measures that mean children's work is needed for family survival, lack of family resources to pay for school fees, exercise books, uniforms, and so on" (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 17). Poverty also puts great strain on relationships – in families, schools and communities (Bartlett, 2018). Financial hardship places great stress on families, which gives rise to interpersonal violence, such as domestic violence (see the examples of Ravi and Nga below) or children may need to work to support their families, exposing children to other forms of violence, including from employers or teachers.

In rural areas, many children face the challenge of balancing working and schooling as children's labour is needed for subsistence agriculture, especially at peak seasonal times of year. Often children miss school to work, but are physically punished by teachers when they return to school. In India, Ranadeep, aged 13, explained he was beaten when he returned to school after the harvest: "They hit us because I didn't go to school for one month, and ... I missed [the lessons]" (Morrow and Singh, 2015: 76). Lack of materials for school also resulted in children being punished: as a boy, aged 7 from India, said: "If we don't get [buy and bring] notebooks, then teachers will beat us" (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 19).

Poverty was also a factor in children's accounts of being bullied or harassed by other children. This involved physical violence, such as fighting but also symbolic forms of violence, including name calling or insults referring to children's impoverished circumstances, such as poor quality clothing or lack of shoes. In Ethiopia, Kebenga, aged 12, described being absent from school for three days because of not having clothes after having faced insults from his peers on a previous occasion: "I went to school barefoot because my shoes were torn apart. Then students laughed at me, and some of them insulted me calling me a 'poor boy'" (Pells et al. 2016: 31). Other children reported being absent from school, and even stopping attending completely, rather than being stigmatized and bullied. Such forms of violence are either trivialised or dismissed (Horton, 2016) or subject to "misrecognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004) as poor children and children from other marginalized groups internalise the stigma of poverty. For instance, Bereket, aged 16 from Ethiopia explained: "When the students come wearing better clothes, I don't like to feel inferior to them, so it is a must for me to work hard [earning money] to change my situation" (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 19). Through everyday interactions and practices these forms of symbolic violence reinforce the marginalization of poor children as illustrated by Y Think, a 16-year-old boy from the Cham H'roi ethnic minority group in Viet Nam. Y Think described being bullied by other children for "being 'an ethnic'" which meant he "couldn't digest the lessons. So I felt tired of learning." He left school and worked on the family farm (Pells et al. 2016: 32).

These case studies illustrate therefore, the "importance of locating interpersonal violence within wider social patterns of power and inequality" (Merry, 2009: 23) as interpersonal violence is both a manifestation of structural violence, as well as being accompanied by the symbolic violence of shame and stigma, which in turn reinforces the structural violence of poverty and marginalisation.

VIOLENCE AND UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS

Violence affecting children occurs at the intersections of unequal generational power relations between adults and children and other markers of social difference, such as class, gender and ethnicity or caste. These intersecting, unequal power relations are shaped by social understandings and norms operating in different contexts, such as within the school, or public space and shaped by, as well as an expression of, structural violence.

Across the Young Lives countries, the use of violent discipline is widely accepted and normalised, and seen as supportive of children's learning and development. In Peru, José (age 13) said: "If we are punished it is because we deserve it, because we have done something wrong" (Guerrero and Rojas, 2016: 30). In some cases, children and caregivers perceived that corporal punishment by teachers was an acceptable way of shaping children's behaviour and values. The mother of a 9-year-old boy in India, said: "Nowadays, the teachers don't beat the students. ... but it should be necessary sometimes to keep them in control. So we ourselves ask them to be strict with the students" (Morrow and Singh, 2015: 77).

Assumptions about the nature of children intersect with other social and gender norms. As I have explored previously:

Girls' and boys' differential experiences and responses to violence are linked with notions of masculinity and femininity, especially in relation to physical punishment. This varies cross-culturally, but in India, for example, norms relating to femininity mean that girls are required to be docile and submissive, must not be 'naughty', while constructions of masculinity may mean that boys are supposed to be able to accept physical punishment and withstand pain (Morrow and Singh, 2014). In Vietnam, powerful patriarchal norms mean that men are entitled to discipline other household members, and this frames young people's understandings of violence as an appropriate mechanism for educating and controlling younger children and women. Girls often experience forms of violence which reflect unequal gender norms (Vu, 2016). In Peru, girls receive less frequent physical punishment than boys, reinforcing gender stereotypes that see men as strong, able to accept and endure pain – boys 'never show a submissive attitude while being physically punished; rather they strive to appear resilient and to hide pain' (Rojas 2011: 18). (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 13)

Unequal power relations are therefore reproduced through both interpersonal and symbolic violence, particularly normative assumptions regarding gender and generation. Similarly, with ethnicity (as illustrated by the previous example of Y Think) and caste. In India, teachers are often of a higher caste than the children they teach. Boys aged 9–10 described receiving verbal abuse from teachers: "They abuse us, and use foul language: 'You look like bullocks and donkeys – the herdsman is better than you.' This makes us very sad." (Morrow and Singh, 2015: 75)

As noted earlier, children are situated in multiple configurations of power relations, not only with adults but also with their peers. Children's relations with peers, do not take place in a vacuum but are shaped by wider inequalities which children attempt to navigate in their

daily lives (Horton, 2016). For example, in India, children recounted how teachers hit children who were 'dirty' or irregular in attending school. Children adopted and used similar expressions, stating that they wanted to hit children who were not in school to teach them a lesson. For example, one girl explained how with the girls in her village who were absent from school she felt "like beating them...as they have not come to school" but that the teacher said, "let them spoil". In Peru, violence from teachers was replicated by children in forms of violent bullying, with the use of violence justified as teaching a lesson, enforcing conformity with gender norms to establish masculine identities for boys (Rojas 2011).

Older girls reported experiencing sexual harassment and gender-based violence. In Ethiopia, Haftey, age 12 described being harassed on the way to and from school: "We cannot study because we always worry about the boys' threat. We are frightened always." (Pells et al. 2016: 35). Likewise, Harika, age 14, living in rural Andhra Pradesh, described how some girls had stopped going to school because of harassment from boys, often termed 'eve-teasing' (Morrow and Singh, 2016). She explained:

Earlier we used to be in school [doing homework] but now no one stays back after school... we all decided now in 10th class we return home fast. [...] Big boys used to come and sit there, at the school... Because other boys come to the school, so they [the girls] don't come now. (Pells et al. 2016: 35).

Violence is therefore intimately intertwined with dynamics of power that operate within and between institutional contexts and children's material environments (Bartlett, 2018; Horton, 2016; Walby, 2012) mediated through interpersonal and symbolic violence that reproduces the dominance of certain social groups over others.

CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

Children's responses to violence are complex and varied, influenced by social positioning on account of their age and gender, as well as economic resources and social networks (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015). How children construct, experience and navigate violence changes over time. This encompasses not just changes in the nature of violence which children may experience, but also children's understandings and interpretations of what constitutes violence. In other words, what is considered unacceptable at one point later becomes normalised and vice versa (Pells and Morrow, 2017). The following case from India illustrates changing responses to domestic violence over time (Morrow and Singh, 2016: 24-26):

Ravi, a Scheduled Caste boy from rural Andhra Pradesh, had stopped going to school aged 9 to work as a bonded labourer to pay off family debt. At age 12, he said: "When my Mum and Dad fight I feel very bad. When my Dad beats my Mum we go to try to stop him. Me and my brother go." He was adamant aged 12 that in the future he would not hit his own wife like his father hit his mother. When he was 13 he described having left work as he was beaten by his employer. He was also hit at home by his father. When interviewed for the third time, aged 16, Ravi no longer mentioned domestic violence between his parents. However, he described how he was drawn into fighting his brother-in-law who was hitting his sister, to protect his sister and her son. Caught up in the violence, he said:

“She [his sister] told me not get involved and to go inside. He pulled me out and started hitting my sister. I had to free her.”

By age 20 Ravi was married and his wife was 4 months pregnant. He wanted to take care of his wife but said: “she [his wife] gets a beating...I hit her when she tells anything...she won’t keep quiet [after the quarrel], she keeps muttering to herself...she just nags, I get angry.”

As we saw in the previous sections, Ravi’s case also shows how structural, symbolic and interpersonal violence are intertwined and intersect with generation and gender norms. As Morrow and Singh (2016: 26) argue: “gender norms – in the form of dominant masculinity – intersect with poverty, indebtedness” and unequal adult-child relations over time “generating violence towards women as well as reinforcing and connecting to cycles of violence affecting children.”

However, in other cases while children accepted violence as normal when they were younger, as they became older they started to raise questions. When Shanmuka Priya (India) was younger she described how she hit other children to try to protect herself and her younger brother. She also said she was hit by teachers for being late and for not understanding the lessons, adding that teachers also physically punished children for being dirty. When she was older (age 14) Shanmuka Priya questioned teachers’ use of physical punishment explaining that primary school teachers hit the children because the teachers were “from the village” and did not know it was a crime to “mishandle” children, whereas high school teachers were from further afield and are aware that the government would punish them if they hit children (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 11).

Contrary to constructions of children as passive, children’s accounts therefore reveal a more complex picture of how they respond to violence:

Children may seemingly do nothing (or cry); complain; seek help individually; seek help as a group (rather than individually) which may be a safer way to respond, depending on the problem; avoidance - running away, leaving an abusive employer, refusing to go to school; and intervening: children (especially boys) may try to physically stop violence, sometimes using violence themselves against the instigators or adopt more indirect strategies to try and help (Pells and Morrow, 2017: 11).

These responses are illustrated by findings from research on domestic violence in Vietnam. Younger children described how they distanced themselves from the violence physically, such as hiding away or going to another house, whereas older children tended to have developed other strategies, including helping their mothers. Older boys intervened directly to try and protect their mother from abuse, whereas older girls adopted indirect strategies, such as earning money to give to their mothers and so reducing her dependence on her husband (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015). Children also described the positive role that friendships and school can play in supporting with difficult home environments. However, children who felt different or stigmatised on account of their home situation struggled to learn and in some cases left school (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015). For example, in Vietnam, Nga did not pass the exam to progress onto higher secondary school when she was 15. After leaving school Nga started protecting her mother from her father’s drunken

violence by staying up late and going to the bar where he drank. She said: "I go wake him up and tell him to come home." Nga also worked at her mother's café and gave her earnings to her mother. Nga described feeling inferior to the children who were still at school but was supported by "a few good children who had to quit school because of their family situation." (Pells, Wilson and Nguyen, 2015: 60, 62).

Thus these case studies illustrate how children's agency is highly "situational" (Overlien and Hyden, 2009: 490) changing over time and shaped by wider inequalities of power and resources, which shape and constrain children's responses.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated how 'everyday violence' is hidden and routinized in the lives of many children. Rather than just focusing on the behaviour of individuals (whether adults or children) there is a need to understand how interpersonal violence emerges from structural and symbolic forms of violence and how these forms of violence shape the operation of power in institutions, such as the school and the family. Violence can thus be understood as a structural phenomenon; a way in which societies are organized. Children as a social group are marginalised and positioned as unequal to adults with generational power relations intersecting with other multiple inequalities of power, such as gender, class, ethnicity that puts children at risk of experiencing violence, as well as shaping children's relations and interactions with others, which may include enacting violence as children navigate their daily lives. While not neglecting the multiple, negative effects violence has on children's lives and well-being, understanding children as social agents who respond in multiple ways, including reproducing, re-working or resisting violence is vital in understanding the complexities of the dynamics of violence and in efforts to prevent and respond more effectively to violence affecting children.

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