

Play it Safe

A Summary of
our findings



The Silence of Violence

There are many children in our country who face violence in their everyday lives. This issue of violence is still a big problem and we, children and adults, need to work towards resolving it together. It is important to provide children with safe environments to grow, wherever they are—be it at home, school or out in the public. There is a need to protect children from abuse and exploitation so that they can develop to their full potential and benefits from the joys of childhood by creating environments where they feel safe and are respected.

Reflect on your own life; do you think sometimes children are treated badly? Are there any children in your locality who you think have been treated unfairly? Have you or children in your school been made to feel ashamed or been beaten? Have you ever seen a child who should be in school working at a tea-shop or department store near you?

Violence has a deep impact on the child's physical, psychological and emotional health; it often leads to the child feeling frustrated and isolated. Children who face violence during their childhood, often use violence themselves when faced with problems. Violence, therefore, usually works in a cyclic manner, leading to further violence. This can be done as a child who has suffered violence and abuse in childhood is more likely to inflict violence and abuse on others, both as a child and as an adult.

What do we mean by violence?

There are many different forms of violence:

Physical (hitting, slapping, kicking, etc.)

Psychological (being made to feel humiliated or ashamed, made to feel afraid, witnessing violence, discrimination, verbal abuse like shouting, screaming, etc.)

Economic (being forced to earn, facing violence at the workplace, not being paid, etc.)

Sexual violence (being touched inappropriately, forcefully kissed or touched, etc.)

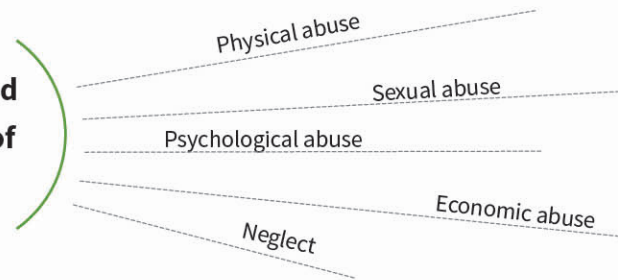
Neglect (being deprived of necessary attention)



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**The children surveyed
reported five forms of
violence**



Violence could occur in the home, school, institution, workplaces, or even in the community. Violence against children is most often not seen as a serious problem or crime, since it is usually regarded as a ‘private’ matter (which only concerns the child and its family) or seen as ‘normal’ (that there is nothing wrong with beating/humiliating children). It is, therefore, important to talk about these problems and bring them to the attention of everyone in the community.

Your voice!

Twenty-seven years ago, the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child led to a change in the way children were viewed and treated—as human beings, with their distinct set of rights.



Subsequently, there has been a gradual change in the way governments across the globe interact with children. People have realized that it is important to listen to children and actively involve them in promoting and planning actions for their own safety. The Government of India adopted this Convention 25 years ago and has since worked towards achieving and promoting healthy and safe environments for every child’s growth.

Children’s experiences and their life-stories can help us to understand the issues faced by children everywhere. All the information given by children and the adults working with children can lead to the framing of guidelines and policies which would be binding on all people.



PLAY IT SAFE

To bring the stories of children forward, **UNICEF, NINEISMINE and Mumbai Smiles** carried out an Opinion Poll called '**Play It Safe**' to identify, record and track the violence that children experience. This Poll tried to start a process of creating safe spaces for children by encouraging them to speak up. It will be used to study how often and what kinds of violence children face in different places like home, school, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyayas (KGBVs), workplaces and communities.

The poll was conducted with children in schools (**41.63%**), out of school (**38.95%**) and those in KGBVs (**2.04%**), Ashramshalas (**5.8%**) and institutions (**11.58%**).

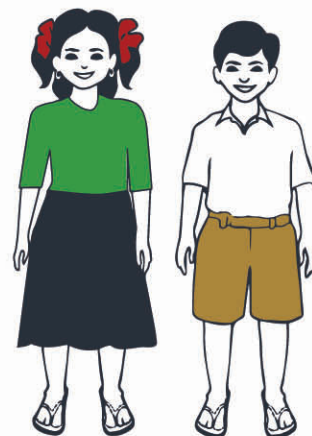
I feel unsafe at home as my Grandmother or Mother fight a lot at home. (Saumya, Age 16 years, Yavatmal)



The 'Play it Safe' poll is different and unique because it has listened to the voices of the children; their opinions and vision for a world free of violence towards them. This participation from children is the main goal of this Poll. It is hoped that it will lead to new methods, ideas, and conversations to help children get access to their rights.

The Poll: How we did it

Around 5000 children in the age group 13–17 years, in eight districts of Maharashtra, were given a list of questions and asked to provide information on the different kinds of violence they have personally faced or have seen other children endure.

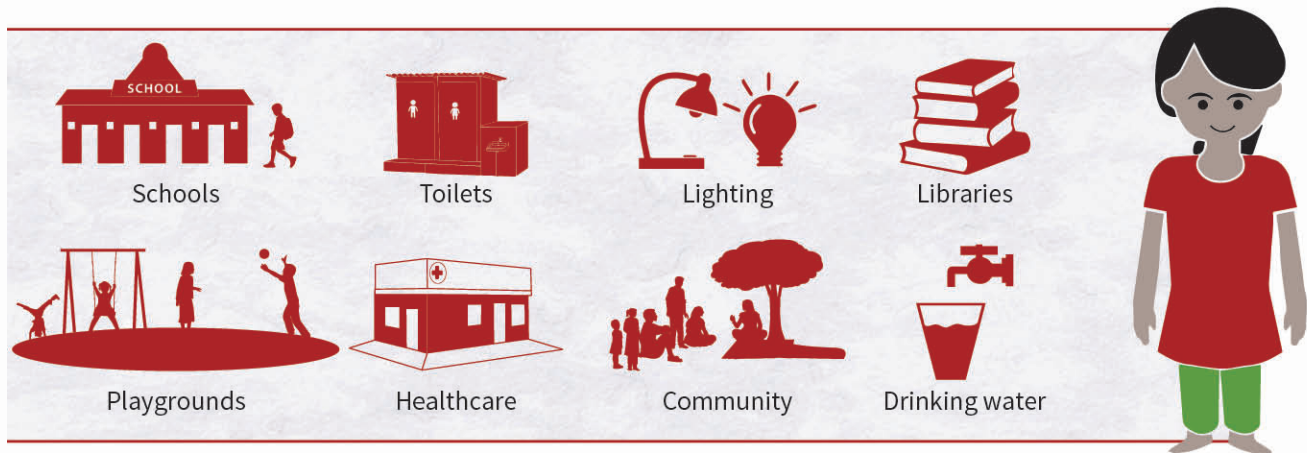


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Children were asked to share their experiences by answering the questions as well as speaking about the violence they have faced through story-telling. Other methods of sharing were sessions of free expression where children used drawings, poems and compositions to describe their situations regarding safety within homes, schools and communities.

What we found

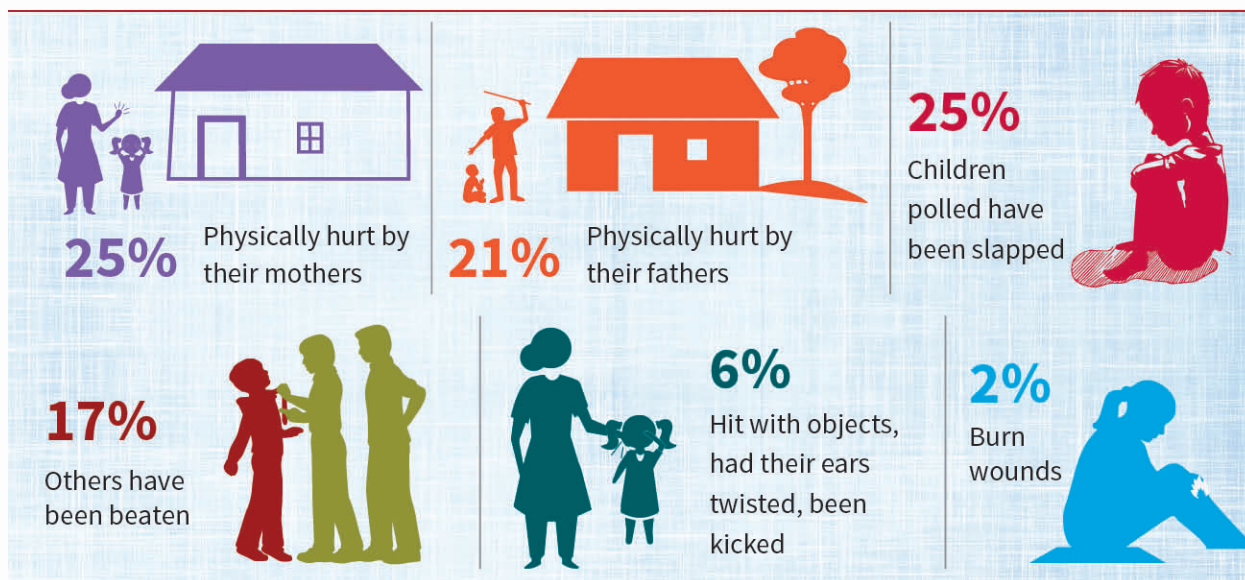
The Poll highlights that a large number of children do not have the basic components of a healthy life. Although India has a good legal structure for children, this Poll shows that a lot still has to be done to protect them. A healthy and protected childhood involves physical, emotional well-being as well as proper shelter, food, healthcare, access to basic services (drinking water, toilets, electricity, playgrounds for recreation), and education.



An important finding of this Poll was that there is **widespread violence against children, which is worrying**. It showed that children of all ages, sex, family background, religion and caste suffer abuse in one form or another, which could further lead to problems that could be physical, behavioural, social, emotional, or sexual in nature.

A. Forms of Violence reported by Children

It was found that children experienced different kinds of violence in many different settings (home, school, institutions, the workplace, and the local community) and within different groups, depending on their gender, level of ability, social group, or district.

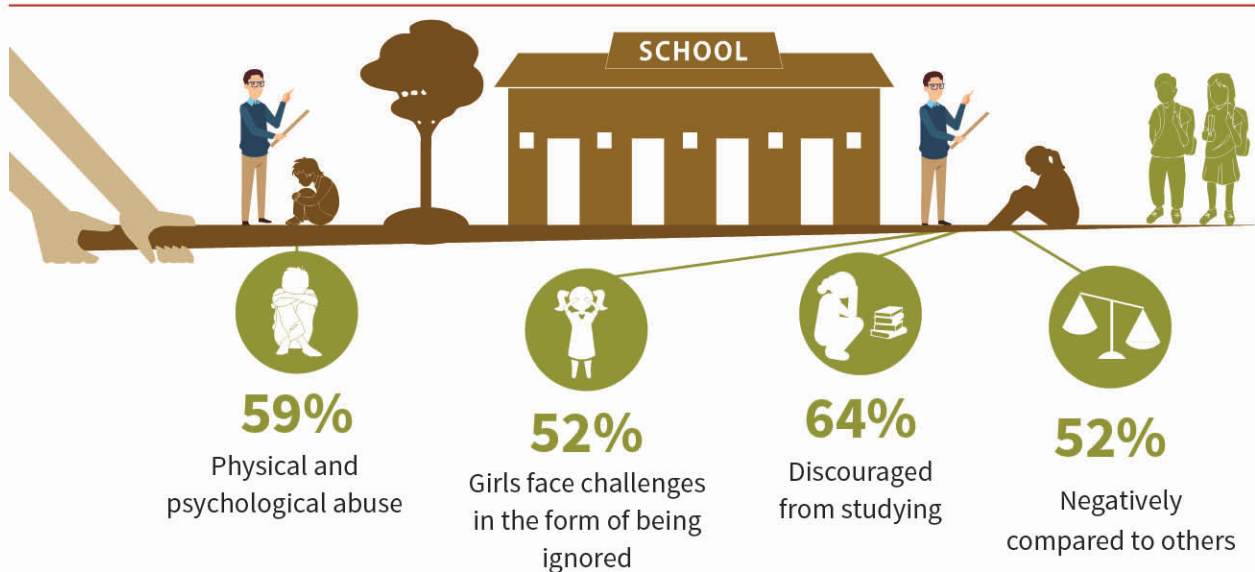


For far too many children, violence **begins within their homes, and begins early.** Violence within homes is often hidden and ignored and, therefore, seriously threatens the child's rights to a healthy and fulfilling life. Children pointed out that they felt afraid of being hit or physically hurt by their mothers (25%) and fathers (21%). As many as 25% of the children polled have been slapped, while others have been beaten (17%), hit with objects, had their ears twisted, been kicked (6%) or even had burn wounds inflicted in them (2%).

While **68.27%** of the children say their homes make them happy; **11.16%** of the children say it makes them sad. Another **6.73%** of the children feel afraid in their homes, **6.65%** of them feel nervous, **6.35%** angry and **2.76%** helpless.

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At school, children are at a risk of being violently punished by those who have authority over them. Teachers, non-teaching staff and older students are largely responsible for acts of **violence in school**. Boys, it was found, face far more physical and psychological abuse (59%) while girls face challenges in the form of being ignored (52%), discouraged from studying (64%), or negatively compared to others (52%).



The nature of violence in schools ranges from children being hit with an object (16.60%), made to stand outside the class (14.77%), being slapped (5.57%), having their ears twisted (4.75%), to being slapped (2.28%).

64.95% of the children affirm the teachers' pro-active offers of help, and 56.48% say that the teachers encourage the children hugely and channelize their individual merits. But on the flip side, 58.85% children hold teachers responsible for psychological violence of varying degrees.

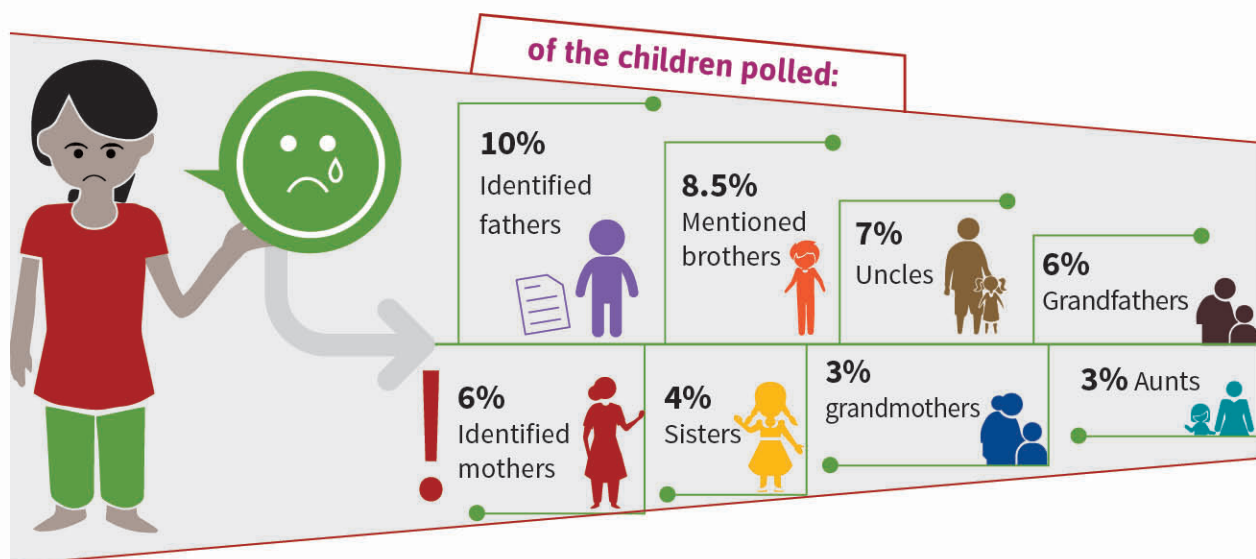


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In the **community** as well, data showed that some children have a fear of physical harm (17%), while the fear of sexual harassment (21%) or being approached by drug addicts (22%) also prevents them from feeling safe in the community. Physical features such as inaccessible toilets (21%), and poor lighting (15%) also play a role in the fear of harm.

The fear of **sexual harassment** and abuse is very real for both boys and girls. It is more disturbing when children face violence **at the hands of trusted adults within their own homes and community**. Almost 10% of the children polled identified fathers while others mentioned brothers (8.5%), uncles (7%) and grandfathers (6%) as people who sexually abuse children at home. In a surprising discovery, 6% of the children named mothers as the offenders, while others named sisters (4%), grandmothers (3%) and aunts (3%).



The loss of confidence and belief in the people closest to the child can cause feelings of fear, suspicion, uncertainty, and a sense of isolation. Sexual violence causes a lot of damage – physically, psychologically and socially. It also increases difficulties at school and the risks of illness, unwanted pregnancies, distress, stigma and discrimination (i.e., being treated unfairly). Not only children, but their families and communities also suffer because of such violence.



B. Violence suffered by different groups of children

Gender

This Poll draws attention to the belief held by many that boys are physically stronger than girls and that beating and lashing them would help them grow into men of worth. The data revealed that a greater percentage of boys were mistreated; 57% boys as compared to 40% girls. Boys also experienced more shame (65%) as compared to girls (31%), are more afraid to talk about the abuse (51%) as opposed to girls (48.5%), and had a higher likelihood of being threatened with force (74%) as opposed to girls (19%).

Both boys (50%) and girls (45%), who had experienced any form of violence, felt isolated, with no one they could confide in. However, it was noted that a higher percentage of boys (65.5%) informed others of the abuse as opposed to the girls (32%).



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Children rarely reported violence to the authorities out of fear of consequences (35%), feelings of shame (16%), lack of anyone to talk to (16%), and threats (8%). Of those who chose to report it, many of them (32%) found that not many people were willing to help them.

Data reveals that of the people who knew...



16% confronted
the abuser



11%

children were asked to
ignore the abuse



4%

were asked to keep
it a secret



3.5%

cases were
reported to police



62%

of boys felt that
children should
ignore the abuse



60%

said that children should
accept it as normal



Socially marginalized groups

The Poll points to violence against **children of socially marginalised groups**. The caste break-up of those made to stand outside the class revealed that more students belonging to Scheduled Cates (SCs) (9.5%) were made to do so than the general caste (9%), Scheduled Tribes (STs) (8%) or the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and other castes (8%). However, in terms of physical violence like being beaten or having their ears twisted, more children from the general category were abused as compared to those belonging to ST, SC or OBC categories. In terms of those children who faced humiliation in schools, it was seen that 5% of children of the OBC and the other castes (SBC), 4% of the general caste category, 4% of the SC and 3% of the ST had experienced humiliation in schools.

The study of psychological abuse in schools on the basis of caste shows that 3% of children from the general category, 3% from OBC and other castes, another 3% belonging to SC and 1% belonging to the ST categories are threatened with failure. Of the children abused within institutions, 33% were from the general category, 26% STs and the Nomadic Tribes (NT), 13% SC, 13% OBC while 15% chose not to respond to the question of caste, either because they did not know which caste they belonged to or they did not want to specify it.



Location: urban or rural

A comparison of the physical and psychological abuse between urban and rural areas showed that a larger percentage of children from rural areas face different forms of corporal punishment (hitting or beating) in school and at home. For example, of the children who were hit with an object, 72% were from a rural area, whereas only 28% were from an urban area. A higher percentage of children from rural areas were kicked (71%), scarred with burn wounds (79%) and had their ears twisted (75%); as opposed to a lower percentage of children from the urban areas (29%, 25% and 21% respectively).

However, regarding abuse in institutions, the Poll shows that children in urban areas experienced more abuse, as compared to rural areas. More children in urban areas (76%) were criticised and blamed for things that they were not responsible for as opposed to rural areas (24%).

Disability

Children with disabilities also suffer from a lack of support and social prejudices that push them to the margins of society. Violence against them pushes them further towards loneliness. This needs to be addressed. The Opinion Poll observed that 15% children with disabilities were slapped, 16% had their ears twisted and 13% complained of being hit with an object.



Children with disabilities stated that they experienced psychological abuse in school, in the form of being threatened with bodily harm (20%) and being locked in a room (20%), while 15.19% were compared negatively with others, 14.29% were criticized and 12.79% said abusive language was used against them.

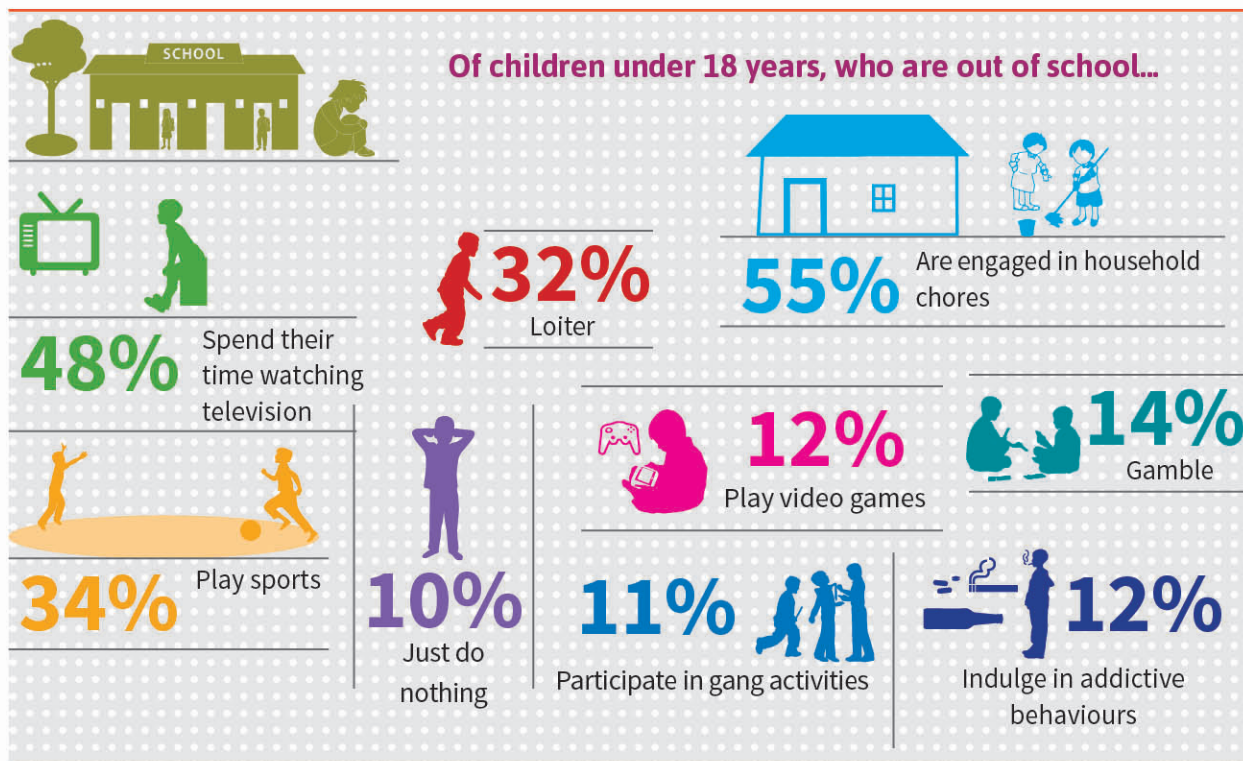
C. Violence experienced in the workplace

Many children are employed as workers in different factories, farms, institutions, offices, etc. The reasons that the children polled stated for not continuing their education included:

- » Need for contributing to the family income (35%)
- » Helping with household chores (35.09%)
- » Failing at school (24.96%)
- » Losing interest in school (20.42%)
- » An unpleasant experience (11.64%)
- » Having the responsibility to care for younger siblings while parents are away at work (21.40%)
- » The lack of schools in the neighbourhood (20.21%)
- » Travelling long distances
- » Marriage (3.72%)

Children also shared that some of their parents were against their going to school, and therefore they were forced to give up their education and work. Disability was a hurdle for one child and another had no clothes to go to school.

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Children **at their workplace** are the most helpless and likely to be exploited. Of the children polled, 13% feared being verbally abused by employers; not being paid (11%); or losing their jobs (10%). Other children were scared of the consequences of not completing work on time, and a few panicked about being touched inappropriately. Not having proper toilets, being bullied, their families being harmed and no proper lighting were other concerns of working children. Many of them (44%) spoke of feeling unsafe while commuting to work.

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Of the 49.77% children who admitted to working, 61.38% said they worked for members of their family, while 19.44% were employed by people not related to them. Of those who worked for non-family members, 27.36% said they were not paid, while 5.53% had no idea whether they were paid or not. While the majority of working children (63.35%) got a weekly day off, 21.62% children were not given one, again a clear denial of their rights.

What should be done?

Keeping in mind the information provided by children through the Poll, the following recommendations emerged:



1

Lack of basic facilities: Many children mention a lack of toilets, lighting, libraries, playgrounds and inadequate healthcare within schools, institutions and the community. These are the basic rights of children which must be ensured.

Only 50.69% children pass their classrooms as being good, 39.21% say lighting at school is adequate, 37.42% approve of the toilets, 38.23% say that there are libraries, 50% like the teaching and playground facilities and 40.70% are happy with the counsellors



2

Child-sensitive reporting: All those who work with and for children need to be made aware of the denial of child's rights that exist at all levels; physical and psychological abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, economic violence and the lack of facilities. There is a need for **creating child-sensitive ways for reporting and investigating violence** so that the people who commit the crime are punished.



3

Informed caregivers: Parents need to be educated to understand that violent and humiliating ways of disciplining children are unacceptable. While schools and institutions need to be sensitised to the harmful effects of corporal punishment (hitting/beating children).

4

Breaking the silence: Speaking about abuse is neither easy nor a real option for most children. Fear, trauma, shame, isolation, and the view of abuse as 'normal', all cause children to stay quiet and not talk about their problem. It is important to spread a culture of safety and mutual respect to break this silence. Especially **in cases of sexual violence, there is a need for far more sensitivity and the focus must be on recovery and helping the child get back to a better life. Children should be involved in developing confidential ways** of reporting violence.



5

Girls, children from socially disadvantaged castes and tribes, and those who have disabilities often face more violence in childhood. More than physical violence, these children face psychological violations that can be very damaging. It is important to make children aware of their rights when they are still young.

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6

Promoting equality: Ending violence in the lives of children from vulnerable groups by **stopping discrimination (i.e., treating them differently because of their social identity)** and ensuring that they have equal participation in society is an urgent priority. It is important to treat all children equally.

7

Cycle of violence: It is often seen that children who have been treated badly in their childhood, use violence themselves to resolve their problems. For instance, boys can be made to feel that it is their right to use force and violence when they become older.



8

The child's voice: Children have the right to express their views, and have their opinions heard. **Children should be actively involved in spreading awareness** at all levels for changes towards the creation of a violence-free society. There is an urgent need to promote awareness among all the people involved in the child's life.



9

Children should know their rights: For children's participation in planning and monitoring of actions to stop violence against them, it is as necessary for children to know of their rights and entitlements. A sensitisation to the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**, particularly Article 42, is required.

10

All government policies and programmes have to be created **to address poverty, gender discrimination and other forms of inequality** (disability, urban-rural divide, etc.).

12

Spreading information: Information based on the data from this Poll has to be provided to everyone involved in challenging violence against children, including the government, child's rights and human rights organizations and individual activists.



The Way Forward

The opinions and information given by children through this Poll can be used as reference points for future action. Using this information, we can create documents, toolkits, guidelines as well as policies to prevent violence and make sure children are provided a safe environment.

This Poll shows that viewing violence as ‘normal’ or ‘private’ further leads to children’s rights being taken away. It is often the people that should be involved in looking after the children that cause them harm, within places where the child should be protected (e.g., home or school). Violence is often present all around us, but still there is rarely any acceptance of violence as a serious crime or a violation of child’s rights. The main problem lies in making this violence visible and making it unacceptable. There is a need to bring forward the idea that change is needed and is possible!

We need to urgently address this problem of violence against children, so that all children can benefit from education and realize their own self-worth, which is very important for their emotional as well as physical health. Through this Poll, we hope to gain a clear picture of the causes, extent and kinds of violence against children, and a better understanding of what children consider to be a ‘safe place’. With the help of this information, the Poll will find the different strengths and weaknesses in our communities by involving different people who can address this issue, like the government officials, school authorities and NGO representatives.

To create ‘child-safe’ environments, and keeping ‘the best interests of the child’ in mind, we need to take a few concrete steps:

- » Firstly, to **create guidelines and policies** on safety and standards of care for children.
- » Secondly, to **create ways through which children can report violence** and to make all children aware of this.
- » Thirdly and more importantly, we must **change individual and societal attitudes** to end violence against children by creating awareness in all parts of society—family, school, *ashramshalas* and communities.



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‘Play it Safe’ can also be the starting point in each state, as well as across the country, to begin a movement to change attitudes and practices. We can begin a social movement of change by (a) educating parents (that violent and humiliating forms of disciplining children are not acceptable and improving their parenting skills); (b) sensitising schools and institutions (to ban hitting of any kind and respect children’s views and capabilities); (c) giving importance to the prevention of violence against children (by identifying risk factors, and preventing violence before it happens); (d) promoting alternate ways of disciplining (that are respectful of children’s dignity and self-worth) and (e) increasing the capacity of all who work with and for children (by ensuring they are fully informed on this subject).

Actively challenging people who cause harm to children or think it is ‘normal’ to harm children can influence many people to become **role models for change**—setting examples of how one should and should not behave and communicate with children. They can help create awareness and sensitise people to the violation of children’s rights that exists at all levels. This can further lead to the creation of a safe and positive environment where change is possible. The messages will help people realise that violence against children is a serious social problem, unacceptable, and that change in the current attitudes and practices is needed.

Therefore, this Poll highlights that we need to give more attention to the children’s concerns and listen to their voices if we want a world free of violence against children.

We hope the results and findings from this Poll will help change the lives of many children and save them from violence. Children and adults should work together towards creating an equal and inclusive world—where everyone is treated with respect and has an equal opportunity to a violence-free future.

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