

CHILD PROTECTION BASELINE RESEARCH:

Volta Regional Profile



Canada 



MINISTRY OF GENDER
CHILDREN AND SOCIAL
PROTECTION

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This profile of the Volta Region summarizes the situation regarding violence, abuse and exploitation of children. It draws mainly on findings from the Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014¹ and will be a useful tool for evidence-based advocacy to better target resources for child protection, inform policy decision-makers and guide future strategies for community action.

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The regional context

Regional demographics²

TOTAL POPULATION:
2,118,252 (8.6 PER CENT) OF
GHANA'S 24,658,823 POPULATION,
ON AN AREA OF 20,570 KM²
(8.6 PER CENT OF GHANA'S TOTAL
LAND AREA OF 238,533 KM²)

**38.4 PER CENT
OF THE POPULATION
IS AGED 0–14 YEARS**

Resources

Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing are the main industries of the Volta Region. There is iron ore mining in the region, as well as small-scale illegal gold mining known as *galamsey*.



¹ Child Protection Baseline Research Report, 2014, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Accra, Ghana. The report also draws on information from the Regional Qualitative Reports, 2013, Government of Ghana/UNICEF; Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Ghana Statistical Service; and Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

² Ghana Statistical Service Census 2010

Child-protection concerns

Prominent concerns in the Volta Region are poverty, parental neglect, poor infrastructure, child labour, work-related injuries and poor medical care.

Traditional practices that increase vulnerability of children

Trokosi

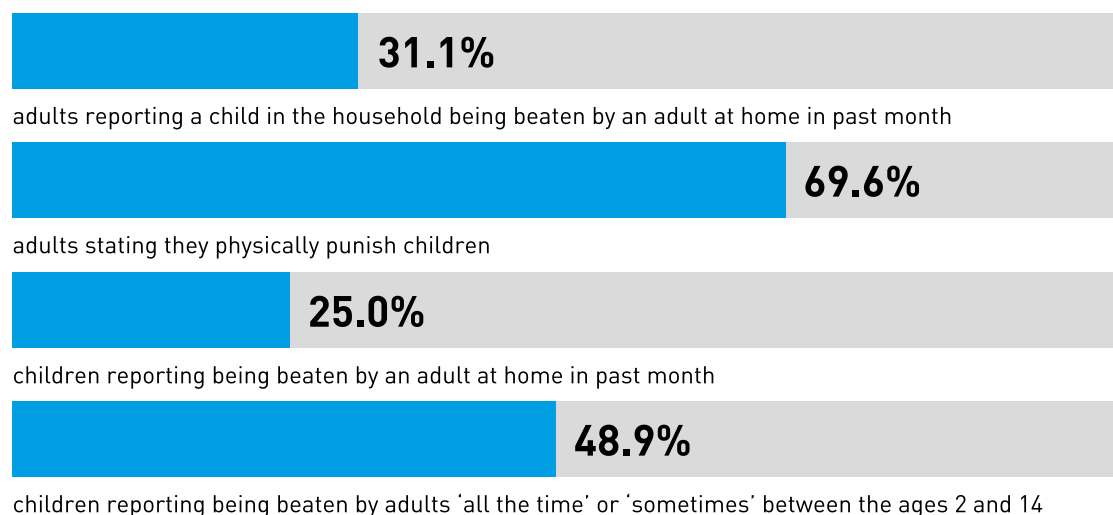
Volta Region is one of the regions in Ghana which practises *trokosi*, a tradition involving the ritual servitude and enslavement of girls who are brought to atone for the sins of a family member. The girls are given to priests, for whom they act as domestic and sexual slaves for a number of years. The girls remain isolated and are denied schooling and access to their families and their peers, therefore increasing their vulnerability to abuse.



Violence at home and at school

Violence at home

Children in the Volta Region experience some of the highest levels of physical abuse at home in Ghana, with 69.6 per cent of adults stating they physically punish children, and two in five children reporting that they have been verbally humiliated or insulted at home. The cane, sticks and sometimes bare hands are the most common methods used to physically abuse children.



32.0%

CHILDREN
AGED 5-17
INVOLVED IN AN
ECONOMIC
ACTIVITY



Violence at school

While the Volta Region has high levels of violence in the home, lower levels of physical violence and verbal humiliation were recorded in schools, as reported by one in three children (33.3 per cent) and one in five children (16.8 per cent), respectively. Many children surveyed expressed the fear of verbal abuse more than physical abuse.



adults reporting a child in the household being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month



children reporting another child in the household being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month



children reporting being beaten by a teacher/head teacher at school in past month

Sexual abuse and exploitation

Sexual abuse and defilement occurs across all age groups in the Volta Region, from incest producing multiple children, to abuse of young children, as well as the defilement of girls.

Sexual exploitation of girls and, to a lesser extent, of boys, mostly by middle-aged men and rich migrant mining workers, is a growing phenomenon. The majority of cases of sexual exploitation are perpetrated by people the victim knows. The Volta Region reports the second highest rate in Ghana of transactional sex, reported by 68.9 per cent of children.



adult respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community



child respondents who state that children having sex for money or other things they need happens 'all the time' or 'sometimes' in their community

Child labour

Child labour, according to the baseline study, was not extensively reported in urban areas compared with rural areas where fishing is a common practice. Children who are trafficked for labour are forced to do more dangerous work on rivers such as diving deep to free nets that are stuck. The study revealed that girls were involved in hawking, while some of the boys were employed to push trucks. Boys also assist in mines, although girls are used to carry loads and help with food preparation, exposing them to mercury fumes in the gold extraction process, which damages their health. Heavy work, such as carrying or pushing heavy loads, can also cause many injuries to young children and can inhibit their growth. Boys and girls who assist with fishing, which starts as early as 3 am, become too tired to go to school or pay attention in class.



According to the GLSS 6³, the average age at which a child starts to work in the region is 9 years. The survey revealed that the region has the fifth highest number of children involved in child labour in the country with one out of every five children (26.9 per cent) aged 5–17 involved in child labour while 22.0 per cent are engaged in hazardous labour. According to the MICS report (2011)⁴, 32.0 per cent of children aged 5–17 are engaged in an economic activity. Of the children who were involved in child labour, 24.4 per cent were attending school while 19.3 per cent were working in other forms of hazardous labour. Among children who were not attending school, 41.2 per cent were engaged in child labour with 37.8 per cent in hazardous forms of child labour.

Trafficking

Trafficking for child labour occurs mainly in connection with children working in the fishing industry (mostly boys, though girls are involved in smoking and selling fish). Most of this fishing goes on in the Volta Lake but some children are sent further afield.

Child marriage

The baseline study revealed that child marriages were common in urban communities which were predominantly Muslim. In these communities there is a belief that a girl upon attaining age 16 is mature and can take care of a home and as a result is ready for marriage. The Volta Region, according to the MICS report (2011), has the third highest rate (8.8 per cent) of women aged 20–49 marrying before the age of 15; a third of this cohort (29.3 per cent) married before the age of 18.

Separation from parents

The Volta Region has the lowest proportion of children living with both parents: 45.4 per cent (MICS, 2011). Poverty is the most often cited reason for fostering children out of the home; the parents cannot afford to take care of the child.

Many children who live with their grandparents tend to have minimal supervision compared with those that live with their parents. Following parental divorce, separation and/or death, children can be placed in the care of step-parents or foster parents where they may have an inferior status to the biological children of the household and be given excessive workloads.

Some relatives who foster children involve them in forced domestic labour, fail to provide for their basic needs and deny them education. Children with inadequate parental care are often at risk of substance abuse, gambling, stealing and commercial sexual exploitation.

8.8%

WOMEN
AGED 20–49
MARRIED
BEFORE
AGE OF 15



At 45.4% the region has the lowest proportion of children living with both parents

³ Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6), 2012/2013, Ghana Statistical Service

⁴ Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2011, Final Report, Ghana Statistical Service

53.6% Mechanisms for protecting children

BIRTH
REGISTRATION
(UNDER 5 YEARS)



When I am
sick, I go to
my brother.

Girl, 10, rural
community, Volta
Region

In the Ghanaian cultural context, there is a natural dedication of most caregivers and community members to protect children – a great strength and opportunity in child protection. Families, communities and institutions are among the mechanisms identified in the region for protecting children.

Birth registration

Birth registration protects children against violations like child marriage and trafficking. According to the MICS report (2011), 53.6 per cent of children under 5 in the region have their births registered.

Families

Parents are the principal protectors of children, counted on for basic, school and health needs and discipline. In the absence of parents, other actors within the family system are drawn into the web of responsibility to ensure that younger ones are adequately cared for and put out of harm's way. The foremost protective system for children outside the nuclear family is the extended family, comprising uncles, aunts and grandparents. Children often resort to their grandparents, especially grandmothers, for advice, and in times of wrongdoing, are disciplined by them.

Communities

Family members seek community assistance when their own methods fail. Sometimes community members also initiate protective measures for children. In addition, opinion leaders and the elderly generally correct children.

Chiefs and queen mothers play a role in the community by intervening in child-related cases before they enter the formal legal system. Religious leaders such as pastors, imams, chief priests and *mallams* are all actors in the communities who protect and promote the rights and welfare of children in various ways.

Institutions

The Ghana Education Service has guidance and counselling centres which organize counselling for parents and schoolchildren on the importance of education. They provide counselling services to children in schools, children involved in child labour and girls who have dropped out of school as a result of teenage pregnancy.

The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOWVSU) of the Ghana Police Service visit communities to sensitize parents on domestic violence and child abuse, and educate them on how to report such cases to the police and other child-protection focused institutions.

The Ghana Police Service, the courts, the Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development and the District Assemblies play key roles in child protection such as responding to incidences of child abuse and exploitation, protecting children who come into contact with the law, enacting by-laws, and providing resources to address child-protection issues.

Recommendations for positive change

Increase financial and other resources for child protection

The regional institutions concerned with child protection receive little or no funds from the central government and so lack the means to fulfil their mandate. Public/private partnerships should be explored to help provide resources for children and their families. However, apart from seeking funding, mechanisms should be set up in all communities as well as in all districts and sub-districts to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Stakeholders should collaborate and coordinate their resources to deal with child protection issues like *trokosi*, defilement, assault, child labour, teenage pregnancy, truancy and abandonment, and report such cases to the relevant authorities.

Capacity building

Existing social and public education programmes in the districts need to be strengthened to sensitize relevant entities about their roles in child protection. The district police departments should also be adequately staffed with well-trained probation officers who have suitable knowledge on child protection. There is a need for more trained and experienced teachers in schools. Shelters should be built to house trafficked and/or abused children.

Policies and laws

Apart from the fair and equitable application of established policies, some further policy decisions could benefit the region. Local chiefs should provide by-laws and the level of allowable punishment for children should be clearly defined.

Sensitization and awareness creation

Inadequate knowledge of child-related institutions, their focus areas and their location affects coordination and collaboration. Survivors of abuse often do not know where to report such abuse cases. It is therefore important for NGOs and community-based organizations that work in areas concerning child protection and development to intensify their public awareness programmes. There is also a need to increase or strengthen alliances and partnerships with government and other community structures such as opinion leaders, traditional authorities and religious leaders in engaging communities to address child protection.



Children between the ages of 8 and 12 in this community need to be protected from teenage pregnancy because most of them live on their own.

Guidance and
Counselling
Coordinator, Volta
Region



Conclusions

Although there are continuing threats to the welfare of children in the Volta Region, the family structure is strong, with traditional values still protecting children. With better funding and coordinated participation from all stakeholders, the situation could be further improved.

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