WHAT IS WORKING
Evidence of effective child protection systems in practice

SUMMARY
This reader is based on a review of the evidence analyzed by K4D Research Helpdesk on effectiveness of child protection systems in low resource settings. The review drew largely on evaluative papers, academic papers and grey literature produced as part of programme assessments commissioned and published by international agencies. The Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development Programme (K4D) of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) provides quick access to evidence and analysis on development policy and programme questions through rapid response and emerging issues reports.

Keywords: Child protection, child protection system, effectiveness, evidence, ineffectiveness

Introduction
Prevention of violence against children (VAC) hinges greatly on proactive measures taken by key stakeholders to develop mechanisms and strategies that keep children safe in homes, schools and communities. These child protection systems require regular modification as old problems are resolved and new threats emerge, thus the systems must remain robust and relevant for prevention efforts.

What are child protection systems?
Child protection systems are the formal and informal structures and functions put in place to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. Child protection systems involve national and local governments, schools, communities, children, civil society actors and a host of other stakeholders whose combined efforts are aimed at preventing and responding to violence against children in all settings.

Box 1: Hindrances to effective child protection systems

1. Data Availability
   - recent establishment of systems approach to child protection limits the amount of data available
   - low capacity of national systems to gather and process data

2. Quality
   The quality of evidence is affected by
   - Lack of standardized data collection due to absence of uniform definitions of systemic child protection approaches
   - Questions on the validity of measured outcomes owing to insufficient attention to contextual factors in programme design
Formal Child Protection Systems
- Laws, policies, strategies and programmes to protect children
- Institutional framework to coordinate, monitor and provide oversight for child protection
- Formal fostering, guardianship & adoption of children
- Juvenile justice
- Child protection services by CSOs

Informal Child Protection Systems
- Parenting
- Family and kinship care for children
- Traditional, cultural and religious practices that provide a safe and caring environment for children
- Community-based mechanisms and practices for protecting children e.g. para-social workers who volunteer to respond to child protection issues

Sources of overall effectiveness at a systems design level

Multi-sectoral approach
Taking a multi-sectoral approach to child protection that addresses capacity building and system strengthening needs while also targeting harmful social norms
Example: Bringing together sectors that compliment each other to produce positive child protection outcomes for children; these include gender, education, health, etc

Integration of child protection
Integrating child protection into existing inter-sectoral programmes that combine longer term social change with short term tangible ‘entry points’
Example: Child protection issues are integral part of the various sectoral strategies and plans

Prevention and response
Addressing both prevention and response in the range of child protection services provided
Example: The system should be effective in responding to the needs of children but at the same time promote prevention of the perpetuation of VAC

Programme design
Understanding and considering underlying socio-economic, cultural and political determinants as a critical part of programme design
Example: Promotion of globally tested and proven approaches such as the INSPIRE Package would help to achieve this
Sources of ineffectiveness at programme level

The sources of ineffectiveness include:

- isolated and vertical programmatic responses, which are ineffective and inefficient when compared to more holistic interventions; (for example, programmes that are issue-based focusing on a single component of what could constitute a system)
- weaknesses in applying results-based planning and management; (for example, when VAC prevention actors undertake activities without clear logic simply because that is how they have always done things)
- lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Improving effectiveness

The range of interventions which evidence suggests can improve effectiveness among existing child protection systems include:

- strengthening systematic capacity and coordination mechanisms in order to improve the effectiveness of partnership and community mobilization efforts
- planning for and implementing meaningful participation of children, families and communities more systematically;
- strengthening equity-based programming to address any noted gaps in provision
- reviewing and improving child safeguarding and associated ethical policies.

Further Reading


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