

# International Expert Consultation on Violence against Children in Early Childhood

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Prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

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## Introduction

Young children face heightened risks of violence in all settings — at home, in alternative care, in health facilities, and in early childhood education. Yet violence in early childhood receives insufficient policy attention. This discussion paper was prepared for the Expert Consultation convened in Lima, Peru, in August 2012, to examine the evidence base and identify priorities for action.

## The Scale of Violence in Early Childhood

Research consistently shows that the youngest children are among the most vulnerable to violence. Physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect are most prevalent in the first years of life. Exposure to violence in early childhood has lifelong consequences for cognitive development, physical health, and social-emotional wellbeing.

## Legal and Policy Framework

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 19, 37, and 39) requires States to protect children from all forms of violence and to ensure their recovery. The Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 13 (2011) provides authoritative guidance on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.

## Key Discussion Questions

1. What evidence exists on the prevalence and nature of violence against young children?
2. What are the most effective prevention and response strategies?
3. How can early childhood development systems integrate child protection?
4. What are the data gaps and research priorities?
5. What policy commitments are needed from governments?

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Participants called on governments to: (a) adopt explicit legal prohibitions on violence against young children; (b) integrate child protection into early childhood development programmes; (c) invest in home visiting and parenting support; (d) strengthen data collection on violence in the early years; and (e) ratify the OPCP to ensure accountability for children's rights.

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