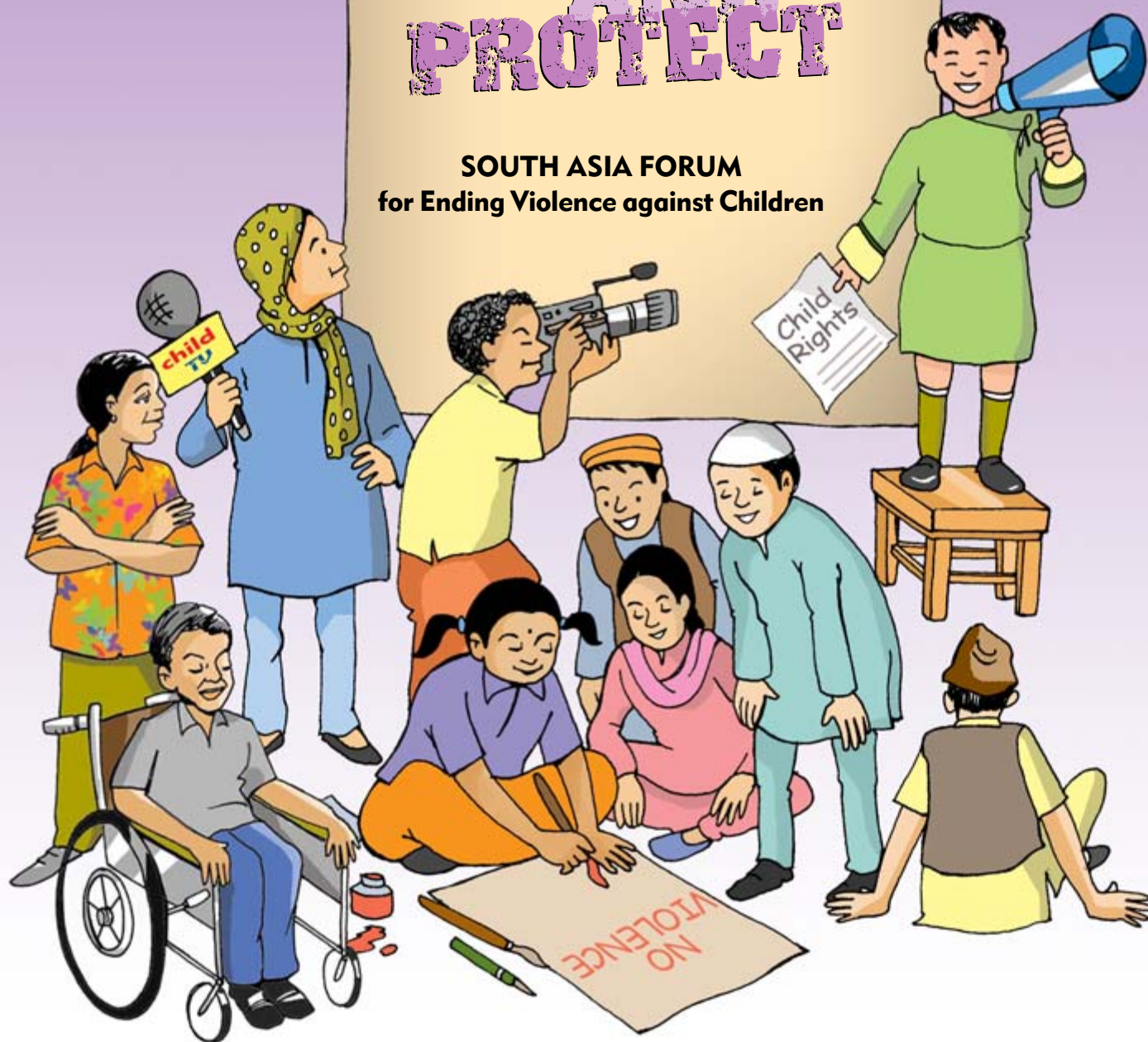


# ACT SUPPORT AND PROTECT

**SOUTH ASIA FORUM  
for Ending Violence against Children**







**SOUTH ASIA FORUM  
for Ending Violence against Children**

Child and Youth Friendly Version of  
Regional Children's Consultation in preparation of the  
First South Asia Forum  
22-23 July 2006

and the

First South Asia Forum  
for Ending Violence against Children  
24-26 July 2006

Rawalpindi, Pakistan  
July 2006

Organised by  
Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education  
Government of Pakistan  
and  
South Asia Coordinating Group on  
Action against Violence

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Project Manager: Ravi Karkara, (Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia)  
Developed by: Fahmida Shoma Jabeen (Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia), Michiko Ono (UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia), Neha Bhandari (Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia)  
Production Coordinated by: Prajwol Malekoo (Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia)  
Illustration: Sayami's Studio  
Design & Film Separation: DigiScan Pre-Press, Kathmandu  
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Save the Children Sweden  
Regional Office for South & Central Asia  
Sanepa Road, Kupundole, Lalitpur  
GPO Box: 5850, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: +977-1-5531928/9  
Fax: +977-1-5527266  
rosca@sca.savethechildren.se  
<http://sca.savethechildren.se>

# Foreword

Dear children and young people

This is a book that tells you what was discussed in the Regional Children's Consultation for the first South Asia Forum held on 22-23 July 2006 and the First South Asia Forum held on 24-26 July 2006 in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

Seven girls and five boys from six countries in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) took part and shared their experiences and ideas on what can be done to stop early marriage and physical and psychological punishment of children.

We hope this book will help girls and boys within and outside South Asia to know what was discussed in the Children's Consultation and what was promised in the first South Asia Forum by the governments to make a region free of violence for children. It is our hope that this book will be part of a process that makes South Asia a better place for all its children.

We would like to thank all our friends who have helped us to make this report better. They are Junita Upadhyay, Carmen Madrinan (ECPAT), Prajwol Malekoo, Saghir Bukhari, Savita Malla (Save the Children Sweden, Regional Office for South and Central Asia) and Sunil Shrestha (DigiScan).

**South Asia Coordinating Group on  
Action against Violence**

**ACT  
SUPPORT  
AND  
PROTECT**

## List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGOs	International Non Governmental Organisations
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NPA	National Plan of Action
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAF	South Asia Forum
TdH	Terre des Hommes
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

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## What is this book about?

This book tells us about what children and adults talked about during the First South Asia Forum held on 24-26 July, 2006. Children met on their own on 22-23 July, 2006 to prepare for this forum.

The countries in South Asia include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

### THE THEMES

There were two themes chosen for the 'Regional Children's Consultation' and the First South Asia Forum. They were:

- Early marriage; that is, marriage when one or both parties are children below the age of 18.
- Physical and psychological punishment in homes, schools, communities, workplaces and institutions.



# What is the South Asia Forum?

## LET US GIVE YOU A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW SOUTH ASIA FORUM WAS FORMED

On 19-20 May 2005, 25 children from all South Asian countries except India came to Islamabad. They came to take part in the Regional Consultation for the UN Study on Violence against Children (read the box on the next page to know about the UN Study on Violence against Children). The Consultation was held to understand the kinds of violence that take place in the region, why violence takes place and share what is being done by governments to stop violence against children. Government representatives from all South Asian countries and other adults from UN, NGOs and media, together with 25 children from South Asia,

talked about the kinds of violence children face in the region and gave suggestions on how to stop violence against children. The

people who represented governments promised to take actions to protect girls and boys from violence. After the South Asia Regional Consultation the governments in South Asia formed the 'South Asia Forum'. This forum would give children, governments and other adults the opportunity to meet regularly and assess the progress of everyone's work to end violence against children in the region.



## SECRETARIAT OF THE SOUTH ASIA FORUM

A small office, called the Secretariat, was set up in 2005 in Islamabad to arrange meetings. In these meetings children and adults can discuss and see if the promises made by the governments and other organisations are being met. This secretariat will move to another country every two years.

The UN Study on Violence against Children is an international project that looks at various types of violence against girls and boys across the world. It gives ideas on how governments and non-governmental organisations, parents and other people responsible for children can prevent all forms of violence against children. If you want to know more about the study you can find information at the following website: [www.violencestudy.org](http://www.violencestudy.org). If you do not have Internet then you can go to your local United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children or Plan office to get a copy of the study.

A child friendly version of the UN Study report has also been created. The report is packaged with a practical guide for adolescent girls and boys on how to work on violence. These publications target 12-18 year old children. The books are:

- United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children: Adapted for Children and Young People
- Our Right to Be Protected: Activities for Learning and Taking Action for Children and Young People

For children in the age group of 7-11 years a book called, Safe You and Safe Me, Violence is NOT OK! has been published. It covers similar issues as the books above, but is adapted for younger children.

The books have been translated into many languages.

# Regional Children's Consultation in preparation for the First South Asia Forum

We, seven girls and five boys, took part in the Regional Children's Consultation. This Consultation was held before the South Asia Forum for Ending Violence against Children. In this consultation, we got a chance to meet on our own to discuss our experiences of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment and share our ideas on what can be done to stop such violence. The Consultation was held at the beautiful city of Rawalpindi in Pakistan on 22-23 July 2006.

We came from six different countries in South Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Some of us were chosen by our friends back home in the National Consultation process to attend this Consultation. So we all carry the responsibility to let others know what our friends back home feel about early marriage and physical and psychological punishment. At the same time, we have the responsibility to let our friends back home and in other countries, know what happened at the Regional Consultation, what we did and discussed and the promises that the governments have made to reduce early marriage and physical and psychological punishment in our countries.

It is with this idea that we have put together this book. As you read along, you will discover our experience.

At the Consultation we discussed:

- The causes of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment.
- How they affect us.
- What needs to be done by the family, school, community, governments and NGOs to end the practice of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment.
- How we (children) can stop such violence from happening in our countries.

We were then able to talk about these issues with adults at the first South Asia Forum.



*"My mother thinks I am too old  
to play outside"*  
- a thirteen year old girl participant

## DAY ONE: EARLY MARRIAGE

On the first day of the Consultation we discussed early marriage.

Early marriage is any marriage of a girl or a boy that takes place before the age of 18 years. Early marriage exists more in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan than in Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Since we have been part of various Consultations, all of us had some knowledge of the issue. We divided ourselves in groups and discussed why early marriage happens and how it affects us? We discussed what the family, school, community, NGO and the governments could do to stop early marriage.





### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF EARLY MARRIAGE?

- It is a cultural practice in most communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan to get their girls married as soon as they reach puberty.
- Girls are married at an early age so that they can be protected from harm, such as rape and kidnapping.
- There is discrimination against girls. Girls are less valued in societies.
- Many poor families get their girls married at an early age to get rid of their burden. They think they will have one mouth less to feed and worry about.
- Families sometimes bring young brides to their homes for doing household chores. Some families make them do both household and agricultural work.
- For dowry. In Afghanistan and in some communities in Pakistan parents get their girls married at an early age to receive money and gifts from the husband's family. Whereas in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, it is a common practice for the parents of the bride to pay dowry to the husband and his family at the time of marriage.
- Many parents think that ill luck will be brought to the family if girls are not married at an early age.

- Young boys and young girls are married to form relationship between families.
- In some communities girls are given in marriage to settle disputes between two families.
- In some families, after the death of the older sister, the younger sister is forced to marry the widowed brother-in-law.
- Many families in South Asia are not educated and are not aware of how early marriage affects girls and boys.
- Many parents and children do not know the rights of the child.

## HOW DOES EARLY MARRIAGE AFFECT CHILDREN?

- Many young girls (and their newborn babies) die when they are giving birth because they are not yet physically developed to bear children.
- Both young girls and boys who marry early have a higher risk of catching diseases.
- Early marriage increases population. They do not know how to plan their families.
- They do not know how to handle conflict in the family and to deal with physical and verbal abuse.
- Many girls and boys who are married at an early age suffer from depression.
- Some even commit suicide because they do not know how to handle family pressure.
- Many young brides suffer from physical and mental torture and sometimes death when girls' families cannot pay the amount of dowry demanded by the husband or his family.
- The chances of divorce are much higher for girls and boys who marry at an early age.
- It stops their education as many children are removed from school to get them married.
- It decreases the opportunity to learn new skills, get employment and reduce poverty.
- They are too young to take care of their own children.

Our ideas on what can be or should be done at the family level, community level and school level, to end early marriage and what governments, NGOs and girls and boys should do to end the practice of early marriage.

### **Family level:**

- Traditions and customs that cause more harm than good for the wellbeing of the society should be changed.
- When one family member is aware, he/she should let other family members know the harmful effects of early marriage.
- Family members should discourage the practice of giving dowry.
- Family members need to be educated about the harmful effects of early marriage and the laws against early marriage.

- Parents must be supported to engage in activities from which they can increase their income.
- The family should let their children study.

**Community level:**

- Political leaders should encourage people to register the birth of a child.
- Religious leaders can preach against early marriage.
- Educated people in the community should create awareness about the harmful effects of early marriage.
- The media should play an active role to end the practice of early marriage.
- Women and girls should play an active part to end early marriage.

**School level:**

- Awareness among teachers is essential.
- Teachers should be trained to give good education and good advice.
- Teachers should teach child rights, reproductive health of girls and the effects of early marriage.
- Teachers should conduct meetings with parents to let them know how children are affected by early marriage.
- Teachers and students should create awareness of early marriage.

**Government should:**

- Improve the laws on early marriage and make sure that people follow the laws.
- Create strong laws in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Make sure that every birth is registered.
- Punish parents and family members who get children married at an early age.
- Create awareness in the community using media, billboards, etc.
- Listen to the voices of children.
- Make sure that all girls and boys get a good education.
- Include negative effects of early marriage in school curriculum.



**NGOs should:**

- Support children, families, communities, schools and governments.
- Hold workshops to develop the skills of children on ways to stand up for themselves.
- Hold Consultations like this and have open discussions.
- Support street plays, theatres, rallies, workshops and TV and radio programmes twice a month.

**Girls and boys should:**

- Know what their rights are.
- Should stand up for their rights and stand up against Violence against Children.
- Make their voices heard.
- Create awareness among friends and peers.
- Report cases of early marriage to the police and community leaders, the media and right people in the government.
- Form child rights clubs and discuss their problems.
- Hold exhibitions.
- Support Child Parliaments to present their ideas to the authorities.



## DAY TWO: PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

On the second day of the Consultation, we talked about physical and psychological punishment. We were divided into groups and then we were asked to give a list of physical and psychological punishment that we normally receive from the people who are supposed to take care of us. Then we tried to explain the causes and the effects of physical and psychological punishment. Finally, we gave our own ideas on ways to stop this from happening. This is what we came up with.

### **Some examples of physical punishment are:**

We shared the examples of physical punishment that children in South Asia face in the home, family, school, community and the workplace.

#### FAMILY

- Beating with sticks
- Pulling a child's hair
- Slapping
- Making posture of a rooster
- Tying children
- Throwing things at us
- Hanging children on fan
- Snatching things from a child
- Using knives to cut us or scare a child
- Making children do hard work
- Pushing children down the stairs
- Whipping with belts and wires



## SCHOOL

- Caning
- Posture like a rooster in front of the headmaster and the school
- Pressing hard a pencil between two fingers
- Standing on the bench
- Pinching
- Hitting with a duster
- Stand up and sit down
- Making the child stand on one leg in front of the whole school
- Making the child look at the sun directly
- Hitting students with shoes or other objects



## COMMUNITY

- Slapping
- Making the children work hard
- Kicking
- Pinching
- Banging the child's head on the wall
- Knocking on the child's head
- Isolation



## WORKPLACE

- Punching
- Hitting
- Sugar on the child's wound
- Hot rods
- Knife
- Sticks
- Making children carry drugs and do illegal things



### Some examples of psychological punishment are:

After our group presentations and discussions we were again divided into groups to give some examples of psychological punishment that are common in the home and family, school, community and the workplace.

## FAMILY/HOME

- Gender discrimination
- Forcing the child to do something she/he does not want to do
- Ignored by adults
- Unequal treatment of siblings
- Threats
- Blaming the child
- Fighting between parents





## SCHOOL

- Bullying
- Degrading and scolding the child in front of others
- Gender discrimination
- Mental pressure
- Locking up the child
- Keeping the child in isolation
- Touching private parts of the body
- Making fun of a child



## COMMUNITY

- Sexual harassment
- Mental pressure when children are encouraged to engage in criminal activities
- Forced marriage
- Caste discrimination
- Calling bad names
- Verbal abuse
- Gender discrimination

Don't touch this,  
you are from lower caste.



## WORKPLACE

- Discouraging children
- Bad treatment
- Sexual harassment (rape, touching, vulgar suggestions)
- Gender discrimination
- Blaming for losses of the employer
- Cut wages
- Girls are forced to work long hours but are paid less
- Too much work
- Less days off
- If children are late they are made to stay back late.



## INSTITUTION

Children and young people who get into trouble with the police and the law are usually kept in children's or juvenile homes. Those children were not present at the workshop but we need to share their concerns also. They too suffer from physical and psychological punishment. Sometimes they are beaten up by the police. Many children are kept with adult prisoners who physically, mentally and sexually abuse children and young people. Some children in orphanages also suffer from physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

## THE CAUSES OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

These were the things we listed as the causes:

- Adults do not know the effects of such punishment.
- Parents often do not know any alternate ways of disciplining their children, so they use psychological or physical punishment.
- When parents are alcoholic.
- When adults are unhappy and depressed.
- When adults do not know how to manage their anger.
- The children and their families are poor.
- When there is a broken family or multiple marriages.
- Ignorance and lack of education.
- When there is family conflict.
- To maintain order and discipline.
- There are no strict laws to prevent it.
- Cycle of punishment and abuse of power - people who were punished when they were children, tend to punish others when they grow up.



## EFFECTS OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

We were asked to list the effects of physical and psychological punishment of the children. We came up with the following list:

- Physical punishment causes physical pain, injury to the body parts and sometimes, permanent damage to an organ or disability.
- Both physical and psychological punishment can have serious harmful effects on children. It can lead to depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, lower self-confidence and anger. It also affects their memory and prevents their talents to flourish. Girls and boys who receive excessive physical and psychological punishment have an increased tendency to run away from home, lose interest in education, take drugs or alcohol, drop out of school, or commit suicide. They also tend to be irritated, stubborn, or be rude to others.

## WHAT MUST GIRLS AND BOYS, PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS, TEACHERS, COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT DO TO STOP PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT?

### Girls and boys must:

- Take the responsibility to teach other girls and boys about their rights.
- Create a child rights forum at community level and a child parliament at the national level.
- Complain at these forums and insist that these complaints are addressed in a higher authority like the national parliament.
- Arrange meetings, street dramas, rallies and be part of conferences.
- Use television, radio, newspapers to voice our concerns about physical and psychological punishment.
- Make songs and posters to stop physical and psychological punishment.
- Put pressure on local government to take initiatives to ban physical and psychological punishment in schools and in communities.



**Parents and family members must:**

- Listen to their children and follow non-violent methods to discipline them.
- Give the children freedom to express their views.
- Discuss the problem with the child and then try to solve it.
- Not force children to work hard.
- Understand the interests of the child.

**Teachers must:**

- Know children's rights.
- Not hit children.
- Should assign work to children according to their age and their abilities.
- Be polite and friendly towards children.
- Encourage children to express their views.
- Use methods to discipline a child that does not involve physical or humiliating punishment.
- Pay attention to children in their care.
- Teach children and parents about children's rights.
- Give good advice to children.

**Community (political figures, educated people and religious leaders) must:**

- Set good examples of child rights to the community.
- Teach the community about children's rights.
- Conduct a survey to find the different kinds of violence practised in the community and then try to solve the problem.
- Include children in community meetings and conferences.
- Organise rallies, dramas, etc.





**Governments must:**

- Ban physical and psychological punishment.
- Remove laws that allow physical and psychological punishment.
- Make sure that people as well as the government follow the laws that prohibit physical and psychological punishment.
- Help NGOs to prevent violence against children.
- Let people know about child rights through programmes in television, radio, newspapers, rallies, street dramas, etc.
- Organise international and regional meetings every year on ways to stop violence against children.
- Invite girls and boys to their meetings on children's issues.
- Support and encourage child rights clubs and youth parliament processes.
- Create child-friendly complaint centres where children can make complaints about violence against children. The authorities at the centre should listen to children's complaints and act upon them. These centres should give information on child rights.

We were then asked to identify the most important points on the impact of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment. We were also asked to give recommendations on how we can end such violence. With this information, we prepared the Children's Statement on Early Marriage and Physical and Psychological Punishment to the governments. We presented this in the South Asia Forum on 24-26 July 2006.

Our final session of the Regional Children's Consultation for the Preparation of the South Asia Forum to end Violence against Children involved the selection of children to represent children of South Asia at the South Asia Forum and at the launching of the UN Study on Violence against Children:

- Two children (one girl and a boy) to present the Children's Statements to the Government representatives and other adults at the First South Asia Forum for Ending Violence against Children on 24-26 July 2006.
- Two children (one girl and a boy) to represent children in South Asia at the launching of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children in New York on 11 October 2006.

## SELECTION OF CHILDREN

We were asked to write down the criteria for selecting these children.

We (girls and boys) listed five qualities that are extremely important for the representatives. We think that the following qualities are the most important.

- Confidence
- Intelligence and with knowledge of the issues
- Good representative
- Good communicator (good speaker and listener)
- Decision Maker

### THE REPRESENTATIVE MUST SPEAK FOR THE GROUP.

We were then asked to independently identify three boys and three girls who had these qualities. We voted among ourselves and selected three boys and three girls. Then, the chosen children gave an extempore speech on why they should be chosen. This made it easier for us to narrow our choice to two girls and two boys. By voting, a pair was chosen to present their statement to the ministers in front of the audience at the South Asia Forum-Violence against Children meeting. (Although a pair was chosen to present the statement at the SAF meeting, all the children attended the meeting.) The other pair was elected by us to represent South Asia at the launch of the UN Study on Violence against Children in New York on 11 October 2006.

# First South Asia Forum for Ending Violence against Children in South Asia

RAWALPINDI, PAKISTAN, 24-26 JULY, 2006

The First South Asian Forum for Ending Violence against Children took place on 24-25 July, 2006 in Rawalpindi in Pakistan.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE FIRST SOUTH ASIA FORUM

- To look at what the governments in the region have done so far to reduce early marriage and physical and psychological punishment.
- To decide on what actions will be taken to end early marriage, physical and psychological punishment of children.
- To listen to our views on what needs to be done by the governments to prevent such violence happening.
- To decide on the functions of the South Asia Forum.

## WHO TOOK PART IN THE FORUM?

- 12 girls and boys from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- Ministers from Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in the meeting.
- There were government delegates from all the countries in South Asia except India.
- Representatives from local NGOs.
- Representatives from International NGOs- Save the Children Sweden, Save the Children Norway, Plan International, ECPAT and IOM.
- Representatives from UN agencies- UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNAIDS and ILO.

## SOUTH ASIA FORUM FOR ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Her Excellency Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Federal Minister for Social Welfare and Special Education, Government of Pakistan was the chief guest.

Some of the members of the South Asia Coordinating Group on Actions against Violence welcomed everyone present in the meeting. They briefly explained the purpose of the meeting and gave an overview of the situation of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment in South Asia.

### COUNTRY PRESENTATIONS

There were country presentations by Government and NGO delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Children's presentations did not include views from children from Bhutan and India, as they were not present at the meeting. The presentations focused on the progress achieved since the Regional Consultation for the UN Study on Violence against Children held in Islamabad in May 2005.

#### AFGHANISTAN



##### **Early Marriage:**

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is developing a birth registration process. The birth of all children will be recorded in government offices.
- There is a national plan for children developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, to raise awareness of child rights and the harmful effects of early marriage.

##### **Physical and Psychological Punishment:**

- The Afghan government has developed the **National Strategy of Children**. This is a plan of how they will protect children who are separated from their families, who are poor or disabled or who are living in families where they are not safe. An 'Implementation Task Force' has been formed to make sure that everyone is following the National Plan.
- Set up a children's human rights commission that helps the government to promote and protect the rights of the child.
- Over 27,000 teachers have been trained not to use physical and psychological punishments.

## BANGLADESH



### **Early Marriage:**

- Early marriage is often called child marriage in many programmes in Bangladesh.
- Kishori Abhijan, an Empowerment of Adolescents project of the Bangladesh Government and UNICEF, teaches young adolescent girls and boys life skills and gives them livelihood training so that they can become more involved in taking actions in their communities.
- Education has been made free for girls in both primary and secondary schools. The government gives stipend (a small sum of money) to girls who attend secondary schools. This has helped to reduce early marriage. The government is using this slogan "No marriage for girls before 20" on posters, billboards, televisions, radio and in newspapers to make people aware of the law against early marriage.
- The new Birth & Death Registration Act 2004 has been working since 3 July, 2006. This law requires that all parents record the birth and death of their children.
- Newly formed 'Gram Sarkars' (local authorities) are given the responsibility to prevent child marriage in villages.

### **Physical Punishment:**

- National Plan of Action for children, 2005-2010 based on UNCRC has already been approved by the government.
- The government is thinking of setting up Children's Ombudsman system that children can use to report violence and other violations of children's rights.
- A special book has been made for the police, magistrate and judges. This book tells them not to physically or psychologically hurt children who break the law and to treat them well in the justice system.





## BHUTAN



### **Early Marriage:**

- Due to the matriarchal society in Bhutan, early marriage is not a serious social issue. There is no special preference for sons and the marriage age is 18 years for both the men and women.
- The government has some actions planned for the future. One is to develop a National Plan of Action for Gender, which will gather data on girls, boys, women and men and see their conditions. The government also plans to hold the National Consultation on child sexual abuse.

### **Physical and Psychological Punishment:**

- There is now a 'Woman and Child Protection Unit' in the police station where women and children can report violence.
- Police officers are given training on ways to treat children who are victims of violence.
- Police officers, teachers, NGOs received training on child rights.
- Awareness is being raised in civil society through the media.
- A child friendly schools project is underway and the government is seriously thinking about banning physical and psychological punishment in schools.

## MALDIVES



### **Early Marriage:**

- Over the past ten years, there has been no record of children under 15 being married in the Maldives. However, with the increase in Islamic extremist elements, there has been a move away from the general thinking and the number of marriages under 18 is increasing.
- The Child and Family Protection Authority has been set up. Its role is to:
  - Develop policies and provide guidance on how to provide services to children.
  - Make sure that all the people and organisations that provide service to children are following all the guidance provided by the Child and Family Protection Authority.
  - Make sure children throughout the country are protected from violence.

### **Physical and Psychological Punishment:**

Corporal punishment has been prohibited in schools in the Maldives.

Some new initiatives were taken to protect children from violence. They are:

- 'Anti-bullying' policy in schools.
- Health programmes in schools to improve children's health.
- Life skills programme that help girls and boys to make good decision, solve problems, think critically and protect themselves from violence and drugs.
- Child-friendly approach introduced in schools.
- Children's court designed for children who are victims of violence and children who break the law.
- There is a new law that states that people have to report violence against children.

## NEPAL



### Early Marriage

- On 13 July 2006 the Supreme Court in Nepal made sex discrimination unlawful and that everyone must follow the minimum age of marriage.
- A draft is ready for changes in the Registration Act - This draft says that 20 years is the minimum age for marriage for both girls and boys. This will soon become law.
- Massive school enrolment programme.
- The government is introducing sex education in curriculum and in the community.
- Media is giving a lot of coverage on the negative impact of early marriage.
- Adolescent - Choose Your Future Programme. This programme teaches girls and boys about the harmful effects of early marriage, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.

### Physical and Psychological Punishment

- Code of Conduct developed prohibiting punishment of children in schools.
- Child friendly schools have been introduced in some localities in rural areas to make schools violence free.
- Domestic Violence Act has been drafted and will soon be made into law.
- Children's Act is in the process of being improved.
- National child protection policy being developed.
- More than 6,000 child clubs were established and these child clubs are advocating the stopping of physical and psychological punishment.
- Improving the skills of twenty - four social workers and twenty - four psychologists in the juvenile justice institutional settings.
- Nominating at least ten juvenile officers.
- The Ministry of Education has already started the Teaching and Learning with Dignity and 'Positive Discipline Programmes'. There are some schools that have already started practicing positive discipline.



### Early Marriage:

The Draft National Child Protection Bill has been prepared to end early marriage.

The Bill proposes:

- Punishment for marrying a child: Whoever marries a female child under eighteen years of age, shall be punishable with simple imprisonment which may be up to two years, or with fine which may be up to one hundred thousand rupees or both.
- Whoever performs, conducts or directs any child marriage shall be punishable with simple imprisonment, which may be up to two years or with fine, which may be up to one hundred thousand rupees or both.

### Physical and Psychological Punishment Report

- The National Commission for Child Welfare and Development has prepared the National Plan of Action (NPA) for children through a consultative process with adults from the government and other organisations and children.
- A Draft Bill on Child Protection has been prepared which prohibits corporal punishment, harmful traditional practices, exploitation, sexual abuse and discrimination and gives children the right to express their opinion.



*"I hate it when my parents fight"*  
- a boy participant



## SRI LANKA



### **Early Marriage:**

#### Prevention Programmes

- Ministry of Child Development and Women Empowerment was recently established to empower women and girls.
- The newly established Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka collects and gives out funds to people and organisations for conducting research on women's issues.
- The Registration General Department is responsible for recording birth, marriage and death of everyone in Sri Lanka.
- Domestic Violence Bill was passed in the Parliament to prevent husbands from physically or emotionally hurting their wives.

### **Physical and Psychological Punishment:**

- Child Rights monitoring committees were set up to gather information to assess the situation of violence against children, to publish such information regularly so that people can see whether progress is made in stopping violence against children, checks whether action is being taken to prevent violence and to protect children who face violence.
- National Child Protection Authority works with all sections of the government to protect children from violence.
- Child Development and Women Empowerment Ministry gives more importance to women and children's development.
- The government supports rehabilitation and treatment programmes for children who face traumatic and difficult situations.



## CHILDREN'S PRESENTATION

One girl and one boy (selected by 12 children) presented the Children and Young People's Statement at the First South Asia Forum.

### ACT, SUPPORT AND PROTECT

*Children and Young People's Statement at the First South Asia Forum for Ending Violence Against Children*

24-26 July 2006, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

We the children and young people (seven girls and five boys) from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka came together in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, for a two day regional consultation. In these two days (22 and 23 July), we discussed the issue of violence against children, focusing on physical and psychological punishment and early marriage and gave our suggestions on ways to stop it.

Through our sharing and discussion, we found out reasons this violence takes place. Although violence exists among rich and poor children, we realised that poverty, unemployment and financial problems can increase violence. Some of the other causes of violence are lack of education and awareness and different treatment of girls and boys. Our traditional and cultural practices, not having proper laws and not following the ones that are there, also lead to violence against children.

We realised the horrible effects that physical and psychological punishment and early marriage have on our development and growth. Children get physically and mentally hurt which can lead to depression and even death. Education is affected as the child can lose interest and can drop out of school. Sometimes children also run away from home. This can result in child labour and criminal activities.

Early marriage allows for easy spread of diseases and increase in population. Another important point is that children cannot provide proper care and take the required responsibility for their babies.

During the past two days, we have come up with several recommendations for governments, parents, communities and many others, including children. We have chosen to put forward the most important recommendations to you so that you can immediately act on them.

We recommend the creation of laws, changing them if necessary to ban physical and psychological punishment and early marriage in all countries. We have to ensure that the laws are followed. We would like to make everyone aware of child rights and laws protecting children, because laws are not important if they are not known and followed by the people. We believe that poverty can increase violence, so governments should provide jobs and other income generating programmes, which would decrease violence for some children.

Governments should ensure free, compulsory and quality education for all children. More importantly, no child should be put through physical and psychological punishment at school. When this is done, we believe children will develop their skills and reach their maximum potential.

We children are the base of our nations and have an important role to play in the development of the country. Such consultations are required because they help us to raise our voices to end violence against children. We once again request the governments to listen to our views seriously and act upon them.

**Please do not raise our hopes by making promises if you cannot fulfil them.**

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAID ON EARLY MARRIAGE

Ms Shanthi Dairam said that most countries in South Asia have different minimum age for marriage based on the legal system, religion, tradition and cultural practice. This is often different from the international laws on the minimum age of marriage. When both children and adults are more aware of their rights and the negative effects early marriage can have on the reproductive and mental health of girls, then slowly things will improve.

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAID ON PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

Mr. Peter Newell listed six actions he felt as possible actions the members of South Asia Forum could take. These are:

- Commitments from governments.
- Identify responsibilities within government departments.
- Have clear laws.
- Education and awareness programmes on violence against children for adults and children.
- Research.
- More money for programmes that help to end physical and psychological punishment and early marriage.

Government representatives and children sat in a group to discuss on what the governments plan to do to end the practice of early marriage and physical and psychological punishment. The children helped them to come up with their plans. The governments came up with the following Regional Statements.

## REGIONAL STATEMENT ON EARLY MARRIAGE

One of the major recommendations was that a regional uniform legal age for marriage be set at 18 years.

### **Legislation and Law Reforms:**

- Establish family courts.

- Punishment that is given for trafficking or kidnapping should be given to people who conduct or arranges early marriage.
- All laws should be based on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Compulsory registration of marriage.
- Birth registration certificate must be attached to the marriage certificate.
- Prior reporting of marriage to local government should be compulsory.

#### **Budget Allocations:**

- They will spend money on establishing 'Family Courts'.
- They will spend money on Children's clubs.
- They will spend money on campaigns and awareness raising programmes.

#### **Improve knowledge and skills:**

- They will increase the knowledge and skills of government/lawyers, judges and police.
- Educate and motivate communities, people in local authorities, governments, NGOs and many more people to get involved and take actions to end the practice of early marriage.
- The countries in the region must work together to monitor early marriage and guard countries' geographical borders.



#### **Sensitisation of teachers, NGOs/Community-based organisations, religious leaders, parents and children**

- Awareness programmes.
- Include this in the curriculum of professional development programmes, teacher training, and school textbooks.
- Hold discussions and conferences and produce posters, stickers booklets, comics and videos to get people interested in this issue.
- Sensitisation to all law enforcement agencies on sensitive handling of cases.
- Legal awareness of all the communities.
- Media awareness for highlighting legal cases.

**Indicators:**

- Minimum age of marriage defined not below 18.

**Monitoring:**

- Mechanism for monitoring should be established.
- Central Information System to maintain a database of marriages.

## REGIONAL STATEMENT ON PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PUNISHMENT

The government representatives promised to do the following:

**Laws:**

- Improve the existing laws, regulations and policies.
- Make sure that people follow the laws. They will put more money and hire people who will make sure that people do not break the laws on corporal punishment.
- Develop a 'child friendly system' to receive and address complaints about violence against children.
- They will not tolerate any form of violence in homes, schools, communities, institutions and workplaces.

**Information and Communication:**

- Conduct research, including a research on psychological punishment.
- Document good initiatives taken by other countries and share them with others.





- Prepare a National and Regional Status Paper.
- Develop awareness raising programmes for law and policy makers and government officials about UNCRC, CEDAW and other international agreements on children.

#### **Advocacy / Awareness:**

- Make advocacy and awareness strategies specific.
- Educate and motivate people in the media to play an important role in ending physical and psychological punishment and promote ways of disciplining children without resorting to violence.
- Make sure there is child participation at all levels, especially child clubs, child club networks, child parliaments.

#### **Capacity Building:**

- Identify the areas of increasing capacity to work to end such violence.
- Develop appropriate books, poster, and other materials to make people know about this issue.
- Put positive discipline in school and teacher's training curriculum.
- Improve the system, and the skills of people who are in charge of protecting children from violence.

#### **Monitoring / Evaluation:**

- Develop a monitoring system at the national level (all administrative levels), separate monitoring system for different settings.
- Monitoring of: legal provisions, policies, programme, resources and its utilisation.
- Monitor government, civil societies, children, parents and communities.
- Include physical and psychological punishment in existing government information and data collecting systems of each country.
- Add ending of physical and psychological punishment to the activities of existing institutions that monitor human rights in the countries.

#### **Budget / Time Frame:**

- Government should spend more money for the above- mentioned activities.
- Development partners should contribute.
- Countries of the region should set a time frame when they can achieve these goals.

After this the adults in the South Asia Forum talked about the role of the South Asia Forum. The South Asia Forum will raise awareness and advocate for ending violence against children in the region. They will share information of examples of good initiatives taken towards ending violence against children. SAF will organise meetings so that governments, girls and boys, representatives of UN agencies, international and national NGOs and other partners will meet once a year. They will discuss the progress and the problems of each country in trying to end violence against children.

Her Excellency Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Federal Minister for Social Welfare and Special Education thanked all the ministers, other government representatives and all other participants. She especially thanked the children.

Mr Chaudhry Amir Hussain, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan began his address by saying that he was delighted to see the happy faces of children and had been reminded by SAF of the responsibility to ensure children do not suffer from violence. With this he concluded the South Asia Forum.



*"My mother is always the last one to eat,  
but I like it when all my family members  
eat together"*

*- a child participant*





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Save the Children Sweden  
Regional Office for South & Central Asia  
Sanepa Road, Kupundole, Lalitpur  
GPO Box: 5850, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: +977-1-5531928/9  
Fax: +977-1-5527266  
rosca@sca.savethechildren.se  
<http://sca.savethechildren.se>

