

Policy Briefing Paper

Why Do Separated Children Matter?

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Introduction

EveryChild is an international development charity working in over 15 countries around the world. EveryChild's focus is children separated from their families and communities or in danger of being so. We do this through three different intervention types: Prevention, Protection and Re-integration. This clear focus on separation sets EveryChild apart from other INGOs

EveryChild believes the separation of children from their families or usual carers in developing countries is seriously undermining attempts to build healthy communities and meet development goals. Articles 7,8 and 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child state that children have the right to be cared for by their parents, that governments must respect family ties and children should only be separated from their families if it is in the best interests of the child.

However, there is very little policy and research around separation as a global issue with most NGOs and governments preferring to focus on analysis of specific groups of vulnerable children such as street children or child labourers. EveryChild believes that the additional damage of separation is hidden within these groupings. A lack of understanding of the specific situations and needs of highly marginalised separated children means that many interventions may fail to target their specific needs. It is essential that research is undertaken that looks at separation as a specific issue to ensure that interventions reach the most vulnerable children within these and other groupings. EveryChild hopes this paper and the research planned to follow will enrich our understanding of separation as a global development issue and enable us to advocate more effectively on behalf of children separated or at risk of being so.¹

1 Who are these separated children?

Separated children are boys and girls who have been separated from their parents, carers or families over a period of time. There are many push factors that can result in separation, including poverty, violence and abuse in the home, the death of parents, armed conflict or natural disasters. Separated children are not a homogenous group. Separation comes in many different forms. The challenge for organisations working with vulnerable children is delivering interventions informed by research that indicates the specific nature of separation in different contexts.

Separated children can be categorised according to the push factors that may have caused their separation. For example:

- Children who have been orphaned, especially those orphaned by HIV and AIDS
- Children who have become separated for the purposes of exploitation e.g. trafficked children
- Child refugees who have become separated from family by armed conflict
- Children with a disability placed in institutional care

Separated children can also be categorised according to their living situation. For example:

- Children living in institutions
- Children held in detention
- Child-headed households
- Children living on the streets
- Children living with employers (e.g. child domestic workers)

¹ This paper is based on a desk review and interviews with EveryChild staff. More comprehensive research is planned for 2009.

2 Why does a child's separation matter?

2.1 Separation threatens children's survival and development

Separated girls and boys are at risk of a range of problems which affect their survival and development. Very young children are especially vulnerable, with 0-3 years old facing increased risk of mortality if they lose their mothers (UNICEF et al 2006). The sexual abuse and early sexual activity associated with some forms of separation, such as early marriage or trafficking into prostitution, exposes children to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and girls to the risks associated with early pregnancy (Pinheiro 2006). Children living on the streets, and children who have been in conflict with the law have been noted to engage in risky activities which expose them to HIV infection (Pinheiro 2006; Ban Ki-Moon 2007). Orphans are also more at risk of STIs than non-Orphans (UNICEF et al 2006).

As shown below, violence, abuse and neglect suffered by separated children can threaten physical health and chances of survival. The abuse, neglect, exploitation and loss often associated with separation can also cause children major mental health problems. Research in Uganda suggests high levels of anxiety and depression amongst orphans with 12% stating that they sometimes wished they were dead (UNICEF et al 2006). In Russia, it has been reported that a staggering 1 in 10 young people leaving in institutions commit suicide (cited in Pinheiro 2006).

Boys and girls who live apart from their parents are more vulnerable to malnutrition. Children who have been orphaned by AIDS often either struggle to provide for themselves in child headed households (see Walker 2002), or live in large extended families where adults, frequently elderly grandparents, are unable to provide for all the children in their care (UNICEF et al 2006). The vulnerability of orphaned children is compounded by discrimination, with many children, living without their parents, receiving different food and clothing from other children in the household (UNICEF et al 2006). Children who live with employers, such as child domestic workers or trafficked children, are often given inadequate food, and may even be denied food as a form of punishment (Blaghbrough 2008).

There is widespread evidence that children who are denied a loving, continuous bond with a parental figure suffer major developmental set backs. Children in institutional care in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union have been shown to suffer from low IQ, poor motor skills, and delayed language development (EveryChild 2005; Johnson et al. 2006; Tolfree 2003).

2.2 Separation threatens children's education

Evidence suggests that the majority of separated children are unable to receive an adequate education. For example, in Uganda 27% of children who have lost both parents stopped primary school at some point, compared with 14% of children who are not orphans (UNICEF et al. 2006). As with the allocation of food, orphans may be discriminated against in decisions about education within the household. Research in ten Sub-Saharan African countries found that orphans were less likely to receive an education than other children in the same household (cited in UNICEF et al. 2006).

Children who are separated for the purposes of exploitation may be especially unlikely to receive an adequate education as their work often prevents them from regularly attending school. Although child domestic workers are often supposed to receive an education in return for their work, evidence suggests that in reality the employers that they live with often deny them this right (Blaghbrough 2008). For girls, leaving their parental home to go to live with husbands following early marriage usually puts an end to all hope of attending school (Pinheiro 2006).

2.3 Separation exposes children to exploitation, violence and abuse

The recent UN global report on violence against children listed children particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse. A striking proportion of these girls and boys are separated children including children living in institutions, children in detention, children living on the streets, orphaned children, trafficked children and children who have been forced into early marriage (Pinheiro 2006). The report shows that separation exposes children to often extreme forms of violence in a number of different settings:

- **In institutions:** The high levels of physical, mental and sexual abuse experienced by children in institutions have been widely documented (EveryChild 2005; Pinheiro 2006; Tolfree 2003). For example, in Kazakhstan, 63% of children in state run children's homes have reported violence. In Romania, one third of institutionalised children are aware of cases where children are obliged to have sex with staff or older children (Pinheiro 2006). Shockingly, abuse can be legally sanctioned, or used as a form of treatment. In 145 states, corporal punishment and other forms of degrading punishment are not explicitly prohibited in institutions. In Turkey, ECT is still used on children in psychiatric institutions (Pinheiro 2006).
- **In detention:** In 78 countries, corporal punishment remains a legal disciplinary measure against children in detention. In 31 states, corporal punishment is still permitted as a sentence against children. In many countries, violence is used to extract confessions from children. Children may be placed in detention with older children or with adults, further exposing them to risks of violence and abuse (Pinheiro 2006).
- **In the home:** Orphans living with extended family members are often treated differently from other children in the household. This discrimination can extend to violence and abuse. Research suggests that corporal punishment is more common against orphans than other children in the household. A study in Zambia shows that orphans taken in by extended family members are often subject to sexual abuse from uncles, step fathers and cousins (Pinheiro 2006). Child domestic workers living in the homes of their employers are often subject to verbal, physical and sexual violence. This abuse may come from employers and from other children in the household (Blagbrough 2008). Girls who are forced to marry early may be subject to rape and domestic violence from their often older husbands. In-laws may also punish girls for inadequate dowry payments or not fulfilling their 'duties' as a wife or mother (Pinheiro 2006).
- **On the streets:** Children living and working on the streets are often viewed as a nuisance. This can lead to violence on the part of police, security guards and members of the public (Delap 2008). In extreme cases, vigilante groups have been formed to rid the streets of beggars, leading to reported murders of street children (Pinheiro 2006).

Separated children are often exploited through harmful forms of work. This exploitation may be the driving force behind their separation, as with child domestic work. Separation for other reasons, such as due to conflict or natural disasters, may place children at greater risk of exploitation. For example, research on child soldiers in three West African countries shows that children are more likely to be recruited if they do not have the protection of parents or carers (Delap 2005).

2.4 Separated children experience high levels of stigma and discrimination

Children's separation is often associated with stigma and discrimination. Children who have been orphaned by AIDS suffer discrimination as they are not the biological children of their carers (UNICEF et al 2006). Those born to HIV + mothers face stigma as a result of either their own or their parent's HIV status, and children in institutions may feel rejected by their families and discriminated against by the wider society because they live in children's homes (Tolfree 2003). As shown above, children often suffer from sexual abuse as a result of their separation. For girls, early pregnancy can lead to rejection by families and communities (Blagbrough 2008; EveryChild 2005). Children may face discrimination because of the work they are forced to do as a result of their separation. This is particularly the case with child beggars, child soldiers and child commercial sex workers (Delap 2005; Delap 2008).

2.5 Separated children are becoming more vulnerable

Rising food prices mean that poor communities need more support to survive and the World Food Programme are currently calling for an extra \$500 million in food aid. However, developed countries' foreign aid expenditure declined for the second consecutive year in 2007 (UN 2008), and many countries are hinting at cutting aid further (Evans 2008). Such reductions are likely to hit vulnerable groups such as separated children hardest. In South Africa, news reports already show that feeding programmes for orphans have had to reduce the amount and quality of food provided because the cost of food has increased so much.

3 Children's separation: A substantial and growing problem

In part because of a lack of attention paid to separated children, no one really knows how many separated boys and girls there are in the world today. However, some estimates of the more common and widely recognised forms of separation highlight the enormity of the problem:

- In Sub-Saharan Africa in 2005, 12% of the child population were orphans; that is 48.3 million children, including **9.1 million 'double orphans' who have lost both parents** (UNICEF et al 2006). Although many of these children are taken in by extended families, evidence suggests that orphans often lack proper parental care as they face discrimination and abuse in their new homes (Pinheiro 2006).
- There are an **estimated 8 million children in institutionalised care across the world** (Pinheiro 2006).
- Many believe that global estimates of **1 million children in detention** (UNICEF 2007) underestimate the extent of this problem. In the US alone, 600,000 teen-ages spend time in detention every year (Pinheiro 2006).
- Around **1.2 million children are trafficked** each year (ILO 2006)
- Millions of girls work as child domestic workers, often living apart from their families. In Dhaka, Bangladesh alone there are around 300,000 child domestic workers (ILO-IPEC 2007).
- Around 10% of the estimated **100-150 million street children** across the world have made the streets the home (Consortium for Street Children 2006; UN Violence Study).
- **82 million girls now aged between 10-17 years will marry before 18**, with many going to live with their husbands family (Pinheiro 2006)
- More than half a million children (at least one fifth of the child population) were deprived of parental care as a result of the Rwanda genocide. Up to 1,500 children who survived the earthquake in Bam, Iran in 2003 lost their parents (UNICEF and International Social Services 2004). After the tsunami, Save the Children registered over 7000 separated children (Save the Children UK website).

These estimates suggests that there are millions of separated boys and girls in both industrialised and developing countries. Alarminglly a number of current global trends suggest that the already vast number of separated children is likely to grow in the coming years.

3.1 Slow progress towards Millennium Development Goals will lead to more separated children

Reports at the mid-way point for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) highlight much important progress, but also many areas of concern. Slow progress towards some of the key targets will increase the number of separated children globally. For example:

- The proportion of people in sub-Saharan African living on less than \$1 per day is unlikely to be reduced by the target of one half by 2015 (UN 2008). In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, poverty is major factor behind children's separation. For example, poverty interacts with abuse, neglect and violence in the home to push children away from their families and into institutional care (EveryChild 2005; Meintjes et al 2007 and Tolfree 2003). Girls and boys are often trafficked, or sent to work as domestic workers because families don't have enough to feed them (Blagbrough 2008; Dottridge 2004).
- Several indicators suggest that targets on gender parity are not being met across the world (UN 2008). Separation often stems from unequal power relations in and outside the home. For example, beliefs about appropriate roles for girls and their powerlessness within the family leave many vulnerable to early marriage and domestic service.
- More than 500,000 prospective mothers die annually in childbirth or through complications in pregnancy each year, leaving many children without their mothers (UN 2008). Evidence suggests that children who have lost their mothers are even more vulnerable than those who have lost their fathers (UNICEF et al 2006).

- Carbon dioxide emissions have continued to increase (UN 2008). Global warming will enhance children's vulnerability to separation in a number of ways. For example, increases in diseases and malnutrition due to rising temperatures and water and food shortages will increase parental morbidity and mortality. Rising poverty and the need to develop new survival strategies will push children out of school and into work. The chaos and loss of life created by natural disasters will lead to many children losing contact with their families. After the Asian tsunami, WHO expressed concern at an increase in child trafficking in the region since so many children had lost their mothers (UNICEF 2008).

Even where progress is now being made towards achieving the MDGs, evidence shows that past slow progress will leave a lasting legacy for children. Reports show a significant fall in HIV and AIDS infection and death rates (UN 2008). However, the delay between infection and death means that the number of orphans is still set to rise to 53.1 million by 2010 (UNICEF et al 2006). Many are concerned that communities will not be able to cope with the care of growing numbers of orphans, leading to increasing institutionalisation (Pinheiro 2006; UNICEF et al 2006).

3.2 Rising commodity prices and global recession makes children more vulnerable to separation

The combination of rising commodity prices and global recession is having a devastating impact on the world's poor (Evans 2008; Save the Children 2008; Ravillion 2008). The World Bank estimates that world food prices have gone up by 83% in the last 3 years (cited in Evans 2008). To place these figures in context, in one region of Ethiopia it took 60% of family income to buy the 25% of annual food needs not covered by the annual harvest in 2001. By April 2008, the same proportion of income only covered 7% of food needs (Save the Children 2008). As shown above, sending children away to work or to institutions is a survival strategy used by many poor families in times of need. A worsening economic situation can also lead to adult ill-health and death and children's removal from school (Save the Children 2008), both of which leave children more vulnerable to separation from their families. For example, it has been shown that education reduces children's vulnerability to trafficking by giving them an alternative to exploitative forms of work and the skills and confidence to negotiate with would-be traffickers (Dotteridge 2004).

3.3 Inadequate protection against violence, abuse and neglect will increase the number of separated children

Two major global reports have pointed towards a continued failure to adequately protect children from violence, abuse and neglect (Ban Ki-Moon 2007; Pinheiro 2006). The UN study on violence against children highlights the pervasive nature of violence in children's lives, affecting girls and boys in developing and industrialised nations, and in all areas of their lives, including homes, schools, and workplaces (Pinheiro 2006). A recent review of progress against the MDGs and goals made at the UN Special Session for Children in 2002 shows serious failings in efforts to protect children against abuse, exploitation and violence (Ban Ki-Moon 2007). EveryChild's own experience has shown that such failings are a major reason behind children's separation. Research suggests that violence or abuse within the home is often a driving force behind children's entry into institutions. For example, in South Africa many staff in children's homes report that being an orphan in itself is usually not enough to push children into residential care. In most cases, children have also experienced violence, abuse, or neglect at the hands of their carers (Meintjes et al 2007). This is reflected by research elsewhere in the world (Pinheiro 2006). In Peru, violence and child mistreatment are precipitating factors in 73% of cases of children migrating to the streets (Pinheiro 2006).

The impact of violence, abuse and neglect on children's separation is compounded by inadequate or inappropriate child protection policies in many countries. Particularly common failings likely to lead to an increase in children's separation include:

- **A continued reliance on institutional care:** Despite widespread global recognition of the risks associated with residential care, many countries continue to rely on children's homes for the care and protection of children. In Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where such care has traditionally been most widely used, evidence suggests that far from falling in the post-communism era, there was an initial rise in the proportion of children in institutions

(EveryChild 2005). In Africa, there is growing concern about the burgeoning number of orphanages being established by often well meaning private donors and faith-based organisations to meet the perceived needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS (Pinheiro 2006).

- **The widespread use of child detention:** Child detention is still widely used in most parts of the world, with often limited efforts made to find alternatives ways of addressing youth crime. In some countries, public concern about delinquency has increased pressure on governments to widen the use of detention. For example, in England and Wales, the number of children sentenced to penal custody increased by 90% between 1994 and 2004 (Pinheiro 2006).

4 Children’s separation has wider implications for the ability to meet development goals

Aside from having a devastating impact on children’s lives, the evidence presented above suggests that separation also has wider ramifications for efforts to achieve the MDGs. The Box below summarises the effect of separation on reaching the MDGs, and the impact of progress in achieving the MDGs on the numbers of separated children.

The relationship between the MDGs and children’s separation from their parents and carers		
MDG	The impact of separation on the MDGs	The impact of the MDGs on separation
Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separated children are more vulnerable to malnutrition • Damage to education and child development caused by separation may lead to poverty in adult-hood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is a major driving force behind children’s separation
Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation prevents children from attending school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education reduces children’s vulnerability to many forms of separation e.g. trafficking
Promote gender equity and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation can perpetuate gender inequity by, for example, denying girls a right to an education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The powerlessness of girls leaves them vulnerable separation through early marriage, domestic work or trafficking.
Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young children are more likely to die if they don’t live with their mothers 	
Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separated children are often exposed to early sexual activity and consequent early pregnancy with associated higher risks to maternal health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High rates of death during pregnancy and child birth deny many children a mother.
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many separated boys and girls, including trafficked children, children living on the streets, and orphaned children, are at higher risk of HIV infection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV/AIDS, and other diseases have left many girls and boys without one or both of their parents.
Ensure environmental sustainability		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A future increase in natural disasters as a result of global warming will lead to more separated children in the future.
Develop a global partnership for development		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced aid flows increases the vulnerability of separated children

5. Initial policy recommendations

The findings presented in this paper suggest that any development agency concerned with child rights or meeting the Millennium Development Goals must consider children's separation in their work. EveryChild's extensive experience of working with separated children suggests that work to address children's separation must take place in three areas.

Prevent children's separation

- Target children vulnerable to separation through poverty reduction strategies and education sector plans.
- Work with governments to reduce the number of children in detention and institutional care.
- Include strategies to prevent child separation in emergency or response plans.
- Support families and work to reduce violence, abuse and neglect in the home.

Protect separated children:

- Ensure that separated children are able to access quality education and health services, including sexual and reproductive health.
- Target food aid to separated children.
- Develop advocacy programmes to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by many separated children.
- Work to protect separated children from violence and abuse in institutions, homes, workplaces, and on the streets.

Re-integrate separated children with their families and communities:

- Work with governments to remove children from institutions, either through supporting families to care for these children, or, where this is not possible, through alternative family based care.
- Encourage communities to accept and support formerly separated children.

To support these efforts, EveryChild calls on the UK's Department for International Development to devote some of its substantial support to development research towards major analysis of the extent, causes and consequences of children's separation.

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