

Final Report of the First Arab ISPCAN Regional Conference

Review of Major issues raised and recommendations developed:

- 1) The conference raised the issue of the implication of cultural issues on child abuse, and on the child's rights in Islam. Islam advocates empowering children, providing for them through the rights of: freedom, life, security, justice, and education.
Recommendation: Social attitudes and practices should be based on the protection advocated by Islam and other religions, based on principles of love and care.
- 2) The need for National Frameworks which coordinate an intersectoral approach to family and child protection was identified as a high priority.
Recommendation: Countries need to create National Frameworks which include key policies for protecting children and families. Models which are currently in development should be shared and evaluated for expanded adoption throughout the region.
- 3) The importance of support in Jordan from their government, as well as from the Royal Family, and especially her Royal Majesty, Queen Rania, were recognized as critical to the important advances made against child abuse and neglect in Jordan, and similar support is proving important in other countries.
Recommendation: Countries should enlist champions and institutional support of governments and royalty at high levels wherever possible, to strengthen their child protection efforts nationally, and regionally.
- 4) The UN Study on Violence was introduced, and the importance of regional and national involvement to inform this study was stressed. UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO will work with members of the region on this project.
Recommendation: Professionals are encouraged to become involved with this study by sharing their country programs and research through the consultation process.
- 5) Violence is a Public Health Problem which is preventable, and this includes child abuse and neglect. Regional medical experts point out the severe short-term and long-term health, as well as social, consequences to abused and neglected children. Violence in the home, community and schools is a problem common to all countries.
Recommendation from the WHO Global Campaign: Each country should create a National Action Plan for violence prevention and data collection, to understand the magnitude and scope of violence within each country, as well as for work on gender and social equality.
- 6) Child abuse and neglect, a major problem globally, is underreported internationally. Many speakers noted the problem of the scarcity of data on child abuse and neglect, and the important need to do research and to analyze this information to inform future policies and practice.
Recommendation: Societies must introduce surveillance systems, public awareness and professional education on the epidemiology of CAN, in order to develop effective strategies for diagnosis, therapy and prevention.

7) From a legal perspective - child protection means protecting child victims and children who have conflicts with the law.

Recommendation: Countries need to strengthen child protective legislation. Further, courts need to be child friendly, and need to prioritize decisions based on the best interests of the child.

8) The conference agreed that the discipline of children, especially corporal punishment, is a major problem in their countries, and that consideration must be given to training of parents within a cultural and religious context – which provides alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Further, severe physical punishment should not be allowed.

Recommendation: A focus must be made by the Arab Regional Network, to address this issue, and to develop this strategy (the alternatives) and training on this for communities, parents and children.

9) Experts stressed the need to invest in strengthening family and victim support. It was also recognized that support and treatment of abusers, who were often victimized themselves, is needed. Models, such as those being developed in Jordan, should be shared with neighbor countries.

Recommendation: Strengthen support services for families and victims. Provide programs for rehabilitation of and help to abusers.

10) Positive experiences were shared from throughout the region at the conference and a separate report on the issues will be prepared.

Bahrain - Child Protection Committee, a regional conference and professional training.
Jordan – The River Jordan Foundation, Center for Abused Children, Processes for Child Examination, etc. have initiated important national efforts for protecting children, including public awareness and educational campaigns.

Lebanon – NGOs increasingly work on identification and rehabilitation of abused and neglected children. A Supreme Council for Children has undertaken a role in a prevention program focusing on professional development to prevent family violence.
Palestine presentors spoke of the serious issue of children being arrested and jailed without clear crimes identified, and the denial of their rights for parental visitation and medical care. They addressed the critical issue of keeping children out of armed conflict through community training on the issue. Children in Iraq, Somalia and Sudan were also identified regarding this issue.

Sudan's representative focused on the issue of female genital mutilation and the need to mobilize all sectors to end this practice, which physically and psychologically harms women, and their families as a result.

Syria addressed the problem of abused and neglected children in their country, including in schools, highlighting issues of child labor and orphaned children.

11) Children in Armed Conflict, and in Occupation/Detention is a serious issue – with implications for health, rights, and all types of abuse and neglect.

Recommendation: Condemnation and empirical evidence which supports the protection of these children must be a priority for the region's professionals. International

Organizations should be enlisted to share the responsibility, according to international resolutions, to Break the Silence and ensure protection for all these vulnerable children.

12) The conference stressed the importance of addressing child abuse prevention according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the convention, issues such as rights to education, development and against harmful forms of child labor must be addressed. Issues such as the rights of orphaned, institutionalized, disabled and refugee children, as well as discrimination against them and against minority and immigrant children were addressed.

Recommendation: Evaluate and modify current laws and mechanisms to more effectively implement the CRC, providing increased protection to all children, including vulnerable children.

13) There is a need for training of professionals in mental health because of the psychological implications of all abuse and the low capacity currently of many mental health professionals in the region.

Recommendation: Increase training opportunities for mental health professionals.

14) The conference identified the significant societal economic cost of child abuse and neglect.

Recommendation: Encourage universities and research centers to do research on the long-term economic cost and overall impact of child abuse and neglect to society.

15) There is a lack of preventive measures against child abuse and neglect which must be a priority in a comprehensive strategy to protect children nationally and regionally.

Recommendation: There is a need for structured awareness raising programs to advance child abuse and neglect prevention, and to involve media in a professional and a positive way.

16) There is a need to provide a balanced response to child abuse and neglect cases, whereby intervention includes more than recognition and investigation, but also focuses on meeting the needs of children and families.

Recommendation: Resources should be invested in meeting children and family needs.

17) There is a need to develop an interdisciplinary approach to child abuse and neglect, with well-trained professionals working effectively together.

Recommendation: Countries should exchange their models and information, learn from one another and develop effective models for the region and their countries.

18) ISPCAN has committed to being a partner with the emerging Arab Regional Network, and the next Arab Regional Conference. ISPCAN shares technical information with the field, such as its guidelines, basing our work on the following principles: rights based, evidence-based, child-centered, an integrated intersectoral approach, culturally sensitive and adaptable, and finally, accessible.

Recommendation: ISPCAN continue as a technical resource and partner for professionals in the region.

19) BREAKING THE SILENCE on Child Abuse and Neglect must be done in every country in the region.

Recommendation: Child protection opportunities should be developed at community, public, professional, judicial or national policy, and children's levels.

Appendix: Statement from the Arab professionals who attended the conference condemning abuse of children in situations of armed conflicts, and under occupation or detention, especially the Palestinian, Iraqi, and Algerian children.

Future Post Conference: Will evaluate every country experience presented - & those meeting criteria will be published (must be based on child rights, facts, child-centered according to child development, intersect oral, according Islamic/Arabic culture & easily accessible).