



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 December 2021

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

14–25 March 2022

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Mission Kids, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Sexual violence spares no culture, country, race, religion, or ethnicity. Globally, 50 per cent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16 years of age, with the negative consequences extending well into adulthood. Research shows that child sexual abuse can result in lifelong adverse physical and mental health outcomes, drug and alcohol abuse, early pregnancies, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and fewer years of schooling, all potentially leading to lost earning potential and intergenerational poverty. Statistics obtained from Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) provided by 22 participating countries, including 14 African nations, reveal that: 1 in 2 girls who had experienced sexual violence never told anyone; most girls who experienced sexual violence knew their perpetrators; 1 in 3 girls who experienced sexual violence became pregnant before 18 years of age; and sexual violence against girls was associated with a 370 per cent increase in HIV infection.

Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center is dedicated to its mission of providing healing and justice for victims of child abuse by providing collaborative services, advocacy, leadership and education. Since 2007, Mission Kids has spearheaded the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) approach in responding to child abuse in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, an area of 800,000 residents, by bringing together police, prosecutors, social workers, medical professionals, mental health therapists, and victim advocates to support the child and non-offending family members. Our vision is to unfailingly serve to protect as many children and youth from child abuse as possible. To do so, we have expanded our reach and resources to do whatever is necessary to prevent them from harm, address their physical and emotional needs, and achieve justice on their behalf across Pennsylvania, a state of 13 million people; nationwide; and internationally. Our areas of leadership expertise include responding to and preventing child trafficking, developing child sexual abuse informational materials, and providing child abuse prevention education. We live up to and exceed the uncompromising values and expectations of our founders to serve and protect our community's own children, while accepting a leadership role that is unencumbered by boundaries and seeks to ensure that the world is a safer, better place for all children.

Creating multi-disciplinary team community responses to child sexual abuse, when adapted to meet the unique conditions of individual municipalities, can mitigate trauma and bring about social and economic gender equity for adult women, empowering female victims of child abuse to reach their full economic potential.

The multi-disciplinary team child advocacy center response model has been proven to work in many different, culturally diverse communities, with approximately 900 centers in the U.S.A. and 33 other countries worldwide. This approach places the child at the hub of a wheel supported by professionals as the surrounding spokes. Each collaborative team of professionals typically includes police, prosecutors, social workers, medical and mental health providers, and victim advocates. Every professional assists the child in a coordinated, trauma-informed manner, promoting better decisions and more positive outcomes. The model also relies on a forensic interview of the victim performed by a neutral interviewer specifically trained to ask questions in an age-appropriate and open-ended manner, allowing the child to tell her story, ideally once, in her own words.

Child sexual abuse is a crime of secrecy. Many girls do not disclose their abuse until adulthood, if ever, due to the stigma surrounding sexual abuse. Further, feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment frequently last a lifetime. Localized, multi-disciplinary collaboration, however, allows communities to effect positive change, improve police responses and adult reactions to abuse, and provides support to victims in ways that reduce the secondary trauma caused by disclosure. This

approach expedites the healing process, thereby allowing the child to stay in school and continue her education for as long as possible, generating future economic stability and employment opportunities.

The process by which the multi-disciplinary team response develops is inherently unique to each community and ultimately depends upon local resources, prevailing laws, buy-in of community and government leaders, and grass-roots support. It is a community-centered, long-term process, built step-by-step, creating a gradual shift away from undisclosed trauma from abuse towards healing and justice for victims. Interested community stakeholders can reach out for more information or be mentored by a well-established child advocacy center like Mission Kids to help facilitate their concerted efforts. Mentorship would include educating governmental and local leaders on the benefits of this model; a needs-based assessment of each community; review of the resources and challenges in each area; and facilitation of stakeholder groups to come to areas of agreement for how to begin improving the community response to child sex abuse, one issue at a time.

We call upon ECOSOC to endorse the evidence-based, multi-disciplinary team child advocacy center model to strengthen communities, foster understanding, change social norms, and improve responses relative to child sexual abuse. Building upon existing community infrastructures and resources makes this model accessible to all, regardless of location, and will help to achieve the Commission's goals of empowering women and safeguarding their economic autonomy.
