ZIMBABWE

Protecting the Child Survivor of Sexual Abuse – the Victim Friendly System

unicef

Save the Children

ZIMBABWE
Protecting Children Affected by Abuse –
the Victim Friendly System

Overview

The Victim Friendly System is the culmination of a number of initiatives aimed at providing essential support services to boys and girls affected by abuse. Coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Services, Zimbabwe Republic Police, Ministry of Education and various non-government organisations, the system seeks to deliver comprehensive, specialised psychosocial care, medical, legal and referral services to boys and girls who have witnessed, experienced or perpetrated abuse.

Why are Specialised Services Necessary?

There is no national data on the prevalence and incidence of sexual or physical violence in Zimbabwe, however there is emerging anecdotal evidence and localised studies that suggest that violence of all types is a significant problem, particularly for girls and other vulnerable children including orphans and children living away from their family, children on the move, children with disabilities and children who come into conflict with the law. For example:

- The National AIDS Council estimates that around 37 per cent of adolescent girls are orphans or otherwise vulnerable and 1 in 5 of these girls are exposed to sexual violence before their 18th birthday.
- 13% of girls report being sexually harassed by teachers and/or fellow pupils. Of this, 7% report having been forced into sex at least once.
- An estimated 60% of rape survivors brought to the attention of authorities are children and an overwhelming majority of these are girls.
- 1 in 4 women living in the nation’s capital reported being raped by their husbands or partners.
- 25% of women aged 15-49 years reported having experienced sexual violence at some point in their lives.
- 36% of 6,293 women reported having experienced some form of physical violence since the age of 15 (ZDHS 2005-2006).
- The Police recorded 3,448 child abuse cases in 2009, the Victim Friendly Courts heard 1,222 cases of child sexual abuse and it is recognised globally that a majority of abuse is not reported to authorities.

Legal and Policy Framework of Victim Friendly Initiative

The Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act (Amendment 1997) provides for the establishment of Victim Friendly Courts in order to protect vulnerable witnesses. Further to the national legislation, A ‘Protocol on the multisectoral management of sexual abuse in Zimbabwe’ developed in 2003 articulates the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the Victim Friendly System. The Courts have lead responsibility for coordinating the initiative.

---


Zimbabwe signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 11 September 1990, without reservations. In so doing, Zimbabwe bound itself to take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to implement the rights of the children enshrined in the Convention as required by Article 4. Articles 19 and 34 particularly state the need for children to be protected from sexual abuse and exploitation. This initiative contributes to efforts to meet this international obligation.
Results so far

In 2008 and 2009 the Government of Zimbabwe, in partnership with UNICEF and Save the Children Norway, scaled up the response to children affected by abuse through capacity strengthening of 17 Victim Friendly Courts in Zimbabwe.

- **5,768 children** were reached directly though the Victim Friendly Courts, Police and Hospital Clinics in 2009
- **17 Courts were equipped to become child-friendly**, including video link up equipment to enable children to give evidence from outside the court room
- **96 court officials, health, education and social services departments, as well as partner NGOs were trained** on the management of child abuse cases in line with national laws and policies as well as international best practice.

A national database was established within the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, to enable specific data on survivor services to be collated.

1,700 children and 1,000 community members in seven districts were provided with specific knowledge and skills to enable them to understand and access relevant services activities.

Elements of the Victim Friendly System

**Victim Friendly Police Units:**

Established in 267 police station, these units are manned by officers with the specific responsibility of providing child-sensitive responses to children affected by sexual and physical abuse. Officers are required to treat all allegations of abuse seriously and provide support to children to get their case to the Court by conducting child-sensitive interviews, assisting children to access medical care and obtain forensic reports, and preparing children for court. The Victim Friendly Police Unit works with boys and girls who witness, have experienced or who are alleged to have perpetrated abuse.

**Victim Friendly Courts:**

First established in 1994, these Courts provide a child-sensitive environment for boys and girls who are required to attend court as they have witnessed, experienced or are alleged to have perpetrated abuse. Child survivors or witnesses can be supported to give evidence in a separate room, away from the alleged perpetrator. Prosecutors, intermediaries, probation officers and magistrates are trained to deal with children in a child-sensitive manner, work to expedite cases involving children and refer children to post-trial care and support services when necessary.
**Victim Friendly Health Services:**

In some areas, specialised clinics have already been established, however victim-friendly services can be provided by all Primary Health Care Clinics and District Hospitals. These services aim to provide children who have experienced abuse with psycho social support and health care to address immediate medical needs and future health risks associated with abuse and to collect evidence that can support criminal investigations. These services can link children with additional support services. Under new guidelines, both nurses and doctors can prepare medical affidavits, significantly enhancing children’s access to justice.

---

**Department of Social Services:**

The Department of Social Services’ key responsibility through Probation Officers, is to ensure a ‘Place of Safety’ for child survivors before and after their case is heard in Court. Other support services rendered include counselling of the child and family; being the ‘support person’ throughout the trial and being a point of referral for the child to access other essential child protection services.

---

**Victim Friendly Referral Systems:**

Children can be referred to any of the victim-friendly services, at which time they can be supported to access any elements of the system that are relevant to their protection, care and support. Sensitising teachers and health staff to signs of abuse enables these professionals to provide support to children who require protection and connect them with appropriate victim-friendly services. The National Victim Friendly Court Committee and its regional Sub committees coordinate the Victim Friendly activities at all Regional Magistrates’ Courts in Zimbabwe and holds periodic multisectoral meetings to discuss pertinent child protection issues. The Victim Friendly Court Committee is also in the process of raising awareness of child sexual and physical abuse and the referral options available to children and their families.

---

**There is Still Work to be Done**

The National Victim Friendly Court Committee will continue to work with government and non-government organisations to establish individual legal, protection, care and support services, and strengthen the linkages between these important components to ensure that all children and their communities receive comprehensive support to access their justice and welfare systems.

There are many exciting opportunities ahead.

By 2012, the System aims to see a 50 per cent increase in the rate of reporting, and to be providing at least 10,000 children a year with specialised protection, care and support.

In 2010-2011, the system will be further strengthened through:

- **Increasing the number of Victim Friendly Courts:** the number of Courts will increase from 17 to 30 and train at least 500 legal, social welfare and judicial professionals to adopt rights-based case management and referral approaches when working with children. It is the long-term goal of the government to establish Victim Friendly Courts throughout the country.

- **A broader child justice sector analysis** including a review of the Victim Friendly Initiative will identify ways to establish and strengthen comprehensive services across the country.

- **Enhancing the existing database** on the Victim Friendly Initiative to enable key service providers to track child survivors from pre, during to post trial, ensuring that children do not fall through the cracks of the justice delivery system.

- **Revising the Protocol on the multisectoral management of sexual abuse in Zimbabwe** to allow for the inclusion of more stakeholders in the Victim Friendly System and most importantly articulate the linkages between the various components.

---

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Chief Magistrate’s Office, Judicial Service Commission
New Government Complex
Cnr 4th Street / Samora Machel Ave, Harare
Tel: (04) 772 9956