



# Child protection violations and poverty in low- and middle-income countries

## Background Note

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- Abuse, exploitation and neglect are large-scale social problems: more children globally are at risk of violence than are out of school or involved in child labour.
- Key factors underlying violation of children's rights include poverty, social norms and the weakness of protective structures.
- The significance of each driver varies by issue: economic deprivation particularly increases children's risk of inadequate care, exposure to neighbourhood violence and to sexual exploitation.
- There is some evidence that good quality cash transfers and skills training programmes have helped adolescent girls delay marriage and have contributed to reduced sexual exploitation.
- The effectiveness of broader child protection programmes could be strengthened by more concerted action to address poverty-related drivers of protection violations.



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# 1 Introduction

The abuse, neglect and exploitation of children is a serious and neglected social problem, with major long-term economic and human development implications.

**Sexual and physical abuse:** An estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys worldwide have experienced unwanted sexual contact, while between 0.5 and 1.5 billion children and young people globally experience physical violence annually (Pinheiro, 2006).<sup>1</sup> Both sexual and physical violence can lead to injuries, death, mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, lower educational achievement and lifetime earnings.

**Early marriage:** Recent data indicate that 14% of girls in low- and middle-income countries marry by age 15, and 30% by age 18. This equates to 14.2 million girls worldwide married before their 18th birthday (UNFPA, 2012). Early marriage (before age 18) is considered to violate individuals' right to consent to marriage when sufficiently mature and to legalise sexual relations at an age when they would otherwise be considered sexual abuse. It is associated with early childbearing, significantly higher rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity<sup>2</sup> and a greater risk of intergenerational poverty cycles. Girls and young women married as children are also at greater risk of violence and abuse from spouses and in-laws (Kishor and Johnson, 2004; UNFPA, 2012)

**Inadequate care:** Studies in middle-income countries indicate that between 30% and 48% of children have been left alone or in the care of other children while their parents are working,<sup>3</sup> putting them at increased risk of injury and worse educational and behavioural outcomes (Heymann, 2006). Despite a growing recognition that problems of child marriage, sexual and physical violence and inadequate care are key barriers to universalising primary and secondary education, and that they and neglect can have profoundly negative effects on human development, child protection is seen as a specialist sector outside the area of expertise of many development professionals. At the same time, it is increasingly recognised that much action to protect children from harm tackles only some of the underlying causes. The move within the child protection 'sector' towards building effective child protection systems provides a strategic opportunity to develop more holistic approaches to child protection, including poverty-related factors.

## Box 1: Key research questions

This research programme focuses on four areas where children's right to protection is violated on a large scale: child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation of children, physical violence against children and inadequate care of children. It examines the following research questions:

- How far and in what ways poverty contributes to violation of children's right to protection;
- How this varies between different kinds of protection violation;
- How far child protection interventions have an anti-poverty focus;
- How far anti-poverty components improve child protection outcomes for children.

Note: These questions were selected on the basis of prior ODI expertise and Oak Foundation interest.

1 Information on the process by which these estimates were derived , and thus, why the range for physical violence is so large, could not be found in publicly available literature.

2 Girls aged 10-14 are five times as likely to die in childbirth as women aged 20-24; 15-19 year olds are twice as likely to die (Temin and Levine, 2010). High maternal mortality and morbidity rates are also associated with a higher risk of infant mortality: a child born to a teen mother is twice as likely to die before the age of one as the child of a woman in her twenties (ICRW, 2007), resulting in a million infants of young mothers dying every year worldwide as a result of pregnancy and childbirth-related causes (*ibid*).

3 Equivalent data for low-income countries were not available.

Analysts and practitioners are divided as to how far poverty and social exclusion underlie or exacerbate violations of children's right to protection, and thus the role of poverty reduction in reducing violation of these rights. This Background Note reports on a year-long review of evidence concerning the relationship between poverty and violation of children's protection rights, and the impact of anti-poverty programmes in reducing violation of these rights. Box 2 outlines the methodology for this first phase of the study in more detail. Fieldwork exploring the relationship between poverty and selected child protection issues is discussed in more detail in Jones, et. al. (2014a), Jones et. al. (2014b) and Walker et. al. (2014).

Defining certain practices or experiences as abuse or violations of children's rights is inevitably contentious. In this literature review, we use definitions derived from international law or policy consensus,<sup>4</sup> while recognising that these may conflict with local understandings.

## Box 2: Methodology

This phase of the project involved four connected pieces of work:

- **An in-depth review of the literature on linkages between poverty and violations of children's right to protection.** This reviewed around 500 qualitative and quantitative papers obtained via Google and Google Scholar, from expert recommendations and via hand searching of institutional websites. These were generally not framed in terms of 'children's rights' but addressed one or more research questions. The majority of these papers drew on sociological or public health traditions; many were multidisciplinary, with insights from a number of different fields. Economic and political economy perspectives were the least well represented in the evidence examined.
- **An adapted systematic review of child protection interventions.** This examined the extent to which child protection interventions involved anti-poverty components, and how far anti-poverty components contributed to improved outcomes. Papers were located through electronic searching in Google, hand searching of selected institutional websites and journals and expert recommendations. The 1,341 documents found were examined against a set of inclusion and methodology assessment criteria, using the Mixed Methods Assessment Tool (MMAT) (Pluye et al., 2011), which attempts to value qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research equally. A total of 83 papers were judged to meet the standards of the review and were included in the analysis, of which 37 were qualitative and 37 quantitative and 26 used mixed methods.
- **An electronic survey of 268 researchers and practitioners,** examining their views on the relationship between child protection and poverty, obstacles to more integrated child protection and anti-poverty programmes and their interest in a network or community of practice on these issues.
- **Telephone and email interviews with 25 researchers and practitioners,** mostly working within the child protection field. These focused on the relationship between poverty and child protection and the potential for improved linkages between anti-poverty and child protection programmes to improve outcomes for children.

For further details, see Marcus (2013), Marcus and Page (2013) and Smith (2012).

Figure 1 summarises the conceptual framework developed for this study, which is intended to capture the key processes and factors at macro, meso and micro levels that contribute to child protection violations. Given the focus of this study, Figure 1 highlights ways in which economic deprivation can exacerbate the risk of children's protection rights being violated, setting this analysis in the context of key structural, political and individual factors. It emphasises the multiple factors that interact to increase children's risk of protection violations. Most importantly, these include the role of **social and cultural norms**, which operate at all levels to influence what is

<sup>4</sup> In brief, early marriage is defined as marriage below 18 years (based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and sexual violence as sexual acts perpetrated against children. Definitions of sexual abuse and exploitation and physical abuse draw on World Health Organization (WHO) definitions: sexual abuse as use of a child for sexual gratification of an adult and sexual exploitation as use of children in prostitution, in pornography and/or for financial gain (including transactional sex). Physical abuse is defined as intentional use of physical force against a child that results in – or has a high risk of resulting in – harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity. Inadequate care is defined as care that does not support children's healthy physical, emotional and cognitive development, or ensure their safety and protection from harm.

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understood as abusive treatment of children, and how individuals, communities and the state should respond to different protection violations.

Shocks and stresses, such as environmental disasters and degradation, economic shocks and conflict, all exacerbate poverty and increase the likelihood of parents/carers, adolescents and children responding in ways that put children at greater risk of protection violations (see Box 3). Conflict and insecurity can also put children at risk of protection violations more directly through normalisation of physical and sexual violence, or through death or displacement of parents and carers. Conflict and physical insecurity can also lead parents to calculate that their daughters will be best protected from sexual or physical violence in the community or from combatants through marriage, and can thus underpin child marriage (Boyden et al., 2012; World Vision, 2013).<sup>5</sup>

### **Box 3: Shocks, stresses and child protection violations**

Analyses of the impact of economic and environmental shocks are increasingly documenting effects on child protection, as well as other aspects of child wellbeing. These include:

- An increase in child marriage as a means of bringing income into a household or reducing costs (Cook et al, nd; IRIN, 2003a; Namatovu and Espinosa, 2011; UNICEF, 2005). In some contexts, being married can facilitate girls' independent migration (World Vision, 2013). Although migration carries some additional risks of sexual and physical violence, for many migrants these are traded off against the prospect of better economic opportunities elsewhere, and dealing with them is seen as part of growing up (Hashim, 2006).
- An increase in sexual exploitation, as increasing numbers of girls engage in transactional or commercial sex (Heltberg et al., 2011; Hossain et al., 2010). This is often, but not exclusively, associated with increased displacement, related to conflict, environmental shocks or migration.
- An increase in physical insecurity related to inequality, unemployment and social exclusion (Heltberg et al., 2012; World Bank, 2011a), manifested through increased risk of physical violence in the community (both as victims and perpetrators), increased domestic violence, affecting children as victims and witnesses (Heltberg et al., 2011) and sexual violence (Pinheiro, 2006).
- An increase in young children being left without competent care while adults are working longer hours to try to make ends meet (Harper et al., 2012), and/ or being sent to live in residential institutions by families unable to afford the costs of caring for them (IRIN, 2003b; Tangaroensathien et al., 2000 in Harper et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2010).

In a given cultural context, **economic pressures** can increase children's risk of protection violations: they can reduce the resources available for protective and responsive services (such as health, education, social work and the criminal justice system) and they can increase the likelihood of individuals and households undertaking livelihood strategies that increase children's exposure to risk (e.g. by leaving them unattended, by marrying off a daughter to bring cash into the household). Children and adolescents themselves also undertake survival strategies that can put them at risk of abuse – such as working in occupations where they may be prey to abuse by unscrupulous employers (as in domestic work or in other occupations where children sleep on the employer's premises). Adult and adolescent responses to the stresses of poverty, such as increased alcohol consumption, can also put children at increased risk of violence and inadequate care.

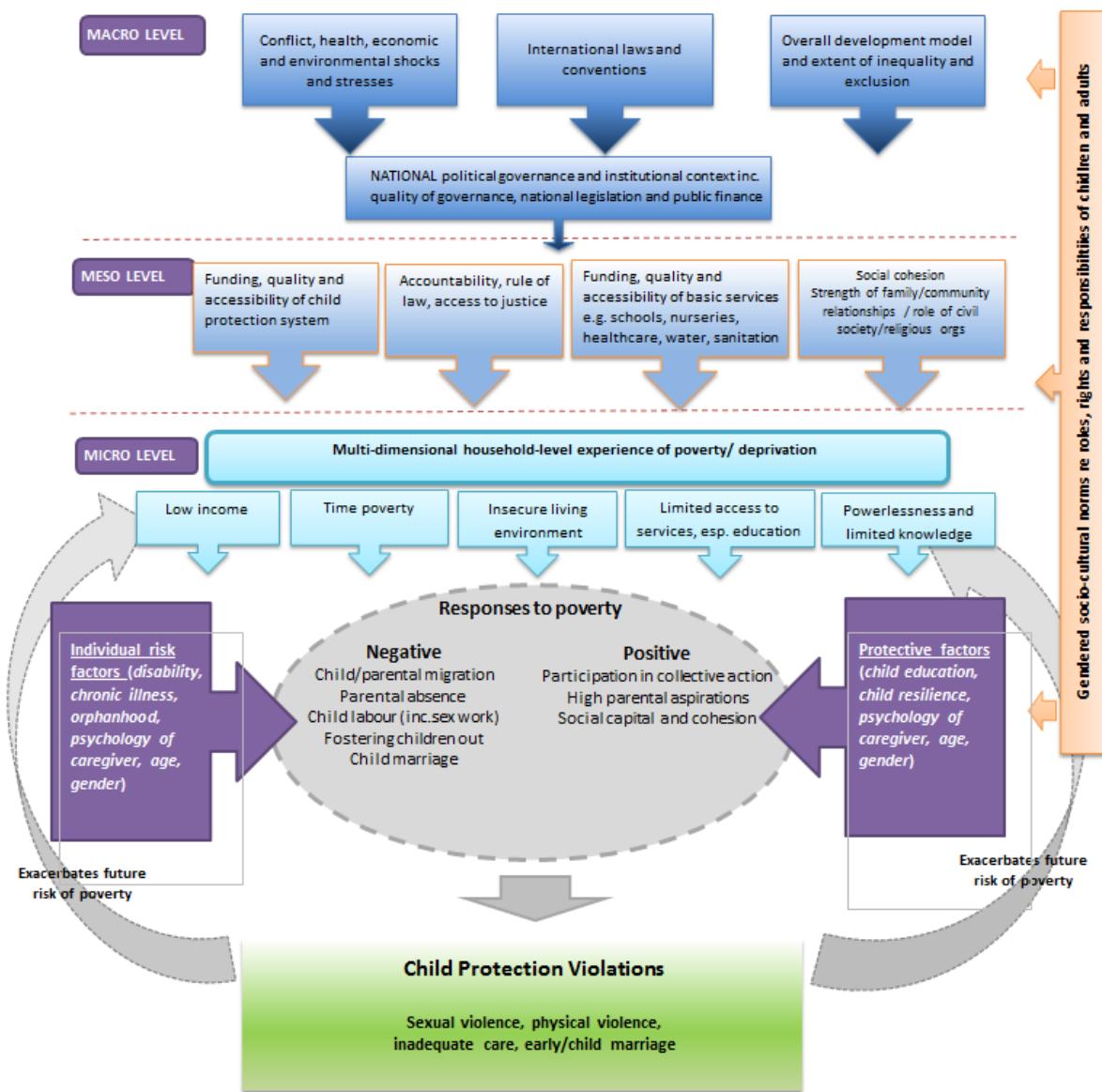
Beyond constrained livelihoods, broader aspects of poverty can also affect children's risk of protection violations. Here we highlight two: powerlessness and – often – limited access to education. Children's structural powerlessness as compared with adults increases their risk of protection violations. Although there is much evidence of children and adolescents resisting proposed marriages and sexual advances (e.g. Russon, 2000; van Blerk, 2008), economic, emotional and social dependence on adults often constrains their capacity to do so (Naker, 2005). Poor children are often doubly powerless – constrained by economic dependence on employers,

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<sup>5</sup> The pathways through which conflict affects children's risk of protection violations are numerous and include forced or voluntary recruitment into armed forces (Brett, 2003), deliberate physical and sexual attacks on children by armed forces (including 'peacekeepers') (UNESCO, 2011) and pathways related to increased poverty mentioned above.

landlords or patrons for their own and families' survival – and thus may be under pressure to say nothing about abuse (Bower, 2003).

**Figure 1: Summary conceptual framework Main findings: relationship between economic deprivation and child protection violations**



The findings in this section are presented according to each type of child protection violation, since the role of economic deprivation varies considerably between these.

### Early marriage

Both the qualitative and the quantitative literatures indicate that child marriage is strongly associated with poverty, particularly where poverty is understood multi-dimensionally to include absence of affordable or accessible education and effective social protection systems and an insecure environment, not just economic deprivation. In such contexts, child marriage – which affects around 10 times as many girls as boys – can seem an effective way of protecting girls from sexual violence in the community, and from shame to their natal families' honour, and of securing their futures. Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data from 78 low- and middle-income countries for 2000-2011 indicate that 16% of 20-24-year-old women in the richest quintile were married by age 18 compared with 54% in the poorest quintile

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(UNFPA, 2012). There is evidence from Nepal, Southern Africa and Bangladesh of girls being married off to reduce household expenses, to bring brideprice or a son-in-law's labour into the household and to reduce the dowry payable (which generally increases with age and education) (Amin and Huq, 2008; Evans and Mayer, 2012; Otoo-Oyortey and Pobi, 2002). However, where cultural norms strongly favour adolescent or child marriage, a significant proportion of girls even in the highest quintile marry before age 18. For example, recent MICS and DHS data show that, in Niger and Bangladesh, respectively, 48% and 46% of 20-24-year-old women in the richest quintile were married by age 18, as were 81% and 83%, respectively, in the poorest quintile (UNFPA, 2012). Girls – particularly those facing severe poverty or violence – sometimes view marriage as a way of improving their situation. Since marriage is a key rite of passage, older adolescents can be keen to make the transition to adulthood signified by marriage (Beegle and Krutikova, 2007; Boyden et al., 2012; Evans and Mayer, 2012).

### **Sexual exploitation and abuse of children**

A perception that emerged frequently in our interviews and in the electronic survey is that, while sexual exploitation of children is strongly linked to poverty, sexual abuse is not and occurs across all socioeconomic groups. Our evidence broadly supports this view.

*Sexual exploitation.* There is a significant literature indicating that poverty can drive adolescents, particularly girls, into commercial sex work, or, more commonly, into transactional sexual relationships (Betancourt et al., 2012; Luke and Kurz, 2002; MSI, 2008). One of the few studies disaggregated by socioeconomic group – from Maputo, Mozambique – found that poor adolescent girls were 10 times more likely than their middle-class counterparts to engage in transactional sex (Machel, 2001, in Luke and Kurz, 2002).

*Sexual abuse.* The relative lack of linkages between poverty and sexual abuse is borne out by quantitative and mixed methods studies in low- and middle-income countries that find no significant differences among socioeconomic groups (e.g. Cabral and Speek-Warnery, 2004; Deb and Modak, 2010; UNICEF, 2011). Studies of school-based sexual abuse and exploitation do not find any systematic relationship between students' economic background and the risk of abuse (Clacherty et al., 2004; 2005a; 2005b; Leach et al., 2003; Plan International, 2006). Instead, teachers' exploitation of the power inequalities between themselves and students, institutionalised corruption, whereby teachers offer better grades to students in exchange for sexual favours and professional subcultures that view sexual exploitation of students as acceptable appear to be more significant (e.g. Leach et al., 2003; Plan International, 2006).

However, poorer children are typically exposed to a wider range of situations in which abuse (both sexual and physical) can take place. For example, children working outside the home – the vast majority of whom are from poor backgrounds – may face sexual or physical abuse in the workplace, particularly in occupations such as domestic work (HRW, 2006), which takes place behind closed doors or where children sleep at their employers' premises (Frederick, 2010). Poor urban children are much more likely to be at risk of sexual or physical assault while visiting communal toilets, fetching water or running errands than their better-off counterparts, who do not need to leave their household for basic amenities (Lennon, 2011). Most analysis suggests that poverty is an important factor leading children to leave home and live among peers 'on the street', where the risks of physical and sexual violence are significantly elevated (e.g. Lalor, 1999).

While girls face a greater risk of sexual abuse, the risk for boys is also significant, although it attracts much less academic, policy or practical attention. In the studies examined, between 10% and 25% of boys and up to a third of girls reported experiencing sexual violence (Marcus, 2013). Most of these studies were undertaken in Sub-Saharan Africa, many in the context of research or programmes on reducing vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.)

### **Physical violence against children**

We considered several different forms of physical violence against children: corporal punishment at home and school, violence in the community (e.g. gang violence) and recruitment of children into armed conflict.

*Corporal punishment.* Most evidence indicates that cultural acceptance of corporal punishment is the key factor underlying this form of violence against children (e.g. Cabral and Speek-Warnery, 2004; Clacherty et al., 2005a; 2005b; UNICEF, 2010). While data from studies in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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(OECD) countries and some aggregate evidence from low- and middle-income countries suggest that poor children are at greater risk of severe corporal punishment from their parents/carers than those from higher socioeconomic groups (WHO and ISPCAN, 2006), other multi-country studies find a limited relationship. A UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) analysis of MICS data from 30 countries (UNICEF, 2010) found a relationship between poverty and frequency or severity of corporal punishment in less than half the countries studied. Ten of the thirteen countries were middle-income, six from Central and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus and three from Latin America, and in most cases the differences were relatively small (around five percentage points) but statistically significant. Overall prevalence of corporal punishment was relatively high in these countries (over 60%), which undermines the argument that socioeconomic differences in the use of corporal punishment sharpen as countries get wealthier. Some qualitative studies suggest poor children are at greater risk of corporal punishment in school than their peers, but the majority (mostly conducted in Africa) conclude that, because corporal punishment is so widespread (with over 75% of children reporting having experienced it in most studies), there is little socioeconomic differentiation, although girls are generally treated less severely than boys (e.g. Clacherty et al., 2004; 2005a; 2005b).

*Violence in the community.* Poor children are much more likely than better-off children to face violence in the community. Violence is often highly concentrated in poor urban areas; children risk being caught in crossfire and witnessing serious violence. A study in low-income townships in South Africa found that 48% of 8-13 year olds had witnessed a murder (Shields et al., 2008). In such contexts, children's mobility and opportunities to play and socialise are frequently constrained by violence in the community (Pinheiro, 2006). Poor adolescent boys and young men are the greatest risk of both perpetrating and being victims of violent crime: they have the highest homicide rate of all population groups worldwide, and inequalities in experiences of crime between rich and poor are striking (SAS, 2006). For instance, in Cape Town, South Africa, male homicide rates in the townships exceed 200 per 100,000; in wealthier areas, they are four times lower, at around 50 per 100,000 (Pinheiro, 2006) (although this is still high in comparative global perspective). As noted above, poor children are frequently exposed to a wider range of contexts in which violence may occur, both in the community and in settings such as work places rarely frequented by better-off children.

### **Inadequate care of children**

In this study, we conceptualised inadequate care as the absence of care that promotes children's healthy physical, emotional and cognitive development that ensures their safety and protection from harm. The literature on this area was the most disparate, and we focused on children left without competent care while adults in their household were working, and the ways in which poverty affects the likelihood and experience of children being cared for outside their natal families.

There is clear evidence that poverty increases the risk of young children being left unsupervised or not in the charge of a competent carer as parents cannot afford preschools or to pay a competent babysitter, even where these are available (Heymann, 2006). Heymann's study in Botswana, Mexico and Vietnam found that between 30% and 48% of children had been left without competent care, with the percentages higher among poor families, those with limited education and single parents. Lack of competent care increases children's risk of accidental injury, and is associated with worse educational and behavioural outcomes (Giashuddin et al., 2009; Heymann, 2006; Ruiz-Casares, 2010), and an increased risk of sexual abuse (Ballet et al., 2012; Heymann, 2006). While views on the age at which children can be responsible for themselves and other children vary widely between cultures, the evidence reviewed suggests children below adolescence without competent adult care face a number of significant and mostly unrecognised risks to their wellbeing (Ballet et al., 2012; Heymann, 2006).

Much literature has examined whether orphans are at greater risk of deprivation compared with non-orphans (e.g. Campbell et al., 2010; Monasch and Ties Boerma, 2004). While there is considerable variation in findings, most studies conclude that orphans' risk of inadequate care and of poorer education and health outcomes is higher than for non-orphans, and that orphans are at greater risk of physical and sexual abuse (reviewed in Marcus, 2013). Evidence on how far different groups of orphans are at greatest risk of negative wellbeing outcomes is also inconclusive. For example, Baaroy and Webb (2008) find that girls whose mothers have died are at greatest risk of dropping out of school or mistreatment (discrimination or violence), whereas Beegle and Krutikova (2007) find paternal death increases poor girls' likelihood of early marriage.

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The evidence reviewed also indicated that orphans living with grandparents or in households with sick adults may be particularly at risk of inadequate care, reflecting higher poverty levels and physical constraints on care capacity (e.g. Cluver et al., 2011; Kuo and Operario, 2010; Roelen and Delap, 2011). Differences are, however, often small, suggesting development strategies should focus on all disadvantaged children in a locality rather than targeting only orphans. A small subset of children (at least 4% in Sub-Saharan Africa (Evans, 2011)) are the main carers of sick or elderly relatives, and thus are net providers rather than recipients of care.

Poverty increases children's risk of entry into institutional care, although other factors – particularly disability and parental migration – also play a significant role. Bilson and Cox's (2007) study found that, in Sri Lanka, approximately half the children in institutional care were there because of poverty. Similarly, in Bulgaria, they found that the main reason parents gave for sending their children to residential institutions was lack of food, heating and supplies. Harper et al. (2012) note that the numbers of children in residential care in Thailand rose following the economic crisis of the late 1990s. There is evidence from Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and from Lebanon, that social workers are more likely to consider poor families to be unable to care effectively for their children and take children into care (Jawad, 2009; UNICEF, 2009a).

### **Additional risk and protective factors**

As the discussion above has demonstrated, poverty often increases the risk that children's protection rights may be violated. Children's individual risk is also affected by age and gender: typically, very young children and adolescents are at most risk of death through physical violence, although non-fatal violence affects all age groups. Sexual violence typically affects girls most (e.g. UNICEF, 2011; 2012), although boys' vulnerability is also significant, and younger children of both genders are also at risk. Child marriage primarily affects adolescent girls; children of both genders are equally vulnerable to inadequate care. Children with disabilities are at significantly elevated risk of both physical and sexual abuse, reflecting their (often) additional powerlessness, ingrained negative attitudes towards disabilities and the stresses of caring for children with severe disabilities with little support (ACPF, 2010; Jones et al., 2012). An Africa Child Policy Forum (ACPF) study in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia (ACPF, 2010) found that children with physical, visual and intellectual disabilities were at particular risk of physical abuse, and those with hearing, physical and intellectual disabilities more likely to suffer sexual abuse. Orphans are also at elevated risk of all forms of child protection violation studied (see below), although the differentials with non-orphans are not as great. Within a given socio-cultural and economic context, adults who have experienced physical violence are more likely to treat children violently (UNICEF, 2006; WHO and ISPCAN, 2006).

### **Among broader social and policy factors, two key protective factors stand out**

*Education.* There is strong evidence that education of both of children and parents is associated with reduced levels of child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation, physical violence and inadequate care, and reduced risk of intimate partner violence in adulthood.<sup>6</sup> (However, there are high levels of violence in many schools and, for individual children, school may be an additional site of violence and abuse rather than offering protection (Jones et al., 2008; Plan International, 2006).

*Capacity and accountability of local protection structures.* Most studies find that local structures charged with the protection of children are ineffective and unaccountable (e.g. CARE International, 2006; Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, 2011). At local level, this often reflects difficulties associated with confronting other community members and – at all levels – capacity constraints related to severe under-financing. Local 'protective' structures are sometimes complicit in the violation of children's protection rights, particularly where there is a disconnect between legal protection and local social norms. For example, research in Sierra Leone showed how, in cases of rape, arranging a marriage between the perpetrator and the victim was often seen to satisfy family honour. Where it was against the girl's wishes, respect for community elders and for traditional dispute resolution mechanisms often meant objections were over-ridden (Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, 2011). Witter et al. (2004) cite similar examples from Uganda. Where individuals in leadership

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of literature addressing this issue include (child marriage) Brown (2012), UNFPA (2012); (sexual violence) Cabral and Speck-Warnery (2004) and Simkhada (2008); (physical violence) UNICEF (2010) and (2011); (inadequate care) Heymann (2006); (intimate partner violence) WHO (2005). With respect to protection from intimate partner violence, in many of the participating countries it was post-secondary education that had the greatest effect.

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positions set strong examples, or where communities mobilise against abuse of children, there can be positive effects on social norms and practices, as Leach et al. (2003) and Plan International (2006) show with respect to school-based physical and sexual abuse in West Africa.

Additionally, *strong social cohesion*<sup>7</sup> encompassing both family and wider community relationships, emerges as a particularly important factor in protecting adolescents from engagement in violence, as it can prevent young people turning to gangs for emotional and social support (MacLure and Sotelo, 2004; SAS, 2006; UNICEF, 2006; World Bank, 2011c). Studies on the other focal areas did not discuss social cohesion as a protective factor.

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<sup>7</sup> This is understood as encompassing strong social support structures (whether within families, informal relationships or formal structures such as religious organisations) and social norms that build a sense of mutual obligations and responsibility for social wellbeing.

# 2 Child protection interventions and linkages to anti-poverty programmes

Having established that poverty often plays an important role in exacerbating children's risk of protection violations, although it is not necessarily a primary driver, our adapted systematic review focused on analysing the contribution of anti-poverty activities to increasing the effectiveness of child protection activities. We therefore examined a broad set of programmes with evidence of impacts on early marriage, physical or sexual violence or inadequate care, both with and without anti-poverty components. These included awareness-raising programmes for adults and youth, life skills programmes, child protection system strengthening activities and accident prevention programmes.

While we recognise that the experience and drivers of poverty are multidimensional, our review focused specifically on the contribution of economic strengthening to better child protection outcomes in programmes addressing one or more of early marriage, physical or sexual violence and inadequate care, as their role in child protection outside emergency settings has been little addressed.<sup>8</sup> We did not systematically assess the extent to which anti-poverty policies or programmes attempted to address child protection issues<sup>9</sup> as this would have been a very large undertaking, but where we found evidence of the impact of anti-poverty programmes on child protection outcomes this is included in our analysis. We also did not systematically assess whether different types of anti-poverty programmes increased or decreased children's risk of protection violations. We contextualise the review findings with insights from the wider literature on both anti-poverty and child protection policies and programmes.

## **Box 4: Who are programmes reaching?**

Relatively few of the evaluations examined disaggregated impacts by socioeconomic group (rather more did so by gender). In part, this reflects an assumption among the smaller, localised programmes that they were targeting poor adolescents or households, although some of those that did disaggregate by socioeconomic group found that poorer adolescents were less likely to participate (e.g. Shahnaz and Karim, 2008).

In evaluations of programmes that were not specifically aimed at poorer sections of the community, such as child protection system strengthening programmes or school-based lifeskills programmes, it reflects an absence of data monitoring of which socioeconomic groups are accessing the services supported by these project, although several studies included qualitative observations of how income poverty undermined access to services (e.g. CARE International, 2006; Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, 2011).

This means conclusions concerning the differential impacts of the interventions examined are necessarily tentative.

<sup>8</sup> The Child Protection in Crisis Network (2011) and Thompson (2012) discuss the potential of economic strengthening activities to promote child protection in emergencies.

<sup>9</sup> See Barrientos et al. (2013), which examines evidence of anti-poverty programmes' impact on child protection outcomes.

## Scale and level of projects

Our review principally generated evidence on small-scale child protection projects,<sup>10</sup> although some large-scale programmes, such as Pakistan's Female Secondary School Stipend, Mexico's Oportunidades and Estancias programmes, Jordan's Better Parenting Programme and two large non-governmental organisation (NGO) programmes – Promoting Change In Reproductive Behaviour (PRACHAR) in India and BRAC in Bangladesh – were included. The majority of projects and programmes worked at micro level, reducing individual children's risk of protection violations through awareness-raising programmes for adults, life skills and non-formal education programmes for adolescents, economic strengthening programmes (these were the three most common types of programme), helping young people develop stronger social support networks and expanding access to formal education, day care or reproductive health services. The main exception was child protection system strengthening activities, which constituted 21% of programmes examined, and which worked from local to national level building institutional capacity to respond to alleged child protection violations (see Table 1). NGOs implement 59% of the projects and programmes examined, with particularly high representation among early marriage and physical violence programmes.

## Programme activities

Table 1 shows that 43% of programmes involved an economic strengthening component. As might be expected, given the child protection-related objectives of the programmes,<sup>11</sup> attempting to reduce risk of violations or support affected children purely through economic strengthening activities was less common, although economic strengthening programmes comprised a fifth of 'stand-alone programmes' – these were entirely cash or in-kind transfer programmes. More commonly, economic strengthening activities were combined with life skills, awareness raising and mentoring/social support activities.

**Table 1: Proportion of interventions with different programme components**

Mechanism	No. and % of interventions with each component								Total interventions with each component across sample	
	EM (N=19)		SV (N=26)		PV (N=16)		BC (N=20)		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Economic strengthening	13 8	6 8	9 5	3 5	5 1	3 1	7 5	3 5	34	43
Education/awareness raising/life skills (children)	10 6	5 6	13 0	5 0	6 8	3 8	1 5	5 5	30	38
Education/awareness raising (adults)	9 0	5 0	8 1	3 1	12 5	7 5	9 5	4 5	38	48
Improving access to or quality of services (education, day care or reproductive health)	5 8	2 8	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 3	1 5	8 5	10	
Child protection system strengthening	2 1	1 1	10 8	3 8	4 5	2 5	1 5	5 5	17	21
Mentoring/social support	7 5	3 5	8 2	2 2	3 9	1 9	4 0	2 0	22	28

Key: EM – early marriage, SV – sexual violence, PV – physical violence, BC – better care.

10 Many of these were very descriptive, focused more on process than outcomes and gave limited insight into the effectiveness of particular approaches in reducing child protection violations.

11 Some of the programmes were not framed as child protection programmes, but all those considered reported on outcomes relevant to this study. The sample included programmes aiming to increase educational attendance that monitored impacts on early marriage and child bearing, and economic strengthening, education and life skills programmes aimed at reducing HIV and AIDS rates through changing youth behaviour that reported on changed attitudes or behaviour with respect to sexual violence.

Note: The total number of components is greater than the total number of interventions for each theme as many programmes had multiple components.

### **Impacts of economic strengthening programmes**

As Table 1 indicates, programmes addressing economic factors were most common in interventions addressing child marriage, with just over two-thirds of programmes addressing early marriage involving economic strengthening activities. This may reflect general acceptance that economic deprivation is a significant underlying factor. Within the other themes, economic strengthening components were concentrated in programmes addressing sexual exploitation, physical violence at community level and care of orphans. Around a third of programmes addressing sexual violence and physical violence and promoting better care involved economic strengthening components.

The most common approaches to economic strengthening were vocational skills/entrepreneurship training and microfinance, targeted primarily at adolescents and young people, with two examples of programmes that aimed to build parents' livelihoods and cash transfers to households with children. Table 2 shows the distribution of different types of economic strengthening programmes.

**Table 2: Overview of economic strengthening mechanisms in interventions examined**

Type of Intervention	Occurrence in Interventions examined				Total	As % of economic strengthening activities	Thematic areas concentrated in
	EM	SV	PV	BC			
Cash transfers	3	1	0	2	6	13	EM, BC
In-kind transfers	2	1	0	3	9	20	BC, EM
Vocational skills training	4	4	5	1	14	31	EM, SV, PV
Entrepreneurship training/support	0	3	0	0	3	7	SV
Microfinance	5	3	1	1	10	22	EM, SV
Job search information/job matching	2		1		3	7	EM, PV

Key: EM – early marriage, SV – sexual violence, PV – physical violence, BC – better care.

### **Vocational and entrepreneurship training**

The review examined seven interventions involving skills training and entrepreneurship building that aimed to reduce girls' and young women's need to engage in commercial sex work or their risk of trafficking, four that aimed to reduce their risk of early marriage and five that sought to reduce children's vulnerability to physical violence (e.g. gang membership) or to help former gang members and child soldiers reintegrate into society. The most effective of the 17 programmes studied were linked to local labour market opportunities and involved training from experienced entrepreneurs or craftspeople, with some particularly positive examples of programmes that had helped girls and young women develop alternatives to transactional sex and early marriage in Uganda (Bandiera et al., 2012; Singhal and Dura, 2008) and India (CEDPA, 2001). Programmes providing training in highly sought after information, communication and technology (ICT) skills in Brazil, Guatemala and Jamaica had helped boys and young men at risk of involvement in violence find stable, well-paid employment and feel socially valued (Bailey and Ngwenyama, 2010; Frix et al., 2009). In all these cases, vocational skills training was accompanied by broader life skills curricula, and/or was part of projects aimed at building adolescents' social networks. The less successful projects generally failed to link training programmes to market demand for skills.

With two exceptions (an anti-trafficking programme in West Africa (Kolokosso et al., 2007) and an orphan support programme in Uganda (Roby and Shaw, 2008), the skills training programmes reviewed focused on adolescents and youth. There are sound reasons for targeting adolescents directly: to build skills they can use immediately or in the future, and because skills-building programmes are often combined with activities aimed at building young people's self-confidence, strengthening their social networks and increasing their bargaining

power in the family. However, failing to help parents and carers develop stronger livelihoods is a missed opportunity in reducing the risk of violations of children's protection rights.

**Microfinance.** The review examined 10 programmes providing microfinance services. Some of these offered loans only, others savings only; some had savings and loan facilities. Loans were generally integrated with vocational skills and entrepreneurship training, but several evaluations found young people averse to taking loans, out of fear they could not repay them or because running a small business could jeopardise their studies (e.g. Erulkar et al., 2006; Fafo, 2006; Shahnaz and Karim, 2008). There were some success stories of girls financing their education and thus delaying marriage or finding alternatives to dependence on sexually exploitative relationships through taking micro loans and developing small businesses (Erulkar et al., 2006; Shahnaz and Karim, 2008). Younger adolescents tended to prefer savings programmes and used them to finance education or reduce the need to engage in transactional sex (Erulkar et al., 2006; Ssemawala et al., 2012).

**Cash transfers.** Six cash transfer programmes were examined. This relatively small number reflects the fact that few cash transfer programmes monitor impacts on child protection violations (other than child labour in some cases), and few other datasets include information on both cash transfer programme participation and the outcomes of interest. Nor have qualitative studies generally explored these issues systematically, although two of the included studies (Pereznieta and Campos, 2010; Valente, 2010) touch on the impacts of cash transfers on child care.

We only found evidence of cash transfers affecting early marriage and quality of care, with much stronger evidence on early marriage rates. There is clear evidence that both conditional and unconditional cash transfer programmes can contribute to delaying girls' age at marriage (see Box 5).<sup>12</sup> In three programmes, the key mechanism for both conditional and unconditional transfers appears to be keeping adolescent girls in school, and thus out of the marriage market. However, among older adolescents in Malawi unconditional cash transfers had a stronger protective effect, probably because they relieved economic pressures towards early marriage (Baird et al., 2010b).

#### **Box 5: Cash transfers or subsidies and delayed marriage**

The **Female School Stipend Programme in Punjab, Pakistan**, started in 2003 and by 2007 was providing quarterly stipends to 245,000 girls in the 15 most educationally disadvantaged districts. Stipends raised girls' enrolment and retention in middle school by 11% and 32%, and increased older recipients' likelihood of entering and completing high school. Greater school completion leads to girls in stipend recipient districts marrying 1.2-1.5 years later than those in non-recipient districts. The effects were greatest for three groups: girls in urban areas and those with parents who had received more education themselves; girls from the poorest households; and girls who had been exposed to the programme for longest (World Bank, 2011b).

The **Zomba Cash Transfer Programme in Malawi** provided incentives (school fees and cash transfers) to current schoolgirls and recent dropouts to stay in or return to school. These were conditional on satisfactory attendance. Among recipient girls who were out of school at baseline, probability of getting married and becoming pregnant declined by more than 40% and 30%, respectively (Baird et al., 2010a). A second arm of the programme provided unconditional transfers. These had most impact on older girls, and those most likely to drop out of school, and led to an 8.6 percentage point reduction in marriage among under 19s, compared with a 2.8 percentage point reduction among conditional transfer recipients (Baird et al., 2010b).

In **Oportunidades, Mexico**, Behrman et al. (2005) found that young people in cash transfer-recipient families were likely to marry later than non-recipients, with the strongest effect for boys. Gulemetova-Swan (2009) also found delays in girls' age of marriage among recipients.

Duflo et al.'s (2006) analysis of **a uniform subsidy and HIV and AIDS education programme in three schools in Kenya** found that girls in schools where free uniforms were provided were 14% less likely to be married than same-age girls in schools not providing free uniforms.

<sup>12</sup> Valente's (2010) evaluation of Peru's Juntos programme reported changes in child care arrangements with men taking on more care of young children. These appear to reflect programme conditionalities, which required women to participate in health education meetings, rather than the impact of the cash transfer.

**Berhane Hewan, a multifaceted adolescent girls' development programme in Ethiopia**, provided livestock to girls who had completed 18-24 months of attending girls' clubs (non-formal education) with 80% attendance or higher (Mekbib and Molla, 2010). It also provided school supplies worth \$4 to assist girls to continue in formal education and recent dropouts to return. Evaluations found that 10-14 year olds in the programme area were three times more likely to be in school, and a tenth as likely to be married as their counterparts in the control area (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2009), although marriage rates after age 15 were higher than in control areas, suggesting the programme had delayed planned marriages for a few years.

### **Child care programmes and poverty reduction synergies**

Three programmes providing day care for preschool age children (in Guatemala, Mexico and Bangladesh) were included in this review. Although they were included as examples of programmes improving the quality of care young children received, the two Latin American programmes clearly also helped increase household incomes, and enabled parents (particularly single mothers) to take more stable and better paid employment (Pereznieta and Campos, 2010; Ruel et al., 1998). These programmes represent a different type of synergy between poverty reduction and child protection programmes to the others discussed. Given the high rates of young children being left without competent care discussed above (Heymann, 2006), expanding such programmes has the potential to reduce both risks to young children and income poverty, so long as the quality of care is sufficient to ensure children are adequately protected. Achieving this requires sufficient resourcing for staff training and safe child to adult ratios (Naudeau et al., 2010).

### **Added value of economic strengthening activities**

As detailed in the previous section, stand-alone economic strengthening activities, such as cash transfers, have proven effective in reducing child protection violations, particularly early marriage. How far do they add value to broader child protection programmes? In most cases, there is no counterfactual evidence, and few interventions are designed with a control group, meaning the added value of economic strengthening components is hard to assess.

While the review found eight stand-alone economic strengthening projects (mostly cash transfers), we found three times as many examples being implemented alongside other activities, most commonly non-formal education and social support programmes for adolescents and awareness raising for parents and communities. They were much less frequently combined with meso-level activities, such as strengthening child protection systems or increasing the quality or accessibility of public services.

Very few of the evaluations distinguished the effects of different components, making it hard to isolate the effect of economic strengthening from that of other initiatives. Two evaluations suggest economic strengthening activities were not as significant as awareness raising or life skills. Mekbib and Molla's (2010) analysis of Berhane Hewan's adolescent girls' programme in Ethiopia found that activities focusing on cultural change (mentioned by 75% of respondents) were considered much more significant than transfers of livestock (4%) or school materials (6%) in delaying child marriage. Bandiera et al. (2012), analysing a project run by BRAC Uganda that combined life skills training with vocational training found that the life skills component had been more effective in empowering girls to resist unwanted sexual advances than the vocational skills training. However, this is an insufficient sample from which to draw conclusions. Several evaluations of skills training programmes also indicated that it was often the vocational skills elements that brought the young people into youth development programmes and secured their parents' agreement that they could participate, even if the life skills curricula they encountered had a greater impact on their wellbeing (e.g. CEDPA et al., 2001; Mensch et al., 2004). Relatedly, an evaluation of a life skills and microfinance programme in Kenya makes the point that, for the most vulnerable adolescents, intensive mentoring and social support are necessary before they can make use of microfinance (Erulkar et al., 2006).

In summary, it appears that, while cash transfers alone can be effective at reducing early marriage rates, skills training tends to have a greater impact when embedded within education and awareness raising. However, these conclusions are based on a relatively small number of studies so further evidence is needed.

## **Programmes undermined by a failure to address household poverty**

The majority of child protection system strengthening programmes did not involve economic strengthening components; nor did accident prevention programmes. Evaluations of these two groups of programmes observed how lack of attention to poverty was undermining programme success. Although all the accident prevention programmes examined led to increased knowledge of accident prevention, or reduced rates of accidental injury, economic constraints emerged as a major factor explaining why rates of uptake had not been higher (e.g. Mock et al., 2003; Odendaal et al., 2009; Rahman et al., 2008).

CARE International (2006), Columbia Group for Children in Adversity (2011), Kashaija (2011) and Witter et al. (2004) all stress that financial obstacles continue to undermine poor families' access to the formal child protection system – and to justice, since they frequently cannot afford transport to police stations to report child abuse-related crimes (particularly sexual violence or severe physical abuse), fees for medical examinations or court fees. They also highlight the impact of under-resourcing, which leaves police and social workers unable to travel to investigate cases, and creates an environment in which corruption can flourish and thus – in the small proportion of child abuse cases that come to court – perpetrators can escape justice (Kashaija, 2011). This in turn reduces public confidence in the formal child protection system and increases the likelihood that child abuse cases are settled through traditional resolution mechanisms, some of which may also violate children's rights, such as 'resolving' rape by requiring the perpetrator to marry the victim (Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, 2011; Witter et al., 2004).

Although most of the orphan support programmes provided some material support to orphans or their carers, this was generally haphazard and dependent on mentors – who were themselves often poor – giving their mentees small cash or in-kind gifts (Mwaipopo, (2005); Lee et al., (2002). These programmes were generally felt to be unsustainable and to have limited impact on households' capacity to care for vulnerable children. One orphan support programme (Roby and Shaw, 2008) provided skills training for adults, and had significantly stronger impacts on households' capacity to meet children's needs.

Table 3 summarises insights from the literature examined on the extent that reducing economic deprivation contributes to improved child protection outcomes.

**Table 3: Significance of anti-poverty components in reducing child protection violations**

Issue	Extent to which poverty is a significant factor	Examples of improvement through addressing poverty	Significance of anti-poverty component
Child marriage	xx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cash/asset transfer programmes in Pakistan (World Bank, 2011b), Malawi (Baird et al., 2010a; 2011b), Ethiopia (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2009), Kenya (Duflo et al, 2006; 2011)</li> <li>• Skills/business support programmes in India (CEDPA, 2001)</li> </ul>	Changing norms is the most critical factor; transfers alleviate economic pressures and facilitate schooling; skills/business programmes can increase girls' economic contributions to their families and bargaining power if well designed
Commercial sexual exploitation or transactional sex	xxx	Skills/business support projects in Uganda (Singhal and Dura, 2009; Ssewamala et al., 2010)	Embedded in broader life skills programmes that changed attitudes; business support programme effective in giving adolescents economic alternatives
Trafficking for	xxx	No strong examples included in	Potentially significant but life

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sexual exploitation		review	skills/information provision also plays key role
Gang violence	xxx	ICT skills training in Guatemala, Brazil and Jamaica (Bailey and Ngwenyama, 2010; Frix et al., 2009)	Increased employability had important impact; broader social support and mentoring also highly significant
Young children left without competent care	xx	Free/subsidised day care in Mexico, Guatemala and Bangladesh (Pereznieta and Campos, 2010; Rahman et al., 2008b; Ruel et al., 2002)	Associated with improved child development outcomes, fewer accidents and increased poverty reduction
Households unable to care for orphans	xxx	Cash or in-kind transfers (Uganda, Rwanda); skills training (Roby and Shaw, 2008), Lavin et al (2010)	Larger, more predictable transfers had most impact; small or <i>ad hoc</i> transfers had limited impacts; problems of sustainability

Key: xxx – very significant, xx significant, x – not very significant.

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### **3 Conclusion: how important is strengthening linkages between anti-poverty and child protection programmes?**

As this Background Note has indicated, poverty is an important factor underlying child marriage, sexual exploitation of children, community-level violence and children being left without competent care or moving into institutional care. The evaluations reviewed indicate that cash transfers and good-quality skills-training programmes have helped reduce early marriage rates, and that skills training and microfinance have helped adolescent girls avoid exploitation through transactional sex, and young people develop alternatives to involvement in gang-related violence. Economic strengthening activities have been less common in programmes promoting better care of children, but in one case alleviated pressures on households caring for orphans.

Overall, 43% of programmes examined involved economic strengthening components, with 65% of early marriage programmes and around a third of programmes in our other focal areas including such activities. Recognising the multiple causes of child protection violations, and the vital role of social norms, we would not expect all child protection programmes to include economic strengthening activities. Where cultural norms and accepted social practices are the key factor underlying a particular violation, education awareness-raising programmes often have the most important role to play (e.g. Fayyad et al., 2010; UNICEF, 2009b; Wint and Brown, 1988). Where power imbalances (e.g. between adolescent girls and adult men, or between girls and their parents) are most critical, life skills programmes have proven effective in giving adolescents the knowledge and confidence to negotiate over their futures and relationships (CEDPA, 2001; Kabir et al., 2007). This is particularly so if such programmes also involve communication activities with people who influence social norms, such as religious and community leaders, or have the power to make decisions about young people's futures, such as parents and grandparents (Kabir et al., 2007; Pedersen et al., 2008).

Although few evaluations directly explored this issue, it would appear that, by increasing adolescents' room for manoeuvre, and the resources they bring into their households, effective economic strengthening programmes can synergise with education and life skills programme, and lead to greater overall impacts (e.g. Shahnaz and Karim, 2008). They also help attract poorer young people who perceive improving their economic situation as their most pressing need (Mensch et al., 2004).

The evaluations reviewed also indicated that some child protection activities, including those educating parents in accident prevention and child protection system strengthening activities, would be strengthened through greater integration with poverty reduction initiatives. For example, an evaluation of awareness-raising courses aimed at child accident prevention in low-income households in South Africa found that mothers (the targets of programmes) were unable to adopt new safety practices because they could not afford safer cooking facilities (many cooked on floor-level paraffin stoves that children could easily knock over) (Odendaal et al., 2009). Similarly, Mock et al. (2003) found that poorer participants in child accident prevention courses in Mexico had much lower rates of uptake of protective safety devices than those from higher socioeconomic strata. Likewise, further consideration is needed of ways access to justice can be facilitated for poor households wishing to pursue

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legal redress through the child protection system, particularly for those constrained by transport costs and/or court fees.<sup>13</sup>

The economic strengthening components of the anti-trafficking programmes reviewed were also very weak, making it difficult to judge whether more effective livelihood activities might help prevent trafficking and/or the reintegration of trafficked children. However, these evaluations indicated that the continuing draw of better economic opportunities elsewhere meant programmes with weak economic strengthening components were unable to prevent children being re-trafficked (IOM, 1999 Kolokosso et al., 2007, resonating with the large body of evidence that locates the draw of better economic opportunities as a critical reason why young people wish to migrate (and may find themselves trapped in exploitative arrangements) and why some migration brokers (and traffickers) find a ready source of children and young people (Dottridge, 200; Hashim, 2006).

Our e-survey indicated that the main reasons why more child protection programmes do not involve economic strengthening activities were a lack of appropriate good practice models (mentioned by 69% of respondents); lack of information about partners and insufficient funding (both mentioned by 51%); and a perception that poverty is not a key cause of child protection violations (34%). Integrated social protection and welfare systems in Argentina, Brazil and Chile (Barrientos et al., 2013) and Moldova (Everychild, 2011) could provide lessons for good practice that could be adapted to other contexts. More work is needed to develop effective ways of integrating child protection and other economic strengthening activities (such as vocational skills and entrepreneurship training), and to develop approaches that are effective in less institutionally developed contexts.

With the exception of BRAC's programmes in Bangladesh, PRACHAR in India, Juntos in Peru, Estancias in Mexico, the Better Parenting Programme in Jordan and the Female School Stipend Programme in Pakistan's Punjab province, most of the programmes examined were very small in scale. In thinking about the challenges in scaling up effective programmes, a number of important knowledge gaps remain:

- The review found some examples of effective, but complex and thus relatively resource-intensive, programmes with multiple components (e.g. awareness raising, economic strengthening and life skills). Further analysis of the relative contributions of individual components of integrated programmes would help with identifying ways in which programmes can be designed for maximum effectiveness and large-scale implementation.<sup>14</sup>
- Under what conditions can as much or more be achieved through broader poverty interventions compared with child protection-focused initiatives? Answering this is likely to require more focused monitoring of the child protection impacts of broader anti-poverty and development programmes.
- What types of interventions have longer-lasting impacts? For example, are the impacts of awareness-raising/life skills programmes more sustainable over time than those that focus on economic strengthening?
- What political economy factors and institutional conditions have facilitated programmes with positive child protection outcomes going to scale?

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13 CARE International (2006), Columbia Group for Children in Adversity (2011), Kashaifa (2011) and Witter et al. (2004) all raise the issue of financial barriers to accessing justice in cases of child abuse. These barriers comprise transport costs and both formal and informal fees. They also raise issues of corruption and the risk that perpetrators can buy off the police or judges.

14 Some evaluations are starting to assess these issues but the body of evidence remains limited.

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