No Excuse for Violence Against Children

By: Zoleka Mandela, Etienne Krug, and Howard Taylor

Health policy is a crucial component of progress, and there are some encouraging signs on this front. In 2017, for example, India’s National Health Policy identified violence against children as one of the country’s seven major public-health concerns. In addition to these specific examples, a broader effort is under way to promote universal health coverage for children, to coordinate policies between maternal, child, and adolescent health, and to provide child protective services. More governments and public agencies are recognizing the link between violence and mental health, and are taking positive steps to provide purchaseable care and support for victims. But the battle is not won. Violence-prevention and response services are still absent in many areas, whose services are available, children are too often treated without the benefit of evidence-based protocols. From medicine and counseling to safe houses and large support systems, some countries lack appropriately trained professionals to care for child survivors in need.

The global health community has confronted similar challenges before. There has been tremendous progress toward ending childhood deaths from malaria, tuberculosis, and other preventable diseases. These gains are the result of political commitment and action on the part of governments and multi-stakeholder groups. The same is true in the field of violence against children. Making the investments needed to end violence against children will also accelerate progress toward a number of other Sustainable Development Goals. But if we do not make those investments, the hard-earned gains made toward universal health care, high-quality education, and other goals will be lost. In May 2014, Nelson Mandela once observed that, “There can be no nearer path to peace than the one our world has treated its children.” To keep the momentum with the WHO’s 72nd General Assembly this year, we must approximate the health stories and shocking statistics about the ongoing scourge of violence against children. Finding inspiration in the progress made and intact leadership, we can double our commitment to ensure that all children are afforded the safety and opportunity they deserve.

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