

World Vision
Bosna i Hercegovina

Child Neglect

as the Form of Violence against Children
– Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours in BiH



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Impressum

World Vision International has been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1994.

Since then the organisation has come far: from providing humanitarian aid to war-affected communities, reconstruction of destroyed homes, schools and kindergartens, to empowering communities and improving the quality of life of children and their families.

Our vision is a child-friendly society based on communities of trust, where each child has hope, equal opportunities and is empowered to fulfil their full potential.

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Foreword

Violence against children in all its forms is a global problem today, and it represents a violation of children's basic rights – the right to life, survival, and development. The main problem is that different forms of violence against children, in particular child neglect, are not recognised in time, resulting in the absence of needed assistance and support to the child and adequate reaction to the perpetrators of violence.

Wasted time is the biggest threat to ensuring access to these rights for each child. It is therefore very important to quickly recognize the risks that violate the basic rights and interests of the child. Regardless of the type of neglect in question (emotional, physical, medical, educational) and regardless of the risk factors -- which can be different and relate to parents, children or social factors — neglect, especially in the earliest years, has lasting consequences for the child and endangers her/his right to healthy development.

Neglect is the failure to provide adequate care during, and supervision of, a child's upbringing, to the extent that it significantly affects her/his development. Through neglect of a child's basic needs, which the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines as a fundamental right, the child's right to healthy development and growth are being violated, as well as their right to life without violence, abuse and neglect. Moreover, this in no way reflects the child's best interests. All rights stipulated in the Convention represent the 'best interest of the child' and facilitate the child's healthy development and growth.

The very title of this research report states its essence and points to its content – neglect as the form of violence against children. In the introduction, the author defines neglect as a form of violent behaviour toward children, and discusses different types of neglect and its consequences for a child's health and development.

The Report then describes its methodological approach to the quantitative research conducted in 14 municipalities of Bosnia and Herze-

govina, in the period from December 2017 to March 2018, using a sample of 1717 respondents. It also reflects on its qualitative segment, which was obtained through focus groups and activities with young people and youth activists carried out by World Vision BiH. The results presented in tables and graphs, as well as through the narrative account, focus on two facets: the respondents' knowledge and understanding of neglect and their responses to cases of recognised or suspected child neglect.

In the final part, the author gives an analysis of the findings and suggests systemic measures and activities as a good basis for policymakers to improve social care and protect every child from neglect. Apart from decision-makers, the report is aimed at professionals who work with children in different sectors, and it provides an invaluable source of information in assessment and safeguarding the best interests of children in concrete situations.

With her expertise and professional experience, through this research, Prof. Ivana Zecevic contributes to the improvement of the system of child protection and care for every child.

The research has been conducted on the initiative of World Vision in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which under the auspices of its global campaign 'It Takes A World To End Violence Against Children'. Recognised as a long-term socially engaged partner working in the field and especially committed to work with children whose basic needs for different reasons are not being met, World Vision in BiH carried out this research with the aim of raising awareness and improving the responsibility of adults in relation to the risks and consequences of child neglect, highlighting the utmost importance of the best interest of the child in all activities concerning children.

Doc. dr Nada Grahovac

Deputy Ombudsman for Children Republika Srpska



Neglect

- *the term, causes and detection*

Violence against children may be either “abuse” or “neglect”. Abuse may be physical, emotional and/or sexual violence. However, there are no clear lines between these forms as different types and situations of violence tend to overlap and condition one another.

Neglect presents a failure to ensure conditions for a child’s proper development in all areas, which leads to endangering child’s health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.¹

Such failure refers to physical neglect, but it may also be emotional, health or educational neglect. In all its forms, neglect may have grave consequences for a child exposed to all or any one form.

Neglect should be distinguished from an intentional or malicious withholding of needs from a child. This type of behavior constitutes abuse. Neglect is passive, without an intention to invoke harm, yet it causes major consequences to child’s development.

¹ Guidelines for Action in Case of Violence Against Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Global, regional and BiH statistics

The prevalence of neglect as a form of violence against children is statistically collected in Bosnia and Herzegovina in various ways and by different institutions (police, centers for mental health, centers for social work, educational institutions), but there are no official statistics as a basis for the preparation of strategic documents or action plans or to introduce preventive measures. Yet, the consequences of neglect are far from insignificant, which is denoted in global statistics.

Recent American studies (Bilić, Buljan Flander, Hrpka, 2012) provide some **context to this discussion**:

35-60%

of all forms of violence against children is caused by **neglect**

most victims of **neglect** are under the age of

3



40%

of all deaths under the age of 2, are a result of neglect

In the past 10 years, the number of children as victims of abuse has decreased by

20%

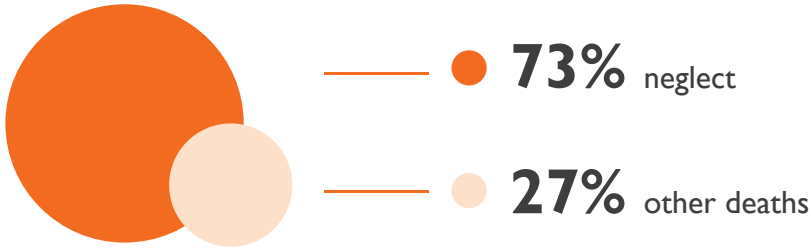
while, in the case of **neglect**, the decrease is only

7%²

² Child neglect. Child and Youth Protection Center of Zagreb.

Global statistical data shows that, in **2015**, out of the **total** number of childhood **deaths** from violence, **73%** of recorded **deaths** were caused by **neglect**.³

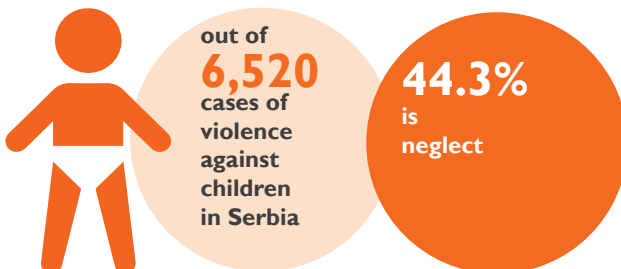
Total childhood deaths from violence in 2015.



Studies on neglect do exist in the neighboring countries of Serbia and Croatia, but the data is light on the prevalence, type, and frequency of neglect.

A study entitled Determinants and Factors of Violence Against Children in Serbia: Review of Findings reviewed determinants and factors of violence against children, as well as interventions used in attempts to prevent and suppress forms of violence in order to build a systematic response to provide support to children exposed to violence.

The study states that out of **6,520** cases of violence against children registered by centers for social work, **44.3%** pertain to neglect. Other forms of violence registered by Centers for Social Work occur significantly less frequently: *physical violence (27.2%)*, *psychological abuse (23%)* and *sexual abuse (1.8%)*.

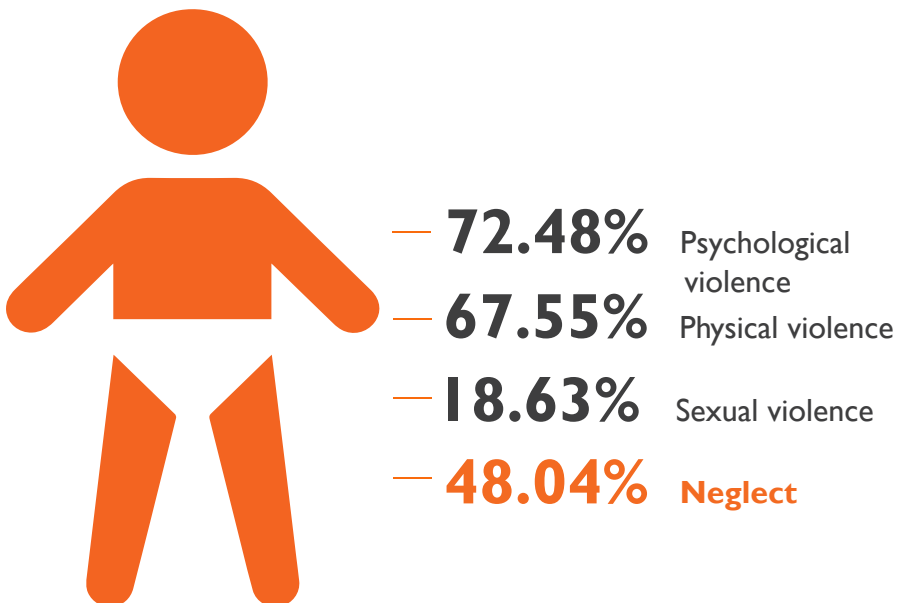


³ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf>

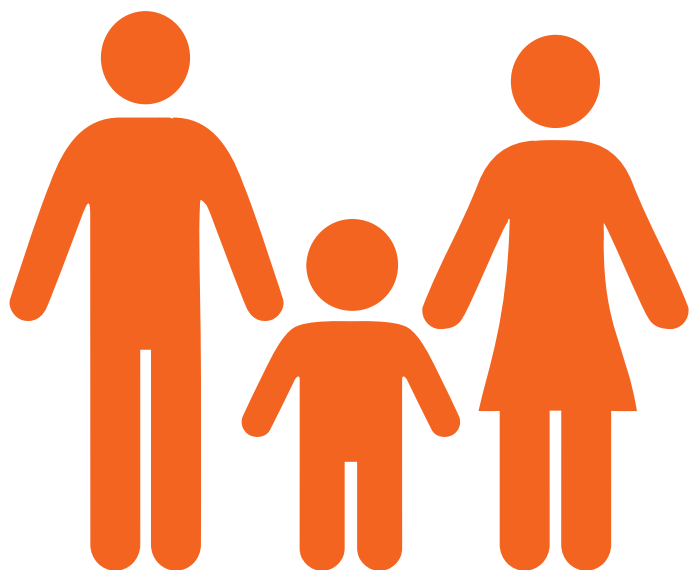
There are very few studies that have been conducted in BiH on violence against children with a focus on child neglect. One study, the Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect (B.E.C.A.N.) was implemented from September 2009 until January 2013 in nine Balkan states.

Data on the prevalence of *violence against children* has shown that most children (**72.48%**) have experienced some form of *psychological violence*, while **67.55%** have experienced *physical violence*. The study showed that **48.04%** of the children surveyed had experienced *neglect*, while **18.63%** had experienced a form of *sexual violence* (inside and outside their families). In spite of the data, **95.9%** of the children surveyed stated that they had experienced a positive upbringing.

Recording keeping, consistent reporting and knowledge of what to report must become the mainstays of government policy in order to reduce violence against children including neglect.



Neglect in families is often related to emotional and/or physical abuse by the father and/or mother (Letić and Ivanović, 2012).










27% reported neglect
in family

A study gathered data on the experiences of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding various forms of violence and trauma in childhood (Letić and Ivanović, 2012). Most respondents in the study noted experiences of emotional and physical abuse, while **27%** of respondents reported neglect in their families, including improper care, improper and untimely reaction to respondent's needs.

According to the Annual Report of the Ministry for Families, Youth and Sport, in **2015, 637** children were subjected to *violence* in the Republic of Srpska. The data shows that the most frequent form of *violence* against children is *emotional* and *psychological violence, physical violence* ranking in second place, followed by *neglect, negligent treatment* and other forms of violence (Table I).⁴

Recorded types of violence in 2015 in Republic of Srpska

	— Emotional violence	378
	— Physical violence	188
	— Neglect and negligent treatment	63
	— Sexual violence and abuse	27
	— Electronic violence	9
	— Social violence	6
	— Abuse of children	2
	— Exploitation of children	0

TOTAL 673

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no data on which to rely on, which is a problem because it means that effectiveness of the prevention programs, implemented by the state, is not monitored.

We may generally conclude that consequences of neglect can turn a child, and later a young person, into either a victim of violence or the one who is violent toward others.

⁴Annual report by Ombudsman for Children in Republika Srpska for 2016 (<http://www.children.rs.ba/uploaded/2016.%20GODISNJ%20IZVJESTAJ%20CIR.pdf>)

To better understand this type of violence, it is important to first eliminate misconceptions about the circumstances of neglect.

First, poverty is not a prerequisite to neglect. Children living in middle class or wealthy families may also experience neglect.

Second, neglect is not a condition that should be dismissed as small or irrelevant with few long-term effects. Neglect happens over a long period of time and children who live in these conditions experience long-term consequences to their development and later suffer from depression, apathy, and they may express aggressive behavior and struggle to find meaning in life and be productive individuals.

Third, the presence of conditions that may be defined as neglect does not lead to state action to separate children from their parents or caregivers. State institutions provide alternative measures to strengthen family and ensure children are not neglected.

Fourth, neglect does not only happen in the family. There is a thin line between neglect of a child by his/her family and social neglect of the family. In each case, consequences may be equally destructive for children and their future adult life.



The list of needs that children must receive for proper development closely related to the child development at all stages :



proper diet



cognitive stimulation



emotional support



the need for family



personal hygiene



security, protection against dangers inside home



health care



protection from conflicts and violence within family



care for child's mental health



protection from general violence

If one or more of these needs are not met over a significant period of time, such conditions can be defined as a neglect.

Consequences of child neglect

A neglected child lives in conditions where he or she does not feel acknowledged in personhood. He or she does not exist in the minds of his or her parents and therefore does not develop the feeling that he or she exists. Children, who do not receive feedback from their parents that suggest they are good, special, or unique, are at a disadvantage developmentally because children use the information of their uniqueness or specialness to develop their self-respect, self-awareness, feeling they are worthy of respect and life itself. As a result, children caught in cycles of neglect often withdraw or take special efforts to be noticed and do not build the necessary cognitive and socio-emotional resiliency necessary for development (*Bilić, Buljan Flander, Hrpka, 2012*).

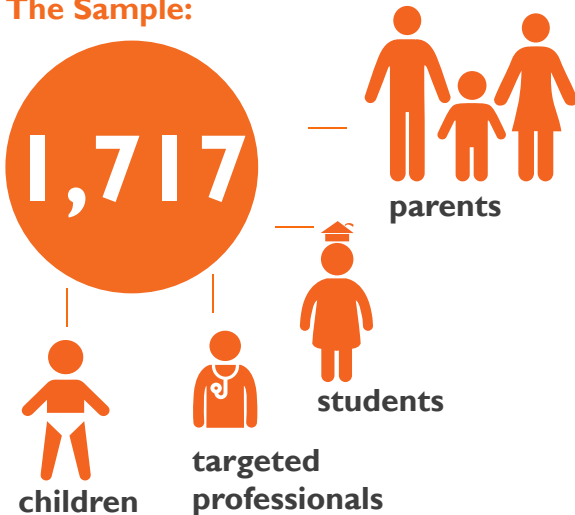
1. Consequences of childhood neglect on **cognitive development** include: lack of problem-solving skills, they give up easily, short attention spans, implement rules rigidly, under-developed speech, under-developed intellectual skills, limited academic results.
2. A consequence of childhood neglect related to **social development** includes attachment disorder: avoidant or anxious. Consequences of child neglect on social development are: low self-esteem, inability to feel empathy, social withdraw, limited cooperation skills; some might experience an increased need for companionship and create bonds with other people uncritically; these children are sometimes prone to delinquency.
3. Consequences of neglect related to child's **emotional development** include the inability to interpret the feelings of others, decreased ability to deal with responsibility and stress, and poor frustration or tolerance level.
4. The following problems related to child's **physical development** are linked to children who have experienced neglect are: restrained physical stature, malnourishment, heart and sex organ anomalies, anemia; limited or slow psychomotor development.

Neglect as the form of violence against children - knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in BiH

This study offers one of the first research glimpses at the study of neglect as a form of violent behavior of adults against children in BiH. Neglect itself is a form of violent behavior, which is difficult to notice and it is often the case that these consequences of neglect are noticed only at later stages. Therefore, it is important for all those working with children, along with parents and children to receive information and learn how to notice the different types of neglect.

One potential reason for the lack of data child neglect concerns a lack of robust indicators to measure child neglect. Therefore, this research targeted professionals, graduate students, parents and children to answer questions on the topic of neglect, aiming to understand what it is and to create strategies for detection, prevention and intervention at different levels of government.

The Sample:



The study shows that children and professionals have received the most education to date in this field, however, this level of information still remains insufficient to prevent neglect. Further, it is imperative to introduce a system of education about neglect. Education is considered to be the first step to prevent and detect improper and violent forms of behavior. This step was also confirmed by respondent answers, who noted as well that education or knowledge of neglect was needed. It should be emphasized that even those respondents, who acknowledged their attendance at trainings or events related to neglect, stated that such information sessions had not adequately trained them to understand and respond to neglect. The study also revealed that graduate students, secondary students, and their parents have had opportunities to attend trainings that included discussion on neglect at faculties and schools. There is a sense among school administrators that they have a role to play to prevent neglect.

The scales used to measure respondents' knowledge on neglect were compared and some statistically significant differences were discovered based on which we may conclude that professionals are the most knowledgeable about the subject, while parents follow in second place.

The result is not entirely surprising, although children were expected to show more knowledge than the study suggested since they received opportunities to learn about neglect in school.

The results add to what we have previously established – that all participants in the research need more knowledge about neglect. Since increased tolerance to violence may lead to apathy of violence, we must work to decrease tolerance for this particular type of violence.

The study results show that those who received education about neglect had further knowledge of neglect than those who did not receive training. However, since the sample size of this respondent group is small, such results are unable to be transferred to the general population.

Have you attended a seminar on violence?

NO (66.6%) 


66.6% of the sample never attended a seminar on violence

Have you had a learning opportunity on this type of violence (neglect) at the school your child/children is/are attending?

NO (54.3%) 


54.3% of parents and 56.8 children never had an opportunity to learn about neglect.

Do you believe you have learnt enough and that you are able to recognize this type of violence in your own behavior?

YES (74.47%) 

74.47% parents believe they know enough about neglect and that they could recognize it.

 — **83.75%** of people asked believe they should be educated on neglect in schools.

 — **84.5%** of future professionals in the field of child protection and education believe they should be well informed on neglect.

The study also reviewed possible responses by respondents when confronted with a case of neglect. Professionals and graduate students predominantly stated that they would first engage parents directly, and only then, inform the school as an institution where a child spends most of his/her time. This suggests that there is an awareness that certain behaviors may be perceived as neglect, yet fall short of neglect. This reflects subtlety in the approach to the problem that should be recognized by all stakeholders, including children, young people and their parents.

The study shows that parents prefer to be told about possible evidence that could appear to look like neglect by teachers and professors, which means they like talking about it with school staff they are closest to. Parents also stated that they would also report their suspicions of neglect to educators over other types of childcare specialists. These results could show that parents trust teachers who work with their children. This level of trust should be harnessed to strengthen the child protection system. Parents who said that they would not report neglect (a very small number) said that the primary reason behind such a decision is their fear that their own child could be labeled negatively.

If you noticed a case of neglect, would you report this to the school?
81.8% YES

Which school-based personnel should inform parents about alleged situations of neglect?
78,2% Teacher



— **5.94%** would not report neglect

Reasons why parents would not report neglect of someone else's child



My child could be labeled.

51%

of parents would not report neglect because of the fear of stigma.



This is none of my business.

47%

of parents would not report neglect because they believe it is none of their business.

Types of neglect that would not be reported in percentages



physical	28.55%
medical	30.80%
emotional	34.40%
educational	38.47%

33% of people would not report neglect if they believe that a situation does not compromise neglect, it is non of their business, or if it could become worse if reported.

This is a frequent issue in the wider BiH community and it should be tackled through the development of an ethical approach to the prevention of violence, which assumes mandatory discretion and confidentiality.

The majority of children, as well as all previous respondents, also stated that they would report neglect to their teachers and professors

first. They would go to parents as a second option. For children who believe that they would not report neglect, they stated that their intervention would not change the situation of neglect or rather that it could even inflict more damage to the victim. These pieces of information should be taken into consideration because as part of preventive work, it would be important to introduce a mandatory protocol for all cases to ensure that all children within the system are well taken care of and that others may witness this special and insistent treatment.

The last segment of the study provides information on professional respondents' sense of institutional capacity to prevent neglect. The results are conflicting. One half of respondents believe that their institutions have the capacity to appropriately respond to neglect, while the other half felt unsure of their institution's capacity.

There is thus a need to reflect on the various components of the child protection system and how each institution coordinates and fits into the wider network. Further, respondents expressed indecision because they themselves believed that they were not sufficiently educated to identify neglect and understand how best to respond.



31.2% do not know if their institution is able to work on prevention of neglect.

11% of professionals working in education, medical and child protection sector believe their institution is not able to work on prevention of neglect

10% of professionals working in education, medical and child protection sector believe that there is an efficient system in place for reporting of and response to childhood neglect.

Finally, we asked respondents – professionals, graduate students, and parents – to identify the name of the document describing the work

flow of activities, both inside an institution and coordinating among them, that must be adhered to in cases of violence against a child. It was disappointing to discover that education professionals in schools received the lowest score even though schools were noted to be the first entry points for reporting.

37% of professionals working in education, medical and child protection sector were not able to name the documents prescribing the order of steps in case of violence against a child.

Recommendations

Based on the study's results, the following recommendations provide some next steps for practitioners, governments, institutions and civil society. Children, parents, graduate students and professionals working with children need more education on neglect as a violent form of behavior of adults toward children.

A monitoring mechanism should be introduced to follow every student's development path at all levels of the educational process in order for consequences of neglect and other improper forms of behavior to become more likely to be noticed at early stages.

BiH must become a society that does not tolerate the violent behavior of adults toward children, that is, reacting quickly and with resolve to such violence is critical.

Local communities should establish teams comprised of experts from centers for mental health, centers for social work and police authorities that are trained and coordinated to help school staff prevent neglect.

Apart from establishing expert teams at the local community level, intersectoral cooperation at the entity/cantonal/district level should also be established.

A system should be introduced to keep records on children subjected to neglect.

Involve media, TV, and online channels in a campaign to combat neglect.

Policy Recommendations

- I.** Reporting and referral mechanisms must be strengthened through adequate coordination of authorities. Protocols should be in place that specifically reference neglect, define and state possible interventions in clear language, using timelines.
- II.** A robust study on “what works” to educate various stakeholders on neglect should be funded and produced with the help of government officials and donors. There are many methodologies to bring awareness raising and attitude and behavior change into conversations and capacity building actions. We need to know what is cost-effective and presents impact.
- III.** Positive parenting skills may prevent neglect and empower/equip parents to respond to the needs of their children. Social welfare services need to be scaled to help parents handle issues of physical, educational, and emotional neglect. Parents often need new skills and experts to help them - after school programs that help with homework, nutrition, a safe place to stay, and such are needed in today’s society to keep children safe, protected and cared for.
- IV.** Specialists in social work, education, healthcare, and police authorities are not yet equipped to respond to neglect. Continuing education classes should be mandatory in these professions and require attendance.
- V.** Schools are natural places to build capacity to report and respond to neglect. To strategically use them, teachers need to be trained to recognize neglect and specialists must be available to take these reports forward, not teachers.
- VI.** Confidentiality is an essential component of social work. Parents as respondents in this study did not all agree that confidentiality is present. New conduct rules should be put in place and training provided to instill the needed level of trust and confidentiality that is critical in this field. Any breaches of the public trust regarding the situations of children should be well disciplined and managed.

The full text and data of the research “Child neglect as the Form of Violence to Children - Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors” is available online www.wvi.org/bosnia-and-herzegovina

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