



# Regional Child Protection Situational Analysis — Pacific *Child-Led Research Report*



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# 1. Introduction

The Nossal Institute for Global Health (University of Melbourne) together with Macquarie University and in-country collaborators were commissioned by Save the Children (SC) to undertake a regional situational analysis of child protection systems in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. This report details the Child Led Research (CLR) component of this research that was conducted in Fiji and Solomon Islands. Dr Holly Doel-Mackaway designed and led this component of the research. Iris Low conducted the field research in Fiji and Solomon Islands assisted by Save the Children staff in both countries. We thank the following staff from Save the Children in Solomon Islands and Fiji: Aydah Akao, Fredrick Seni, Collin Leafasia, Solomon Jack, Davidson Dau, Clera Rikimani, Lulu Tasianna, John Mausio, Makereta Tawa, Flora Naqio and ILisapeci Buinimasi.

This report is structured in the following way. Section 1 details the research questions and terminology used. Section 2 details the research methodology, including the model for children's participation, the process of conducting the CLR and the limitations of the research. Sections 3 and 4 present the responses to the research questions and research findings from Fiji and Solomon Islands, respectively. Section 5 discusses Adolescent Facilitators' (AFs) reflections about conducting the CLR. The report concludes with a summary in section 6 and annexures are included in section 7.

## 1.1 Research Questions

The questions for the CLR were based on the three overarching research questions from the broad study. These questions were adapted to enable Adolescent Facilitators (AFs) to lead focus group discussions (FGDs) with children aged 8-16 years old. The questions were then refined further by the AFs during the Adolescent Facilitators Training Workshops in Fiji and Solomon Islands. Research participants were asked the following 10 questions, grouped under each of the overarching research questions:

### **What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)**

1. What makes children feel safe and cared for in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online?
2. What makes children feel unsafe/worried in the home, home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online?
3. Do children worry about other things?

### **What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)**

4. If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online, do you think they would tell someone?
5. If children did tell someone, who could they go for help?
6. How would children be helped by the people they told?
7. Is there anyone children would not go for help?
8. If a child shares an experience of violence, how are adults likely to react?

### **RQ 3. What ideas do key stakeholders suggest for future child protection programming and advocacy work at the national, provincial and community levels?**

9. What do you think children like best about being a child in your village/community?
10. What can be done to better protect and help children feel safer in your community?

All questions were phrased in this way to convey to participants that they were being asked to provide their views about the broad situation of children and young people in their community, not about individual participant's own experiences. The research design seeks to ensure participants are not asked to share any personal experience of violence and were reminded at various points throughout the research, and in the preparatory workshops, that they would not be asked to disclose any personal information. As described in the limitations section below this approach was not fully successful, as on many occasions participants spoke about their personal experiences, although there were no disclosures.

## **1.2 Terminology**

Children and young people aged 8-16 years-old participated as research participants in this study. Adolescents aged 16 and 17 facilitated the focus group discussions (FGDs) with the research participants and are referred to as 'Adolescent Facilitators' (AFs).

Focus group discussions were conducted in two sites in both Fiji and Solomon Islands. For each site the FGDs were conducted in several cohorts: one with children aged 8-11 years old (mixed gender); one with young males aged 12-16 years old; and one with young female aged 12-16 years old.

In this report the words 'child/children/younger participants' are used to describe participants from the 8–11-year-old cohort. The words 'young person/young people/older participants' are used to describe participants in the 12–16-year-old cohort. This aligns with the child rights-based approach to the CLR that sought to employ youth friendly terminology and emphasise young people's agency and evolving capacities by avoiding infantilising adolescents (those 12 years-old and over) by referring to them as 'children, boys or girls' (Doel-Mackaway, 2022). In this report the use of this terminology is a means by which to disaggregate the findings between the views expressed by children (8-11 years-old) and the views expressed by young people (12-16 years-old).

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 What is the Child Led Research design based on?**

Seeking children and young people's views about matters involving them in a way which upholds their rights is a sensitive and complex undertaking. The Child Led Research (CLR) component of this research is based on Doel-Mackaway's model for children's participation that utilises a child rights-based approach (Doel-Mackaway 2022). This model provides a template for the participation of children in research that is child-friendly, culturally appropriate and respects and upholds participants rights. The model consists of five interconnected elements: (i) adopting a child rights-based approach; (ii) addressing ethical considerations and consulting with communities prior to the research taking; (iii) undertaking preparatory activities with children and seeking children's assent; (iv) seeking children's views in safe, child friendly and culturally appropriate ways; and (v) ensuring reciprocity. A diagram of the model is below in Figure 1.



Figure 1: A Model for Children’s Participation (Doel-Mackaway 2022, 182).

The model utilises Lundy’s four pillars of children’s participation, ‘space, voice, audience and influence,’ highlighting that children’s ‘voice is not enough’ as article 12 demands more than children simply having the opportunity to express their views (Lundy 2007). Article 12 requires a safe and inclusive ‘space’ or opportunity (pillar 1) for children to freely ‘voice’ their views in a manner that is appropriate to, or chosen by the child (pillar 2); these views must be listened to by the appropriate ‘audience’ (pillar 3); and these views must ‘influence’ the decisions made (pillar 4) (Lundy 2007).

Doel-Mackaway’s model emphasises the importance of meaningful engagement in communities, with caregivers and with children and young people before data collection is undertaken to ensure all involved understand the nature and scope of the research before assent is sought. The model outlines an ethically robust method to seek free, prior and informed assent (as well as reconfirm assent throughout the research process) and uses culturally appropriate and child friendly methods to engage young people in research such as using play-based materials including drawing and modelling with clay/ play dough. The aim is to make the research process ‘fun’ for participants as far as is possible as a form of ongoing reciprocity and thanks for their participation (Barker and Weller 2003). It is especially important to make the research enjoyable for children and young people when the research is about serious matters such as child protection, as is the case in this research.

The design of the CLR is also based on the following:

- The literature review and Inception Report for the broader project;
- The project’s Terms of Reference; and
- Discussions with Save the Children staff (including staff and consultants in Fiji and Solomon Islands and members of the project’s Reference Group) and the Nossal Institute that occurred from December 2022 to December 2023. We have incorporated the suggestions, preferences and requirements stipulated for the CLR during these discussions into this design and this report.

## 2.2 What is Child Led Research?

Respecting and supporting children and young people to participate in research about matters affecting them ‘is a human rights obligation’ (Jamieson et al. 2021, 1). Article 12 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), along with articles 13-17, provide children’s rights to be heard and for

their views to be considered in decision-making processes. This body of rights are broadly referred to as children's 'participation' rights.

There has been a significant shift in childhood studies from undertaking research *on* children to conducting research *with* children as co-researchers (Lundy, McEvoy, and Byrne 2011; Save the Children East and Southern Africa Region 2022). Research is no longer the exclusive domain of adults, nor of research institutions, as children themselves are 'increasingly taking on different roles within research processes, from advising research studies as consultants, to peer researchers collecting and analysing data, to research collaborators' (Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall 2019, 1). There is growing recognition of the valuable role children and young people can play in research processes as agents and experts in their own lives and as vital contributors to the expansion of knowledge to increase understandings of the world we live in (Save the Children Sweden 2012).

Kellett describes child led research as research that children 'design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management' (Kellett 2010, 195). The two main elements encompassed within this definition are the extensive role children play in child-led research, and the supportive (not determinative) role of adults.

Ideally, children and young people would have been involved in the initial design and framing of this project. That was not able to occur however, and as such a strict child-led approach to research is not being followed. Nevertheless, many other aspects of a child-led research approach have been employed in this research with a focus on supporting child-led research to take place in Fiji and Solomon Islands (two of the five countries where this research is taking place). Adolescent facilitators were trained and supported to lead focus group discussion about the research questions with children and young people. The young facilitators assisted with analysing and validating the data collected which contributed significantly to the production of this report. Adolescent facilitators were also supported to produce two short results videos for Fiji and Solomon Islands (each approximately 5 minutes) that will be used to communicate the research findings and shared on social media.

## 2.3 Child Led Research Plan: Fiji and Solomon Islands

Figure 2 illustrates the nature and scope of the child-led research that was conducted in Fiji and Solomon Islands.

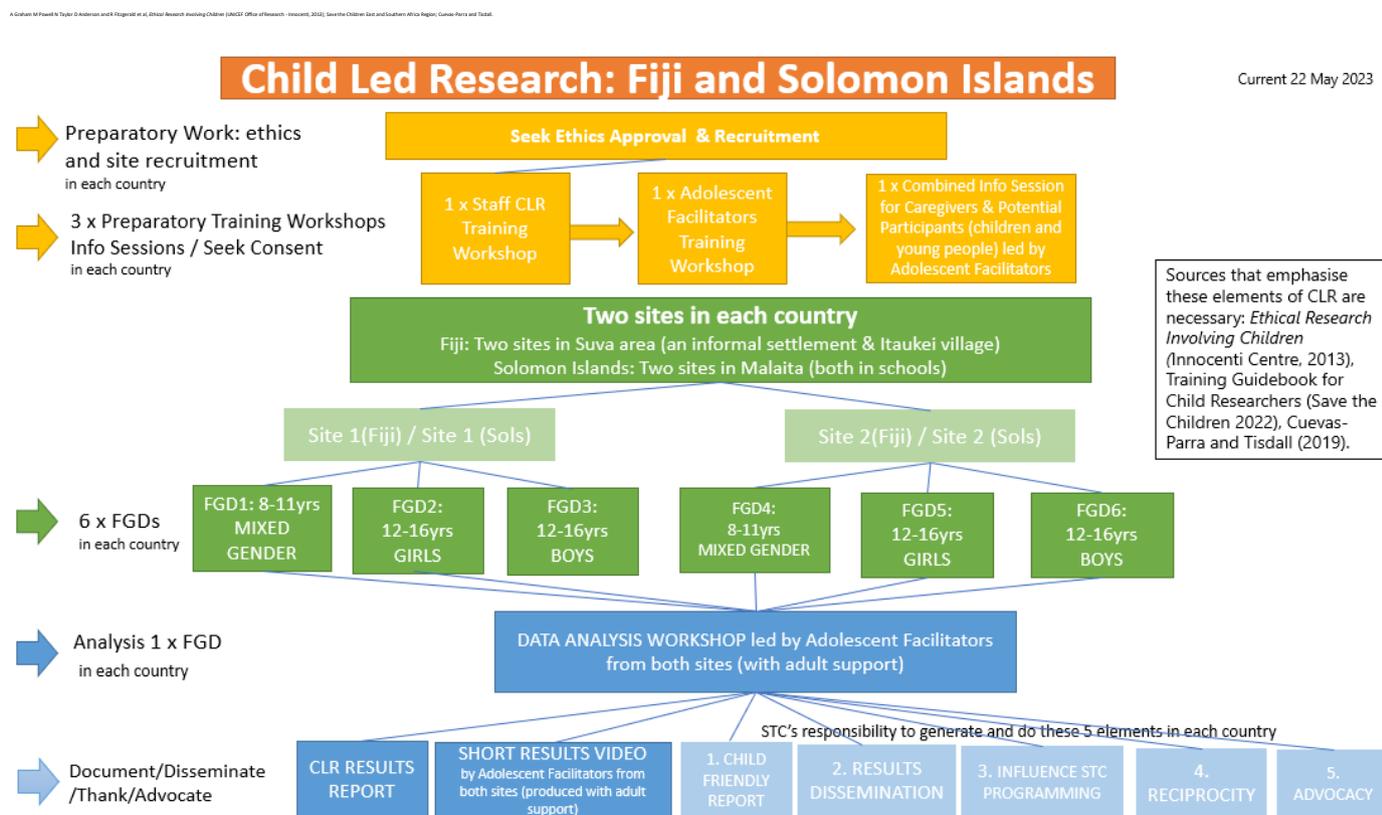


Figure 2: Summary of Approach to Child Led Research in Fiji and Solomon Islands

There were three main elements of the child-led research (each of the three elements are represented in the figure above in yellow, green and blue) as follows:

- 1. Preparatory work, preparatory training workshops and information session:** (2 workshops and 1 information session per country).

Preparatory work: The Nossal Institute obtained ethics approval for the CLR along with the same ethics approval for the larger research project. Save the Children (SC) staff in Fiji and Solomon Islands recruited research participants and adolescent facilitators and engaged with caregivers. Child Protection Technical Advisors supported the recruitment of research participants and adolescent facilitators including screening and character reference checks.

Preparatory training workshops and an information session: Two training workshops and a caregivers/potential participants information session were conducted in each country. Dr Doel-Mackaway conducted the staff/adult researchers training workshop and Iris Lowe conducted the AF workshop. The AFs conducted the information session for caregivers and participants in each country. Details of these activities are below:

- **1 x staff/adult researchers training workshop per country:** The CLR lead, Dr Doel-Mackaway conducted a training workshop with staff/researchers involved in the CLR in each country. The purpose of this workshop was to support staff and adult researchers to understand the CLR design, methodology and plan and to provide an opportunity for staff/adult researchers

to seek clarification about any of the elements of the plan and adapt the design/plan if needed.

- **1 x CLR adolescent facilitators training workshop per country:** The lead country researcher, Iris Lowe, conducted the one-day AF training workshop in each country.
  - **1 x combined information session for caregivers and potential participants:** The AFs ran this session with assistance from staff/adult researchers. They presented an overview of the research and information forms were distributed, there was time for questions and answers, and the AFs sought assent and distributed the assent forms. This involved SC country offices coordinating the recruitment of 30-42 child and youth participants, plus at least four youth facilitators in each country and engaging with the caregivers of all potential participants (between 60-84 caregivers in each country).
2. **Focus group discussions** (6 per country, 3 at each site, 12 in total): Each FGDs was conducted by 2-3 AFs with between 5-10 participants in each group. An adult support person (or persons) provided assistance as necessary to the AF. The adult support person's role was to provide logistical support to the AFs. For example, this included organising and coordinating the necessary resources, materials, or arrangements for the research. The adult support person(s) carried out this role while acknowledging, understanding and respecting the child-led nature of the research and the AFs agency over, and leadership of, the research process. The adult support person(s) did not run the FGDs as this was the role of the AFs.

There were four AFs in Fiji (two female and two male) and six AFs in Solomon Islands (two female and four male). The AFs undertook the FGDs across both sites in each country. Save the Children's Child Protection Technical Advisor was present at all the FGDs to monitor and ensure safety processes are followed and was on standby for any disclosures. The following details the twelve CLR FGDs and the age and gender cohorts in each.

#### Fiji Site 1

- CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group
- CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males
- CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females

#### Fiji Site 2

- CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group
- CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males
- CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females

#### Solomon Islands Site 1

- CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group
- CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males
- CLR FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females

#### Solomon Islands Site 2

- CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group
- CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males
- CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females

Thus, there were two age cohorts: 8-11yrs-old (mixed gender participants) and 12-16 yrs-old females and males (where FGDs were conducted in separate gender groups). It was agreed at the country level that it was appropriate to conduct separate gender FGDs in line with Alder et al's conclusion that this is ideal when engaging adolescents in research (Adler, Salanterä, and Zumstein-Shaha 2019).

The following two figures show the CLR FGDs in Fiji and Solomon Islands:

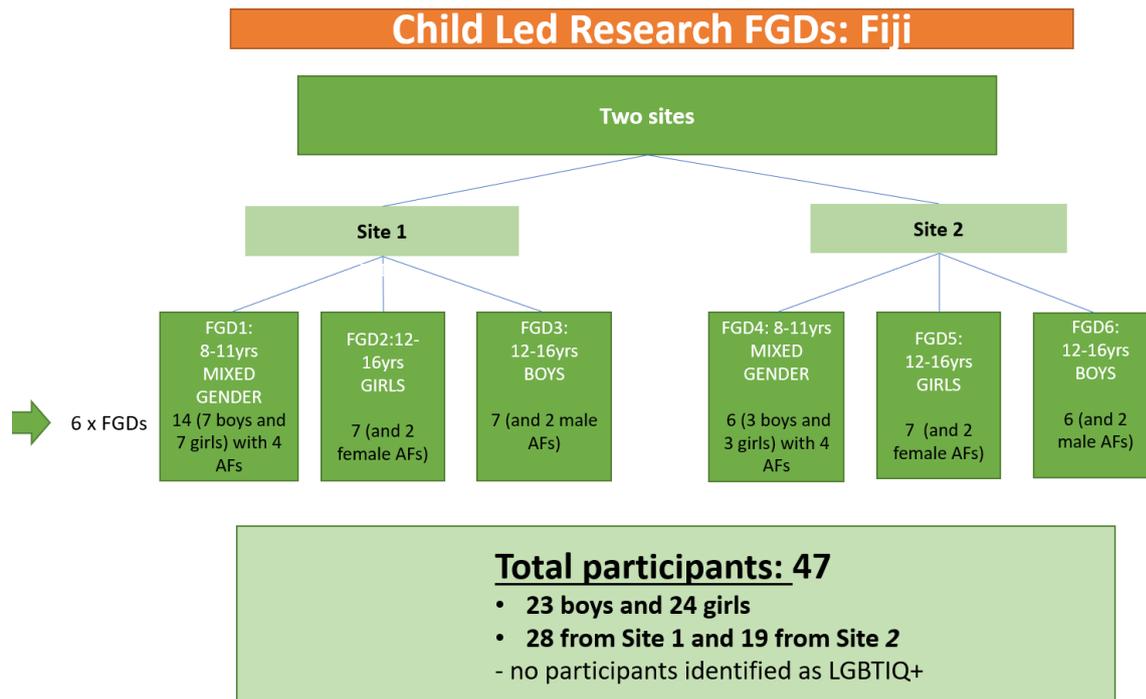


Figure 3: Diagram of CLR FGDs: Fiji

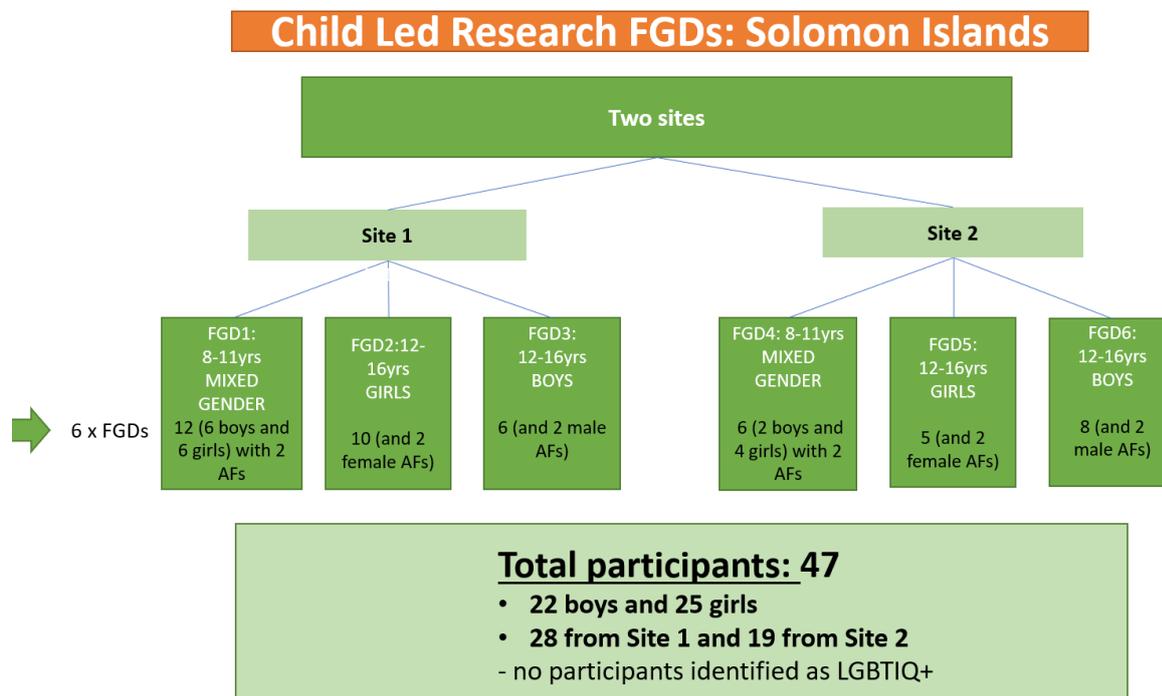


Figure 4: Diagram of CLR FGDs: Solomon Islands

## 2.4 Participant Selection criteria

Recruitment of FGD participants was based on the following selection criteria. The AFs contributed to the design of the selection criteria for participants. Children and young people **must** be:

- Aged either between 8-11 or 12-16 years old;

- Be willing to be involved in the research;
- Available during the relevant school holidays; and
- Live in one of the sites where the CLR is taking place in each country.

In addition to the criteria above participants should represent a diverse cross-section of the population. Thus, recruitment sought children and young people who:

- Live with a range of different abilities (including children and young people who have a disability);
- Represent diverse genders, including people who identify as LGBTIQ+, as well as males and females. In general, there should be approximately ‘the same number of boys’ and girls’ in the FGDs (Save the Children Sweden 2012, 21); and
- Are from a range of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Recruitment of AFs for the FGD was based on the following selection criteria. Young people **must** be:

- 16 or 17 yrs old;
- A person who shows, or has the desire to develop, leadership abilities/willingness to act as agents of change in their community. This could be young people who are already showing leadership skills such as holding a leadership position at school (e.g., captain) however, this may also include people who have not had the opportunity to lead yet but demonstrate a willingness to;
- Live in either one of the communities where the CLR is taking place;
- Available during the relevant school holidays;
- Willing to participate in preparatory training sessions in the school holidays to learn how to undertake the CLR (with support); and
- Willing to facilitate the FGDs in the relevant school holidays.

The decision about who becomes the AFs rested with the young people themselves under the understanding that the selection process should ensure equal and fair consideration and inclusion of all potential leaders, including young people living with disabilities.

The group of AFs had an even number of female and male facilitators, and efforts to ensure inclusivity for adolescents who identify as LGBTIQ+ were made.

3. **Data Analysis Workshop** (1 x workshop per country with adolescent facilitators): a workshop was conducted by Dr Doel-Mackaway and Iris Lowe in each country with the respective AFs. The AFs were supported to participate in this workshop by SC staff in each country. The purpose of this workshop was for the AFs in each country to meet to discuss and analyse the data from the CLR. During this workshop the AFs reflected on the data and developed a set of key themes that emerged from the field research. The AFs also made a short CLR results video to be used by SC to disseminate the key research findings.

## 2.5 Participants

Ninety-four children and young people participated in the CLR: 49 females and 45 males across Fiji and Solomon Islands with ten Adolescent Facilitators (AFs). There were an equal number of participants in Fiji (47) and Solomon Islands (47) with almost the same gender breakdown across the two participant cohorts as follows:

**Total participants:** 94 (45 males, 49 females)

**Fiji—47:** 23 males, 24 females + AFs (2 females and 2 males)

Site 1 (28)

- 8-11 years old – mixed group (7 males and 7 females)
- 12-16 years old – males (7)
- 12-16 years old – females (7)

Site 2 (19)

- 8-11 years old – mixed group (3 males and 3 females)
- 12-16 years old – males (6)
- 12-16 years old – females (7)

**Solomon Islands —47:** 22 males, 25 females + AFs (2 females and 4 males)

Site 1 (28)

- 8-11 years old – mixed group (6 males and 6 females)
- 12-16 years old – males (6)
- 12-16 years old – females (10)

Site 2 (19)

- 8-11 years old – mixed group (2 males and 4 females)
- 12-16 years old – males (8)
- 12-16 years old – females (5)

The graphs below depict the number of participants by country and gender, and the number of participants by country and age respectively.

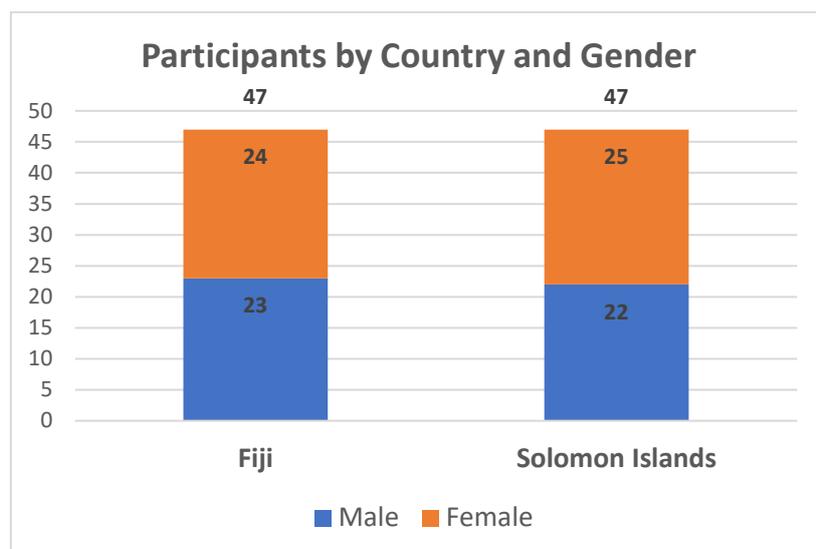
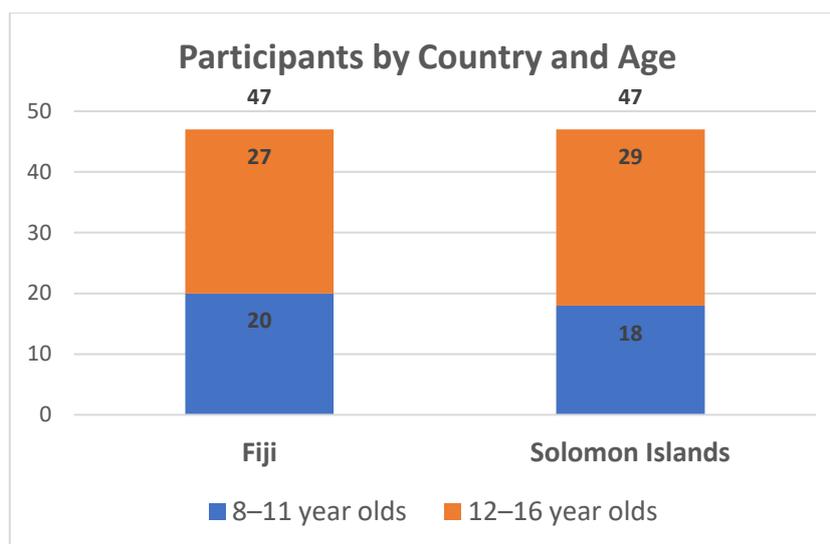


Figure 5: Participants by Country and Gender



**Figure 6: Participants by Country and Age**

## 2.6 Limitations

The research design was aimed at engaging participants to talk about what they think children in their community experience in relation to each of the research questions. We acknowledge however, that children and young people can only speak based on their own experiences and from what they know and see in their communities. We acknowledge that some of what children have said is reflective of their own personal experiences. Whilst no participant disclosed personal experiences of abuse, if they did, the adolescent facilitator and adult support person were trained to follow the process outlined in the safety plan detailed in the *CLR Inception Report*. At the beginning of each FGD the adolescent facilitators explained that participants would not be asked to disclose personal experiences, and that if they (or the adult support people) were concerned about the welfare or safety of any participant that they have the obligation to report this to the SC Child Protection Technical Advisor who may then report the concern to responsible authorities/service providers. The aim of this ‘de-personalised’ research approach was to reduce risks for participants and avoid personal disclosures. However, this ended up being a difficult circumstance to place participants in, as people are not generally well placed to talk about the experiences of others. Adolescent Facilitators themselves identified this as a problem. In Solomon Islands, at the Adolescent Facilitator Workshop, one facilitator said: ‘I found it difficult because sometimes the children were trying to talk about their personal experiences’.

The AFs said this approach was difficult to implemented because they found it hard to explain to participants, and at times the AFs inadvertently personalised the research questions by giving examples from their own experience, or sometimes changing the wording of questions slightly thereby asking participants about their own experiences. For example, in one FGD in Fiji there was a mix of both externalising (talking about children in the community generally) and personalising (talking about themselves) as can be seen in the exchange below:

AF3: Okay this one you will use thumbs up or thumbs down. If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online, do you think it’s likely that they would tell someone? If you think yes, thumbs up and if you think no, then thumbs down.  
 AF1: So how many of you think you will share your problem? Put your thumbs up.  
 Counts – 5 thumbs up and 2 thumbs down  
 AF3: Okay, for those that had thumbs down, why?

Young Person 2: Because the perpetrators can warn them and sometimes they don't feel comfortable telling anyone.

AF1: And why would you tell someone?

YP1: So they can solve the problem.

AF1: Yes, so they can solve the problem. Anything else. Why would you tell someone? Thumbs up.

AF1: Okay for me I say thumbs down because I feel like they won't believe me if I tell them what happened, they won't listen or maybe because I am a kid, they won't believe me.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst there were no disclosures from participants about personal experiences of abuse, at times, participants answered questions based on their personal experience. On reflection, perhaps asking participants to respond based on their assumptions about other children and young people's experiences was not ideal, yet it was the most appropriate approach in the context of this research. This approach was chosen as the most ethically robust option and to reduce the possibility of causing harm and distress to participants, all of whom were young, some as young as 8-years-old. Alternatives to this approach, such as asking children to report on their own experiences of violence, could be likened to asking children to disclose personal child protection concerns and could cause a high level of distress to participants and expose them to risk as well as lead to many disclosures in the research environment.

A cohort of 97 child and youth participants across two countries is a large cohort for the CLR component of this research. Each participant was only involved in one research engagement via a single FGD of 60-90 minutes. Participants and their parents were also involved in an information session (yet this was not a formal research engagement). Given the research sought children's and young people's views about a sensitive topic—child protection—perhaps a single, brief engagement was not sufficient to effectively establish the requisite degree of rapport and develop enough trust between researchers, facilitators and participants to produce in-depth data. Adolescent Facilitators reported that children across all FGDs were often shy, and it took a large portion of the allocated time to assist participants (especially the youngest participants) to feel comfortable talking. Nevertheless, a substantial body of data was obtained from which valuable results have emerged. However, in future, CLR should be conducted allowing for greater engagement with children and young people, over a longer period beyond a single research interaction.

In addition, some research questions were not asked in both countries, and this limits the findings. This is evidenced by reference in this report to 'this question was not discussed due to time constraints'. The reason why some questions were missed was predominantly due to time constraints and the fact that the duration of most of the FGDs were on average about 60 minutes. Adolescent facilitators reflected that an hour was quite a long time for a continuous research engagement, especially for the younger cohort, and after time was spent building rapport through engaging activities there often was not enough time to ask all of the questions. Engagement with participants required a lot more time and there was a need for a more paced approach to build trust and an open environment where children could feel comfortable speaking. This was also the first time all the AFs had undertaken research of any form and quite understandable it took some time for them to learn how to do this field work. Future CLR should seek to engage participants over a longer period of time that includes several research sessions, rather than only a single session per participant.

Another limitation of this research is that there were inconsistencies in the way the FGDs were recorded between the two countries. In Fiji all FGDs were recorded and transcribed, however, in Solomon Islands no FGDs were recorded and transcribed, instead contemporaneous notes were

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<sup>1</sup> CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old.

taken by the lead researcher and SC adult support persons. The two different methodologies for recording data produced a strong body of data. The reason why recordings were not used in Solomon Islands was because 'tok-stori' is the way people, especially children, communicate with each other. Save the Children staff in Solomon Islands reported that once children see a recorder or video camera, they will not openly discuss matters or they will shy away. Therefore, staff recorded notes during the FGDs. Later Dr Doel-Mackaway and the lead researcher, Iris Lowe, along with SC adult support persons met to discuss Solomon Islands data where clarification about the data was sought and obtained.

Further, the research was designed such that the caregiver and potential participant information session would occur at least several days before the FGDs to give people time to provide informed consent and contemplate the research. However, in Solomon Islands this did not occur. Instead, the information session took place directly before the FGDs were held. This is a limitation of the research because it did not afford sufficient time for caregivers or participants to properly consider whether they wanted to be involved in the research, nor did this give participants time to contemplate the nature of the research before they were engaged in the FGDs. In future rapid turnaround between providing information and seeking consent to undertaking the FGDs should be avoided.

Another limitation of this research is that no participants identified as LGBTIQ+ and none were living with a disability. This limits the findings of the CLR as there is no data about the child protection concerns facing children in these contexts.

The next two sections detail the CLR research findings from Fiji (section 3) and Solomon Islands (section 4). This is followed by section 5 that details AFs reflections about conducting the CLR finishing with the conclusion (section 6).

### 3. Fiji

The CLR in Fiji was conducted with children and young people in two communities in Suva. The names of these sites have been withheld to protect participants' privacy in accordance with the ethical agreement entered into for this research. Site 1 is a close-knit community (many people in the community share kinship relationships) where there are many social programs and community groups most of which centre around church gatherings where religious practices and rituals are observed daily. People in this community live in close proximity to one another, with houses built closely together. The community is located close to a main highway. Site 2 is an informal settlement located in a densely populated area. Its proximity to the main road exposes it to high traffic volume and associated noise and pollution. The settlement predominantly comprises poorly constructed and often incomplete housing structures. The community residing in Site 2 face significant socioeconomic challenges. High rates of crime and social unrest are prevalent, with the latter often triggered by conflicts with individuals from neighbouring communities. This environment contributes to an unstable and stressful living situation for children Site 2.



*Cropped photographs of participants during FGDs in Fiji<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Photograph is cropped to protect the privacy of participants.

### 3.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

#### FIJI: KEY FINDINGS

##### Factors that make children feel safe and cared for in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online.

###### Home

- Stable family environment, being surrounded by loved ones (especially parents, grandparents and siblings), and adherence to family rules.

###### School

- Teachers, supportive peers, positive behaviours and adherence to school rules.

###### Community

- Family, neighbors, friends, police and church leaders.
- Laws, rules, road safety and other security measures in the community.

###### Online

- Strategies for positive online experiences include having time limits and parental oversight, chatting with trusted and known people and being discerning about what content to follow.
- Employ safety measures such as blocking and reporting.

###### Cross-Domain Factors

- Family consistently emerged as a key factor in children feeling safe across domains.
- Adherence to rules, laws, and positive connections with others is crucial across domains.
- Older participants highlight the lack of children's rights as a barrier to safety.

##### Factors that make children feel unsafe/worried in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online.

###### Home

- Harsh parental discipline and parental anger, especially the prevalence and impact of corporal punishment.
- Family violence and conflict, fighting, physical and verbal abuse including the impact of violent parental behaviours induced by substance abuse (alcohol and drugs).
- Being left at home alone and strangers coming to the home.
- Dangers related to houses being structurally unsafe/incomplete, household items being used to physically harm children and sharp objects near homes injuring children.

###### School

- Harsh disciplinary measures and corporal punishment by teachers.
- Bullying, peer pressure and other negative peer interactions and influences in the classroom and playground.
- Unfair and inconsistent implementation of school rules.

###### Community

- Peer bullying, intoxicated individuals, kidnapping, drug dealers and disturbances/large scale community conflict caused by intruders.
- Inadequate infrastructure—lack of playgrounds, unsafe roads and unsafe public areas (many sharp objects in the community that compromise physical safety during outdoor activities).

###### Online

- Negative experiences with and exposure to violence and/or adult content online via social media platforms such as TikTok (e.g. violent and/or pornographic images or videos).
- Cyberbullying and negative comments by known and unknown people in chat forums (e.g. on Facebook Messenger).
- Online stalking, hacking and scams by strangers.

These findings reveal the multifaceted nature and pervasive extent of violence that children face across various contexts—in the home, at school, in the community and online. In the **home** children frequently experience and are frequently exposed to various forms of violence. The most prevalent forms of violence children experience in the home are corporal punishment (including the use of household objects as weapons to cause harm) and harsh parental discipline, family violence and exposure to violent parental behaviours induced and exacerbated by substance abuse. Threats to children’s safety posed by strangers also featured as a persistent and key concern as did structural hazards within and around homes. Children also experience violence at **school** through corporal punishment and harsh disciplinary measures by teachers, peer bullying and other negative peer interactions in the classroom and playground—all of which is compounded by inconsistencies in the enforcement of school rules by teachers. Children also experience violence in the **community**, the most frequent and feared of which are peer bullying on the street, scary and negative encounters with intoxicated individuals and being involved in, or witnessing, larger-scale community-wide conflicts caused by external intruders. Inadequate infrastructure is also a key factor that compromises children’s physical safety during outdoor activities. In the **online** sphere the key threats to children’s safety are the frequency and impact of children’s exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and various forms of online harassment and exploitation.

Collectively, these findings underscore the endemic nature and prevalence of violence against children in the home, school, community and online. These findings call for greater investment in understanding and addressing the diverse range of factors that make children feel unsafe in their various environments, providing a foundation for targeted interventions aimed at promoting child safety and well-being.

### **(i) What makes children feel safe and cared for in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online? (CLRQ1)**

Participants said children’s safety is related to staying close to family and to home, not talking to strangers or going out alone at night, and seeking safety in known places, such as in church. All participants emphasised the importance of parents and extended family for children’s sense of security. Parents and teachers were identified as the key people who facilitate children feeling safe and cared for in the home, school, community and online.

Child participants defined ‘feeling safe and cared for’ by what children should and should not do, and what they need from their families and their community. They characterised children’s safety in relation to ‘protection’ and their proximity to parents, family and community. When asked what makes children feel safe and cared for child participants drew connections between child safety and being ‘safe with their parents’ and family, the importance of ‘staying in their community,’ ‘not going out without parents,’ not going out ‘alone at night’ and not talking to or going anywhere with strangers’.<sup>3</sup> The focus of these responses is on obedience to adults and compliance with rules. These findings were in response to the first question in the FGD and it is important to note that participants were acclimatising to the research engagement at this time. It is possible that at this early stage of the research participants could have been repeating ‘stranger danger’ messages conveyed in the community and by parents, rather than speaking from their own perspectives. Although, fears of possible harm from strangers was a common theme throughout the FGDs.

Older participants also identified the importance of parents and family to children’s safety and sense of being cared for and the threat to this posed by strangers. However, the older participants also emphasised a lack of children’s rights as an obstacle to children’s safety: ‘Children need more rights

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<sup>3</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

in order to feel safe'.<sup>4</sup> Youth participants also defined child safety and being cared for in terms of being 'protected' however, also added 'feeling comfortable' in their families within this notion.<sup>5</sup>

Participant's conclusions about what makes children feel safe and cared for in the four domains of children's lives (the home, school, village/neighbourhood/street and online) are explored below.

### Home

Participants across the different age groups (8-11- and 12-16-years old cohorts) and sites said having a stable family environment, being surrounded by loved ones (especially parents, grandparents and siblings) and following rules are key factors that contribute to children's feelings of safety and being cared for at home.

Young children correlated being with their parents, grandparents and 'having plenty people at home'<sup>6</sup> and being inside their homes 'reading', 'studying' and eating 'good food' as the primary factors that make children feel safe and cared for.<sup>7</sup> Older male participants reflected similar sentiments about the importance of kin and added the importance of children following family rules such as 'not swearing at home'<sup>8</sup> and 'listening to and helping parents'.<sup>9</sup>

Young female participants spoke frequently about home being a 'safe zone' or a 'comfort zone' where children are 'beside [their] loved ones' and 'parents [are] there to protect' children.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as mentioned above, it was in this context that both groups of older participants identified gaps in the fulfilment of children's rights in the home as an obstacle to children's sense of safety.<sup>11</sup> As will be discussed further below in the Adolescent Facilitators Analysis Workshop the AFs confirmed that participants across all ages spoke about the prevalence of corporal punishment in the home along with children fearing they will not be believed if they disclose experienced of violence.

### School

Participants across the different age groups and sites said the importance of teachers, following school rules, and feeling safe when surrounded by friends and supportive peers are key factors that contribute to children's safety and feelings of being cared for at school.

In addition to teachers and head teachers, younger participants identified roles performed by student leaders such as prefects, head boys and girls, and class captain as contributing to children's sense of safety and feelings of being cared for in school.<sup>12</sup> Older participants said teachers and senior students contribute to making children feel safe and cared for in school.<sup>13</sup> There was some disagreement about this via commentary from an Adolescent Facilitator who said in response to this: 'Oh wow, seniors make you feel safe? Mine make me feel scared'. Although this was not said by a participant.<sup>14</sup> Participants discussed a range of behaviours that, if avoided, also contribute to children

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<sup>4</sup> YP 1 (F) CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females. This was also said by YP 3 (M) CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>5</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males and CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>6</sup> C11 (M), CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>7</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group and CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>8</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>9</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>10</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>11</sup> YP 1 (F) CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females. This was also said by YP 3 (M) CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>12</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group and CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>13</sup> CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>14</sup> AF1, CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

feeling safe such as: ‘following the rules’, ‘when people don’t swear or name call’, ‘not fighting with children’, ‘listening to teachers’ and ‘following the school rules’.<sup>15</sup>

Female participants in the older cohort emphasised that ‘having fun with friends’ and ‘helping teachers’ in the context of having guidelines and guidance from teachers contributes to children being safe and feeling cared for at school.<sup>16</sup>

### Community

All participants emphasised the importance of family, parents, neighbours, friends, police and church leaders as key people in the community that make children feel safe and cared for. Young male participants also correlated the enforcement of laws, rules and regulations with children’s safety. This suggests they value these elements of governance and wish for these mechanisms to be strengthened. Several male participants said having ‘laws in place’, abiding by these rules and having ‘police patrols’ or ‘security guards’ enforcing these rules, especially ‘following the road rules’, is crucial to children’s safety in the community.<sup>17</sup> Older female participants also detailed a range of community safety features on the streets such as traffic lights, zebra crossings and security cameras as additional factors that contribute to children’s safety in the community.<sup>18</sup>

### Online

Participants across age groups and sites engaged in online activities and understood the notion of online safety. Children’s and young people’s experience of safety online is closely tied to their ability to control their online experiences and maintain positive connections with trusted individuals in the online sphere.

Child participants said time limits and having positive online experiences such as chatting with friends and family made them feel safe and cared for online. Younger participants also said they enjoy playing online games or watching YouTube, and several said children feel safer if ‘parents are watching while they are playing games’.<sup>19</sup> Child participants described online activities predominantly in terms of ‘playing games online’<sup>20</sup> and ‘using ‘Facebook messenger’ to message parents, family and friends.’<sup>21</sup> Youth participants also described children’s and young people’s online activities in this way (i.e., gaming and messaging) however, said they engage online in a wider variety of ways, by doing their homework online, using Tik Tok, YouTube, watching the news, and using Instagram and Facebook.<sup>22</sup>

The older age groups also emphasised being aware of, and discerning about, the content they follow to feel safe online. Many young people said they used TikTok but expressed concerns about its safety ‘because too many bad things inside’.<sup>23</sup> They said all social media platforms ‘can be negative or positive’ and ‘it depends on [the] people you follow, whether they are good for you or not’.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males, CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females, CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>16</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>17</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>18</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>19</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>20</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>21</sup> CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>22</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>23</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>24</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.



'I am afraid of the knife and chopper'.  
'When somebody touching the knife'.  
'I am doing the roll (cigarette), but I don't like to smell the roll'.<sup>27</sup>

Both age groups expressed concerns related to physical safety in the home, such as fear of sharp objects, incomplete structures, and bullying. Older participants demonstrated an awareness of online safety issues, including cyberbullying and inappropriate content. The findings highlight a diverse range of fears, emphasising the importance of addressing both physical and online safety concerns to ensure the well-being of children in these communities.

Participant's views about what makes children feel unsafe or worried about in the four domains of children's lives (the home, school, village/neighbourhood/street and online) are explored below.

### Home

Participants across the sites, age groups and genders described a range of factors that make children feel unsafe or worried in the home. Common concerns include the prevalence of harsh parental discipline and the impact of parental anger including corporal punishment of children involving belts, brooms and other objects. Family violence (including physical and verbal abuse), conflict and fighting among siblings, and the impact of parental behaviours (such as parents smoking and being 'drunk'<sup>28</sup> or intoxicated at home) were identified as key factors that make children feel unsafe and worried in the home. Many participants expressed concerns about the threat of strangers causing harm to children in and around their homes, this was a recurrent worry. Household items such as gas cylinders used for cooking, knives, scissors, matches and 'sharp objects left around the house'<sup>29</sup> were described as potential sources of danger that could be used to physically harm children and caused children to feel unsafe or worried. Participants also said children felt unsafe when left alone at home without their parents and when their parents went to work.<sup>30</sup>

One of the main concerns from all participants across both sites, ages and genders was that children feel unsafe and worried about the frequency and threat of corporal punishment in the home. This was expressed as a major concern of all participants across all FGDs, however, the prevalence and impact of corporal punishment in the home was particularly pronounced in the responses from young children from Site 2.<sup>31</sup> Children from both sites explained many ways caregivers engage in corporal punishment of children including pinching or hitting children with their hand or implement such as a 'hosepipe', 'sasa broom', 'stick', 'knife', 'father's belt',<sup>32</sup> 'mother's rolling pin'<sup>33</sup> or 'spoon'.<sup>34</sup> One young participant said the kitchen was a place that could make children feel very unsafe 'because [there is] a lot of sharp stuff there for smacking, the fire, the pan, the belt'.<sup>35</sup> Two females in the younger group in site 2 said, and all other participants agreed, that children feel unsafe when parents threaten to or 'smack' children.<sup>36</sup> Nearly all the youth participants, across both sites, emphasised the prevalence and detrimental impact of corporal punishment in the home on children's lives. Most children and young people spoke about parents using corporal punishment,

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<sup>27</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>28</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>29</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>30</sup> CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>31</sup> CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>32</sup> Different male and female participants from CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>33</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>34</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>35</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>36</sup> CLR FGD 5, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males and CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

however, two male youth participants (one in site 1 and the other in site 2) mentioned 'pinching' by grandparents as a form of corporal punishment.<sup>37</sup>

Another key concern that makes children feel unsafe and worried in the home is family conflict, fighting and verbal abuse.<sup>38</sup> This concern was most evident in the older participants FGDs where 'fighting with siblings'<sup>39</sup> including with 'smaller siblings'<sup>40</sup> was identified as a problem. This, said older male participants, included 'violent fighting with siblings', 'name calling' and 'swearing at each other at home'.<sup>41</sup> Female participants in the older cohort said this involved 'fighting [and] teaching your child to do bad things like violence'.<sup>42</sup>

Feeling unsafe when children's parents are not at home and when houses are incomplete or damaged were two interconnected themes that emerged among the younger and older participants.<sup>43</sup> Related to this was the threat of strangers, particularly 'drunk' strangers, being able to approach or come into homes and harm or 'kidnap' children because some homes have not been built fully or adequately, are damaged and therefore not secure.<sup>44</sup> Several children expressed this concern in various ways, one said it is unsafe if 'strangers visit homes'<sup>45</sup> and children shouldn't 'open the door to anyone'.<sup>46</sup>

Young children also emphasised that when parents, particularly fathers, are intoxicated that this threatens children's sense of safety and is a major source of worry for them.<sup>47</sup>

Dangerous objects around the home also featured as key concerns for younger children. These objects were of concern in three main ways: firstly, in terms of how some of these items could be used by caregivers and to a lesser degree siblings to hit them with; how they could be used as weapons by intruders into the home; and how 'sharp objects left around the house'<sup>48</sup> can cause unintended injury to children.

The images below depict younger participant's depictions with plasticine about what makes children feel unsafe or worried in the home.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Bubu's [grandmother's] pinch' CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>38</sup> Put in all FGDs for Fiji 12-16.

<sup>39</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>40</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>41</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>42</sup> CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>43</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group and CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group; CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>44</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed.

<sup>45</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>46</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>47</sup> CLR FGD 1, Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>48</sup> CLR FGD 2, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.



Figure 8: 'These are sharp things. When I play on the side of my house, sharp objects hit me'.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 9: 'I am scared to go into this house because it is incomplete'.<sup>50</sup>

### School

Participants in the FGDs explained numerous factors that make children feel unsafe or worried at school. Two overarching themes emerged in response to this question. First, the impact on children's sense of safety at school when harsh disciplinary measures are used by school leaders and teachers to enforce school rules, including the use of corporal punishment. Second, the detrimental impact of bullying and negative peer interactions in the playground and classroom environments.

Younger participants expressed anxiety about going to school alone, encountering bullies, and facing teachers' anger, especially when subjected to corporal punishment with the use of implements such as 'smacking with teacher's rulers'.<sup>51</sup> Older participants said children often experience a range of physical punishment from teachers at school including being hit by, or having the following items thrown at them: 'dusters, sasa brooms, throwing chalk and dustpans'.<sup>52</sup>

Participants reported that the fear of being bullied or harassed by peers, as well as teachers' harsh disciplinary actions, such as yelling and smacking, contributed to a sense of insecurity for children in

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<sup>49</sup> CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>50</sup> CLR FGD 4, Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>51</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>52</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

the school environment.<sup>53</sup> Younger children expressed concerns going to the principal's office, as particularly feared, often resulted in warnings. The fear of teachers, playing with chemicals, throwing objects, and swearing in school also contributed to their concerns.<sup>54</sup> Participants said that feeling unsafe in school also stems from worries about home-related consequences if they misbehave at school underscoring the connections between the home and school environments.

Older participants highlighted issues like peer pressure, bad influences, and the negative impact of older peers in out-of-bounds areas. Concerns about vandalism, smoking and glue sniffing at school were also raised. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of teachers not resorting to corporal punishment and using tools like rulers, sasa brooms, and hose pipes to hit children. Older female participants shared fears about specific teachers, indicating that teachers can be perceived by children as bullies: 'I am scared of my Basic Science teacher'.<sup>55</sup> This fear was attributed to some teachers' potential to wield authority and power in ways that make students feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Older participants across the genders expressed concerns about teachers' anger, particularly when teachers were unaware of students' backgrounds, reflecting a desire for understanding and empathy. A participant said: 'I feel unsafe as a student when the teacher gets angry at me because some of them do not know our background'.<sup>56</sup>

Non-compliance with school rules leading to visits to the principal's office and potential disciplinary actions like 'growling, screaming, or smacking' contributes to children's sense of unease at school.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, the data underscored the significance of fair and consistent implementation of school rules and disciplinary practices and the importance of positive teacher, student and peer interactions in shaping children's feelings of safety and care in the school environment. The participants highlighted the need for a supportive and understanding educational atmosphere without the presence of corporal and degrading punishment so that students feel respected and valued and can focus on learning without being afraid.

### Community

When asked the question, 'what makes children feel unsafe or worried in the village, community and street?' Participants across age groups express fears related to children's safety in the community, emphasising concerns about bullying between peers in the community, encountering intoxicated individuals, worries about inadequate infrastructure such as unsafe roads and the absence of proper playgrounds, and a heightened awareness of external threats such as drug dealers, kidnapping, and disturbances caused by outsiders. These fears underscore the need for comprehensive interventions that address both immediate environmental issues and broader community dynamics to ensure the well-being of all children.

The younger cohort's concerns involve physical safety during activities like playing and walking in the community alone as well as the threat of kidnapping. The older cohort expressed worries about bullying in the community as well as external threats such as kidnappers and disturbances caused by intruders in the community, including drug dealers. Key themes include the fear of drunk people, concerns about inadequate infrastructure and worries related to bullying.

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<sup>53</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females; Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>54</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>55</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>56</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>57</sup> Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

In the younger age cohort participants expressed concerns about physical safety when undertaking outdoor activities such as 'running', 'playing' and 'walking alone'.<sup>58</sup> Participants explained their neighbourhoods feel unsafe because of the likelihood of encountering 'drunk people' as 'people drinking on steps, footpaths and on the street' is very common.<sup>59</sup>

Older participants said children fear drugs, kidnapping and disturbances caused by outsiders. Some children in these FGDs had witnessed big brawls in their community because of people from outside the community coming in and causing significant conflict and social disruption.<sup>60</sup> One participant described this when he said children feel unsafe and worried 'when outsiders come into our community to fight and come and disturb the peace'.<sup>61</sup> Participants said they feel responsible for solving these conflicts in their communities and 'when there are brawls...we have to go and stop them'.<sup>62</sup>

A major concern that echoed through this research more broadly, and arose in response to this question as well, is the concerns children and young people have about inadequate infrastructure and playgrounds. Unsafe road conditions and the absence of proper playgrounds was mentioned many times by all participants in these FGDs along with concerns about incomplete houses and the lack of recreational spaces.<sup>63</sup> Numerous participants also spoke about the prevalence of sharp and dangerous objects near children's houses, 'there are sharp objects when I play on the side of our house, sharp objects hit me' (referring to sharp objects lying around such as building materials, metal and rubbish).<sup>64</sup> This was reiterated in several other FGDs, and one young female said, referring to the presence of drug paraphernalia in the community, said 'I feel unsafe when I am playing and there is sharp materials and objects around'.<sup>65</sup>

Younger participants emphasised the impact of busy roads being nearby children's houses, 'children are unsafe when they go on the road, if one car come it will bump them'.<sup>66</sup> Several participants also expressed that the community is made unsafe because of 'dogs who chase children and bite them'.<sup>67</sup>

Participants illustrated a range of factors that make children unsafe in the community including fears related to personal and physical safety in the community, concerns about bullying, encountering intoxicated individuals and worries about inadequate infrastructure and the lack of suitable child-friendly areas to play.

### Online

When asked, 'what makes children feel unsafe/worried online?' participants across the FGDs described the nature of children's worries about engaging online ranging from exposure to inappropriate content and cyberbullying to the fear of encountering strangers online.

Younger participants said children fear encountering 'scary' or 'bad' (meaning violent and/or pornographic images or videos) content on platforms like TikTok and that sometimes communicating

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<sup>58</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>59</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males; Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>60</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>61</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>62</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>63</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group; Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males; Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group; Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>64</sup> Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>65</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>66</sup> Fiji Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>67</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

on Messenger is risky because people can say 'bad comments'.<sup>68</sup> They express concerns about 'name-calling,' 'teasing each other,' and 'swearing' online, underscoring the impact of negative interactions in their online spaces.<sup>69</sup>

Older male participants spoke about online stalking, hacking, scams, and exposure to inappropriate content (pornography) as key areas of concern for children.<sup>70</sup> Participants in the older groups stressed the impact on children of negative comments and the importance of being cautious about social media connections.<sup>71</sup> Older participants identified that many children and young people in their community have had negative experiences online through being exposed to inappropriate, adult content (including pornography) on various platforms such as TikTok and Facebook.<sup>72</sup>

Encountering people operating under 'fake accounts,' 'cyberbullying,' and negative experiences communicating with strangers online ('online stalkers'<sup>73</sup>) was expressed as commonplace.<sup>74</sup> Older male participants said, 'bad photos,' 'pornography' and 'bad links' make the online environment unsafe for children.<sup>75</sup>

Participants said the online environment has 'plenty of bad things'<sup>76</sup> not only in terms of 'bad images' but also 'bullies' and that 'communicating with strangers is very scary'.<sup>77</sup>

### **(iii) Do children worry about other things? (CLRQ3)**

This question was not asked in any of the Fiji FGDs due to time constraints. However, in the AF Analysis Workshop the adolescents reflected on what children and young people spoke about during the FGDs and said some of the key things participants said children worry about are having 'no playgrounds' in their local area, 'getting hit by their parents', 'failing their exams', 'not having any friends' and 'parents being drunk'.<sup>78</sup> These reflections confirmed many of the findings explored above.

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<sup>68</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>69</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>70</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>71</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; CLR FGD 6, Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>72</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; CLR FGD 3, Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females and Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>73</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>74</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females; Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males; and Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>75</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>76</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>77</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>78</sup> Fiji AF Analysis Workshop, October 2023.

### 3.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues? (RQ2)

#### Key Findings

If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online would they tell someone? If so, who would they tell (and not tell) and how would they be helped?

#### Would children disclose problems?

- Mixed responses about children disclosing problems: 57% said children would disclose and 43% said children would not. This was influenced by trust and fear of consequences.

#### Who would children seek help from and how would they be helped?

- Parents, police, teachers and social welfare. They would offer legal help, support, counselling, prayer and advice.

#### Children would not seek help from

- Strangers, some friends/teachers, siblings or unsupportive stepparents.

The research findings reveal a nuanced perspective on the likelihood of children disclosing child protection problems, highlighting a divide where 57% of participants believe children would disclose, while 43% think they would not. Trust and fear of consequences emerged as influential factors in this dynamic. The strengths in the current child protection system are evident in the identified sources from which children would seek help—parents, police, teachers, and social welfare. These entities are recognised for their potential to offer legal assistance, support, counselling, prayer and advice. However, notable gaps in the formal and informal child protection systems include children's hesitancy to seek help from certain individuals, such as strangers, some friends or teachers, siblings, or unsupportive stepparents. This underscores the importance of fostering a trusting and supportive environment within formal and informal systems to encourage children to disclose their problems. The mixed responses also suggest the need for targeted interventions addressing trust-building and mitigating fears of negative consequences arising from disclosing, thereby strengthening the child protection system to effectively prevent and respond to key protection issues across all contexts in which children live, whether at home, in the community, at school or online.

#### (i) If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online, do you think they would tell someone? (CLRQ4)

When participants were asked if they thought children would tell someone if they had a problem at home, in the village or neighbourhood, at school or online 27 said yes and 20 said no. The mixed responses indicate that there are many factors that impact on whether children in these communities are willing to disclose experiences of violence to others.

In the younger cohort half of the participants said children would disclose to others (10/20) and half said they wouldn't (10/20). Some participants expressed the belief that children would disclose problems because, 'parents need to be told the truth'.<sup>79</sup> However, others, said children wouldn't tell someone because they would fear they would not be believed, and the person they told 'might spread it around like gossip'.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Female participant from Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>80</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

In the older cohort of males all participants in one FGD said that children wouldn't tell someone if they had experienced violence because of fears of not being believed, being labelled, or facing potential consequences.<sup>81</sup> They explained that if boys disclosed these experiences they would face significant, negative societal impacts, stating, "for us boys, they will call us girls,' underlining the gendered stigma attached to sharing personal issues.<sup>82</sup> In the other male FGD half of the participants (3/6) said children would disclose and the other half (3/6) said they wouldn't.<sup>83</sup> Participants in this group said children would 'just tell it straight to their fathers' so as 'not to cause a lot of problems'.<sup>84</sup> There were no reasons provided by those who said children would not tell someone in this group.

In the older female FGDs there was an even split again between those who said children would disclose to someone (7/14) and those who said they wouldn't (7/14). Participants provided some concerning reasons as to why children would not disclose including suicidality, one participant said, 'if children tell their parents they might commit suicide'.<sup>85</sup> Other reasons articulated were that children may feel scared or shy, or be concerned about potential punishment, victimisation and bullying such as 'backstabbing' if they speak up.<sup>86</sup> These findings suggest there is a lack of trusted social support networks for children including a lack of trust in parents and other individuals in the community.

These findings suggest a complex interplay of factors influencing children's willingness to share problems with others in their communities. While some participants said children would be willing to express trust and believe in the supportive nature of disclosure, a large proportion of participants expressed genuine concern about the consequences for children if they do disclose including societal judgments, potential harm, and a lack of trust.

**(ii) If children did tell someone, who could they go for help? (CLRQ5); How would children be helped by the people they told? (CLRQ6); and is there anyone children would not go for help? (CLRQ7)**

Who would children go to for help?

Across the age cohorts, genders and sites participants said children are likely to primarily seek help from parents (both mothers and fathers), the police and teachers. They would also seek help from neighbours, other family members, peers, various professionals (such as nurses, firefighters, social welfare), community leaders and community organisations.

The younger cohort preference parents, the police and social welfare as key people children would be likely to go to for help. This reflecting a belief that these people and entities could intervene and conduct investigations, ensuring that wrongdoers face consequences.<sup>87</sup>

Males in the older cohort said children would tell parents, teachers, friends, Save the Children and they might contact the child helpline.<sup>88</sup> The motivation behind these choices surrounded trusting these individuals to address the problem effectively.<sup>89</sup> Females in the older cohort said children would seek help from parents, friends, neighbours, and friends.<sup>90</sup> They emphasised trust in these

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<sup>81</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>82</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>83</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>84</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>85</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>86</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>87</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>88</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>89</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>90</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

individuals, with participants believing that these people would understand their concerns and take appropriate actions.<sup>91</sup>

Participants suggested a variety of people and support systems children would be likely to go to for help including parents, teachers, friends and organisations like Save the Children and the police. Trust, confidentiality, and the perceived ability of these individuals to provide the necessary assistance are important factors influencing children's choices to seek help.

#### How would children be helped by the people they told?

The younger mixed group (CLR FGD 1) anticipated that disclosing problems to trusted adults would lead to solving them, involving actions like police investigation and parental involvement, as one participant mentioned, 'they will call the police, and the police will come and help'.<sup>92</sup>

In the older male FGDs participants suggested children would be helped by older siblings and they 'might beat them up or talk about it'.<sup>93</sup>

Other participants said children would be helped by social welfare with potential solutions involving counselling, and advice from adults and authorities,<sup>94</sup> and parents could also be involved in problem resolution.<sup>95</sup>

#### Who would children not go to for help?

Participants identified a range of people who children might avoid seeking help from if they had experienced violence. Distrust was expressed toward people in the community who might worsen the situation or gossip about it. Several people were identified by young female participants as untrustworthy, they were, strangers, some friends, backstabbers, some teachers and siblings.<sup>96</sup> Participants in this group expressed concern about telling untrustworthy people 'because they might make it worse and gossip'.<sup>97</sup>

The older male group highlighted concerns about children telling 'fake friends' who could spread information.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, stepmothers and stepfathers were considered potentially unsupportive in the female group (CLR FGD 6), with one participant stating, 'because they won't believe you or won't want to solve the problem'.<sup>99</sup> Overall, the responses underscore the importance of trust and credibility when seeking assistance, while also acknowledging potential risks associated with certain individuals or relationships.

Across the focus groups, there is a consistent theme regarding potential sources of support that children might avoid. Issues of trust, fear of gossip, and doubts about belief or willingness to solve problems were recurrent reasons for hesitating to seek help from specific individuals. Understanding these dynamics and realities for children is crucial for creating environments where children feel secure and confident in reaching out for assistance. The findings emphasize the need for fostering trust and effective communication channels to ensure that children have access to the support they require.

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<sup>91</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>92</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>93</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>94</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>95</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>96</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>97</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>98</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>99</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

### **(iii) If a child shares an experience of violence, how are adults likely to react? (CLRQ8)**

Only the two FGD, the ones consisting of older male participants, addressed this question. The other four FGDs did not answer this due to time constraints. When asked how adults are likely to react if children shared an experience of violence participants said adults would likely react with ‘shock and anger’, although anger directed at the perpetrator of violence, not the child who experienced the violence.<sup>100</sup> Both groups agreed that if children chose trusted adults to share this information with that they ‘will help solve the problem’ and may ‘go to the police’ or ‘take them to a lawyer’.<sup>101</sup>

One significant finding concerns problematic reactions by religious leaders if children disclose a child protection concern. An exchange between two young people, an AF and the lead researcher from a FGD with 12–16-year-old males is worth noting in this regard. When asked how a pastor would react if a child shared an experience of violence they said:

Lead Researcher: If you go to them for help, what will they do to solve the problem?

YP1: They will go to the police

YP3: Or a pastor

Lead Researcher: What will the pastor do?

YP1: Pray and give you the knowledge.

AF2: How will they help?

YP1: Do the sevusevu (traditional forgiveness ceremony). They will go say sorry.

Lead Researcher: Is seeking forgiveness the right thing to do?

YP1: They have to report to police.

YP2: Take you to the lawyer.<sup>102</sup>

Participants suggested that a religious leader may ‘pray’ with children to ‘give them the knowledge’ and perform a religious forgiveness ceremony, the sevusevu to ‘say sorry’.<sup>103</sup> Whilst it was not confirmed in this interaction as to who was apologising to who, there is an indication that if a child disclosed harm to a pastor that the child themselves may be encouraged to say sorry instead of the perpetrator and be engaged in a religious ceremony to do so. As can be seen from the excerpt the researcher sought clarification about this and the participants then indicated religious leaders should assist children to seek a legal response. This was the only mention of the use of religious forgiveness ceremonies in relation to child protection matters in the CLR for Fiji and it was a brief exchange, thus, further research about this would need to be undertaken to understand this fully. However, more broadly, this highlights how cultural and religious practices shape children’s understanding about how to respond to violence. This example also raises some pressing concerns about the onus of responsibility for violence against children, particularly in relation to sexual abuse and other criminal activities, and whether some religious practices such as the sevusevu are used to absolve perpetrators from blame and reverse the onus of responsibility onto children. The notion of children seeking forgiveness for harms done to them is contrary to children’s rights to protection and is an example of a harmful religious practice.

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<sup>100</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>101</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>102</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>103</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

### 3.3 Recommendations for how to better protect and help children feel safer in the community. (RQ3)

#### Key Findings

##### What do children like best about being a child in this community?

- Childhood is perceived as a privileged time, exempt from heavy responsibilities and chores.
- Playing with friends and family and enjoying outdoor activities.
- Social relationships and learning about culture and traditions is highly valued.

##### Children can be better protected and feel safer through:

- Increased community awareness of children's rights.
- Improved unity and collaboration within the community and families.
- Greater focus on religious practices including daily prayers and bible studies.

##### Children can contribute to improved child protection measures by:

- Staying close to home, avoiding going out at night, and exercising caution with strangers.
- Having positive peer relationships, helping younger children/siblings learn manners, respect and listen to parents and pray.

##### Parents, Teachers, and Community Leaders can contribute to improved child protection measures by:

- Increasing their awareness of children's rights and protection.
- Communicating more with children, organising child-focused activities, and providing safe play areas.
- Demonstrating positive discipline and creating opportunities for children to engage in recreation.

##### Role of Organisations like Save the Children:

- Organise activities, create awareness, and offer counselling.
- Provide educational support, including financial assistance for essential school items.
- Support children facing abuse, neglect, or violence, ensuring a safe environment.

The research findings offer valuable recommendations about how to better protect and help children feel safer in the community. Children cherish their privileged and carefree childhood, emphasising the importance of preserving these aspects for their well-being. The recommendations accentuate that in order to provide a more protective environment for children there is a need for increased community awareness of children's rights, enhanced unity and collaboration and a greater focus on following religious instruction in the community. Children themselves can contribute to their protection by fostering positive peer and family relationships, while parents, teachers and community leaders play pivotal roles through promoting and facilitating increased child rights awareness, by communicating more effectively with children and by creating child friendly spaces. The involvement of organisations like Save the Children is highlighted, emphasising their role in organising child rights-based activities and creating child rights awareness, offering counselling, providing educational support and ensuring a safe environment for children facing abuse and violence.

These recommendations advocate for a comprehensive strategy involving children, parents, teachers, community leaders and organisations to enhance child safety in communities. The recommendations focus on rights awareness and community collaboration with specific actions at

individual and organisational levels that collectively contribute to creating a secure environment for children.

### **(i) What do you think children like best about being a child in your village/community? (CLRQ9)**

Only the two FGD, the ones consisting of older female participants, addressed this question. The other four FGDs did not answer this due to time constraints. Participants said children enjoy a special and privileged position in their communities, where childhood is a sacred time where parents and the community do not have high expectations of children ('they don't have to do house chores') and enjoy pampering them.<sup>104</sup> Participants said children like playing with friends, siblings and family as well as 'playing outside', 'getting spoiled', 'getting anything they want without asking', and 'not getting blamed for anything'.<sup>105</sup> This was confirmed in the other FGD where this was discussed when a participant said: 'children like being children in the community because they get to do what they want. They wake up and go play, they don't have to wash the dishes, children are free eh?'<sup>106</sup> The notion of young children being blameless and carefree conflicts to some degree with other findings from the CLR where participants said children may not be believed if they disclose, or may be expected to 'say sorry', for harms inflicted upon them.

When asked if value is placed on relationships with family and learning about traditions and custom the participants said this is very important in their communities.<sup>107</sup> One participant said that learning about their heritage and understanding their cultural identity is important because 'they should know where they are from, the maternal link so they don't get lost'.<sup>108</sup> Participants spoke about respecting elders and well-mannered behaviour as contributing to the safety and well-being of children in their communities.<sup>109</sup>

### **(ii) What can be done to better protect and help children feel safer in your community? (CLRQ10)**

Four of the FGD addressed this question, the other two FGDs did not answer this due to time constraints. Several themes emerged from participant's responses.

#### **Rights Awareness**

Child participants emphasised the importance of creating awareness about children's rights in a way that also teaches children about their responsibilities. A participant said: 'Do awareness to let them know they have rights, but don't use it too much'.<sup>110</sup> The older male group also suggested increasing community awareness about children's rights will help children be safer and more protected, they also added this will assist with children feeling more cared for. One participant emphasised the importance of 'bringing more awareness' and 'showing care to children'.<sup>111</sup>

#### **Unity and Collaboration**

Another recommendation emerged from the older male participants who suggested greater collaboration and unity within the community and family. A young male said there is a need to 'work together as a community' and 'work together as one'.<sup>112</sup> (CLR FGD 5).

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<sup>104</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>105</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>106</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>107</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>108</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>109</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>110</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>111</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>112</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

### **Religious Practices Across Groups**

Child participants suggested children would be better protected and feel safer in the community if there was a greater focus on religious practices with suggestions such as daily prayers, masumasu, and bible studies.<sup>113</sup>

Collectively, these themes underscore the significance of awareness, community collaboration and positive reinforcement in fostering a safer environment for children.

#### What can children do to better protect and help children feel safer in the community?

Participants suggested a range of measures children can take to feel safer and be better protected in the community.

Children across age groups and genders explained a range of measures used by children in the community to stay safe including staying close to home, avoiding night outings, and being cautious about strangers. Older males suggested actions like staying indoors, being obedient, following the right peers and teaching younger siblings proper behaviour. These participants stressed imparting values to younger children, including manners and the importance of listening to parents.<sup>114</sup> This suggests that peer-to-peer support initiatives could play a greater role in better protecting and helping children feel safer in the community.

Older female participants suggested listening to parents, praying, forming children's clubs, and respecting parental authority are all measures children can take to feel safe and be more protected in the community.<sup>115</sup>

#### What can parents, teachers and community leaders do help children feel safer in the community?

Participants suggested that parents, teachers and community leaders could take an active role in increasing awareness about children's rights and about children's rights to protection. This includes, participants said, 'communicating more with their children' and community leaders organising more child-focussed activities such as child clubs<sup>116</sup> and family bible studies.<sup>117</sup>

Some participants stressed the role parents, teachers and community leaders could play in greater discipline of children and providing safe play areas for children to be, thereby reducing the need for children to move far from home to engage in recreation.<sup>118</sup>

#### What can organisations like Save the Children do?

Participants suggested that organisations like Save the Children could organize more activities, create awareness, and provide counselling for children.<sup>119</sup> They also suggested that Save the Children could provide educational support to schools to learn more about children's rights and teaching this at school.<sup>120</sup>

Participants also suggested that various organisation provide support to children who are experiencing abuse, neglect or violence, and offer a safe environment. Finally, participants suggested

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<sup>113</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>114</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>115</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>116</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>117</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>118</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>119</sup> Fiji Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>120</sup> Fiji Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

that greater financial assistance is needed for children to attend school and to succeed at school. They suggested Save the Children or other organisations should providing financial assistance for stationery, textbooks, school fees and other essential items for school.<sup>121</sup>

The findings emphasize a multifaceted approach to child safety, involving the active participation of children, parents, teachers, community leaders, and organizations. Community-wide initiatives, clear communication, and targeted awareness programs can contribute to fostering a secure environment for children. Participants suggested that Save the Children along with other organisations can play a pivotal role in helping to protect children and make them feel safer in the community by organising and/or advocating for a range of child-rights activities and providing educational support to mainstream children's rights in schools as well as provide educational financial assistance.

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<sup>121</sup> Fiji Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

## 4. Solomon Islands

The CLR in Solomon Islands was conducted with children and young people at two schools in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita Province. Auki is one of the largest provincial towns in Solomon Islands. The names of these sites have been withheld to protect participants' privacy in accordance with the ethical agreement entered into for this research. One of the schools was close to the main town and the other school was further from the town centre.



*Cropped photographs of participants during FGDs in Solomon Islands<sup>122</sup>*

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<sup>122</sup> Photographs are cropped to protect the privacy of participants.

## 4.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Factors that make children feel safe and cared for in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online.

##### Home

- Parental presence, protection and guidance are crucial, and it is important that children follow parental advice.
- Access to nutritious food and healthcare.

##### School

- Positive relationships with teachers.
- Adherence to school rules and positive peer relationships.

##### Community

- Extended family relationships, community bonds, and local safety measures.
- Neighbours, friends and relationships with professionals in the community such as nurses and doctors.

##### Online

- Positive and supportive online interactions.
- Connecting with friends, sharing ideas, and encouraging others online.

##### Cross-Domain Factors

- Parents and teachers play a pivotal role in fostering safety and care for children.
- Parental nurturing includes love, care, shelter, sustenance, and protection.
- Teachers provide protective relationships beyond their academic roles.
- Social cohesion and adherence to rules contribute to children's safety.

#### Factors that make children feel unsafe/worried in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online.

##### Home

- Inadequate housing, food insecurity and poverty.
- Parental neglect, verbal abuse and corporal punishment.
- Fear of breaching rules and consequences, feeling unsafe due to strangers at home.

##### School

- Incomplete school buildings and lack of school security (enabling strangers and thieves to enter school premises) and inadequate school resources (poor sanitation facilities, lack of access to textbooks and uniforms).
- Peer bullying. Harsh punishment and bullying by teachers and inconsistency in enforcing school rules.
- Financial pressures on families (parents unable to pay school fees).

##### Community

- Children witnessing alcohol and drug-related street violence.
- Fear of harm from strangers, including fearing sexual abuse and kidnapping.

##### Online

- Exposure to inappropriate content including pornography.
- Fear of negative comments, swearing and bad statements online.
- Anxiety about interacting with strangers and being tricked online.

The findings illuminate the nuanced and interconnected factors contributing to the nature and extent of violence that children encounter in the home, school, community and online. Within the **home** a range of factors impinge on children's safety: inadequate housing, food insecurity and poverty intertwine with parental neglect, verbal abuse and corporal punishment, creating an environment where children feel insecure and at risk. At **school** risks to children's safety and well-being is compromised because of incomplete school buildings and inadequate security that allow for the entry of strangers, making children feel unsafe at school. Additionally, inadequate resources for children to thrive academically and have their basic hygiene needs met at school pose significant child protection risks. For example, inadequate sanitation facilities (especially for females) and lack of access to textbooks (due to financial pressures on schools and families) featured as common obstacles to children's educational outcomes, success, safety and sense of wellbeing at school.

In the **community** children frequently witness street alcohol and drug induced violence. This fosters an atmosphere of fear among children, especially regarding potential harm from strangers, including the fear of sexual abuse and kidnapping. Children also face significant child protection risks in the **online** realm and are regularly exposed to inappropriate content (including pornography); children also experience cyberbullying including having negative, disparaging and harmful comments said about them. These negative online experiences profoundly and adversely impact children's sense of safety and cause severe anxiety and emotional distress.

These findings demonstrate the many forms of violence children experience and the pervasive impacts of this on children's wellbeing in the home, school, community and online. The findings underscore the need to address parental neglect, corporal punishment and other forms of child mistreatment, inadequate resources, violence including sexual violence, online safety, and the impact of negative behaviours within communities to create safer and more supportive environments for children. When developing interventions aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of children in these domains it is necessary to develop wholistic approaches to address the multifaceted challenges that children encounter in their varied environments, including understanding the interconnectedness of each of these factors.

### **(i) What makes children feel safe and cared for in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online? (CLRQ1)**

All participants in Solomon Islands emphasised the pivotal role of parents and teachers in fostering a sense of safety and care. Across all age groups and genders participants explained the multifaceted nature of parental nurturing, encapsulating love, care, shelter, sustenance, and protection. A child participant expressed this when she said: 'Mother and father care for children, hem na bae umi feel safe'.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, children and young people expressed the importance of, and connection between, parental guidance and assistance from the broader community, specifically teachers, in their lives. A participant said children feel safe and cared for with the combined 'help of our schoolteacher and our parents'.<sup>124</sup>

Social cohesion and respecting and abiding by school, family and community rules also featured as key factors related to children's sense of security. For example, a child explained that feeling safe requires 'obedience and working together',<sup>125</sup> another said, 'I feel safe when I live in a happy

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<sup>123</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>124</sup> Combined activity 'What makes children living here feel safe and cared for?': CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group; CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males and same for FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>125</sup> CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

Same for CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males and same for FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

community',<sup>126</sup> and another said, 'we stay safe because our parents make many good rules for us'.<sup>127</sup> The importance of parents living with children and providing healthy food and structurally sound homes was also mentioned many times by participants across both sites.<sup>128</sup> This evidenced the importance of structure within the family setting.

Participants identified key factors that contribute to children's safety and feelings of being cared for across the two sites. They said 'love, care, respect', abiding by laws, having structurally sound houses and school buildings, there being an absence of bullying, being protected by teachers, having a 'peaceful environment' and 'praying together' contribute significantly to children's safety.<sup>129</sup>

The connection between having structurally sound houses and school buildings as a necessary basis for children's safety was mentioned frequently especially in relation to children having secure environments away from dangers posed by strangers: 'so no-one will creep them or spy on them'.<sup>130</sup> As this example demonstrates, and as is explained further below, participants highlighted the interplay of familial and societal contexts in shaping children's sense of safety.

Participant's conclusions about what makes children feel safe and cared for in the four domains of children's lives (the home, school, village/neighbourhood/street and online) are explored below.

### Home

In response to the question, 'What makes children feel safe and cared for in the home' across all age groups, genders and both sites the importance of parental presence and guidance was a dominant theme. Children expressed feeling safe when their parents were at home, a young participant said: 'Having your parents at home makes you feel safe'.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, children said following 'guidelines' from parents such as 'not to walk alone from home to school ... but walk together with other children' helps to keep them safe.<sup>132</sup> Many children and young people emphasised parents as the key people who 'keep children safe',<sup>133</sup> and others added the importance of parental protection from outside dangers such as 'drunkard people'.<sup>134</sup>

Older male participants also emphasised the significance of parental protection with many comments such as 'parents keep me safe'.<sup>135</sup> This was reflected by all participants who highlighted broader safety considerations saying that staying with parents at home, respecting and obeying parents and receiving advice from 'parents, chiefs and community leaders'<sup>136</sup> are essential for

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<sup>126</sup> CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group same for CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males same for CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>127</sup> CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

Same for CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males and same for FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>128</sup> CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group same for CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males same for CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>129</sup> CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

Same for CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males and same for FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group same for CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males same for CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>130</sup> CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>131</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>132</sup> CLR FGD 8, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>133</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males. See also SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group; SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>134</sup> CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group same for CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males same for CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>135</sup> CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>136</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

children's safety.<sup>137</sup> Older male participants, and several children in the mixed gender group, also specified that 'mothers taking care of children's needs'<sup>138</sup> was a key factor contributing to children's safety and experiences of being cared for in the home.<sup>139</sup> This suggests that the role mothers play in these communities is a significant factor in ensuring children's safety and care. Although, as explained above participants did not tend to shape care for children exclusively as the domain of mothers, as many participants mentioned the crucial role fathers play in the home environment in terms of protecting and caring for children. This demonstrates the importance of shared responsibilities in child rearing and child protection, which contradicts some of the traditional norms around fatherhood and motherhood.

Older female participants also noted that having access to health care makes children feel cared for in the home. A participant said, and others agreed, words to the effect of (this was translated from Pidgin by an AF): 'Medical care, that's what makes children feel safe, whenever they are sick'.<sup>140</sup>

### School

There was limited data about the question 'What makes children feel safe and cared for in school' across all FGDs due to time constraints. However, the main finding in all FGDs was that children said teachers are the key people who provide a protective environment for children and make them feel safe and cared for at school. When asked: 'Who takes care of children and makes them feel safe at school?' an older female participant said 'the protection of teachers',<sup>141</sup> by which she meant that children's safety at school is closely associated with educators. Many other participants both agreed with this statement and made similar statements themselves. This indicates that teachers offer a protective relationship to students and suggests they form positive teacher/student bonds that mean students can place their trust in them. Further, these comments demonstrate the role of teachers beyond academic guidance to a broader sense of protection provided by teachers.

Participants correlated children's safety and wellbeing with the enforcement of school rules and said teachers play a leading role in upholding these rules. A child reflected this when she said: 'We feel safe in school because of our teachers and because school rules guide students'.<sup>142</sup> This was reinforced by another participant who said, 'because of teacher and school rules we feel safe'.<sup>143</sup> The importance of having school rules and enforcing them was resonated strongly across both sites and across all age and gender groups.

Another factor contributing to children's sense of safety and care at school was the importance of social connections with peers. Several participants said having friends both within and outside school contributes to a sense of safety. One participant said: 'Having friends in and around the school or streets makes you feel safe' to which another participant said, 'but you need to have the right friends'.<sup>144</sup> The nuanced perspective that having the 'right friends' enhances safety emphasised importance to children of having positive peer relationships in the school setting.

Older male students also identified that teachers setting homework engages children and safeguards them because when they undertake their homework they are not then involved in unwanted

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<sup>137</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group; SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>138</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>139</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group (quote from this group); see also SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group where the role of mothers in the care of children was also mentioned.

<sup>140</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>141</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>142</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>143</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>144</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

activities in community.<sup>145</sup> This suggests that educational activities not only contribute to academic development but also serve as a protective measure against potential risks to children outside the school.

The overarching theme from the focus group discussions is the crucial role of teachers in creating a safe and caring school environment. This extends beyond academic guidance to encompass the social and emotional well-being of students. Additionally, adherence to school rules and the importance of peer relationships emerged as significant contributors to children's overall experience of feeling safe and cared for in school.

### Community / Street

There was limited data about the question 'What makes children feel safe and cared for in the community and on the street' across all FGDs. Participants identified community bonds, relationships and local safety measures as the key factors that make children feel secure and cared for in their communities.

In the younger cohort participants emphasised friendships, community respect, and not walking around the streets alone as key factors that make children feel safe and cared for in the community.<sup>146</sup>

All the older participants spoke about the importance of being known to people within the community and how neighbours make them feel safe. One participant said: 'Neighbours who know us and [they] will recognize us when anything bad happens to us'.<sup>147</sup> Participants also emphasised how neighbours often play a role in protecting children from being harmed and also provide advice to help children from getting into trouble.<sup>148</sup> Other participants said community protections such as this extends to relationships with 'relatives and friends', 'nurses at the hospital', and 'doctors'.<sup>149</sup>

Participants from site 2 did not express concern about their safety on the street and said there are usually 'many people around so no one can harm' children.<sup>150</sup> However, one participant did say that for children to be safe on the street that it is important to 'have a good relationship with non-school children'.<sup>151</sup> This theme arose later in the FGDs and refers to school aged children who are not attending school for a range of reasons but who are not homeless. These are children who, for example, are living with family and may not be supported to go to school. Sometimes these children can experience discrimination from other children, and other people, on the street, and at times may be called names or spoken to negatively. The young male in this FGD was suggesting by his comment that it is important for all children's safety and sense of wellbeing for children to speak respectfully to children who no longer attend school for any reason.

Community relationships and the protective role of neighbours emerged as key factors contributing to what makes children feel safe and cared for in these communities.

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<sup>145</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males. This was not said word for word by the participant instead this sentiment was provided in the notes were written by the adult support person during the FGD.

<sup>146</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>147</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>148</sup> CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males This was not said word for word by the participants instead this sentiment was provided in the notes were written by the adult support person during the FGD.

<sup>149</sup> Three other participants from the SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>150</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>151</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

## Online

There was limited data about the question ‘What makes children feel safe and cared for online’ across all FGDs as many groups missed this question due to time constraints. One FGD answered this question briefly.<sup>152</sup> Participants in this group emphasised that children feel safe and cared for online when these spaces are used for positive interactions and support. One participant reflected this when he said: ‘Connect with friends online when you feel alone’.<sup>153</sup> Two other participant said, ‘sharing good ideas with friends online’ and telling stories to encourage other friends online’ are ways children use online environments in ways that make them feel safe and cared for.<sup>154</sup>

These comments highlight the importance of positive interactions and support online, expressed through activities like connecting with friends when feeling alone, sharing good ideas, and telling stories to encourage others.

## (ii) What makes children feel unsafe/worried in the home, school, village/neighbourhood, street and online? (CLRQ2)

All participants in the CLR were asked to respond to the general question: ‘What makes children living here feel unsafe or makes them feel worried?’ by either writing down their response on post-it notes (the older participants) or making something out of plasticine (the younger participants). The photos below of the models made by participants in both the 8–11-year-old mixed gender FGDs depict the broad range of factors that make children feel unsafe or worried. Children in this group made the following models: a drunk man, a beer bottle, someone with a knife, strangers, people with stones, people fighting in the street, people smoking marijuana, drunkards, someone with sharp objects that might cut them, and thieves.<sup>155</sup>

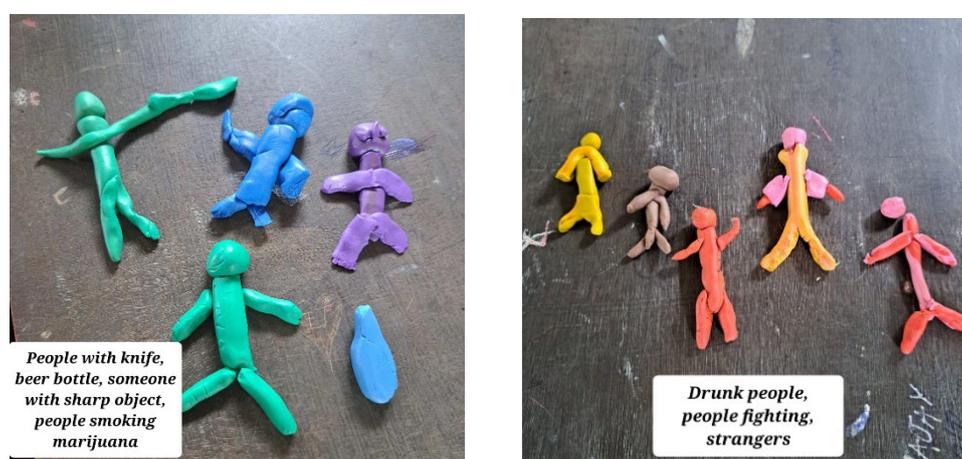


Figure 10: ‘What makes children living here feel unsafe, or makes them feel worried?’<sup>156</sup>

Adding to, and reinforcing many of these concerns, children in the other 8–11-year-old FGD in Site 2 also expressed a range of factors that make children feel unsafe or worried. Children in this group also made plasticine models to describe children’s concerns relating to parents and family, school, the community and online. This included models that depicted parents fighting at home, incomplete

<sup>152</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

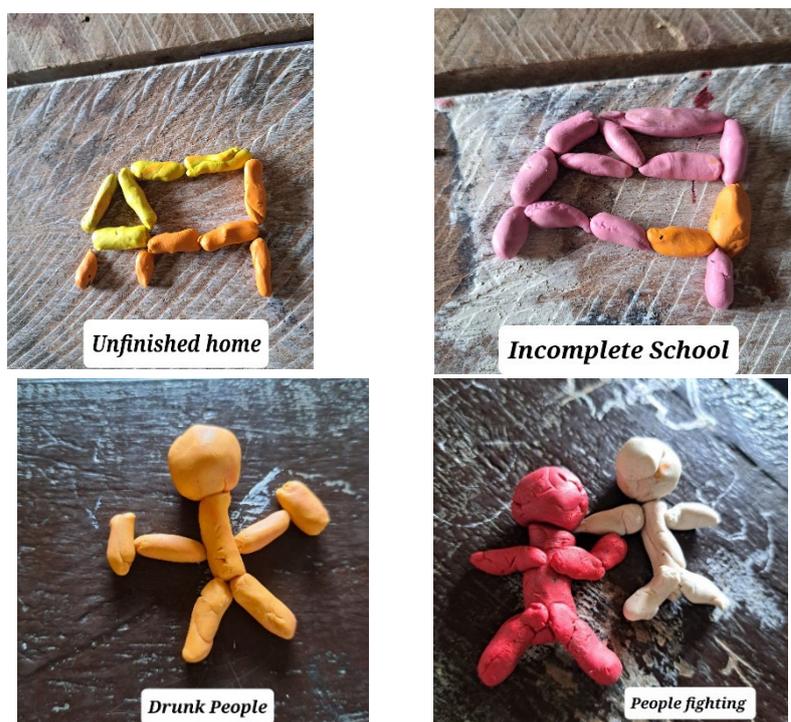
<sup>153</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>154</sup> Various participants from SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>155</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>156</sup> CLR FGD 7, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

homes and classrooms, drunk people on the street and people fighting in the street and talking with strangers online. Some of these models are shown below:



Figures 11: 'What makes children living here feel unsafe, or makes them feel worried?'<sup>157</sup>

Children in this group also raised concerns in the home about parental neglect, and parents swearing at children make them feel unsafe. Unfinished or broken houses and school buildings also made children feel scared or worried about their safety.

Participants expressed a range of concerns that make children and young people feel unsafe or worried span many aspects of their lives. Across both sites and all age groups and genders children expressed fears related to external factors such as strangers who make children feel unsafe and worried. This includes 'drunkards' and 'mentally sick people' and other people on the street who make them feel unsafe, including public fighting on the streets.<sup>158</sup> Importantly, older female participants also indicated knowledge and concern about sexual assault occurring in their community by saying there are unsafe areas 'that we know that rape happened there'.<sup>159</sup>

Many participants spoke about child abuse, harsh words, and physical punishment by parents and teachers. A pervasive theme across all discussions was the impact of negative behaviours within the community, including abuse, violence, and substance abuse. Numerous participants spoke about the negative implications of child labour and said they do not like it when adults are 'abusing children to do work, child labour'.<sup>160</sup>

Participants also said they feel unsafe online when strangers talk to them.

<sup>157</sup> CLR FGD 7, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>158</sup> FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>159</sup> FGD 9, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>160</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

Participant's conclusions about what makes children feel unsafe or worried about in the four domains of children's lives (the home, school, village/neighbourhood/street and online) are explored further below.

### Home

Participants spoke about the many challenges children face within their homes, encompassing issues to do with neglect, mistreatment, verbal and physical abuse, and domestic violence.

Older female participant responses from Site 2 about what makes children feel unsafe at home are notable. They list numerous factors that summarise the sentiments expressed by participants across the FGD. They said children feel unsafe and worried in the following circumstances:

- 'When there is no proper shelter'.
- 'No proper food'.
- 'I feel worried when I disobeyed my parents'.
- 'I feel worried when parents give harsh punishment to children;' 'I feel unsafe when my parents smack me with a stick'.
- 'Because my parent leave me'.
- 'I feel unsafe because of drunk men coming to my home'.
- 'I feel worried because I am not rich'.

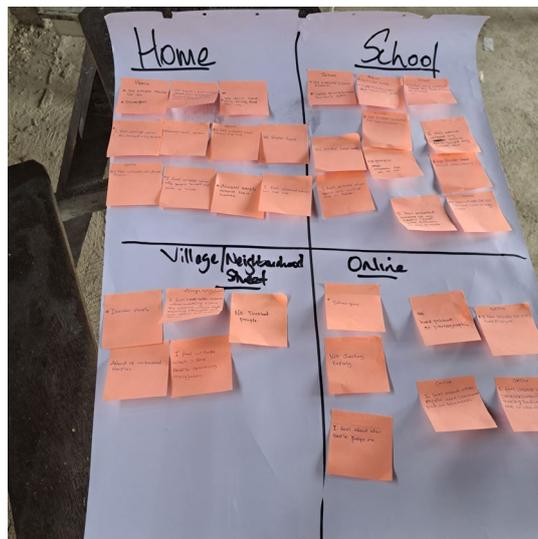


Figure 12: What makes children feel unsafe/worried in the home.<sup>161</sup>

These concerns include worries about inadequate housing, food insecurity, poverty, neglect, fear about complying with rules and the consequences of breaching these rules and threats from strangers coming to the home (either invited or uninvited).

Participants across the FGDs spoke about the prevalence of child abuse and violence in the home. Older female participants said children are 'hurt' and 'bullied' in the home and often made to do 'child labour'<sup>162</sup> Many participants spoke about the mistreatment of children in the home including 'harsh talking', 'threats', 'swearing' and when 'parents sometimes treat their children badly'.<sup>163</sup> Most participants also spoke about the high rates of corporal punishment in the home and how this makes children feel unsafe 'when parents smack with a stick'.<sup>164</sup> Being left alone in the home, feeling unsafe

<sup>161</sup> CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females. These points were noted by participants individually on the post-it notes pictured in this image.

<sup>162</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>163</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this).

<sup>164</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

'because of drunk men coming to the home',<sup>165</sup> people stealing from people's homes in the community, and when 'houses are run down or incomplete'<sup>166</sup> also featured as a common reasons why children feel unsafe or worried in the home.<sup>167</sup>

### School

A range of factors that contribute to children and young people feeling unsafe and worried at school were summarised by female participants in Site 2. They said they feel unsafe and worried when there are:

- 'No proper classrooms'.
- 'No proper sanitation or toilets'.
- 'Hard punishment given by teachers'.
- 'No proper uniform'.
- 'No proper textbook'; 'No proper school stationary'.
- 'I feel worried because my parents do not pay my school fees'.
- 'I feel unsafe when someone bullies me at school'.
- 'I feel unsafe because my parents or some problems to my friends'.
- 'I feel unsafe when no teacher comes to my class'.<sup>168</sup>

These statements demonstrate participants perceptions about inadequate family and educational resources and facilities, inappropriate conduct by teachers and peer bullying. Additionally female participants in the younger cohort expressed concerns about 'strangers and thieves' coming into their school (which is possible because of incomplete buildings that enable members of the public to access school buildings making children feel insecure and vulnerable).<sup>169</sup> Male participants in the younger cohort highlighted concerns about inconsistent enforcement of school rules, and how conflict, fighting and swearing makes children feel unsafe at school.<sup>170</sup>

Participants in the older cohorts also expressed very similar worries about fighting and 'negative talk and gossip' at school. They also said children are concerned about inadequate school buildings, harsh teacher punishments, lack of proper resources and feeling unsafe due to bullying by peers. Importantly, older female participants said the lack of adequate sanitation and toilet facilities is a key barrier to young women's ability feel safe at school. Lack of access to secure, lockable and structurally safe toilet facilities for females at school is essential to ensure they can attend during menstruation. Participants said, 'teachers shout and swear at students [and this] makes them feel unsafe'.<sup>171</sup> Punitive punishment by teachers was also noted as a key reason why children feel unsafe and worried at school. Several participants provided examples of this when they said, 'getting punished by teachers without good reasons' and 'teachers give notes without further explanation'<sup>172</sup> makes children feel unsafe and worried.

These findings signal the many factors that contribute to children's feelings of being unsafe and worried at school. These concerns include unsafe school buildings and environments, harmful teacher behaviours, resource deficiencies, interpersonal conflicts with peers and financial pressures within families.

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<sup>165</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>166</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>167</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>168</sup> CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>169</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this).

<sup>170</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys' section of this).

<sup>171</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>172</sup> This meant teachers giving students notes to take to their parents noting bad behaviour at school.

## Community

There is very little data due to time constraints during the FGDs in relation to the question, 'what makes children feel unsafe or worried in the village, community or street? However, some important insights were gathered. The main, and very significant finding, is that all participants said children feel unsafe when they see 'people drinking on the street' and when they witness 'street fighting'.<sup>173</sup> Participants explained this is commonplace and sometimes leads to 'people killing each other'.<sup>174</sup> Alcohol fuelled violence in the community, says participants, has a profoundly negative impact on children because this makes children 'fear strangers who may harm them' and it also leads children to 'think that people can kill them'.<sup>175</sup>

Female participants in Site 2 summarised a body of reasons that make children feel unsafe and worried in the community. One participant said children 'feel unsafe when walking alone on the street and meeting strangers on the street and about sexual abuse'.<sup>176</sup> Other participants from the same group expressed children are 'afraid of untrusted people in the community and on the street' and feel 'unsafe because a lot of people are taking marijuana' and there are many 'drunkard people'.<sup>177</sup>

The interplay between substance abuse and serious community conflict and concerns about strangers are key factors that contribute to children's feelings of a lack of safety in their communities and on the streets.

## Online

When asked the question, 'what makes children feel unsafe or worried online,' participants across the FGDs said concerns related to sharing inappropriate content, interacting with strangers, encountering fake accounts and negative experiences when playing online games.

Younger participants expressed worries about online interactions such as people swearing online, and the emotional impact of people making fun of photos of children and taking and distributing photos of children without children's consent.<sup>178</sup> These participants also highlighted the fear of encountering bad photos and inappropriate content including pornography, indicating children did not want to see 'bad photos'.<sup>179</sup>

Older participants reflected the same online safety concerns expressing anxiety about interacting with 'strangers', encountering 'bad pictures', and facing judgment and negative comments online.<sup>180</sup> Several female participants said children 'feel bad [about negative] comments on Facebook' and children 'feel unsafe when someone is swearing and making bad statements about them'.<sup>181</sup> Participants said 'not all [online] friends are good friends' indicating the importance of children exercising caution when engaging with people online.<sup>182</sup>

Participants also said children are worried about being tricked by fake accounts, about having their images uploaded.

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<sup>173</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this).

<sup>174</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys' section of this).

<sup>175</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females, the fear of being killed by people in the community who engage in street fighting such as this was pronounced in the older female cohort.

<sup>176</sup> CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>177</sup> CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>178</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>179</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>180</sup> CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>181</sup> CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>182</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

### **(iii) Do children worry about other things? (CLRQ3)**

Participants were asked the question, 'do children worry about other things?' and aside from the matters already covered above they raised additional concerns. Children across age groups shared a range of additional common worries, but the nature of these concerns appeared to evolve with age.

In this younger group, fears and concerns appeared to be more immediate. Younger female participants said children were worried about being kidnapped, with one saying, 'someone might steal you'.<sup>183</sup> Many younger participants said children worry about the mortality of their parents, and the consequences for children if their parents did die, this was a concern shared by the older participants too.

The older participants raised a body of concerns related to societal expectations, financial pressures (school fees), and concerns about their future. The fear of being unable to afford necessities, like food and clothing, books, pencils, is a recurring theme among both genders and across all groups. The visibility and reality of socio-economic inequality was raised as a key issue. A participant emphasised these disparities when she said: 'If she sees rich people, if she or he was one of those rich, she wants to be like them'.<sup>184</sup>

Additionally, the fear of experiencing sex-based discrimination was raised by one participant as a key concern. This participant highlighted the illegality of same-sex relationships, when he said: 'It's so worrying when you walk around with a guy because same sex is not allowed'.<sup>185</sup>

This information paints a fuller picture of children's worries, demonstrating a progression of concerns as they age. Younger participants' additional concerns focused on immediate threats like strangers, older children grapple with complex issues such as financial insecurity, societal norms, and future uncertainties.

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<sup>183</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this).

<sup>184</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>185</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

## 4.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues? (RQ2)

### KEY FINDINGS

If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online would they tell someone? If so, who would they tell (and not tell) and how would they be helped?

#### Would children disclose problems?

- Participants unanimously agreed that children would likely disclose a problem. Qualifications were expressed by some male participants, citing potential fear or concerns about the reactions of people children would disclose to.

#### Who would children seek help from and how would they be helped?

- Parents (mothers and fathers), teachers, and peers.
- Younger female participants said children would also disclose to police, community leaders, nurses, and classmates. Older participants said children would disclose to community leaders, the Chief, social welfare, and Save the Children.

#### Children would not seek help from:

- People may be unkind.
- Female participants expressed reservations about going to the police.

#### Adults reactions to disclosures from children

- Younger participants expected that adults, including parents and family members, would believe and support children if they disclosed experiences of violence.
- Older participants were less confident children would be believed and anticipated varied reactions from parents and other adults ranging from taking legal action and seeking compensation to advising children to be strong.

These findings present a complex picture of the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system, particularly in the context of children's willingness to disclose problems and concerns about how adults would react if children did disclose. While participants unanimously agreed that children would likely disclose child protection concerns, some male participants expressed concerns about potential fear or negative reactions from those to whom children might disclose. Identified strengths in the child protection system include the recognition that children would likely seek help from key figures such as parents, teachers and peers. However, variations emerged among younger and older participants, with younger participants expressing greater confidence that adults, including parents and family members, would believe and support children if they disclosed child protection concerns. In contrast, older participants were less certain about whether children would be believed and if children were believed anticipated varied adult reactions, ranging from legal action to advising children to be strong. The reservations expressed by some female participants about going to the police if children had a problem or had experienced violence or harm highlight a notable gap in the perceived effectiveness and support provided by the police in the context of the formal child protection system. This analysis underscores the need for targeted efforts to address children's concerns about disclosure, build trust and enhance the capacity of both formal and informal systems to effectively prevent and respond to key protection issues, ensuring a supportive environment for children to disclose problems and have these concerns appropriately addressed across various contexts.

**(i) If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online, do you think they would tell someone? (CLRQ4)**

When participants were asked if they thought children would tell someone if they had a problem at home, in the village or neighbourhood, at school or online **all participants across all FGDs said yes**. However, in one FGD (SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group) the male participants in this group said yes they thought children would most likely tell someone, yet they expressed some qualifications about whether children would disclose if, for example, ‘they are scared to tell anyone’ or if the person who they told might be ‘a friend’ of the person who caused the problem for the child.<sup>186</sup> This indicates reservations about who a child would be likely to tell under the given circumstances, not that children would not tell. This is an important finding of this study indicating that children are willing to share concerns with people around them in contexts where their concerns are taken seriously and when they have trusted members of the community to talk with.

Younger female participants said children may approach the police if they had a problem in the community: ‘If they are on the street, they will tell the police, and the police will arrest them’.<sup>187</sup> The males in the same group suggested children would approach teachers for assistance: ‘Yes, tell the teacher so she can help’.<sup>188</sup>

Older male participants also said children would approach police to report crimes against children and seek legal redress. One participant said it would ‘depend on the crime but [children] must tell the police for law to act’.<sup>189</sup> They emphasised the importance of reporting crimes against children to the police to stop further abuse: ‘Need to tell who did the sexual abuse if not, it will happen again’.<sup>190</sup>

Older female participants cited the need to share problems to receive ‘help’, ‘advice’, ‘encouragement’ and ‘comfort’.<sup>191</sup> A participant in this group said, ‘we share our problems to get help’ and another participant described the positive impact of telling someone, children ‘tell someone to get the worry out, to avoid stress’.<sup>192</sup> These participants also indicated children may share problems to preventing subsequent anger and consequences: ‘When everyone else discovered the problem later on they will get angry at you and beat you’.<sup>193</sup>

In general children across all age and gender groups expressed confidence that if children tell someone they have a problem that this will be taken seriously.<sup>194</sup> These findings underscore children’s willingness to communicate their problems, seeking assistance and emotional support.

**(ii) If children did tell someone, who could they go for help? (CLRQ5); How would children be helped by the people they told? (CLRQ6); and is there anyone children would not go for help? (CLRQ7)**

**Who would children go to for help?**

Across the age cohorts, genders and sites participants said children are likely to primarily seek help from parents (both mothers and fathers) and teachers. They would also turn to peers and arrange of professionals, community leaders and community organisation.

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<sup>186</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys’ section of this group).

<sup>187</sup> Female participant, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>188</sup> Male participant, SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>189</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>190</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>191</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>192</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>193</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>194</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys’ section of this group).

Along with parents and other family members ('grandfathers, uncles, aunts and sisters') younger female participants identified a diverse array of people children would go to for help including police, community leaders, teachers, pastors, nurses, neighbours, elders and classmates;<sup>195</sup> and males in the same cohort emphasised the role of parents, teachers, and organisations (police, parents, teachers, Care Centres).<sup>196</sup> A participant said young people would be likely to seek help online from family members: 'Tell Aunty who is online with them'.<sup>197</sup> Older participants mentioned these people as well adding children could go to the Chief, the social welfare department and Save the Children.<sup>198</sup>

#### How would children be helped by the people they told?

Participants emphasised their belief that the people or organisations children talk about their problems would provide help, advice, counselling and solutions to their problems. They said, 'they will help us,' 'they can solve the problems'.<sup>199</sup>

#### Who would children not go to for help?

Participants in two FGDs identified several people children may not go to for help if they had a problem.<sup>200</sup> These included any 'places where people will not be kind' to children, although these places were not articulated, and rather, this sentiment was shared as a broad criteria for approaching anyone about a problem, that the person a child goes to must already have built some trust and have a positive relationship with children in order for them to go to them with a problem.

In both FGD where this question was asked directly several female participants said children would not go to the police if they had a problem because they may be 'worried that they may come to parents to discuss about the issue' or that children may be 'scared or ashamed to go and report to the police'.<sup>201</sup> This was confirmed by several other female participants in the younger cohort who said children wouldn't go to the police if they had a problem, this group also added that children wouldn't go to a priest if they had a problem.<sup>202</sup> This contradicts some of the data noted above about children's confidence in going to the police if they had a problem and it is notable that these sentiments were expressed by female participants across two age cohorts. However, this finding only arose in two FGDs thus, further exploration of whether female children and young people are less likely to take problems to police would need to be undertaken.

### **(iii) If a child shares an experience of violence, how are adults likely to react? (CLRQ8)**

Participants presented a range of views about how adults are likely to react if children disclose experiences of violence.

All younger participant across both sites unanimously agreed that adults, including parents, aunts, uncles, and siblings would believe and support children if they disclosed an experience of violence, saying they 'will believe' children,<sup>203</sup> 'they will take care of the children' 'protect the children' and 'provide advice to children'.<sup>204</sup> They said children's parents and family members, especially fathers

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<sup>195</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this group).

<sup>196</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys' section of this group).

<sup>197</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>198</sup> CLR FGD 11, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males and SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>199</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>200</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females and CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group. This question was not asked in the other FGDs due to time constraints.

<sup>201</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>202</sup> CLR FGD 10, SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>203</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this group) and SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys' section of this group) and SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>204</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (boys' section of this group).

and brothers, would defend children who had been harmed, 'parents would go and talk to those who make them worry or afraid'.<sup>205</sup> However, these younger participants questioned the trustworthiness of the police saying that the police 'No trust children'.<sup>206</sup>

Older participants presented a more complex picture about how adults are likely to react if children share experiences of violence. They said adults are very likely to react by seeking verification of children's experiences by making sure they 'get good information from the children' before doing anything.<sup>207</sup> Several female participants said that children would not be believed and that a 'big brother would say that ... it's your fault, you looked for it'.<sup>208</sup> Many participants mentioned that if children shared experience of violence, including sexual assault, that adults will report this to police to have the 'perpetrator jailed' and 'relatives will ask for compensation'.<sup>209</sup> An older male participant described the notion of compensation as follows: 'If an adult touches children's private parts, relatives of the child will looking for the adult and ask for compensation for violating the child'.<sup>210</sup> Other participants said adults would react by telling children to 'be strong' and not take any action.<sup>211</sup> This was said in the context of questioning whether adults would believe children who reported violence and suggests that children encounter significant barriers when reporting experiences of violence including not being believed, adults not taking the harm caused seriously and not taking action to address such harm and prevent future harm.

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<sup>205</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>206</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>207</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>208</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>209</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>210</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>211</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

### 4.3 Recommendations for how to better protect and help children feel safer in the community. (RQ3)

#### Key Findings

##### What do children like best about being a child in this community?

- Familial and community bonds and participation in recreational activities like storytelling sports (swimming, fishing, soccer, and volleyball).

##### Children can be better protected and feel safer through:

- Improving community safety, including community collaboration, enforcing bylaws, and police playing a more active role.
- Strengthening home security especially by building robust residences and fixing broken homes.
- Addressing substance abuse and preventing sexual violence through unified efforts by parents, elders, and community leaders.

##### Children can contribute to improved child protection measures by:

- Avoiding walking alone, following rules, participating in community work and church activities and abstaining from using alcohol and drugs.
- Listening to parents, talking with them about problems and following community, church, and home rules.

##### Parents, teachers, and community leaders can contribute to improved child protection measures by:

- Ending corporal punishment at home and in schools.
- Addressing domestic violence by raising awareness about the correlation between alcohol abuse and family violence.
- Providing safe play/recreation areas and facilities for children.
- Greater focus on community education about customs and religious beliefs to promote respect and collaboration.

##### Role of Save the Children:

- To provide child rights education awareness raising activities in the community, including with children so they know their rights.
- SC should also provide information about sexual reproductive health and education specifically to address violence against children.

The research results provide valuable suggestions for improving children's protection and safety. What children value most about being part of this community are familial and community bonds, as well as engaging in play and recreational activities such as storytelling and sports.

Recommendations to improve formal child protection systems involve enhancing community safety collaboratively, enforcing bylaws and increased police involvement in monitoring and enforcing children's safety. Strengthening home security, addressing substance abuse, and preventing sexual violence are also emphasised as critical measures requiring unified efforts from parents, elders, and community leaders. Children are seen as contributors to their own protection by actively participating in community work and church activities, adhering to rules and abstaining from alcohol and drugs. The involvement of parents, teachers, and community leaders is vital to improving children's safety and protection especially in relation to ending corporal punishment, addressing domestic violence, providing safe play areas and promoting community education about customs and religious beliefs. The recommendations highlight Save the Children's key role in providing child

rights education to raise awareness about the importance of children's rights and to contribute to better implementation of children's rights. It was also recommended that Save the Children provide education to the community about sexual reproductive health as well as violence against children. These recommendations suggest a range of ways to create a safer environment for children in the community.

### **(i) What do you think children like best about being a child in your village/community? (CLRQ9)**

Participants across all FGD said they enjoy many aspects of their family and community life, particularly familial bonds, communal activities. Younger participants also said they think children enjoy the freedom and fun associated with being a child in the community.

Younger children expressed joy associated with children helping their parents and fostering a sense of togetherness and collaboration: 'to help parents,' 'to love each other'<sup>212</sup> and there was an appreciation of feeling 'free, happy and good'.<sup>213</sup> They also listed a range of activities children enjoy such as 'swimming in the river', 'telling stories with friends', 'fishing', 'playing soccer and volleyball'.<sup>214</sup> Many comments from this group centred on the way children feel in their community in relation to how they are treated by adults and the special position children hold in society: 'I feel good when my parents are praising me [and] make my birthday cake'.<sup>215</sup> The importance of friends was prominent in all FGD: 'Telling jokes with friends makes a lot of fun in the village'.<sup>216</sup>

Older participants spoke about many aspects of life that children value in their communities. Females emphasised the happiness derived from familial bonds and the respect accorded to them: 'Being happy and enjoy our lives,' and being 'respected by others' because they are seen as children.<sup>217</sup> Males highlighted recreational activities like sports, storytelling as notable aspects of their enjoyable childhood.<sup>218</sup> The differences between females' and males' responses reinforces the gendered nature of childhood and how childhood experiences are informed by the socio-cultural context in which children grow.

Children, particularly in the older age groups, appreciated times in their community where children have the freedom to 'do whatever they want', including at 'church activities'.<sup>219</sup> Participants noted children like it best in their community where there is in the absence of strict discipline, when there are respectful interactions with adults that are devoid of corporal punishment and negative language: 'when adults don't say bad words or swear' at children.<sup>220</sup> This is an important finding and emphasises the significance of community education about children's rights, including children's right to play and to live free from harsh and degrading punishment.

### **(ii) What can be done to better protect and help children feel safer in your community? (CLRQ10)**

Participants across the FGDs articulated many ways to better protect and help children feel safer in their communities including improving community safety, strengthening home security and

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<sup>212</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this group) (there were no notes from the male's section of this FGD about this question).

<sup>213</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>214</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>215</sup> SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed group.

<sup>216</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>217</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>218</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>219</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>220</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

addressing substance abuse and sexual violence. They highlight the crucial roles of parents, community leaders, schools and authorities in creating secure environments for children. Their ideas to improve protections for children are below.

### Improving Community Safety

Participants suggested greater focus on community collaboration and efforts to improve safety at the community level though 'bylaws'<sup>221</sup> including police playing a greater role in 'looking after children' and that the 'police should look after the streets'.<sup>222</sup> A recurrent fear was expressed about the dangers presented by strangers and many participants said there was an urgent need to 'stop drunkard people from coming into the community'.<sup>223</sup> The importance of community watchfulness was reinforced by older male participants who advocated for police patrols to provide greater security for children, they said, 'police must patrol in all communities'.<sup>224</sup>

### Strengthening Home Security

Another theme around strengthening home security emerged in connection to improving community safety. Older female participants emphasised the importance of feeling secure within their homes and said this is impossible if homes are damaged, or not built adequately. Participants recommended constructing robust residences, and fixing broken homes, as a necessary measure to keep children safe. Participants said there is a need to 'build good house for children' to 'keep the children safe at home'.<sup>225</sup>

### Address Substance Abuse and Sexual Violence

Participants also highlighted key issues such as address substance abuse (in the community and in the home) and preventing sexual violence against children. Older female participants expressed the need for drug addiction and sexual violence to be addressed and said, 'stop those taking drugs like marijuana' and 'stop sexual violence of children—by strangers, big men, family members and adults'.<sup>226</sup> To do these participants emphasised the need for unified efforts by parents, elders, and community leaders to 'work together in the community'.<sup>227</sup>

Children and young people provided a diverse range of measures and strategies to improve safety in the community and in the home. Participants did not make any recommendations about better protecting children at school, although it is likely that this was only because of time constraints and had there been more time participants may have suggested ways school environments could be enhanced as well.

### What can children do to better protect and help children feel safer in the community?

Participants suggested a range of measures children can take to feel safer and be better protected in the community.

Younger female participants suggested children should avoid walking alone on the street, that they should listen to their parents and teachers, and talk about their problems with friends.<sup>228</sup> Males in the same age range highlighted the importance of 'following the rules' in the community, church, or home.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>222</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this group).

<sup>223</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>224</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>225</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>226</sup> CLR FGD 12, SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>227</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>228</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

<sup>229</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group.

Older female participants suggested children would feel safer if they dressed in certain clothes by 'wearing long skirts' and if they behaved in certain ways, by 'staying quiet'.<sup>230</sup> These were the only two responses from this FGD about this question and are a cause for concern given this suggests that young females themselves believe that clothing and a child's behaviour, especially their silence, are means by which to keep themselves safe.

Young males emphasised that children's active participation in community work and church activities are ways children can be safer in the community because these endeavours will 'protect them from problems'.<sup>231</sup> Participants were noting here that such activities have the potential to redirect children and young people into productive uses of their time.

Many participants said abstaining from alcohol and drugs and staying at home instead of sleeping over at other people's houses are other ways children can feel safer in the community. Participants said children should: 'Stay quiet at home,' 'not stay overnight with friends,' 'children should not drink alcohol or take drugs like marijuana, cigarette,' and 'learn not to take drugs'.<sup>232</sup> These comments suggest participants have imbued public health messaging about the dangers of substance abuse and stranger danger. These comments also however, present some concerns in relation to children needing to be passive and unassertive, to be 'seen and not heard'. These notions pervade societal constructions of childhood in many contexts and conflict with children's rights to express their views and have these views taken into consideration.

#### What can parents, teachers and community leaders do help children feel safer in the community?

All participants noted that corporal punishment, especially in the home as well as harsh punishment at school, are key obstacles to children's and young people's feeling of safety in the community and suggested that this be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Participants correlated alcohol over-consumption with family violence and said community leaders should invest in creating greater social awareness about the detrimental impacts of alcohol abuse. It was suggested that this would reduce domestic violence and reduce children's exposure to the harmful effects of this.<sup>233</sup>

Many children and young people spoke about the lack of safe, dedicated areas for children to play such as playgrounds and pools.<sup>234</sup> Participants said the provision of these facilities would greatly contribute to children being and feeling safer and happier in the community.

Importantly, the overwhelming body of data in the CLR suggests that greater awareness in the community about children's rights, including the right to live free from all forms of violence, including sexual violence, is a pressing concern.

#### What can organisations like Save the Children do?

The main message participants conveyed in response to this question was the important role Save the Children plays raising child rights awareness in the community. Participants viewed SC as a key organisation whose role it is to 'keep children safe'.<sup>235</sup> This question was not addressed fully in most FGD due to time, however, where it was addressed participants said SC have a role in supporting

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<sup>230</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>231</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>232</sup> SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>233</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>234</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group, SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males; SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females; SI Site 2, 8-11 years old, mixed gender group; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, males; SI Site 2, 12-16 years old, females.

<sup>235</sup> SI Site 1, 8-11 years old, mixed group (girls' section of this group).

children to know their rights by undertaking awareness raising activities.<sup>236</sup> Children and young people suggested that SC and other organisations ‘come around in schools to give advice, awareness about culture, children’s rights and information about sexual reproductive health and violence against children’.<sup>237</sup>

## 5. Adolescent Facilitators’ Reflections about Leading the Field Research

Adolescent facilitators shared their reflections about undertaking the CLR in two forums: in debriefing sessions after each FGD and in an AF Analysis Workshop conducted in each country. Their collective experiences underscored the transformative impact of being an AF in this research including how this role empowered them by increasing their knowledge about child protection and children’s rights, developing their leadership skills, instilling confidence, amplifying their voices and positioning them as agents of positive change in their communities. All AFs said they enjoyed undertaking the role, despite all expressing their feelings of nervousness about it. They said they were nervous because they had not undertaken such a role in their communities before and they were concerned about knowing what to do as well as meeting their own and others’ hopes and expectations (including adult researchers, SC staff, caregivers and other community members). All AFs said the AF training Workshop conducted in each country equipped them with the necessary skills to undertake the CLR, however, that having adult support people on hand during the FGDs was vital and needed, adding an additional layer of support that gave the AFs significantly greater confidence when undertaking their roles.

The AFs’ reflections converged on four key themes, encompassing insights and learning gained from leading the CLR, what aspects of being an AF they enjoyed the most, the challenges they encountered and their collective hopes for the research outcomes, each of which is explored below.

### Insights and Learning

The AFs said they gained meaningful and profound insights into children’s rights and child protection through the CLR. They highlighted how the CLR expanded their understandings about importance of children’s rights and protecting children from harm when they said:

‘I learned about child rights’. (AF Solomon Islands)

‘I learned how important it is to keep children safe and cared for in our community’. (AF Fiji)

‘I learned that children’s rights are very important’. (AF Fiji)

Adolescent facilitators also identified gaps in understanding about child protection and children’s rights and said there is a need for greater investment in raising awareness including with children themselves. For example, an AF in Fiji said, ‘I learned about child rights and how many children weren’t aware about it,’ and an AF in Solomon Islands said doing the CLR helped him to ‘understand child protection issues that children are facing’.

Adolescent facilitators also expressed insights into the value and importance of undertaking CLR recognising this mode of research as an important way to generate ideas about how to better protect children from harm from the ground up. In support of their support for this CLR they shared that children’s views are not often sought and said children have valuable insights to share and that these views can help shape solutions to problems, including addressing child protection concerns. The

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<sup>236</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, males.

<sup>237</sup> SI Site 1, 12-16 years old, females.

value of young people leading research with children was explained by one AF who said, 'I think children need to be protected and I like child-led research. It gives some more ideas about how children can be safe' (AF Fiji). These positive attitudes reflect the AFs collective assessment that CLR is a constructive and important means to understand children's perspectives.

These shared learnings reflect the impact the CLR had on enhancing AFs awareness of, and knowledge about, child protection. Importantly, these reflections emphasise the need to increase awareness about children's rights throughout all levels in society and across all age groups. These findings also demonstrate the value of CLR as a useful medium for gathering children's views about key matters.

### **What Adolescent Facilitators Like Best**

All AFs said they enjoyed undertaking the CLR emphasising two factors: the 'fun' they had in their roles researching and talking with children; and how being an AF increased their self-confidence and knowledge. In relation to the first factor—that being a researcher was fun— AFs said they enjoyed 'being happy and laughing with the children' (AF Fiji) and explained their role as AFs as privileged positions where they were able to 'spend time with little kids and listen to their opinions' (AF Fiji). One female AF from Solomon Islands said, 'I loved talking to the children and now I have the skills and knowledge to talk with children'.

All AFs reflected that one of the best things about being an AF was the increased confidence it afforded them. The positive impact on their self-confidence because of being an AF was particularly pronounced in Solomon Islands. Two AFs from Solomon Islands reflected this when they said that because of their roles as AFs in the CLR:

'I feel brave to talk' (AF Solomon Islands, male).

'It gives me confidence to speak' (AF Solomon Islands, female).

Adolescent facilitators in Solomon Islands also said that being involved in the CLR was the first time they had had the opportunity to talk to adults when undertaking a leadership role via the Information Sessions with caregivers. They said, 'we were nervous, they are adults, but they really cooperated with us' and it 'built our confidence' (AFs Solomon Islands).

### **Difficulties and Challenges**

Despite the AFs saying they enjoyed participating in the research all noted a range of difficulties and challenges associated with the role. These centred on AFs feeling concerned about their ability to be effective researchers and the difficulties they encountered communicating with child participants. Adolescent facilitators explained how they dealt with feelings of anxiety or worry about taking on the role and articulated how they managed communication difficulties with participants by rapidly developing a new range of communication skills tailored for each age group, especially the younger children.

Several AFs said they initially felt uncomfortable talking with caregivers and participants in the Information Sessions and first FGDs, but they persisted and tried very hard to address this by using a range of strategies. For example, one AF expressed how she overcame feelings of anxiety through persistence, she said, 'I felt shy to present to the children, but I tried my best' (AF Fiji). All AFs said this was the first time they had communicated with children in this way, having never led research before, consequently, they said they had to adapt and develop new ways of communicating with

children because ‘communication was very difficult’ (AF Fiji). Adolescent facilitators explained how they utilised new approaches to communicating with participants in the CLR as follows:

‘I needed to change the way I talked to children because I found communication so difficult’ (AF Fiji)

‘It was difficult to communicate with certain children because they were shy. I tried to be more open and understanding’ (AF Fiji)

One of the communication difficulties AFs in both Fiji and Solomon Islands mentioned was the fact that they had to translate the research questions from English into the local language, and then participant responses from the local language into English, during the FGDs, and this was time consuming. On reflection the research questions and guides should be translated for the AFs although it was agreed that this was unnecessary for this project, yet it ended that this would have in fact been helpful.

A further communication difficulty was expressed by an AF in Solomon Islands when he said: ‘I found it difficult because sometimes the children were trying to talk about their personal experiences’. This reinforces one of the limitations of this research in terms of the methodology chosen and perhaps that this approach was too difficult for participants to understand at times, especially for a single FGD engagement per individual. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the AFs did not lose sight of the methodological approach adopted and tried to redirect participants to speak generally, not personally, about child protection matters throughout the research, thereby adhering to the safety plan. These challenges underscore the effectiveness of the pre-CLR AF training workshop and the importance of the ongoing support provided to the AFs during the research. This assisted the AFs to develop and enhance their communication skills and handle difficult situations.

These findings demonstrate how seriously the AFs took their roles, how adaptable they were in these positions and the AFs capacity to lead research with children and young people about complex matters such as child protection.

### **Hopes for the Research**

Adolescent facilitators expressed common hopes for positive changes resulting from the research including that the research will lead to increased respect for, protection of and fulfillment of children’s rights to protection. This encompassed some mention that the research could promote large scale societal change although in the main the AFs framed their hopes that this research would promote greater adherence to children’s protection rights in the family context, particularly in relation to ending corporal punishment in the home.

In Solomon Islands AFs expressed hopes that the research would contribute to enhanced collective understandings of children’s rights within communities, including that children are aware of their rights and responsibilities. An AF expressed this by saying that he hoped ‘everyone will know their rights and how to work together’ (AF Solomon Islands). Another AF in Solomon Islands correlated increased awareness of children’s rights with ‘helping children be more safe’.

Most AF reflections however, centred on hopes that the research would be communicated to caregivers and that it would help with addressing very high rates of corporal punishment in the home. These reflections were emphasised by AFs from Fiji and mentioned in brief by AFs in Solomon Islands indicating that corporal punishment, whilst problematic in both countries, is of particular concern in Fiji.

When summarising some key findings from the CLR noting that many participants spoke about the negative impact of corporal punishment in the home one AF in Fiji said she hoped ‘that parents will be fair’ and the research would provide some evidence for the need for parents to reassess their parenting styles. Several other AFs in Fiji reinforced this view calling for the research to ‘be taken to parents and to children that that parents will stop smacking children’ (AF Fiji, female). Another female AF in Fiji said she ‘hopes parents learn something and children know their rights come with responsibilities and don’t abuse their rights’.

These aspirations reflected a shared desire for greater implementation of children’s rights in the home, school, community and online. Adolescent facilitators suggest a safer environment for children could be achieved via increased awareness of children’s rights and through shared aspirations and commitment to preventing harm to children across all levels of society. The synthesis of their experiences underscores the transformative potential of empowering adolescents as advocates for positive change in their communities through child-led research.

## 6. Conclusion

The Child Led Research (CLR) conducted in Fiji and Solomon Islands confirms that children experience many forms of violence in their everyday lives—in the home, school, community and online. The findings demonstrate that violence against children is prevalent and endemic and seriously and negatively impacts children’s sense of safety and well-being.

The CLR research utilised Doel-Mackaway’s model for children’s participation (2022) and sought to engage children and young people in an ethically robust, child-friendly and culturally sensitive manner. Across Fiji and Solomon Islands ten adolescent facilitators (AFs) were trained and supported to conduct 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 94 participants aged between 8-16 years old.

The findings underscore the urgent need for well-resourced, comprehensive and targeted interventions to address and end all forms of violence against children in the home, school, community and online. In **Fiji** the research shows that key child protection concerns are corporal punishment in the home and school, family violence, threats from strangers, inadequate home and school buildings, peer and cyber-bullying and lack of safety online. Strengths in the formal and informal child protection systems were identified especially as this relates to the many individuals children would likely seek support from (parents, police, teachers and social welfare). However, children’s hesitancy to disclose harm also emerged as a key finding indicating the need for targeted interventions that address trust-building and mitigate children’s fears of negative consequences arising from disclosing.

In **Solomon Islands**, the research highlighted the interconnected factors contributing to violence against children, including inadequate housing, poverty, parental neglect, parental abuse, harassment and sexual abuse in the community and online threats. The findings underscored the strengths in the formal and informal child protection systems, including the recognition that children would likely seek help from key figures such as parents, teachers and peers. However, variations concerns were raised about the effectiveness of public authorities, such as police, in responding to child protection issues.

This research presents an exemplar for how to support young people to lead research with children. It also demonstrates that young people can, and should, be at the forefront of research endeavours about matters involving them. The Adolescent Facilitators (AFs) reflections provide valuable insights about the benefits of engaging young people in CLR as well as the transformative impact of the

process. Despite facing some challenges, the AFs said leading this research contributed to increased confidence and knowledge and empowered them to play a leading role in their community—roles they indicated they would like the opportunity to undertake again. Their hopes for the research outcomes centred on promoting children's rights, fostering greater awareness and effecting positive changes in parenting behaviours, particularly regarding ending corporal punishment.

The recommendations to address violence against children call for collaboration between people and organisations throughout all levels of society including children, parents, teachers, community leaders, government and civil society organisations such as Save the Children. The recommendations emphasise building greater awareness of children's rights as well as enhanced community collaboration and targeted actions at the individual and organisational levels to create secure environments for children.

The CLR in Fiji and Solomon Islands brought to the forefront the myriad challenges faced by children and the many ways they experience breaches of their rights through violence and abuse. It also showcased the potential for positive change through empowering young voices and fostering a collective commitment to children's rights. The recommendations and reflections from participants and AFs provide a roadmap for future interventions and advocacy efforts, emphasising the importance of sustained community engagement and awareness-building to ensure the safety and well-being of children in Fiji and Solomon Islands.

## 7. Annex

### 7.1 Annex 1: Child-Led FGDs: Quick Guide

<b>Pre-FGD</b> (see guide for - Responsibilities / Set-up / Materials Needed)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult support person(s) and AFs meet for pre-FGD briefing /set up</li> <li>• AFs greet/welcome young people and caregivers on arrival / name tags / pick-up time, mark names on roll.</li> </ul>				
<b>START RECORDING</b> <b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome / Intros / Housekeeping</li> <li>• Review PICF / Rules / Child protection info / mandatory reporting / about this research</li> </ul>				
<b>Icebreaker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>GAME:</b> <i>What makes children living here feel safe and cared for?</i></li> </ul>				
<b>1. What makes children living here feel safe and cared for in the?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home / School</li> <li>• Village/neighbourhood, street / Online</li> </ul>	<b>Group discussion PROMPTS:</b> things that parents, teachers, friends, siblings, relatives, neighbours, police, health care workers etc do. Or programs that are run. Or people in the community who are trusted.				
<b>2. Write or draw one thing that make children living here feel unsafe, or makes them feel worried?</b>	<b>Individual exercise</b> – young group use <b>play dough</b> / older group use <b>post-it notes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children share responses with group</li> <li>• stretching activity for tension relief</li> </ul>				
<b>3. What makes children living here feel unsafe or feel worried in all the different places children living here go.</b> <table border="1" data-bbox="359 1216 710 1574" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Home</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">School</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Village / Street / Public Place</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Online</td> </tr> </table>	Home	School	Village / Street / Public Place	Online	<b>Extension of question 2: Group discussion</b>
Home	School				
Village / Street / Public Place	Online				
<del>4. Skip question 4 in guide</del>					
<b>5. Do you think children worry about other/different things?</b>	<b>Open discussion Prompts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does being a girl, boy or gender diverse, impact what children worry about?</li> <li>• How does it change if children live with or without their parents? In the rural areas or city?</li> <li>• If children go to school or if they don't go to school?</li> <li>• If children are rich or poor?</li> <li>• If a child has a disability?</li> <li>• If a child identifies as LGBTQI?</li> <li>• If your parents use alcohol and other drugs?</li> </ul>				

<p>6. If children had a problem at home, in the village/neighbourhood, at school or online, do you think they would tell someone?</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thumbs up and Thumbs down</li> <li>• Why yes?</li> <li>• Why not?</li> </ul>
<p>7. If children did tell someone, who could they go for help?</p> <p>Is there anyone children would not go for help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who? Why them?</li> </ul> <p><u>Prompts:</u>  No-one  Mother or father/Sister, aunty/Brother, uncle/Friends/Village or community leader/Church/Teacher/Social welfare officer/Police/Nurse/Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why not?</li> </ul>
<p>8. How do you think they would be helped by the people that they told?</p>	<p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What would their friends say? Would they encourage them to tell an adult? Who?</li> <li>○ What would adults say or do? Would they encourage them to report to the police or a social welfare officer? Why or why not?</li> </ul>
<p>9. If a child shares an experience of violence, how are adults likely to react?</p>	<p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Would the adult react the same to girls and boys? To small children and older children? To children with disability?</li> <li>○ What do you like about how adults react? Why?</li> <li>○ What do you not like about how adults react? Why?</li> <li>○ Do you think adults should respond differently? How?</li> </ul>
<p>10. What do you think children like best about being a child in your village/community? Why?</p>	<p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Is there value placed on relationships with family, learning about traditions/custom?</li> </ul>
<p>12. What can be done to help children feel safer in your community?</p>	<p><u>Prompts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What can children do?</li> <li>○ What can parents, teachers and community leaders do?</li> <li>○ What can organisations like Save the Children do?</li> </ul>
<p>Post FGD debrief / pack up</p>	

## 8. Bibliography

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