

Resilience building training for children with disabilities

Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID), Bangladesh

THE CONTEXT IN BANGLADESH

- The pandemic created particular new challenges and huge suffering for children with disabilities (CWD).
- A CSID study¹² found women and girls with disabilities to be at high risk of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.
- Many CWD experience violence and abuse from those who are supposed to protect them. Social norms are that beating and shouting at children and using force to discipline them is acceptable. Few parents see these behaviours as domestic violence. Girls face increased restrictions as they are expected not to talk loudly or to play outdoors. They are also more vulnerable due to gender discrimination in daily life.
- Children with disabilities are vulnerable to all sorts of abuse and violence in the community and at home due to their physical and communication limitations. Dependency and mobility problems result in children being confined at home which in turn increases their vulnerability.

- Before COVID-19, CWD went to school and met with their friends, but lockdown meant they were confined to their homes where they often face neglect and are not treated with respect or understanding. They face continued harassment by the community, which causes trauma and prevents them interacting with the outside world. Many CWD are treated as a burden or considered to be weak.

THE PRACTICE: RESILIENCE BUILDING TRAINING FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Since 2019, CSID has been providing a ten-day resilience building training course on the protection of children with disabilities, for the children themselves. The course consists of ten sessions over ten weeks, with each session being two to three hours.

Most children with disabilities have little or no access to information about their rights, good touch and bad touch, body boundaries and abuse including domestic violence. The training enables them to understand their rights, including around protection and issues of violence and abuse, and how to address violations of these rights.

During the pandemic, the training was carried out in three project locations: the urban areas of Dhaka and Barisal, and Bhola, a rural setting.

12 'The Feminine Dimension of Disability' http://www.csid-bd.com/assets/backend/study_research/1600321234-research05.pdf

CSID also provides a five-day training course to parents and caregivers of children with disabilities to raise awareness on violence against children with disabilities and how to care for them, and to provide information regarding the referral system for seeking help and support. With this knowledge, parents and caregivers can report cases of abuse to Community Based Child Protection Committees.

HOW THE PRACTICE WAS IMPLEMENTED

CSID staff identified children with disabilities aged 8 to 18, assessed their understanding of child protection and encouraged them to take part in the training. The training took place in a suitable venue (a playground or a large hall) which was accessible for all the participants. Children with a range of disabilities took part, as CSID field staff are experienced in working in sign language, or with visually impaired children and children with neuro developmental disabilities.

Each session was conducted by two CSID facilitators. One facilitated the session while the other ensured that all children could participate fully. Staff used child-friendly methods to include those children who were not participating. The facilitator focused more on such children by creating a climate of participation that reduced anxiety. The staff facilitated the sessions in a comfortable and non-threatening way, using role play, drama, songs and pictures to make the sessions fun and interesting. Each child received personal attention and a chance to be heard.

At the end of the training, an evaluation was conducted. Staff visited each child's home to assess their learning and feedback was used to adapt and modify the next training programme.

HOW THE PRACTICE WAS CONDUCTED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

At the beginning of the pandemic, community service providers based in the field were monitoring children's progress through mobile phones. However, children with disabilities need support which cannot be provided virtually, such as therapeutic intervention, physiotherapy, speech therapy and psychosocial counselling. During COVID-19, CSID community service providers, with the necessary permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs, conducted face-to-face meetings with the children while maintaining social distancing; the training was also carried out face-to-face.

Before COVID-19, training was provided in groups of 12–15 children. This number was reduced to a small group of only five children, maintaining all government guidelines on safeguarding against COVID-19. CSID staff followed the WHO's guidance on disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak.¹³

IMPACT

- Approximately 654 children – 361 boys and 293 girls – reported a reduction in domestic violence as a result of the training.
- From March 2019 to April 2021, 37 children reported an incident of violence or abuse against them to the CSID field staff.
- Children with disabilities have become more confident in identifying their inner capacity and strength, are able to protect themselves through wise and quick decisions and have become more social and can share their problems with others.
- Prior to the training most of the children were very shy and did not

13 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332015/WHO-2019-nCov-Disability-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

share much with their parents or friends. Now a huge number have been enabled to share incidents of violence with their parents, friends and also CSID staff. Some are now talking about the problems they face at school.

- Children learned about their body boundaries, that their body is their own and that no one can touch it without their permission. They can now differentiate between safe and unsafe touch and sense and recognise potential risks. They understand that keeping abuse a secret doesn't protect anyone from being abused and that seeking support can help stop abuse. This helps them to take appropriate action to protect themselves. Many have lodged complaints via the child helpline number and informed CSID staff. This was not common before the training.
- Domestic violence against children with disabilities has decreased due to the training for parents and caregivers, which has significantly increased their awareness.

WHY THE PRACTICE WAS EFFECTIVE

- **Holistic approach:** to change prevalent perceptions about domestic violence against children with disabilities, CSID involved all the key stakeholders – children, parents, community, local government and central government. The Community Based Child Protection Committees followed up all the child protection cases and CSID carried out family follow-up visits.
- **Goal oriented training:** each day's training had clearly defined objectives and enough time was built in for discussions allowing children to interact freely.
- **Skilled facilitators:** the facilitators had the knowledge and skills required to work with children with disabilities. They were also knowledgeable about the community's characteristics and the resources and support available. They were well-trained in interacting with children, providing positive feedback and making children feel comfortable. Activities were run in a fun and humorous way so that sensitive topics like domestic violence could be talked about without overwhelming participants. Facilitators also maintained confidentiality and worked within a framework of understanding and respect, helping all children to participate.

Family for Every Child has produced a Disability Toolkit. The toolkit resources have been collated to support Family alliance members to better understand children with disabilities, their rights and needs, and the rights and needs of their carers, parents and other family members. It can be found on the Changemakers for Children platform [here](#).

VOICES OF CHILDREN

“Through the training I have learned what is abuse. I informed CSID staff immediately when one local street vendor tried to abuse me.”

Fourteen-year-old girl with mild intellectual disability, Kashipur, Barisal



Case study: helping parents learn about children’s rights

One mother always shouted at and sometimes physically beat her intellectually disabled 15-year-old son because of his behaviour. CSID organised counselling sessions with both parents, discussing how their actions were not helping but were actually harming their child, and amounted to violence against him. There has since been a positive change in the mother’s behaviour towards her son, and the violence has stopped as a result of the counselling received.

Kamrangirchar, Dhaka

