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Kanykey Jailobaeva, Karin Diaconu, Alastair Ager & Carola Eyber

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CHILD PROTECTION PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES OF FAITH LEADERS ACROSS SENEGAL, UGANDA, AND GUATEMALA

By Kanykey Jailobaeva , Karin Diaconu, Alastair Ager, and Carola Eyber

Tackling violence against children is the focus of sub-goal 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Relative to the previous Millennium Development Goals, the SDG agenda puts a stronger emphasis on child and youth development looking beyond children's access to basic services to children attaining their human potential. Violence against children is increasingly recognized as one of the key barriers to this goal (Raikes et al. 2017). Globally, one billion children are subject to violence every year, 9 in 10 children reside in countries where corporal punishment is not fully prohibited, and 120 million girls have been victims of sexual violence (End Violence Against Children 2020).

The Global Partnership to End Violence against Children illustrates the coming together of diverse stakeholders on this agenda. It currently convenes over 360 organizations, including UN agencies, governments,

multilateral agencies, civil society and faith organizations, the private sector, foundations, academics, and independent experts (End Violence Against Children 2020).

However, the development of national child protection systems has to date generally been premised on a top-down approach by

Abstract: Faith leaders are well-positioned to address violence against children, but the extent to which they do so is unclear. This mixed-method study examined faith leaders' child protection practices, attitudes towards child rights, and views around physical punishment in Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala. Child protection practices—specifically listening to children and reporting abuse—were strongest among faith leaders in Uganda, although they also most favored use of physical punishment. Overall, findings documented how faith leaders play an important role in promoting the wellbeing of children in their communities. Building on this contribution, however, requires sensitivity to important contextual differences.

Keywords: faith leaders, faith communities, child protection, physical punishment, child rights

government institutions, focused on the provision of child protection services through professionals (Wessells 2015). Such an approach may be suited to high-income settings, but low and middle-income countries risk poor community ownership of child protection, a low use of formal child protection services by community members, and misalignment of formal and non-formal elements of child protection (Wessells 2015). To mitigate these risks, there have been calls for a more bottom-up approach to child protection systems with greater involvement of community-based actors, including faith leaders and communities (Robinson and Hanmer 2014; Ager, Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, and Ager 2015; Wessells 2015).

This article examines faith leaders' child protection practices, attitudes towards child rights, and views around physical punishment in three countries with different religious contexts: Senegal (predominantly Muslim), Uganda (a mix of Christian and Muslim), and Guatemala (predominantly Christian). The study used a newly developed and validated Faith Community Child Protection Scale (FCCPS) (Diaconu et al. [under review](#)) to consider how current child protection practices and attitudes of faith leaders showed commonality and variance across these settings. The article also draws on the qualitative data collected within the study.

The article starts by providing an overview of the faith leaders' involvement in child protection in the first section. The second section provides background information on each of the country settings. The methodology of the study is described in the third section. The fourth section presents the findings of the study focusing on each dimension of FCCPS: faith community child protection practices, attitudes to child rights, and views around physical punishment. The implications of findings are discussed in the fifth section.

Faith Leaders in Child Protection

Faith communities have always played a critical role in providing care, education, and health services and in supporting neglected, abused, and vulnerable children (Robinson and Hanmer 2014). However, until recently, this has

been widely overlooked in planning development strategies (Robinson and Hanmer 2014; Duff and Buckingham 2015; Rutledge and Eyber 2019). Engagement with issues of faith is also clearly important given its role in the lives of most people globally: shaping values, beliefs, and behaviors at the individual level as well as social norms and collective practices at the community level (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta 2018; Palm and Eyber 2019).

Faith leaders serve as a moral authority in many communities and generally have trusted relationships with the community members and, thus, they can be very influential in changing beliefs, attitudes, and practices that undermine child protection (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta 2018; Palm and Eyber 2019).

Consequently, there is a growing consensus in development that faith groups should be involved in addressing violence against children (Robinson and Hanmer 2014; Duff and Buckingham 2015; Roux and Bartelink 2017). As Robinson and Hanmer (2014, 610) note, "partnering with religious communities is not only possible but, in many cases, essential to addressing violence against children and promoting systems at national and community levels to enhance the protective environment for children."

The 2006 Kyoto Declaration, adopted by almost 1,000 religious leaders representing all world religions, states that faith communities can promote child protection through inter-religious cooperation, the use of religious texts to teach about child rights, advocacy and awareness against violence, and educating and supporting families and communities to care for children holistically (UNICEF 2010; End Corporal Punishment 2020). Involving faith communities in child protection may also be cost-effective for low and middle-income settings where formal child protection structures typically lack sufficient financial resources to run their services competently (Ward et al. 2016). Projects of international faith-based organizations (e.g. World Vision, Catholic Relief Services) and non-governmental organizations (e.g. Tostan and Ford Foundation) on addressing child marriage are empirical illustrations for engaging faith

communities in child protection (Karam 2015; Walker 2015).

However, faith can also be used for perpetuating, defending, or hiding violence against children, which is a significant factor for working with faith communities in order to change their views and practices undermining child protection (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta 2018). For example, in a survey on the prevalence of abuse in the Christian Reformed Church, 12% of adult members of the denomination reported experienced physical abuse or neglect, 13% sexual abuse and 19% emotional abuse (Annis and Rice 2002). 28% of respondents reported experiencing at least one of these types of abuse. Child marriage is another example where faith, notably Islam, is referred to in justifying practices (Wodon 2015).

While valued, it is acknowledged that engagement of faith leaders and communities in child protection must be framed by effective communication between these actors and other stakeholders (Robinson and Hanmer 2014). Recent scoping studies have identified a considerable lack of literature and evidence on the engagement and role of faith communities in child protection (Palm and Colombo 2019). Child protection activities of faith communities are undocumented due to their informal nature (Rutledge and Eyber 2019). A large part of the literature does not make any references to faith communities other than referring to religion as a factor like culture (Rutledge and Eyber 2019).

There is thus a need for rigorous evaluation and study of faith communities' engagement in child protection, as well as their attitudes towards child rights and child protection, to generate evidence regarding their role in ending violence against children and identifying effective ways to secure protective environments for children.

Guatemala

Religious Landscape

90% of people in Guatemala identify themselves as Christians (Bjune 2016). The Roman Catholic Church came to Guatemala from Spain in the 16th century (Chiappari 1999). Up until the 1970s, Catholicism was the

official and dominant religion in Guatemala (Chiappari 1997). Since the 1970s, Guatemala has seen a phenomenal growth of Protestantism. The number of Protestants grew from 3% in 1970 to 40% in 2014 (Bjune 2016).

In the context of Guatemala, Protestantism is an umbrella term for a number of different denominations such as Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Protestants in Guatemala are mostly known as evangelicals (*evangelicos*) or evangelical Christians (*la iglesia evangelica*) (Bjune 2016). Practice of Christianity by Guatemalans, especially in the rural areas, is influenced by the Mayan heritage, values, and beliefs in such natural phenomena as rain, volcano, and mountains (Chiappari 1999; Derose et al. 2010).

Guatemala has other religions such as Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism brought by migrants, but they are in the minority (around 10%; Bjune 2016).

Child Protection Issues

Poverty is a key issue for children and their families in Guatemala. In 2014, 78% of children and adolescents were living in poverty (UNICEF 2017). In the context of impoverishment, child labor is a necessity for the survival of many families in Guatemala (WV Guatemala 2015; de Baessa 2008). In 2016, 9.8% of children aged 7–14 years old were engaged in labor. Working children face harsh working conditions risking their health. Two thirds of working children do not attend school (US Bureau of International Labor 2016).

Poverty also contributes to child neglect and child abandonment as parents and caregivers struggle to provide adequate care because of lack of resources (WV Guatemala 2015). In 2013, there were 5,474 children in the residential institutions (UNICEF 2014).

Poverty also leads children and young people from vulnerable households to join gangs ("*pandillas*" or "*maras*") which provide them with some income and food but expose them to a range of protection risks (Escobar-Chew 2013).

Violence against children is widespread in Guatemala. Children experience violence in their families, schools, and among peers. One in three

parents uses a belt (*cincho*) for physical punishments (McMillan and Burton 2009).

Children living in the streets is another serious child protection issue in Guatemala. This problem is mainly acute in Guatemala City as children migrate there from rural areas. There are between 1,500 and 5,000 street children in Guatemala City (Rölz 2016). Street children are at high risk of exploitation, violence, and slavery (Toybox Charity 2018).

Child marriage is also a child protection issue in Guatemala driven by culture, poverty, discriminatory gender norms, and a lack of access to education. In 2017, 6% of children were married by age 15 and 30% by age 18 (Girls Not Brides 2017). The adolescent pregnancy rate is high. In 2013, 63,412 births were registered among mothers aged 10–19 (UNICEF 2014).

Uganda

Religious Landscape

According to the 2014 census, most people in Uganda (84.5%) belong to Christianity, and 13.7% practice Islam. Among Christians, 39.3% are Catholics, 32% are Anglicans, and 11.1% are Pentecostals/Born Again/Evangelical. The remaining 17.6% belong to other Christian denominations.

Christianity and Islam came to Uganda between 1840 and 1880. Among Christian groups, British Protestant (mainly Anglican) and French Roman Catholic missionaries were first to arrive in Uganda. The Pentecostal/Evangelical movement formally came in the 1950s and experienced a substantial growth (Bearman et al. 2005; Gusman 2009; Otiso 2012).

Within the Muslim community in Uganda, Sunnis are in the majority (Abduwahad 2011). Religion is highly embedded into the daily lives of people in Uganda (Otiso 2012). For example, weekly, there are large congregations at Christian and Muslims services (Tumwesigye et al. 2013).

Child Protection Issues

Child protection remains a major concern for Uganda. The latest statistics indicate that 8% of children are critically vulnerable and 43% are moderately vulnerable.¹ As much as 40% of

children are not registered within a year of birth. Many Ugandan children have encountered some form of violence—physical, sexual, emotional, or domestic. 40,000 orphan children are in residential institutions (UNICEF 2020). Uganda has a high proportion of child labor (Muhumuza 2012) which is driven by a number of factors such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and a prolonged armed conflict in the northern part of the country (Bantebya, Muhanguzi, and Watson 2013; MoGLSD and UNICEF Uganda 2015). The situation analysis by the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development and UNICEF Uganda (2015) claimed that almost 93% of children in rural areas worked in commercial or subsistence agriculture (land tilling, sowing, weeding, and harvesting) and fishing where conditions can be very hazardous, exposing children to chemicals, heat, extra hours, and harsh conditions.

Girls face such risks as FGM, early marriages, adolescents' pregnancy, and sexual abuse (UNICEF 2020). Street children are a particular group of children whose risk of violence is high (Walakiraa et al. 2014; Kamy and Walakira 2017). Child trafficking and child sacrifice are serious issues (Bukuluki 2009). The Anti-human Sacrifice and Trafficking Task Force in Uganda claims that 3,000 children disappear annually; some of these children might be sacrificed (Bukuluki, Fellows, and Luwangula 2017).

Senegal

Religious Landscape

Two main religions are present in Senegal: Islam and Christianity. Islam has been present in Senegal since 1040. Christianity was introduced in the 15th century with the arrival of the first Europeans (Portuguese) (World Vision Senegal 2015). The statistics indicate that 90% of the population in Senegal are Muslims, 5% are Christians, and 5% belong to other religious groups (Camara and Seck 2010; Gifford 2016).

Both Islam and Christianity are influenced by indigenous religious beliefs and traditions (Camara and Seck 2010). Sunni Islam is widely

practiced based on the Ash'arite theology and the Malikiite jurisprudence (World Vision Senegal 2015). Sufism including such brotherhoods as Tijanism, Mouridism, Qadiriyya, and Layenism, and the NabyAllah movement are also present in Senegal (World Vision Senegal 2015).

With regard to Christian groups, there are around 482 Christian missionaries in Senegal, approximately 45 of which are evangelical Christian missions (World Vision Senegal 2015). Senegal has more than 100 churches with over 250 pastors (World Vision Senegal 2015).

Child Protection Issues

Poverty is widespread in Senegal with almost half of the population living below a national poverty line (World Bank 2020). As a result, basic needs of children, namely food, health care, education, housing, are not met (Save the Children Sénégal 2014). There are around 340,000 malnourished children; 79,000 of these are severely malnourished (PNUD 2014).

Birth registration for children under five years was 77.4% in 2017 (Zewoldi 2019). Child labor is a common issue in Senegal. According to the survey conducted by CPC Learning Network and UNICEF (2017), 34.69% of surveyed adolescents said that they worked outside the home for family. Domestic work was also identified to be prevalent with 80% of adolescents reporting doing it. Similar statistics were found among parents/caregivers. 71.90% of them said that at least one of their children engaged in domestic work and 35.62% said that at least one child worked outside of the home for family (CPC Learning Network and UNICEF 2017).

Child marriage is another key child protection issue in Senegal. 37.08% of parents/caregivers in the survey of CPC Learning Network and UNICEF (2017) agreed that their community believes that girls should be married before 18 years.

Parents/caregivers also commonly accept corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Physical violence towards children by adults and other children is common (CPC Learning Network and UNICEF 2017).

Study Design

The purpose of the study was to assess child protection attitudes and practices of faith leaders in different faith contexts. Consequently, three countries with different religious environments were selected: Senegal (predominantly Muslim), Uganda (Christian and Muslim), and Guatemala (Christian).

In each country, three or four communities with evidence of significant child protection concerns, a poor reach of government services from urban centers, and strong religious engagement within communities were selected for the study. The site selection process also ensured that the selected sites represented a variation of demographic characteristics of the population and socio-economic, religious, and cultural factors.

Study districts in Senegal were three communities in Missirah district and one community in Kaffrine district. Populations in these districts were largely Muslim, broadly mirroring the religious background of the nation (90% Muslim, 5% Christian, and 5% others) (Gifford 2016). In Uganda, the study was carried out in Buikwe, Kalongo, Kyalulungira, and Mpigi. The districts' religious make-up reflected the national picture of 85% of the population Christian and 14% Muslim (UBoS 2016). Guatemalan districts studied included Jocotán, San Juan Ermita, and Camotán. Guatemala is predominantly a Christian country, with 90% of people self-identifying as Christian (Bjune 2016).

Field studies were completed in Senegal in March 2016, in Uganda between April and May in 2017, and in Guatemala in September 2018.

Data Collection Methods

The study used a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, which involved using both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools concurrently and then integrating the findings at the analysis stage (Creswell and Clark 2017). Using only either quantitative or qualitative methods would not be sufficient to examine and understand the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of faith leaders toward child protection and child rights as each of these methods pursued specific

Table 1. Faith Community Child Protection Scale.

Construct	Code	Measurement item
Faith community child protection practices	CP1	I regularly pray for children in our community that are facing difficult circumstances
	CP2	I put time aside to listen carefully to the concerns of my own child/children
	CP3	It is important to listen and to talk to children about their opinions
	CP4	It is my religious duty to protect and support children with disability because all children are created equally by God.
	CP5	Reporting child abuse to a child protection committee is a good thing
	CP6	I know how to report child abuse to the authorities.
	CP7	All children—no matter what their circumstances or behavior—are equally precious and created in God’s image
	CP8	It is important to register the birth of a child who has a disability.
Faith community attitudes towards child rights	ACR1	There are laws in place that protect children
	ACR2	It does harm to withhold food from a child who has disobeyed.
	ACR3	Child rights are acceptable since they do not force us to allow practices which go against our scriptural beliefs
	ACR4	Long and hard hours of work in the fields harm a child
	ACR5	It is equally useful for girls and boys to complete school
	ACR6	If it was discovered that a faith leader abused a child, they should be exposed or penalized even though they are doing God’s work
Faith community views around physical punishment	PP1	You should not strike a child that is misbehaving.
	PP2	It is my understanding that our Scriptures do not allow us to spank our children to discipline them
	PP3	You do not need to punish a child physically in order to bring them up properly.

research aims (Creswell and Clark 2017). The quantitative part aimed to identify the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of faith leaders towards child protection and child rights. The qualitative part aimed to explore the local context to gain insights into the role of faith leaders in promoting a protective environment for children.

Quantitative Data Collection Method

The study utilized the Faith Community Child Protection Scale (FCCPS) with faith leaders. The development and refinement of FCCPS through psychometric analysis is discussed in-depth in Diaconu et al. (under review). The FCCP scale is comprised of 17 Likert items across three constructs (dimensions): (1) Faith Community Child Protection Practices, (2) Faith Community Attitude Towards Child Rights, and (3) Faith Community Views around Physical Punishment (Table 1). Internal reliability of the scale ranges from 0.532–0.747 (Cronbach Alpha). In their

paper, Diaconu et al. (under review) also provide recommendations for the use and adaptation of FCCPS by child protection practitioners and researchers globally to inform faith-sensitive programing in this field.

The sample sizes presented in Table 2 were determined by the availability of faith leaders in the study locations. Each sample differed depending on the country context. The sample in Senegal consisted of only male faith leaders, most of whom (87%) were Muslims. The Ugandan sample comprised of 79% Christian faith leaders and 21% of Muslim faith leaders. In Guatemala, 100% of faith leaders in the sample were Christian. In Uganda and Guatemala, the samples had female faith leaders (24% and 31% respectively).

Qualitative Data Collection Methods

The study also utilized key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with faith leaders, faith leaders’ spouses, faith communities, child protection actors,

Table 2. Sample characteristics.

No	Country	N	Faith		Gender	
			Christian	Muslim	Female	Male
1	Senegal	92	12 (13%)	80 (87%)	0	92 (100%)
2	Uganda	246	195 (79%)	51 (21%)	59 (24%)	187 (76%)
3	Guatemala	141	141 (100%)	0	44 (31%)	97 (69%)

community members, and local leaders to investigate the role of faith leaders in child protection in their communities.

Faith leaders who were involved in the FCCP survey were invited to participate in KIIs and FGDs. Child protection actors and local leaders present in the communities were also interviewed. Active members of faith congregations and broader communities were invited to FGDs to enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes of the study. The number of KIIs and FGDs held in each country is presented in [Table 3](#).

Data Analysis

We collated composite scores for each construct (dimension) of the FCCP scale and also analyzed individual items within the scale. Entries that had missing data were excluded from calculations of the construct composite scores. Four items (CP8, ACR2, ACR5, PP1 in [Table 1](#)) were added to the survey questionnaire for use in Uganda and Guatemala that were not included for Senegal (these items were identified following review of the experience in Senegal where the survey was first conducted). The analysis of Senegal data did not exclude the four items given a risk of data loss. Construct composite scores for Senegal were thus scaled up to make them comparable with the scores of Uganda and Guatemala, acknowledging the potential risk of bias this introduced.

Table 3. Numbers of KIIs and FGDs held in each country.

No.	Country	FGDs	KIIs
1	Senegal	30	54
2	Uganda	50	49
3	Guatemala	35	33

Composite scores for each dimension of FCCPS—i.e. (1) faith community child protection practices, (2) faith community attitudes towards child rights, and (3) faith community views around corporal punishment—for the three countries were calculated (summation of item responses) and compared using one-way ANOVA. When statistically significant differences were found, a post-hoc test was undertaken using the Tukey HSD to determine which countries were statistically different from each other. The same test was used to compare means of each item from each country. For all survey results, statistical significance was determined at the 0.05 level. Only statistically significant findings are reported and discussed.

KIIs and FGDs were recorded and transcribed verbatim into English by a professional translator. The transcripts were analyzed using a thematic approach in Nvivo 10. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses were integrated to cross-validate and triangulate the findings.

Faith Community Child Protection Practices

[Table 4](#) shows composite scores for the first construct (dimension) of FCCPS—Faith Community Child Protection Practices—in the three settings. A one-way ANOVA identified that there were statistically significant differences between the scores of the countries. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed significant differences between scores in Uganda and Senegal as well as between scores in Uganda and Guatemala.

A one-way ANOVA analysis across country mean scores on the items comprising this construct indicated statistically significant

Table 4. Composite scores of Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala for the first dimension of FCCPS—Faith Community Child Protection Practices.

Country	N	SD	Composite score (max 40)
Senegal	90	3.71	36.08
Uganda	241	2.74	37.04
Guatemala	141	3.01	35.62

differences for three items (see Table 5). The Tukey HSD test identified significant differences on item CP3 (*It is important to listen and to talk to children about their opinions*) between Uganda and Guatemala. For items CP5 (*Reporting child abuse to a child protection committee is a good thing*) and CP6 (*I know how to report child abuse to the authorities*), means in Uganda were significantly higher than both in Senegal and Guatemala.

Survey findings suggest that child protection practices are somewhat stronger amongst surveyed faith leaders in Uganda than in the other two countries, with a greater commitment to listening and talking to children and reporting child abuse as key drivers of this difference.

Qualitative data shed light on the survey findings, suggesting that the selected communities in Senegal and Guatemala may have weaker child protection structures at the community level. In the selected communities in Senegal, most Child Protection Committees (*Comité Villageois de Protection de l'Enfant* or CVPD) were not functioning. There was confusion about the purpose of CVPDs, with some FGD participants seeing their role as dealing with referrals for sick children. Many

CVPD members reported that their committee members had not ever met as a group and had not elected roles such as a chairperson or secretary. They also said that most CVPDs had never been approached by a family or an individual to respond to a child protection issue and that they had not received any training about how to deal with any such issues.

In the absence of strong child protection mechanisms in Senegal, cases of child violence, abuse, and neglect were mostly dealt with by faith leaders and village chiefs who sought to resolve these using customary methods. In cases of rape, the perpetrator may be forced to marry the girl he has abused. The marriage is seen as a resolution that serves several purposes: the honor of the girl and her family is preserved, and the perpetrator is “punished” by taking responsibility.

Similar weaknesses in child protection were identified from KIIs and FGDs in Guatemala. Child protection issues are meant to be dealt with by Community Development Committees (CDC). However, their involvement in child protection appeared limited, mostly because community members considered caring for children to be responsibility of parents or other caregivers (KIIs with CDC member, Jocotán; FGD with child protection actors, Jocotán). Some study participants also raised concerns that complaints of children about abuse and violence were not taken seriously:

I do not think it is really taken seriously when a child complains. We really have to listen to the children ... For example, several girls, who were raped, they sought

Table 5. Means of items within Faith Community Child Protection Practices for Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala that had statistically significant differences.

Code	Measurement item	Senegal	Uganda	Guatemala
CP3	It is important to listen and to talk to children about their opinions	4.64 SD = 0.48	4.73 SD = 0.50	4.50 SD = 0.58
CP5	Reporting child abuse to a child protection committee is a good thing	4.30 SD = 0.95	4.70 SD = 0.53	4.34 SD = 0.75
CP6	I know how to report child abuse to the authorities.	4.08 SD = 1.06	4.48 SD = 0.74	3.96 SD = 1.10

help, but they said they were not heard and not helped. Imagine a complaint that they entered on August 5 [2018] and today [mid-September] nothing has been done, and the aggressor is on the loose. (KII with child protection actor, Camotán)

This report is consistent with lower survey scores on the items CP3 and CP5 regarding listening to and reporting children's concerns.

Involvement of faith leaders in child protection cases appeared to be very limited in Guatemala. A number of faith leaders said that they had not undertaken any specific child protection activities (e.g. KII with a faith leader, San Juan Ermita; FGD with faith leaders, Jocotán). One of the faith leaders criticized his counterparts who did not even speak to children in fear that they would lose respect: "There are people who say that they do not speak [to children] because they [community members] will not respect us" (FGD with faith leaders, Jocotán). Most child protection actors stated that they had not had any interaction with faith leaders. One of the community leaders was critical of faith leaders, saying that faith leaders did not talk about children's wellbeing issues: "They are not really interested in children ... they do not even mention children" (KII with CDC President, San Juan Ermita). Another child protection actor reported that when they had a case of child violence and called a community meeting, the faith leaders did not get involved at all (KII with child protection actor, San Juan Ermita).

In comparison with Senegal and Guatemala, Uganda has better-established child protection structures which are decentralized and involve communities directly. The Child Protection System Mapping in Uganda by the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development and UNICEF (Yiga 2013) identified a wide range of formal and non-formal child protection actors on different levels (national, district, and community). At the community level, those engaged in child protection include voluntary groups, Village Health Teams, Local Councils, and Child Protection Committees (CPCs) (Yiga 2013; Walakiraa et al. 2014). All of our data

collection sites had a CPC. Members of CPCs, which tended to include faith leaders too, said that their role was protecting and promoting child rights, informing parents about their roles and responsibilities in terms of provision and protection, addressing child protection issues directly and sensitizing communities on childcare and protection and the value of education. The study found that child protection actors experienced a range of challenges such as a lack of a clear division of responsibilities between child protection actors, poor coordination, a shortage of financial and material resources, limited capacity of CPC members, and lack of transparency in the processes of child protection cases including the payment of bribes.

Faith Community Attitudes Towards Child Rights

A one-way ANOVA test showed that composite scores for the second construct (dimension) of FCCPS—faith community attitudes towards child rights—across three countries had statistically significant differences ($p < .05$). The Tukey HSD test identified that Senegal's score was significantly lower than those of Uganda and Guatemala (Table 6).

The comparison of item means using a one-way ANOVA test identified that scores on item ACR6 (*If it was discovered that a faith leader abused a child, then they should not be exposed or penalized even though they are doing God's work*) in Senegal were statistically lower than in Uganda and Guatemala (Table 7). The surveyed faith leaders showed a stronger reluctance to expose/report faith leaders, who abused a child, in the

Table 6. Composite scores of Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala for the second dimension of FCCPS—Faith Community Attitude Towards Child Rights.

Country	<i>N</i>	SD	Composite score (max 30)
Senegal	91	3.29	23.87
Uganda	245	3.30	26.10
Guatemala	141	3.57	25.62

Table 7. Means of items within Faith Community Attitudes Towards Child Rights for Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala.

Code	Measurement item	Senegal	Uganda	Guatemala
ACR6	If it was discovered that a faith leader abused a child, then they should not be exposed or penalized even though they are doing God’s work.	3.37 SD = 1.51	4.27 SD = 1.12	4.31 SD = 1.14

selected communities in Senegal than in the other settings.

Fieldwork indicated that imams in Senegal held a very distinctive role within communities, which potentially explains this reluctance. Imams commanded respect from community members and were considered as educated and wise because of their knowledge. Their role in mediating cases in the community was noted to be crucial. Imams were also said to serve as a link between government and local communities by conveying the necessary communication. Thus, faith leaders were widely seen as having an important function as facilitators of communication between different actors. In some villages imams were also village chiefs serving a function of a community leader. Consequently, if a child was abused by a faith leader in Senegal, other faith leaders would most likely deal with the case themselves instead of reporting it to the government structures.

Faith Community Views Around Physical Punishment

Regarding the third construct (dimension) of FCCPS—faith community views around physical punishment—a one-way ANOVA test found statistically significant differences in composite scores of the three countries. The Tukey HSD test identified significant differences between scores in Uganda and Senegal and

between scores in Uganda and Guatemala (see Table 8).

This construct is comprised of three items, and the lowest means for all three items were found in Uganda. The Tukey HSD test showed the means scores in Uganda for items PP2 (*It is my understanding that our Scriptures do not allow us to spank our children to discipline them*) and PP3 (*You do not need to punish a child physically in order to bring them up properly*) were significantly lower than those in Senegal and Guatemala. For item PP1 (*You should not strike a child that is misbehaving*), a Kruskal–Wallis test was undertaken to compare the means of Uganda and Guatemala (this item was not presented in Senegal). This confirmed that scores on this in Uganda were significantly lower than in Guatemala (Table 9).

In line with this, through KIIs and FGDs, many research participants in Uganda, including child protection actors, expressed acceptance of corporal punishment. They distinguished between excessive and reasonable punishment. According to them, reasonable punishment such as striking can be acceptable: “So the law is not banning corporal punishment but it doesn’t [allow] torture. There is what we call excessive and reasonable punishment. If you give one stroke like that, let us not treat it as corporal punishment” (FGD with CPC, Buikwe district). At FGDs, particularly with faith leaders and their spouses, research participants referred to a Bible verse “Spare the rod and spoil the child” (Proverbs 13:24) to explain why physical punishment was an acceptable method for disciplining children and that a child could not be raised properly without physical punishment.

Different studies have shown that indeed corporal punishment is widely accepted in Uganda (Naker 2005; Damien 2012). Violence against children is recognized as a major public

Table 8. Composite scores of Senegal, Uganda, and Guatemala for the third dimension of FCCPS—Faith Community Views around Physical Punishment.

Country	N	SD	Composite score (max 30)
Senegal	92	3.26	10.598
Uganda	246	2.63	8.004
Guatemala	141	2.67	11.227

Table 9. Means of items within Faith Community Views around Physical Punishment that had statistically significant differences across three countries.

Code	Measurement item	Senegal	Uganda	Guatemala
PP1	You should not strike a child that is misbehaving.	—*	1.92 SD = 0.99	3.61 SD = 1.29
PP2	It is my understanding that our Scriptures do not allow us to spank our children to discipline them.	3.07 SD = 1.49	2.46 SD = 1.33	3.40 SD = 1.38
PP3	You do not need to punish a child physically in order to bring them up properly.	4.00 SD = 1.30	3.62 SD = 1.31	4.21 SD = 1.0

*Item was not in the questionnaire in Senegal.

health concern (Ashburn et al. 2017). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2012, Uganda had the 10th highest rate of homicide for children and adolescents under the age of 19 (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development and UNICEF 2015). A national survey by the Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development and UNICEF in 2015 identified that, among survey participants of 18–24 years old, 59% of female participants and 68% of male participants reported experiencing violence in childhood. Among adolescents of 13–17 years old, 44% of girls and 59% of boys said that they had experienced physical violence in the past 12 months. 92% of these children experienced multiple incidents of physical violence. According to the Ministry’s survey, the main perpetrators of the violence are (1) parents, adult caregivers, and other adult relatives, (2) intimate friend, (3) peers, and (4) other adults in the community. The legal ban of corporal punishment in the Children’s Act of Uganda did not seem to stop this practice because of weak enforcement of the law. Many parents and teachers lack alternative non-violent child discipline methods (Damien 2012).

Discussion

Using a recently validated survey measure (Diaconu et al. *under review*)—the Faith Community Child Protection Scale—significant differences have been identified between the country settings studied both in respect of composite construct scores and on selected individual item scores. The validity of the differences observed has generally been supported through triangulation from qualitative

KII and FGD data and other sources. This suggests that the FCCPS may be a useful tool for assessing the degree of child protective orientation amongst faith communities or for measuring change following implementation of relevant interventions.

Faith community child protection practices are stronger in the selected communities in Uganda than in Senegal and Guatemala. Faith leaders in Uganda have a greater commitment to listening and talking to children and reporting child abuse than in the other two settings. This can be explained by functioning child protection structures in Uganda (Yiga 2013; Walakiraa et al. 2014). Communities in Uganda have CPCs of which faith leaders are part.

Guatemala and Senegal have weaker child protection structures at the community level. In Guatemala, child protection cases are dealt with by generic Community Development Committees as there are no CPCs. Faith leaders are largely not involved in child protection. In Senegal, CPCs in communities are not operational. Thus, faith leaders play an active role in dealing with child protection issues. However, methods that they apply to address child protection cases, especially cases of sexual abuse, are not always in the best interest of the child and respectful of child rights. This indicates the significance of working with faith leaders where interventions should build their capacity to engage with child well-being issues from a faith perspective to bring changes (World Vision 2019).

Attitudes of surveyed faith leaders in Senegal are less supportive of child rights than in Uganda and Guatemala. For example, the

surveyed faith leaders in Senegal were significantly less inclined to report child abuse by a faith leader than in other two settings. This can be potentially explained by the distinctive role of imams in the communities that became apparent during fieldwork. Imams serve as mediators of conflicts, facilitators of communication between different actors, and community leaders. In contrast to other settings such as Uganda, in Senegal faith leaders can resolve the issues, disputes, and conflicts themselves without relying on the government structure. If there was a case of child abuse by a faith leader, other faith leaders would be able to bring justice to the case themselves within their community. In Uganda, the status of faith leaders is different and, they tend to operate within the government system. However, in both settings, there are instances where faith leaders are not held to account for child abuse perpetrated by them and this continues to be a serious challenge, as it is in many other settings.

Further, the surveyed faith leaders in Uganda are significantly more in favor of physical punishment than those in Senegal and Guatemala. The fact that the interviewed faith leaders referred to Bible verses to explain their use of physical punishment indicates that faith communities can also be a sources of child mistreatment and abuse highlighting the importance of working with faith communities to change these views to improve child protection in communities (Wilkinson, van Mierlo, and Trotta 2018; Palm and Colombo 2019).

To sum up, faith leaders' role can be central in child protection (UNICEF 2010; Wessells 2015). However, this study shows that context significantly influences the involvement of faith communities in the promotion of child protection. A universalized "one-size-fits-all strategy" should be avoided in working with faith

communities to ensure that contextual drivers and social norms underlying violence against children are sustainably changed (Palm and Colombo 2019).

Given the limitations of the current data stated in the methods section, any potential for conclusions to be drawn for policy development need to be viewed with caution. Advocating for closer collaboration with all faith leaders, regardless of their specific orientation towards the complex sociocultural issues underlying child protection issues, would be premature. Policy development needs to be grounded in detailed analyses of the specific factors that influence the power, status, and extent of their influence within communities, as well as how social norm change within entire communities, as opposed to amongst faith leaders within these, can be brought about.

A UNIVERSALIZED "ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL STRATEGY" SHOULD BE AVOIDED IN WORKING WITH FAITH COMMUNITIES

Conclusion

The evidence provided by this study is important to inform and expand work with faith communities in child protection. The role of faith communities in development has been reconsidered, with more international actors promoting closer collaboration with faith communities. However, to date, work done by faith communities has been poorly documented, resulting in a shortage of evidence for working with faith communities. This study contributes by offering evidence based on both qualitative and quantitative data.

Faith leaders have the potential to play a key role in child protection in communities by bringing together formal and informal elements of child protection. They also have the power to influence social norms and beliefs in their communities. However, the efforts of engaging faith leaders in child protection need to be context-specific and aim to build their capacity to engage in promoting child-wellbeing. ❖

About the Authors

Kanykey Jaiobaeva is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University. Her research expertise has focused on child protection, child rights, community development, civil society, social capital, social norms, and psychosocial support in low and middle-income countries. Dr. Jaiobaeva has conducted feasibility studies, child rights situation analyses, and other types of studies for international development organizations in Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Western and East Africa, and Central America.

Karin Diaconu is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University. Her work focuses primarily on supporting research in the Middle East, including mixed-method cross-sectional evaluations of mental health, diabetes, and hypertensive care delivery and uptake among vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian populations in Lebanon. She is interested in health service delivery and health system function in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings.

Alastair Ager is a Director of the Institute for Global Health and Development. He has worked in global health and development for over 30 years. He has wide international experience as a researcher and consultant across sub-Saharan Africa, south Asia, Europe, and North America, working with intergovernmental, non-governmental and governmental agencies. He is co-author, with his son Joey, of *Faith, Secularism, and Humanitarian Engagement* (Palgrave 2015).

Carola Eyber is a Senior Lecturer with the Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University. She is an experienced researcher on child protection, mental health, and psychosocial wellbeing in low and middle-income countries with over 25 years of experience. She has work experience in fragile states and conflict-affected contexts and has conducted research, evaluation, and teaching assignments in such contexts. Her work has focused on sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, and eastern Europe.

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Note

1. A vulnerable child is defined as one who faces the risk of physical, emotional or mental harm and whose survival, well-being and development is threatened (UBoS 2017). The exact definitions of critically vulnerable and moderately vulnerable were not available.

ORCID

Kanykey Jaiobaeva  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1316-8449>

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