



# Child Neglect in Guyana

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**Family**  
for every child



**EUROPEAN UNION**

*A GUYANESE SOCIETY WHERE EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO GROW UP IN A SAFE AND SECURE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY*

## **FOREWORD**

Child neglect is detrimental to the development of children and thus a growing concern at the increase in the reported cases. Examination of 2016 data from the Childcare & Protection Agency shows a total of 3842 reported cases of abuse of which 2038 were cases of child neglect. In 2015, the number of reported child abuse cases was 2,815 of which 1335 cases were neglect of children, hence 2015 figures compared with 2016 figures shows a significant increase in the reported cases of child neglect. These figures are not the true picture of the situation of child abuse and neglect in Guyana since a number of cases go unreported.

A research of this nature to understand the phenomenon of child neglect in Guyana should result in comprehensive approaches that address risk factors and has the support of the Childcare & Protection Agency (CPA). Child neglect is a serious form of abuse that results from the failures of parents, guardians and the wider society to provide basic necessities for the survival, protection and development needs of children. The prevention of child abuse and neglect calls for a change of behaviour and attitudes of all since this is a task for everyone in society. There must be more caring and child-friendly communities, increased collaboration of service providers which must include the family as there cannot be any true collaboration without the involvement and support to the families.

It is expected that this research forms a basis and guideline to improve strategies that reduces the risk factors for child abuse and in particular child neglect. It is hoped that the findings will be used in advocating and lobbying with all stakeholders particularly at the community, family and services levels inclusive of health, education, and security to strengthen the protection of children.

The CPA extends appreciation to ChildLinK and its sponsors, and the Consultant of the research, and looks forward to the positive outcomes for children and families.

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***Director of Children Services***  
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## **ACRONYMS**

CPA	Childcare and Protection Agency
CPMA	Childcare and Protection Agency Mapping Assessment
CPO	Child Protection Officers
CPS	Child Protection Services
CRA	Child Rights Alliance
CRC	Convention on Rights of the Child
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HSB	Harmful Sexual Behaviours
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
RCC	Rights of the Child Commission
SASOD	Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination
SVU	Special Victims Unit
SWO	Schools' Welfare Officer
UG	University of Guyana
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
CPMIS	Child Protection and Monitoring Information System
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SSWO	Senior Schools' Welfare Officer

# 1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview to the position paper on Child neglect in Guyana

This position paper commissioned by ChildLinK Guyana, sets about to understand the phenomenon of child neglect in Guyana where 70 percent of its populace are under age 18 years. (See Table 1-1 extracted from Childcare and Protection Agency Mapping Assessment (CPMA) unpublished report

**Table 1-1: Population of Guyana**

Indicator	Total	Male	Female
Total Population (thousands)	751	376	375
Population (thousands) under 15	267	135	132
Population (thousands) under 18	267		
Population under 5 (%)	10.4	9.4	9.9
Population annual growth rate (%)	0.3%	2.7%	1.1%
Population that is urbanized, %	28.5%	48.3%	51.7%
Life expectancy at birth (years)	68.8	65.7	72.1

by Henry, 2014). A child is defined by both the Conventions on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Guyana Constitution as a person under age 18 years. The Henry's report also showed that children within the 0-15 age cohort account for more than a third of Guyana's population (36.4 percent), and children not only make up a significant portion of Guyana's population, but are also a significant portion of Guyana's poor. This is corroborated by the 2006 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), which states that half of all children aged 16 years and below are poor (47.5%). About 86 percent of the general population living in hinterland regions, live in extreme poverty and child poverty, as a consequence of the poverty rates is also high. This paper

**ChildLinK** works with partners to advocate and create public awareness on child abuse and strengthen the protection and care of children, promoting family-based care services and articulating messages on the importance of keeping the family together. One of the key focus areas of **ChildLinK** is to develop a national Child Rights Alliance (CRA) with local stakeholders to speak with one voice on the protection of children in Guyana.

specifically looks at child neglect and its attendant issues in a context where its children and by extension their families are poor. Concomitantly, the 2011 Guyana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) also identified the need for a strategy to rapidly tackle child poverty in Guyana and an even deeper analysis into generational poverty.

Child neglect adversely affects the development of the child. This view was endorsed by Hildyard and Wolfe (2002), with the neglect of assessing and addressing the seriousness of child neglect as a major child protection issue being also raised by Stoltenborgh et al. (2013), who asserted that the consequences of child neglect, though important with similar consequences as the more active types of child maltreatment and neglect, is not properly studied to

inform policy. Moreover, Hackett (2016) suggests that children and young people with a background of child neglect are more likely to display harmful sexual behaviours

(HSB). Child neglect is evidenced in various forms and encompasses: physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect and medical neglect.

Children in Guyana are exposed to neglect at home, in school, in their communities and in the wider society. The attention of this study is on neglect in the home and by the caregiver. A growing number of children do not receive adequate physical and psychosocial care from parents and caregivers. A 2016 study commissioned by ChildLink shows that institutional care of children has increased over the past ten years, and the family environment is likely to be further exposed to violence. The Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA) and media reports also continue to illustrate that the bulk of child protection issues were in the realm of child neglect (Guyana Chronicle, 2016). However, the main issues on the neglect of children are not aggregated. It is therefore not clear what are the main contributing factors of child neglect, particularly given the high percentage of what is seemingly a socio-economic challenge in review of the national reported cases of violence against children.

ChildLink therefore commissioned this paper that critically examines the factors of child neglect in Guyana. The purpose is to engage all key stakeholders with the findings and promote the introduction of evidence based advocacy to influence policies and actions to safeguard and protect children. This position paper provides evidence to the Child Rights Alliance (CRA) on issues of childcare to strengthen initiatives and evidence based advocacy for the CRA to lobby government for better policies and resources for the protection of children. Specifically, the position paper will establish and build upon the following thematic issues:

- Definition of neglect within the context of Guyana
- Factors that leads to children being neglected
- Who are the children that are neglected?
- Children stories and experiences of neglect and by whom were they neglected?
- Parents and carers experiences whose children have been removed as a result of neglect
- The national response, skills, resources and programmes to address this challenge.

## **1.2 Scope and Focus**

This paper provides an analysis of all forms of child neglect in Guyana. It brings attention to neglect of child/ren in the care of a parent or guardian of a child; a person “with parental responsibility for the child”; a person who “has de facto custody of the child”; a person who is a relative and who has assumed the responsibility of the care of the child due to any reason”; or someone “employed as a babysitter of the child when looking after that child wholly or mainly in the home of the employer” (Childcare and Development Services, 2011). Neglect of children in pre-school, play group, home care, day care or night care services or a combination of both, as outlined in the Childcare and Development Services Act (2011) was not addressed in this study.

Data collection and analysis on child neglect is crucial in outlining the challenges of children, the plights of their families who have neglected them and the strategies,

policies and expertise in the response that are currently available to children who are neglected in Guyana is critical. This position paper will form the basis to help shape an understanding of the nature and extent of child neglect and the institutional provisions necessary to support children and their families. It will further assist in developing initiatives for safeguarding children, addressing themes for advocating in line with current and potentially new legislation and policies for prevention and intervention programmes. Information relating to risk factors of children being neglected can be drawn from family and the social environment. Information on attitudes and beliefs may help to explain social norms that drive the neglect of children. Assessing child neglect and the circumstances associated with this issue are needed in order to understand the scale of the problem in Guyana. In addition, collated regional and administrative data and the condition of care and support are necessary to ensure a comprehensive understanding around this particular issue of child neglect. Further, an analysis of challenges that lends to some understanding of the processes involved in reporting neglect of children, making referrals, and skills in interventions and reducing recurrence is needed to create safer homes and communities for children.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Data for this study were obtained through review of literature, annual reports of the CPA, administered surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The information detailed in this paper was gathered from six of the ten Administrative Regions in Guyana, and presents a primarily coastal, but rural/ urban perspective since the data was gathered from Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. The main aim was to understand the key issues of neglect of children and critically analyse previous studies, undertake interviews and focused discussions with key stakeholders including children to triangulate data in order to establish a better understanding of issues of neglect of children in Guyana but with a focus on the unique issues within the Regions.

Caregivers of neglected children were surveyed in the six (6) Regions. These caregivers who were identified by the CPA, provided information to assist in better comprehending the causes of child neglect as well as their perception on the effectiveness of the current institutional approach to child neglect in Guyana (See Annex 1: Survey form). Children also affected by neglect participated in focus group discussions and also provided their own thoughts and explanations on the issue which affected them (See Annex 2: Discussion guide).

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with the key actors in child protection to gain a better understanding of the role of each actor and their experiences in addressing child neglect in Guyana. The key informants interviewed included representatives from the Childcare and Protection Agency, Police Officers, Welfare Officers, teachers, Childlink and other NGOs. A copy of the interview schedule for key informants can be found in Annex 3.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

The study was limited to six of the ten administrative regions in Guyana. These were four coastal regions (Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6) and two near in-land regions (Region 7 and 10) of Guyana. Regions that are located further away from the Capital City and are occupied mainly by indigenous peoples (1, 2, 8, and 9) could not be included in this study because of inadequate resources. Attempts should be made to extend future studies to these outlying regions to ensure that the issues related to child development and protection in these regions are adequately documented and catered for in the national response to child neglect. Additionally, not all caregivers and children identified showed up to participate in the study hence the number of participants were reduced.

## **2 CHAPTER 2: DEFINING CHILD NEGLECT**

### **2.1 Definition of child neglect in Guyana**

There have been several attempts to define child neglect in the literature. Child neglect is defined very similarly in both scholarly and oral discussions as any effect which does not allow the child to thrive in an environment that allows for the child's physical, emotional, educational and social wellbeing. UNICEF (2012) defines neglect as "the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development". Neglect is identified by WHO (2016) as one of many forms of child maltreatment. Along with other forms of maltreatment, child neglect is defined as any action "which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity (WHO, 2016). Moreover, according to the Virtual Lab School (2017), "neglect includes the failure to provide for a child's basic needs despite being financially able to do so". The Virtual Lab School is an Online Learning Platform created by the University of Ohio to build the knowledge and skills of professionals on "research-based practices in child care and youth development" (Virtual Lab, 2017). This definition which was derived from the Child Welfare of the US Department of Health and Social Services, suggests that in cases where parents or caregivers do not provide adequately for the child/ren because of poverty or other cultural factors, this does not constitute neglect, but rather a need for information (Child Welfare, 2008).

In the Guyana context, several definitions of child neglect can be found in national legislation. UNICEF Guyana summarized neglect and abandonment according to the Guyana Laws by stating that this happens if a parent or guardian does not properly care for a child by, for example, not providing the child with adequate food, clothing, health-care, education and a loving home. Child neglect is therefore the failure of the responsible adult in the child's life to adequately provide for the child's safety and wellbeing providing that they have the ability to provide since there may be caregivers who are incapacitated either mentally, medically or financially. For instance, the Protection of Children Act (2009) defines child neglect as "the failure or refusal, without reasonable cause, of a person having care of a child to provide the child with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, adequate supervision or medical attention (Protection of Children Act, 2009). In accordance with this Act, a parent may not be viewed as neglectful in instances where there is "reasonable cause" or where caregivers lack the means to provide adequately for their child/ren. Further, in Chapter 13 of the Childcare and Development Services Act (2011) child neglect is referred to exposure of a child "to any kind of hazards, whether mental or physical"; the absence of "active and proper adult supervision" of child/ren and the use of "buildings, grounds, all equipment and furnishings, for childcare services [that are not] well maintained, secure, clean and of hygienic condition" (Childcare and Development Services Act, 2011).

Whilst national legislation does not define the forms of child neglect, the Protection of Children Act (2009) attempts to speak to the various forms of neglect. For the purpose of this study the following definitions were adopted from the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**Physical Neglect:** failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision

**Medical Neglect:** failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment

**Educational Neglect:** failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs

**Emotional Neglect:** inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008)

Abandonment is increasingly being considered a form of neglect therefore that was included in this study. "A child is considered to be abandoned when the parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, the child has been left alone in circumstances where the child suffers serious harm, or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or provide reasonable support for a specified period of time" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).

Caregivers and children have also shared their definitions of Child neglect correctly emphasizing child neglect as a form of Child Abuse. As indicated in Box 2-1 both caregivers and children seem to have a reasonable understanding of the various types of abuse since their explanations qualified physical, educational and other forms of neglect.

## 2.2 Recommendation 1: Localized definition of Child Neglect

Whilst there is a convergence by all the key stakeholders inclusive of children on what child neglect means, it is evident that for many there is an overlap between child neglect and other forms of abuse. Based on the review of definitions, legislations and dialogue with key stakeholders, child neglect within the Guyanese context may be defined as the consistent failure of the caregiver to meet a child's basic needs for food, shelter, supervision and love as well as ensuring the child receives medical attention when needed and consistently attends school, providing they have the wherewithal to do so. Other jurisdictions have included child abandonment as a form of child neglect. Whilst child abandonment is included in the Guyana legislation as a type of child abuse, it is not addressed as a form of neglect (Protection of Children Act, 2009). This should also be considered for Guyana.

### Box 2-1: Perception of caregivers and children on child neglect

#### Caregivers

- Leaving children unattended for long periods;
- abandoning a child without food, clothing or shelter;
- failing to provide proper education;
- child abuse;
- 'not sending the child to school';
- not keeping him or her clean and tidy; and
- 'beating the child'.

#### Children

- when a parent does not have time to look after their child/ren,
- 'when someone disowns you',
- when your parents migrates and leaves you with an aunt,
- 'when a child is left at home'.

### 3 CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO CHILD NEGLECT

This section identifies the various institutions that play a key role in child neglect and their operational procedures. The primary institutions that comprise the national response to child neglect in Guyana include the Childcare and Protection Agency of the Ministry of Social Protection, the Ministry of Education, the Guyana Police Force of the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Public Health, Indigenous Affairs as well as Non-Governmental Organisation and Faith-based organisations. Financial and technical support is also given by the international community (Figure 3-1). The Childcare Protection Agency (CPA) is the lead agency on child neglect issues in Guyana. The CPA implements legislation and policies on child neglect with the assistance of other state actors, and also through support from non-state actors (Figure 3-2).

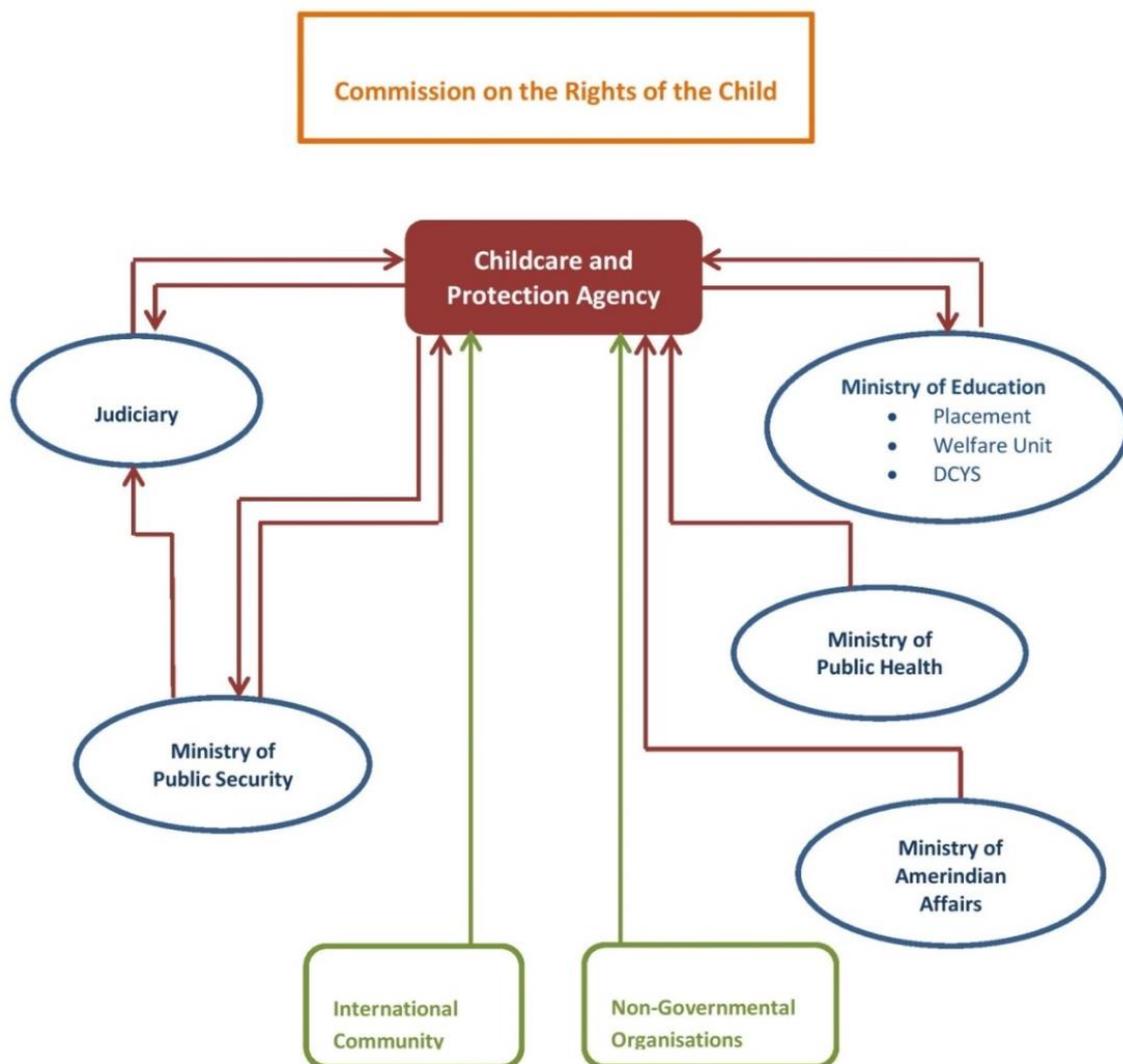
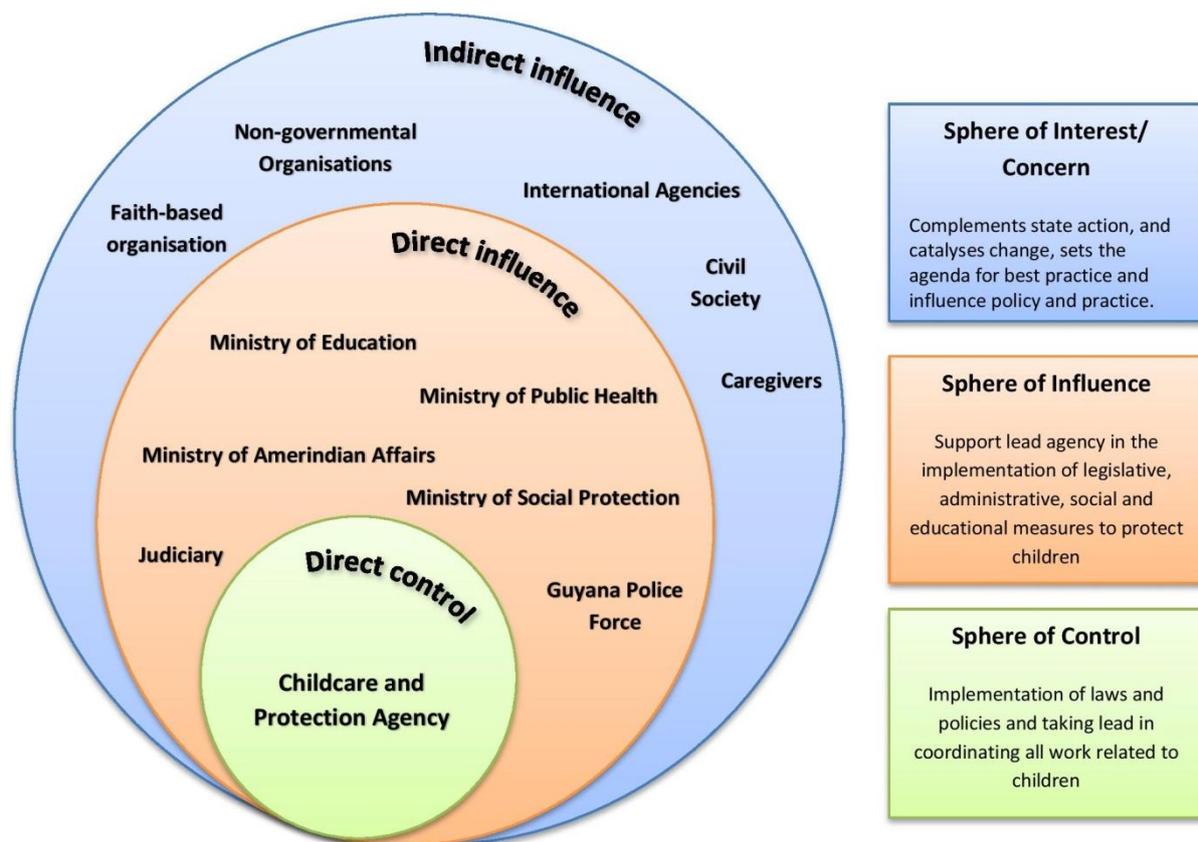


Figure 3-1: State and non-actors in the response to child neglect

#### 3.1 Childcare and Protection Agency

The Childcare and Protection Agency coordinates the national response to all forms of child abuse in Guyana, including child neglect. The agency was established in 2010,

following the passing of the Child Care and Protection Agency Act in 2009, and serves as the central stakeholder in the reporting, referral and prosecution of all cases of child abuse with support from its various partners including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health, Non-governmental Organisations and the International Community. Figure 3-2 outlines the various spheres of influence of the state and non-state actors in their support of the CPA which has direct control for the protection of children in Guyana.



**Figure 3-2: Sphere of influence of state and non-state actors in the response to child neglect**

*(Adapted from: Mauremootoo, n.d.)*

### 3.2 CPA: Operational Procedure for addressing Child Neglect

The CPA receives reports of child neglect directly or indirectly from multiple sources. These include family members of children, children themselves in some instances, and concerned community members or indirectly through one of its partner agencies. Following the report, the Child Protection Agency visits the home of the child/ren ‘as early as possible’ (Langford, 2017<sup>1</sup>). Box 3-1 outlines the steps in investigation of child neglect and other forms of child abuse. Whilst, there is no timeframe specified within the national legislation for response to reports of child neglect, the standard protocol developed by the CPA states that reports received through the hotline should be forwarded to the District Team for an urgent response within 48 hours (Annex 4).

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Leota Langford, Deputy Director, Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana, January 24, 2017

Notwithstanding, there have been reports that child neglect reports are not responded to in the earliest possible time. The Child Protection Agency, who is often the first responder to reports of child neglect, indicated that their delayed response to child neglect is often due to the high demand on the limited human resources and transportation services at the disposal of the agency (Greene, 2017<sup>2</sup>). Systematic orientation to and enforcement of the protocol should be maintained by Officers and its partners.

There is currently a formal referral system between the Placement Department within the Ministry of Education and Childcare Protection Agency in Region Four that allows for speedy placement of children in reported child neglect cases where children have never been registered in school or those that have been absent for significant periods. Additionally, regular impromptu follow-up visits are made to the homes of children in reported cases of child neglect, once to twice weekly, as part of a follow up plan for neglected children (Langford, 2017). This should be the standard operational procedure, but has not been found to be consistent in all of the regions assessed. Information garnered indicates the following: (1) either no visits were made or (2) long delays between follow-up visits by CPA officers.

**Box 3-1: Steps in the investigation of Child neglect**

1. An initial assessment is carried out on *inter alia*, the education, health, needs of the child and relationship with family members.
2. Preparation of a care plan which provides recommendations on how the caregiver and child can be assisted.
  - The care plan includes recommendations for the provision of support services from the agency or other agency,
3. Referral of the case to the relevant agency Recommendation for protective intervention.
4. Monitoring for reintegration with families
5. Interim assistance in the form of food hampers are also provided to families, when available.

According to the CPA, where it is determined that a neglected child is in need of protective intervention, the child is removed from the home and placed in protective custody. Reintegration is deemed a priority. Thus, as far as possible, immediate steps are taken to ensure that children are reintegrated with their parents within the shortest possible time. This should take into consideration the safety, best interest and wishes of the child. In accordance with the Protection of Children Act (2009), cases involving protective custody should be reviewed bi-annually to determine whether the situation of caregivers has improved to allow for the reintegration of the child/ren with their families. This warrants active case management and supervision.

### **3.3 Human Resources**

Currently there are forty (40) child protection case-workers stationed in the ten (10) administrative regions of Guyana (Table 3-1). The child protection case-workers are responsible for all child protection matters as established in the relevant laws of Guyana to ensure the well-being and safety of the child. The current complement of Childcare and Protection Officers within the Childcare and Protection Agency is believed to be grossly inadequate to address reports of child neglect and other child protection

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ann Greene, Director, Childcare and Protection Agency, Guyana, January 26, 2017

matters in the respective regions. In the hinterland regions there is almost an absence of Childcare and Protection Officers, with the presence of one or the maximum of two CPA officers to attend to child neglect and all other forms of child abuse within these regions. The paucity of CPA officers can contribute to the inadequacies in timely response to child neglect as well as the quality of visits, counselling and follow up support that are required to manage each case. Even in regions along the coast where there are higher numbers of Childcare Officers, the number of officers has still proven to be inadequate to address the high volumes of child abuse and neglect cases in coastal regions. This results in high cases loads for CPA officers. Significantly, there are no minimum standards to indicate a social worker/client ratio in Guyana. Thus, even where there is a heavily centralized placement of staff due to the rural/urban population, staffing is still inadequate and staff shortages result in an overburdened system with poor delivery of services (Henry, 2014).

**Table 3-1: Number of Child Protection Case workers, by Region in Guyana**

Region	Number of Cases workers	Number of Child neglect Cases	Average Number of Child Abuse Cases (2012-2016)	Child neglect Cases as a percentage of Child Abuse Cases	Ratio of CPA Officers to Child Abuse cases	Child Population	Ratio of CPA Officers to children
One	1	11	36	31	1: 36	14,917	1: 14,917
Two	1	29	73	40	1: 73	19,600	1: 19,600
Three	4	225	430	52	1: 108	39,853	1: 9,963
Four	17	1219	2175	56	1: 128	114,626	1: 6,743
Five	3	118	203	58	1: 68	19,698	1: 6,566
Six	7	240	486	49	1: 69	41,685	1: 5,955
Seven	1	172	356	48	1: 356	7,901	1: 7,901
Eight and Nine	2	10	19	53	1: 10	18,387	1: 9,194
Ten	4	100	237	42	1: 59	17,238	1: 4,310
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2124</b>	<b>4015</b>	53	<b>1: 100</b>	<b>293,915</b>	<b>1: 7,348</b>

*(Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency, 2017 – Guyana and Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2012)*

A 1:25 ratio with Case workers not having more than 25 active cases may assist the CPA officers to better manage the cases of child neglect and other forms of abuse which fall under their purview. Specifically, Table 3-1 shows, the scarcity of CPA officers in the hinterland regions. This terrain is not always easy to manage and will require the strategic location of CPA officers to address the acute need within the affected regions. A multifaceted approach which can provide attractive incentive packages to encourage officers to work in in-land regions, scholarships programmes to train persons from within these regions, as well as training and empowering of community groups and NGOs to support the work of CPA, specifically in responding to selected cases of child abuse and neglect would be advantageous. NGOs can play a more significant role in filling the identified gaps in human resources within the CPA since the CPA should not be seen as the solely responsible agency for the protection of children

given the range of child protection issues affecting children in Guyana. There is therefore the need for both governmental and non-governmental attention and collaboration to systemically address these issues.

### **3.4 Non- financial Safety Net Provisions**

Several non-financial Safety Net programmes were developed through the Ministry of Social Protection to address many of the underlying needs of children and caregivers and have been designed to increase positive parenting and enhance the well-being of children and families. The Safety-Net provisions include: food hampers for families in need, training of caregivers and monetary assistance to vulnerable children, foster care programme, parenting workshops and a realm of public education programmes. Programs are often done in collaboration with government and non-government stakeholders and serve as a prevention strategy to protect and support children in families and communities. These can positively reduce the issue of child poverty which affects children in communities where caregivers do not always have the finances to provide even for basic needs of their children.

### **3.5 Financial Assistance**

The Government provides monetary support (financial Safety Net) to vulnerable children/families through the Ministry of Social Protection's Public Assistance Programme. The programme particularly targets "children who do not have the basic necessity to attend school on a regular basis" (Guyana Chronicle, 2017). Children, who meet the requirement and are approved by the Ministry, currently receive GYD 7,500 monthly (Guyana Chronicle, 2017<sup>3</sup>). The monetary assistance provided through the programme has been welcomed by caregivers, however caregivers indicated that they are often forced to wait for long periods for approval and processing of the assistance after the application is made. Even in cases where there is an immediate need for support with food or transportation, officers are unable to provide immediate financial assistance to families because of the absence of an organized finance system. Further, once received the public/financial assistance may be discontinued without adequate monitoring to ensure the caregiver's resilience or ability to financially take care of the child/children. Bearing in mind the poverty levels of the children in Guyana, this has the potential to return the child into a harmful situation such as child neglect or other forms of abuse. This is corroborated by the 2016 ChildLinK report on institutional care, which found that children were taken from caregivers when left unattended as parents engaged in income generating activities and were unable to provide constant childcare supervision to their child/ren.

### **3.6 Protective Intervention**

The Protection of Children Act (2009) recommends protective intervention, that is, removal of children from the home, as "a last resort measure". Protective intervention includes placing the child/ren in protective custody, which may be in the care of a relative, foster home or institutional care facility, once removed from the home. Protective intervention may be recommended for one of the following reasons related to child neglect:

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<sup>3</sup> Guyana Chronicle: The Nation's Newspaper. May 3, 2017. Public assistance list growing. <https://guyanachronicle.com/2017/05/03/public-assistance-list-growing>

*“[Child] is at risk of being, physically or emotionally harmed by the action or lack of appropriate action by the child’s parent, guardian, person in whose care the child is left or other persons living in or visiting the household;”*

*“[Child] is being emotionally harmed by a person”*

*“[Child] is in the custody or de facto custody of a person who refuses or fails to obtain or permit essential medical care or treatment to be given to the child when recommended by a qualified health practitioner.”*

*“[Child] is abandoned”*

*“[Child] has been left without adequate supervision”*

(Protection of Children Act, 2009)

Institutional care is one of three means of protective intervention utilised by the CPA. Children may be placed in care within any of the twenty (20) institutions located within any of the regions offering institutional care inclusive of one of the three (3) state managed facilities in Region 4. Although concerns have been expressed in the 2016 ChildLink Report: An Analysis of the Nature and Extent of Institutionalization of Children in Guyana, these institutions are sometimes the only primary care option available when the CPA needs to respond to child neglect, and are utilized in the best interest of the child. Of concern though, is the absence of clear criteria in determining child placement as well as the absence of information on the child when taken to the home. These concerns point to the need for the implementation of the alternative care policy which would mitigate these anomalies and enhance the support systems as required by the CPA.

Other protective care options include placing the child with a family member or a concerned person within the community. Children may be placed in temporary care for up to a period of three months, with possibility of extension for an additional three months, while children in continuous custody may remain in the care of the Childcare and Protection Agency until the age of 18 (Protection of Children Act, 2009). In all cases it is anticipated that the child would be returned to his/her family in the shortest possible time. Notwithstanding, it has been found that reintegrating the child with the family does not always work seamlessly. The 2016 report on children in institutional care in Guyana shows that 25 percent of children in institutional care were in protective custody between one to twelve years (Bess-Bascom, 2016), 53 percent of whom were in institutional care for three years or more.

### 3.6.1 Recommendations: Child Protection Agency

#### 3.6.1.1 Recommendation 2: Timely Response to child neglect reports

Adherence to protocol which caters for timely response must be maintained. Further, the protocol should be reviewed to include the timeframe for home visits. Additionally, a systemic review should be undertaken to ensure that caseloads assigned to officers

are manageable since child neglect is only one aspect of services within the portfolio of CPA officers.

#### *3.6.1.2 Recommendation 3: Roles and responsibilities of state and non-state actors*

Partners must know and follow standard operating procedures for inter-agency partnership on child protection which outlines clear roles and responsibilities for all actors.

#### *3.6.1.3 Recommendation 4: Increase number of CPA Staff*

An audit of the staff complement by child cases needs to be undertaken with quality controls for case management. This strategy will allow the CPA to address the human resource deficiencies within the system so that child neglect which is the largest child protection issue within Guyana can be properly addressed. Specific attention must also be placed in Region 10 which is also severely impacted. Currently the ratio of CPA officers to child abuse cases by region is 1:100 (See Table 3-1). This number, though low in some regions, is exceptionally high in others and highlights the need for additional officers. It is proposed that a ratio of 1:25 should be considered by the CPA. This is primarily because when attending to a child, there are a range of other associated issues which must be looked at since the child as a part of multiple systems which may require attention by the CPO who will have to make a holistic assessment of the child.

#### *3.6.1.4 Recommendation 5: Continued investment in non-financial Safety Net provisions*

The CPA needs to continue its non-financial investments in safety nets since these not only help caregivers and families to better take care of children, but also serve to address the underlying problem of poverty which impacts children and their families. These programs cannot be undertaken by the Government or the CPA alone and requires collaboration with other stakeholders inclusive of NGOs and faith based organizations who can work locally within communities.

#### *3.6.1.5 Recommendation 6: Improved financial approval mechanisms*

- There is the need for the development of a rapid approval mechanism to offer financial support to children and families affected by child neglect. This mechanism should be available to child protection officers with quality assurance controls to ensure its appropriate use.
- Vulnerable families should be provided with public/financial assistance, until the family demonstrates resilience. A follow-up assessment should be carried out to determine whether the family is still in need of assistance prior to discontinuing this form of support, as the family is prepared to be independent. This process must be factored into the management of each case by the CPO and the supervisor.
- Coordination for referrals should ensue between the CPA and the labour unit (job placement services) both within the Ministry, as well as with other agencies to assist unemployed caregivers in securing jobs.

- State provided day/night care facilities in targeted communities to augment the efforts of parents seeking work but cannot afford to paid child care should be considered.

### 3.6.1.6 Recommendation 7: Implementation of the alternative care policy

The implementation of the alternative care policy would ensure that the CPA is able to better manage the government and non-government institutions and other forms of alternative care with clear criteria on placement, duration and case management.

## 3.7 Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education, in keeping with the provisions of the Education Act (1998) and through the Ministry’s Child Welfare Unit and Regional Education Offices, monitors the attendance of children to school. The Education Act (1998), addresses the duty of “parents” to educate their child/ren and determines a parent to be negligent of this duty if a child is absent from school “habitually and without reasonable excuse” or found “habitually wandering or not under proper control or in the company of rogues, vagabonds, disorderly persons, or reputed criminals” (Education Act, 1998). The Education Act was amended in 2004 to increase the age of compulsory school attendance to age 15, and the Employment of Persons Act was amended to increase the age of employment to 15.

Children who are identified as being “habitually” absent from school without a reasonable excuse are reported to the Regional Education Department and a visit is made by the School Welfare Officer to determine the reason(s) for the absence. Attempts are made to conduct follow-up visits to the homes however this is often difficult because of the scarcity of School Welfare Officers. Table 3-2 shows the total number and distribution of School Welfare Officers in Guyana based on data provided by the Ministry of Education. The current data indicates an overall ratio of School Welfare Officers to schools of 1: 22. This ratio is higher in some Regions.

Several coordinating initiatives have been undertaken by the MOE that centres on child protection. The MoE works closely with the police, the Probation and Social Services Division (PSSD) and CPA in truancy campaigns designed to get children back in schools. There is also a good collaboration with the labour unit within the Ministry of Social Protection to address child labour and ensure that children complete school.

**Table 3-2: Distribution of SWO and Guidance and Counselling Officers and Identification of Major Challenges**

Regions	# of Primary and Secondary Schools	# of SWOs and Councillors	Challenges
1	77	3	Slow police response to matters
2	75	3	Poor referral systems Suicide
3	150	7	Absenteeism; Suicide Poor parental support; Teachers needing mental health support

Regions	# of Primary and Secondary Schools	# of SWOs and Councillors	Challenges
4	97	4	School Violence Poor parental support Extreme poverty Child headed households
G/town	80	9	Gang Violence Ineffective communication and untimely reporting Limited coherence in programmes Child headed households
5	51	2	School violence Limited cooperation from Police
6	91	4	Abused children with sexual abuse being the most prevalent Suicide
7	43	3	Abused children Poor cooperation from Police Investigative process lengthy and too emotionally and mentally draining for children
8	40	0	Absenteeism, truancy
9	89	1	Birth Registration, Violence
10	47	3	Birth Registration, children with disabilities
	840	39	1:22 (ratio of SWO and councilors to primary and secondary schools)

(Source of Data: Ministry of Education, 2017; Hunte, n.d.)

Whilst the current Ministry's policy requires that truancy campaigns be carried out weekly, this is often not possible because of the unavailability of finances and/ difficulty in organising campaigns (Vyphius, 2017<sup>4</sup>). Data received from the Ministry of Education indicates that for the year 2013 to 2016 an average of eight (8) truancy campaigns were conducted within each region annually (please see Table 3-3). During campaigns, children who are found "wandering" are taken into the custody of SWOs. Parents/caregivers of children are subsequently contacted to collect children and explain the reason for their absence from school. Caregivers may also be issued a warning through a letter in either of the two scenarios identified above. Where it is determined that the family requires financial support, a referral is made to the Childcare and Protection Agency for the provision of public assistance or to other philanthropic organisations for similar support. Data were unavailable for some Regions. It was suggested that the data reporting may be improved with the implementation of a database system within the Ministry that would allow officers to submit data on truancy as a part of the child protection monitoring systems, and also allow Officers to track reports in real-time (Vyphius, 2017)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Gillian Vyphius, Chief Schools' Welfare Officer, Ministry of Education, June 6, 2017

**Table 3-3: Regional Truancy Campaigns 2013-2016**

Region	2013	2014	2015	2016	Average
1	10	14	14	14	13
2	7	8	7	5	6.75
3	n.d	ND	Nd	nd	
4	nd	Nd	6	9	7.5
5	7	7	16	11	10.25
6	nd	Nd	Nd	nd	
7	14	11	8	5	9.5
8	nd	Nd	4	12	8
9	2	4	4	2	3
10	2	2	20	13	9.25
<b>Average</b>					8.5

(Source of data: Ministry of Education, 2017)

Based on reports, the data on truants include other children who were out of school. Children were found to be absent from school because of illness or in some cases lack finances for transportation. Therefore, parents/caregivers may only be able to provide transportation for selected days or may have to choose between which child to send to school and which should remain at home. In hinterland regions, children walk long distances to attend school, often without lunch. They are also required to walk home for lunch and sometimes do not return for afternoon sessions. For this reason, it was found that many children in the hinterland regions are habitually absent during the afternoon sessions of school (Vyphius, 2017).

There is no cash assistance program in place for School Welfare Officers to access in cases of urgent need hence they are unable to provide immediate assistance to children or families, unless they utilise their personal finances, as is done in a few cases. In Region Five, the Regional Education Office, started a “Care Barrel”, where parents are invited to donate used items to children in need. Through this regional innovation Officers in this region were able to provide some assistance to children who were found in need of clothing or other school supplies.

*“I don’t think I am coming back this afternoon, because I am hungry and there is nothing to eat at home”.*

*- Story of a child reported by SWO on East Coast Demerara*

For purposes of reporting and accountability, local SWOs are placed in all regional offices and report to the Regional Education Officers (REO). This helps with the monitoring of the SWOs within the Regions and reporting on the daily execution of duties. The SWO is responsible to the Regional Education Officer or Principal Education Officer. It would appear that there is not a strong reporting system between the central and regional systems. This reduces consistency in terms of the roles and functions of the schools’ welfare officers within all of the ten (10) regions.

### 3.7.1 Recommendation 8: Ministry of Education

- Parents need to be sensitized on child absenteeism and how it contributes to the educational neglect of the child.
- Both the Schools Welfare Department and the Child Protection Agency need to devise and operationalize clear criteria on child neglect.
- Mechanisms to ensure that children benefit from the education system needs to be in place as education is one of the means by which poverty can be reduced.
- The ratio of SWO to schools (1:22) does not allow SWOs to effectively respond to the absenteeism and outcomes of truancy, hence many schools are underserved. A more realistic proposition would be a ratio of 1:5 providing that each school has regular access to a counsellor.
- The Regional MoE offices, particularly the School Welfare Department, must follow up within the regions to ensure that the government Three Bs program (Bus, bicycle, boat) introduced by the government reach vulnerable children and communities where caregivers lack the finances to send children to school.
- School feeding should be considered particularly where the Ministry of Education has identified vulnerabilities.
- There is need for a clearer definition of education neglect in the context of the Education Act to allow for consistency in addressing this phenomenon in Guyana.

### 3.8 Ministry of Public Security

In accordance with the Protection of Children Act (2009), it is expected that Cases of child neglect which are reported to the Guyana Police Force will be referred to the CPA. Following the review and assessment of cases by both the CPA and the Police, where appropriate, charges could be recommended by the Guyana Police Force. Whilst the Police have an obligation to protect children from neglect and abuse and have been working to improve their response in this area, in some instances the police were accused of not adhering to the protocols of reporting. Reports suggest that police sometimes make decisions, independent of the CPA, which are not in the best interest of the child. The Protection of the Children Act (2009) mandates that the police officer shall immediately inform the Director [of CPA of child neglect reports], investigate the matter promptly and inform the Director of the findings of the investigation. However this mandate is not always employed. Whilst the Guyana Police Force is one of many actors in the Child Protection System (CPS), when one actor fails to undertake their responsibility, the system does not work in the best interest of the child. Despite the legislation (Protection of Children Act, 2009) which clearly articulates the duty of police officers to report, one must consider mitigating factors such as terrain as well as channels of communication.

From all indications, police officers throughout the regions have participated in on-going trainings by both CPA and ChildLinK which should have addressed this standard practices when child related matters engage the attention of the Police. The inconsistent response in cases of child neglect and other forms of abuses raises

concerns on whether child matters are seriously considered by all Police officers since the Police is a key stakeholder in ensuring that perpetrators are charged and matters are taken before the Courts to ensure justice for children. The Police need to be consistent in working with the CPA and understanding the important role in the protection of children. Additionally, child neglect and other cases of child abuse require a 24-hour service by all critical officers. When child abuse matters occur after the regular close of government offices, holistic child protection services to children are delayed and can result in a range of discrepancies which negatively impact the care and support to children offered by the Police and other partner agencies.

### 3.8.1 Recommendations: Guyana Police Force

#### 3.8.1.1 *Recommendation 9: 24-hour service for children*

Whilst there is a 24 hour hotline, this does not necessarily transmit into a 24- hour service provision for children. Whilst the CPA has a standard operational procedure (SOP), other critical agencies such as the GPF in collaboration with CPA must ensure that regardless of the time of the day or night, children affected by child neglect and other forms of child abuse must access the requisite interventions especially in known high risk areas. This will require a review of the standard operational procedures for night care.

#### 3.8.1.2 *Recommendation 10: Care packages for agencies responding to child neglect*

The Guyana Police Force (GPF) must ensure that Police officers and others working in child protection, especially neglect and its attendant issues should have in place a minimum care package for children. This should include basic supplies to meet the immediate short term needs of children such as food and clothing.

## 3.9 University of Guyana

The University of Guyana (UoG) has a unique role to play through promotion of evidence-based research in the national response to child neglect. Identified gaps in research related to child neglect include but are not limited to the effect of child abuse and neglect of children on national development but the ability of children to contribute to national development and growth (Madray, 2017). Madray further stated that a discourse on and research into the long term socio-economic costs of neglected children to society will help to attract attention to the subject and encourage action to determine what can be done to prevent child abuse and neglect. Other critical themes on child neglect that require further research include child poverty, single parenting, grand-parenting as well as how child neglect differentially affects boys as against girls. Additionally, through its field practicum the UoG can also promote and support evidence-based practice.

### 3.9.1 Recommendation: University of Guyana

#### 3.9.1.1 *Recommendation 11: Research Agenda of the University of Guyana to include child neglect and other child protection issues*

There is a need for greater financial support from state and non-state actors to encourage faculty members to undertake research pertinent to the range of issues surrounding child neglect. However, research courses within the University can

encourage undergraduate research particularly within the faculty of social science and health sciences to conduct research linked to a research agenda on such issues. The results of these studies should be shared with the relevant stakeholders.

### **3.10 Non-Governmental Organisations and other Constitutional Bodies**

NGOs often play a critical function, serving as a bridge between the community and government agencies. Many NGOs through their work with children often encounter cases of child neglect, which is often linked with many other forms of child abuse and other social issues such as sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy. NGOs report cases of child neglect to the Childcare and Protection Agency where their intervention is required. A few of the NGOs actively involved in addressing child neglect directly or indirectly are ChildLink<sup>5</sup>, the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association<sup>6</sup>, United Bricklayers<sup>7</sup> and SASOD<sup>8</sup>. This list is not finite and does not include those faith based organizations (FBOs) which also reach out to improve the situation of children and their families impacted by child neglect and other social ills.

Additionally, the Rights of the Child Commission (RCC) has an overarching mandate to ensure that there is a supporting framework to ensure child justice and promote the best interest of the child. As noted by Henry (2014) a properly resourced RCC will be able to provide strong oversight on child protection and properly advise government on the gaps which exist and the essential actions required for government meet both its national and international legislative agreements.

#### **3.10.1 Recommendation 12: Use of NGO as a partner**

NGOs can play a greater role in identifying cases of child neglect and supporting the CPA in the both information sharing at the community level as well as advocacy at the policy level. Trained staffers of NGOs can provide support in the follow up and after care needed by children and families affected by child neglect. These activities must be sanctioned and approved by the CPA and known to other stakeholders, such as the Police, Schools Welfare and Public Health to allow for the seamless collaborations and reciprocity.

#### **3.10.2 Recommendation 13: National and Regional RCC**

The Rights of the Child Commission (RCC), having a constitutional mandate, must continually engage and advocate on policy issues pertinent to child neglect as an important aspect of child protection.

#### **3.10.3 Recommendation 14: Child Protection and Monitoring Information System (CPMIS)**

Monitoring of all systems to assess where a child is located is required. There is therefore the need for the re-introduction of a database on children such as the Child Protection and Monitoring Information System (CPMIS) used by the Ministry of Social

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<sup>5</sup> [ChildLink](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association](#)

<sup>7</sup> United Bricklayers facilitates and advocates for the social and economic development of the most vulnerable. The membership-based organization works in partnership with relevant organizations and the broader community to address issues of care and support and prevention in Guyana.

<sup>8</sup> [SASOD](#)

Protection formerly the Ministry of Human Services and funded by UNICEF around 2005. This will help in the tracking of children from the time of birth and as such a child would always be accounted for within each system. Henry (2014) found that every agency that works with children across the child protection spectrum in Guyana has its own indigenous way of managing information but there is no coherent or structured data management system to measure their location and progression. Children in care as well as children in conflict with the law are primarily amongst those affected. A well-functioning database that is utilized by agencies in child protection would assist in reducing the data deficit. Child neglect could be a push factor for older children in conflict with the law and these children are therefore punished twice.

## CHAPTER 4: LEGISLATION AND POLICIES ON CHILD NEGLECT

On 14 January 1991, Guyana ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Government of Guyana, 2010) and monitors the implementation of the provisions of the Convention through the Commission on the Rights of the Child. Articles 18, 19, 24, 27 and 28 of the Convention address Child neglect.

**Article 18 (Parental responsibilities):** Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children, and should always consider what is best for each child (UNICEF, n.d.).

**Article 19 (Protection from all forms of violence):** Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally (UNICEF, n.d.).

**Article 24 (Health and health services):** Children have the right to good quality health care – the best health care possible – to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy (UNICEF, n.d.).

**Article 27 (Adequate standard of living):** Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs (UNICEF, n.d.).

**Article 28: (Right to education):** All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable (UNICEF, n.d.).

### 4.1 National Policies and Legislation

Guyana presented its 2015 United Nations Human Rights Convention (UNHRC) report which highlights its legislative accomplishments in child protection. Guyana continues to be applauded for enacting laws and policies that protect children in line with CRC. In 2003, in further compliance with Article 3 of the Convention, the Constitution was amended to reflect the best interests of the child. Henceforth, Article 38B of the Guyana's Constitution enacts that the best interest of the child be the primary consideration in all judicial proceedings and decisions and in all matters concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, administrative authorities or legislative bodies.

Further, in an attempt to nationalise the provisions of the Convention, Guyana passed the Protection of Children Act in 2009, the Child Care and Protection Agency Act in 2009, the Status of Children Act in 2009 and the Child Care and Development Act in 2011. The passage of the Child Care and Protection Agency Act (2009) was unprecedented in Guyana being the first legislation passed to create an agency that deals specifically with children, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and in which the welfare of the child is paramount (Section 8 (1) of the Act). The Act is consistent with Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 18 and 19 of the CRC, and stipulates that the Agency is empowered to implement policies and decisions in relation to the laws governing children, monitor childcare facilities, intervene in cases where a child is abused or neglected and among others, to make proposals and recommendations on the enactment or improvement of laws relating to the welfare of children. The Agency is the leading body and coordinator of all agencies which are involved in the management of child abuse and neglect cases. Additionally, the 2011 Custody; Access, Guardianship and Maintenance Act stipulates that parental responsibilities and parental rights may be exercisable by either parent without the other, and a person who has parental

responsibilities and parental rights in relation to a child shall not give up those responsibilities or rights to anyone else but may temporarily arrange for some or all of them to be fulfilled or exercised on the person's behalf. The legislation clearly does not condone child neglect and provisions are made for the CPA to take action where a child is felt to be neglected (Henry, 2014).

Other legislation related to child neglect in Guyana include the Childcare and Development Services, Foster Homes and Voluntary Organisations; the Status of Children; Adoption of Children Act; Custody, Contact, Guardianship and Maintenance of Children Act and Education Act. Table 3-4 below provides a description of relevant national legislation.

**Table 3-4: Selected national legislation on Child Neglect**

Legislation	Date	Child Protection
Protection of Children Act	2009	Protect children from threatening, vulnerable and harmful circumstances to be assisted and or cared for by CPA  The most important consideration in relation to children is their best interests
Childcare and Protection Agency Act	2009	Monitoring and oversight; be proactive in the protection of children to abuse, neglect or abandonment  Ensure the enforcement of the 2009 Protection of Children Act
Status of Children Act	2009 and 2011	The right of children born, to have their births registered and a birth certificate issued stating the names of parents and where they were born.
The Custody; Contact, Guardianship and Maintenance Act	2011	The best interest of the child the primary consideration in related court decisions. Children over twelve years of age are to be allowed to express their opinions or views regarding their care and custody, unless they are unable to do so. The opinions and views of children under twelve years old shall be heard and considered in coming to any decisions once the child is sufficiently mature and can understand the proceedings.
Education Act	1998 and 2004	Duty of parent to educate child. The Education Act was amended in 2004 to increase the age of compulsory school attendance to age 15, and the Employment of Persons Act was amended to increase the age of employment to 15

*(Extracted from: Legislative Framework on Child Protection (CCPMA unpublished Report-Henry, 2014)*

The Director of the Childcare and Protection Agency, expressed satisfaction with national legislation on child protection at the Agency's disposal (Greene, 2017). In fact, Greene (2017) believes that Guyana is an example of good practices in the area of child protection legislation. Nevertheless, the Agency Director lamented the long delays and absence of enforcement in some cases, pointing to a need for a revamp of the judicial process in order to provide a quicker response to victims. She also pointed to the need for the establishment of a targeted Unit such as a Special Victims Unit (SVU) to attend to child neglect and all other forms of abuse.

#### 4.1.1 Recommendation 15: Training of Judicial Officers

Additional and targeted training on child abuse and neglect is needed for judicial officers, inclusive of prosecutors and magistrates, so that they know what to look for, recognise the urgency of the issues and attend to them in collaboration with CPA officers and Probation Officers and the Police who take forward cases.

#### 3.10.4 Recommendation 16: Establishment of a Special Victims Unit

Among other areas identified to allow for strengthening of the enforcement of child neglect cases, as well as other forms of child abuse, is the establishment of a Special Victims Unit (SVU) to attend to child neglect and all other forms of abuse. The SVU is usually a specialised division within the police department, comprising of specially trained detectives who investigate crimes involving sexual assault or victims of non-sexual crimes such as, domestic abuse, or crimes against children or the elderly. The establishment of this Unit in Guyana is expected to allow for more expeditious processing of child abuse and neglect cases. Specialised training for detectives and members of the judiciary will be required for the effective functioning of this Unit.

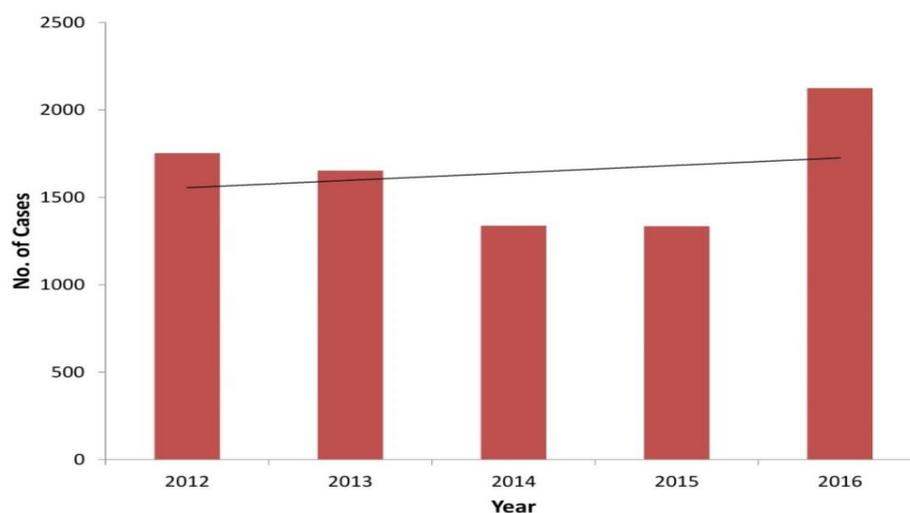
## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS ON CHILD NEGLECT IN GUYANA

Since child neglect is often associated with other forms of child abuse, it may be difficult to disaggregate data specific to child neglect. Therefore, it is unclear whether child neglect is counted in other forms of abuse, *vice versa*. Nonetheless, based on data received from the Child Protection Agency (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016) during the years 2012-2016, child neglect was the most prevalent reported form of child abuse in Guyana, accounting for half of the total number of reported cases of child abuse during this period (Table 0-1). Figure 5-1, shows an increasing trend in the number of child neglect cases, with an overall growth of eight percent over the five-year period. The data also show variations in the number of cases reported annually. It is unclear whether the observed annual variations are independent of other factors such as public awareness, advocacy, management and staffing of the CPA. For the year 2016, the highest number of reported child neglect cases was in Region 4, followed by Regions 3, 6, 7, 5 and 10 respectively (Table 0-2). For the same year, smaller numbers of child neglect cases were also reported in Regions 1, 2, 8 and 9. Reported numbers of cases at the regional level may be influenced by child demographic data, availability of CPA officers and accessibility to efficient means of communication within the regions.

**Table 0-1: Reported Child neglect and child abuse cases for the period 2012-2016**

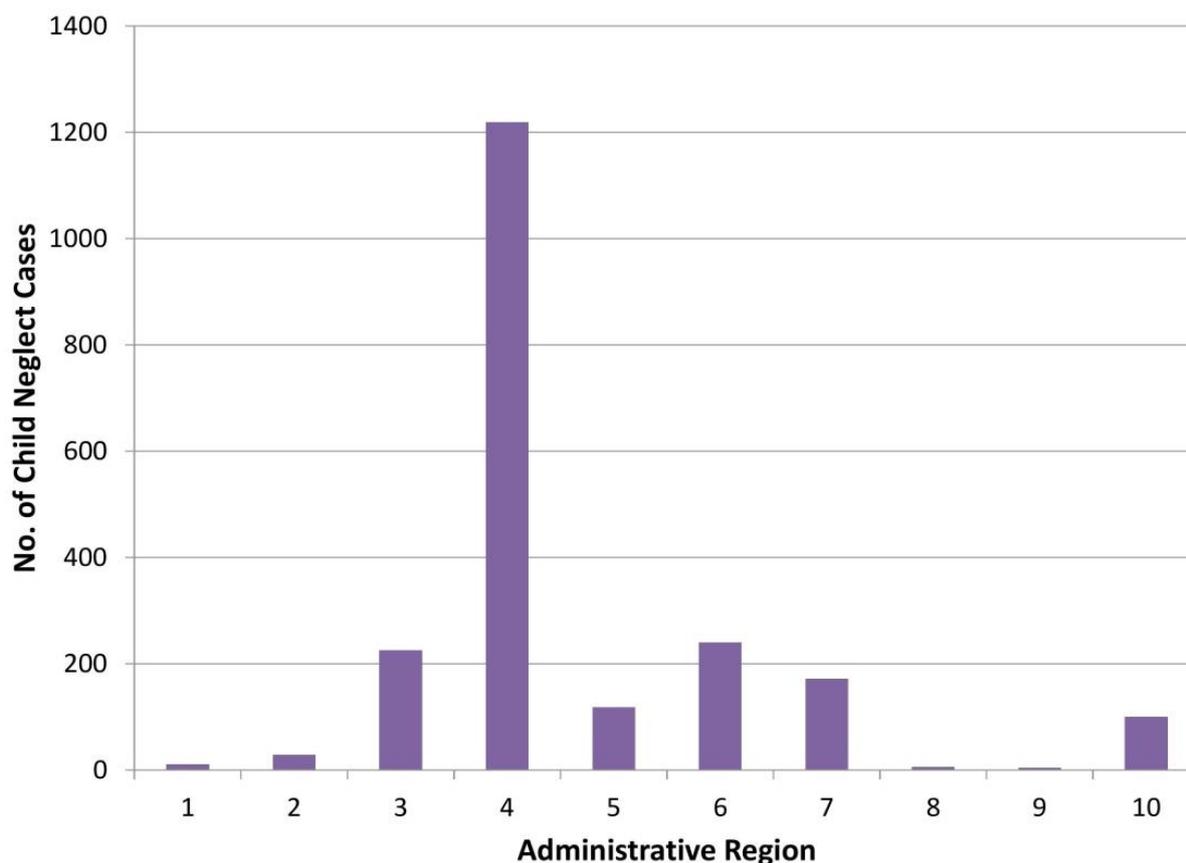
Year	No. Neglect cases	No. Abuse cases	Neglect cases as a % of total abuse cases
2012	1,753	3,689	47.5
2013	1,652	3,342	49.4
2014	1,337	2,745	48.7
2015	1,335	2,815	47.4
2016	2,124	4,015	52.9
2013-2016	6,448	12,917	49.9

(Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)



**Figure 0-1: Observed trend in reported cases of Child neglect in Guyana**

(Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)



**Figure 0-2: Number of reported child neglect Cases in Guyana by Region for the year 2016**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)

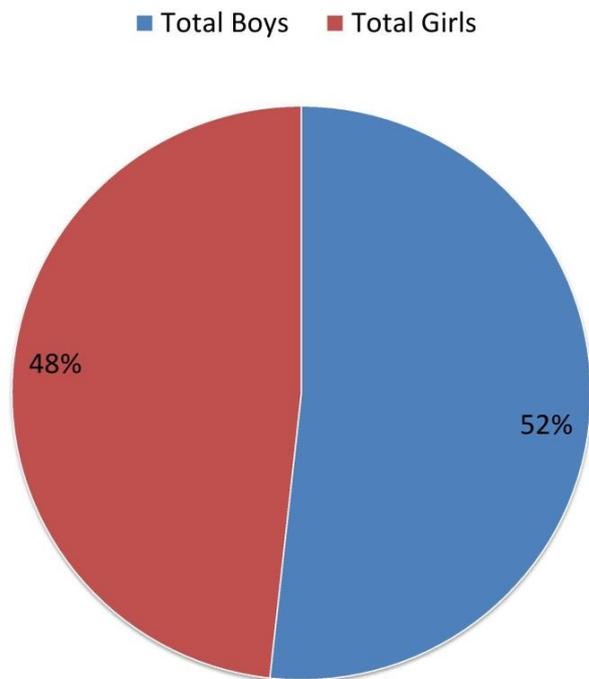
### 5.1 Gender and Child neglect

In most years (4 of 5) of the 2012-2016 period, the majority of neglect cases were among boys (Figure 0-3). Differences in the number of child neglect cases between genders varied from 2 to 22 percent annually over the period, with the exception of 2013 where the reported number of neglected girls was greater than the number of boys. During the years 2012 to 2016, an average of 52 percent of reported neglect cases affected boys, with a 12 percent increase in the number of male victims, compared to a six percent increase in female victims over the period (Figure 0-4). The dominance of boys in child neglect cases is also visible at the regional level (Figure 0-5). The data suggests that girls are affected by more forms of child abuse than boys (CPA, 2012-2016). Further analysis of data indicated that boys experience more child neglect and a prevalence of reported cases of child sexual abuse among girls (CPA, 2012-2016). A UNICEF supported situational analysis of children in conflict with the law completed by the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers (n.d.) found that “most young offenders at the NOC in Guyana had troubled backgrounds including one or no parent households, a high incidence of poverty and insufficient or inappropriate parental support and supervision, often due to a range of social issues including alcoholism or substance abuse, domestic violence and unemployment”. The 2015 National Youth Policy states that “male youth who drop out of the formal educational system are more likely to be in conflict with the law”. The report also identifies males as the main perpetrators of, as well as those most affected by youth crime. Whilst the difference in the number of neglected cases between boys and girls may not be perceived to be significant, given the propensity of

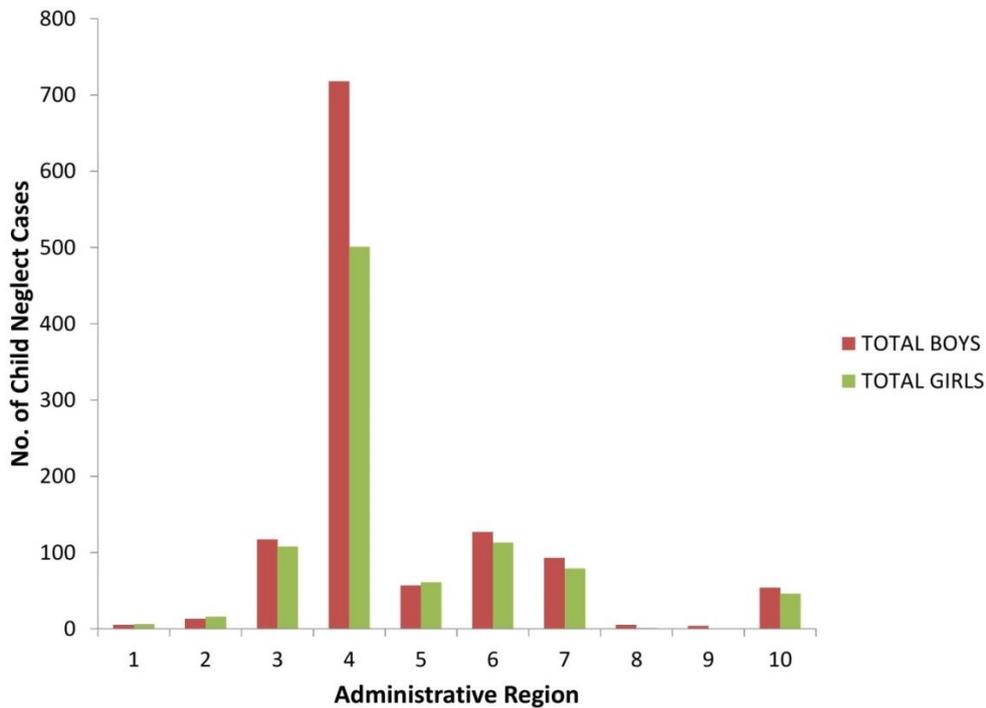
boys to matriculate into other forms of dysfunctional behaviours warrants that attention be given to the observed increasing trend in neglected boys.



**Figure 0-3: Child neglect cases in Guyana by Gender**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)



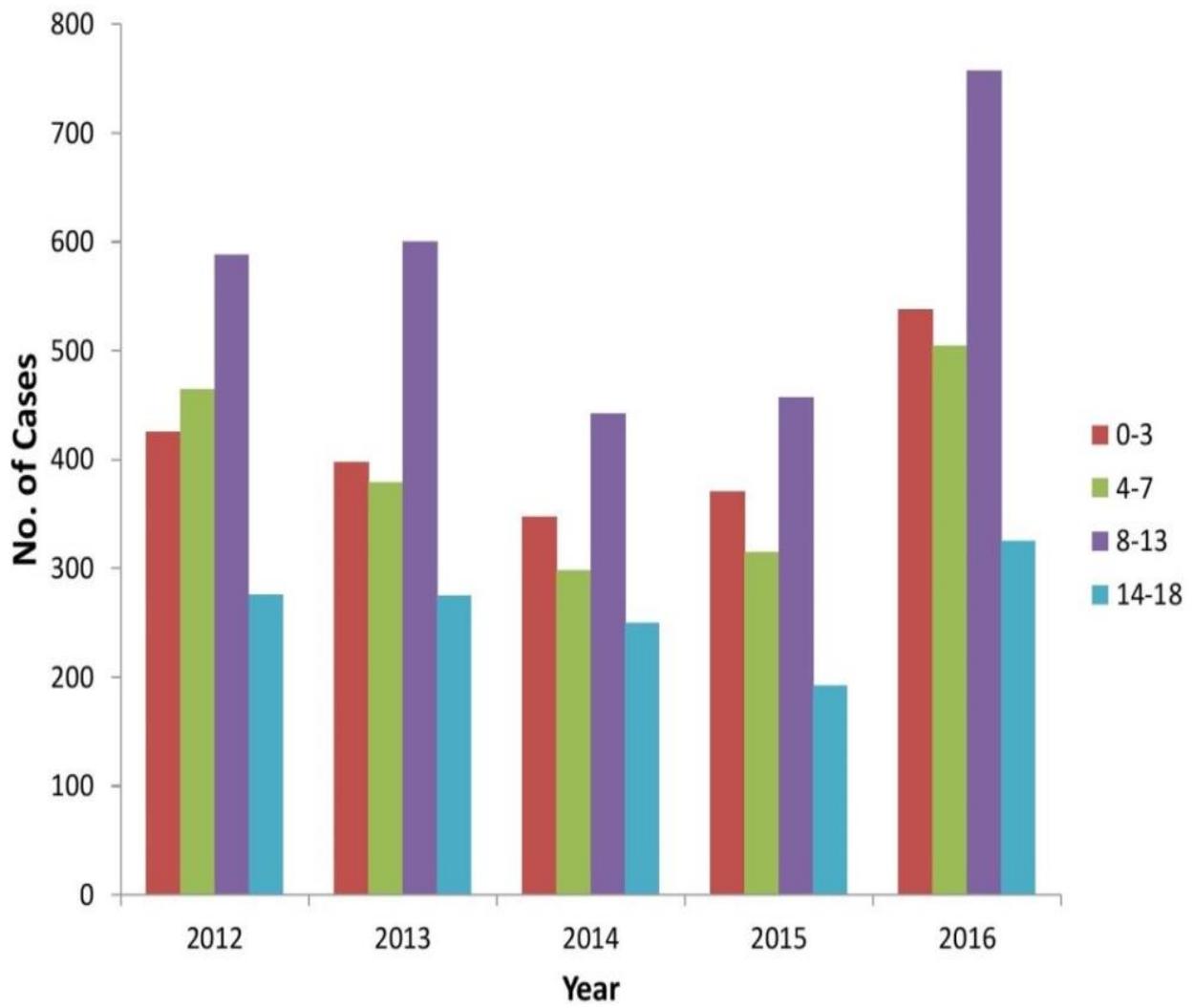
**Figure 0-4: Reported cases of child neglect in Guyana by gender during the period 2012-2016**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and protection agency – Guyana)



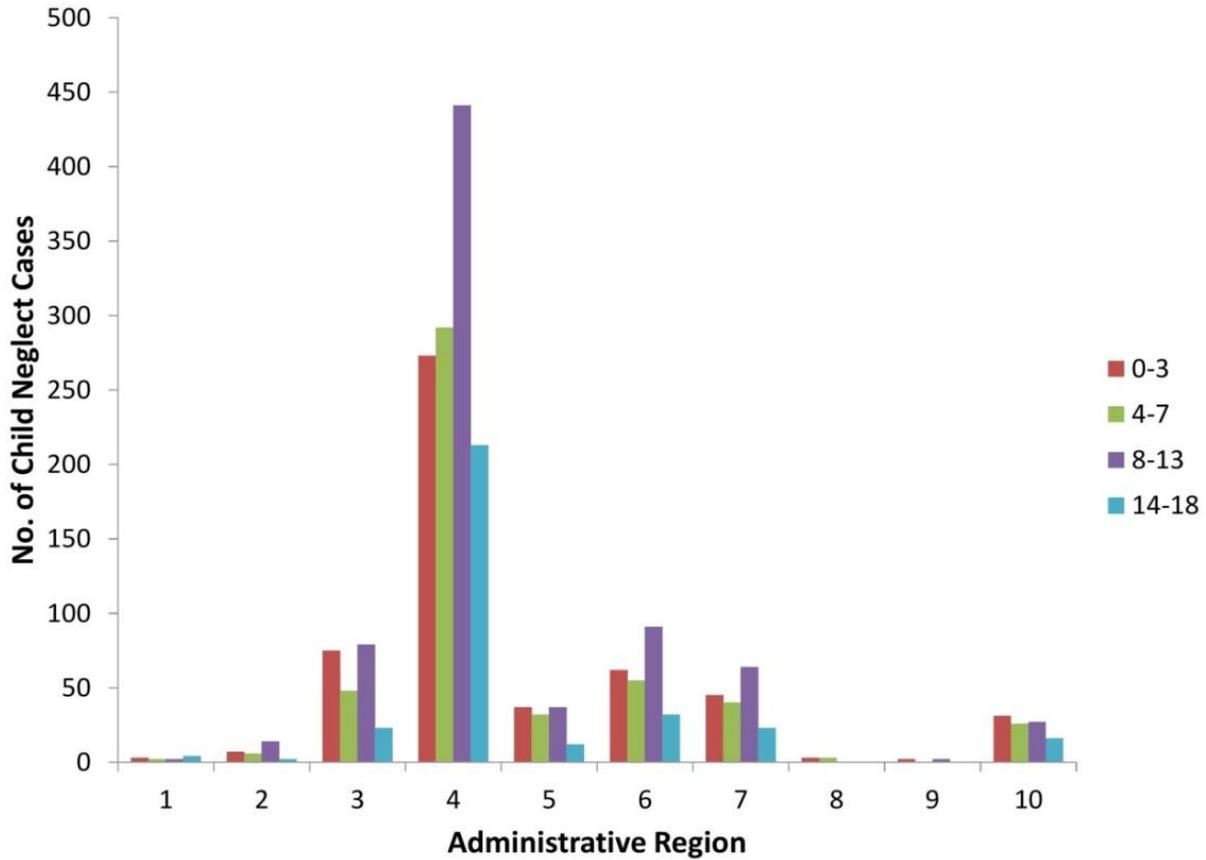
**Figure 0-5: Regional Cases of child neglect by gender for the year 2016**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)

#### Ages of children

An average of thirty-four percent of child neglected cases was reported among children ages 8-13 during the years 2012-2016 (Figure 0-6). The high incidence of child neglect among children ages 8-13 was particularly evident in Regions 3, 4, 6 and 7; with Region 4 leading this group (Figure 0-7). This is followed by children between ages 0-3 (25%) and children from ages 4-7 (24%). For all the years during the same period, the fewest (16%) child neglect cases were recorded among children aged 14-18. Based on the data, it can be inferred that, as children get older, they become more resilient and are better able to protect and provide for themselves. It would be important for health care providers and day-care facilities to be actively engaged in child protection in order to capture neglect among children in pre-school and early education (0-7) age groups. With the requisite training these practitioners can be better able to detect neglect and understand their roles in reporting abuse and protecting children.



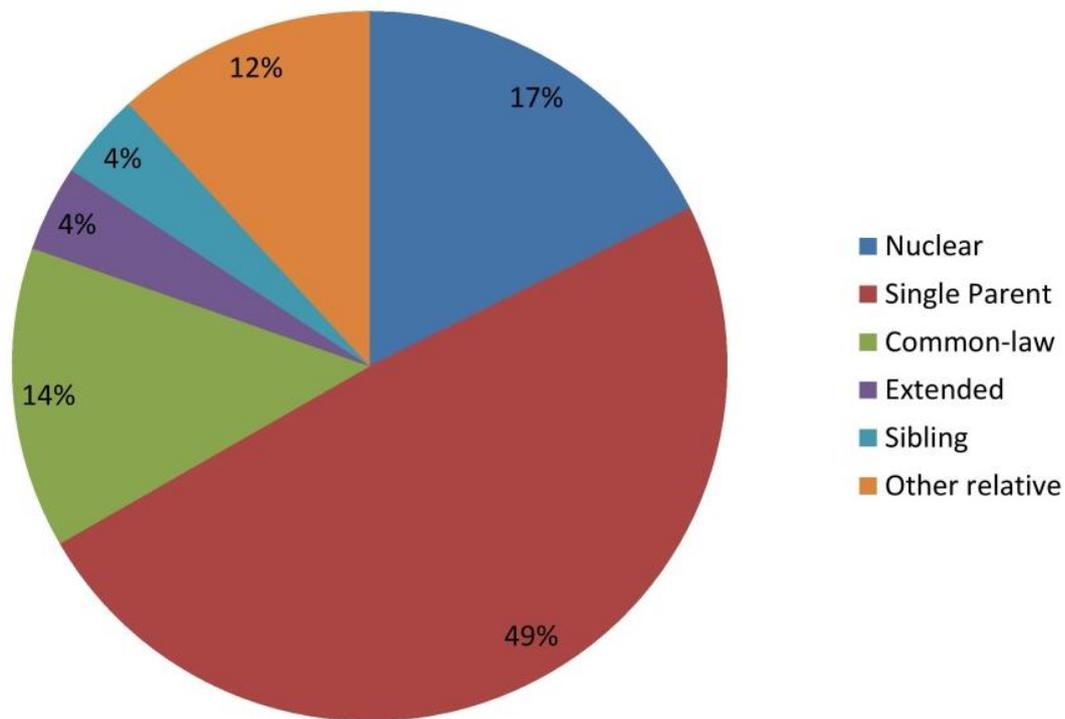
**Figure 0-6: Reported cases of child neglect in Guyana by age group**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)



**Figure 0-7: Regional Child neglect cases by age**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)

## 5.2. Type of Family and Child Neglect

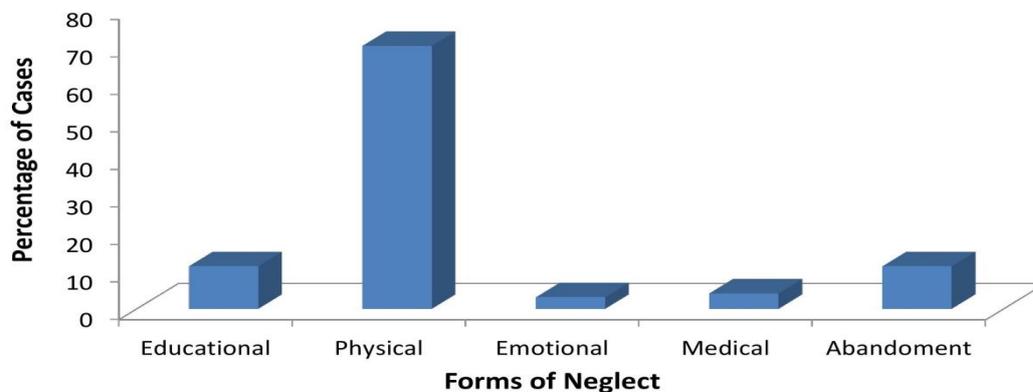
Thirty-one percent of families affected by neglect had two adult caregivers. Of these, eighteen (18) percent of caregivers and children surveyed were from nuclear homes with both biological parents. The data indicate that there is a higher incidence of child neglect among single parent families (Figure 0-8). Forty nine percent of caregivers surveyed were the head of single-parent households; ninety-two percent of these single-parent households were headed by females. In some cases, grand-parents or other relatives are the caregivers as biological parents are either absent or deceased.



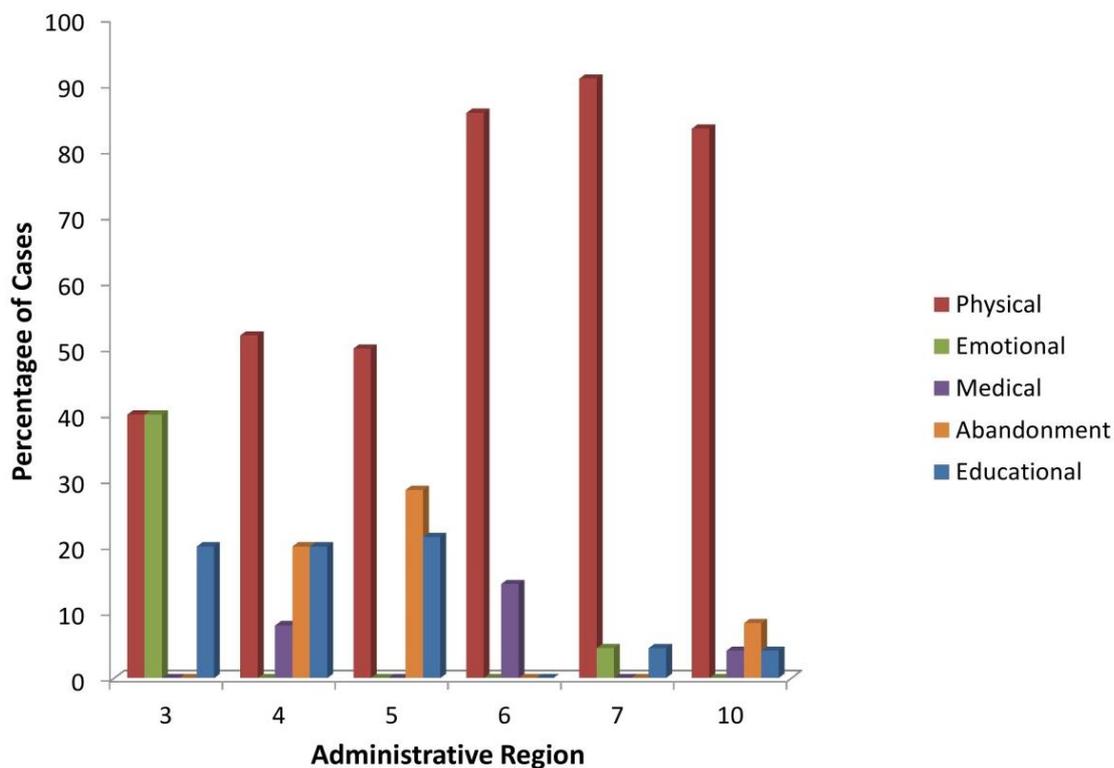
**Figure 0-8: Types of families involved in reported cases of child neglect**  
 (Source of data: Childcare and Protection Agency – Guyana)

### 5.3. Forms of Child Neglect in Guyana

Please see Section 2.1 for discussion on the categorisations of the forms of child neglect adopted for this paper. The most common form of neglect observed was physical neglect. This included failure to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter and supervision of children (see Figure 0-9). This was followed by abandonment and educational neglect. Emotional and medical neglect were the least observed forms of child neglect. At the regional level, there is a higher incidence of educational neglect in Regions, 3, 4 and 5 (Figure 0-10). Physical neglect is the most common form of neglect in all regions. The occurrence of physical neglect relative to other forms of neglect is higher in Regions 6, 7 and 10.



**Figure 0-9: Observed forms of Child neglect in Guyana**



**Figure 0-10: Forms of Child neglect by Region**

### 5.3.1 Physical neglect of children

The failure of caregivers to provide for the physical needs of child/ren was a common observation during this study. Reports have been made of children being ‘housed like animals’ or often left without food for significant hours or days. In addition, many single-parents often leave their child/ren unsupervised for long hours or even days in order to provide for their home. Forty percent of the reported cases of unsupervised children were as a result of the work of the parent or caregiver. Some single parents are security officers, or work in other jobs that require them to work at nights or leave very early in the morning. Single parents who work in the interior regions may leave children unsupervised for days or weeks, as was observed in several reported cases. In other cases (60 percent), children were left unsupervised by their parents for significant hours or days to pursue other social engagements such as partying. Unsupervised children are often left in the care of older siblings, many of whom are children as well. Such was the case of two girls, ages 4 and 8, who were reportedly left at home in the evenings while their mother was at work. Children left unsupervised sometimes harmed themselves, were prone to wander or became prey to adults.

Child abandonment, the second most common form of neglect, was more prevalent in Regions 4 and 5 compared to other regions targeted during this study. Child abandonment in this context refers to a caregiver(s) leaving a child with a family or non-family member for an extended period without any form of support. In addition to the data, discussions with key informants within the Child Protection System (CPS) point to a growing trend of abandonment of children. Ninety percent of child neglect cases were related to neglect by the mother. The data also show that among the

reported causes of child abandonment by mothers was domestic abuse, the abuse of drug and alcohol, a broken relationship with father, migration and poverty.

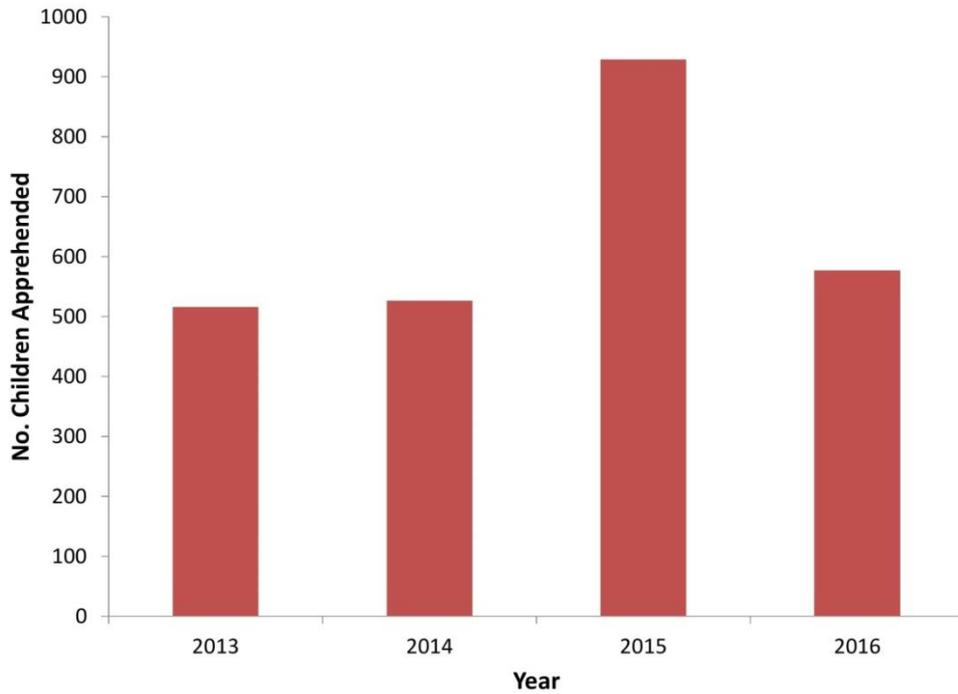
#### 5.3.1.1. Recommendation 17: Provision of child care for families in need

In the absence of strong family support system for single parents, support services provided by the Ministry should include a mechanism for caring for children of single parents while parents are at work. This may include the provision of state funded/subsidised day-care and night-care services in regions and communities where there is a high prevalence of this form of neglect.

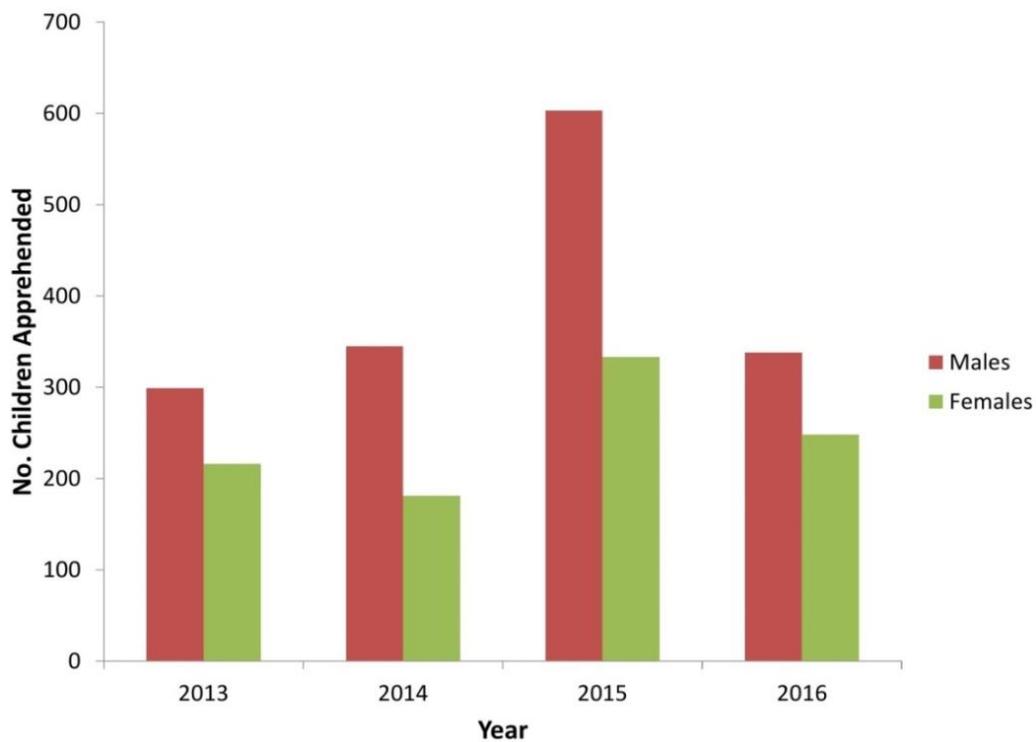
#### 5.3.2. Educational Neglect of children

Educational neglect was the third most prevalent form of neglect reported. Whilst educational neglect was present in all regions, only a small percentage of this form of neglect was observed in Regions 7 and 10 (Figure 0-10). The truant campaigns are carried out during regular school hours to identify children who are systematically absent from school. From 2013 to 2016, the Ministry of Education conducted an average of 60 truancy campaigns annually in selected regions through regional welfare offices. Campaigns were carried out in Regions 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10. An average number of 637 children were apprehended annually for truancy during the reported period and the majority of children found to be truant being males (please see Figure 0-11 and Figure 0-12).

Figures quoted for truancy include all children who are out of school during truancy campaigns. Since there are no standard guidelines for assessing truants, it is unclear how many of the children who were apprehended were 'habitually absent' or wandering or were out of school with the knowledge of parents. Not only is it unclear what mechanisms are employed by the Ministry of Education, Child Welfare and Placement Unit on the criteria used to determine child neglect, but how often a child has to be found to be absenting from school with the knowledge of the parent or being truant before the child is seen to be a victim of child neglect. The absence of clear guidelines can lead to subjectivity and lack of uniformity across the Regions. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education, in accordance with the Education Act (1998), continues to ensure that children take advantage of educational opportunities available through the government.



**Figure 0-11: No. Children apprehended through truancy campaigns**  
 (Source of data: Child Welfare Department, Ministry of Education)



**Figure 0-12: No. Children, by gender, apprehended through truancy campaigns from 2013-2016**  
 (Source of data: Child Welfare Department, Ministry of Education)

Lack of finances for transportation, food and school supplies have been among the leading cause for habitual absence of children from school (Vyphius, 2017). According to Vyphius (2017), these cases were particularly prevalent in single-parent households. However, this is not always the case, since there are single parents who make significant efforts to ensure their children attend school despite relatively small income. One therefore has to be careful in using finances as the only indicator of child neglect. Other reasons for the absence of children include illness and in a small percentage of cases, children are kept at home to work. In some cases, parents are unaware that children are not attending school. This view was also supported by caregivers in the study.

The Government of Guyana, in 2015 implemented a three 'Bs' Programme, through which buses, bicycles and boats are provided to children in need of support. Some educators believe there is a dire need for this programme to be extended to all schools, since many children, especially those from inner city and squatter communities are in dire need of this assistance with transportation, food and school supplies. The government also funds a feeding programme for primary schools students. Teachers in secondary schools have advocated that the government's school feeding programme be extended to secondary schools or that additional support be provided to expand their school's on-going feeding programme since many disadvantaged children who attend secondary school, often without breakfast and lunch are in need of this support (Jacobs, 2017<sup>9</sup> ; Isles, 2017<sup>10</sup>; and Head Teacher, Three Miles Secondary <sup>11</sup>). Additionally, it was also recommended that the school's feeding programme should be extended to the upper grades of primary schools. The current programme only caters for children in grades one and two. However, it was pointed out, that whilst it is not necessary that the programme caters for all the children in the upper grades, with the extension of the programme, teachers would be able to identify children within the higher grades who are in need of this support (Vyphius, 2017).

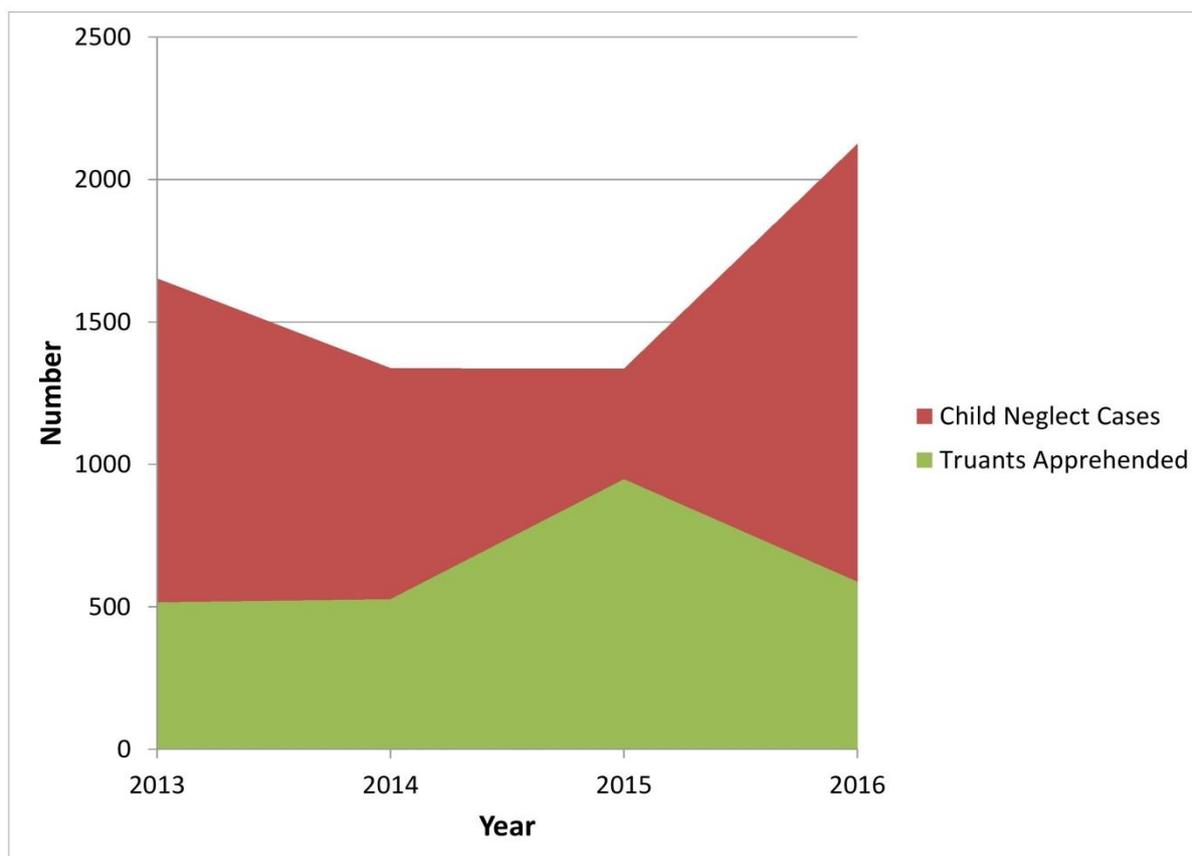
Of significance, the data on child neglect by the MoE is not pooled together with national data by CPA. This is needed for a holistic understanding of the magnitude of the problem. Figure 0-13 provides a comparison between child neglect cases reported to Childcare and Protection Agency and number of truants apprehended by the Ministry of Education from 2013 to 2016. The extent to which data is shared between the two agencies is unclear, despite the Protection of Children Act mandates the reporting of all cases of all forms of child abuse to the Childcare and Protection Agency.

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<sup>9</sup> Vanessa Jacobs, Head Teacher, Canje Secondary School, East Berbice

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Donna Isles, Head Teacher, South Ruimveldt Secondary School, Georgetown, February 1, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Head Teacher, Three-Miles Secondary, Bartica, Region Seven



**Figure 0-13: Comparison of the child neglect cases and truants apprehended**

### 5.3.3. Recommendation 18: Ministry of Education

- The MoE needs to provide clarity on the definition of truancy and child neglect in the context of the Education Act. There is need for clearer definition of “habitually absent” and “habitually wandering” in the context of the Education Act (1998), which should be reflected in reported cases of truancy or absence. Before a case is labelled as child neglect, due diligence must be undertaken to ensure that the prevailing conditions of the child and parents. The MoE also has to determine how many times a child must be found to be truant before it is deemed as child neglect.
- The cases of child neglect by the MoE are not included in the CPA data and points to the need for greater collaboration between these two primary agencies working in child protection as well as the use of a management information system.

### 5.3.4. Medical Neglect of children

Four percent of the child neglect cases were related to medical neglect (Figure 0-9). Whilst this was the least reported form of neglect, it is unclear whether this is due to under-reporting of such cases. There is therefore the need for an effective database system to properly coordinate data for all agencies involved in child care which will allow for better on-going monitoring of children’s circumstances between agencies, understand the circumstances of children and prevent as well as reduce child neglect. Children born at the hospital or to a mid-wife should be registered and that child should

be tracked to assess his/her vaccination status in the first instance. Community health nurses can follow up either by home visits or through the school system where this does not exist.

#### **5.4. Causes of Child Neglect in Guyana**

The most observed causes of neglect were directly related to the lack of finances which in some cases was the result of unemployment; separation of parents; type of work in which caregivers are engaged and drug and alcohol abuse (Figure 0-14). These relate back to the issue of child poverty in Guyana which is interconnected to the situation of their parents.

##### **5.4.1. Financial needs**

Forty three percent of child neglect cases were related to inadequate finances, resulting from unemployment or small income of caregivers. Often parents with inadequate finances, particularly those without the support of extended family, found difficulty in providing the basic physical needs of their children, resulting in some cases in the non-attendance of caregivers to the educational needs of children. In addition to their inability to provide for their children, some of these parents became, physically abusive to children which reinforces that child neglect can potentially lead to other forms of abuse.

Figure 0-15 shows that more than 60 percent of the families who participated in this study earn GYD 50,000 (USD 250) or less monthly. Of these families, 40 percent earn GYD 30,000 (USD 150) or less monthly. Twelve percent of the families earn more than GYD 70,000 (USD 350) monthly. The World Bank (2017) identifies persons in poverty as those living on less than US \$1.90 per day. Of the families surveyed, 46% earned less than US \$1.90 per capita income per day, suggesting that these families can be characterised as poor (Figure 0-16).

Some caregivers who were given protective custody of children through CPA also indicated their need for financial assistance. One grandparent, aged 65, was asked to care for her granddaughter because of abuse of drugs by the mother of the child. The grandmother indicated that whilst she was happy to care for her granddaughter, her primary source of income was her pension. The grandmother receives little or no additional financial support from the child's father who does not have a permanent job. In preparation of the care plan, the financial situation of the possible caregiver should be thoroughly assessed to ascertain his/her short-term and long-term financial ability to care for the child to aid in the decision on temporary placement of the child/ren. Further, more ready financial assistance should be available to caregivers through CPA or other agencies who assume responsibility for neglected children. Langford (2017) of the Children Protection Agency corroborated the reports from caregivers suggesting too that financial need is likely the primary contributory factor to all other causes of neglect.

Some caregivers may find difficulty in securing full-time employment because they lack the necessary training. More than thirty percent of the caregivers interviewed were trained to the primary school level or received no formal educational training (Figure 0-17). Of the remaining caregivers 55 percent were trained at the secondary school level. Twelve percent of the caregivers possessed post-secondary vocational or

technical training. Educational attainment of caregivers contributes to the type of job they can secure and the financial remuneration they will receive. Education attainment, type of employment and income are therefore directly related to the incidence of child neglect.

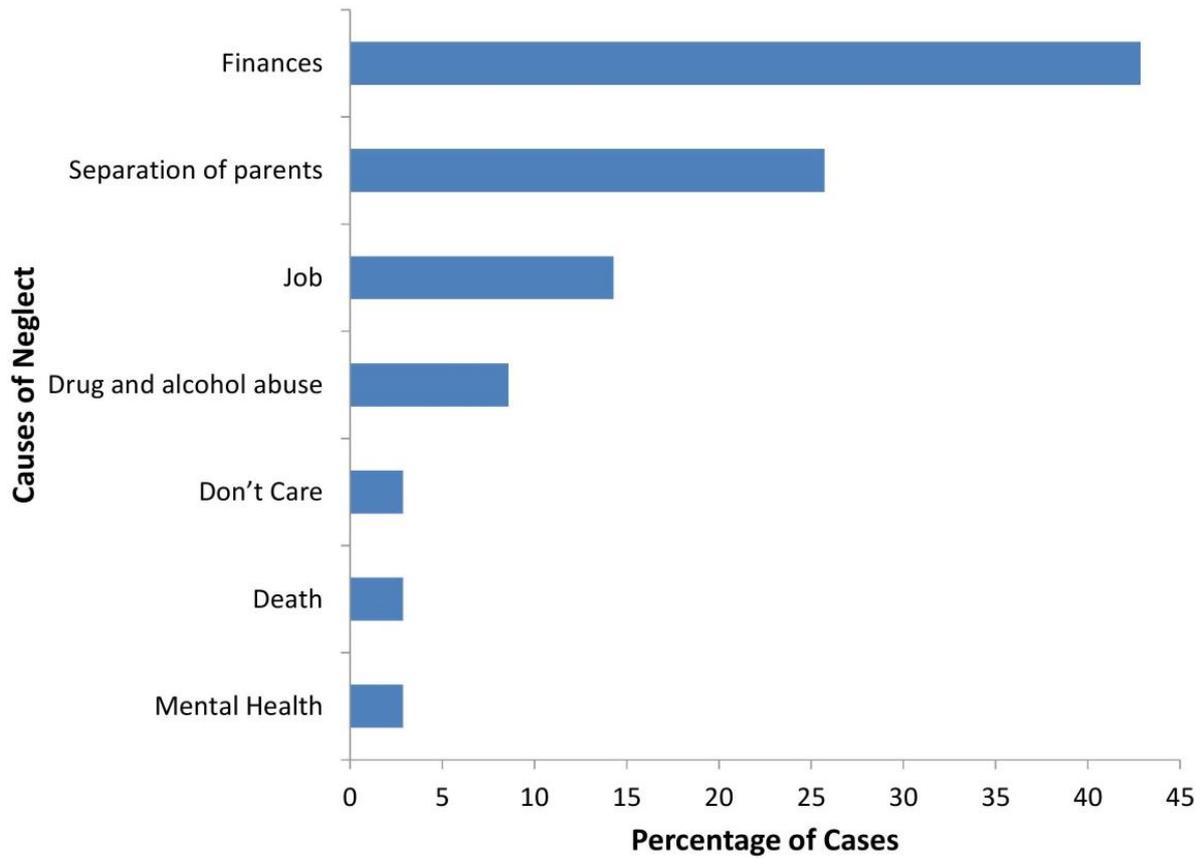


Figure 0-14: Causes of Child neglect

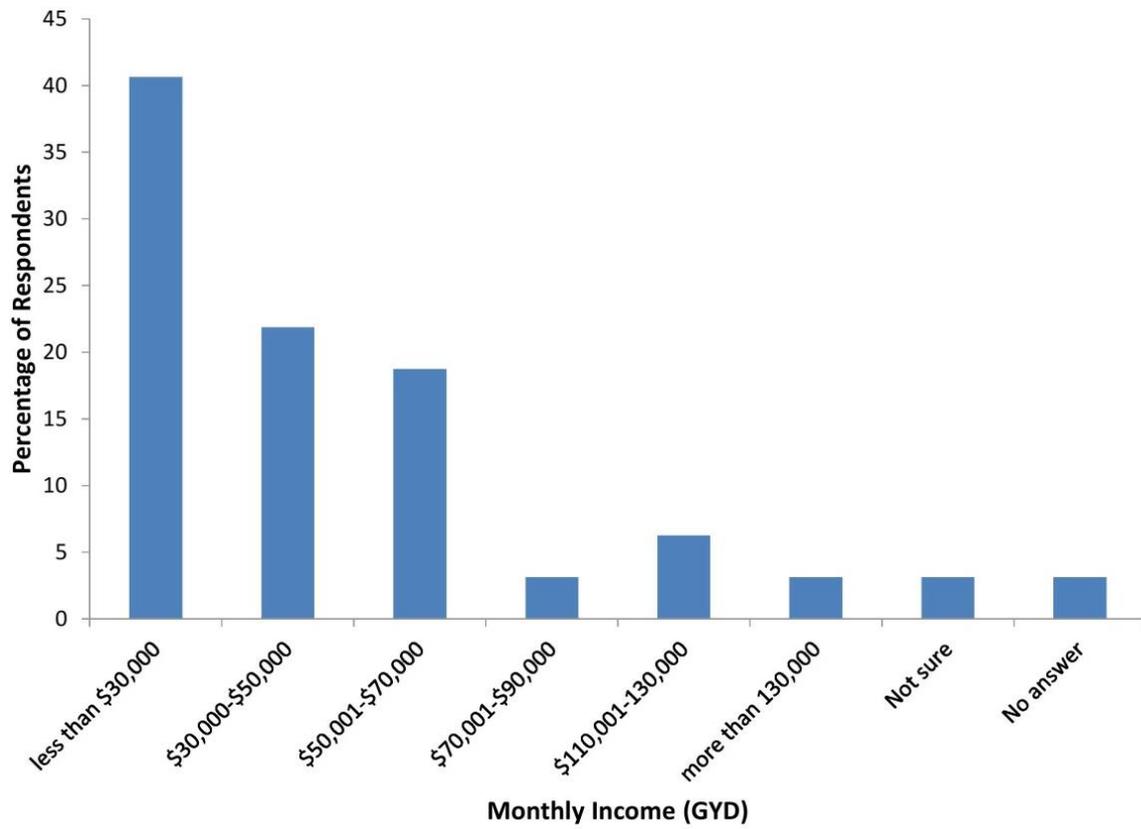


Figure 0-15: Monthly Household income for families with Child neglected cases

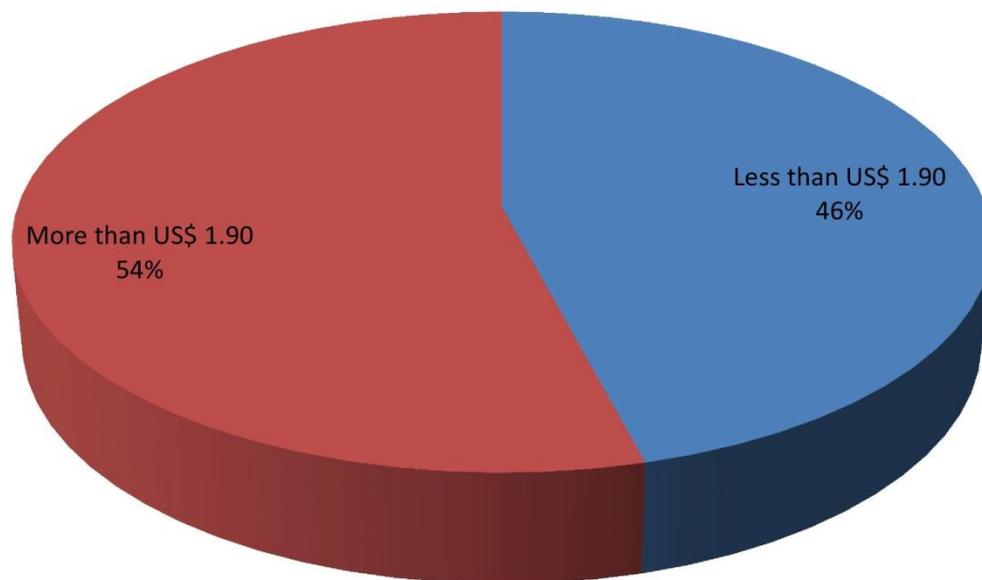
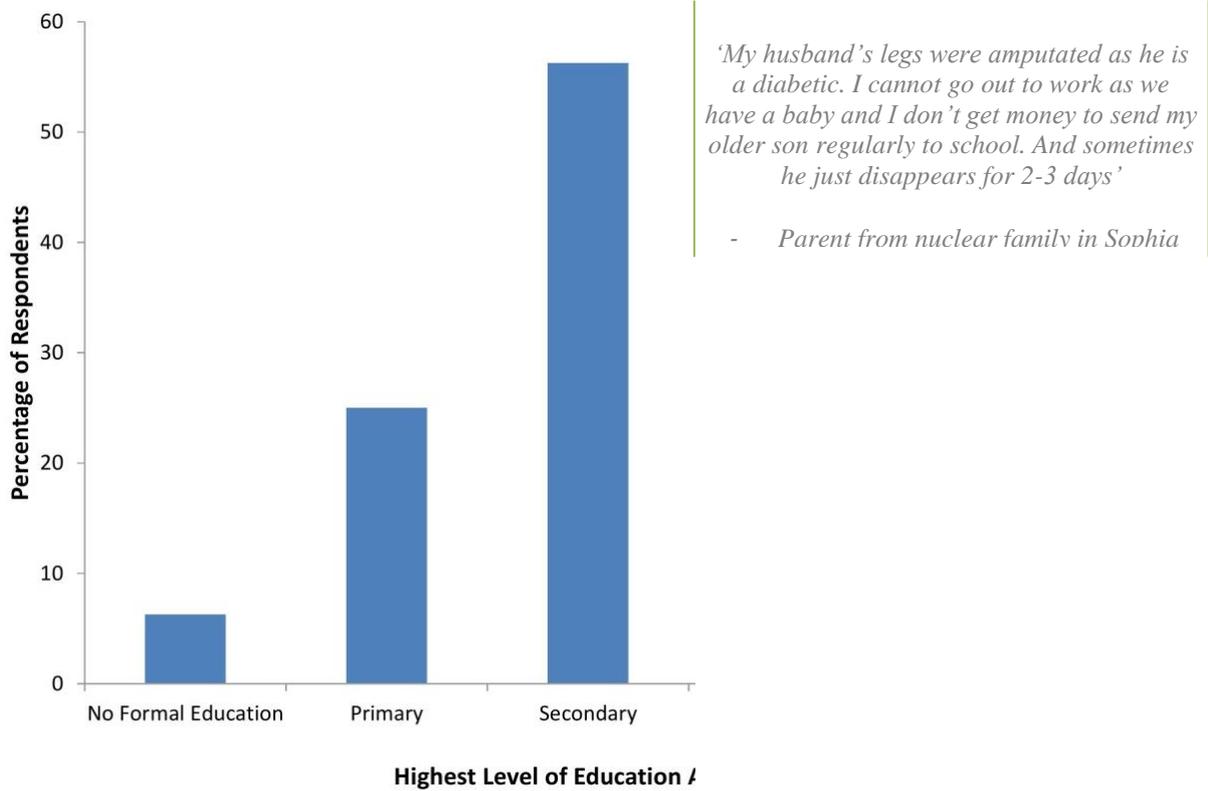


Figure 0-16: Household daily per capita income



**Figure 0-17: Education level of caregivers**

#### 5.4.2. Separation of parents

Twenty five percent of observed child neglect cases were related to separation of parents. Following the separation of parents, children may be left in the care of a parent who lacks the financial means to adequately provide for his/her child/ren, in the absence of support from the second parent. In some cases, children may be required to live with a step-parent or other relative who is not fully attentive to the child's needs.

#### 5.4.3. Caregiver involvement in Work and Child neglect

Fourteen percent of the child neglect cases deemed to be Child neglect ensued whilst the parents was working to provide for their families. This may take the caregiver away from home resulting in children being left unsupervised for long hours and in some cases days. Please see an in depth discussion on this occurrence in Section 5.4.1. Other observed causes of neglect were the death of a parent (3%), illness of a parent (3%) and lack of concern by parent/s (3%).

#### 5.4.4. Recommendations: Categorisation of Child neglect

**Box 0-1: Assessment Questions for Caseworkers**

1. What are the risk factors and the needs of the family that affect safety, permanency and wellbeing?
2. What are the results of neglect that affect safety, permanency, and well-being?
3. What are the individual and family strengths?
4. What does the family members perceive as their needs and strengths?
5. What must change in order for the effects of neglect to be addressed and the risk of neglect and other maltreatment to be reduced or eliminated?
6. What is the parent or caregiver's level of readiness, motivation, and capacity for change to ensure safety, permanency, and family well-being?

*Adapted from: DePanfilis, 2006*

There needs to be a clear understanding of what constitutes child neglect so that all stakeholders working with children understand and are compliant. With the issue of poverty being a major challenge for some caregivers which may force them to leave children unattended as they seek money to provide food and send children to school, the question is then asked: Is this child neglect? It is for these reasons that the stakeholders within the child protection system need to develop an approach to assess and attend to child neglect.

A useful structure to aid those working in child neglect is outlined in Table 0-2 which proposes a three tiered assessment. The writers in the design of this framework outlined some critical questions for caseworkers in determining a case of child neglect. See Box 0-1. This guidance provides the associating indicators for determining how the child fits into the various categories.

Indicators for each category should be discussed and agreed on by stakeholders. This ranges from mild to severe and high. Each category outlines the appropriate interventions and the parties responsible.

**Table 0-2: Risk Assessment of child neglect**

<b>Tiers of Neglect</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Appropriate Interventions</b>	<b>Parties</b>
Mild Risk	<p><b>Physical indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely dirty or unbathed</li> <li>• Inadequately supervised or left alone for unacceptable periods of time</li> <li>• Malnourished</li> <li>• May have severe nappy rash or other persistent skin disorders or rashes resulting from improper care or lack of hygiene</li> <li>• Condemned housing (no electricity or running water,</li> </ul>	Early intervention, family support, formal or informal services, parent education, housing assistance, community neighbourhood advocacy	NGO or Community Programmes

Tiers of Neglect	Indicators	Appropriate Interventions	Parties
	<p>children diagnosed with lead poisoning, other safety hazards for young children)</p> <p><b>Indicators in a child's behaviour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates severe lack of attachment to other adults</li> <li>• Poor school attendance (absent for more than 30 consecutive days).</li> <li>• Poor school performance</li> <li>• Poor social skills</li> <li>• May steal food</li> <li>• Is very demanding of affection or attention</li> <li>• Has no understanding of basic hygiene</li> <li>• Acting out .behaviour (refusing to listen, throwing temper tantrums, fights with peers</li> <li>• Communication problems or conflicts (domestic. violence, parent-child conflict)</li> <li>• Fear of expressing feelings, verbally abusive, not recognizing feelings of others</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicators in adult behaviour:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to provide for the child's basic needs, such as housing, nutrition, medical and psychological care</li> <li>• Fails to enrol a child in school</li> <li>• Permits truancy</li> <li>• Is overwhelmed with own problems and puts own needs ahead of the child's needs</li> <li>• Frequent moves (in and out of placement, numerous schools, numerous caregivers).</li> <li>• Parental addiction</li> <li>• Inappropriately harsh parenting, inappropriate expectations of children</li> <li>• Lack of social supports</li> </ul>		
Moderate Risk	<p><b>Physical indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely dirty or unbathed</li> <li>• Inadequately supervised or left alone for unacceptable</li> </ul>	Appropriate formal services, coordinated family support, safety plans, community support services	CPA and community programmes

Tiers of Neglect	Indicators	Appropriate Interventions	Parties
	<p>periods of time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Malnourished</li> <li>• May have severe nappy rash or other persistent skin disorders or rashes resulting from improper care or lack of hygiene</li> <li>• Condemned housing (no electricity or running water, children diagnosed with lead poisoning, other safety hazards for young children)</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicators in a child's behaviour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates severe lack of attachment to other adults</li> <li>• Poor school attendance (absent for more than 30 consecutive days).</li> <li>• Poor school performance</li> <li>• Poor social skills</li> <li>• May steal food</li> <li>• Is very demanding of affection or attention</li> <li>• Has no understanding of basic hygiene</li> <li>• Acting out behaviour (refusing to listen, throwing temper tantrums, fights with peers)</li> <li>• Communication problems or conflicts (domestic violence, parent-child conflict)</li> <li>• Fear of expressing feelings, verbally abusive, not recognizing feelings of others</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicators in adult behaviour:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to provide for the child's basic needs, such as housing, nutrition, medical and psychological care</li> <li>• Fails to enrol a child in school</li> <li>• Permits truancy</li> <li>• Is overwhelmed with own problems and puts own needs ahead of the child's needs</li> <li>• Frequent moves (in and out of placement, numerous schools, numerous caregivers).</li> <li>• Parental addiction</li> <li>• Inappropriately harsh</li> </ul>		

<b>Tiers of Neglect</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Appropriate Interventions</b>	<b>Parties</b>
	parenting, inappropriate expectations of children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of social supports</li> </ul>		
Severe Risk	<p><b>Physical indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely dirty or unbathed</li> <li>• Inadequately supervised or left alone for unacceptable periods of time</li> <li>• Malnourished</li> <li>• May have severe nappy rash or other persistent skin disorders or rashes resulting from improper care or lack of hygiene</li> <li>• Condemned housing (no electricity or running water, children diagnosed with lead poisoning, other safety hazards for young children)</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicators in a child's behaviour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrates severe lack of attachment to other adults</li> <li>• Poor school attendance (absent for more than 30 consecutive days).</li> <li>• Poor school performance</li> <li>• Poor social skills</li> <li>• May steal food</li> <li>• Is very demanding of affection or attention</li> <li>• Has no understanding of basic hygiene</li> <li>• Acting out .behaviour (refusing to listen, throwing temper tantrums, fights with peers</li> <li>• Communication problems or conflicts (domestic. violence, parent-child conflict)</li> <li>• Fear of expressing feelings, verbally abusive, not recognizing feelings of others</li> </ul> <p><b>Indicators in adult behaviour:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to provide for the child's basic needs, such as housing, nutrition, medical and psychological care</li> </ul>	Intensive family preservation or reunification services, child removal, court-ordered services, foster care, adoption, criminal prosecution	MOE, CPA and law enforcement

Tiers of Neglect	Indicators	Appropriate Interventions	Parties
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fails to enrol a child in school</li> <li>• Permits truancy</li> <li>• Is overwhelmed with own problems and puts own needs ahead of the child's needs</li> <li>• Frequent moves (in and out of placement, numerous schools, numerous caregivers).</li> <li>• Parental addiction</li> <li>• Inappropriately harsh parenting, inappropriate expectations of children</li> <li>• Lack of social supports</li> </ul>		

#### 5.4.5. Recommendation 20: Public awareness and training of caregivers

This section reiterates earlier recommendations suggesting that effort and resources should be dedicated to increasing awareness on the issues of child neglect and serve as a preventative approach. Public awareness programmes on child neglect and the work of the CPA in addressing child neglect should target the general public, children, caregivers and police officers. Moreover there is a need for continual training and counselling of parents and caregivers who have been identified as perpetrators of child neglect. This programme should be mandatory and all caregivers and parents should be provided with a certificate on completion of the programme to assist in identifying those who have or have not completed the programme. It can no longer be assumed that parents have the requisite knowledge to care for their child/ren. This programme could be implemented in partnership with schools, NGOs, Faith-Based Organisations and health centres, inter alia.

#### **Box 0-2: Suggested topics for caregiver training programme**

- What is Child neglect?
- Forms of Child neglect
- National laws related to Child neglect
- The responsibility of parents regarding the education of the child/ren
- The responsibility of parents in meeting the emotional needs of children
- The responsibility of parents with regard to the health of their child/ren
- The responsibility of parents regarding the provision of necessities for the child/ren development
- Social and financial support programmes available to parents nationally

## CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Recommendations

A summary of the recommendations is presented in Table 6-1 below in the order in which they are discussed in the paper.

**Table 0-1: Summary of recommendations to address institutional gaps**

<p><i>Recommendation 1:</i></p> <p><i>Localized definition of Child neglect</i></p> <p>Whilst there is a convergence by all the key stakeholders inclusive of children on what constitutes child neglect, it is clearly evident that for many there is an overlap between child neglect and other forms of abuse. Based on the review of definitions, legislations and dialogue with key stakeholders, child neglect within the Guyanese context may be defined as the consistent failure of the caregiver to meet a child’s basic needs for food, shelter, supervision and love as well as ensuring the child receives medical attention when needed and consistently attends school, providing they have the wherewithal to do so. Other jurisdictions have included child abandonment as a form of child neglect. Whilst child abandonment is included in the Guyana legislation as a type of child abuse, it is not addressed as a form of neglect (Protection of Children Act, 2009). This should also be considered for Guyana.</p>	
<p><b>Child Protection Agency</b></p>	<p><i>Recommendation 2: Timely Response to child neglect reports</i></p> <p>Adherence to protocol which caters for timely response must be maintained. Further, the protocol should be reviewed to include the timeframe for home visits. Additionally, a systemic review should be undertaken to ensure that caseloads assigned to officers are manageable since child neglect is only one aspect of services within the portfolio of CPA officers.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 3: Roles and responsibilities of state and non-state actors</i></p> <p>Partners must know and follow standard operating procedures for inter-agency partnership on child protection which outlines clear roles and responsibilities for all actors.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 4: Increase number of CPA Staff</i></p> <p>An audit of the staff complement by child cases needs to be undertaken with quality controls for case management. This strategy will allow the CPA to address the human resource deficiencies within the system so that child neglect which is the largest child protection issue within Guyana can be properly addressed. Specific attention must also be placed on Region 10 which is also severely impacted. Currently the ratio of CPA officers to child abuse cases by region is 1:100</p>

	<p>(See Table 3-1). This number, though low in some regions, is exceptionally high in others and highlights the need for additional officers. It is proposed that a ratio of 1:25 should be considered by the CPA especially since when attending to a child, there are a range of other associated issues which must be looked at as the child is a part of multiple systems which may require attention by the CPO who will have to make a holistic assessment of the child.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 5: Continued investment in non-financial Safety Net provisions</i></p> <p>The CPA needs to continue its non-financial investments in safety nets since these not only help caregivers and families to better take care of children, but also serve to address the underlying problem of poverty which impacts children and their families. These programs cannot be undertaken by the Government or the CPA alone and requires collaboration with other stakeholders inclusive of NGOs and faith based organizations who can work locally within communities.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 6: Improved financial approval mechanisms</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is the need for the development of a rapid approval mechanism to offer financial support to children and families affected by child neglect. This mechanism should be available to child protection officers with quality assurance controls to ensure its appropriate use.</li> <li>• Vulnerable families should be provided with public / financial assistance, until the family demonstrates resilience. A follow-up assessment should be carried out to determine whether the family is still in need of assistance prior to discontinuing this form of support, as the family is prepared to be independent. This process must be factored into the management of each case by the CPO and the supervisor.</li> <li>• Coordination for referrals should ensue between the CPA and the labour unit (job placement services) both within the Ministry, as well as with other agencies to assist unemployed caregivers in securing jobs.</li> <li>• State provided day/night care facilities in targeted communities to augment the efforts of parents seeking work but cannot afford paid child care should be considered.</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Recommendation 7: Implementation of the alternative care policy</i></p>

	<p>The implementation of the alternative care policy would ensure that the CPA is able to better manage the government and non-government institutions and other forms of alternative care with clear criteria on placement, duration and case management.</p>
<p><b>Ministry of Education</b></p>	<p><i>Recommendations 8: Ministry of Education</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need to be sensitized on child absenteeism and how it contributes to the educational neglect of the child.</li> <li>• Both the Schools Welfare Department and the Child Protection Agency need to devise and operationalize clear criteria on child neglect</li> <li>• Mechanisms to ensure that children benefit from the education system needs to be in place as education is one of the means by which poverty can be reduced.</li> <li>• The ratio of SWO to schools (1:22) does not allow SWOs to effectively respond to the absenteeism and outcomes of truancy, hence many schools are underserved. A more realistic ratio would be 1:5 providing that each school has regular access to a counsellor.</li> <li>• The Regional MoE offices, particularly the School Welfare Department, must follow up within the regions to ensure that the government Three Bs program (Bus, bicycle, boat) introduced by the government reach vulnerable children and communities where caregivers lack the finances to send children to school.</li> <li>• There is need for a clearer definition of education neglect in the context of the Education Act to allow for consistency in addressing this phenomenon in Guyana.</li> </ul> <p>• The cases of child neglect by the MoE are not included in the CPA data and points to the need for greater collaboration between these two primary agencies working in child protection.</p>
<p><b>Guyana Police Force</b></p>	<p><i>Recommendation 9: 24-hour service for children</i></p> <p>Whilst there is a 24 hour hotline, this does not necessarily transmit into a 24- hour service provision for children. The CPA must ensure that regardless of the time of the day or</p>

	<p>night, children affected by child neglect and other forms of child abuse must get the requisite interventions required especially in known high risk areas. This will require a review of the standard operational procedures for night care.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 10: Care packages for agencies responding to child neglect</i></p> <p>Further, police officers and others working in child protection especially neglect and its attendant issues should have in place a minimum care package for children. This should include basic supplies to meet the immediate short term needs of children such as food and clothing.</p>
<b>University of Guyana</b>	<p><i>Recommendation 11: Research Agenda of the University of Guyana to include Child Neglect and other child protection issues</i></p> <p>There is a need for greater financial support from state and non-state actors to encourage faculty members to undertake research pertinent to the range of issues surrounding child neglect. However, research courses within the University can encourage undergraduate research particularly within the faculty of social science and health sciences to conduct research on such issues. The results of these studies should be shared with the relevant stakeholders.</p>
<b>Other Constitutional State and Non-state partners</b>	<p><i>Recommendation 12: Use of NGO as a partner</i></p> <p>NGOs can play a greater role in identifying cases of child neglect and supporting the CPA in the both information sharing at the community level as well as advocacy at the policy level. Trained staffers of NGOs can provide support in the follow up and after care needed by children and families affected by child neglect. These activities must be sanctioned and approved by the CPA and known to other stakeholders, such as the Police, Schools Welfare and Public Health to allow for the seamless collaborations and reciprocity.</p> <p><i>Recommendation 13: National and Regional RCC</i></p> <p>The Rights of the Child Commission (RCC), having a constitutional mandate, must continually engage and advocate on policy issues pertinent to child neglect as an important aspect of child protection.</p> <p><i>Recommendation 14: Child Protection and Monitoring Information System (CPMIS)</i></p> <p>Monitoring of all systems to assess where a child is located is required. There is therefore the need for the re-introduction of a database on children such as the Child Protection and</p>

	<p>Monitoring Information System (CPMIS) used by the Ministry of Social Protection formerly the Ministry of Human Services and funded by UNICEF around 2005. This will help in the tracking of children from the time of birth and as such a child would always be accounted for within each system. Henry (2014) found that every agency that works with children across the child protection spectrum in Guyana has its own indigenous way of managing information but there is no coherent or structured data management system to measure their location and progression. Children in care as well as children in conflict with the law are primarily amongst those affected. A well-functioning database that is utilized by agencies in child protection would assist in reducing the data deficit. Child neglect could be a push factor for older children in conflict with the law and these children are therefore punished twice.</p>
<p><b>Legislation and Policy</b></p>	<p><i>Recommendation 15: Training of Judicial Officers</i></p> <p>Additional and targeted training on child abuse and neglect is needed for judicial officers, inclusive of prosecutors and magistrates, so that they know what to look for, recognise the urgency of the issues and attend to them in collaboration with CPA officers and Probation Officers and the Police who take forward cases.</p> <p><i>Recommendation 16: Establishment of a Special Victims Unit</i></p> <p>Among other areas identified to allow for strengthening of the enforcement of child neglect cases, as well as other forms of child abuse, is the establishment of a Special Victims Unit (SVU) to attend to child neglect and all other forms of abuse. The SVU is usually a specialised division within the police department, comprising of specially trained detectives who investigate crimes involving sexual assault or victims of non-sexual crimes such as, domestic abuse, or crimes against children or the elderly. The establishment of this Unit in Guyana is expected to allow for more expeditious processing of child abuse and neglect cases. Specialised training for detectives and members of the judiciary will be required for the effective functioning of this Unit.</p> <p>The MoE needs to provide clarity on the definition of truancy and child neglect in the context of the Education Act. There is need for clearer definition of “habitually absent” and “habitually wandering” in the context of the Education Act (1998), which should be reflected in reported cases of truancy or absence. Before a case is labelled as child neglect, due diligence must be undertaken to ensure that the prevailing conditions of the child and parents. The MoE also</p>

	<p>has to determine how many times a child must be found to be truant before it is deemed as child neglect.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 17: Provision of child care for families in need</i></p> <p>In the absence of strong family support system for single parents, support services provided by the Ministry of Social Protection should include a mechanism for caring for children of single parents while parents are at work. This may include the provision of state funded/ subsidised day-care and night-care services in regions and communities where there is a high prevalence of this form of neglect.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 19: Risk assessment of child neglect cases</i></p> <p>There needs to be a clear understanding of what constitutes child neglect so that all stakeholders working with children understand and are compliant. With the issue of poverty being a major challenge for some caregivers which may force them to leave children unattended as they seek money to provide food and send children to school, the question is then asked: Is this child neglect. It is for these reasons that the stakeholders within the child protection system need to develop an approach to assess and attend to child neglect.</p>
	<p><i>Recommendation 20: Public awareness and training of caregivers</i></p> <p>Public awareness programmes on child neglect and the work of the CPA in addressing child neglect should target the general public, children, caregivers and police officers. Moreover there is a need for continual training and counselling of parents and caregivers who have been identified as perpetrators of child neglect. This programme should be mandatory and all caregivers and parents should be provided with a certificate on completion of the programme. It can no longer be assumed that parents have the requisite knowledge to care for their child/ren. This programme could be implemented in partnership with schools, NGOs, Faith-Based Organisations and health centres, <i>inter alia</i>.</p>

## 6.2. Conclusion

Several institutions collaborate nationally to respond to child neglect in Guyana through formal and informal referral arrangements. These include the Ministry of Social Protection, through the Childcare and Protection Agency and Social Services Department; the Ministry of Education, through the Placement Unit, the Child Welfare Unit and the Department for Culture Youth and Sport; the Guyana Police Force and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. These collaborations are not seamless and require stronger commitments from each stakeholder to protect children who are the legacy of Guyana.

The national response to child neglect has included the passing of legislation which provides guidance on the reporting and treatment of child neglect cases. It is believed that the national legislation speaks to all forms of neglect as well as makes some attempt to distinguish between being poor and child neglect. The intervention and categorisation at the agency level, both with regard to social assistance as well as punitive measures for caregivers, should be consistent with the legal definition of child neglect.

Additionally, there is state support via financial and non-financial safety nets which have been extremely beneficial to affected families but needs a quality assurance mechanism to ensure that it is properly administered and benefits the child and family. The support service is inadequate especially in terms of the human resources to manage cases and monitor child and family well-being. There is need for the provision of a financial incentive system for short term assistance to families where needed, in order to improve the effectiveness of the intervention provided at the agency level. The lack of financial and other support mechanisms negatively impacts both Child Protection and School Welfare Officers in the regions who oftentimes use their own resources to render assistance. This is not an acceptable intervention and affects the quality of services regional officers provide. This issue should be addressed at the policy level by both agencies. The absence of available finances or transportation for the movement of officers, especially in the regions, in a timely manner also a part of the action item that agencies working in child protection should address. If child neglect is not properly managed it may potentially have long term financial consequences for the country as dysfunctional children become dysfunctional adults.

Child neglect is the most common form of child abuse in Guyana. It is difficult to address child neglect without addressing the other core issues of child abuse and family poverty. The report shows a high prevalence of child neglect among children, ages 0-13 especially from single-parent households. These are critical developmental years in the life of a child, and can impact the long term psycho-social well-being of a child even as the child moves into adulthood.

In addition, whilst both male and female children are equally impacted by child neglect, there is an obviously higher growth in the number of boys in reported child neglect cases. This warrants further investigation on boys since it has a further impact on boys dropping out of school, boys' involvement in youth crime, child labour, sexual abuse and many other psycho-social issues for boys which, if neglected, exacerbates the potential long term impact of child neglect as boys move into manhood. This does not negate the attention needed for girls who, from all reports, rate higher amongst cases of child sexual abuse.

The most commonly reported forms of child neglect observed in Guyana were physical neglect, educational neglect and abandonment as well as small numbers of reported cases of emotional neglect and medical neglect. However, the leading observed causes of child neglect were directly linked to the poverty of families and other psycho-social needs of families since they could not attend to their financial obligations as a result of unemployment of one or both parents or low income. This was exacerbated by other factors such as the separation of parents, drug or alcohol abuse, type of work, physical or mental illness of parent and general non-concern for the wellbeing of the child/ren.

A series of twenty (20) recommendations were put forward to address institutional and social gaps at the systemic and family levels (See Table 6 1). These recommendations centre on a range of issues pertinent to critical stakeholders who directly or indirectly work to protect children. The response to child neglect or any other forms of abuse however, must never be seen as a state responsibility but as a national requirement which requires all of civil society be made aware and to get involved.

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## 8. ANNEX

### Childcare & Protection Agency- Hotline data entry flow chart & process

#### Intake

