Embracing technology for safety of children in care settings:

Ending online violence against children in all settings

4th Regional parenting conference.

Conference date: 23rd-28th October 2017

Venue: Sun and Sand. Mangochi, Malawi

Parenting in Africa Network (PAN) is a Network of organizations, individuals and institutions keen to promote 'skilful' parenting practices in Africa, for the overall wellbeing of children and families. Our mandate is drawn from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). We advocate for the rights of children by focusing on specific issues that affect African families.

PAN has an active membership largely in Eastern and Southern Africa with pockets in Northern, Central and Western Africa. The network has over 250 registered members within and without Africa and over 800 subscribers. PAN is registered in Kenya, and has active country chapters in South Africa, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Rwanda, Mauritius, and Namibia as well as presence in Ethiopia.

Our drive is to see a society where children are parented and empowered to reach their full potential. This we realize through our commitment to providing forums and platforms for learning and sharing information on positive parenting skills. We complement our approaches through researching and documenting various parenting disciplines, education and capacity building by means of facilitating members to address policies and practices within their communities.

Background

Protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments. In Africa, these rights are guaranteed in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Despite the prevailing protective legislative instruments, chid violence remains part of life for children around the globe, and more so in Africa. The violence occurs in all economic and social circumstances, culture, religion or ethnicity and results in both immediate and long-term consequences.

Measuring the breadth and depth of violence against children is complicated by the multi-layer aspect of violence: First, it takes many forms: physical, sexual and emotional. Second, it occurs in any setting: home, school, work place and over the Internet. And third, perpetrators can be individuals, parents and other caregivers, peers, intimate partners, authority figures and strangers or groups. For instance, every five minutes, a child dies as a result of violence. An estimated 120 million girls and 73 million boys have been victims of sexual violence, and almost one billion children are subjected to physical punishment on a regular basis[1].

Online violence is an emerging issue in Africa. It can loosely be defined as the use of online digital devices or services to engage in activities that result in physical, psychological, and emotional self-harm or cause harm to another person. In a world

---

[1] http://www.end-violence.org/

saturated with attractive possibilities enabled by the online digital technologies, and where time is money, it looks worrying when parents use digital devices to entertain their children. Where a there are immense dangers that exist online. Some authors have equated exposing children to online media as "risks living in children's pockets." Forms of cyber violence against children include: child pornography and 'live' online sexual abuse for paying customers, online sexual solicitation, cyber stalking and bullying, and access to illegal and harmful materials. Further, ECPAT International[2] reports that child exploiters use cyberspace to network for child sex tourism and trafficking. The report flags out weak laws and fragmented industry action as contributing to exposing children to increasingly serious violence through the Internet and other cyber technologies.

What happens in the online world, however, is a reflection of society at large. The possible violence, exploitation and abuse children might face online mirror abuses at home, school and community. Online abuse of children takes many forms; perpetrators may produce, distribute and consume child sexual abuse material; victimize children through live streaming their sexual abuse; and groom children online for sexual exploitation. Child sex offenders are fast to adapt the latest technology to perpetrate crimes against children. Building a better Internet means being aware of this abuse, and supporting users who might be at risk.[3]

At an Abu-Dhabi Summit in 2015, governments and organisations agreed to establish and deliver, in their own countries, a coordinated national response to online child sexual exploitation, guided by the WePROTECT Global Alliance Model National response (MNR). However the progress has been slow and children continue to be violated online.

Rationale

The family in Africa plays a critical role in nurturing children and preventing violence against children. Being the first socialisation unit that provides the basic lessons to a child, the values, practices and norms of the family goes a long way in influencing their lives in future. Over time, the African family has been facing challenges ranging from poverty, shock from natural epidemics, civil and governance instability and effects from technological advancement among others. Pressure from these has seen the family adapt mechanisms to keep afloat and acquire new skills to help nurture its children.

While technology is applauded for revotionising the world by making operations swifter, it equally presents challenges on adaptability and need to realign and review standards in the best interest of the child. Unfortunately, violence is one of the most popular forms of entertainment as presented in form of Television programs, video games and social media platforms.

---

[2] The ECPAT is a leading expert group on child violence around the world and the report was written as a contribution to the UN Study on Violence Against Children
[3] https://www.unicef.org/endviolence/endviolenceonline/

Evidence from both scientific and normative media studies conclude that significant exposure to violent media content increases the risk of aggressive behaviour in certain children, desensitizes them to violence and makes them believe that the world is a 'meaner and scarier' place than it is." If children begin to think that this type of violence is normal behaviour these thoughts are often said to be difficult to change later on in life.

It is for this reason that PAN organises a conference on ***Child Online Safety and Security*** The conference will bring together Civil Society organisations, practitioners, knowledge and research institutions and policy makers from Africa and beyond to share on evidence based promising practices, legislation and policy implementations, and research and studies conducted on the role of family in preventing violence against children.

Conference Objectives:

- Promote learning and sharing among stakeholders on promising practices across the region.

- Launch country specific campaigns on online violence against children

- Increase knowledge on the use of technology in enhancing safety of children.

- Create awareness on existing national, regional and Africa wide legislative framework

Conference Theme: Ending Online Violence against Children

I.   Sub theme: Technology

For a long time in Africa, children have been exposed to violence of various forms, however technology and internet has changed the magnitude, impact and form of abuse. Advancement in technology equally exposes children to dangers that are poorly understood by policy makers, parents and social workers.

Abstracts submitted to this tier should focus on:

- Software problems and solutions to online violence against children
- Trends and emerging issues in online violence against children.
- Promising practices and unexplored products that enhance safety of children

II.   Progress in Policy

At an Abu-Dhabi Summit in 2015, governments and organisations agreed to establish and deliver, in their own countries, a coordinated national response to online child sexual exploitation, guided by the WePROTECT Global Alliance Model National response (MNR). However the progress has been slow and children continue to be violated online. There is need to study policy progress in countries as well as share the best practices as applied by countries that have made policy progress.

Abstracts submitted to this track should focus on

- Policies and legislative frameworks that guard against online violence on children

- Monitoring frameworks and structures for measuring progress.

- Reporting mechanisms for reporting offensive online material and disposal of the same.

III.   Online Violence in Care Settings

Young children and young people who currently use new ICTs and those who will do so in the future are at a great risk and exposed to online violence. Similarly, those children who do not have access to the latest communications devices also may be subjected to influences arising from their usage. such children are made the subjects of photos that are then sent into cyberspace, or they are advertised online as commodities, and/or they are affected by violence and harms arising from other people's online interactions, including the use of pornography (depicting adults and/or children),cyber bullying .This happens in care settings such as schools, at home and in institutions of alternative care.

Patterns emerging from work with children on various forms of commercial sexual exploitation, indicate that where a child is sexually abused or exploited in settings such as in the home or the street, image-making of their abuse is frequently involved. These images may be then used to inhibit and silence the child. They also may be widely circulated or traded online or via phone, fuelling a vicious cycle of demand for children for sexual purposes[4]. From the above it is clear that sexual exploitation in care settings has a co-relation with what happens online. This is done by recording the act and sharing it online.
.
Abstracts submitted to this tier should focus on
- Institutional practices to protect children from online violence
- Promising practices that integrate online child safety, and normal programing.
- Innovations that enhance child safety.
- Research, evidence based Innovation on responsible use of technology for child safety.

Conference outcome.

1. Joint call to action to heighten online child safety
2. Launch country based campaign on online chid safety.
3. Consolidated conference learning points on online child safety.

---

[4] http://www.ecpat.org/wpcontent/uploads/legacy/Cyberspace_ENG_0.pdf