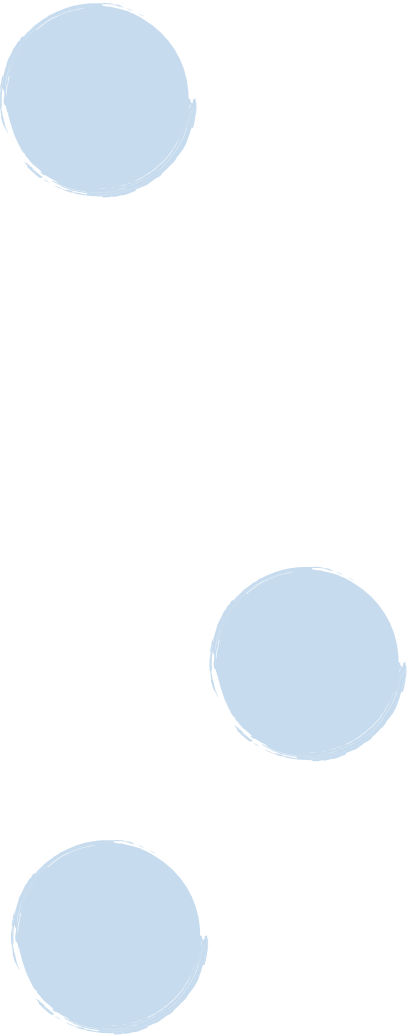




**Gendered social norms,
attitudes and behaviours regarding
violence against children
in the Republic of Moldova**

2020



The authors wish to thank all the staff members from Terre des hommes Moldova for their valuable technical support and their continuous effort in data collection.

Special thanks to all the children and adults who agreed to share their stories with us!

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Executive Summary

The aim of this report is to scrutinize, for a baseline study on gendered social norms, attitudes and behaviours regarding violence against children in relation to the Terre des hommes Moldova project *Preventing childhood violence through engagement – a community based model*.

The baseline study *Norms that sustain violence in Moldova* – commissioned by Terre des Hommes and carried out by Dr Ana Bleahu, Laurentiu Calciu and local researchers from Terre des Hommes Moldova, Anatolii Oprea, Teodora Rebeja, Olga Pinzari, comprises evidence collected at community level from 29 different rural and urban communities. Central to the study was to identify through qualitative and quantitative data collection, the main norms and social behaviours related to violence against children and to generate meaningful recommendations for future interventions.

Multiple studies show that violence affecting children is prevalent in all societies. In Moldova, there were some important research efforts supported especially by UNICEF, providing a general background for violence against children. According to UNICEF¹, approximately 75% of children experienced various forms of physical or psychological violence and one in three children have been involved in a fight with their peers. Also, both boys and girls experience violence in childhood, although it differs in the nature of the violence performed by the perpetrator and experienced by the victim (Landers, 2013; UNICEF, 2014).

In this research, alongside non-social factors (economic, religious, political, legal, technological) that are affecting the traditional child upbringing model, the social environment is considered to be crucial for understanding the social norms which are a critical driver that can either prevent or perpetuate violence in childhood. (Lilleston, Goldmann, & Verma & J. McC, 2017)

This study is organized as follows: the first chapter will largely draw on factors and drivers that facilitate or block the transformation of social norms in Moldova. The second chapter comprises the aims and the design of the methodology, explaining in detail the research tools used for the data collection process, the sampling methods, some ethical considerations and the main limitations of the study. In chapter three, four and five we identified and listed the main social norms related to violence in families, among peers, in schools and communities. We also acknowledged any positive norms which could challenge and possibly change the negative social norms. Besides, we displayed the most prevalent gender ideologies (especially those related to traditional masculinity) and portrayed the most vulnerable groups and families. Chapter six and seven draw general conclusions and specific strategies and derive specific recommendations for changing social norms related to violence against children.

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1. Introduction

Since social norms are the key driver of violence in childhood, they should be an integral component of any comprehensive effort to reduce violence against children. Understanding how people's perceptions are shaped, propagated and ultimately, refined, is crucial for preventing violence in childhood.

1.1 Defining social norms and how they operate in relation to violence

The theoretical starting point of our study was the general recognition that violence in childhood occurs in a variety of contexts – from home and family to school and community – and is manifested in various ways, within different types of relationships.

Therefore, in defining the social norms related to violence against children, the researchers opted for an extensive and inclusive definition, which encompasses behaviours, attitudes, common beliefs or moral judgements, according to which, behaviours are “right”, “good”, “acceptable”, “unjudgeable”, but also “imitable” by the generalized other.

While collecting data, a clear distinction was made between **descriptive norms** (perceptions about what members of social groups do) **and injunctive norms** (perceptions about what members of a social group think others ought and ought not to do)^{1,2}.

Also, there was a constant awareness that the social norms declared by the people interviewed in a research context might not necessarily reflect reality, since members of a social group may think that a belief or behaviour is prevalent within their social group, when in reality, it is not³.

The researchers were conscious that the violence experienced in childhood can be direct, when a child experiences aggression, or indirect, when she/he witnesses the aggression⁴. In regard to direct violence, the accent was rather on interpersonal violence than on self-directed violence⁵, uncovering the pathways that motivate adults/peers to comply with harmful practices (social sanctions, fear, internalization of traditional norms, perpetuating old parenting/teaching models).

Violence in childhood occurs in a variety of contexts – from home and family to school and community.

The analysis distinguishes between descriptive and injunctive social norms and direct and indirect violence.

1.2 Mechanisms through which social norms influence violence in childhood

The Moldovan society is nowadays a mix of patriarchal society and structural socio-economic changes (economic transition, international migration, influence of the Internet and new mass-media), therefore, alongside pinning down the traditional social norms which maintain violence against children, the study will identify the factors and mechanisms that influence and challenge the existing social norms.

It is largely recognized that socio-ecological framework and political instability affect social norms related to violence in childhood, while it is accepted that "the social environment is complex, constantly shifting, and does not represent one single thing."⁶

Also, some important scholars, like Cislighi & others (2018), showed how social norms intersect with other factors (economic, religious, ethnic).

Social norms related to violence against children are influenced by the socio-ecological determinants, national policies and legal framework.

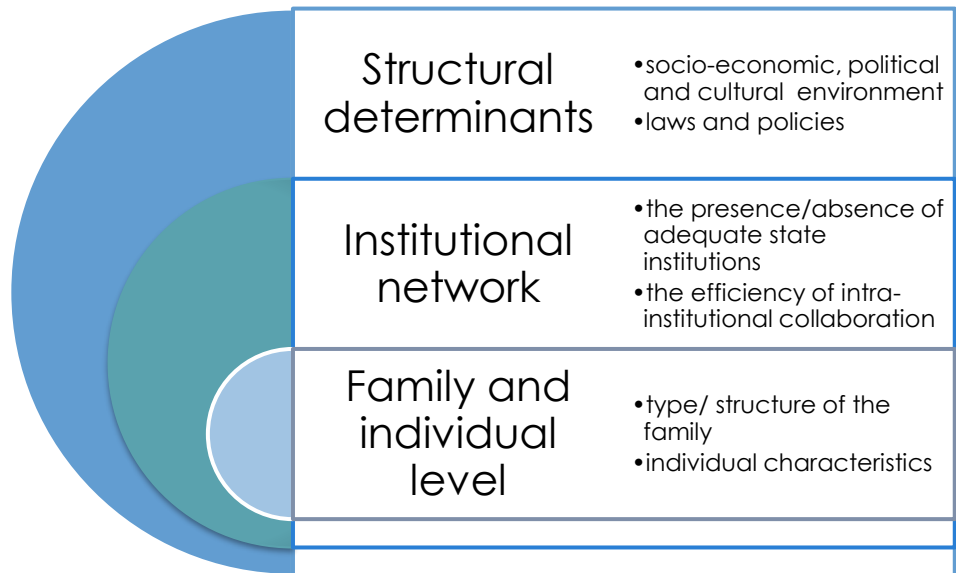


Figure 1: The socio-ecological framework

Starting from this theoretical approach, the study depicts the most important social norms in Moldova, by adopting a multi-level analysis of how various social phenomena and actors interact across household, institutional (schools), community and national levels.

1.3 Main drivers and maintainers of social norms related to violence in childhood

Social and non-social environment/ structural/ community level

- Living in deprived areas/ communities
- Economic transition
- Internet and telecommunication infrastructure
- Lack of jobs, underemployment, unemployment
- International migration
- Laws and social policies
- Lack of coherent policies for child protection
- Compulsive consumerism and false needs
- Access to health services, social benefits
- Social and regional disparities
- Independence from USSR and links with Europe and Romania
- Tensions among ethnic groups
- New official language and a new elite
- Tensions among pro Europe and pro Russia supporters
- Internal mobility
- Poverty and social exclusion

School level

- The quality of the relationships with peers and teachers
- Unfair behaviour of teachers
- Ethnic discrimination
- Religious background
- Lack of institutions and facilities
- Diffuse responsibilities at institutional level
- Peer pressure (gang culture)

Household level

- Family type (organized , disorganized, married couples/prtnerships)
- Family size (complete/incomplete families - missing mothers and/or fathers)
- Unorganized family (high number of single-parent families or children born from unmarried couple)
- Family size and presence of siblings; smaller average family size without horizontal family ties
- Family rank and status in the community
- Family network
- The quality of the relationships with parents
- Culture, values and traditions
- Access to Internet
- Gender inequality and family routines
- Domestic violence
- Community control weakness
- Fragmentation of the social fabric of the communities
- Community dissolution – lack of social connection and relationships
- Extended families; the vertical ties (with grandparents and great-grandparents) overburdened , d migration of the parents
- Weakening of the relations with relatives

Individual level

- Gender
- Age
- Disabilities
- Personal skills
- Language abilities, biligualism (vocabulary)
- Personal wellbeing
- Possesion of material goods (including technical devices)
- Mental health
- Online self-image, accounts and networks
- Offline and onliine popularity and social capital

Figure 2: The main drivers and factors that influence social norms

There are

various conceptual and empirical theory of change models based on top-down and bottom-up interventions.

1.4 How to change the social norms?

The change and the stabilization of new social norms have been subjects of constant interest for most of the scholars working on violence against children. Various conceptual and empirical theory of change models concede the importance of 1) social determinants (macro-level) combined with 2) community beliefs (micro – level) and 3) individual behaviours and personal judgements.

Two main types of interventions have been acknowledged:

-Top-down interventions, through changing official laws and regulations. In order to assure their success, the laws should be perceived as legitimate and moderately congruent to the existing practices. They should approximate the popular views and do not appear completely distant or even opposed to the existing social norms.

-Bottom-up interventions that imply micro-level discussions and consistent dialogs/campaigns. These debates should facilitate behavioural changes by sensitively alleviating the guilt and stigma of those who dare to adopt a new social norm and by focusing on the positive benefits of the new norms.

Drawing from the empirical research on this topic, there are a few principles which should be respected by the social actors who are aiming at efficient social norms changes.

They should:

- help local people imagine positive alternatives
- create opportunities for social dialogs and public debates
- show and praise positive behaviours in public
- demonstrate that the positive shift already exists and it is totally normal
- find appropriate allies at local level⁷
- proactively help the community to overcome misperceptions
- celebrate the successes, as positive norms grow⁸.

Therefore, as Cislighi & Heise⁹ advised, any community intervention should be informed by "exploratory formative research, specifically tailored to develop an in-depth understanding of the relations between various constellations of norms, and their direct and/or indirect effects over the practices of interest"(p. 5, 2018).

2. Research design and methodology

2.1 Main aim and objectives of the study

The overall aim of this study was to build initial evidence and context specific models for preventing childhood violence and reducing harmful social norms in Moldova.

The overall aim of this study was to build initial evidence and context specific - models for preventing childhood violence and reducing harmful social norms in Moldova.

The main objectives of the study were:

- 1) to provide a benchmark in the monitoring and evaluation frameworks against changes in gendered social norms, attitudes and behaviours;
- 2) to identify positive norms which challenge or can challenge the negative social norms;
- 3) to identify barriers to transforming social norms which perpetuate violence;
- 4) to identify the existing and most prevalent social norms and gender ideologies (especially traditional masculinity) which perpetuate violence against children;
- 5) to identify the most pervasive forms of violence against children and
- 6) to explore strategies for changing social norms and make specific recommendations for improving behaviours and developing key messages to address the most significant high-risk behaviours.

The design of the research tools was a result of a collaborative effort of the Terre des hommes staff members, community researchers and the appointed researchers.

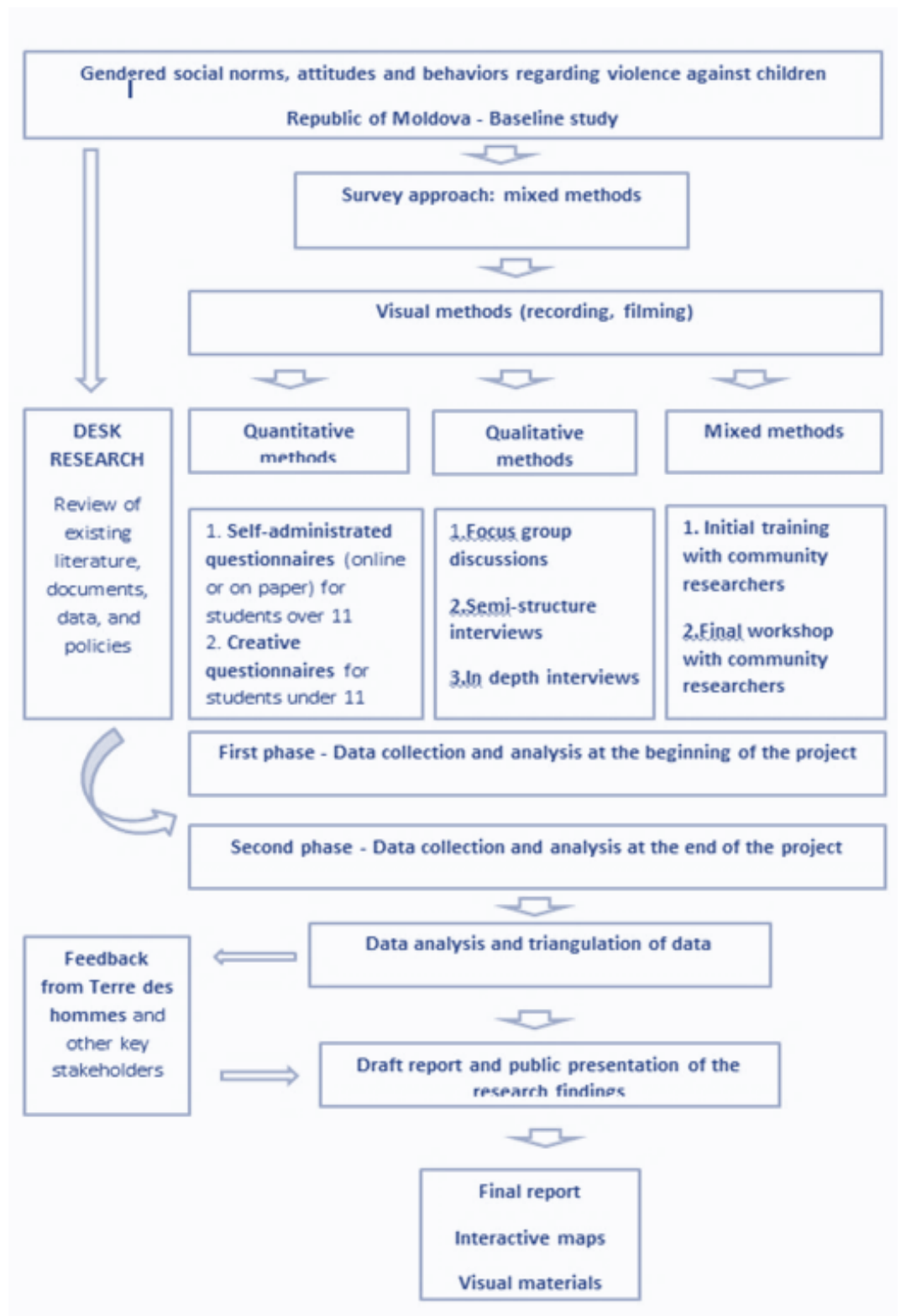


Figure 3: Research design

Staff members from Terre des hommes were actively involved in the design of the research and data collection.

Community researchers became familiar with the objectives of the research and were trained with regard to the main concepts of the research.

More than 1,300 students (approx. 10% of the reference group of 12,000) were involved in the research, alongside their parents/careers/teachers.

Staff members from Terre des Hommes were actively involved in the design of the research. Also, the created research tools were tested during a pilot study in two schools (15 and 19 self-administrated questionnaires, two creative workshops and two focus group discussions with children) and improved accordingly. Experts in the field were consulted and their suggestions were welcomed and followed.

In collecting data, local community researchers were involved. They were informally interviewed and trained over the two-weeks summer camp period, when they became familiar with the researchers and the aims of the research. Also, during the summer camp, they learned about some sociological concepts, such as social norms, customs, taboos, and were trained to identify them in real contexts. By being included into interactive exercises and activities, they learned how to become aware of the social rules that guide their relationships with their peers, parents and teachers, particularly of those which could influence and preserve the violence against children. Also, they co-designed together with the researchers the research tools (questionnaires), suggesting themes and items to be included in the final data collection forms. During the data collecting phase, they supported the research team in organizing focus groups and identifying the most relevant case studies for the research report and the videos.

2.2 Participants

The reference group of the study represented a total of approx. 12,000 children and adolescents from 29 schools from Moldova. More than 10% (approx. 1,300) were questioned (online, by participating to creative workshops, focus group discussions or in depth interviews), alongside their parents/careers/teachers.

2.2.1 Selection and sampling criteria

At community level, data was collected using both qualitative (individual interviews, focus groups and participative observation) and quantitative methods (self-administered questionnaires and creative questionnaires). Part of the focus groups and the in depth interviews and some activities of the students were audio or video – recorded. The most vulnerable categories of children were purposely included in the sample: children left alone (or with neighbours) (4%), children from mono-parental families (divorced, single mothers, single fathers, widowed), children in poverty (both parents unemployed) or from disadvantaged minorities (Roma minority children).

Below is the geographical distribution of the locations where focus groups were conducted and self-administrated questionnaires applied .

The schools involved in the study were evenly distributed geographically, comprising primary, secondary and mixed schools.

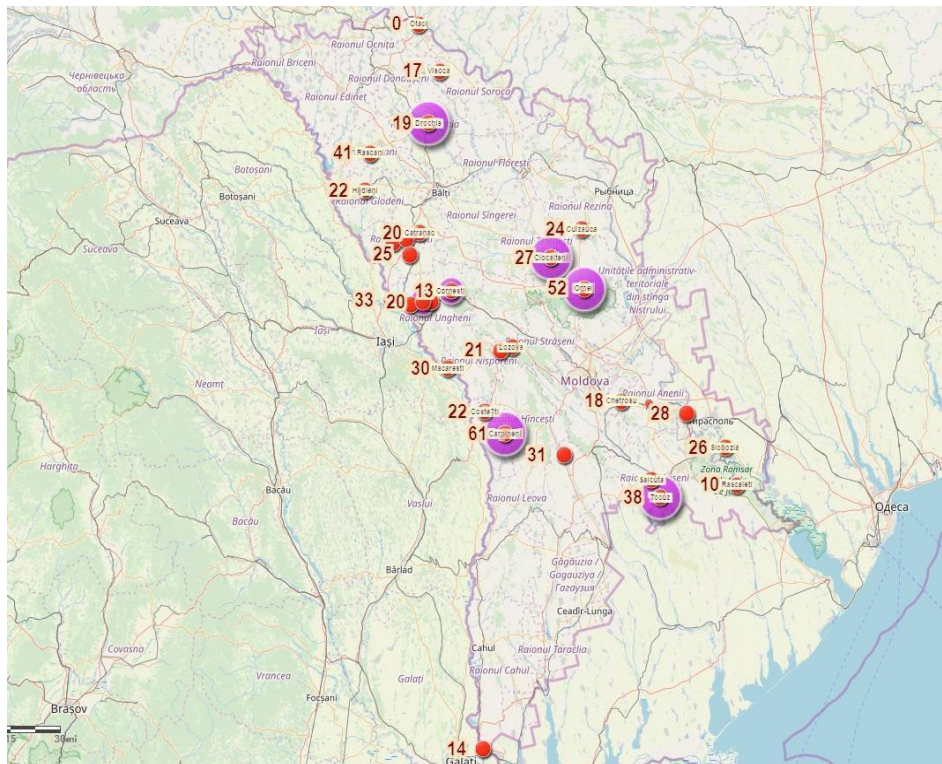


Figure 4: Map of Moldova: the geographical distribution of data collection (red: quantitative data, purple: mixed data)

The data collected could be clustered around a few important criteria:

Criteria for the school sample:	
Age of the reference group students: under 11/over 11	Over 11 years old: 798 Under 11 years old: 462
Geographical location	Centre: 13 North: 10 South: 6
Type of school	Primary schools: 4 Secondary schools: 3 Mixed (primary/secondary) schools: 21 High School: 1
Type of location: rural/ urban	Rural: 6 Urban: 23
Rate of international migration	High rate of migration: 7 Low rate of migration: 22
Ethnic homogeneity/ diversity	Ethnic homogeneity : 4 Ethnic heterogeneity: 25

Figure 5: Sampling criteria

2.2.2 Participants characteristics

The general socio-economic and demographic profile of the students involved in the quantitative data collection (age 11-18) could be defined as follows:

- 60% of the total number of children were girls
- 88% of the children were born and raised in the same locality,
- 83% of the students live in families (married parents) (although one of the parent might have been involved in temporary migration)
- approximately 6% of the students are in an extremely vulnerable situation (left alone at home, looked after by their neighbours or distant relatives, in institutions or in foster care families)
- only 45% of the students have both parents employed (while in 10% of the families, both parents are unemployed)
- 31 children (out of 798) have one deceased parent.

The creative questionnaires were applied to 462 children under 11 years old, randomly selected, boys and girls, from year 3 and 4. The creative workshops were conducted by their teachers and the data was scanned and sent to Terre des hommes and the researchers.

Although most of the students who participated in the focus group discussions were randomly selected, the researchers required that the selection would reflect the local diversity in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic status.

The parents/careers and the teachers were selected for the focus groups according to their availability, therefore the sample was heavily gender biased, for all of the interviewed parents were women.

2.3 Methodology and main tools

Below is presented the research tools and methods used:

Research methods and tools	Adults/children involved
Self-administered questionnaires for children over 11 years old	798
Creative workshops for primary schools	18
Creative questionnaires for children under 11 years old	462

A few research tools were created and applied: self-administrated questionnaire, creative questionnaire and focus group guidelines.

Community researchers - students	summer training
Community researchers - teachers	summer training
Focus group discussions with teachers	9
Focus group discussions with children/teenagers	12
Interviews/ Focus groups with parents	5
In-depth interviews with children	1

Figure 6: Research tools and methods used.

2.3.1 Focus groups with children/parents and teachers

Focus group discussions were conducted with children, parents and teachers. Each focus group discussion involved between 7 and 12 participants, randomly selected. Focus group discussions were conducted by the researchers and assisted by staff members from Terre des hommes. All of them were audio recorded and part of them were filmed.

The children - participants in the focus group discussions were clustered by age (year 5 mixed with year 6, year 7 with 8 and 9 with 10), while the parents (most of them mothers) and teachers (most of them women) were arbitrarily grouped.

The main facilitator used preformatted guidelines, and all the other researchers were free to add extra questions.

The factual information collected through focus groups was cross-checked with data collected through quantitative methods. During the focus group discussions, both children and adults were encouraged to speak freely and were reassured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their data. The discussions took place in a safe and friendly environment (mostly in Ludotec).

The focus groups were conducted using preformatted guidelines, and the discussions evolved naturally, were gently led and took place in friendly environments.

2.3.2 In depth interview

One in-depth interview was conducted with a “problematic” teenager, who was considered a bully in his school and community. The main facilitator used a semi-structured questionnaire and the interview was recorded. Both facilitators conducted the interview with extreme care and full consideration for the interviewee and his special situation.

2.3.3 Online self-administered questionnaire

The sample size for the quantitative survey was representative at school level for all the schools involved in the project (approximately 10% of the population of each school), providing an adequate level of data disaggregation at gender and age level and by type of area - urban/rural.

2.3.4 Creative workshop (questionnaire)

In parallel with the online questionnaire, in 18 schools we organized one or two creative workshops for children under 11 years old. They were asked to answer four questions (see the Annexes) and each possible answer was associated to a body part of a random animal. Based on their individual answers, by collating the body parts (head, trunk, legs and tails), each child created a “hilarious little creature”.

The creative workshops were pilot tested by the researchers and conducted by the local community researchers, teachers and older students.

2.4 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted with integrity and respect for the children and all those involved, carefully considering their personal views and the local culture. In order to prevent any potential harm to the children and the parents and teachers involved, the researchers showed interest for and deep awareness of their views, avoiding any judgmental comments.

Children were continuously encouraged to express their opinions and were given the opportunity to fill in the questionnaires, to talk freely, draw, write and communicate creatively, while the researchers listened to them and took them seriously. Most of the children were willing to participate and expressed their joy by the end of the discussions. At the beginning of the discussion they were explained in detail the purpose of the study, along with the reassurance that the data collected will not be used for any purpose other than the research and that the information they will provide will remain strictly confidential.

The research was conducted with integrity and respect for the children and all those involved, carefully considering their personal views and the local culture.

The data collected online was anonymous and each student involved received a unique automatic ID. They were not asked to provide names or addresses, or any other personal data. Moreover, the questionnaire was designed in such a way that the respondents could fill it in at their own pace. No specific identification questions were introduced. The respondents were free to avoid unwanted questions and to leave the survey at any time they wished, and they were not forced to respond against their will. For sensitive questions, the researchers were aware of the emotional involvement and discreetly avoided putting any child or adult on the spot or embarrassing them. The data collected was securely stored and protected.

2.5 Data analysis

Social norms are ambiguous and they are subject to modification and instrumental manipulation, therefore the authors considered that triangulating data collected through different research tools (qualitative and quantitative), from various sources, would enable them to depict the truthful attitudes and behaviours existing in society.

The qualitative data (focus-groups and in-depth interview) was transcribed in Romanian and partially translated into English, stored and analysed in NVIVO. The quantitative data was collected online, automatically anonymized, cleaned and safely stored. It was analyzed using a dataset in Romanian language and the output was translated into English.

2.6 The main limitations of the research

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. Although all those involved - the Terre des Hommes local team, teachers and students - were extremely responsive, responsible and constantly engaged, the research had a few limitations.

The main limitation was the selection of the communities. The participant communities were those who applied for funding (by completing an application form) and the ones which are very active and engaged, therefore they may not be the most representative for the socio-economic landscape of Moldova.

Another important limitation was the fact that part of the communities/schools which participated had a long relationship of collaboration with the Terre des Hommes foundation. On the one hand, this was a great benefit, because they were open and helpful, but on the other hand, since they were interested to please Terre des hommes, their behaviour

The study has some structural limitations which will be taken into consideration in extracting the general conclusions.

may have been biased. Hence the students'/teachers' narratives about the social norms which maintain violence against children may have been distorted, because some students/teachers and parents involved in the research were knowledgeable about the attitudes and behaviours promoted by the foundation.

Another limitation consisted in some bias in the composition of the sample. Therefore, the final quantitative data is slightly gender biased (60% of the children were girls and most of the interviewed adults were mothers and female teachers).

Also, there was a lack of balance between the various ethnic groups involved. Most of the participants were Romanian speakers and 88% declared they belong to Moldovan/Romanian ethnicity. Subsequently, the Russian ethnic group may be underrepresented, since only 57 children declared they speak Russian at home (mainly from Riscani). Also, Otaci, a multi-ethnic town (with a mixed population of Ukrainians, Russians, Romanians and Roma), organized only a creative workshop.

The qualitative and quantitative data collected from various sources was triangulated and cross-examined.

Migration, poverty and the dismantling of families and communities are the major risk factors in initiating and perpetuating violence against children.

3 Research findings

As mentioned previously, a social norm is what people in some groups believe to be normal in that group. Therefore, we asked students (using questionnaires and focus groups), parents and teachers (focus groups), what they think people consider to be generally accepted in regard to parental strategies, the role of education, gender roles, types of punishment, relationships between children, families and school. Cross – examining the collected data, we extracted some general social norms which are negotiated at family, peer, school and community level.

3.1 Main risk factors for social norm change intervention

Out of all these factors that could influence and affect the emergence or the maintenance of social norms related to children's wellbeing, the analysis of empirical data highlighted that migration, poverty, institutional incoherence and the dismantling of families and communities are the major risk factors.

3.1.1 International and internal migration

Nowadays, the rate of external migration is still high, and the main push factors for Moldovan migrants is a mix between poverty, lack of adequate employment opportunities and low salaries¹⁰.

According to the National Statistics Bureau¹¹, large numbers of both immigrants (mainly returned migrants) and emigrants have been registered during the last five years. In 2017 (the last year for which migration estimates were calculated), about 110 thousand migrants arrived in Moldova and about 160 thousand left the country, giving a negative net migration balance of almost 50 thousand persons in that year. According to the same source, both women and men were involved in migration, but more men than women in the last two years, and the number of children left behind decreased from 160 000 in 2012 to 41 000 in 2017.

Out of the total number of students interviewed, 190 admitted that their mothers emigrated (long or short term). Also, almost half of the children (339 out of 798) declared that their father left the family in order to work abroad at some point in time.

The absence of one parent or both, due to internal and international migration, influences the social norms related to violence against children left at home.

The phenomenon of the temporary absent male figures in a household is predominant by comparison with female absent figures. 47% of the children's fathers, 19% of brothers, 37% of uncles and 7% of grandfathers experienced migration at some point, while only 28% of mothers, 11% of grandmothers, 14% of sisters and 33% of aunts were involved in international migration over the years.

According to the qualitative data, the decision to leave the household for international migration is partly justified by the lack of jobs and income opportunities, but sometimes, as some interviewees observed, migration could be motivated by people's desire to accumulate material goods or need to escape from their responsibilities:

"There are two kinds of parents who go abroad: some go because they need to, others go to enjoy themselves." (Focus Group with teachers, Drochia)

"But why do parents leave? Because they can't make ends meet. They go to France, to Germany, they go everywhere, because they need money. They say that if they had bigger wages here, they wouldn't go anymore." (Focus Group with teachers, Drochia)

"Young parents nowadays want everything at once: a house and money and everything." (Focus Group with teachers, Drochia)

The migration of the parents has a huge emotional impact on the children left at home. In the absence of their parents, children feel unprotected and become violent towards their peers or adults (caregivers and teachers).

"The parents who work abroad manifest their love towards the child by giving money to the grandmother to buy everything the child wishes (the latest phone model, clothes), instead of offering them a kiss or a hug. Their material needs are fulfilled, but children suffer emotionally. One of my pupils said: "I'd like my mother to be with me. She goes and buys us phones and clothes". So this boy will be more violent at school. This is a trauma coming up all the time. The mother says, 'It's the last time when I'm going away!' 'You always say that, but never do it' says the child. (Focus Group with teachers, Drochia)

Parents' migration has a huge impact on the emotional wellbeing of the children left home influencing their relationships with other adults and peers.

Migrant parents tend to compensate for their absence and let go of their guilt by offering their children material goods.

On the one hand, the parents feel guilty and obliged to fulfill their children's needs, and on the other hand, the material goods sent by the migrant parents (smartphones, computers) do not compensate for their children's need to feel secure and protected.

“When children go home and tell their mother about something that their peers have but they don't, the parents, especially those who work abroad, will buy it for them. They're trying to compensate for their absence by buying goods and offering the child all that he/she is asking for.” (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

3.1.2 Poverty and lack of material resources

In contrast to parents who migrated abroad, the ones who decide to find jobs in the country are seriously disadvantaged, since their salaries are significantly lower for long hours and hard work, with serious delays in payments sometimes.

“Some parents who work here, in the country, can't afford to provide for their children like the ones who work abroad. They cannot afford to offer their children everything they need.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

Parents who are not involved in international migration and are temporarily employed locally or unemployed, are complaining about being tired of too much work, not having time for their children, stressed about debts, showing clear signs of mental health issues (alcohol dependency, depression).

“The economic poverty in the country is to blame for everything. They have no jobs and get depressed, start drinking and the children are suffering.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

“Our town suffers very much because there are no jobs. Everything has closed down. In the past, there was the sugar factory but now a foreigner came and computerized everything and there are very few jobs left. The foreigners came and installed new equipment. Everything was destroyed and ruined.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

“People are sad and distressed because of the poverty and the lack of time. They spend a lot of time doing low paid work. I tell the parents, when they come to the parents meetings, that they should make time for their kids.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

Poverty and lack of opportunities impact directly on the physical and mental wellbeing of the parents and lower the parenting standards, affecting indirectly the children too.

Unemployed or locally employed parents are distressed, tired, without time for their children, stressed about debts, showing signs of mental health issues.

3.1.3 Institutional barriers - “The law is a two-headed stick”¹²

The Child Protection Strategy for 2014-2020 (CPS MD) and its Action Plan for 2016-2020 demonstrate a particular focus on deinstitutionalization and prevention of violence against children¹³.

Several important legislative, institutional and policy measures were adopted, in particular the Law no. 140 on the Special Protection of Children at Risk and Those Separated from their Parents (2013), the Law no. 315 on social benefits for children (2016), the establishment of the National Agency for Social Assistance (2016) and of the Ombudsman for child protection (2016).

Previous legislation, such as the Law No 45/ 01.03.2007 regarding domestic violence in Moldova¹⁴, followed by the Law no. 140/2013 regarding the special protection of children at risk and children separated from their parents, stipulated that, at community level, the multi-sectorial commission is the most important institution, alongside the central specialized bodies of the state¹⁵ and the specialized authorities of the second level local public administration¹⁶. The law states that the local public authority appoints a specialist responsible for preventing and combating domestic violence, and the other local public services will also appoint persons with this aim, responsible for coordinating the specific activities within their institutions and for collaborating in these activities.

Although all these specialists should work together, based on established procedures for preventing and combating cases of domestic violence, sometimes the decisions are not beneficial for the children involved, due to lack of flexibility and openness to children's will.

“These vulnerable children wanted to continue to go to High School, but the local authorities wouldn't allow them.” (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

In some communities, the interviewees reported a lack of communication and synchronization between horizontal institutions from the same locality (town hall, school, police) and inefficient vertical communication between the centre and the local institutions.

Sometimes the messages and directives received through different communication channels from different regional or central institutions contradict each other or are incomplete or inconsistent.

“A concrete example: a girl from year 9, from a family with many children, was not allowed to continue her studies and was sent to

Over the years, Moldova has adopted new legislation and social policies focused on violence against children.

At local level, the multi-sectorial commission is the most important institution that has to tackle children in vulnerable situation.

Lack of communication and synchronization among local institutions and inefficient vertical institutional flows maintain violence against children.

a Vocational School instead, because the legal authority couldn't afford to keep her at High School. They want to eschew responsibility. Why didn't they create the conditions for these children to stay at High School? This was their only salvation". (Focus group teachers, Făleşti)

In some local multi-sectorial teams, there is a lack of confidence in their own forces, divergent priorities and scarcity of resources which cause delays in solving children's problems.

"The legal authority, due to lack of resources and poor management, are moving these vulnerable children very often from one school to another or from one locality to another. This is really detrimental for the most vulnerable ones, especially for those from the "House of Hope" institution. " (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Also, the roles of the members of the team are diffused and their responsibilities are not clearly defined and understood. In some localities, there is a tendency to delegate responsibilities between local institutions, while in others, important social actors like the Roma mediators are not trusted by their own people.

"It seems that the mediator is stealing. A football match was organized for the children, and no treats (sweets, refreshments) have reached them. The children don't have birth certificates. The parents can't prove that they work or have wages, so the children are not accepted at the kindergarten. They come straight to school, and that's why they have problems. Not with reading and writing, these we teach them, but with basic communication and socialization. When they first come to school in year 1, and see so many children, they don't know where they are. They don't understand how to sit down, what school is about, how long a class will last." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

In reality, at practical level, the direct effects of social policies are not as expected, and the measures imposed are not very efficient.

"The official procedures are cumbersome. There is a law, but the law seems to have limited power. At some point it stops. I don't know how to deal with the parents. We could say that they are punishable, but how to punish them? In fact, in the end, we don't have the necessary levers. There are many discussions, but no

Some local multi-sectorial teams, who are responsible for vulnerable children, have divergent priorities, delegate their responsibilities and face a lack of resources .

The national laws and social policies seems to have limited power and efficiency.

Punishing irresponsible and abusive parents is detrimental to the wellbeing of the children.

clear measures are taken. Until recently, the parents were fined, but now the law has changed and there is no fine for the parents anymore. The law is a two-headed stick - on the one hand you fine the parents in order to discipline them, on the other hand the money comes from the family food budget, so it's the child who's suffering, again ... So what's the solution? Another kind of penalty was for the parent to work for the benefit of the community, but in any case, the child is the one who still suffers, and the parent cannot or does not know how to pay him/her sufficient attention."
(Focus group with teachers, Ciocâlteni)

Case study: boy, 15 years old, orphan, "lost " among institutions:

There is this child who was raised by his grandmother, because the mother has died. But she was like dead even when she was alive, because she never looked after the child. The grandmother used to get the social benefit for the child, and he was doing some day's work here and there. I was asking the people from the bakery and from the canteen to feed him, if possible. For instance, if I knew he was harvesting walnuts one day, I would speak with some woman to feed him that evening. And just before Christmas I was called by this committee to tell me that he has stolen a couple of baubles from the tree in the square. And I told the people from the committee: how many times did I contact you to tell you that he was working and nobody was looking after him. You didn't do anything all this time, and now you call me? I sent the child home and I showed them the amount of paperwork I had done for this boy. I told them to go and buy some clothes for him for Christmas, because he doesn't get any benefit, and even if he would, the grandfather would take the money and not give him a penny. I wrote a pile of papers and you haven't done anything. And for two Christmas decorations you made a big fuss now. Because he didn't come to the commission, his foster file didn't move forward. He's too old to come to school now, but we want to help him a little, to be a point of support in his life. Although I could say I'm tired of this, I have my own family to care for too. The child is forsaken." (Focus Group with teachers, Făleşti)

3.1.4 The dismantling of families and communities

On long term, the international migration weakened the relationships among members of the same community and produced an important shift within extensive families, changing the dynamics of the relationships among relatives. In some cases, the social collaboration is replaced by social competition, and mutual help and care, by rivalry. These important changes alter the internal dynamics of the community and facilitate the emergence of new social norms, loosening the cohesiveness and mutual control among people from the same locality.

3.2 Main norms that promote and maintain violence in the family

Under the pressure of international migration and major socio-economic reforms, the Moldovan families suffered important structural changes. Geographical distance between relatives increased, and children are now more likely to grow up without siblings and cousins, or vice versa, to live with their relatives but not with their parents. On average, the size of the family decreased and there are more families with an absent father. Also, families had to reassemble and switch roles according to their economic needs. Some family ties become overburdened on both vertical (grandparents and great-grandparents) and horizontal (aunts, uncles) dimensions.

3.2.1. "Seven years at home"

In Moldovan culture, the family is considered the most important social institution in the formation and socialization of the children. The family is the major anchor for a child's safety and wellbeing, and the parents play a crucial role in educating a young child.

In the Romanian language, when someone is considered as "*not having the seven years at home*" (meaning the period before going to school), this means that the person does not fulfill the minimum requirements for behaving in society.

The burden perceived by the parents for being exclusively responsible for the first seven years of education, combined with the lack of parental alternative strategies, may be a possible explanation for the fact that both adults and children equally agreed that it is "normal" for children under seven to be physically punished by their parents. More than that, the interviewed children

The structural economic and political changes influence the social dynamics and challenge the traditional norms.

There are systemic changes in the size, dynamics and composition of Moldovan families.

"The seven years spent at home" seems to be a crucial period in children's development.

At societal level, it is expected that parents are fully accountable for educating and disciplining their children.

supported the fact that they themselves will be smacking their own young children in the future, as parents, if needed.

Also,

- 81% of the children between 11-18 admitted that children have to obey and listen to their parents

- 70% of the children considered that their parents know better than themselves what is better for the children

- 78% of the children agreed that only their parents are entitled to smack/hit them

- 43% of the children agreed completely and 34% agreed partially that "it is better for a child to cry when young, rather than for the parent to cry when the child will become an adult."

The qualitative data indicated that parents and children are aware of their crucial role in providing the ongoing care and support for their children during "the first seven years spent at home", but not all of them feel competent to do it properly.

Some of the parents interviewed felt overwhelmed by, and unequipped for this huge responsibility. When comparing themselves with their own parents, they described themselves as not having the appropriate skills and abilities to educate, discipline and control their children, especially the younger generation.

"I often hear parents say: I would really like to educate my children just as my parents educated me. But how they did it, I don't know, since I don't know how to do it! There was something I can't quite grasp." (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

"The quality of people degraded from one generation to the other. We are not as good as our parents, nor are our children as good as us." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

If a child/teenager or even an adult does not behave properly at societal level, the family is held accountable for his/her lack of suitability for the social norms.

"As a teacher, I find it difficult ... For example, I have a pupil, a girl, who does not come to school now. I spoke with her and it seemed I convinced her to come. She comes one day, then again she doesn't. I spoke with her mother and she said: "What can I do?" They use bad language in the family, and with the girl

Smacking a child under seven is an acceptable social norm.

too. And I told her mother that she should try to find something positive in this girl. She must have something good too, not only bad. And after all, who's fault is that the girl is like that? She does what she has seen at home, that was her model. She came to school at seven, but until then, she learned certain elementary things". (Focus group, Ciocâltei).

3.2. 2 Physical and verbal violence in the family

Although a previous UNICEF¹⁷ report from 2014 (presenting the findings of the 2012 MICS) reported that 76% of Moldovan children aged 2-14 experience violent methods of discipline, the latest reports, such as Violence Against Children in Moldova (2019) and Child Protection Evaluation in Moldova (2019), consistently confirm an improvement of almost all indicators of child well-being in Moldova¹⁸. The findings of this research are in line with these reports, which identified a general decrease of the violence against children in Moldova.

The qualitative and quantitative data collected from various sources (young and older children, parents and teachers) validate a rate of abuse against children similar to the one reported by UNICEF in Violence Against Children (2019). In September 2019, UNICEF reported that one in nine females (10.6%) and one in eleven males (8.9%) experienced physical and emotional violence by a parent, adult caregiver or adult relative before the age of 18¹⁹. According to our data collected online (children between 11 and 18), around 9% of the children (boys in a higher number than girls) declared that they suffered regular physical punishment (ear/hair pulled, slapped/hit, beaten with a stick/belt/mop)

The same consistency could be observed when it comes to identifying the most vulnerable categories of children who are maltreated by the adults or peers: children with disabilities, children with divorced parents, children with parents affected by mental health, children from poor families (especially Roma). Approximately 10% of the respondents considered that poor children and Roma children (approximately 8%), should not sit side-by-side with other children in the classroom.

According to the online survey and focus group data, recently, in the large majority of families, corporal punishment and physical violence are replaced by other forms of punishment (verbal criticism, interdictions to use new technologies, to meet their friends, etc.)

The research findings of the report are aligned with other recent research studies.

Corporal punishment is replaced by other forms of punishment such as: verbal criticism, interdictions to use new technologies, to meet friends, etc.

In the past, the violence against children was justified by the noble aim of “raising good people”: “Better for him/her to cry now, than for the parents to cry later”, but nowadays, the use of violence is not justifiable anymore.

“I want to be clear, we do not want to go back to the old methods, because this is another generation and the living conditions are different. Also, the motivation of the children has changed. Violence is not good. I remember that my mom only pulled my hair once, just because I dared asking her “what do you want?”. We can't go back!” (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

Although children got punished by their parents/carers, very few reported that they have recently suffered corporal punishment from their parents. Both adults and children, reported that, nowadays, there are more sophisticated methods to constrain and punish a child.

Out of the 792 surveyed children, less than 5% (for each category of punishment) admitted having been frequently physically punished.

“When I am punished by adults” (more often)	Girls	Boys
I am explained were I was wrong	68.97%	67.3%
I am told off/lectured by adults	38.48%	38.56%
I am compared with another child	19.24%	18.15%
I have my phone/tablet taken away	8.65%	10.73%
I don't get access to the Internet	9.43%	8.57%
I have to look after my younger siblings	8.42%	9.78%
I am not allowed to watch television/stay at the computer	7.35%	9.43%
I am not allowed to go out with my friends	8.39%***	3.77%
Nothing happens to me, no measures are taken	3.57%	3.49%
Adults around me don't care what I do	2.77%	3.83
I have my ear/hair pulled	0.42%	5.35%***
Adults refuse to speak to me/ignore me	3.14%***	0.63%
I am slapped/hit/beaten	0.63%	2.53%*
I am beaten with a stick/belt/mop	0.42%	2.20%*
I am sent out from the house/class	0.00%	1.57%

Figure 7: Methods of punishment used by parents, per gender

* the difference per gender is statistically significant for a p value lower than 0.05

***the difference per gender is statistically significant for a p value lower than 0.01

Most frequently children are verbally disciplined by their parents.

Cross-analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, both adults and children accepted that children get punished for various reasons, and almost every child described at least one memorable episode of being disciplined. Boys and girls are equally punished, although boys are more often punished physically (slapped/hit/beaten, ear/hair pulled), whereas girls emotionally (their parents refuse to talk to them or they are not allowed to meet their friends).

Below are listed the main reasons why children get punished:

Usually, I am punished if:	
I don't do my homework	49.37%
I spend too much time at the computer/tablet/mobile phone	46.92%
I use bad language with my parents/grandparents/relatives	46.84%
I am not good at school	40.74%
I come home late	37.63%
I don't help enough in the household	35.97%
I use bad language with my teachers	34.81%
I play truant	31.56%
Adults find out that I was smoking or drinking	26.09%
I spend too much time with my friends	21.95%
I watch too much television	19.87%
I spend too much time playing with other children	19.60%

Figure 8: Main reasons why children get punished by parents

Although some parents still apply corporal punishment, they do not feel entitled to do it and they acknowledge that they may be judged or disapproved by other adults and by their children.

"In the past, there was physical punishment. There was the belt, which my father used every now and then. We were also afraid when my mother was raising her voice. Nowadays we don't beat

Most of the time children get punished for not doing their homework, spending too much time at the computer and answering back to the adults.

Corporal punishment is publicly condemned and parents do not feel entitled anymore to apply it.

them. I use verbal punishment or refuse to talk with him, and it works." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

Most of the parents interviewed agreed that they have a very strong relationship with the teachers and the school. They inform the teachers about their problems and expect advice from them about their children.

"The child may not do something at home, but at school they imitate each other, and you, as a parent, may be surprised about what your child is able to do. I couldn't believe it and I was really surprised when I heard that he used bad words. He would never do it at home." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

Parents and teachers support each other and collaborate closely in guiding the children, although sometimes teachers feel overwhelmed by their double role of educating the children and the parents at the same time:

"We have to be cunning, both with the children and the parents." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

"We have a responsibility towards the parents too." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

3.2.3 Relevant shift in parental authority: frustrated adults versus entitled children

The public narrative about the most appropriate parenting model is built around the tension between "unequipped" and "unskilled" parents and entitled children with more "rights" and no obligations:

"Children expect us all to pamper them: the parents and grandparents at home, the teachers at school. They think they're the navel of the Earth and everybody should fulfil their desires. That's because the parents have given them everything they wanted." (Focus group with mothers, Ciocâlteni)

"When somebody uses bad language with them, they answer back with the same language. They don't necessarily listen to what I'm saying." (Focus group with mothers, Ciocâlteni)

It is largely recognized that all children have the need for, and the right to parenting, and the adults are more and more publicly questioned about the quality and the style of their parenting.

"The mass media are promoting children's rights, but I haven't seen any broadcast about their responsibilities. Maybe we should

Parents (especially mothers) and teachers support each other and collaborate in guiding the children and educating them.

Most parents are concerned with, and dedicated to the education of their children, but sometimes they do not have the skills and knowledge for dealing with their own children.

Lecturing a child is an “old” parenting method which is still used and socially accepted.

do that, there should be a children and parents code which should be respected. Nowadays, the child manipulates the parent. If they get a bad mark at school, they say that everybody did. But the parent is concerned about his own child, not about everybody.”(Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Since Moldovan society is still in a transitional phase, and the rhythm of overall changes is very alert, the old social norms overlap the new social norms, which are not completely formed, generalised and internalised. Out of the old parenting methods, one that is still accepted nowadays is lecturing. The parents think they are “allowed” to lecture their children, although the cause and the impact of this parental tool have drastically changed. While in the past the main cause was the children not having completed their chores, currently the children are lectured when they don’t do their homework, or spend too much time at the computer/watching TV. Also, while in the past lecturing used to be very effective, nowadays, children do not seem so affected by it.

Parents are searching and experimenting new parenting tools.

Parents are rather in a searching mode, experimenting new parenting tools picked up from various sources (media, internet) or witnessed on their migration journeys. At societal level, there are no uniform and homogenous expectations about how a parent should behave in order to be considered a “good parent”, although it is relatively clear what a good parent should pursue. It is expected from a “good parent” to educate his/her child “seven years at home”, prepare him/her for life and offer and support his/her formal education.

There are two main tendencies which compete with each other and are almost opposed: on the one hand, there are the migrant parents who offer their children material goods in order to compensate for their absence and advocate the idea of a “good parent sacrificing the emotional life and offering everything to his/her child; on the other hand, there are “local parents”, who can secure an emotionally stable environment, but cannot satisfy the material needs of their children.

Overall, beyond these two extreme models, the general opinion is that there is a rather general deterioration of the quality of the parenting.

“Neither are we as good as our parents, nor our children as good as we were”. (Focus group with teachers, Drochia).

The adults (both teachers and parents) acknowledged that nowadays, “the child is educated by the society rather than by parents and school”, and although their responsibilities remained the same (to educate a child and prepare him/her for being a good member of the society), the parenting tools available to them in a society focused on children are rather scarce and sophisticated.

During the focus group discussions, most parents referred to their own personal experience rather than judge other parents' methods for disciplining their children.

Most of them felt overwhelmed by their external responsibilities (to provide for their families, to adapt to a new socio – economic ecosystem, to adjust to the new technologies) and there is little time and energy left to be spent on questioning and actively researching new parental models.

When it comes to moving from “what are” to “what ought to be” the best parental models, parents suggested that:

*“You have to scold them a little, but treating them kindly is better”
(Focus group with mothers, Ciocalteni)*

“A slap is permitted occasionally, but not on the face, on the back or on the buttocks” (Focus group with mothers, Ciocalteni)

“A child should understand when he is told something from an early age, when he/she grows up, it's too late“

“Not beating them, but taking their phones away or blocking the Internet”. (Focus group with mothers, Falesti)

“When they repeatedly break a rule, you need to be tougher. When you understand that they do it on purpose, you have to get tougher.” (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

“Until it starts school (aged 7), it is accepted to beat a child” (Focus group with mothers, Tocuz)

“The child needs to be beaten moderately” (Focus group with mothers, Tocuz)

“Slapping is better than caning”(Focus group with mothers, Tocuz).

Some parents described themselves and are considered by others as unfit, unable to adapt their attitudes and behaviours to the new societal requirements, and trapped into their own stereotypes and fixed ideas.

“Children can be changed in time, not adults though. I asked parents to come and see the psychologist, but it's very difficult, because they have fixed ideas. Things are as they think, and can't be changed. Even if they come to the psychologist, they give up soon, because they say there's nothing wrong with their mind. There are stereotypes and different kinds of parents.” (Teacher, Ciocãlteni)

Mental health among children and parents is treated superficially.

**There is a steep decline
in parental authority.**

In parallel with the steep decline in parental authority, children are considered to be given too much freedom, and not being taught about boundaries and self-control.

"A child must know what he can do and what he can't, what he should do and what he shouldn't. These are simple facts, but essential. We have reared our own healthy and educated children, but now it's different." (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

**Too much freedom is
damaging for a child.**

"Some parents give their children too much freedom, without checking up on them. You can't let your child play 3-4 hours without knowing where he/she went and with whom. I check up a lot on my child. He won't go even for half an hour, without me knowing where he is. I sometimes think this is over the top, but I can't help it." (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

**The public messages
about children rights
and obligations are
strongly unbalanced.**

All the adults and children involved reported an important turn in the style of upbringing children.

"Children only know about rights, but not about responsibilities. Sometimes we threaten them with the policeman, but they're immune to that. Because they know they have rights. This is what we taught them. They forget they have responsibilities too, and that there are things they shouldn't do." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

**By advertising their
rights, adults' authority is
deeply undermined .**

Young parents recognize that their values, their attitudes and behaviours towards their children are very different from, and sometimes opposite to how their parents brought them up:

"Our parents didn't maltreat us, they educated us in the fear of God and of the parents. The prayer was a habit." (Focus group with mothers, Drochia)

"We were listening. We didn't talk much with our parents, but we knew what we had to do." (Focus group with mothers, Ciocâltei)

"We were much busier, the parents were giving us work to do. We give them some chores too, but they do them flimsily. The work is not the same anymore, like we used to go weeding on the field." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

3.2.4 Restricting gadget usage and the role of new technologies

The penetration of the new devices and technologies, deeply distorted the internal dynamics of the family.

The amount of time that children spend on the computer/phone is subject to a constant negotiation between children and parents. Sometimes they have to physically deprive their children of their devices.

"When they come from school they go straight on the Internet. Right now, coming to this meeting, I saw him with the phone at school and I took it away from him. They do their homework in a hurry, ticking strictly what they have to do, nothing more. Then they rush to the computer." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

"They're all day with the phone in their hand. They take advantage of the fact that we are not at home from 8 to 5, so they're on the Internet from 2 o'clock, when they get back from school. This is their main occupation, there is no communication with their parents and they place little emphasis on learning, because of the internet." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti).

According to both parents and children, the most efficient method to punish child is to interdict his/her access to the phone, tablet and computer.

"If you tell them you won't give them food, it doesn't affect them, but if you tell them you won't let them use the computer, then they may listen to you." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

"We tell them they are not allowed on the phone. If they do not comply with the one hour limit, they are punished by not being allowed on the phone or computer for a few days. They do not challenge this, they understand this is the punishment." (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

Since not all parents are highly computer literate, the children can trick them easily.

"Her father forbids her access to the phone but she breaks the rule. We don't have time to check and she knows there are other

The penetration of new technologies distorts the internal dynamics of the family.

Restricting gadget usage and the access to the Internet become effective forms of punishment for both teenagers and young children.

Parents feel incompetent to engage in, and control their children's addiction to the new technologies.

Parents acknowledge that online-game addiction is a proper illness but they do not know where to ask for professional support.

methods of punishment, so the Internet for her is not the biggest punishment." (Focus group with mothers, Orhei)

In some extreme cases, children become aggressive towards their parents, if they deprive them of their online games. Parents acknowledge that online-game addiction is a proper illness but they do not know where to ask for professional support.

"It causes a big fight and a lot of anger if you take their phone away. They become aggressive, very aggressive. They are addicted to online games. It's a disease. Taking their phone away is the only punishment. Nothing else works. Words have no effect." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

"Some of the computer games are very aggressive. I noticed that my son was very aggressive when he was playing such games. Now he only plays football, and he's much better. I insisted he should give up on those games. At some point I was trying to shut down his computer, and he nearly hit me. Then I said: that's enough, you can play, but change the games. He deleted those games. Cartoons are aggressive too." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

Some parents, not aware of how severe their children's "screen addiction" is, are content that their children do not go out and spend more time indoors.

"Now kids just stay at home on the Internet. And we sometimes think this is better than going who knows where and who with, so that something may happen to them. It's safer to know they're at home, although we understand it's not good to spend so much time on the Internet." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

On the one hand, parents acknowledge the free access to information their children can enjoy through Internet, but on the other hand they can sense the danger of addiction, too.

"The dependence on technology is very big. But they don't always find something interesting. I noticed he was wasting a lot of time just searching." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

Other parents consider that the Internet is useful for their children, since they have access to more information.

"The children spend a lot of time on the Internet and gather a lot of information from there, and they choose what interests them." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

There is an increasing cultural distance between parents and children.

“We are not at home, and until we come back from work they are online all the time. They need some information for their homework from the Internet, but they spend much more time than needed on the Internet.” (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

“This generation is growing in the era of modern technologies. They watch many movies and they want to try everything. To apply everything. Not only movies, but also videos on the Internet, they try to imitate the vloggers and the Challenges. They are not interested in books.” (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

The cultural distance between parents and children enlarged due to the emergence of the new technologies and a big shift in parental upbringing.

“We grew up differently. We used to play a lot. We used to work on the field too, but there were lots of outdoor games. Now they don't go out anymore. They don't meet each other. We used to meet up and play.” (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

Short summary:

Moldavan families suffered important transformations and changes in size, structure and dynamics. Some family ties became overloaded by extra responsibilities (for example relatives who look after the children left at home by parents who went abroad), while other weakened and got dismantled (through divorce or separations). Parents consider that they are in a disadvantageous position. On the one hand, their patriarchal authority and traditional upbringing methods are seriously challenged and undermined by new norms and rules “borrowed” from other cultures, which penetrated the social fabric of their communities through the Internet, social-media and mass-media. On the other hand, they are not offered alternative models or strategies to fulfil their role.

3.3 Main norms that promote and maintain peer violence

Children and teachers equally admitted that there is a lot of physical and verbal abuse in classrooms, on the corridors and outside the schools (especially on the way back home):

- 10% of the students admitted witnessing very often physical altercations in schools and about 33% acknowledged to see them only sometimes
- 17% of the students admitted witnessing very often verbally abuse among peers and about 38% acknowledged to see them only sometimes.

Children and teachers reported verbal and physical abuse among peers.

Young children punished by their fathers have more chances to bully other children or avoid relations with peers.

Most of the studies about violence among peers show that the exposure to domestic violence and aggressive behavior directed towards children is strongly associated with bullying behaviours, and the results of this study support this statement.

For the age group under 11: While most of the children involved in the study seem to have healthy friendships with their peers, the children (mostly boys) who are punished by their fathers or by others (temporary carers), are more likely to become bullies (figure 8) or to self-isolate themselves, avoiding relationships and having a poor management of their anger (figure 9).



Figure 9: the profile of a bully: a boy under 11, aggressive with his peers (tail), punished often by his father (head) and not allowed to use the phone/tv (legs), for not doing work at home (trunk)



Figure 10: the profile of an angry boy under 11, who refuses to play with his peers (tail), is often beaten (legs) by his father (head), for not doing work at home (trunk)

The main reasons for starting a fight among peers are:

Gossip (if some talk badly about others)	78.51%
Reporting to teachers / parents	65.78%
Some are stronger and others weaker	58.41%
Jealousy (if you like the same girl or boy)	57.81%
Messages (if some post on phone / Facebook / Instagram messages about others)	57.16%
Envy	54.99%
Some are bigger and others smaller	48.47%
They belong to different groups	39.92%

There are many circumstances that could degenerate into a fight among peers.

Some are richer and others poorer	38.94%
Some are girls and others are boys	29.35%
They come from different localities / neighbourhoods	25.51%
Some have parents abroad and others do not	22.11%

Figure 11: Main reasons that could rise a conflict among peers (the question permitted multiple choices)

3.3.1 Strong children solve their problems on their own

The parents consider the “little” conflicts that occur among children insignificant and they either avoid getting involved or sometimes encourage their to respond in the same way:

“Some parents encourage their children to beat other children. Did he harm you? Do the same! They don't tell their children that this is not a nice thing to do.” (Focus group, Falesti)

Unfortunately, most of the time children are left alone to face their abusers and only in extreme situations parents are asked to come to school and possibly participate in mediating the conflict.

“If it's difficult, I'd tell my parents, if it's more simple, I'd sort it out myself.” (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

Therefore, children are socialized to be resilient, to solve their problems alone: 66% of the children between 11 and 18 agreed that “strong children” solve their problems on their own, without asking teachers and parents for help, although for 82% of them there is a person who could help them if they needed.

The main strategies children use to tackle the physical or verbal abuse are:

- Good friends gather and confront/punish the abuser

“If the teacher doesn't react, we girls get together and beat the boy who had beaten us” (Focus group with children, Fălești)

- Report the agresor to an older child:

“If I have a problem, I call an older pupil during the break or I tell the student on duty that day”. (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

- Join a sport :

Parents avoid to get involved in mediating conflicts between peers. They advise their children to defend themselves.

Children are encouraged by adults to solve their peer fights on their own.

"When I was little, they were all beating me. Now I joined a box club and even have older friends". (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

- Accept and do not react

"Girls tell me I'm dark, ugly and don't do well at school. I got used to it. I don't tell anybody. This is my way. They call me "nigger", "snickers" ... (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

-Run away from home :

"Children who run away from home - and the police is looking for them, run because their parents are beating them." (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

While dealing with cyber bullying, children also tend to solve online disputes on their own, without engaging the adults:

"If our parents ask for passwords, we don't disclose them. They try to see our messages, but they are blocked, hidden." (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

There are a few tactics teenagers use to react when someone is bullied online, ranging from mild rejection (not giving a "like", posting an unpleasant picture) to extreme dismissal of the abuser(unfollow, reject, block or even report).

"Not give a "like" is a form of rejection. You "unfollow" when you're not interested in someone anymore, when you're not curious anymore or when they're posting too much, are too self-centred, were rude to you in real life or have upset you. I did "unfollow" when I lost when I lost respect and curiosity for someone". (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

Among children, leaving them to solve their problems on their own and the negative connotation of "reporting to an adult" go hand in hand.

"Snitching is worse!" (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

The act of "reporting to an adult" is actively discouraged by the children and he/she who dares doing it, is automatically excluded and targeted.

3.3.2 Verbal violence among peers - nickname calling

Both parents and children reported that verbal taunting and nickname calling is the most pervasive verbal abuse used among peers. Usually older children bully

The act of "reporting to an adult" is perceived as being negative and is actively discouraged among children.

Nickname calling is a traditional norm, strongly embedded in the traditional culture especially in rural areas.

younger ones, dominant children bully weaker ones/children with disabilities or those who belong to other ethnic groups.

"Children get upset when they are called by their nicknames. My son is blond and the children call him "Yolk". I told him that, as his mother, there is nothing I can do. I came and spoke with his teacher, but they keep calling him "Yolk." (Focus group with mothers, Ciocâltei)

"Our family name is Semenei, and they call my son "Sârmă" (Romanian for "wire"). I went to the school and clarified it. He grew up by now, and doesn't mind anymore." (Focus group with mothers, Ciocâltei)

"I was the class teacher, and this boy, who had a difficult family situation, was called "the Rat". Then he took a sheet of paper and gave nicknames to everybody in the class. I set up a meeting with the children and then I called the parents to school. This fight lasted for a year, but by the time they were in year 9, they calmed down." (Focus group with teachers, Ciocâltei)

3.3.3 Exclusion among peers

The diversity and differences between students can produce clusters ("mici bisericute", "little congregations"), which can exclude or discriminate against some children.

Here are two portrayals of children excluded by their peers; both of them are taken care of by other adults, relatives or not, but not by their parents (figures 9 and 10).

Children group themselves and discriminate against and exclude outsiders.

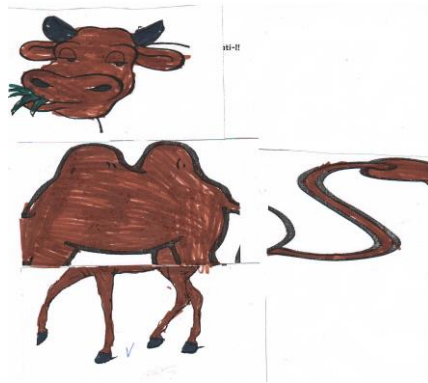


Figure 12: boy, who is often excluded by other children, who is often punished by adults (other than his mother or father) for spending too much time watching tv or on the Internet.



Figure 13: boy, who doesn't play with others and often gets beaten by adults (other than his mother or father) for not obeying the rules.

The children congregate into small groups and exclude and discriminate on the basis of various criteria: age, skills and abilities, nationality, language, socio-economic status of their family.

Based on the qualitative data, possible criteria for the open exclusion of some children are:

- Educational criterion (learning abilities): children with good results exclude those with lower results.
- Non-academic skills/life experience: children with more life experience exclude those less experienced.
- Circumstantial criteria: refer to a wide range of situational factors that go far beyond personal characteristics and constraints.
- Orphans or those who temporarily are not with their parents
- Parents involved in migration: children with parents working abroad exclude children whose parents are not abroad
- Temporarily unemployed parents
- Families in financial difficulty
- Health criterion: children without disabilities exclude children with physical impairments or disabilities
- Geographical criteria: students who belong to the same neighbourhood/locality discriminate against students who are commuting or live in another village. Also, children from urban exclude children from rural communities

- Cultural criteria: language, values, cultural capital, religion/belief, country of origin/residence, ethnicity/race, social background.
- Dispositional criteria: cover broadly not just students' perceptions and beliefs about the world around them but also about themselves.

3.3.4 Online relationships among peers

Most of the children (75%) have a smartphone and 82% of them have at least one account on social media platforms and spend long hours on their devices.

The relationships among peers are negotiated both in the offline and the online environment. The quality time of their relationships is equally divided between face to face meetings and screen to screen messages. The two types of engagement overlap and there are no clear boundaries between them. A conflict could rise from posting something online and could be solved by discussing in person, or vice versa.

Nowadays, children prefer screen to screen relations to face to face relationships.

"Kids don't go out. Now you don't see any children in the village. They all stay at home on the Internet." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

"It's considered a shame to go to the library and ask for a book. You must have a top mobile phone if you go to the library. Children nowadays, they're not asking for a nice coat, but rather for a new and expensive mobile phone. If you compare the phones of the children with those of the teachers, there is a big difference. But when you suggest to raise some funds for teaching materials, they complain that the school is asking for money." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

3.3.5 Mowgli, "gangs" and the street culture

Under the umbrella of "street culture", there are clustered various different types of social phenomena. Foca & others²⁰ identified a few types of street children: children who beg or work on the street during the day, and go back to their family over night; children who live and work on the street and do not have any contact with their families; and children who live on the street together with their family.

Nowadays, the relationships among peers are negotiated in both the offline and the online environment.

Children prefer screen-to-screen relations to face to face relationships

Outside schools, there are various types of relationships among peers: daily street gatherings among fluid groups of teenagers, children who choose to run away from home and live on the street and "street gangs".

Neglected and abused children run away from home.

Based on the qualitative data collected, there were identified: 1) children who run away from home and 2) children/teenagers involved in street gangs.

1. "Mowgli" phenomenon - an euphemism for children who run away from home. Most of the time, the runners were either neglected (by an alcoholic mother) or molested (by an aggressive father).

"In our village we heard of children who ran away from home. Some have gone for good, and the police is searching for them. They run because they are beaten by their parents." (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

According to national figures, there are approximately 600 children who left their homes or foster care families and foster care institutions.²¹

2. Street culture

"The street" is perceived as a symbolic place of socialization, where children share and negotiate their values, influencing each other.

Teachers and parents observed that they have a limited influence upon their children, since there are other "social institutions" that shape their values and goals:

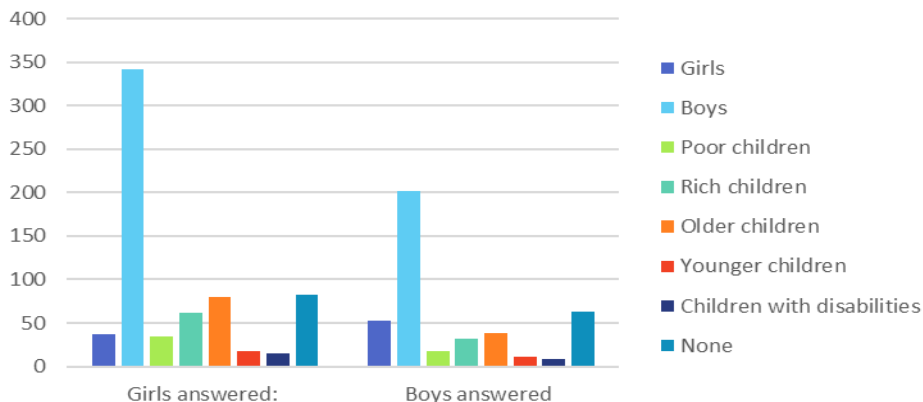
"It is the society that influences this generation. The children are educated by society more than by the family and school. In the family they are guarded and cared for, but when they pass the threshold of the house, they must become someone else, otherwise they are not accepted by the others. They only play with you if you are like them." (Focus group, teachers, Falesti)

Both, the boys and the girls interviewed (aged 11-18) admitted that boys are more likely to get into a fight (inside and outside the school).

Marginalized children form "street groups" in order to compensate the lack of economic and social resources.

Physical violence among peers (especially boys) is seen as a source of gaining social capital, popularity and social acceptance.

Who got into fights with their peers more often?



Peers fights may start at school and “finish” outside the school.

To prove one’s masculinity through violence is a source of social respect.

On the street, there is a culture of pride and respect and proved masculinity.

Lack of material wealth could be replaced by dominance, through imposing and maintaining daily, violent, routine bullying.

The fights that start within the school are negotiated and resumed after school hours, on the street or in other public spaces (parks, “behind the school”, in safe places - “în locuri ferite”). There, in front of some witnesses (invited peers and friends), after agreeing on some rules (for example “no one will go and report to their teachers”, “no one will involve their parents”) they start fighting.

To the teenagers who may be marginalized or socially excluded, their involvement in “gangs” and “companies” (“companii”) and fights, confers them local fame, recognition of their authority among peers, and it’s a source of enhancing their social status. Sometimes, members of this “companies” will be the future offenders and prisoners. According to United Nations Children’s Fund, in 2015, every seventh child offender was sentenced, and one in six sentenced children was imprisoned.

Case study: boy, 14 years old, from a vulnerable family, member of a local “company” (street gang)

I had a conflict with a girl from year 5, who threw a box on the ground. I accidentally got angry and I broke her finger. The girl went to her parents, and her father came to school, but nothing happened. I told him that it was her fault, because she threw the box. My parents didn't find out about this.

Another time, I punched a boy in the nose. He was taken to the medical centre and I went home. Together we decided to go to the “green house” and fight. Before we went to fight, we both decided that no one would call our parents. I was angry with him because he started talking about me and insulting my family. He had been doing this for a while. Since then, he is silent and says nothing. My teacher told my parents that I hit the boy in the nose.

The weaker boys have to listen to the stronger ones. The weak should listen and should be beaten, not heavily, just a slap. From all the boys in our school, I am the strongest one. I have not beaten everyone. I have beaten only some of them, at the others I just shouted. There are situations when a weaker one comes and asks me to defend him.

When needed, people from your gang (we call it “companie”, Romanian for “company”) would get involved. In our group we are nine boys. We meet and go to town together. There is also another gang - “companie”, with older boys who go around in cars.

In order to be part of the company you have to pass a test: you have to fight alone with three people to pass the test of courage. The three boys I fought with were from the countryside.

Also, we have the following rule: when a boy just arrived in town from a nearby village, one of the boys who lives in town has to slap him. If he dares to fight back, we all will jump on him. In the other "company", the test one has to pass is to drink a lot of alcohol until you collapse.

There are more gangs, and if something happens among us, we go to "the pond". There is a meadow, on the outskirts of the town. A place where we meet to negotiate and fight. To these meetings you have to go with a stick or a knife. I was also present at the meeting when we fought. I haven't seen any fight with knives yet. Yes, I got beaten myself too. Those who win must take care of those who have lost. The battle ends when the band leader decides that they must surrender. Our leader is the strongest from all of us. Our boss didn't beat anyone from our gang. If one gets upset with somebody, they decide if they fight alone or everybody gets involved.

We all meet every day. They post on social media the time and the place of the meeting. I don't have a mobile phone but I go to the public library to use a computer and see where we will meet. Daily, we spend about three hours together. My parents are not aware of this, they only know that I am meeting my friends. My teacher knows.

At home, I have to take care of my grandmother who is bedridden. I bring water for her and for my family. We do not have running water. I never upset my mother and I always help my brothers. My mother is more strict than my father, who is softer. My brother is in jail because he stole 20 cars. He tells me not to do illegal stuff, and end up there. At least he is making money there because he works."

From an early age, physical confrontations are very common among boys. Their sociality and sociability is mainly organized through very physical interactions, perceived sometimes as a game, culminating with legitimizing hierarchies and leaders.

"The very moment the bell rang, they started to slam the doors and push one another left and right ... I have 16 boys in my class and they're all fighting up and down. As teachers, we can't control the class anymore. They don't perceive it as violence though, they say that's how they play. If their computer games are

Sometimes excessive aggressiveness is an act of response to long term bullying.

There are "planned " among equal peers.

all with fights and shootings, they perceive violence among themselves as a game. (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

"Young boys get beaten by older ones, either joking, or play fighting. (Focus-group with children, Ciocâlteni)

Sometimes excessive aggressiveness is the reaction of a victim, who act in response to repetitive episodes of intensive bullying :

"This girl who is always fighting, is on a lower level compared with the other children, she's more dirty, has untrimmed nails, and the children don't befriend her. She has a few friends from a slightly higher level, but still low, like her's. (Ciocâlteni)

Once someone is provoked, he has to accept the fight, otherwise he will be seen as a coward, which on long term may attract more bullying.

"If you don't go to fight, you'll be considered a coward. You can't just not go because you're afraid. You go anyway, even if you know you'll get beaten. You can't be a coward."(Orhei)

A planned fight (at a certain time and place) can happen only between two boys, considered relatively equal in the local social hierarchy (same age, same class, same body size).

"They agree to sort out the conflict in some hidden place, but sometimes it can happen anywhere, when the anger is overboiling. The boys agree to meet "behind the school", in order to avoid ending up in the police station or the town hall." (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

"On the sports ground: when we fight, we're wrestling, punching each other. One boy was kicked, then my cousin punched him in the face and he got a black and blue bruise."(Focus group with children, Făleşti)

If one is much younger or weaker, the physical dispute takes place on the spot, instantly (on the corridor, in the classroom, on the way home).

"Usually there are no altercations between boys of different ages. Only the big ones go 'behind the school'". (Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

Short summary

Physical and verbal bullying (nicknames calling) is very present among peers. Sometimes bullying is not treated seriously by adults and children are left to deal with the situation on their own. The stereotype that a strong child wouldn't report if he is bullied is deeply socially embedded among peers. It became a social norm for children who are repeatedly abused and neglected by their parents to run away from home or get involved in "street gangs".

3.3 Main norms that promote and maintain violence in the school

3.3.1 Teachers versus students

Although most of the students involved declared that they want to continue to study and go to university in the future (almost 49%), in some schools, teachers interviewed complained about the lack of motivation and lack of implication of the students in the learning process.

Therefore, for some, the school is defined as a battlefield where the teachers and the students are perceived as opposite entities, set against each other.

"If a child doesn't want to learn, he doesn't. He would answer only if he wants to. That's it. We, teachers, have no weapons against them. In the past, it was not only the beating, there was also the verbal reprimand. But now? Nothing! You can't even raise your voice. Our generation knew how to respect and how to be responsible. The methods were more efficient. A child knew about fear and respect. But now, teachers and students are all equal." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

The teachers were complaining about the lack of diversity of concrete tools, methods and behavioral guidance for both teachers and students, equally. The patriarchal model of teaching is heavily criticized and avoided by all the actors involved, but it is also largely accepted that the effort to replace and impose a new type of education takes time and resources.

"As a teacher, you do not have the right to gaze at the children, or to raise your voice, far from us to even talk about other methods, like beating. Now, even a loud voice is considered abuse and violence." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

Both students (60% of the total participants) and teachers interviewed, agreed that some teachers are unequipped to control the class and impose their authority.

"Sometimes there are pupils who intervene in defense of the teacher, and who have more authority over the others than the teacher." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

Teachers complained about the lack of motivation and implication of the students in the learning process.

Teachers complained about the lack of general and homogenous behavioural guidance.

Teachers feel insecure and most of them adopt a defensive behaviour, being in a state of permanent self-defense and self-justification towards the parents of the students.

Teachers feel insecure and most of them adopt a defensive behaviour, being in a state of permanent self-defense and self-justification towards the parents of the students.

"In the past it was not shameful for a child to be educated using violence. Nowadays, it is not allowed and not diplomatic to invite a parent to apply violence with his child in school. I remember when I was a child and got my first bad mark, how I got struck by my mother over the palms of my hands. My generation had fear, responsibility and esteem, respect for the teachers. Nowadays, it is strictly forbidden for a teacher to apply violence. It would be shameful to break this code of ethics and teachers would be punished. In the past it was not the case." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

"Children only greet you as long as you are their teacher. If they don't have lessons with you, they won't greet you anymore. It's a different generation this one." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

The status of the teachers was higher in the past. Nowadays, teachers have small wages. It takes a lot of time, patience and wisdom to be a good teacher. But we still have problems." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

Some teachers admitted they lack the skills to deal with unreceptive and unmotivated students and demanding parents. Others emphasized the situation when parents honestly ask for help and support from the school.

"They come and tell me honestly what their problems are, and why their child is missing school or is not studying: they either have to help harvesting corn or to stay with their younger siblings. I try to understand their situation and support them. I tell my pupils to try to do their homework at least. A grandmother called once to say that the child has eaten cherries and can't come to school because he had diarrhea. So, they open up at school with all sorts of problems." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Therefore, their main effective tool to tackle undisciplined students is to get in touch with their parents. In most cases, this method works and parents are receptive and collaborate with the school.

"We are asked to go to school only if it is something serious. I am glad when the teacher calls me when my son does something bad. The kids hate it when the school calls us. Yesterday, I was

The most effective tool to tackle undisciplined students is to get in touch with their parents.

called because he didn't bring his physical education equipment to school." (Focus group with mothers, Fălești)

"It all starts with the family. For example, the child went home and said that the teacher raised her voice at him, but didn't say why. And the parent, without asking, came to school to complain to the teacher." (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

On the one hand, they are not allowed to physically punish students, in order "to inflict fear or respect", and on the other hand, verbal observations and moralizing discussions seem to be ineffective and treated superficially by the students.

"There is no respect for teachers anymore. In the past, it was shameful if you complained to a parent about his child. But nowadays, it is very difficult to work with the children and with their parents. The teachers who remained in schools are deeply motivated, they have the right personality and a strong desire to teach, otherwise they would have left by now." (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

The strategies they use in some schools are to take the students to the headteacher's office or to call their names and ask them to step in front of the whole school.

Since there is no compulsory code of practice for schools and no anti-bullying policy designed to resolve conflicts between teachers and students, sometimes teachers feel unprotected and react emotionally. While some may apply small physical corrections, others become defensive, act unpredictably or give up:

The teacher got angry with a pupil and he damaged some girl's book." (Focus group with children, Ciocâltei)

She was a very good teacher, very diligent, but she got discouraged. Some pupils didn't respect her and she felt humiliated and was crying. It's a weakness for a teacher to be good. (Focus group with children, Ciocâltei)

There are very few measures that a teacher can apply when a child misbehaves, and all of them imply a certain time frame between the moment when the child did something bad and the moment when he/she will be punished (have the parents called to school, being taken to the headmaster/headmistress, being exposed in front of the whole school).

"I never raised my hand against a pupil, I educated them with a gaze. Children used to understand. But this new generation doesn't seem to understand. (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

Since teachers cannot exert their authority anymore, it seems to be very inefficient to apply old strategies which involved shaming a child or appealing to morals and responsibility:

"Our generation listened to the words, but these ones now don't seem to react, have no shame, don't assume responsibilities, don't admit that they may at fault, don't understand when and why they are wrong. Some are very aggressive, they simply push and punch. We have between 30 and 50 years of experience, we have dealt with many generations and we can say that there is a big difference. We think this is because of the computers and the smartphones. Learning has become least important." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

Therefore, for some old-fashioned teachers (especially male teachers), a light physical punishment (beating with a stick, pulling the ear or the hair) may be the only tools left to discipline the children in the class.

3.3.2 Teachers and parents

Although there were many attempts to formalize the process of learning and the relationship between students, teachers and parents, there were rather individual initiatives than congruent efforts to elaborate clear norms and homogenous rules to be applied in all schools.

Where the official regulations, committees and institutions failed, the teachers acted on their own. They judged the situation in accordance to their personal experience, personality type, personal motivation and empathy, and supported the children, often overlapping parents responsibilities.

"We had children whose parents were illiterate or children in risk situations with many difficulties. The children just came to the lesson to assist, they only had one notebook for all subjects. I decided to keep them after school to help them do their homework. But then, there was this girl who rang the Child Helpline to report that a teacher (myself) violated her rights and kept her at school after hours. A team of specialists from the Child Helpline came and interviewed her, they asked her if I was asking for money, if she was the only one kept after school ... Finally, things were clarified. The girl had a boyfriend and she did not have enough time for him, before

The teachers suggested that one should produce a "guide" for students, teachers and parents, which should contain homogeneous measures and standardized strategies to be followed and applied in specific situations.

her mother came home from work, if she had to stay after school to do her homework. The team was very responsive, they came immediately to see what happened. And then I thought, maybe I should spend more time with my own child at home, rather than doing this. But I couldn't, so I'm still doing homework with them after school. I know everything about my pupils, even what they had for breakfast ... Some have received the first vaccination with me, they come to me when they have a problem rather than going to their mother. In general, parents are sad, because of the poverty and the lack of time. They spend a lot of time doing low paid work. I tell them when they come to the parents meetings, that they could still find a quarter of an hour every day to spend with their child.” (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

The teachers suggested that one should produce a “guide” for students, teachers and parents, which should contain homogeneous measures and standardized strategies to be followed and applied in specific situations.

This would help teachers to rebuild their authority and better control the class. Also, by applying consistent disciplinary measures and behaving in consistent manners, double standards or unfair treatment would be avoided. For instance, teachers would be happy if there would be no confusion anymore regarding the use of mobile phones and gadgets in school.

“Children are dependent on their phones. Technology has become harmful. Kids don't know how to use technology to their advantage. They use it to their detriment. To show who is more authoritarian, through various comments. They become hysterical if you take their phones away. But we have school regulations, and they know them. For instance, today, a boy was taking a picture of a girl in the class. So I took his phone and put it in my locker until the end of the school day. I don't think he cried when his mom went abroad, like he did for his phone until he got it back. You see, their priority is this object which doesn't breathe, doesn't have senses, and could stop working in the next five minutes. And the parents are facilitating this, they get credits, they do everything so that their child has what all the others do. There is a race so that all have the same, all have everything ...” (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of documents and forms they have to fill in on a regular basis.

"Children can't concentrate, they have problems with their eyes, with their backs. I see them sitting in a bad posture in the class." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Sometimes opposite rules and instructions create tensions among teachers and students: on the one hand pupils are allowed and encouraged to use their mobile phones, and on the other hand this is prohibited.

Also, teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of documents and forms they have to fill in, which are sometimes just a formal cover for hiding a problem rather than a concrete solution for solving it.

On the one hand, the heterogeneity of the teaching styles creates an unhealthy competition between teachers and determines young teachers to give up and leave the school.

On the other hand, the lack of structure and formality allows teachers to be very engaged and flexible and find innovative solutions to certain situations. For instance, children who are not supervised at home are given the opportunity to spend more time at school to do their homework.

Between the child and the teacher there can be genuine human relations and closeness, which continue beyond the formal framework of the school (they can be relatives, neighbours, family friends).

"When they ask why I raise my voice, I tell them that's because I want more from them, because I'm not indifferent. That's why I was scolding you." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

The teachers reported that sometimes they have to educate parents and grandparents too, not only students.

"It is a colossal job to be a teacher, because we do not just educate children, we educate parents and grandparents too. You do not only teach knowledge, you create behaviours, educate parents, persuade grandparents. This is why there are not enough teachers. Many just give up. More than that, young teachers think differently, they think "I am not going to strain my nerves with you". They just give them the information and leave. In our school, teachers are old fashioned. If the child is asking us something, we are happy and feel rewarded just because of that." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Also, teachers have to mediate conflicts and relationships between the parents of the students.

The heterogeneity of the teaching styles creates an unhealthy competition among teachers and tensions among teachers and students.

"I was called to school by another parent, because the kids played with a phone and dropped it and it broke." (Focus group mothers, Făleşti)

3.3.3 Teachers outside the school gates

Since teachers relate to the parents' economic struggles (insufficient financial resources), some try to support them by covering part of their responsibilities (keeping the children to do their homework at school). Although they are very empathetic, they cannot avoid questioning and noticing how parents' decisions (long term migration, involuntary neglect) affect the wellbeing of their children.

Sometimes teachers get involved in supporting the children beyond the school gates.

"We have organized charity concerts to help the institutionalized children, with whatever people can donate. What I noticed though, is that institutionalized children do not necessarily need material things. They need encouragement, a good word and moral support. They have seen enough bad things. They need security and appreciation." (Teacher, Ciocâlteni)

"Education starts with little things, not everybody will become a mathematician, or a linguist or a historian. Why are there health problems, for instance? The children don't know how to boil a potato or to sew a button. And the parents don't seem to understand the importance of these things." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Migration also influenced the role of the teachers and the school. The teachers try to fill in the emptiness caused by the lack of care due to migration, and the school plays the role of a buffer zone.

"Sometimes we raise our voice, sometimes we're hard on them, sometimes soft. The problems we have in our school you actually find everywhere. All over the country there are Roma children and children without parents, children whose parents emigrated, and we are trying to understand them all. We are not saints, we have our own problems too. That's life, unfortunately. We could all live better, if the people in power wouldn't steal, and we wouldn't have such small salaries." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

Teachers get involved in supporting the children beyond the school gates.

Between the child and the teacher there can be genuine human relations and closeness.

Short summary

The main social actors responsible for forming and educating children are the family and the school. Unfortunately, lately, both of these social institutions have suffered important transformations and are facing a visible decline of their authority over the children. Both parents and teachers feel overwhelmed by and not in control of their children's role models and values, which are modelled by the Internet, mass media and peer pressure.

3.4 Main norms that promote and maintain violence in the community

International and internal migration weakened the cohesive ties among people, and communities are falling apart. Migration is a divisive factor, reduces collaboration and increases polarization and competition. Non-migrants who are left at home perceived visiting migrants as being disruptive and sometimes arrogant.

At the same time, there is a considerable decrease of the social mutual support within the community. Apparently, people care less about each other and tend to judge each other more. On top of that, there is a lack of trust in the local institutions responsible for supporting children, which are not coherent, nor trustworthy in their actions (77% of the interviewed children expressed lack of trust in the local authority).

3.4.1 Violence in the community - ethnic discrimination and stereotypes

There is a general nostalgia for the communist past in small communities, where the local industry was completely dismantled, there are no initiatives and investment and a high rate of unemployment among the adult population.

People do not embrace easily the large economic differences and the lack of equality in accessing public services (health, education). Those with less resources and opportunities, the most vulnerable ones (Roma people, uneducated people, people with disabilities and/or mental health issues) are becoming poorer and feel trapped in their deep poverty .

The marginalization and increased polarization facilitates the apparition of "the street culture", or the culture of the "mahala" (suburb).

International and internal migration weakened and divided communities.

Mutual support at community level decreased.

Polarisation and the gap between rich and poor increased.

"The lack of means plays a major role. Some don't have clothes, nor do they have money to buy them. Others have plenty to buy phones and a car. Young people are talking a lot on the street about this. The street plays a central role in education. They spend more time there than at school. That's where they learn things like: my father is away, my father has a lot of money, my father has not found work for 10 years now. Before, there was work for everybody, here and in the whole country (USSR)." (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

3.4.2. "Your dirty linen shouldn't be washed in public" - lack of trust in others and/or in authorities

Covering personal and family issues is a form of social self-protection, which is deeply inserted in the social fabric of the Moldovan society. It is a normalized behaviour which goes hand in hand with the lack of trust in officials, professionals and state representatives.

Most of the children (77%) considered that family problems should be kept secret from others and should not be displayed and discussed publicly. To cover personal and family matters and not expose them even within the kinship network is a social strategy used in order to avoid any possible judgment and stigma.

Children with parents who go abroad perceive the school, the neighbours and the community as potential informants of the authorities. Since the new regulations demand that parents declare who will be the carer of the children while they are going to be abroad, both parents and children avoid admitting that parents left and try to hide the fact that children live on their own/ alone.

From a very young age children learn how not to be very open and not to talk in public personal matters:

- **about the relationship between themselves and the adults:** 34% of the children admitted to keep it secret if anyone (adults or peers) would offend / abuse them. Also, 10% of the children confessed not having anyone trustworthy to whom to talk about their problems.

- **about the relationships among peers :** 65% of both girls and boys equally considered that disclosing children's matters to an adult (parent or teacher) could be a possible reason for starting a fight, and is seen as very negative behaviour (they are perceived rather as "traitors"). Systematically, less boys than girls would divulge their problems to a member of their family (only 52%

Family matters should be kept secret.

Systematically, less boys than girls would divulge their problems to a member of their family or other adults.

of the boys would talk compared to 75% of the girls) or to their teachers (only 34% of the boys compared to 50% of the girls).

4. Gendered differences

4.1 Gender ideologies in the adult population

There is a major social norms shift with regards to gender rights and equality. The women interviewed acknowledged the fact that the traditional masculinity is drastically challenged and changed.

"Twenty years ago, there was only one woman who knew how to drive a tractor; now all women can drive and they are working in many areas like construction, machinery. The world is promoting women politically and economically". (Focus group with teachers, Făleşti)

According to qualitative data, nowadays, men collaborate with women rather than dominate them.

"Relationships between men and women have changed. He must know the work of a woman, know how to take care of himself. When I got married, my ex-husband was surprised by my mother-in-law washing the floor and she said: "Woe, darling, didn't you get married, or what? This is a woman's job, not a man's." Nowadays, everything is in place and the woman helps the man and vice versa. But it depends on the man, because there are men who do not want to do it. The new generation is different." (Focus group with mothers, Făleşti)

4.2 Women and education

According to the data collected online, mothers are more educated than fathers (the percentage of mothers who finished university is double compared to the fathers, 24% compared to 12%). This may be a possible explanation for why some men, lacking self-esteem, may be more verbally and physically abusive towards women.

The traditional masculinity is drastically challenged and changed.

Nowadays, men collaborate with women rather than dominate them.

The mothers of the children involved in the study are more educated than fathers.

Also, girls are more prone to learn than boys and plan to study at university (the differences are statistically significant, verified by applying chi square test for the equality of proportions, with a significant p value <0.05).

4.3 Gender biases in bringing up children

Parents admit that in the past there was a clear guidance with regard to bringing up a boy or a girl. Nowadays, boys and girls are brought up alike and their daily responsibilities overlap.

Parents consider normal and useful to train their sons to do the daily chores of a household and think that they should participate equally to the domestic work.

4.4 Gender biases in perceptions and beliefs - "If someone loves you, he/she would beat you"

According to the online survey, the number of boys who agreed "*If someone loves you, he/she would beat you*" were significantly bigger than the number of girls who agreed (26% of the boys and 13% of the girls) .

Although both boys and girls believe that they should be treated equally by others, there are some statistically significant differences (verified by applying chi square test for the equality of proportions, with a significant p value <0.05) between how boys and girls perceived themselves:

- girls perceived themselves as being equal with the boys,
- while boys did not perceive themselves as being equal with the girls .

4.5 Gender biases in social behaviors

According to quantitative data, for most of the criteria there were no statistically significant differences between boys and girls in terms of how they behave, perceive themselves, interact or are treated by others.

The only differences spotted when applying statistical tests on a large number of items (chi square test for the equality of proportions, with a significant p value <0.05) were the following:

Boys and girls are brought up equally and their daily responsibilities overlap.

Significantly more boys than girls believe that if someone loves you, he/she would beat you.

Only the girls perceive themselves as being equal to boys. Boys do not perceive girls as being equal to them, although they expect everybody to treat them equally.

Boys and girls are treated and punished differently by adults.

- Significantly more boys than girls are meeting their friends on a daily basis, after school, and consider as extremely important to have more friends.
- Significantly more boys than girls react aggressively when someone denigrates/swears at them or beats them and they tend more to intervene in conflicts.
- Significantly more boys than girls use bad language with teachers and other children and laugh at other children.
- Significantly more boys than girls are pulled by their hair/ears.
- Significantly more girls than boys ask teachers and family for help and discuss about their problems with their friends, parents and teachers.
- Significantly more girls than boys do their homework on a regular basis.
- Significantly more girls than boys report that adults ignore them and refuse to speak to them as a form of punishment.
- Significantly more girls than boys are involved in gossip.

Based on qualitative data analysis there could be stressed a few differences between what is considered acceptable for boys ' behaviour and girls' behaviour:

It is generally accepted that a girl should pay more attention to the way she dresses, compare herself and compete with others in this respect. Clothes make a difference among girls, nicer clothes seem to attract boys.

"Boys don't quarrel over clothes. It's only among girls that counts how they dress." (Focus group with children, Făleşti)

Also, it is considered sensible for girls to do the light chores in the house (cooking, washing dishes), while boys should do the heavy ones (hoovering, gardening, fetching water).

"I do women's stuff, washing dishes, Cristi is carrying water and pulling the hoover, because it's heavy. We're getting on well.(Focus group with children, Ciocâlteni)

It is less accepted for a girl to spend time with her friends in the evening until very late into the night, while it is normal for boys to be outside a lot with their friends.

4.6 Gender biases and family roles: "Mother with the palm, father with the stick"

In terms of how boys and girls are treated by adults, the pattern described by the children is as follows:

- Mothers punish both boys and girls similarly
- Fathers punish their sons more often than their daughters

The punishment applied by the mother is perceived by the children as mild, bearable and less traumatic, whereas the punishment applied by the father has a greater emotional impact on them.

Women are responsible for the education of the children.

Women are expected to be responsible for the education of their children, to be educated and obedient.

- Teachers praise girls more than boys
- Both parents punish more often the boys for not doing their homework and for not behaving in school.

However, when asked which adult punishes them more often, children under 11 declared that it is their mother (407 out of 462). Only 26 were punished more by their father and 12 by other adults. Among children over 11, 64% admitted that their mother punished them more often.

In most of the cases, the punishment applied by the mother is perceived by the children as mild, bearable and less traumatic, whereas the punishment applied by the father has a greater emotional impact on them.

Asked if they consider that their parents are entitled to punish them corporally, 77.5% of the girls and 78% of the boys agreed that only their parents (and no other adults) are allowed to do it. Also, significantly more boys than girls approved of the fact that a child deserves to be beaten if he/she did something wrong.

4.7 Gender biases and descriptive social norms at community level

The most prevalent gender biased descriptive social norms at community level are:

- At societal level it is expected for women to get involved more than men in all the matters related to education and school
- At societal level it is expected for a woman to be rather silent and obedient in front of a man, although she may be more educated
- At societal level it is considered more likely for women to bring shame to their families

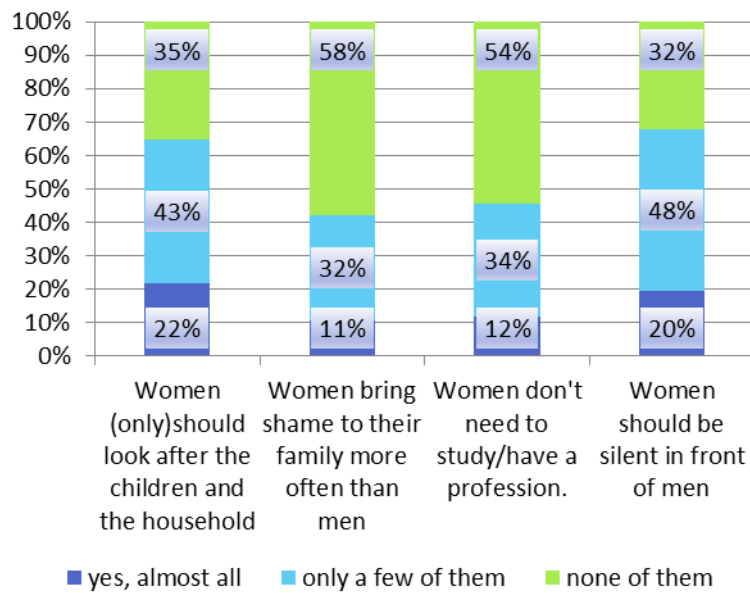


Figure 14: Question: In your community, most of the people believe that:

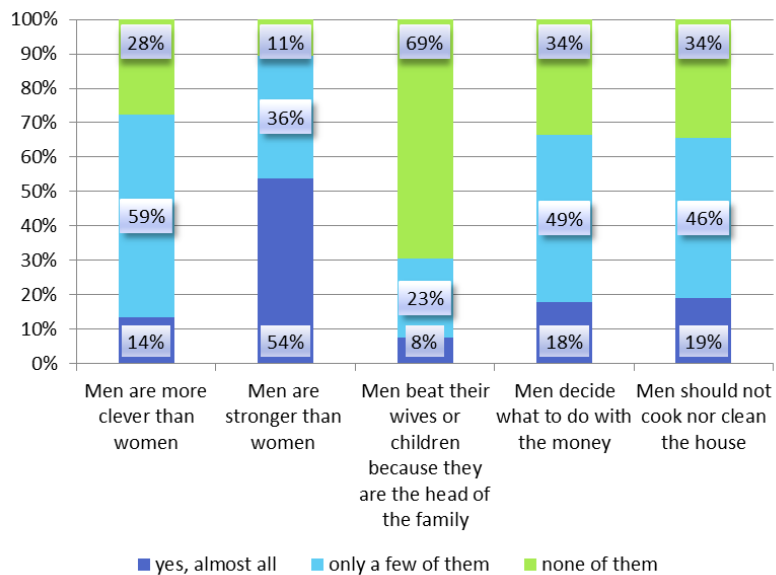


Figure 15: Question: In your community, most of the people believe that:

At societal level it is expected that:

- men are more clever and stronger than women
- men should decide how to manage the money and avoid domestic work
- men should not be aggressive towards their family.

Men are expected to be clever, strong and not aggressive towards their family.

Short summary

Boys and girls are treated /punished differently by their parents, but their domestic responsibilities are equally shared between siblings.

Girls are more open to discuss with adults, more prone to get involved in gossip, consider themselves entitled to be equal, expect to be treated equally by others and have high ambitions regarding their further education.

Boys have a lower threshold than girls when defining the acceptable level of violence. They get involved more in physical conflicts, are corporally punished more often than girls and have lower ambitions with regards to their further education.

At societal level, there are different expectations from women (educated, obedient, involved in the education of the children and vulnerable to public shame) and men (clever, money wise, physically strong but not entitled to be aggressive towards their families).

5 Other findings

5.1 Vulnerable children/families have a higher risk of severe violence, neglect , exclusion and abuse

What could be identified as a major problem indeed is the vulnerable children and families. In every school visited by the researchers, they identified a few children heavily neglected by their parents, abandoned and/or suffering extreme violence: a child who was locked for one night in a dark cellar (Drochia), an orphan who had to work for food (Fălesti), one who was passed between his divorced parents (Orhei) or another one who was regularly beaten by his mother (Ciocâlteni).

The most vulnerable category of children with a high risk of exposure to violence and abuse are:

Children from disorganized families

The absence of one or both parents due to divorce/separation or death has a big emotional impact on the affected children. 1 in 10 children (aged 11-18) are brought up by divorced parents. 6 children (out of 798) had lost their mother and 25 children (out of 798) had lost their father.

Vulnerable children/families have a higher risk to be exposed to severe violence, neglect , exclusion and abuse.

The most vulnerable groups of children are: children from disorganized families, children with both parents working abroad, children with special educational needs, Roma children and institutionalized children.

Children from disorganized families are in extremely unfortunate situations and their reactive behaviour influences the wellbeing of other children:

"A few days ago, my boy was beaten by a "problematic child". I don't know why some boys started to fight and a child from "a socially vulnerable family" kicked my child and he now has a "nice" swelling. I was called by the teacher to school to clarify the situation. This child creates many conflicts. He comes from a troubled family. The mother left and he was kept by his father in revenge on the mother. She has another family now, and doesn't want him anymore, now that the father wants to pass him to her. So, in fact, neither of them needs this child. The father is not receptive when the teachers tell him that the child is violent in school. The child may or may not understand. It seems there is no other path for him, he will get into trouble again, maybe with another child next time." (Focus group with mothers , Orhei)

The migration of parents increases children's vulnerability to violence, neglect and exploitation.

Children with both parents working abroad

The migration of parents increases children's vulnerability to violence, neglect and exploitation. National figures show that in the case of multi-generational households with migrants, 60.8% of the children left behind are without any form of legal protection (guardianship, trusteeship). Therefore, their grandparents, relatives or the people they are entrusted to, cannot represent and defend their legal rights in the occurrence of situations of abuse.²²

"There is a difference between the children living with their parents or with their grandparents. The grandparents only make sure that the child is well fed and clad, the practicalities." (Focus group with teachers, Orhei)

Children with special educational needs or mental health issues

The national data estimate a number of 12,200 children with disabilities registered in 2018²³. Although Moldova made significant progress in the inclusion of children with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream education, the quality of their education is very low and only one third of children with disabilities graduate from school.²⁴ According to qualitative data, children with disabilities are very often targeted by bullies.

Children with disabilities and special educational needs were included into mainstream education but the quality of their learning is rather low.

Roma children and their families need a special approach, in order to bring them to school and keep them motivated to learn.

"There is this boy with a speech impediment. One day, someone glued a sign on his back, reading "fool". Generally they're laughing about him because he can't talk. Another day, some boys were fighting on the corridor and they knocked him down by mistake. Instead of helping him to get up, they were laughing at him because he started crying, calling him a wimp." (Focus group with children, Tocuz)

Although most teachers are trying to create an inclusive environment for the children with disabilities, sometimes their peers show a lack of sensitivity.

"We have this colleague with some mental health problems. He also suffers from epilepsy. He often runs away from school and we chase after him and he gets scared. One day he escaped through the window and five of us surrounded him from different directions and caught him. We brought him in the classroom and he tried to throw some chunks of soil at us, then he grabbed a chair and tried to throw it at our teacher." (Focus group with children, Drochia)

In other cases, they are more or less accepted, tolerated or completely ignored by their peers.

"Children with disabilities are accepted. We had a child who would bite the other children's hands and ears and now he is accepted in the class. " (Focus group with teachers, Drochia)

Roma children

According to previous reports on the Roma population in Moldova from 2013²⁵, almost 51% of Roma households live below the threshold of absolute poverty, and both the incidence and the depth of poverty are twice as high among Roma children compared to non-Roma children. A later UNDAF report (2018) demonstrated that there are systemic barriers to Roma people's employability (low literacy level, lack of skills/qualifications, weak outreach by public employment services, the employers discriminatory attitudes based on ethnic stereotypes) which keep whole families trapped in poverty. This has a significant impact on Roma children's enrolment in school (one fourth for primary level, half for secondary level, and one fifth for upper level)²⁶ and on their attendance (less than three quarters of Roma children attend school daily). Therefore, some teachers suggested that Roma children and their families need a special approach, in order to bring them to school and keep them motivated to learn.

Orphans were taken away from their biological families due to lack of care or domestic violence.

“ You have to know how to deal with Roma families. The Roma don't have time to wait. They want everything here and now. You definitely shouldn't scare them. They will get defensive and authoritarian. You need to treat them with respect. I organized a festival for them, and we displayed their symbol and their anthem. Our Roma go to the Czech Republic as seasonal workers. There are different kinds of Roma.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

Institutionalized children - orphans and foster children

In Ciocârleni and Fălești, there were a few children who, for different reasons, live in foster care institutions (boarding houses). Some of them are orphans, others were taken away from their biological families due to lack of care or domestic violence.

“Children from the Boarding School (Internat) have a different attitude, they're expecting compassion. They tell me I have to give them passing grades, because they're from the Boarding School (Internat) and have no parents.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

“The children [from the boarding school n.a.] start to self-classify themselves. They need human warmth”. (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

“The biggest problem are the foster children, who are moved from one place to another, from one village to another and from one school to another.” (Focus group with teachers, Fălești)

Short summary

Although both children and adults are aware of the situation of some children exposed to severe and regular abuse and neglect, there are very few practical initiatives to alleviate their situation. There is a general indifference and lack of empathy. Children caught in ill-fated situations become sometimes “cases” circulated among institutions which are inconsistent in their decisions and insensitive to their particular needs.

5.2 Evolution of the norms

Since Moldova is a country in transition, which had to face a huge pressure from inside (migration, new economic rules, new social roles) and outside (Internet, international institutions, globalization), the entire social structure is changing. Alongside this macro-

phenomenon, the social norms about violence against children are also transformed and questioned:

	In the past: old norms/ stereotypes	SOCIAL NORMS	Nowadays: new norms/ stereotypes
FAMILY	The respect towards parents was not questioned	Mutual respect between parents and children	The respect towards parents is questionable
	A good child has to listen to his/her parents	Authority versus obedience between parents and children	It is acceptable to question your parents requests
	In the past parents and children didn't communicate	Communication between parents and children	Parents and children communicate more
	Children were educated through fear	Education through fear	Children do not fear their parents anymore
	Shame and faith were tools to educate children	Education through shame and faith	Shame and faith do not play an important role
	Physical punishment was socially accepted	Education through physical punishment	Physical punishment is publicly condemned
	Lack of financial resources was accepted by children	Economic/social status of the family affects children's behaviour	Lack of financial resources is a source of frustration for children
	Children used to share responsibilities with their parents	Daily responsibilities for children	Children are not set responsibilities by their parents
PEERS	Children used to play outdoors, meeting their friends face to face.	Behavioural norms among friends and peers, friendships and games	Children play indoors and most of the interactions are intermediated by screens.
	SCHOOL	Teachers were respected, recognized as authorities	Authority versus obedience in schools
Education was a source of social mobility and economic success		Attitude towards school and learning	Education is not a source of social mobility and economic success

MEDIA	Mass - media was relatively restricted and controlled by certain institutions, it was not parents' / teachers' responsibility	The social role of the media and the Internet	Mass - media and the Internet are open and it became a responsibility of parents/teachers to restrict/control /protect their children's access to the Internet
	People used to share and live in functional families and neighborhoods where collective scrutiny was an effective tool to control and guide children	Lack of social control at community level	Due to migration, people lost the sense of belonging to their large families and communities. Mutual scrutiny and social control is loosening.
COMMUNITY	There were systemic stereotypes against Roma children (discrimination and segregation against Roma children)	Stereotypes, exclusion and marginalization of vulnerable children	At national level there is a sustained effort to reduce discrimination and segregation based on ethnicity
	The main accent fell on children's obligations	General rights and obligations of the children	The main accent falls on children's rights
LEGAL RIGHTS	Children with disabilities were institutionalized	Special rights for children with disabilities and vulnerable children	Children with disabilities tend to be included into general education

The most recurring messages collected from parents/carers and teachers involved in this research were aggregated around a few main themes:

- there is a lack of state and civil society support for both adults and children (state institutions, charities, churches, care and mental health institutions)
- there is a decline in adults' authority in relation to their children
- there is an increasing divergence in values between adults and children
- there is a generational gap: adults feel unprepared to acknowledge the challenges their children have to face (especially in relation to the new technologies and addiction to games and Internet)
- there is a societal tension: children are empowered (more rights) while adults are overwhelmed and unequipped to face the new societal expectations

6. Conclusions

6.1 General conclusion

This study identified the main risk factors and the most prevalent social norms which maintain the violence against children. It also measured and checked how cemented the social norms are in people's beliefs and mentalities, as detected from their social behaviours, and how deeply embedded they are in the social fabric of the present Moldovan society.

In describing the social norms, the study used empirical data collected with various research tools and methods. The main informants were children (under and over 11 years old) and adults responsible for their upbringing and education (parents and teachers).

6.2 Specific conclusions

The main conclusions will be wrapped up in accordance with the initial objectives of the study :

6.2.1 A benchmark in the monitoring and evaluation frameworks against changes in gendered social norms, attitudes and behaviours

Moldova is in a phase of deep structural changes and people seem to be open and prepared to adopt new societal models. The traditional social norms have started to erode because of the economic and political changes, the growing influence of Western European values, the extended international migration and the access to the Internet and various mass-media.

The main social actors responsible for forming and educating children are the **family and the school**. Unfortunately, lately, both of these social institutions have suffered important transformations and both parents and teachers are facing a visible decline of their authority over the children. Both parents and teachers feel overwhelmed by and not being in control of their children's role models and values, which are modelled by the Internet, mass media and peer pressure.

Parents and teachers consider that they are at a disadvantage. On the one hand, their patriarchal authority and traditional upbringing methods are seriously challenged and undermined by new norms and rules "borrowed" from other cultures, which penetrated the social fabric of their communities through the Internet, social-media and mass-media. On the other hand, they are **not offered**

alternative models or strategies to fulfil their role. Teachers are using unstandardized strategies in concrete situations. They get inspiration from their colleagues or from their own experience, although it would be easier if they would all follow the same guidance.

There are important changes in size, structure and role dynamics at family level.

.The horizontal and vertical ties within families can be restricted (there are children who are more likely to grow up without siblings and cousins, or grandparents) or overburdened due to the migration of the parents.

Children endure a lack of parenting, due to either national or international migration of their parents. The migrant parents' strategy to compensate for their lack of parenting is to offer their children material goods and money.

6.2.2 Positive norms that challenge or can challenge the negative social norms

At national level, **children are encouraged to know and exert their rights**, which is a positive fact. The negative aspect is the fact that they are not aware of any possible obligations or responsibilities they could have. Various institutions (schools, NGOs, local mass-media, child protection services) are campaigning to "instruct" children about their rights, but none is making them equally aware of their duties. The immediate effect of this unbalanced messages about rights and obligations undermine the direct authority of parents, carers and teachers over the children.

There are **positive changes in the styles of upbringing**. There is a massive shift in child upbringing: on the one hand, using abusive methods when raising children is not a successful behaviour in Moldovan society, and on the other hand there is a lack of information and awareness of positive methods of upbringing.

There are **positive changes in the behaviour of adults in regard to violence against children**. Parents and teachers admit the hardship of raising children whom they cannot control and/or understand. They are aware of being judged if they are using old parenting methods, but they feel lost since no up-to-date parenting models are clearly offered. Their children do not adopt and follow their values,

but a rather different social interaction model (influenced by the Internet, peers, etc.)

6.2.3 Barriers to transforming social norms which perpetuate violence

The welfare system for children and families is affected by the political instability, lack of material and human capital. Although the stakeholders and professionals could have good intentions, there is a lack of services for the prevention of violence against children, as well as for the treatment of the consequences of violence.

At society/community level, there is a **general indifference and lack of empathy and actions for vulnerable children** who find themselves in ill-fated situations. Children caught in extreme situations are sometimes "cases" circulated among various institutions with inconsistent decisions.

There is a **growing cultural distance between parents/carers/teachers and children**, due to the influence of the new technologies and the different upbringing models.

6.2.4 The most prevalent social norms and gender ideologies (especially traditional masculinity) which perpetuate violence against children

Violence among peers as a source of gaining social capital, popularity and social acceptance is improving the status and is used as a way to fit in, to be part of a group, to belong, not necessarily because the culture is one of violence.

Lack of material wealth could be compensated by aggressive dominance and by imposing and maintaining a daily, violent bullying routine. There is, in a certain sense, a culture of pride and respect and proved masculinity. Unfortunately, in order to gain the respect of the peers, they have to prove their masculinity through violence.

Although the gender stereotypes are changing very rapidly, there still are reminiscences of traditional model (young boys still believe that "if he/she loves you, he/she would beat you!")

6.2.5 The most pervasive forms of violence against children

The most pervasive forms of violence identified are:

- **A largely spread and generally practiced low level of violence, deeply embedded in traditional social norms.** Although the social expectations of people are changing massively, the traditional parental practices (the

stick - “varguța”, and “the stick comes from heaven” - “bataia e ruptă din rai”) are still persisting. There are profound doubts about the efficiency of corporal punishment of children, and at discursive level this practice is disapproved of by parents/carers/teachers, who largely recognize the importance of good communication between children and parents/teachers.

- **A very high level of corporal and verbal violence and abuse against vulnerable children:** children who live in extreme poverty, abandoned children, children who run away from home, exploited children, children with mental health problems or with mild disabilities.

7. Recommendations

The project *Preventing childhood violence through engagement – a community based model* could follow two main directions :

1. **To boost and support the main shifts in social norms that already occurred at societal level, and organize:**
 - Public campaigns for complete eradication of any form of violence against children, with accent on the long term positive outcomes and impact on the general and mental wellbeing of children.
 - Public campaigns for children's human right to physical and moral integrity and dignity in parallel with practical support and guidelines for parents/carers and teachers.
 - Public discussions and informative meetings about alternative child upbringing models and the importance of healthy relations between adults and children.
 - Public discussions which encourage audiences to think critically about social norms that maintain gender based differences.
2. **To develop particular and specific strategies by targeting vulnerable children and families.**

In their interventions, Terre des homes should envisage:

- To balance the support for the children with the support for their parents/carers and teachers.
- To carefully assess the interconnected nature of all the actors involved.
- To engage local people, stakeholders and other decisional factors in supporting the interventions.
- To provide information in order to correct misperceptions regarding social norms.
- To incorporate in their actions the core values that are already shared within the communities.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁴ Law of physical violence - intentional injury of bodily integrity, sexual violence - any sexual violence, psychological violence - imposition of will or personal control, spiritual violence, economic violence, moral prejudice
- ¹⁵ Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Protection, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/ce-facem/protec%C5%A3ia-copilului/combaterrea-olen%C5%A3ei-%C3%AEmpotriva-copiiilor>
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Annexes

Quantitative sample (4 November 2019 - 6 December 2019) in the following localities:

County	Locality	Rural/Urban	Students	Questionnaires
Fălești	Albinetii Vechi	rural	223	22
Hâncești	Cărpineni	rural	677	61
Fălești	Catranâc	rural	220	20
Drochia	Chetrosu	rural	211	18
Orhei	Ciocălteni	rural	349	27
Ungheni	Cornești	urban	248	13
Ialoveni	Costești	rural	504	22
Rezina	Cuizăuca	rural	309	24
Drochia	Drochia	rural	206	19
Fălești	Fălești	urban	445	27
Cahul	Giurgiu-lești	rural	324	14
Cimișlia	Gura Galbenei	rural	461	31
Glodeni	Hîjdieni	rural	316	22
Strășeni	Lozova	rural	598	34
Ungheni	Măcărești	rural	419	30
Strășeni	Micleușeni	rural	237	21
Orhei	or. Orhei	urban	1183	52
Ocnîța	Oțaci	urban	381	0
Ungheni	Pârlița	rural	512	34
Ungheni	Petrești	rural	400	30
Stefan Voda	Răscăieți	rural	239	10
Râșcani	Râșcani	urban	592	41
Căușeni	Sălcuța	urban	534	39
Fălești	Sărata Veche	rural	290	25
Ungheni	Sculeni	rural	569	34
Stefan Voda	Slobozia	rural	340	26
Causeni	Tocuz	rural	446	38
Ungheni	Todirești	rural	363	20
Anenii Noi	Varnița	rural	358	28
Soroca	Visoca	rural	230	17
TOTAL			12,184	799

