Rewind

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The Voices of Children and Young People in the Middle East and North Africa

GIVING A VOICE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WORLDWIDE
The Global Network of Child Helpline International Membership in: the Middle East and North Africa as of April 2013

Current members in MENA - 18 members in 15 countries

12 full members in 11 countries

• NADA Algeria
• Ministry for Social Affairs Bahrain
• The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood Egypt
• SPRC Sedaye Yara Iran
• Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs Iraq
• Jordan River Foundation Jordan
• Sawa Palestine
• Qatar Foundation for Children and Womens Protection Qatar
• National Family Safety Programme Saudi Arabia
• Social Service Department Sharjah UAE Sharjah
• Dubai Foundation for Women and Children UAE Dubai
• Arab Human Rights Foundation Yemen

Associate members

6 associate members in 5 countries

• Higher Council for Childhood Lebanon
• Naba’a Lebanon
• Libyan Association for Child Rights Libya
• National Council for Child Welfare Sudan
• Tunisian Association for Child Rights Tunisia
• Social Support Centre UAE Abu Dhabi
2004
The establishment of the Green Line -Algeria (Algeria).

2004
The establishment of the Sawa Child Protection Helpline 121 (Palestine).

2005
The establishment of Child helpline 16000 (Egypt).

2006
The 1st MENA Regional Consultation of Child helplines held in Cairo, Egypt.

2007
The establishment of the child helpline Social Services Department (Sharjah, United Arab Emirates).

2007
The 2nd MENA Regional Consultation of Child helplines held in Amman, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

2008
CHI signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the League of Arab States.

2009
The establishment of the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children- (Dubai United Arab Emirates).

2009
The 3rd MENA Regional Consultation of Child helplines held in Rabat, Morocco.

2010
The establishment of Aman Helpline for Children and Women (Qatar).

2010
The Establishment of the Saudi Arabia Child Helpline (Saudi Arabia).

2011
The Establishment of the Child helpline Bahrain (Bahrain).

2011
The establishment of the Iraq child helpline- Kurdistan.

2009
The CHI network grows to 108 full members in 92 countries and 27 associate members in 27 countries.

2009
Children and young people most commonly wanted to talk about psycho-social mental health (19%), abuse and violence (19%), peer relationships (15%), sexuality and sexual awareness and family relationships (both 10%).

2009
CHI contributes to the development of the International Telecommunication Union’s Global Guidelines on Child Online Protection.

**2010**
The CHI network grows to 109 full member child helplines in 95 countries and 38 associate member child helplines in 38 countries.

2009
Plan International and CHI sign a Memorandum of Understanding to start a pilot project on Violence in Schools.

2009
The role of child helplines to fulfill children’s Right To be Heard is recognized in the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment on article 12: “… to establish easy access to individuals or organisations to which they can report in confidence and safety, including through telephone helplines, and to provide places where children can contribute their experience and views on combating violence against children.”

**2010**
The number of contacts received by child helplines tops 13.6 million. The number of visits to websites increases rapidly to 3.8 million visits in 2010.

2010
Most common reasons for contact were abuse and violence (19%), psycho-social mental health (17%) and peer relationships (15%).

2010
The Fourth International Consultation of Child Helplines is held in Madrid, Spain (25 - 27 October).

**2011**
The CHI network grows to 114 full members in 98 countries and 41 associate members in 40 countries.

2011
The number of contacts that child helplines in the network receive continues to grow to 17.3 million. Another 4.3 million visits to child helpline websites are registered.

2011
Abuse and violence was an issue for one in five of the children who contacted child helplines around the world. Other common issues children and young people wanted to discuss were psycho-social mental health (17%), peer relationships (15%) and family relationships (11%).

2012
The CHI network starts its third strategic period. Its objectives are to: establish more child helplines, strengthen the network and use child helpline information to strengthen national child protection systems worldwide.

**2012**
CHI publishes its fifth Violence Against Children Report which is launched by Marta Santos Pais, United Nations Secretary General’s Special Representative on Violence Against Children in Paris, France (25 January).

2012
CHI network grows to 167 member child helplines in 135 countries.

**2013**
In ten years, child helplines received 126 million contacts from children and young people.

2013
In ten years, 118 child helplines in 95 countries have joined the CHI network.

2013
CHI holds its first Policy Dialogues.
1945
The establishment of the League of Arab States.

1984
In December 1984, the Conference of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs declared “the Charter on the Rights of the Arab Child”.

1987
The establishment of the Arab Council for Childhood and Development.

1989
The establishment of the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR).

1992
The First Arab High Level Conference on Childhood in Tunisia, 1992.

1995
The establishment of child helpline SPRC Sedaye Yara (Iran).

1996
The Arab Agreement No. (18) for 1996 Concerning the Work of Minors.

1996
The establishment of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) MENA Child and Youth Initiative (CYI).

2001
On July 2001 the first Arab High Level Conference on the Rights of the Child was conducted in Cairo.

2002
The establishment of the Arab Human Rights foundation (Yemen).

2003
The First Arab ISPCAN meeting.

2004
The adoption of the Arab Charter on Human Rights on May 23, 2004 by the sixteenth Arab Summit hosted by Tunisia.

2004

2004
The ITU issues a statement on the allocation of short toll free numbers, preferably 116 111 to child helplines.

2005
The International Telecommunications Union and CHI sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

2005
In this year, child helplines in the CHI network received over 10.6 million contacts from children and young people.

2006
The CHI network grows to 88 member child helplines in 76 countries (associate and full members) and worked in another 58 countries to establish child helplines.

2006
Child helplines are recommended as a tool to create child-friendly reporting mechanisms in the United Nations Violence Against Children Report in overall Recommendation 8.

2006
For the first time, child helplines in the CHI network received more than 12 million contacts from children and young people (12.4 million).

2007
CHI starts its second strategic period. The network has three objectives: Advocate for better child protection services, increase recognition of children’s voices by creating awareness about child helplines and establish a global network of child helplines.

2007
The CHI network grows to 91 child helpline members (full and associate).

2008
International Child Helpline Day is celebrated for the first time under the theme Towards a Regional and Global Number.

2008
The Fourth International Consultation is held in Amman, Jordan (17 – 19 November).

2008
The ITU issues a statement on the allocation of short toll free numbers, preferably 116 111 to child helplines.

2008
Nearly 30% of all contacts to child helplines worldwide were about abuse and violence. Other common issues that children and young people wanted to talk about were family relations and peer relations.

2008
The CHI network grows to 99 full members in 88 countries and 27 associate members in 27 countries.
Introduction

Dear Readers,

Child helplines, though relatively new in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), are often supported by governments, recognising the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Child Helpline International started in the region with two child helpline members in 2005, and has grown to 18 member child helplines in 15 countries to date.

From the beginning, child helplines in MENA have been striving to be at the forefront of child protection, allowing children and young people to get counselling and assistance, especially when they are in need. Our data shows that over 126 million contacts were made to child helplines worldwide, of these more than 2.5 million were collected from MENA since 2005.

Children, young people and adults (on behalf of children) have consistently contacted child helplines on issues about abuse, violence and neglect, family relationships and psycho-social distress. There are many reasons why children can be at risk of abuse, violence and neglect. At their homes, it may be that their parents or caretakers are experiencing stress due to unemployment, illness, isolation or loneliness, parenting challenges, or domestic violence. In the streets or at school unprotected children can be subject to bullying and other forms of violence. These are just a few examples of the myriad of contextual factors driving children to contact a child helpline in times of need.

Recently the ongoing crises in MENA placed a significant additional strain on children and young people in the region. Child helplines are not only there for those in the countries that they operate in, but also assist immigrant or refugee children who are looking for protection. Child helplines are non-discriminative and are there for all children and young people.

I strongly believe that child helplines empower children to take control over challenges in their lives. Child helplines also function as an early warning system to politicians and policymakers, and act as a social barometer that cannot be ignored and which indicates what is going on in the lives of children and young people - one of society’s most vulnerable groups. Whilst this publication offers further insight into the many serious problems faced by children in the region, I can see a great deal of hope for the future, especially when child helplines can work together with key decision makers.

This publication is about the voices of children and young people in MENA, growing up in our societies, encountering joy, and youthful optimism on the one hand, but also hardship and experiences in their childhood and adolescence that will shape them for the rest of their lives. They are the region’s future leaders, doctors, craftsmen, entertainers, teachers and they all have the right to be protected and to be heard. They all have, without exception, the right to live a life with dignity, free from fear and violence.

That is why I personally urge politicians, policy and decision makers and partners to read The Voices of Children and Young People in the Middle East and North Africa. It contains a wealth of information, stories and trends. Please take it to heart and listen to their voices in all your work. Only through collective action can we ensure a bright future for the next generation of children and young people in MENA.
Executive Summary

Child helplines in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and around the world, provide children and young people with a way to obtain counselling and express their concerns and needs, in a confidential and secure environment. Child helplines listen to children and young people and guide them to the appropriate child protection services. In 1995 the first child helpline ‘Sedaye Yara’ was established in Iran. In 2005 Sedaye Yara and Childline 16000 - Egypt joined the Child Helpline International network and since then our membership in the region has grown to 18 members in 15 countries.

In the past ten years, more than 126 million contacts were made with child helplines around the world. Child Helpline International has been collecting data from child helplines that are based in MENA and since 2005, 2.5 million contacts have been received by child helplines in the region either by telephone, walk-in services, online chat, text messages or email. This publication is based on 8 years of data (2005 - 2012) that has been collected from 12 child helplines in MENA. The majority of these contacts were received in 2012 (half a million contacts). It is also noted for several child helplines in the region that a large portion of contacts are from adults who reach out to child helplines – either on behalf of the child or because they found themselves challenged with an issue relating to children.

The majority of contacts in the MENA region are made via telephone services (95%), other methods of contact used are walk-in services, regular postal mail or internet services (chat and email). Child helplines in the MENA region are currently seeking more opportunities to reach out to children and young people through online services.

The three most common issues that children, young people, or adults contacted child helplines about, related to abuse and violence (33%), psycho-social and mental health problems (18%), and family relations (12%). These topics were consistent over the years and represent the concerns children and young people have.

>> IN 2005 SEDAYE YARA - IRAN AND CHILDLINE 16000 - EGYPT JOINED THE CHILD HELPLINE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK. SINCE THEN OUR MEMBERSHIP IN THE REGION HAS GROWN TO 18 MEMBERS IN 15 COUNTRIES <<
I. Age and gender of children and young people child helplines are contacted about in the Middle East and North Africa 2005-2012

Millions of children and young people around the world and in MENA face different forms of violence and abuse, and when this happens they turn to child helplines for support and protection. Child helplines in MENA received more than 130,000 contacts relating to abuse and violence, of which more than 40% were physical abuse cases.

Children, young people and adults seek counselling on psychosocial and mental health problems. Since 2005 over 70,000 contacts were received on these issues. Children, young people and adults sought advice on how to cope with their fears and anxiety (29%), and many of them sought counsel because they were experiencing lack of confidence (16%).

Family relationships represented 15% of the contacts since 2006. Most contacts regarding family relations concerned parents who are seeking advice and asking questions about the (moral) behaviour of their children. Similarly, children contacted child helplines because they were suffering from their parents decisions or judgement.

The MENA region, as well as other regions, has been affected by the global economic crisis that started in 2008. In addition to these developments, a number of countries in the region have gone through or still have ongoing protests, civil upheaval, insecurity, unrest and internal armed conflict. The ‘Arab Spring’, has affected the region as refugees have crossed borders in order to reach neighbouring countries. This had a substantial impact on children and young people who have fled their countries with their families, in order to find peace and security.

Anxiety, insecurity, and danger accompany any armed action and cause harm to society—specifically to children and young people. The high numbers of contacts related to abuse, violence, fear, anxiety, and loss of confidence received by our members since 2010 underscore this.

CHI member helplines in the region received 13,500 contacts on the requests for basic needs—the majority of which were from children seeking shelter and calling for resources and financial aid.
No Child Should Be Left Alone

In the Middle East and North Africa, child helplines are the first point of access for children suffering violence, psycho-social, and health issues, as well as the trauma of conflict and crisis. Child helplines let children know they are not alone, allow them to voice concerns safely, and link them to the appropriate protection systems. Throughout ten active years in CHI, I have been proud to witness and contribute to the network’s growth, in this region and worldwide.

Child helplines in MENA have increased in number and sophistication. Whatever our context and stage of development, we have much to learn from one another, and a wealth of knowledge to share. It is vital to support emerging helplines, to share knowledge on introducing new communications technologies, building and maintaining networks with Community Service Organisations (CSO’s) and governments, and advocacy for child protection concerns. We should try to ensure unity among lines in different countries—for instance, by working with telecommunications companies to adopt a single number for the region. This is especially important following the upheaval the region has witnessed, which has resulted in the displacement of many children and young people.

During these critical times, some countries facing hardship do not have functioning child helplines yet, and require the support of neighbours in order to play an effective role in helping children to cope and heal. In times of crisis and emergency, it is important that children and their families know about the child helpline service and receive the proper psycho-social and practical support. Additionally, having a network of humanitarian services is imperative because counsellors need to feel supported, and learn through others who have experience in the same environments. This should be the focus of our work.
Many children and young people in MENA cannot access a child helpline yet. Governments in the region need to cooperate with civil society to establish child helplines in countries where there are none.

Existing child helplines provide services to millions of children and young people annually. Governments should support child helplines in their role as a child protection service.

Governments should recognise child helplines as a vital source of information on the state of children and young people. Governments should use the data provided by child helplines to improve child protection services.
Contacts on commercial exploitation increased relatively from 2009 onwards, especially on certain issues such as children used for begging, children who are forced into bonded labour and children who are sexually exploited. In 2010, almost 2,000 children reported that they were forced to beg, whereas close to 200 children had suffered sexual exploitation, most of these contacts were from boys.

Children increasingly look to child helplines for legal support in cases where they are denied fundamental rights. Throughout the past 5 years, child helplines in the MENA region have supported children and young people on legal issues over 11,000 times. Children and young people, and adults on behalf of them are increasingly contacting child helplines for support in annulling and preventing child marriage, according to the number of request for legal support on this topic. The same increase is found in requests for legal support in obtaining a birth certificate.
THE DURBAN RESOLUTIONS

Gathered in Durban, South Africa on 20 November, child helplines operating in 136 countries adopted the Durban Resolutions. Child helplines call upon all stakeholders in governments, agencies and the private sector to:

- Recognise child helplines unique capacity to bring the voices of children to bear on strengthening child protection;
- Partner with child helplines to ensure that they are sustainable and accessible for all children free of charge; and,
- Ensure that the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the protection and empowerment of children and young people.

Discrimination such as access to education and employment or racism, are reported on more frequently in children and young people’s lives in MENA. Data shows that in 2005, there were few contacts made on discrimination, however in 2012, the annual average rose to over 50 contacts per child helpline. During the same period, children or young people who reported being discriminated against, due to physical or mental health problems increased to 70%, and the majority of these contacts were made from girls.

Child helplines play an invaluable role in gathering data and highlighting issues, while protecting children and young people. Child helplines also have a unique insight into the health and welfare of their society’s children. Governments are urged to support the starting of child helplines in countries where the service does not yet exist, to work closely with existing child helplines, and to align child protection policies at the national level.

The data in this publication represents the voices of children and young people. It is imperative that governments and civil society listen to this call for action and ensure the strengthening of child protection systems by supporting existing child helplines and establishing child helplines in countries where they do not currently exist.
The incidence of Abuse and Violence

In the Middle East and North Africa, abuse, violence and neglect emerge as the most common reason for children and young people to contact child helplines. More than 130,000 of all contacts made in the past eight years related to abuse, violence and neglect - representing over one in three contacts with a known reason made with child helplines in the region. Close to half of these contacts related to physical abuse of a child or young person. Of all the contacts on physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect, more than 50% of the cases occurred within the family surrounding. Data shows that abuse and violence continues to be one of the main reasons children contact child helplines for support and protection.

Child helpline data shows that the majority of abuse and violence reported by children and young people in MENA involved physical abuse (42%), followed by emotional abuse (13%), neglect (12%), sexual abuse (10%) and bullying (9%). Reported contacts on physical abuse demonstrate that a family member often inflicts the abuse (71%). Of all contacts on physical abuse, 70% were from girls or on behalf of girls.

Emotional abuse is the second most prevalent form of abuse reported to child helplines in MENA. One in seven cases of abuse and violence concern emotional abuse. More girls than boys reported emotional abuse cases (55%), the majority of which were committed by a male (65%). Immediate family members and/or the extended family were responsible for 54% of all emotional abuse cases.

One in ten contacts on abuse and violence concern sexual abuse. In 20% of these cases a family member is reported to be the perpetrator. More girls (81%) than boys contact child helplines on sexual abuse, and in 66% of these cases, a male was indicated as the perpetrator.

In 13% of abuse and violence contacts, children and young people sought support and help because they had been neglected. Of these contacts, 15% of the contacts involved family and extended family.

Bullying accounted for one in ten of all contacts relating to violence and abuse. Child helplines in MENA, as worldwide, have only recently begun collecting data on bullying, as the issue of bullying and the harmful bullying is being taken more seriously in the past years, both by children and young people as by child helplines.
**Case:** A neighbour called on behalf of three young children suffering severe neglect. The eldest child was 5 years old. The children were often left at the house alone and sometimes locked between the window and the exterior “protection bars” of their third floor apartment. The child helpline contacted the National Social Services who sent a team to verify the situation. This team assessed the risk the children were subject to and, taking into account the best interests of the children, decided that they needed to be catered for at a children’s shelter, until the father was located and an intervention plan could be made.

**WARNING SIGNS**

- One in three contacts made with child helplines in the region concern abuse and violence.
- Family members are responsible for a substantial number of abuse and violence cases.
- One in ten abuse and violence cases relates to sexual violence.

» With any request for support we work closely together with our referral partners to reach the child as soon as possible and to determine the best form of intervention. « Qatar
Coping with Psycho-Social and Mental Distress

Children and young people in MENA are struggling with psycho-social and mental health issues. Psycho-social health refers to a child’s state of mental well-being, resilience, and capacity to adapt to a range of demands, stresses, and trauma, whilst being able to contribute to society. Psycho-social mental health represents almost one in five of all contacts received by child helplines in the region. Causes of distress are related to depression, lack of confidence, loneliness and fear and anxiety.

Over the past eight year period (2005 to 2012), most contacts made with child helplines regarding distress related to fear and anxiety (29%), and lack of confidence (14%). Girls (58%), more often than boys discuss these issues related to psycho-social mental health.

Interestingly, more boys contacted child helplines in MENA to seek counsel on how to cope with phobias and obsessions, whereas girls more often sought counsel on issues of boredom, depression, fear and anxiety, identity and purpose in life, lack of confidence, loneliness, self-harm and suicide.

Since 2008 contacts relating to self-harm have been increasing. Since 2009, contacts on self-harm increased from 1% to 3% in 2012. Similar increases are also evident in contacts on suicide and fear and anxiety during the same period. This shows that more children and young people resort to suicidal thoughts contact child helplines for support on how to cope with their distress and how to handle their feelings. In such emergency situations, child helplines work closely together with referral partners to prevent children from harming or mutilating themselves.

Adults also contact child helplines on this topic to learn how to support their children when they have been subjected to trauma. Often, though not in all cases, the trauma is related to the experience of violence and war (see box). Clients in need of trauma counselling often contact the child helpline more than once.

**Case:** A seven-year-old boy called. His parents had left the house to search for his grandparents in between the bombardments, however after some time, they had not yet returned. The boy did not know how to take care of his little sister and was worried he would never see his parents again. After settling the boy’s panic, the counsellor managed to find out in which area the family lived and was able to establish contact with the shelter where the parents had gone. The boy was quickly reunited with the parents.
CHILD HELPLINES IN MENA Respond to Long-term Psychological Trauma Effects of Violence and War

Many contacts on psycho-social and mental health in the region are directly related to ongoing conflicts in the region. For example, Palestine’s child helpline SAWA received more than 22,000 calls in a few months, after the war on Gaza in 2008/2009. Many of these contacts concerned the long-term psychological trauma effects of the violence and war. Child helplines in Jordan and Iran received contacts from refugees from surrounding countries. These refugees were mostly children who were left scarred and traumatised, having witnessed lethal violence and having had to face situations and take on responsibilities far beyond their years. When a child helpline documented such cases, they were usually recorded under psycho-social and mental support.

WARNING SIGNS

Children and young people are experiencing fear and anxiety, showing the long term effect of war and conflict.

Children resort to self-harm and suicidal thoughts to cope with distress.

Girls increasingly express suffering from lack of confidence and resorting to self-harm.
The family environment is one of the most important places for children or young persons. The family is their secure space, where children and young people observe, learn and practice interpersonal relationships. Most decisions directly affecting their lives are taken within family boundaries. The importance of family in the lives of children and young people is reflected in the number of contacts and questions child helplines in the region receive on family and changing family dynamics. Family relationships are the fourth most enquired about topic, and most often girls contact child helplines on these matters.

Children generally seek advice from child helplines to learn how to deal with their parents, whether it is learning how to communicate with them, resolve and cope with fighting, interfamily arguments and conflicts of interest. Approximately 52% of contacts on family relationships are due to children expressing problems with their parents, or similarly parents seek advice on how to address problems that they encounter with their children.

Children and young people seeking counsel on interrelated issues such as divorce, maintenance, separation and new and blended families, account for approximately one third of all contacts on family related issues - of which 10% concerned child maintenance and child custody.

A proportion of children and young people are also calling helplines (3%) to discuss their parents who are either addicted to a substance or are suffering from mental health problems. In 2005, there were no contacts on this issue however since 2008 data demonstrates that the number of contacts have increased - as each child helpline received approximately 18 contacts on this issues per month, in 2012. Although the number of contacts is low, they can indicate a growing concern amongst children in the region.

**Case:** A 14-year-old girl contacted the child helpline because she had been imprisoned by her parents and taken out of school, because she allegedly had a boyfriend. The girl admitted that she had been disobeying her parents. She also shared with the counsellor that her parent’s strictness caused her to feel anxious and depressed. The child helpline established a meeting with the parents and the girl’s school principal. Together they discussed the specific characteristics of adolescence. Another counsellor advised the girl on how to gain the trust of her parents again. At a final meeting with the parents, girl and child helpline counsellor everyone involved formed a plan of action so that the girl could enjoy freedom with responsibility.
**Case:** An 11-year-old high-achieving schoolgirl was not allowed to continue her studies under the pretext that she acquired some immoral behaviors at her school. Her father made her work in his shop instead. The girl struggled between a very strong desire to attend school and fear of losing her father’s respect and love. After several counselling session, the girls decided that she should try to reopen the discussion at home, for her own well-being. Meanwhile the child helpline contacted her school and learned that the father had been uncooperative throughout the girl’s school career. The girls was often called in sick and sometimes just did not show. The child helpline tried, in cooperation with the school, to force the father to send his daughter to school using use existing education laws. The case is not yet closed.

**WARNING SIGNS**

Children disclose that they are severely affected by conflicting interests between themselves and their parents.

Boys are often expected to assume responsibilities inappropriate for their age, such as working for family income, severely hindering their possibilities for academic and social development.

Girls, simultaneously, are expected to behave in a premeditated modest and pure like manner, which is restricting them severely in their pursuit of academic and social possibilities.
In my capacity as Secretary General of the Higher Council for Childhood in Lebanon, and through my work with the Arab Childhood Committee of the Arab League’s Department of Family and Childhood, I had the opportunity to closely follow the activity of Child Helpline International since its launch. I have always been impressed by CHI’s professionalism and commitment as reflected in the network’s adoption of a solid scientific methodology on the creation, operation, and training of many child helplines across the world and its commitment to children’s rights through insistence on building helplines to serve as bridges between children in need and the response systems.

I was also impressed by the network’s respect for prevailing values and traditions and by the constitutional framework within which it operates. CHI does not impose solutions. It relies on available resources and countries’ willingness to help their children report their complaints or ask for help and guidance on issues that prevent them from living peacefully, happily, and conveniently.

CHI helps protect children’s rights through the creation of safe and easy mechanisms that enable children to report their problems and discuss their concerns safely. Child helplines respect children’s privacy and use various means of communication to allow the largest number of children to report complaints or ask for guidance. This, naturally, enhances child protection systems and opportunities.

CHI knows that its activity must be an integral part of the work of all the other components of the child protection system so that protection can be effective and callers can be sure their voice will be heard and their concerns will be addressed.

Children exposed to violence often do not know where to turn to, how to report the abuse they have endured and to seek help and assistance to overcome the trauma they have suffered. For this reason, a priority of my mandate as Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children is to promote in all States the establishment by law of safe, child-sensitive, well-publicized, confidential and accessible mechanisms before whom children can report incidents of violence, and benefit from effective remedies and adequate support to promote healing, recovery and long lasting reintegration.
The availability of a child reporting and complaint mechanisms is an important part of a child protection system. This is why CHI has become an important international partner, working with other organisations to help children attain their rights and to ensure effective protection based on the rights of children (child participation, child’s best interest, protection against discrimination, and the right to life and development). CHI’s work in the MENA region is of special importance as the region’s culture and social traditions still discourage reporting of abuse and its child protection systems are still not aligned with the principles of child rights. The channels available to children to express themselves are also limited. This is why the availability of helplines is important as they compensate for the lack of these channels and serve as platforms for children to express themselves and discuss their concerns. They also support professionals and families in offering guidance and intervention for the sake of children.

It was not a coincidence, therefore, that the Comparative Arab Report on Implementing the Recommendations of the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children recommended “encouraging the Arab countries that have not yet established child helplines to start the establishment steps benefiting from CHI expertise and training and planning guides.”

As people committed to the values and principles of child rights, we cannot but express our high appreciation for the role that CHI is playing and our readiness to cooperate with the organization for the sake of a happy childhood enjoying its right to safety and prosperity.

Elie Mekhael, former General Secretary of the Higher Council for Children, Lebanon

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing comprehensive landscape of child helplines to address incidents of violence. This is an important development as child helplines enable children to anonymously seek help from well trained personnel and they can reach out to children and give them the advice and support they need and are entitled to. Moreover, through their numerous contacts with children child helplines generate valuable data and information about manifestations of violence and risk factors aggravating their occurrence. Governments and other stakeholders alike should benefit from these insights when shaping action to prevent and respond to violence against children. <<

Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
Increasing want for Basic Needs

Since 2008 the global financial and economic crisis has posed new challenges to our societies. Worldwide and in MENA, child helplines have seen an increase in the number of children and young people requesting basic needs. In the past 5 years, child helplines in MENA have received close to 20,000 contacts on basic needs, two contacts per child helpline per day. Before 2008 child helplines in MENA did not receive even one contact per day. The data suggests that the number of requests for basic needs will continue to increase.

Since 2008, contacts in MENA on basic needs dealt with children contacting the child helpline for food, resources and financial aid (adding up to 48%). Requests informing about employment opportunities from adults and young people totalled more than 800 (4%). Child helplines in MENA furthermore received over 4,000 requests for support from children, or adults on behalf of children in need of shelter. The data indicates that contacts on requests for basic needs are increasing in general, and specifically in countries struggling with high numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees, for example Jordan, Palestine and Sudan.

There is a clear gender distinction in the number of contacts made with child helplines on basic needs. Of all requests for food, 84% percent are received from girls, or are made on behalf of girls, and 55% of the requests for resources and financial aid are from girls. Additionally girls, more often than boys (86%), contact child helplines in the region to ask about employment possibilities, either for themselves, or on behalf of their parents needs. Boys, more frequently than girls, contact child helplines because they are in need of shelter (64%) and more often reach out to child helplines after being abandoned (69% boys).

One in twelve contacts on basic needs (8% of the contacts in this category) concerned a missing child. The number of contacts on missing children peaked in 2010. More contacts (55%) regarding missing children were made by, or on behalf of girls. Contacts on orphaned children and abandoned children account for 14% of the contacts (2,746 contacts). More contacts were made by boys on these issues.

Case: Omar (16) really wanted to continue his education, but became the head of the family at his early age. He needed to find work to support his mother and younger siblings, and contacted the child helpline to get direction. The counsellor supported Omar in finding a solution to be able to both work and continue studying.
Case: A family of five struggles for daily survival and can no longer fulfil their youngest child’s need for medical services. The little five year old has grown up suffering from an eye infection that was never treated. Now the child needs care urgently. The child helpline assisted the family with basic needs and connected the family to a medical support programme.

Case: A mother of four called the child helpline after a television program mentioned the child helpline. She asked for assistance saying her ex-husband does not spend money on the family. The mother struggles for income and needs support either financial or in child care, so that she can work. The child helpline helped the mother to obtain legal aid.

WARNING SIGNS

Contacts from children and young people in want of basic needs are increasing.

An increasing number of contacts refer to children who are abandoned, orphaned and/or gone missing. Children are a vulnerable and easy prey for traffickers, when unprotected.

Want for basic needs is growing, specifically in countries with large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP’s) and in countries which take on refugees.
Commercial exploitation of children and young people

Commercial exploitation of children is the exploitation of a child below the age of 18 by an adult - involving a transaction in cash or in kind. It is an abhorrent violation of the rights of children. Worldwide there has been an increasing awareness on commercial exploitation of children and young people is emerging worldwide, and MENA is no exception to this. In MENA, before 2008, contacts on the commercial exploitation were few. Since 2008 however contacts on commercial exploitation have accounted for more than 2% of all the contacts made to child helplines. In numbers, this 2 percent represents 7,213 contacts. Analysis of the data suggests that the numbers will increase.

In MENA, children contact child helplines because they are victims of commercial exploitation. Since 2008, children have contacted child helplines because they are being exploited through different forms of child labour, such as bonded child labour (26%), unspecified forms of child labour (7%) and domestic child labour (4%). Many contacts are made to child helplines by, or on behalf of, children who are being abused for begging (47%) or who are being sexually exploited (6%). More girls contact child helplines on bonded child labour (53% girls as compared to 47% boys) and domestic child labour (66% girls). Interestingly, more boys contact child helplines on sexual exploitation (53% boys) and on being used for begging (57% boys).

Child helpline data from the region indicates that the number of contacts with children, or with adults on behalf of children, concerning children used for begging is rapidly increasing. In 2008 child helplines received 28 contacts per child helpline regarding children who were being used for begging. In 2012 this number increased to 55 contacts per child helpline.

In 2010 child helplines received a peak in the number of contacts on this topic. Close to 2,000 children contacted a child helpline in the region to disclose that an adult had forced them to beg that year. That is 250 contacts per child helpline. The steep increase in numbers on this topic since the onset of the global economic crisis hints at a connection between this practice and increasing lack of resources.

The number of contacts on commercial sexual exploitation also seem to be increasing, albeit less steeply. Commercial sexual exploitation is likely to be the worst form of bonded child labour. In 2009 and 2010, the number of contacts child helplines received on this atrocity peaked for MENA region, 127 contacts in 2009, 182 in 2010.

Simultaneously there is an increase in the number of contacts on child trafficking; in 2008 there were few contacts on child trafficking and kidnapping, just one per helpline. In 2010 this number grew to 18 cases per child helpline.
Case: Muneer’s father was divorced and remarried by the time Muneer was ten years old. Custody was given to his father, but after the second marriage Muneer was severely neglected by his father, stepmother and stepsisters. He was ‘sub-let’ to work at a local bakery and he often had to spend the night there. His uncle noticed the abuse and alarmed the child helpline. The father was charged with severe neglect and abuse, and was summoned to reverse his custody claim in favor of Muneer’s biological mother.

The numbers demonstrate that child helplines play a pivotal role in providing services to children and young people, especially when they are in dire need.

**WARNING SIGNS**

The number of contacts on commercial exploitation has increased steeply.

Governments and policy makers should listen to the advocates from child helplines and pay close attention to the statistics and recommendations child helplines provide.
Increasing requests for Legal Support

Children’s rights and children’s empowerment starts with the basic right to exist and partake in any decision that affects their mental and physical well-being. Data from child helplines in MENA shows that there are children who are forced to work, are forced into child marriages and are forced to undergo harmful traditional practices. Child helplines support children in defending their rights by providing support in legal matters.

Children and young people, or adults on behalf of them, are in need of this support, as they are often unaware of their nation’s legal framework, the rights they have as children and the processes in existence to defend their rights. Data indicates that more and more children are requesting legal support, and are turning to child helplines for help in obtaining it.

Child helplines provide legal advice and referral services to children who need general information or guidance in legally defending their rights. Child helplines have supported children and young people in legal issues 11,684 times since 2005. The majority of these requests are from girls (60%). Analysis of child helpline data from the region suggests that contacts on legal matters may increase.

Further to contacts on general advice (6,291; 58% of total): children contact child helplines because they were in need of legal representation (1,466; 13%), or because they needed information on the consequences of being in conflict with the law on specific issues (1,391; 12%). Children also contacted child helplines to enquire about birth registration and birth certificates (534; 5%).

Child marriage is an issue that children, and adults on behalf of children seek information on more and more. In MENA, since 2008 child helplines were contacted 455 times on child marriage related issues. Analysis of the data suggests an increase in contacts on this topic. The majority of the contacts on child marriage were made by girls (72%).

Interestingly, more girls (72%) than boys contacted child helplines on legal issues such as: advice and information, birth registration, child marriage, the consequence of being a child witness, need of legal representation and information on incidences when the law is in conflict with child rights. Boys contacted child helplines because they needed support and counselling because they themselves had conflict with the law. Both boys and girls, or adults on their behalf, equally enquired about harmful traditional practices.
Case: A 14 year old girl was forced by her parents to leave school. They said that they could no longer afford to educate her, but she claimed that her father wanted to marry her off against her will. She had repeatedly tried to commit suicide using poison and large quantities of medication. While speaking with the counsellor the girl agreed not to contemplate suicide while she was in contact with the child helpline. The child helpline managed to liaise with the parents and openly discuss the girl’s future and prospects. The parents agreed to allow the girl to finish her education and to marry only when she is ready.

Case: Bilal was orphaned when he was five years of age, and was placed under the custody of his uncle. He knew his family name, but only found out that he, legally, did not exist, at age 16, when he argued with his uncle about his future plans. He wanted to find employment, whereas his uncle said he was not of age and had to remain in his custody. The counsellor helped him search for the legal proof of his birth, and supported him in using it to obtain a birth certificate.

WARNING SIGNS

Not all children in MENA have birth certificates. Children who do not “exist” are prone to abuse and commercial exploitation.

Not all children in MENA are protected from child marriage and harmful traditional practices.

Children are entitled to proper legal representation.
Children and young people in MENA are facing discrimination while trying to access the services that they are entitled to. They are being denied access to education, basic healthcare, housing and medical services, due to their income status, ethnicity, physical and mental health, and sex. Data implies that discrimination has increased, both globally as well as in the MENA region, in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. As resources have become more scarce, those most in need are harshly denied access to them.

Analysis of contacts made with child helplines show that children and young people in MENA are subjected to discrimination when trying to access services that they are entitled to, based on income status, ethnicity, physical and mental health and gender. Before 2008 the total number of contacts received by all child helplines on the topic was only 7. In 2012 this number grew to 22 contacts per child helpline for that year. In the 8 years in total, child helplines were contacted on this topic 8,091 times.

Generally, since 2008 children and young people contacted child helplines most often on discrimination based on: mental and physical health (74%), access to education (7%) and racism (3%). Interestingly, in the 2 years following the start of the economic crisis (2009 and 2010), the data shows a peak in contacts on racism related discrimination (33%) and immigration status related discrimination (19%), in percentages as well as in absolute numbers. The data indicates that the number of contacts on discrimination relating to racism and access to employment opportunities will continue to increase.

Boys mostly contacted child helplines after experiencing some form of discrimination based on mental or physical health (65%). Also more boys contacted helplines after experiencing discrimination regarding access to education (60%) - the second most enquired about topic regarding discrimination.

The numbers of contacts received by child helplines on physical health indicate that access to healthcare is becoming a growing concern to children and young people. Since 2008 more than 30,000 contacts were made by children in the MENA region on matters related to physical health and healthcare. More than half of these related to access to healthcare. Of these 68% where made by or on behalf of girls.
Case: Omar and Aliya are sixteen year old twins suffering from severe overactive behaviour and lack of concentration. Omar also has aggressive spells. They are both not attending school because of their condition. The family has limited resources and limited access to information. The child helpline managed to get intensive weekly treatment for Omar, which gradually improved his condition. He can now return to school and help his father at work quietly. As Aliya’s condition is less obvious it is more difficult for the child helpline to prove the need for therapy. She finally received treatment but is still not attending school.

WARNING SIGNS

Children and young people in the MENA region are denied services such as education and health care, due to discrimination.

Boys report discrimination in education, whereas girls report mostly on discrimination in relation to access to health care.

Discrimination of mentally and physically disabled children is caused by lack of knowledge and awareness and should be addressed.
The Importance of Child Helpline Data

Longitudinal analysis of data from the MENA region

Since its foundation, child helplines in the Child Helpline International network have received over 126 million contacts. Of these 2,555,842 were with child helplines in the MENA region. These numbers clearly demonstrate the need of children and youth to discuss their questions, their need for social support and help. Data from child helplines in MENA was collected from 2005 onward.

Child helplines play a unique role in supporting children and young people due to the combination of several characteristics:
1. caller anonymity produces an emotionally secure environment and enhances self-disclosure;
2. mediated communication increases the caller’s perceived control and;
3. the elimination of time and distance barriers significantly increases the accessibility of support. Child helplines offer confidentiality and serve vulnerable individuals in crisis, at times when free of costs access to other services is unavailable.

Scientific study of child helplines has shown that child helplines succeed in having confidential conversations with children and young people that empower them (Butler, Potter, Danby, Emmison & Hepburn, 2003). Staff of child helplines generally succeed in creating a supportive environment that affords the caller emotional safety. Staff is able to establish rapport with the child, focusing the conversation on their problems and managing the conversation while adapting the pace and duration to their needs.

Statistical analysis of data from child helplines in the Middle East and North Africa shows that impressive numbers of children were seeking support in the last eight years. The data does not show evidence for decreases for either answered or responded to calls. The overall picture that emerges from the data is that child helplines will continue to fulfill a need for the child population. Longitudinal analysis of the MENA data is limited because of the small database. The number of child helplines is relatively small, and data is available for a limited number of years. This makes the database too weak for statistical longitudinal trend analysis, but does allow to provide with an insight into the issues children, and adults on behalf of children face.

The CHI database has, as any database and empirical study, its strengths and weaknesses. The use of data in international comparative research is not without pitfalls (see Hantrais, 2009, for example). The registration of child helpline contacts however, show a wide variety of topics, and is structured by a concise set of problem categories, which is used internationally. The extensive collaboration between different child helplines in the CHI network for the past ten years has stimulated the constructive debate and exchange of findings between different members. Seen from this perspective, the CHI database has summarised the stories of children in need of answers, social support and help worldwide for the past ten years.

Prof. dr. Ruben Fukkink
Professor at the Graduate School of Child Development and Education
University of Amsterdam
Child Helpline International (CHI) is the global network of 173 child helplines in 141 countries (April 2013). In ten years together child helplines in the network received more than 126 million contacts from children and young people in need of care and protection. CHI supports the creation and strengthening of national toll free child helplines worldwide and uses child helpline data and knowledge to highlight gaps in child protection systems and advocate for the rights of children.

Disclaimer:
CHI’s work is firmly grounded in the principles and values enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), including children’s right to privacy and protection from harm. To this end, and to preserve the trust and confidence children place in child helplines worldwide every day, all identifying details and information about individual children cited in this report have been removed or altered. Although cases and quotes are real, the names of children and young people are not.

This publication is based on the analysis of information received from child helplines in the CHI network in the Middle East and North Africa region and the world through CHI’s data questionnaire. The conclusions and statements are based on this information and they do not capture the full scope of practices and policies of all countries and cases handled by child helplines and other child protection organisations at the national level.

Globally, data has been collected for 11 consecutive years. Data for MENA region has been collected for 8 consecutive years. Some graphs and tables are based on a subset of data, as some information was not collected for all years. The totals of different graphs and tables, are therefore, not always compatible.

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GIVING A VOICE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WORLDWIDE

The Voices of Children and Young People in the Middle East and North Africa

2003 - 2013
126 million contacts