

Children at risk of losing parental care worldwide amid systemic failures to support families, finds new report

First-of-its-kind study by SOS Children's Villages interviewed hundreds of children across eight countries to reveal multiple factors driving family separation.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 29, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Millions of children



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*Dereje Wordofa, President of
SOS Children's Villages
International*

across the globe are at risk of losing parental care because of a multitude of unchecked threats, from intergenerational violence to economic hardship to discrimination, a [new report](#) has revealed.

The study is the first of its kind to assess the drivers behind the separation of children from their families, which can have harmful and lasting impacts on children and their development. The research was commissioned by SOS Children's Villages, the world's largest non-governmental organisation focused on children and young people without parental care, or those at risk of losing it.

Experts conducted research through workshops across Côte d'Ivoire, Denmark, El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, and Uruguay involving more than 1,000 research participants, including children, young people, families and professionals.

The study found families are under severe pressure from a range of factors. Violence – within both families and communities – was identified as a particularly strong driver, increasing the risk of children losing parental care. The report also reveals systemic failures to address the root causes of family separation, including weak social protection systems, poor coordination across sectors to support families, and a lack of resources for child protection. These systemic shortcomings are exacerbating the impact of family stressors like poverty and ill-health, leading to preventable separations.

SOS Children's Villages recommended a three-pillar approach to address the causes of child-family separation, calling on governments and global bodies to strengthen families, societies and approaches to protection.

“Inadequate care for children and young people has long-lasting – even intergenerational – physical and mental effects. Yet millions of children are separated from their families against their best interests and denied the family bonds they need to thrive,” said Dereje Wordofa, President of SOS Children’s Villages International.

Mr Wordofa added: “This report tells us there is no single cause of child-family separation, but a lack of institutional support for families is allowing children to slip through the cracks. Governments and stakeholders across all social sectors – from healthcare to education to child protection and beyond – must join in partnership to address the root causes of child-family separation in a proactive and coordinated way.”

The report was launched at the UN in New York on October 29, the International Day of Care and Support. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the right of every child to “grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding”. However, globally an estimated [220 million children](#) – one in ten children – live without parental care or are at risk of losing it. In Africa alone, [35 million children](#) were believed to be living without parental care in 2020.

As part of the report, researchers interviewed children living with their families in difficult circumstances as well as those living in the community after leaving alternative care.

The report revealed that the factors behind family separation fall into three categories. The first related to factors within wider society, such as poor social protections, violence in the community, and the climate crisis. The second covered impacts and circumstances within the family, such as death, disability, divorce and substance abuse. The third cluster included decision-making within child protection systems.

“Our findings reveal that many children are being unnecessarily placed in alternative care due to a combination of factors including the societal pressures families face, such as poverty and inter-generational violence, the strained capacity of some parents to provide adequate care, and the shortcomings in national child protection systems,” said Chrissie Gale, lead international researcher of the multi-country study.

Ms Gale added: “If families received the necessary access to services and other support, these placements would be preventable. Our research shows that international guidelines requiring states and organizations to address the root causes of separation and keep children with their families are not being fully upheld.”

Of the 228 professionals who responded to the online survey, more than 40 per cent believed children were often placed in alternative care because of physical abuse of a child.

A significant number of interviewees made direct links between the stress caused by poverty and

the breakdown of relationships including divorce, and violence in the home. In some countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Indonesia, a consequence of poverty is that one or both parents migrate within or outside their country to find better livelihoods.

A small number of respondents spoke about concerns related to sexual orientation or gender identity as a contributor to the loss of parental care and a product of living in a patriarchal, or “macho” society. In Lebanon, for example, religious courts may separate children from their mothers and place them in the custody of their fathers, who may later relinquish the child to alternative care.

The research found these drivers were similar across diverse countries of all socio-economic type.

SOS Children’s Villages urged governments to scale up investments in preventative child protection systems - including anti-violence and parenting programmes - as well as improving social protection systems. The organisation also called for care and support systems to be designed and delivered according to the latest evidence and best practices.

“Many family separations could be prevented with integrated, accessible child protection systems that support families, reducing vulnerability and the risk of child rights violations by addressing the root causes of separation,” said Lanna Idriss, CEO of SOS-Kinderdörfer Weltweit.

Ms Idriss added: “Failure to address the root causes of unnecessary separation undermines broader investments in child protection, social stability, and sustainable development. Strengthening families and providing adequate support through integrated care systems is crucial to preventing unnecessary separations and mitigating their long-term impact.”

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