

Circumventing Pathology and Exclusion: Language and cultural considerations for child protection policies and programmes.

By Diane Swales, Regional Child Protection Advisor and Amalee McCoy, Child Protection Specialist (both UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office EAPRO)

Although not specifically accounted for in the Millennium Development Goals, a close look at the MDGs reveals that not a single goal can be achieved unless the protection of children is an integral part of national policies, strategies and plans. Substantial research indicates that child protection – the field which concerns the prevention, response and impact mitigation of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation – is closely linked to child academic achievement as well as immediate and long term health outcomes for children. However, most governments and development actors around the world are struggling to develop and strengthen sustainable and comprehensive child protection systems that can effectively prevent and protect all children from harm, particularly those from ethnic minority groups and children with disabilities.

The presentation begins with an overview of the existing evidence base on the interrelationship between child protection, education and health. It then highlights how language and cultural considerations need to be reflected in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national child protection policies, in terms of the potential bias in targeting or excluding ethnic minority groups and those with disabilities, facilitating access through the provision of multilingual information and services, and by addressing the particular experiences of discrimination and violence which ethnic minority children and children living with disabilities often face. The presentation ends with an exploration of some promising child protection practices from East Asian countries, the UK and the US in better reaching and serving children with disabilities, children from ethnic minority groups and/or those who do not speak the official language, as well as some recommendations for policymakers and development actors.