

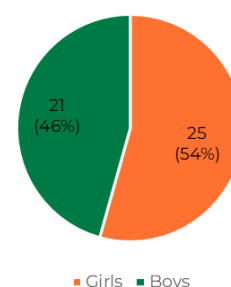
Background & Objective

The Education for Protection and Wellbeing (EPW) model is a holistic, evidence-informed program that aims to improve children's protection, learning, and well-being through strengthening child-adult relationships, enhancing social-emotional learning (SEL), reducing violence, and creating conducive and nurturing school and home environments. Targeting children aged 6-12, their teachers, and caregivers over two years, the EPW program emphasizes improving relationships within and between levels of the ecological model among children, caregivers, and teachers.

EPW is implemented by ChildFund Sierra Leone in collaboration with Daindemben Federation, a local implementing partner in Koinadugu district and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School (MBSS). This brief elevates the voices of the children, highlighting the changes they reported in their school and home environments, socio-emotional wellbeing, and self-protection knowledge and skills after participating in EPW.

In September 2023, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with students who participated in the EPW program from March 2022 to July 2023. Four FGDs, separated by gender and school, were conducted with 46 students in 4th and 5th grades from two schools (see Graph 1).

Graph 1: Students Participating in FGDs
Total Participants: 46



Findings

Students from both schools reported similar changes after participating in the EPW program: **1) reduced corporal punishment, 2) improved emotional regulation, 3) enhanced self-protection knowledge and skills, and 4) positive changes in relationships with peers, teachers, and caregivers.**

Theme 1: Reduced corporal punishment. Students reported a reduction in, though not the complete elimination of corporal punishment both at school and at home, as teachers and caregivers began adopting alternative disciplinary methods. In addition, a common theme that emerged from both schools was the decreased use of withholding food as a form of punishment.

"So, the program has made teachers stop flogging children using corporal punishment that was making some children afraid to come to school but now children are not afraid to come to school because they've stop beating children." – Boy, semi-urban school

"But now since this program came there have been now some changes when I do something at home that [my caregivers] not happy about they will call me and talk to me instead of beating me." – Boy, rural school

Theme 2: Improved Emotional Regulation. Students reported that they have learned to manage their emotions better, which has led them to more likely use non-violent responses.

"Before... if somebody does something to me that I'm not happy about. I'll react at times, and I would even end up fighting. Since I started this program, we've been taught self-management that we need to make sure we control our emotions. If somebody wants to do something that I'm not happy about I'll make sure I report the matter the issue to some to an adult who will intervene to help us resolve." – Boy, rural school

"Before this time, ...I would always react in an angry manner. For instance, if you step on me, I will also try to make sure I step on you, [if] we're playing football, and you foul me, I will also retaliate, I'll make sure I foul the person. But since we've been attending this program, we've been taught how to control ourselves so if somebody stepped on me, I'll try to make sure I call his or her attention that what you've done to me is not right. If he or she repeats, then I'll make sure I report to a trusted adult. In school the trusted adults can be my teacher; at home the trusted adults can be my mother or my father." – Boy, rural school

Theme 3: Enhanced Self-Protection Knowledge and Skills.

Students reported that they have more knowledge on self-protection, including awareness of appropriate and inappropriate touches, understanding safe and unsafe places or situations, and the importance of choosing good friends. Students reported that they have learned to identify, report and seek help from trusted adults, respect the rights of others and treat everyone impartially.



"As for me, if my friend comes to me and tells me about something bad that an adult wants you to do to her and considers me like somebody she trusts, like a trusted adult, if it happens in school, I will accompany her to report it to the headmaster. If it happens at home, I will accompany her to report the incident to her parents." – Girl, rural school

Theme 4: Positive Changes in Peer, Teachers, and Caregiver Relationships.

Positive changes in peer-peer relationships. Students reported less fighting and bullying at school. They noted better relationships with peers characterized by positive, non-violent interactions. Students reported that improved emotional regulation helped them to report issues to adults instead of reacting violently. These changes have fostered a more supportive and collaborative environment, enhancing the overall school experience and social dynamics.

"When we used to play, there were times we would end up fighting, we hit each other and at times we even end up hurting ourselves; but now we're not doing that." – Girl, semi-urban

Positive changes in child-caregiver relationships. Students reported that caregivers are more supportive overall, communicating better and consistently meeting children's basic needs. Expectations are clearer, corporal punishment has decreased, and household chores are more evenly distributed, creating a more supportive home environment.

"Since this program started, [caregiver] is no longer asking me to carry heavy bundle of firewood to go and sell in the [town]." – Girl, rural school



Positive changes in student-teacher relationships. At school, teacher classroom instructional practices and relationships with students have improved, contributing to a more effective learning environment.

“So, this program has helped me to actually love coming to school...because of the good teaching, I like to come to school.” – Boy, semi-urban school



The preliminary findings of the EPW program highlight a connection between the voices of children, teachers, and caregivers, particularly in improved relationships and communication. These main themes emerged from the focus groups:¹

- Social cohesion
- More conducive learning environments
- Improved parenting practices
- Improved child well-being reported by educators and caregivers
- Increased parental engagement children’s education

Teachers and caregivers who participated in the program highlighted how the program helped them build stronger, more positive relationships with the children through social-emotional learning, positive parenting and teaching practices, reduced use of harsh discipline, and greater engagement in the children's lives. Educators and caregivers reported seeing positive changes in their children due to the EPW strategies they were starting to implement since participating in the program.

A teacher shared,

“As I’ve been observing the children, before this, they could hardly come closer to me. But now, through sharing with them, they will discuss with me what their problems are... before, I never knew [their problems]... but now we’re sharing with them, talking with them, having a good relationship with them. I can know what [the challenges that the] children [have] at home and on the way to school and in school also. I have really learned that there is a great impact, there’s a change.” - Male teacher, semi-urban school

Similarly, caregivers reported stronger communication with their children.

“One of the things that I learned is how to manage emotions. I am somebody who likes shouting, like yelling at children... But since I started attending this program, I’ve been taught it is very important to talk to the child in a positive and calm manner... now I no longer shout at them and no longer yell at them; this is something I learned.” - Female caregiver > 45 years, semi-urban school

¹ Perry, E. W., Hwang, S., Marah, B., Mansaray, Y.K., Self-Brown, S., Kim, E. T., Nelson, J. (2025). “If you take care of that child, tomorrow it will be a profit to you and an entire generation.” A Qualitative evaluation of a program to prevent ACEs and promote child development in Northern Sierra Leone. *Child Protection and Practice*. 100090, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2024.100090>.

These shifts have fostered stronger communication and trust between children and adults, enhancing social cohesion within families, schools, and communities. The consistent positive feedback from EPW participants underscores the program's role in creating more inclusive, safe, and supportive environments for children, where social emotional well-being and effective communication are prioritized.



In conclusion, the program evaluation of the EPW program in Sierra Leone has yielded promising findings, as reported by students. Through improved emotional regulation, reduced corporal punishment, and enhanced self-protection skills, students reported a stronger sense of safety and healthier relationships at school and home. These changes were observed in improved peer interactions and more supportive teacher and caregiver relationships. The program has not only fostered a more nurturing environment for students but also empowered them to better manage their emotions, and seek help when needed, contributing to their overall wellbeing and social-emotional growth.

ChildFund International works throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas to connect children with the people, resources and institutions they need to grow up healthy, educated, skilled and safe — safe at home, at school, in community and online. Delivered through over 150 local implementing partner organizations, our programs address the underlying conditions that prevent any child or youth from achieving their full potential. We place a special emphasis on child protection throughout our approach because violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect can reverse developmental gains in an instant. Last year, we reached 21.1 million children and family members in 23 countries. Learn more at [ChildFund.org](https://www.childfund.org).

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Translator: All quotes included in this brief were translated by Bando Marah (oral interpretation).