

Child Protection: A Survey of Small INGOs

A White Paper by Amy S. Travis

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Abstract:

This White Paper explores the results of a 2014 child protection survey of small international nonprofits (INGOs). The responses indicate cause for concern regarding the strength of child protection and basic safeguarding measures to prevent child abuse within organisations. Many INGOs do not have safeguarding policies and lack basic screening of employees and volunteers. INGOs view their risk for abuse as low despite having had abuse accusations at their organisation. Current research provides evidence to the contrary: the risk is high. However, there is cause for hope. Most INGOs are interested in improving their protection of children.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2002 that a quarter to one half of all children are subjected to “severe and frequent physical abuse” by caregivers. Additionally, “150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 are estimated to have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence and exploitation,” according to WHO estimates in the UN’s 2006 *Violence Against Children* (Pinheiro, 2006). Both organizations warn that these tragic statistics are likely underreported due to taboos and shame, and actual figures are likely higher.

Child abuse and maltreatment is a global, widespread problem, and the humanitarian aid and development sector with its altruistic ideals is not exempt from having these problems. In fact, these organizations can both actively and passively perpetuate the problems identified in WHO reports. Nonprofits without strong child protection policies, appropriate job training for local staff, explicit codes of conduct, thorough screening of volunteer and employee candidates, and mechanisms for reporting

suspected abuse, provide situations where abuse is likely to happen and to continue happening. Even worse, by not sufficiently vetting volunteers and employees, the organizations can unwittingly enable those who would commit such acts, and effectively operate as a vehicle for sexual abuse of marginalized children – responsible through neglect as much as facilitation. With the growing economic resources of citizens in western countries, and the growth of sex tourism, sexual predators are choosing aid organizations as a low-risk method of accessing children (OHCHR, 2013; ECPAT, 2014; US DOJ, 2010). Recent high-profile cases include: 1.) the British Airways (BA) pilot Simon Wood accused of molesting children at schools and orphanages while doing charity work for BA (Press Association, 2014), 2.) Oklahoma volunteer Matthew Durham accused of sexually abusing 10 children at an orphanage in Kenya (Associated Press, 2014), and 3.) British citizen Simon Harris convicted of assaulting boys in Kenya through his position as a director of a street-children charity (IJM, 2014).

Nonprofits cannot rely solely on the presumed good intentions of their volunteers and staff to maintain the organization’s mission and reputation, or to ensure that children will receive care and not further maltreatment. Even those organizations whose service do not include programs providing direct contact with children may inadvertently facilitate abuse by their workers – who develop a social status through their aid worker position with the nonprofit can leverage using organization’s time, property, or status to create opportunities to abuse victims. In one horrifying example, a man from Sierra Leone said, “If you do not have a wife or a sister or a daughter to offer the NGO workers, it is hard to have access to aid.” (Save the Children-UK & UNHCR, 2002) Abusers are often known to be working at a nonprofit and thus there is an inequality of power. The abusers may receive special protection because the community’s fear of losing aid. When a child is severely hurt, an organization’s local, and possibly international, reputation is damaged. Social capital diminishes, donors leave, and funding declines. Sometimes, nonprofits must fold [Note: Somaly Mam Foundation suffered a scandal but not a child abuse scandal and subsequently has been forced to close. Likewise, Central Asia Institute’s scandal was around lying, not child abuse.] (Passoth, 2014; Somaly Mam; Central Asia Institute, 2014).

Save the Children UK brought attention to the abuse of women and children in the mission countries by international nongovernmental organizations' (INGOs) and the UN's employees abusing women and children in mission countries in their 2002 report on sexual violence and exploitation in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Save the Children's 2008 report *No One To Turn To: The under-reporting of child sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers* provided more information on the worldwide abuse of children at the hands of UN and INGO employees and volunteers. Between 2004-2006, four UN agencies (UNPKO, WFP, UNHCR, and UNV) received 122 allegations of sex with minors (Czáky, 2008); this does not include other types of sexual abuse, maltreatment or exploitation. Save the Children and its partners recorded 11 allegations of sexual misconduct in 2006 and 15 in 2007 (Czáky, 2008). The report readily admits that the problem is likely severely underreported, suggesting the numbers reported by the UN, Save the Children, and other organizations are lower bounds (Czáky, 2008). InterAction, the UN, HAP International, and several INGOs have attempted to address the problem through programming, a task force, and proposed operational standards (IASC-PSEA, 2013). These standards include hiring processes, codes of conduct, training for employees, and reporting mechanisms; however, these efforts mostly focus on the large organizations and UN agencies, while neglecting small INGOs in language, situation, inclusion, and outreach. These tools need to be adapted for use by small nonprofits and include even more supplemental information and resources to protect children.

Child Protection in Small International Organizations

In this paper, I will share findings of a 2014 study conducted to examine small INGOs' perspectives regarding their interest in and ability to prevent and address child abuse within their organizations. In this survey, "small" is rather loosely used comparatively to larger nonprofits such as Save the Children, Oxfam, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Plan, etc. Here, small nonprofits have budgets under US\$10 million, and a staff of less than 300.

This study was to inform a child protection toolkit project for small international nonprofits being created by the author. The web-based toolkit will include video trainings, documents, templates, and resources targeted at small INGOs to provide free assistance for organizations to create their own situation- and culturally-specific child protection policies and programming. These results however are important for more than just creating a child protection toolkit.

Child protection survey. The study was an online survey conducted from October 15, 2014 to December 6, 2014. Subjects were chosen through a simple search of organizations that self-selected the category of “youth” and “nonprofit or community organizations” on Idealist.org, an online platform “to close the gap between intention and action by connecting people, organizations, ideas, and resources.” (Idealist.org) Over 24,000 nonprofits fit within these two filters. The group was further winnowed down by the nonprofits’ self-described “about us” sections on Idealist: organizations that appeared to be small and based in a Western country working in a developing country. Approximately 1240 organizations should have met the criteria but time and funding restrictions meant that not all nonprofits could be examined. The first 558 were selected. They do not compose the complete list of all institutions fitting this description within the search, but were newer profiles and thus more likely to have correct contact information. Organizations with which the author has had previous contact were excluded from consideration.

Table 1: Survey Basics

Organizations	
Emailed	558
Requests Received (54 emails bounced)	504
Responded – Started Survey	140
Responded – Completed Survey	92
Response Rate – Started (based on requests received)	28%
Response Rate – Completed (based on requests received)	18%

Emails containing an introduction, explanation request, and the web-based survey were sent to 558 nonprofits of which 140 participants started the survey and 92 completed. See Table 1. Three (3) organizations submitted duplicate responses, presumably by different members as the answers differed. All of these respondents were counted in the survey data.

The survey was 33 questions long, with vast majority of questions being closed or running prompts. Most questions allowed an opt out answer of “don’t know” and/or “not applicable.” Many also included an “other” category with fill-in section. The survey took an average of 17 minutes to complete. The term “child protection” was left undefined for survey participants to interpret as they understood the concept.

Overview of Organizations. To develop a context of the organizations, respondents were asked about their programming, location, and frequency of work with children. The top answers were: 35% East & Central Africa, 25% West Africa, 23% Central America & Caribbean, 18% South America, 16% Southern Africa, and 16% Southeast Asia. It is important to note that some organizations have multiple sites. North America was chosen as a site location by 19% of participants but it seems that there was some confusion as to whether or not to report the headquarters as a site. While some did have programming in the USA, most did not.

There was a large list of programmatic areas reported. See Table 2. While most nonprofits broke down the services into specific programs, the general areas were: education, community development, volunteer programming, health, sports/play, business/microfinance, and orphanages/OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children). Again, organizations tended to offer many services in support of their missions.

Table 2: Types of Programming in which Organizations Engaged

Programming Areas	
Business/Microfinance	
Sustainable Business	20%
Agriculture	17%
Microfinance	14%
Business Development	13%
Livestock Programs	9%
Community Development	38%
Education	
Community Schools	33%
Tutoring Program	25%
Language Classes	24%
Boarding School	7%
Health	
Health Clinic	20%
Medical Mission	15%
WASH (Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene)	7%
Orphanages/OVCs	
Orphanage	20%
Adoption	2%
Sports/Play	20%
Volunteer Travel	39%

Volunteering was very common. 39% of organizations reported having “volunteer travel opportunities” as a specific programming area. Overall, 95% claimed to have a form of volunteer program either international or domestic; 63% had international volunteer opportunities. 61% of programs worked with 20 or fewer volunteers each year.

Finally, respondents were asked about the children with whom they worked. Organizations were encouraged to participate in the survey, even if they did not work directly with children but did work on ‘youth’ or ‘children’s’ issues. Despite, this many did not. 3% of participants said they “never” worked directly with children. This could mean that they funded other partner organizations that provided services to children, facilitated connections of adults who in turn would work with children, or they worked on infrastructure projects, which benefited children without interacting with children during their work activities. Similarly, 11 nonprofits, which did not take the survey, emailed to

explain that child protection was not relevant to them as they did not work directly with children and thus they had no interest in participating. The vast majority of respondents (78%) worked with children “All of the Time.” See Table 3. 11 to 15 year olds were the most popular age group at 80%, followed by 16 to 18 at 77%, 6 to 10 at 76% and 0 to 5 at 58%. See Table 4. One respondent, in the notes section, requested that age groups older than 18 should have been included as they do work with youth populations that are not “children” by international law. The nonprofit felt that these youth belonged in child protection. As many education systems and programs serve youth over the age of 18, this is a point that should be included in future research.

Table 3: Frequency with which Organizations Worked with Children

Frequency of Working with Children	
All the Time	78%
Often	12%
Sometimes	7%
Never	3%

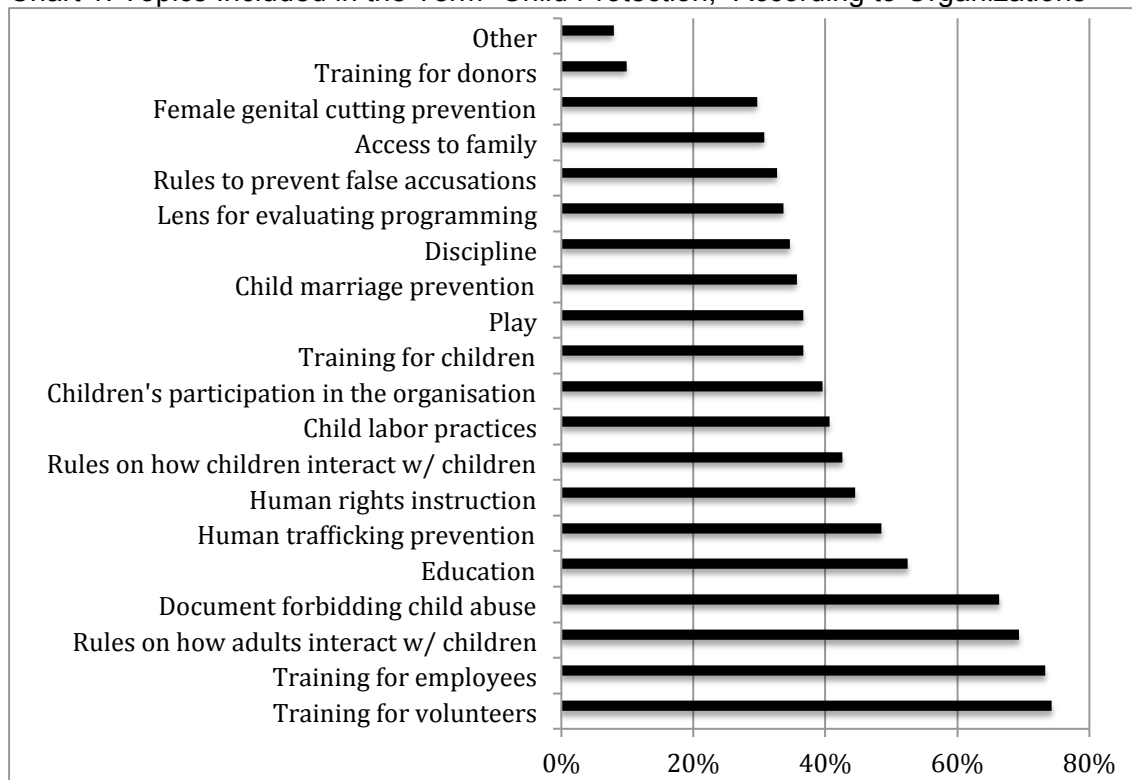
Table 4: Age Ranges Served by Organizations

Ages of Children	
0-5 yrs. old	58%
6-10 yrs. old	76%
11-15 yrs. old	80%
16-18 yrs. old	77%
Not Applicable	5%

Organizations’ understanding of child protection. Survey participants were asked what activities and topics they understood to be captured by the term “child protection.” They were allowed multiple selections in order to respond, including a fill-in section. “Training for volunteers” was the top response at 74%, followed by “training for employees (73%), “rules for how adults can interact with children” (69%), “a document for employees to sign agreeing not to physically or sexually abuse children (66%), and “education” (52%). See Chart 1. Interestingly, the number one answer was that child protection should include “training for volunteers”, but in a later question, when asked who

was trained in child protection at the organization, “volunteers” were trained in only 22% of the nonprofits. See Table 5.

Chart 1: Topics Included in the Term “Child Protection,” According to Organizations



Child protection in practice. Overall, 38% of organizations had a child safeguarding policy, 38% did not, and 24% were in the process of creating one. See Chart 2. This question clearly had a social bias for answering “yes” or mitigating a “no” by choosing “in the process.” How influential was the bias in actual answers is difficult to determine as with any self-reporting, but nonprofits were assured that this survey’s answers would be kept confidential with organizations’ names remaining unconnected to specific answers in reporting. Of those institutions working with children “all the time”, 27% had no safeguarding policy, while 20% were in the process of creating one. See Chart 3. Of significant note, 17% of the survey participants dropped out at this point when asked if they had a safeguarding policy – 18% of whom worked with children “all of the

time.” The highest participation dropout being at this question suggests that the percentage of those without a child protection safeguarding policy is higher than the numbers show.

Chart 2: Organizations with Child Protection (CP) “Safeguarding” Policies

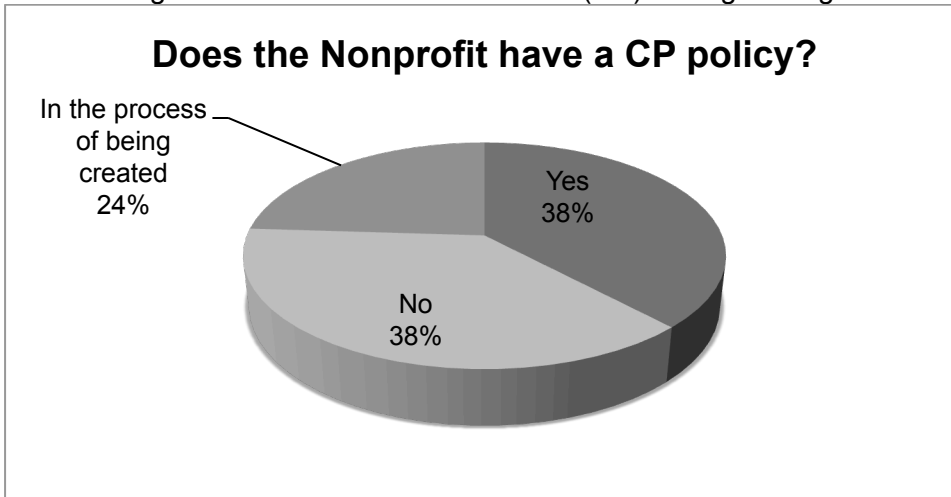
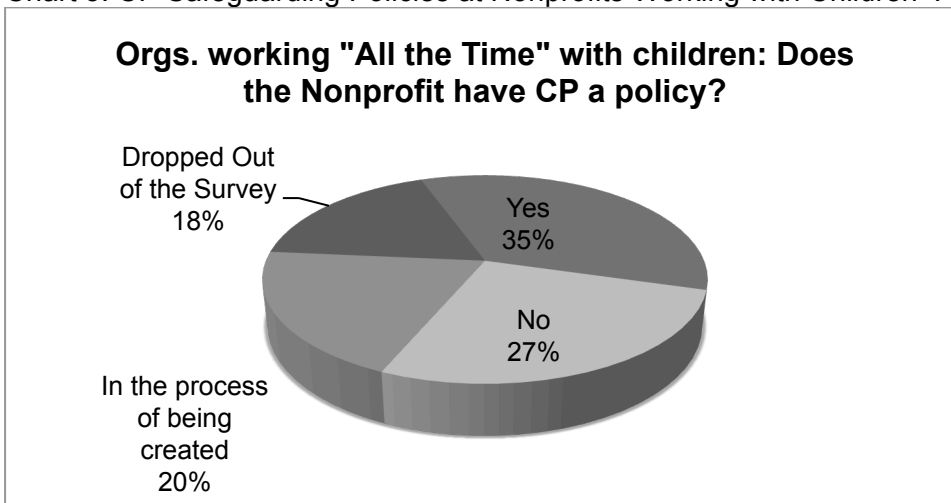


Chart 3: CP Safeguarding Policies at Nonprofits Working with Children “All the Time”

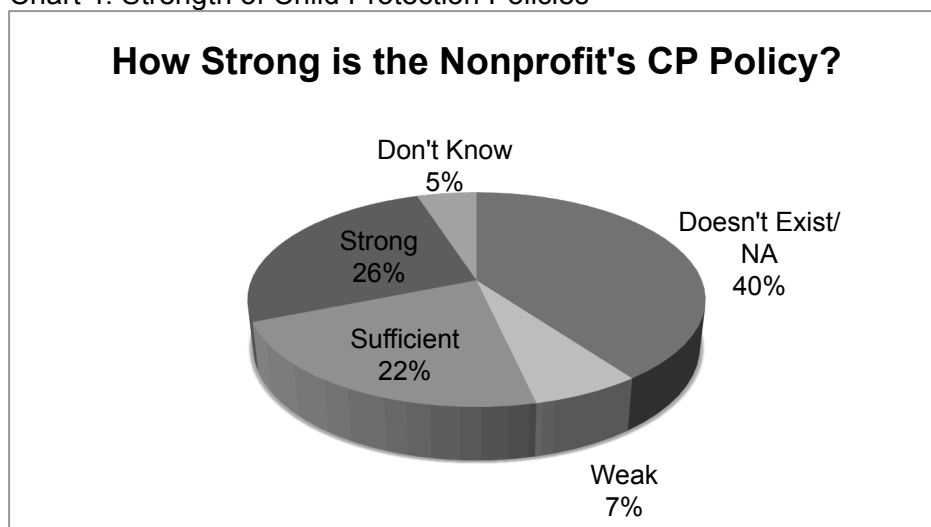


Respondents were asked if they had help creating their child protection safeguarding policy: 8% worked with a government and 29% had worked with another organization or a consultant. While having an expert to guide the process of writing a child protection policy is not imperative, child safeguarding and protection policies must cover many different situations and can be nuanced. Research, training, experience, and/or

assistance are necessary for creating strong, comprehensive policies. Almost two-thirds of nonprofits had no outside expert helping them.

When asked about the strength of their child safeguarding policy, almost equal numbers felt that it was strong or sufficient with 26% and 22% respectively. 7% answered “weak,” 40% “does not exist,” and 5% “didn’t know.” See Chart 4. While three (3) organizations had no child protection policy, they believed their policy to be “sufficient” to “moderately strong.” This mentality seems consistent with optimism biases and later findings about respondents’ beliefs in the low risk of abuse at their organizations. Despite few respondents negatively asserting that they felt their policies were weak, more telling is that less than half exerted confidence in the organizations’ policies to protect children.

Chart 4: Strength of Child Protection Policies



Organizations were asked about child protection training at their institutions. 39% said that staff onsite were trained in child protection, while 35% indicated that “no one” was trained. See Table 5. Less than half of the front-line staff, those that work directly with children are trained in child protection. Additionally, the percentage of those institutions, which do not train any of their staff, is likely higher, because 11% of nonprofits “do not know” who was trained in child protection. As most surveys were completed by a member of headquarters’ staff, who would be responsible for policy and

implementation, the lack of knowledge suggests that no one was intentionally trained by the organization. Therefore, the percentage of nonprofits where nobody was trained in child protection was likely closer to 46%.

Table 5: Child Protection Training

Who is trained in Child Protection?	% of Organizations	Training that should be part of child protection
Site Staff	39%	73% said employees
No One	35%	--
HQ Staff	23%	(these are employees)
Volunteers	22%	74% said volunteers
Board Members	15%	(these are volunteers)
Do Not Know	11%	--
Children	7%	37% said children
Other	6%	--
Donors	1%	10% said donors

As described earlier, respondents felt that training volunteers was an important part of child protection. Despite this, only 22% trained volunteers – roughly 1 in 5. A cause for more concern, 17% of organizations with “sufficient” to “very strong” child protection policies did not train their volunteers in child protection. Furthermore, almost 10% of organizations with a safeguarding policy being created, which felt their child protection safeguarding policy was “sufficient” to “very strong,” did not train volunteers. Overall, 63% of nonprofits that work with children and have volunteers believe volunteer training is important but have not actually trained their volunteers. This leaves open questions for further research as to why the discrepancy among understandings of child protection, implementation of practices, and strength of policies.

Staff members conducted 80% of the trainings held. No question was asked as to the qualifications of the staff member leading the training, neither was the content or format of the training explored. More investigation is needed to better understand the quality of trainings.

Moreover, 64 organizations answered that child protection training was not applicable. However, in the question prior, which asked “Who was trained?”, 51 respondents said “no one” or “don’t know.” This leaves 13 nonprofits being ‘trained’ without having received ‘training’ from a staff member or other outside entity. This raises questions as to the discrepancy. Initial numbers could have been inflated due to social bias or perhaps the organization does not provide group training but considers reading the safeguarding policy to be sufficient training. Participants were given an “other” category to write in a response; answers provided in the “other” category referred to actual group trainings rather than self-study of a provided document. Hopefully in future studies, this can be clarified.

The survey asked about perceptions of risk and assistance. As noted before, most nonprofits (74%) believed that their risk of child abuse at their organization was “low” or “very low.” Likewise, 53% believed the physical and sexual abuse risk at a similar nonprofit was “low” to “very low.” 32% reported being aware of suspected abuse at either their (13%), and/or another nonprofit. Almost one in three organizations knew of abuse, yet 66% of INGOs aware of child abuse accusations in an institution, perhaps even their own, still believed the risk was “low” or “very low.” Meanwhile, 31% believed the risk to be moderate to very high. While a few organizations might be able to attribute their belief to implementing preventative steps, most likely this is attributable to an optimism bias, whereby the nonprofit believes itself to have less risk of experiencing “a negative event compared to others.” (Wikipedia) Convincing nonprofits of the risk of child abuse at their institution will be a challenge for changing behaviors and implementing stronger policies.

Chart 5: Perceived Child Abuse Risk Level at Respondent's Organization

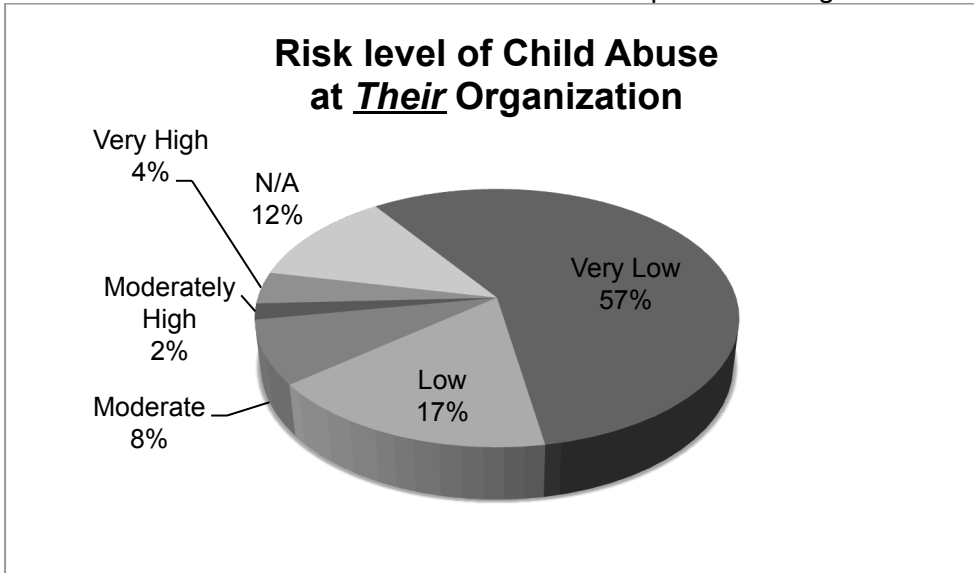
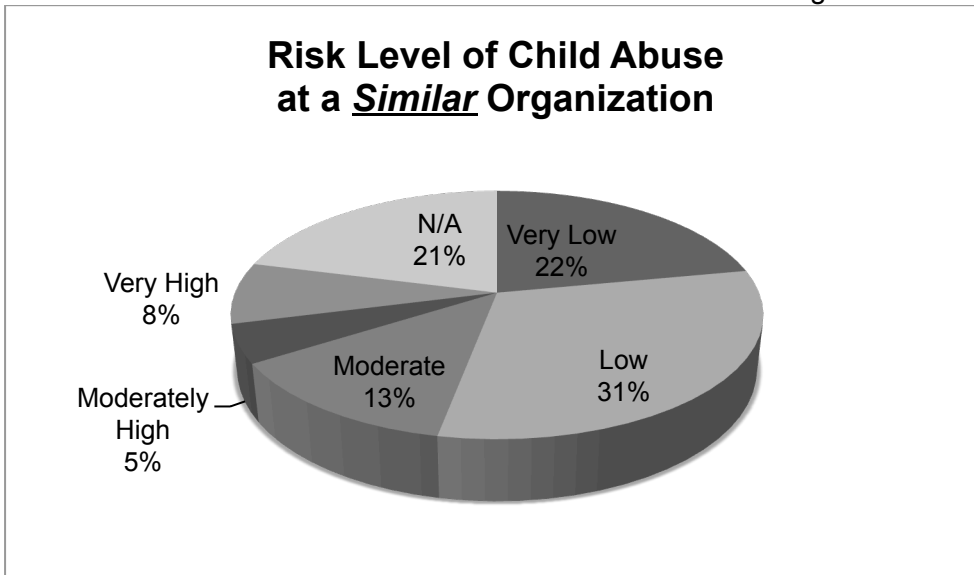


Chart 6: Perceived Child Abuse Risk Level at Other Similar Organizations



Next, the survey addressed recruitment screening of employees and volunteers. While criminal background checks are not available everywhere, many countries offer some sort of good standing or criminal check (Home Office, & Disclosure and Barring Service). Background checks are widely considered best practice and a minimum level of prevention. The utility of these checks is limited by the strength of the judicial system and

the existence of accessible criminal records; therefore, this tool, augmented by interviews and reference calls for character reference, are becoming the new standard (Grimwood, Hawkins, Gaffney; UK Department of Education, 2013). Although these practices are accepted standards of prevention, fewer than half of all surveyed organization screened employees using criminal background checks. Specifically, 44% of organizations that worked with children and have volunteers, do not regularly screen volunteers using either criminal background checks or reference calls. Additionally, 27% do not regularly screen anyone, employees or volunteers, with either tool. Perhaps more intriguing is that 12-21% of nonprofits did not feel that these processes were applicable to their situations and many respondents did not know the answer, which calls into question the likelihood that workers are regularly screened.

The low incidence of screening suggests that many small INGOs do not recognize the importance of hiring practices for keeping children safe (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, US DOJ COPS, 2013). Because no questions were asked about the content of the reference calls as character references, it is unknown how many nonprofits use these as a child protection screening mechanism. It is likely that the survey data on reference calls as child protective screening provides an inaccurate picture of thorough vetting and active prevention on the part of the organizations. This presents an interesting avenue for further studies.

Table 6: Employee and Volunteer Screening at Organizations

	Employee Criminal Background Checks	Employee Reference Calls	Volunteer Criminal Background Checks	Volunteer Reference Calls
Yes	40%	63%	31%	43%
No	27%	11%	40%	26%
Sometimes	4%	7%	8%	16%
Do Not Know	8%	4%	5%	3%
N/A	21%	16%	16%	12%

Barriers to improved child protection. Initial cost (54%), ongoing costs (55%), time (56%), and cultural sensitivity & appropriateness (66%) are all inhibitors to implementing child protection, with respondents being moderately to very concerned. Encouragingly, only 37% were concerned about their image in relationship to how emphasis and implementation of stronger child protection would reflect on them as an organization, which reinforces the idea that child protection is perceived positively. It also suggests that individuals believe child protection to be proactive rather than reactive. These responses suggest further study is needed to understand uptake, implementation, and support needs and obstacles.

Interest in change. When questioned about the concern various stakeholders had in child protection, respondents perceived board members (68%), headquarters’ staff (73%), and site staff (73%) to be “moderately” to “very concerned.” However, donors were not thought to be as relevant. 53% believed donors were very concerned while 24% believed donors were “not applicable”. This, along with other comments and responses, seems to indicate that many nonprofits do not recognize donors as advocates for change, affected by a scandal (i.e. lost revenues, shaken confidence, etc.), or, depending on circumstances, as potential abusers. Nonetheless, respondents felt that more than half of board members, staff, and donors were interested in child protection. Better yet, almost three quarters of these stakeholders were concerned. This suggests fertile ground for discussing protection, policies, and changes. Additionally, over 75% of nonprofits wanted help with “strengthening child protection policies,” “strengthening hiring practices,” “evaluating volunteer programs,” and gaining a “certification for child protection.”

Table 7: Organizations Interest in Child Protection Assistance

	Orgs interested in Help	Of interest orgs, those which are “extremely interested”
Strengthening CP Policy	86%	47%
Strengthening Hiring Practices	78%	41%
Evaluating Volunteer Program	79%	47%
Gaining Certification for CP	77%	52%

Conclusion

Child abuse is a major issue around the world; small INGOs are no exception. This study was conducted to better understand beliefs, perceptions, and procedures within small Western-based international nonprofits and to measure if and how assistance could be structured in the form of a child protection toolkit. While more study is needed to probe deeper into rationales, relationships, risks, and procedures, the survey confirmed reasons for concern as well as profound interest by small INGOs to better protect children.

While 62% of organizations in the survey did not have child protection safeguarding policies, many were in the process of creating one. Screening of employees and volunteers was low. Less than half of the nonprofits had staff and volunteers trained on child protection and less than a tenth had children trained. About a fifth of organizations knew of abuse at a nonprofit similar to theirs and over 10% had had abuse accusations at their own organization. While most nonprofits did not believe their risk of child abuse at their facilities to be high, the majority saw room for improvement and wanted help with strengthening their current policies and procedures. Additionally, the majority of organizations felt that child protection is important to their board members, staff, and donors and over half of the organizations knew where to find support if they had a situation of abuse.

Nonprofits desire to improve their protection and services. They need to have strong child protection policies that, at a minimum, include candidate vetting procedures, trainings, reporting mechanisms, and codes of conduct. The time is ripe. The nonprofit sector is growing rapidly (Urban Institute); child abuse is in the media almost daily; protection from sexual exploitation and abuse is an important agenda for the UN and large INGOs. Child protection in small INGOs needs to receive attention. Small INGOs ought to be brought into the discussion and have better access to information, participation, and resources. Similarly, small INGOs need to actively work to seek out information and work to create better protection systems. Advocacy and education about child protection is needed for organizations and donors, especially to overcome the perception of low risk. The continual growth of the nonprofit sector strengthens their collective impact,

significance, importance, and contribution within international aid, which should no longer be overlooked. Neither should their responsibility towards protecting children.

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Tables & Charts

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Chart 1: Topics Included in the Term “Child Protection,” According to Organizations

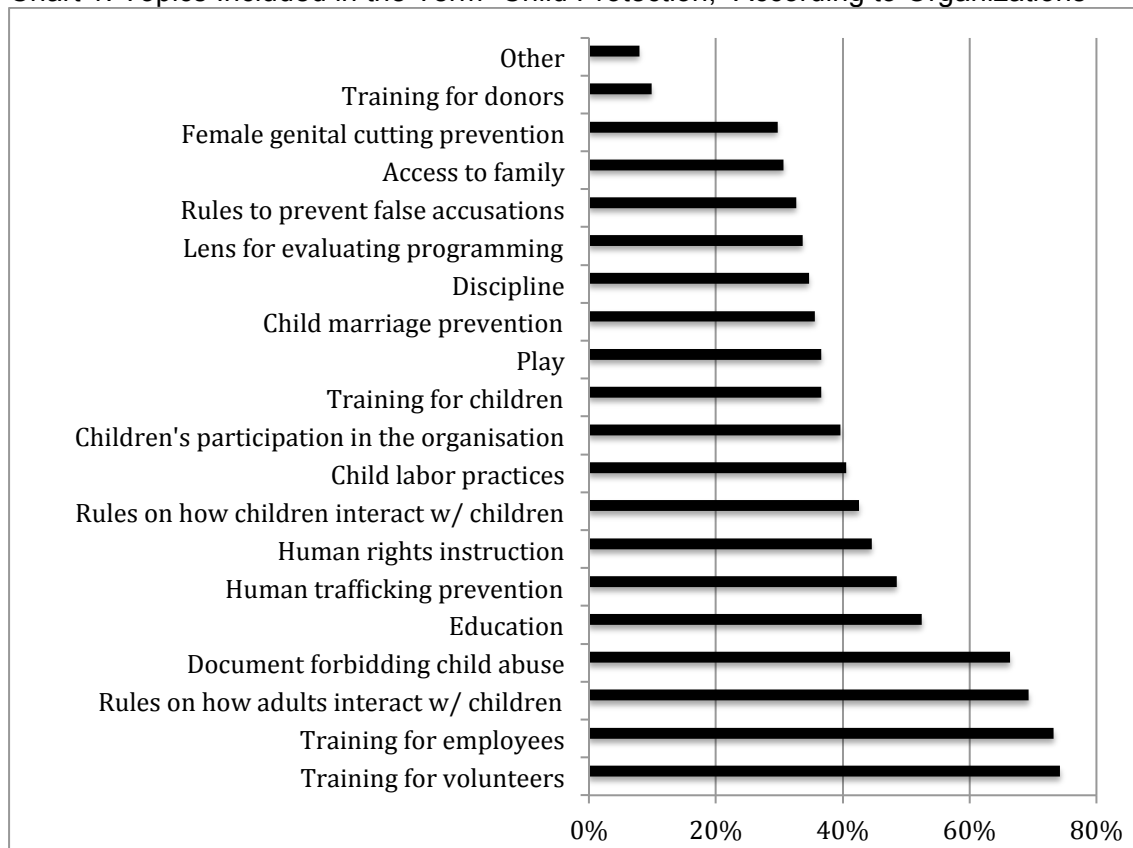


Chart 2: Organizations with Child Protection (CP) "Safeguarding" Policies

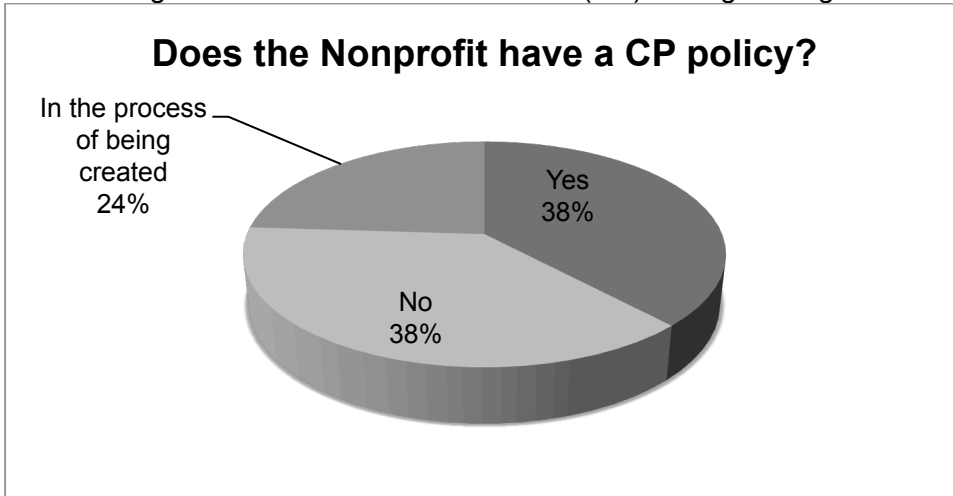


Chart 3: CP "Safeguarding" Policies at Nonprofits Working with Children "All the Time"

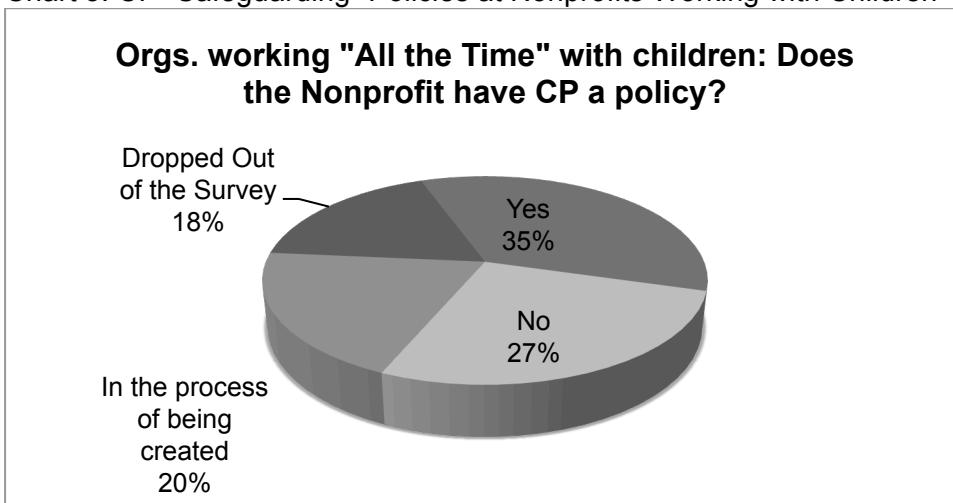


Chart 4: Strength of Child Protection Policies

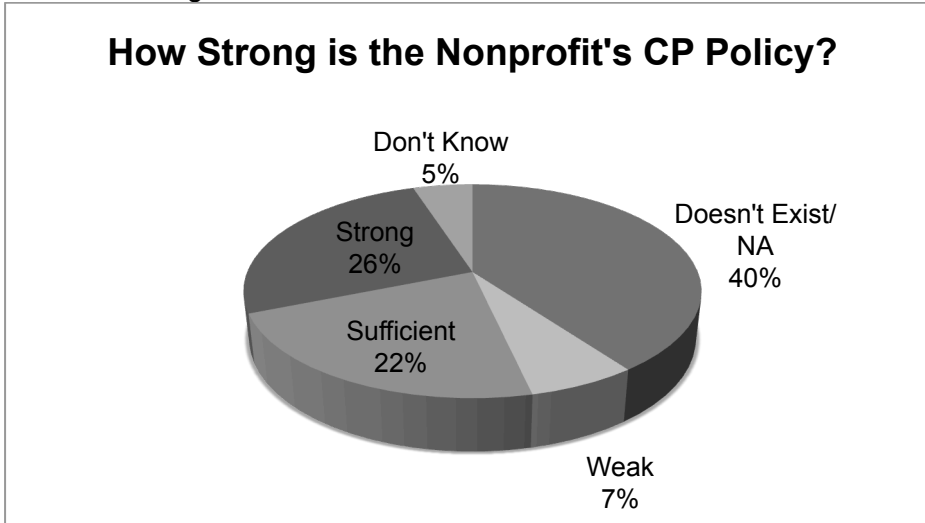


Table 5: Child Protection Training

Who is trained in Child Protection?	% of Organizations	Trainings that should be part of child protection
Site Staff	39%	73% said employees
No One	35%	--
HQ Staff	23%	(these are employees)
Volunteers	22%	74% said volunteers
Board Members	15%	(these are volunteers)
Do Not Know	11%	--
Children	7%	37% said children
Other	6%	--
Donors	1%	10% said donors

Chart 5: Perceived Child Abuse Risk Level at Respondent's Organization

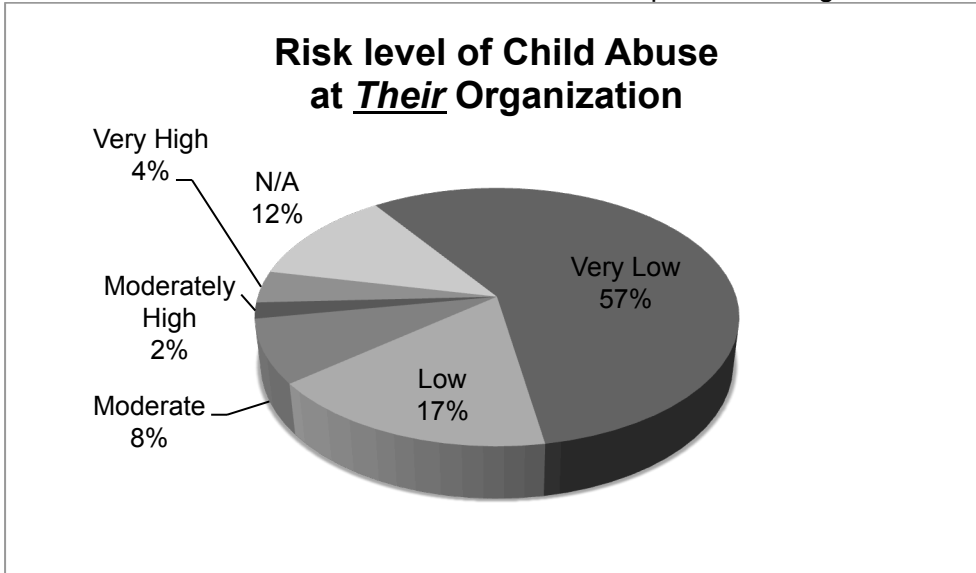


Chart 6: Perceived Child Abuse Risk Level at Other Similar Organizations

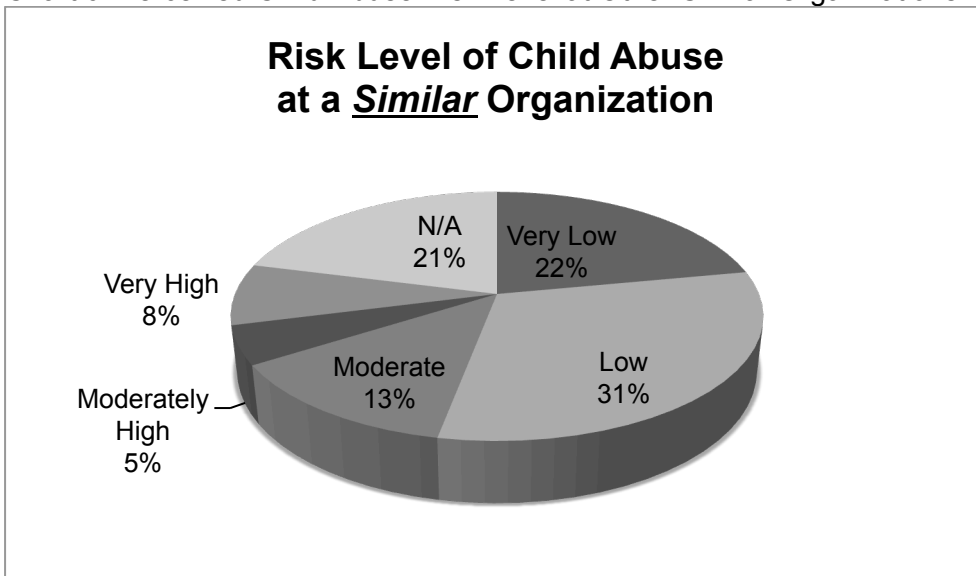


Table 6: Employee and Volunteer Screening at Organizations

	Employee Criminal Background Checks	Employee Reference Calls	Volunteer Criminal Background Checks	Volunteer Reference Calls
Yes	40%	63%	31%	43%
No	27%	11%	40%	26%
Sometimes	4%	7%	8%	16%
Do Not Know	8%	4%	5%	3%
N/A	21%	16%	16%	12%

Table 7: Organizations Interest in Child Protection Assistance

	Orgs interested in Help	Of interest orgs, those which are “extremely interested”
Strengthening CP Policy	86%	47%
Strengthening Hiring Practices	78%	41%
Evaluating Volunteer Program	79%	47%
Gaining Certification for CP	77%	52%