Child abuse & neglect in Suriname
van der Kooij, I.W.

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A national study on the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Suriname

Inger W. van der Kooij
Josta Nieuwendam
Shandra Bipat
Frits Boer
Ramón J.L. Lindauer
Tobi L.G. Graafsma

ABSTRACT

The prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname has never been subjected to a reliable assessment. The only data available include rough estimates of a range of internationally comparable indicators extrapolated from child protection and police corps statistics for offenses against children. This study aimed to provide a reliable estimate of the prevalence of all forms of child maltreatment in Suriname. One thousand three hundred and ninety-one (1,391) adolescents and young adults of different ethnicities completed a questionnaire about child maltreatment. The study sample, obtained by random probability sampling, consisted of students (ages 12 through 22) from five districts in Suriname. A significant proportion of Surinamese children experienced maltreatment. In total, 86.8% of adolescents and 95.8% of young adults reported having been exposed to at least one form of child maltreatment during their lives. Among the adolescents, 57.1% were exposed to child maltreatment in the past year. When the definition of the National Incidence Study was applied, 58.2% of adolescents and 68.8% of young adults had been exposed to at least one form of maltreatment. Among adolescents, 36.8% reported having experienced at least one form of maltreatment in the past year. The results indicate the (extremely) high lifetime and year prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname. The serious and often lifelong consequences of such maltreatment indicate that a national approach to child abuse and neglect, including the development of a national strategic plan, a national surveillance system and changes to the state’s programmatic and policy response, is urgently needed.
INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is a global public health concern because of its severe, lasting physical and mental health effects, which often persist into adulthood (Anda et al., 2006; Felitti, Anda, & Nordenberg, 1998; Gilbert et al., 2009; Mills et al., 2013). It is estimated that approximately 40 million children worldwide under the age of 15 are subjected to child maltreatment each year and that 25–50 percent of all children have been physically abused (World Health Organization, 2001).

Although child abuse and neglect occurs in families of all income levels, a disproportionately high number of reported cases of abuse occur in lower income families (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Unfortunately, data describing the general prevalence of child maltreatment are unavailable in many low- and middle-income countries, where malnutrition and infection are considered major pediatric problems (Stoltenborgh, Van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). This is the case in Suriname, a developing country in northern South America with an estimated population of 530,000. More than half of Suriname’s population lives in the capital city of Paramaribo. In Suriname, 70% of all households live below the poverty line. Approximately 21.5% of the Surinamese population between ages 15 and 24 is unemployed, and approximately 6% of the population is illiterate. The number of highly educated people in Suriname is low (IndexMundi, 2014). Estimates indicate that 34% of children who enter primary school do not pass any exam (Ministry of Education and Development, 2005). Suriname has no mandatory child maltreatment reporting system or standard protocol response to suspected maltreatment.

Despite the lack of reliable prevalence data in this country, interest in child abuse and neglect is increasing (Doek & Graafsma, 2012). Currently, rough estimates of the prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname are derived from a range of internationally comparable indicators of child protection (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS); UNICEF; MICS-3, 2006; MICS-4, 2010) and police corps statistics on offenses against children. In the MICS-4 (2010) survey, respondents to household questionnaires were asked a series of questions assessing how adults tended to discipline children during the month preceding the survey. The results showed that 86% of children between the ages of 2 and 14 were subjected to at least one form of violent psychological or physical punishment by parents, other caregivers or family members, with 60% being subjected to any physical punishment and 12% being subjected to severe punishment. 2010 police corps statistics showed that 240 children (there are approximately 40,000 10–18-year-olds in Paramaribo; General Bureau Statistics, Suriname, 2014) in Paramaribo were the victims
of at least two forms of child maltreatment, i.e., physical and sexual abuse. Another systematic survey has been conducted on the prevalence of child abuse in Nickerie (Van den Berg, Visser, Lamers-Winkelman, & Graafsma, 2009), a district in northwestern Suriname with approximately 34,000 inhabitants (General Bureau Statistics, Suriname, 2012). Data were gathered using 345 questionnaires, which were completed by children and young people under the age of 19. The results indicated a year prevalence of 37.4% and a lifetime prevalence of 61.2% (Van den Berg et al., 2009). Lifetime prevalence rates indicate the number of individuals who have been maltreated at some point in their lives; year prevalence refers to all cases of child maltreatment during the past year.

This research presents the results of a national self-report study undertaken to assess the year prevalence and lifetime prevalence of maltreatment (physical, sexual, and emotional) and neglect in Suriname. The first purpose of the study was to provide more precise information about the lifetime prevalence and year prevalence of child maltreatment by surveying a large-scale nationally representative sample in Suriname. The second purpose was to compare our data with the sentinel data (reports from professionals) of the National Incidence Study – 4 (NIS-4; Sedlak et al., 2010) and the Netherlands’ Prevalence Study on Maltreatment of Children and Youth (Euser et al., 2013). Based on previous results, we expected high rates of both lifetime prevalence and year prevalence of child maltreatment. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to specifically produce a valid measurement of the lifetime prevalence and year prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname.

**METHODS**

**Studied area**

The study was conducted in five areas of Suriname: Paramaribo, Nickerie, Sipaliwini, Marowijne and Brokopondo. These five areas are located throughout the country and are therefore geographically and culturally representative. Furthermore, Paramaribo and Nickerie are urban areas, while Brokopondo, Marowijne and Sipaliwini are rural. Suriname, officially known as the Republic of Suriname, is situated on the northeastern Atlantic coast of South America. It is bordered by French Guyana to the east, Guyana to the west, and Brazil to the south. First explored by the Spaniards in the 16th century and later settled by the English in the mid-17th century, Suriname was colonized by the Dutch in 1667. When slavery was abolished in 1863, workers were brought in from India and Java. Suriname’s independence from the Netherlands was granted in 1975. With an area just under 64,000 sq. mi, Suriname is the smallest sovereign state in South
America. Currently, approximately seven ethnicities are represented in Suriname, all of which have their own cultural characteristics. The official language is Dutch, but Sranan Tongo is a widely spoken lingua franca (World Factbook, 2014).

**Participants**

The participants were 1,391 secondary and vocational education students in Suriname, of which 1,120 were adolescents (12–17 years old, boys: 42.9%; M = 15.04 years, SD = 1.42) and 246 were young adults (18–22 years old, boys: 43.5%, M = 18.53 years, SD = 0.91). The age data were missing for 25 of the children. These children were excluded from the analyses. Data collection was conducted in July 2013 (Paramaribo, Marowijne and Brokopondo) and February 2014 (Sipaliwini). Data from the study conducted earlier (Nickerie) was collected during June and July 2008. The demographic characteristics of the total sample are summarized in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adolescents N = 1,120</th>
<th>Young adults N = 246</th>
<th>Missing age N = 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (n/boys)</strong></td>
<td>480 42.9&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>107 43.5</td>
<td>13 59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro Surinamese</td>
<td>336 30.0</td>
<td>123 50.0</td>
<td>13 52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javanese</td>
<td>113 10.1</td>
<td>12 4.9</td>
<td>1 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo Caribbean</td>
<td>280 25.0</td>
<td>21 8.5</td>
<td>2 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>280 25.0</td>
<td>56 22.8</td>
<td>4 16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>104 9.3</td>
<td>34 13.8</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>7 0.6&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>5 20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower vocational education</td>
<td>192 17.1</td>
<td>59 24.0</td>
<td>8 32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive primary education</td>
<td>879 78.5</td>
<td>115 46.7</td>
<td>17 68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General secondary education</td>
<td>20 1.8</td>
<td>35 14.2</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-university education</td>
<td>29 2.6</td>
<td>37 15.0</td>
<td>- -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramaribo</td>
<td>543 48.1</td>
<td>107 43.5</td>
<td>13 52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokopondo</td>
<td>87 7.8</td>
<td>24 9.8</td>
<td>2 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marowijne</td>
<td>90 8.0</td>
<td>65 26.4</td>
<td>6 24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nickerie</td>
<td>303 27.1</td>
<td>35 14.2</td>
<td>2 8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sipaliwini</td>
<td>97 8.7</td>
<td>15 6.1</td>
<td>2 8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Missing gender, N = 2.
<sup>b</sup> Missing ethnicity, N = 4.
**Instrument**

**Child maltreatment**

A 57-item self-report questionnaire (Euser et al., 2013; Lamers-Winkelman, Slot, Bijl, & Vijlbrief, 2007) was used to assess exposure to a broad range of maltreatment experiences. The questionnaire consisted of 31 items assessing five forms of abuse: (1) sexual abuse within and outside the family (7 items); (2) physical abuse within the family (8 items); (3) parental psychological aggression (1 item); (4) experienced conflicts between parents (7 items); and (5) neglect (8 items). These items were derived from the Dating Violence Questionnaire (DVQ; Douglas and Straus, 2006) and the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics scales (CTSPC; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998; for details, see Supplement 2.1). The self-report questionnaire is the first Dutch questionnaire investigating the extent to which adolescents are exposed to child maltreatment. The DVQ and CTSPC have been shown to be valid and reliable measures (Douglas and Straus, 2006; Straus, 2004; Straus et al., 1998). Lifetime prevalence and year prevalence were assessed by asking participants to rate how many times a certain event had occurred in previous years or in the past twelve months using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = never; 7 = more than 20 times). Scores of 2 (not in the past year, but before) through 7 (at least once) established the prevalence of the maltreatment. Year prevalence was indicated by scores of 3 (once in the past year) through 7 (at least once). Items measuring neglect were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). This measurement was used because neglect is often long-term, and it is therefore difficult to measure the number of times that neglect occurs.

Because a child is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as anyone under 18, year prevalence percentages were based on the scores collected from adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18. Lifetime prevalence rates were based on reports from all participants, who were divided into an adolescent group and a young adult group.

**Socio demographics and social desirability**

The questions about child maltreatment were embedded in a series of questions about the socio demographic characteristics of the children and their families (13 items, e.g., ‘What is your age?’) and social desirability (13 items, also derived from the DVQ, Douglas and Straus, 2006, and adapted by Reynolds (1982) from the Malowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale; for details, see Supplement 2.2). Research that uses self-report data must take into account respondents’ defensiveness, minimization of socially undesirable behavior, and tendency to project favorable images of themselves. Social desirability
items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

**Sample size**

A stratified sample of students from 57 secondary and vocational education classes in Suriname was selected. According to the population rates reported by the World Factbook (2014) and the number of participants (age: 12–17 and 18–22 years) in our study, 1.2% of the children and young adults in Suriname were included in our study. The sample was representative of the total population of Surinamese students, according to information released by the Inspection of Education (Nickerie) and the Ministry of Education and Development (Paramaribo, Marowijne, Sipaliwini, and Brokopondo). During the sampling, school year, school type, gender, residence, and the size of the participating school were taken into account. A list of all of the schools in the participating districts, divided by type of school and grades taught, was provided by the Ministry of Education. Using random probability sampling, schools with different religious backgrounds were selected from each group. The numbers of boys and girls attending the selected schools were gathered prior to the data collection. These numbers were essentially equal. Data from the study in Nickerie was used to enhance the study population and its cultural diversity and thereby improve the representativeness of the sample. Because the questionnaires used in both studies were identical, the data from the studies could be combined.

**Definition**

The definition of child abuse used in our study consisted of the above-mentioned five forms of abuse (for details, see Supplement 2.1). In the National Incidence Study – 4 (NIS-4; Sedlak et al., 2010), any of the following occurrences meets the definition of child abuse: (1) physical assault (including excessive corporal punishment); (2) sexual abuse or exploitation; (3) close confinement; (4) any other pattern of assaultive, exploitative, or abusive treatment; (5) abandonment or other refusal to maintain custody; (6) permitting or encouraging chronic maladaptive behavior; (7) refusal to allow needed treatment for a professionally diagnosed physical, educational, emotional, or behavioral problem or failure to follow the advice of a competent professional who recommended that the caregiver obtain or provide the child with such treatment when the child’s primary caregiver was physically and financially able to do so; (8) failure to seek or unwarranted delay in seeking competent medical care for a serious injury, illness, or impairment; (9) consistent or extreme inattention to the child’s physical or emotional needs; and (10)
failure to register or enroll the child in school, as required by state law. To compare our data with the sentinel data (reports from professionals) of the National Incidence Study – 4 and the Netherlands’ Prevalence Study of Maltreatment of Children and Youth (NPM-2010, Euser et al., 2013), a selection of items from the questionnaire was used. To select these items, NPM-2010 sentinels, trained as reliable coders, were presented the 32 items of the original self-report study (Pupils on Abuse Study (SOM); Lamers-Winkelman et al., 2007) in random order. The coders were asked how well (well, somewhat well, not well) the items fit the definition used in the sentinel study (based on the definition used by the NIS-4). All of the items were considered to be ‘security threatening events,’ but not all of them could be considered child abuse. In total, 13 items were considered by all seven coders to match the NIS definition and therefore the definition of child abuse used by the NIS-4. The selection consisted of items assessing sexual and physical abuse and items assessing experienced conflicts between parents. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) was included in the NIS-4’s definition, but IPV-related items were not included in the selection. Furthermore, the items regarding neglect were not included in the selection because they asked only about the respondents’ childhood, though they are included in the NIS-4’s definition.

**Procedure**

The study used a method similar to that used in studies on the prevalence of child maltreatment previously conducted in Nickerie, Suriname (Nickerian Pupils on Abuse Study; Van den Berg et al., 2009), and The Netherlands (Pupils on Abuse Study; Lamers-Winkelman et al., 2007; Netherlands’ Prevalence Study on Maltreatment of Children and Youth; Euser et al., 2013). Data from the study in Nickerie (Van den Berg et al., 2009), which used the same instrument, were combined with this study’s data. The study received ethical approval from the Ministry of Education and Development in Paramaribo and the Inspection of Education in Nickerie. All participating school directors and children were informed about the study aims (JN). On average, the participants took 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

**Consent procedure**

School directors received a letter to distribute to parents. This letter contained a response form that parents could use to refuse permission for their child’s participation. A letter distributed prior to the data collection informed each participant about the nature of the research, including information about the possibility of receiving help in cases of need and the procedures used to secure confidentiality. This procedure was repeated in person
before the data collection (JN, IWvdK). Respondents were given the option of stopping or of continuing at another time or in another place if they wished. All respondents were given a contact name and information regarding the Child Protection Helpline should they wish to discuss anything arising from the research. All respondents were told that their teacher and school director had been extensively informed about the procedures and that they could contact them in case of need. All children gave verbal consent before participating. During and after the data collection, no children requested help or referrals.

**Statistics**

Means and SDs of the socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., sex) were calculated. To control for answer tendencies and social desirability, we used Z-scores (Z > -3.29 or Z < 3.29; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Questionnaires were included based on their Z-score (Z > -3.29 or Z < 3.29). Outliers (Z < -3.29 or Z > 3.29) were removed. Lifetime prevalence and year prevalence rates were presented in numbers and percentages. All data were calculated using SPSS Statistics 19 (Chicago, IL, USA).

**RESULTS**

The social desirability items were answered completely by 1,200 respondents; two outliers (Z > 3.29) were removed. This reduced the sample size to n = 1,198, with a mean social desirability score of 34.05 (SD = 4.87, range = 18–50). Of the 191 questionnaires whose social desirability items were not completed, 136 questionnaires were missing a response to only 1 item. These 136 questionnaires were, based on their Z-scores (Z > -3.29 or Z < 3.29) included in the sample, which resulted in a sample size of n = 1,334. Gender data were missing from four respondents; age data were missing from 19 respondents. Their questionnaires were excluded, resulting in a final sample size of n = 1,311.

More than 86% (n = 930) of the adolescents and 95% (n = 229) of the young adults indicated that they had been exposed to child maltreatment at least once in their lives. The most prevalent experiences reported were physical abuse (adolescents: 53.4%; young adults: 63.2%), parental psychological aggression (adolescents: 53.1%; young adults: 61.9%) and neglect (adolescents: 49.4%; young adults: 60.7%). In addition, 57.1% of adolescents (n = 612) indicated they had been exposed to child maltreatment during the past twelve months (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). Because of the long-term nature of neglect, this type of maltreatment was excluded from the year prevalence rates.
Table 2.2 Lifetime prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of maltreatment</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th></th>
<th>Young adults</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys N = 457</td>
<td>Girls N = 615</td>
<td>Overall N = 1,072</td>
<td>Boys N = 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within family</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside family</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse (by parent)</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological aggression of parents</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced conflicts between parents</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect (by parent)</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 2

The self-report data were compared with the sentinel data (reports from professionals) of the National Incidence Study – 4 (NIS-4; Sedlak et al., 2010) and the Netherlands’ Prevalence Study on Maltreatment of Children and Youth (Euser et al., 2013). The results showed that more than 58% of the adolescents and 68% of the young adults had been exposed to at least one form of child abuse during their lives. In addition, 36.8% of the adolescents reported that they had been exposed to at least one form of child abuse during the past twelve months (see Tables 2.4 and 2.5).

The year prevalence rates calculated from the 13 selected items indicated that 36.8% (n = 394; a proportion of 367 in 1,000) of children in Suriname had been abused during the past 12 months.

Table 2.3 Year prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of maltreatment</th>
<th>Boys N = 457</th>
<th></th>
<th>Girls N = 615</th>
<th></th>
<th>Overall N = 1,072</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within family</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside family</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse (by parent)</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological aggression of parents</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced conflicts between parents</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect (by parent)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2.4 Lifetime prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname (according to definition of the NIS-4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of maltreatment</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Young adults</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys N = 457</td>
<td>Girls N = 615</td>
<td>Overall N = 1,072</td>
<td>Boys N = 107</td>
<td>Girls N = 132</td>
<td>Overall N = 239</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced by adult to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me</td>
<td>25 5.5%</td>
<td>47 7.6%</td>
<td>72 6.7%</td>
<td>9 8.4%</td>
<td>12 9.1%</td>
<td>21 8.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult had sex with me (within family)</td>
<td>17 3.7%</td>
<td>22 3.6%</td>
<td>39 3.6%</td>
<td>7 6.5%</td>
<td>12 9.1%</td>
<td>19 7.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit with a fist or being kicked hard (by parent)</td>
<td>75 16.4%</td>
<td>104 16.9%</td>
<td>179 16.7%</td>
<td>28 26.2%</td>
<td>25 18.9%</td>
<td>53 22.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrown or knocked down (by parent)</td>
<td>47 10.3%</td>
<td>89 14.5%</td>
<td>136 12.7%</td>
<td>23 21.5%</td>
<td>23 17.4%</td>
<td>46 19.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit at bottom with belt or other hard object (by parent)</td>
<td>77 38.7%</td>
<td>259 42.1%</td>
<td>436 40.7%</td>
<td>51 47.7%</td>
<td>60 45.5%</td>
<td>111 46.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat up (by parent)</td>
<td>89 19.5%</td>
<td>132 31.5%</td>
<td>221 20.6%</td>
<td>31 29.0%</td>
<td>23 17.4%</td>
<td>54 22.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit on some other part of the body besides the bottom with something like a belt, hairbrush, stick, or some other hard object (by parent)</td>
<td>140 30.6%</td>
<td>204 33.2%</td>
<td>344 32.1%</td>
<td>49 45.8%</td>
<td>45 34.1%</td>
<td>94 39.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grabbed around the neck and choked (by parent)</td>
<td>22 4.8%</td>
<td>26 4.2%</td>
<td>48 4.5%</td>
<td>13 12.1%</td>
<td>6 4.5%</td>
<td>19 7.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened with knife or gun (by parent)</td>
<td>19 4.2%</td>
<td>14 2.3%</td>
<td>33 3.1%</td>
<td>5 4.7%</td>
<td>4 3.0%</td>
<td>9 3.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burned or scalded on purpose by glowing object (by parent)</td>
<td>30 6.6%</td>
<td>26 4.2%</td>
<td>56 5.2%</td>
<td>7 6.5%</td>
<td>6 4.5%</td>
<td>13 5.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent has kicked, bitten or punched the other</td>
<td>45 9.8%</td>
<td>58 9.4%</td>
<td>103 9.6%</td>
<td>15 14.0%</td>
<td>13 9.8%</td>
<td>28 11.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent has beaten up the other</td>
<td>65 14.2%</td>
<td>79 12.8%</td>
<td>144 13.4%</td>
<td>24 22.4%</td>
<td>19 14.4%</td>
<td>43 18.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent used knife or gun to the other</td>
<td>23 5.0%</td>
<td>11 1.8%</td>
<td>34 3.2%</td>
<td>7 6.5%</td>
<td>6 4.5%</td>
<td>13 5.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>260 56.9%</td>
<td>364 59.2%</td>
<td>624 58.2%</td>
<td>77 72.0%</td>
<td>87 56.9%</td>
<td>164 68.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) alpha = .005.
DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to assess the lifetime prevalence and year prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname. The findings indicate that more than 85% of the adolescents and 95% of the young adults had been exposed to at least one type of maltreatment in their lives. During the past 12 months, 57.1% of the adolescents had been victims of child maltreatment. According to the definition of child abuse used in

Table 2.5 Year prevalence of child maltreatment in Suriname (according to definition of the NIS-4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of maltreatment</th>
<th>Boys N = 457</th>
<th>Girls N = 615</th>
<th>Overall N = 1,072</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forced by adult to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me</td>
<td>16 3.5</td>
<td>32 5.2</td>
<td>48 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult had sex with me (within family)</td>
<td>12 2.6</td>
<td>12 2.0</td>
<td>24 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit with a fist or being kicked hard (by parent)</td>
<td>37 8.1</td>
<td>68 11.1</td>
<td>105 9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrown or knocked down (by parent)</td>
<td>25 5.5</td>
<td>56 9.1</td>
<td>81 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit at bottom with belt or other hard object (by parent)</td>
<td>71 15.5</td>
<td>132 21.5</td>
<td>203 18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat up (by parent)</td>
<td>41 9.0</td>
<td>74 12.0</td>
<td>115 10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit on some other part of the body besides the bottom with something like a belt, hairbrush, stick, or some other hard object (by parent)</td>
<td>68 14.9</td>
<td>110 17.9</td>
<td>178 16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grabbed around the neck and choked (by parent)</td>
<td>13 3.8</td>
<td>21 3.4</td>
<td>34 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened with knife or gun (by parent)</td>
<td>11 2.8</td>
<td>11 1.8</td>
<td>22 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burned or scalded on purpose by glowing object (by parent)</td>
<td>16 3.5</td>
<td>22 3.6</td>
<td>38 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent has kicked, bitten or punched the other</td>
<td>22 4.8</td>
<td>33 5.4</td>
<td>55 5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent has beaten up the other</td>
<td>33 7.2</td>
<td>44 7.2</td>
<td>77 7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent used knife or gun to the other</td>
<td>13 2.8</td>
<td>7 1.1</td>
<td>20 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>159 34.8</td>
<td>235 38.2</td>
<td>394 36.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the sentinel study of the National Incidence Study – 4 (NIS-4; Sedlak et al., 2010), more than 58% of the adolescents and 68% of the young adults had been exposed to at least one form of maltreatment. Based on these standards, more than 36% (a proportion of 368 in 1,000) of the adolescents reported having experienced at least one form of maltreatment during the past 12 months.

The Netherlands’ Prevalence Study on Maltreatment of Children and Youth (Euser et al., 2013) and the National Incidence Study – 4 (Sedlak et al., 2010), which was conducted in the United States, reported that 34 in 1,000 children and 39.5 in 1,000 children had been abused during the past year, respectively. Compared to these results, the rates in Suriname are alarmingly high, especially because there is no comprehensive national approach towards preventing child maltreatment in Suriname.

Violence towards children appears to be common in Suriname. Its prevalence may be the result of both cultural and socio-economic factors. In the Caribbean, harsh and authoritarian types of discipline have often been described as commonplace child-rearing strategies; ‘beatings’ (with a hand, belt or instrument) are, in fact, defended as essential tools of the responsible parent. Physical punishment remains a frequently employed method of parental control and is exercised even on young children. Caribbean parents often expect obedience, compliance and respectful behavior from their children toward adults, even when such behavior is unrealistic in terms of age and circumstance (Williams, Brown, & Roopnarine, 2006). In addition, in Suriname, violence seems to be an acceptable form of disciplining children (UNICEF; MICS-4, 2010). Furthermore, the continuous stress of poverty is a socio-economic risk factor that predicts increased violence towards children (Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2009). Relatively low levels of education are also a risk factor (MacKenzie, Kotch, & Lee, 2011). High stress levels, inadequate parenting skills and limited knowledge of child development are often observed in abusive parents (MacKenzie et al., 2011; Ronan, Canoy, & Burke, 2009; Wilson, Rack, Shi, & Norris, 2008).

**Limitations**

Several limitations hindered the establishment of true prevalence rates in this study. First, the study relied upon children’s self-reported victimization and did not include any independent verification. A more objective, external evaluation however, would be difficult because the surveillance system in most districts is deficient. Professional help and documentation in cases of suspected maltreatment are underdeveloped and usually unavailable. A sentinel study would be difficult to organize and might under-represent the actual situation because of the lack of infrastructure, professionals and services.
Second, the data were collected solely from children in school, and the children who may be most at risk of being exposed to child maltreatment (e.g., drop-outs and children not sent to school) were therefore not included. The young adults we included were also all students. Therefore, our data cannot be generalized to non-students or other young adults. The high number of children who repeat vocational education classes in Suriname leads to older cohorts of students; we therefore extended the maximum age to 22 years. Because some young adults may have been exposed to violence after the age of 18 and have therefore had experiences that can no longer be considered child abuse, we divided the participants into two groups: adolescents and young adults.

Third, it is likely that the lack of absolute confidentiality in the classroom setting could have influenced children's willingness to report some (more shameful) experiences of maltreatment.

Moreover, there are some important theoretical problems with measuring child maltreatment. First, there is no valid, global child abuse measurement (Forrester & Harwin, 2000). Second, there is a lack of social consensus about what constitutes dangerous and unacceptable forms of parenting (Korbin, 2002). Some define abuse or neglect based solely on parents’ behaviors, whereas others include parental intention or physical consequences in their definitions (Southall, Samuels, & Golden, 2003; Straus et al., 1998). Recent research shows that in Guyana, a Caribbean country in which harsh punishment is normative, maternal warmth can be effectively expressed through the justness and not the harshness of physical punishment to lower negative childhood behavioral outcomes (Roopnarine, Jin, & Krishnakumar, 2014). In addition, many cases of child maltreatment are neither identified nor reported (Munro, 2011a,b). Because some forms of child maltreatment, such as the sexual abuse of minors under age 12, is inherently prohibited everywhere, the extent of the gap between reported cases and actual prevalence in the general child population is difficult to assess reliably. One objective of our study was to compare the current data from Suriname with data from the Netherlands (Netherlands’ Prevalence Study of Maltreatment of Children and Youth; NPM-2010; Euser et al., 2013) and the United States (National Incidence Study – 4; NIS-4; Sedlak et al., 2010). The NPM-2010 used the same study design as the NIS-4. Its estimates include children investigated by the CPS and maltreated children who were identified by professionals in a wide range of agencies in representative communities. These professionals, called ‘sentinels,’ were asked to identify children they believed were maltreated during the study period. Children identified by sentinels and those whose alleged maltreatment was investigated by the CPS during the same period were evaluated against a standardized definition of abuse and neglect. The NPM-2010 also
included a self-report study; the NIS-4 did not. One of the goals of the NPM-2010 was
to compare its self-reports with its sentinel reports and with the sentinel reports of the
NIS-4. Instead of making our own selection, we used the selection chosen by the trained
NPM-2010 coders, and the items therefore do not exactly match the NIS-4 definition.
Moreover, we are aware that we compared self-report data with sentinel data. Suriname
is linked to the Netherlands through its colonial history. Both countries speak the same
language. Most Surinamese families in the Netherlands have family members in Suriname
and visit Suriname regularly. Based on these facts, we decided to use the items selected
for the NPM-2010 and compare our data with the sentinel studies of the NPM-2010
and NIS-4. For financial and logistic reasons, it was not possible to collect this amount
of data in one year. MICS data from Suriname showed only a slight increase – from
84% in 2006 to 86% in 2010 – of children who were subjected to at least one form of
psychological or physical punishment (UNICEF; MICS-3, 2006; MICS-4, 2010). In other
words, no major differences were found between these years. However, only the topic of
punishment was investigated. We decided to select a nationally representative sample
and combined the data collected in 2008 and 2012–2013. We are aware that, for this
reason, the rates might not provide a fully representative picture of the year prevalence
of child abuse in Suriname.

Some limitations regarding the questionnaire should also be acknowledged. Several
of the questionnaire items seemed to be difficult for the younger and less educated
children among the adolescents. This might be a result of the low education level of
children in Suriname (Ministry of Education and Community Development in Suriname,
2004). Therefore, one of the researchers was always present to provide assistance to
the children. Differences between Suriname’s lingua franca (Sranan Tongo; General
Bureau Statistics, 2012) and the language of the questionnaire (Dutch) may have led
the participants to misunderstand some of the items. Because of the difficulty of the
questionnaire and the participants’ level of education, we decided to only include
children aged 12 years and older. Although children of all ages can be victims of abuse
or neglect, infants and young children are particularly vulnerable (DeVooght, McCoy-
Roth, & Freundlich, 2011). These children are not included in our study. Despite the
high percentages reflected in our results, the numbers of children that are or have been
victims of child maltreatment are presumably even higher. Given the survey design,
definitional issues, and sample characteristics, caution should be taken in generalizing
our results to a different time period and different age groups.
**Strengths**

Some clear strengths of the study should also be acknowledged. First, the 12–22 age range was selected on the assumption that the experience of childhood was sufficiently recent among this group and that they would be less likely than older adults to have experienced other major events in their lives, minimizing the risk of recall bias. Second, this self-report study yields reports of child maltreatment that would not conventionally come within the purview of child welfare or child protection services. It is recognized that rates of child abuse recorded by the police corps and child protection services are substantially lower than the prevalence in the population (Gilbert et al., 2009). The above-mentioned numbers of child abuse cases reported to the police corps in Paramaribo are arguably the ‘tip of the iceberg.’ This study made use of a broad assessment. Third, the total number of participants is representative of the population in Suriname.

**Conclusions**

This study was the first to address lifetime prevalence and year prevalence rates of child maltreatment in Suriname on a national and representative scale. Year prevalence rates based on the definition of child abuse adopted in the sentinel study of the NIS-4 show that 368 in 1,000 (36.8%) children had been abused during the past 12 months. Compared to proportions in the United States and the Netherlands, the rates in Suriname are high. The results suggest that prevention programs for child abuse and neglect are urgently needed in Suriname, especially because child maltreatment may have serious and often lifelong consequences. These consequences may justify a national approach, including a national strategic plan, a national surveillance system and changes to the state’s programmatic and policy response.
REFERENCES


SUPPLEMENT 2.1 TYPE OF MALTREATMENT

Sexual abuse

Within family
• Forced by adult to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me
• Adult had sex with me
• Sexual abuse by person under age
• Forced by person under age to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me

Outside family
• Sexual abuse by person under age
• Forced by adult to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me
• Forced by person under age to look at/touch his/her private parts or he/she tried to do this to me

Physical abuse (physical assault by parent)
• Hit with a fist or being kicked hard
• Thrown or knocked down
• Hit at bottom with belt or other hard object
• Beat up (hit the child over and over as hard as they could)
• Hit on some other part of the body besides the bottom with something like a belt, hairbrush, stick, or some other hard object
• Grabbed around the neck and choked
• Threatened with knife or gun
• Burned or scalded on purpose by glowing object

Emotional abuse (psychological aggression of parents)
• Parent threatened to spank or hit but did not actually do it

Conflicts between parents
• Parent has pushed the other (hard) or had gripped the other
• Parent has beaten the other
• Parent has kicked, bitten or punched the other
• Parent has tried to beaten the other with an object
• Parent has beaten up the other
- Parent has threaten the other with knife or gun
- Parent has used knife or gun to the other

**Neglect**
- No help of parent with homework
- Not stimulated by performance by parents
- Parents indifferent for problems at school
- Not reassured by grief by parents
- No help of parents when having problems
- Parents did not look after child looking properly
- Parents did not look after personal hygiene of child
- Parents did not look after regular schooling

**SUPPLEMENT 2.2 SOCIAL DESIRABILITY**
- I am always courteous even to people who are disagreeable
- There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone
- No matter who I’m talking to, I’m always a good listener
- I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own
- I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me
- It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged
- I am always willing to admit it when I make a mistake
- I sometimes feel resentful when I don’t get my way
- There have times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others
- I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget
- There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right
- On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability
- I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone’s feelings