Child abuse & neglect in Suriname

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Summary & general discussion
SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to provide scientific knowledge on the current situation of child abuse and neglect in Suriname. It provides information on the (year) prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Suriname, with particular attention to sexual abuse of children. It also gives insight into perceptions of the use and function of corporal punishment among young people and parents/caregivers from different ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, it pays attention to the prevention of child abuse through the implementation and evaluation of a parenting program. Finally, a tool that screens for posttraumatic stress disorder – one of the possible negative outcomes of child abuse – is examined in order to identify children at risk in an early stage after a (potential) traumatic event.

The current chapter provides a summary and discussion of the main findings of the previous chapters and will set out future directions for research and clinical practice.

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 starts off with the issue of child abuse. Child maltreatment, also referred to as child abuse and neglect, is defined by the World Health Organization as: “all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (World Health Organization, 2017). The protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (from here called: CRC). Yet violence remains a part of life for children around the globe – regardless of their economic and social circumstances, culture, religion, or ethnicity – with both immediate and long-term consequences. Factors identified to have a risk for child abuse include characteristics of the parents (e.g., substance abuse, mental health problems, early parenting) and child (e.g., disability, lower or retarded mental development), family circumstances (e.g., large families, limited parenting skills, intimate partner violence), and contextual factors (e.g., poverty, poor social network; Coulton, Crampton, Irwin, Spilsbury, & Korbin, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2009; MacKenzie, Kotch, & Lee, 2011; Sedlak et al., 2010). Prevalence rates are hard to assess, due to different methodologies, the lack of consensus of what constitutes child abuse and the hidden nature of child abuse. Data describing the prevalence of child abuse in all its forms are relatively less available in many low- and middle-income countries, such as Suriname. Estimates, however, show that 86% of children aged 2 till 14 years in Suriname are subjected to violence like (severe) corporal punishment during the month prior to the interview (UNICEF,
Suriname is no exception in the Caribbean region: a cross-national regional study involving 34 countries found that a majority of mothers in Jamaica, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana uses corporal punishment on children between 2 and 12 years of age (Cappa & Kahn, 2011). Since its commitment to the implementation of the CRC in 1993, the Government of the Republic of Suriname has planned, executed, and evaluated programmes to set and improve the basic conditions for its implementation. In 2016, however, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) expressed in her ‘Concluding Observations’ a serious concern about child abuse and neglect in Suriname, the lack of shelters for child victims and information on investigations of cases of child abuse and neglect. The Committee urged the State party to ensure the development of appropriate legislation, policies, and services for prevention and recovery (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016).

PREVALENCE OF CHILD ABUSE IN SURINAME

Chapter 2 provides the results of the national representative study of child abuse and neglect in Suriname. One thousand three hundred and ninety-one (1,391) adolescents and young adults of different ethnicities completed a questionnaire about child abuse. The study sample, obtained by random probability sampling, consisted of students (aged 12 through 22 years) from five districts in Suriname. Among the adolescents (aged 12 till 18 years), 57.1% were exposed to child abuse in the past year. 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 of Maltreatment of Children and Youth (NPM-2010, Euser et al., 2013), a selection of items from the questionnaire was used. In total, 13 items were considered by reliable coders (NPM-2010) to match 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. When this definition of child abuse was applied, 36.8% of adolescents reported having experienced at least one form of abuse in the past year. The Netherlands’ Prevalence Study on Maltreatment of Children and Youth and the National Incidence Study – 4 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: 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. Although most participants reported to have been exposed to violence by their parents, they might not feel they have been maltreated. The results, however, indicate (extremely) high prevalence rates of child abuse in Suriname. A national approach to child abuse
and neglect is recommended, including the development of a national strategic plan, a national surveillance, and monitoring system, and changes to the state programmatic and policy response.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN SURINAME

Chapter 3 provides the results of our national prevalence study, with a focus on child sexual abuse (CSA). One thousand hundred and twenty (1,120) adolescents (aged 12 till 18 years) of different ethnicities completed a questionnaire about child abuse, including CSA. Present study showed high prevalence rates for both adolescent boys and girls in all stages of adolescence, with an increased risk of CSA (year prevalence) as adolescence progresses. More than 16% of all boys and 15% of all girls indicated that they had been exposed to some form of CSA in the past 12 months. Girls reported significantly more CSA by a minor inside the family than boys (year prevalence: 3.6% vs. 0.7%). Boys reported more experiences of being touched or forced by a minor outside the family to look at/touch his private parts than girls (year prevalence: 8.3% vs. 4.1%). A significant portion of CSA constitutes peer-to-peer sexual victimization. It was concluded that CSA is a major public health problem in Suriname. Further research is needed. As the study relied upon children’s self-reported victimization and did not include any independent verification, a more objective, external evaluation is needed.

PERCEPTIONS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AMONG CREOLE AND MAROON ADOLESCENTS, CAREGIVERS AND PROFESSIONALS

Chapter 4 describes perceptions of corporal punishment (CP) among adolescent and adult community members from Creole and Maroon background, as well as from professionals from Creole and Maroon background working with children. In total, twelve focus group discussions were conducted. Our study showed how violent forms of disciplining children are widely accepted and practiced in Suriname. Both caretakers and adolescents considered CP at times to be a necessary and respected form of disciplining children. It should be allowed as a ‘last resort’ in keeping children on a path toward responsible citizenship and behaviour, and preventing them from getting involved in dangerous activities and unhealthy lifestyles. Participants saw CP as abuse when physical injuries emerge (‘when blood flows’). Furthermore, by saying ‘without a reason’, adolescents seemed to allude to a similar perspective among adults: CP is abuse
when it is carried out in a fit of anger and frustration. CP was not considered abuse as long it is interpreted as ‘in the best interest of the child’. In general, it was thought of as a form of child disciplining when nothing else – less painful, like inducing fear – works. Participants knew about the existence of the CRC and its ratification by Suriname, but there was a lack of knowledge about its content. Given the adverse effects of the use of CP, it is important that parents learn about the possible devastating consequences and that they are offered alternative (non-violent) ways of parenting. The wide availability of Internet could be exploited as a way of distributing information, in particular into less accessible areas.

PERCEPTIONS OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AMONG INDO CARIBBEAN ADOLESCENTS AND CAREGIVERS

In Chapter 5 a second qualitative study is described, in which 12 focus groups regarding perceptions of corporal punishment (CP) are conducted with adolescents and caregivers of Indo Caribbean background in Suriname. This study showed that CP is a key experience in the lives of most adolescents. There was no clear consensus regarding adolescents’ and caregivers’ perspectives on the parental use of CP. While participants generally accepted the use of CP as a parental right (though not a right of teachers however), the endorsement of CP was clearly contextually dependent. Mild CP was only acceptable for more serious transgressions. Rationales against CP centered on the potential for causing distress and pain to a child and aggressive behaviour later in life, the damage to the parent-child relationship, and the lack of constructive or instructional value inherent in the corrective strategy. While many participants hesitated to support efforts to prohibit CP in all settings legally, a number of them argued that such a ban could have helped in protecting children from parents who used CP excessively. Caregivers mentioned the lack of alternative parenting principles and the importance of the implementation of parenting programs before banning CP. Messages arising from this study could usefully inform the development of a public information campaign on safe, non-violent but still effective ways to disciplining children in Suriname. As the UNCRC in her Concluding Observations emphasizes, there is a need to create child-friendly environments that protect children from violence. Parents should be supported in healthy child rearing through a variety of easy to access means. Attitudes, which perpetuate the tolerance and condoning of violence towards children, the regulation of the depiction of violence by mass media included, should be challenged.
THE PARENTING PROGRAM ‘LOBI MI PIKIN’

Chapter 6 describes the study that aimed to implement a parenting program (‘Lobi Mi Pikin’; LMP) in Suriname as well as to evaluate its effects on corporal punishment (CP) and child behavioral problems. Parents/caregivers (N = 70) of children (aged 3 through 12 years) with externalizing behavioural problems participated in a protocolled parenting program. The child's behavioural problems and parenting style of the parent/caregiver were assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997; Dutch translation by Van Widenfelt, Goedhart, Treffers, & Goodman, 2003) and Parental Behaviour Scale - short version (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004; Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2010), pre- and post-treatment. Five-weeks' follow-up measures revealed significant positive effects of LMP on all outcome measures. Follow-up comparisons demonstrated a large reduction of (1) total child difficulties and (2) conduct problems, a moderate reduction of (3) hyperactivity and (4) emotional problems, a moderate to large increase in the (5) self-reported positive behaviour of the parent and a small decrease in the (6) use of CP. This study provides preliminary evidence that LMP may be an effective model of parent training in Suriname. Moreover, it can help guide efforts to reduce the use of CP and encourage positive parenting, thereby preventing child abuse. The major providers of early childhood experiences are parents. Supporting and strengthening the family will increase the likelihood of optimal childhood experiences. Key principles of brain development, child development, and caregiving should be integrated into public education.

SCREENING FOR PTSD IN SURINAME

Chapter 7 describes the investigation of a screening tool for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the Children’s Revised Impact of Event Scale (CRIES-13; Children and War Foundation, 1998; Dutch translation by Olff, 2005). Experiencing child abuse has been linked to a variety of negative consequences, including PTSD. In different settings, 65 children filled out the CRIES-13. All these children had been exposed to one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences during their lives. The Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for DSM-IV - Child and Parent Version (ADIS-C/P; Silverman & Albano, 1996; Dutch translation by Siebelink & Treffers, 2001) was administered to 26 children and their parents to assess PTSD. The CRIES-13 was shown to be a reliable and valid instrument to screen for PTSD in children in Suriname, having good face validity, good internal consistency, and high test-retest reliability. Furthermore, the CRIES-13 correlated well with the ADIS-C/P. A cut-off score of 30 emerged as the one striking the best balance
between sensitivity and specificity. We recommend instructing general practitioners and psychologists to use the instrument for children who might be at risk for PTSD in an early stage after a (potential) traumatic event and therefore offer treatment in order to prevent chronic symptoms.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

*Suriname today*

Suriname – fully independent since 1975 – is an upper middle-income country. The country was one of the Caribbean’s best performing economies over the last decade, largely due to its rich endowment in natural resources. The economy contraction has deepened in 2016, accompanied by currency depreciation and high rates of inflation. The economy is dominated by the mining industry, with exports of oil, gold, and alumina, making the economy highly vulnerable to mineral price volatility. Between 2012 and 2016 the country lost 80% of her mining revenues, impoverished seriously and has recently (2016) asked the International Monetary Fund for help (Ministry of Finance, March 2017). Most of Suriname’s population and economic activities are located in low-lying coastal areas that are vulnerable to rising sea levels, heavy rainfall, and strong winds. Most recent percentages show that 16% of all inhabitants are ‘material poor’ and 53% is at risk of being ‘material poor’ (Sobhie, De Abreu-Kisoens Singh, & Dekkers, 2016). Present-day Suriname is the home to many cultures. Its population (570,000 inhabitants) is composed of three relatively large ethnic groups. Today the Indo Caribbean makes up the largest ethnic group in Suriname (27%). The second largest group are the Maroons (22%), descendants from the slaves that escaped into the interior and established their own free societies there. The third largest group are the Creoles (16%). This term refers to persons of African descent who may often show some admixture with other ethnic groups (Sobhie, De Abreu-Kisoens Singh, & Dekkers, 2016). The official language (and the language of the former oppressor) is Dutch, but the widely and informal spoken language in the country is Sranan Tongo, a mix of Dutch, English and several other languages (World Factbook, 2017). Suriname shows a high rate of suicide in general, with the highest rates for girls and the second-highest rate for boys in the world (Kõlves & De Leo, 2014; Graafsma, Westra & Kerkhof, 2016). Trauma and abuse are found to be risk factors for suicide (Martin, Dykxhoorn, Afifi, & Colman, 2016). Also in this context, the high prevalence rates of child abuse and neglect in Suriname, as our thesis revealed, are worrying. Despite these high prevalence rates, child protection system and services in Suriname still are limited and ‘understaffed’ (Arends, 2016). Across Caribbean
ethnic groups, parenting has been described as a mix of indulgence and warmth in combination with harsh treatment of children (Leo-Rhynie, 1997). This includes the use of corporal punishment (Cappa & Kahn, 2011). Obedience, compliance, and respect are expected of children (Evans & Davies, 1997; Wilson, Wilson, & Berkeley-Caines, 2003), and according to some accounts, there is little praise or reward directed at children (Leo-Rhynie, 1997; Roopnarine, Bynoe, & Singh, 2004). A recent study across four predominantly Black Caribbean nations, however, reported different results (Lipps et al., 2012). Lipps and colleagues surveyed parenting styles experienced by nearly 2,000 Caribbean adolescents and presented that authoritative parenting, referring to strict parental standards for behaviour intertwined with a high degree of parental warmth, was the most common. This apparent cohort difference in the favoured parenting style may reflect an evolution of parenting styles among Caribbean parents.

The use of corporal punishment in parenting

The Caribbean presents an exclusive case with respect to research on child rights and child rights issues. It has been suggested that the legacy of slavery and colonialism may help to explain the social and cultural traditions that have hindered acceptance of the child rights movement (UNICEF, 2006). The focus groups of our thesis showed a widespread acceptance and use of corporal punishment (CP) as an appropriate form of disciplining and/or punishing children. Approval of CP among parents and caretakers was rooted in beliefs linking the use of CP with positive or neutral outcomes such as: ‘I was spanked in my childhood and look where I am today’, and that CP is believed to be effective when talking does not have the desired result. Also linked to approval were beliefs about the state of society: ‘today’s generation is worse off than previous ones and children have too much power’. This finding is congruent with an extended content analysis on beliefs and ideologies linked with approval of CP, showing that reasons for approval of the use of CP are linked with beliefs of positive outcomes (‘I was spanked and I am okay’), that spanking improves child behaviour, that spanking is more effective than other forms of discipline, and that spanking is not abuse (Taylor et. al, 2016). Some adolescents did express their views about whether they believed that CP was necessary, and many did underline a sense of responsibility for having been beaten, the result of them having done something wrong or in the very least as their own fault. This may reflect that, despite them not liking being beaten, they see it as necessary or appropriate similar to views reported in previous studies (Breen, Daniels, & Tomlinson, 2015; Simons & Wurtele, 2010). There was consensus that despite negative responses to CP, parents had the right to use this strategy in selective and appropriate circumstances. Significantly,
adolescents assigned the right of CP exclusively to their parents. Earlier research (Kish & Newcombe, 2015) identified some myths about harmlessness and effectiveness and necessity of CP. It was shown that such myths were predictive of intention to use CP. Changing those myths might lead to a reduction of the parental use of CP.

To support parents in the use of non-violent forms of parenting, thereby reducing the risk of child abuse, a parenting program called ‘Lobi Mi Pikin’ was implemented. The findings of this study provide encouraging results for parents who attended the program and their children. After completing the program, parents reported more positive behaviour towards their child(ren). They displayed a greater ability to discipline their children by using rules instead of CP and also reported fewer behavioural problems in their children. Several hypotheses about why these changes in the relation between the parents and their children occurred can be mentioned. It is assumed that parents and children are mutually influential in their emotions and behaviours. Intervening to change the character of parenting effectively changes the behavioural contingencies and patterns of responsivity in the parent-child relationship, subsequently leading to improvements in child behaviour (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Gardner, Hutchings, Bywater, & Whitaker, 2010; Masten & Schaffer, 2006). The increased self-regulation of the parents also may have caused a change in child behaviour. Children flourish when their parents and other caregivers provide a safe, predictable, and stimulating environment that encourages exploration and mastery. Maternal sensitivity at each period of development appears to promote adaptive functioning (Bradley & Corwyn, 2013; Bridgett, Burt, Edwards, & Deater-Deckard, 2015; Lee, 2010). Furthermore, increased parental social support and confidence may have resulted from sharing problems within a group context (Barlow, 2001; Patterson, Mockford, & Stewart-Brown, 2005). Still, some of the parents participating in the parenting program found it difficult to let go habits and ideas regarding the use of CP. For them, prohibiting CP felt as a violation of a right. This finding fits with earlier research, which revealed that adults who were physically punished as children themselves are more likely to accept and enforce CP on their own children, indicating the cyclical nature of CP in families (Bell & Romano, 2012). Some caregivers expressed in the focus groups their wishes to discipline their children in another (non-violent) way. They, however, lacked the skills to do so. The principles of LMP do not only ‘fit’ the principles of the CRC (respectful treatment of children, parenting goals, supporting parents in raising questions and learn to renounce violence), they also ‘fit’ local customs and wishes in Suriname, such as requirements for non-violent strategies and understanding and respect for longstanding habits. Internet could be a useful tool to reach parents in the interior, as no evidence based parenting programs are easily
available here. Parenting programs like LMP could provide them with evidence-based tools to discipline their children in a non-violent way.

Until now, there is no justification for the use of CP by parents and others enshrined in law in Suriname, but legal provisions against violence are not interpreted as prohibiting all CP in childrearing. The fact that CP is not yet unlawful in Suriname is likely to be both a cause and effect of the attitude towards violence against children (End Corporal Punishment Now, 2017). While noting the progress in prohibiting CP in schools through a ministerial decree, in 2016 the Committee on the Rights of the Child reiterates its previous recommendations that the State party: (a) amend its legislation to explicitly prohibit CP in all settings, and (b) strengthen and expand its efforts, through awareness-raising programs and campaigns, to promote non-violent forms of child-rearing, as well as expand parenting education programs, and training for principals, teachers and other professionals working with and for children (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016).

In our study, caregivers mentioned the lack of alternative parenting principles and the importance of the implementation of parenting programs before banning CP. Many adolescents also expressed some reluctance to ban CP. These views were primarily associated with the difficulties of monitoring parental behaviours in the home and the fear that parents could be imprisoned for using CP. Only a minority of adolescents was indisputably in favour of banning CP at home. In other words, tensions between the ‘law’ (CRC) and ‘everyday reality’ have been found. As in 2017, the ‘everyday reality’ in Suriname lags behind the law, as the CRC considers all forms of CP as violence that should be rejected.

**Sexual abuse of boys**

Sexual abuse as it affects boys has received little attention in the literature. The most recent extensive meta-analysis on the prevalence of sexual abuse across the world showed an overall prevalence rate of 13%, with a rate for girls (18%) being more than twice that of boys (8%; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). Our thesis, however, revealed unexpectedly high prevalence rates of sexual abuse for boys. The high year prevalence rates of sexual abuse for Caribbean boys stand out in comparison to other non-Caribbean countries (Jones, 2013). Several hypotheses about these high prevalence rates can be mentioned. Earlier research in the field of sexual behavior of Afro Surinamese adolescents in the interior of Suriname showed that boys generally start sexual activity earlier than girls and that the frequency of sexual contacts of boys is much higher than that of girls (Terborg, 2002; Guicherit & Bakboord, 2008). Like in other Caribbean countries, many researchers express the opinion that the onset
of sexual activity in Suriname is occurring at a young age (UNICEF, 2012; Heemskerk, 2013). In some villages in the rural interior there is mention of sexual initiation at the age of nine (Ministry of Health Suriname, 2012). Early sexual initiation and sexual risk-taking amongst adolescents is associated with sexual and physical abuse in early childhood (Heemskerk, 2013). Words used in the questionnaire (‘forced’, ‘things that I would consider abuse’) showed the abusive character of (some of) these sexual experiences. Masculine gender expectations – even more prevalent in Caribbean countries such as Suriname – teach boys they cannot be victims (Gardner, 2011). This might be a reason boys do not speak out in daily life. Boys are supposed to be competitive, resilient, self-reliant, and independent, but certainly not emotionally needy. ‘Real’ men initiate sexual activity and want sex whenever it is offered, especially when women/girls behave seductive. For them, acknowledging victimization implies admitting they are weak, ‘no real man’ (Easton, Saltzman, & Willis, 2014; Gardner, 2011). Our study possibly enhanced disclosure by using an anonymous self-reporting instrument administered outside of the home. Other reasons why victims in Suriname in general may not disclose sexual abuse in daily life are cultural barriers (e.g., reluctance of traditional and closed communities to involve outsiders in matters that are perceived to fall under the authority of local leaders; Arends, 2016), the acceptance of violence (e.g., corporal punishment of children), or the absence of police stations or emergency rooms to report a case (e.g., in the interior districts). In addition, frontline workers (such as teachers, nurses or social workers) who could potentially identify and report cases of sexual abuse may not have received the necessary training on early identification and subsequent counselling and treatment of victims (Arends, 2016). The fact that several studies showed that boys are affected just as often as girls (in Africa and Malaysia; Brown et al., 2009; Madu & Peltzer, 2001; Singh, Yiing, & Nurani, 1996) may indicate that previous research designs and methods might not have been adequately constructed to identify male victims or that boys face cultural and social barriers in reporting sexual abuse that are different from girls. In general, higher levels of reporting of sexual abuse are found when study questions are framed around behaviourally specific acts and are carried out in environments that promote honesty, safety, and privacy (Veenema, Thornton, & Corley, 2014). Further (qualitative) research should focus on (perceptions of sexual abuse, masculinity and sexuality of) male victims in Suriname.

The right to be heard & age of consent

The right to be heard is a child rights principle as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). According to Article 12 of the Convention, children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and their views have to be given due
weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. As a general principle, the child’s right to be heard reflects the concept of children’s ‘agency’, viewing children not only as vulnerable persons in need of special protection, but also as informed decision makers, rights holders and active members of society (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Our thesis showed that the CRC and its ratification changes the relations between generations for many communities in Suriname, as most people still believe that children have to respect their parents and should fulfil their ‘duties’ instead of speaking out. In particular in the rural areas, caregivers in our focus groups spoke about rights of children as something that they were not accustomed to. They also expressed the fear that when they do not apply CP their children might end up on the street. They worry that children’s rights have a harmful influence on their behaviour. By only talking and listening to children, they are afraid to relinquish control over their children for fear that their children might take over power in the parent-child relationship.

The age of consent is the minimum age at which an individual is considered legally old enough to consent to participation in sexual activity. Individuals aged 15 years or younger in Suriname are not legally able to consent to sexual activity, and such activity may result in prosecution for statutory rape or the equivalent local law. Suriname statutory rape law is violated when an individual has consensual heterosexual sexual contact with a person under age 16, or has consensual homosexual sexual contact with a person under age 18. Suriname does not have a close-in-age exemption. Close in age exemptions, commonly known as ‘Romeo and Juliet laws’ in the United States, are put in place to prevent the prosecution of individuals who engage in consensual sexual activity when both participants are significantly close in age to each other, and one or both partners are below the age of consent. Because there is no close-in-age exemption in Suriname, although this is rare, it is possible for two individuals both under the age of 16 who willingly engage in intercourse to both be prosecuted for statutory rape. Similarly, no protections are reserved for sexual relations in which one participant is a 15 year old and the second is a 16 or 17 year old (Age of Consent, 2017).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the studies in this thesis have provided new insights with regard to the current situation of child abuse and neglect in Suriname, they have also raised new questions. Several recommendations for future research are presented below.

First of all, our prevalence study (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) relied upon children’s self-reported victimization only. As there could have been tendency biases, a more objective,
external evaluation is needed. Furthermore, the influence and role of Social Media could be subject of further research. Qualitative research could focus on (perceptions of) sexual abuse of male victims. Furthermore, questions that include subjective terms such as ‘abuse’ should be replaced by descriptive situations, as those promote reporting and disclosure.

Second, a recommendation for future research regarding the focus groups (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) would be to use a ‘mixed methods’ approach to further explore the issues. Furthermore, the use of individual interviews as an adjunct to focus groups may provide a forum for going beyond exploring perspectives on these issues. Participants’ views on these issues could be incorporated into existing parenting programs that seek to provide support for parents. A possible avenue for intervention would be to discuss findings of studies such as this in the community, to explain and demonstrate alternative disciplinary strategies and to secure cooperation and provide support in using them.

Third, the availability of parenting programs like Lobi Mi Pikin (Chapter 6) is limited and many parents do not receive the educational support they need. Probably a variety of programs are needed, directed to parents with children in different age groups. Challenges will be the inclusion of fathers and the development of low-cost ways of disseminating essential parenting skills. The wide availability of Internet could be exploited as a way of distributing information, in particular into less accessible areas. Furthermore, programs for parents of adolescents (12 years and older) should be developed and evaluated as well. Further research should also aim to explore the factors that affect parenting program attendance, as well as responsiveness to the intervention. Overall, dropouts and children not sent to school should be included in research as well.

**FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

The high prevalence rates of child abuse and neglect in Suriname revealed in this thesis, in general suggest that investment in a comprehensive national approach is urgent, especially because of the serious and often lifelong consequences child abuse may imply. In this thesis, a tool that screens for posttraumatic stress disorder – one of the possible negative outcomes of child abuse – was examined in order to identify children at risk in an early stage after a (potential) traumatic event. Corporal punishment, though considered in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a violation of the integrity and dignity of the child, is still widely accepted and applied in Suriname, despite growing knowledge of its harmful consequences. The implementation of the CRC, however, may have accelerated the discussion about corporal punishment in Suriname. In this
thesis, parents/caregivers expressed the need for educational support in developing non-violent forms parenting. The implemented parenting program ‘Lobi Mi Pikin’ (LMP) described in this thesis provides preliminary evidence that LMP may be an effective model of parent training in Suriname. Moreover, it can help guide efforts to reduce the use of CP and encourage positive parenting, thereby preventing child abuse. Clearly, a differentiated set of parenting programs should become widely and easily available in the country, also in the less accessible interior.
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