

Child Protection



Life Course Approach to Child Protection and Dignity



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INTRODUCTION



Protecting Children Through Every Stage of Life

Key Message

A life course approach recognises that children’s health, safety, wellbeing and dignity are shaped by experiences, risks and protective factors across every stage of development — from pregnancy and early childhood through adolescence and adulthood.

Why it Matters

- Early experiences influence lifelong health and wellbeing
- Violence, neglect and exploitation have long-term effects
- Prevention and early intervention are more effective than crisis response
- Child protection is everyone’s responsibility



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UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE COURSE APPROACH



A life course approach focuses on:

- Continuous protection and support throughout all stages of life
- Addressing risks early before harm escalates
- Building resilience and protective environments
- Providing integrated services across sectors

Core Principles

- Prevention
- Early identification
- Timely intervention
- Continuity of care
- Intersectoral collaboration
- Dignity and human rights



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WHY IS LIFE COURSE APPROACH IMPORTANT IN CHILD PROTECTION



South African Context

- Rising adolescent pregnancies
- Persistent child abuse and neglect
- Statutory rape concerns
- Mental health and psychosocial challenges
- Violence in homes and communities
- Gaps in reporting and coordinated response systems

Impact Across the Life Course

Children exposed to abuse and trauma are at higher risk of:

- Poor educational outcomes
- Mental health conditions
- Substance abuse
- Violence exposure
- Chronic health conditions
- Poverty and social exclusion



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THE LIFE COURSE STAGES



Protection Across Developmental Stages

1. Pregnancy and Infancy

- Maternal health and wellbeing
- Safe and nurturing environments
- Parenting support
- Birth registration and early health services

2. Early Childhood

- Early childhood development
- Protection from neglect and violence
- Nutrition and stimulation
- Safe caregiving environments

Newborns and
Children

Adolescents

Adulthood

Older age



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...Continuation.



3. Middle Childhood

- School safety
- Bullying prevention
- Emotional wellbeing
- Community support system

4. Adolescence

- Sexual and reproductive health services
- Prevention of adolescent pregnancy
- Prevention of statutory rape and GBV
- Mental health support
- Youth empowerment and participation

5. Transition to Adulthood

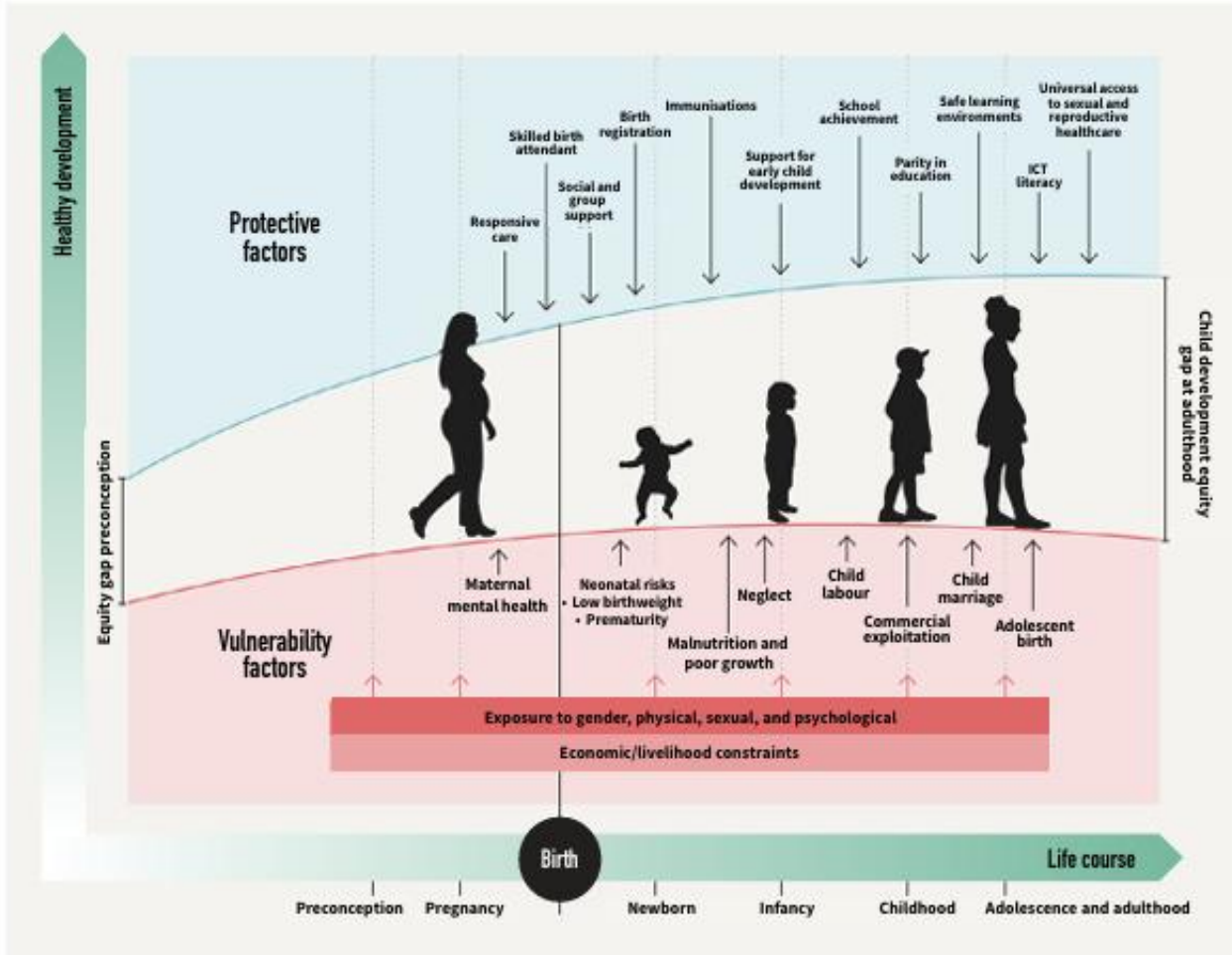
- Economic empowerment
- Healthy relationships
- Continued psychosocial support
- Breaking cycles of violence and abuse



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CHILD PROTECTION RISKS ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE



Common Risks

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect
- Exploitation
- Human trafficking
- Online exploitation
- Substance abuse exposure
- Harmful cultural and social practices

Source: Adapted from Clark H, Coll-Seck AM, Banerjee A, Peterson S, Dalglish SL, Ameratunga S et al. A future for the world's children? A WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission. Lancet. 2020;395(10224):605–58. doi: 10.1016/S0140 6736(19)32540-1



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THE ROLE OF HEALTH SECTOR



Prevention and Awareness

- Health education campaigns
- Community outreach
- Radio and social media engagement

Early Identification

- Screening for abuse and neglect
- Risk assessments
- Identification of vulnerable children

Mandatory Reporting

- Reporting suspected abuse and statutory rape
- Strengthening accountability mechanisms
- Referral pathways and case management

Service Delivery

- Adolescent and Youth-Friendly Services
- Psychosocial support
- Clinical management and referrals



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INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION



From
episodic
care

To continuous
care

From
fragmented
programmes

To person-
centered
integrated
care

From
coverage of
some life
stages

To coverage
across the life
course

Why Collaboration Matters

- No single sector can address child protection alone
- Integrated responses improve outcomes
- Shared accountability strengthens protection systems



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ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND STATUTORY RAPE



Strengthening Prevention and Response:

Key Concerns

- Rising adolescent pregnancy rates
- Underreporting of statutory rape
- Limited awareness of reporting obligations
- Social and economic vulnerabilities

Prevention Strategies

- Comprehensive sexuality education
- Access to reproductive health services
- Parent and caregiver engagement
- Youth empowerment programmes
- Community awareness campaigns



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COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION AND AWARENESS



Protecting Children is Everyone's Responsibility:

Community Actions

- Speak out against abuse
- Report suspected cases
- Support vulnerable families
- Promote positive parenting
- Create safe environments for children

Communication Platforms

- Radio campaigns
- Social media
- Community dialogues
- Schools and faith-based platforms
- Webinars and knowledge-sharing sessions



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BUILDING A DIGNITY-CENTRED SYSTEM



Protecting Dignity Through the Life Course:

What Dignity Means

- Respect
- Protection
- Inclusion
- Safety
- Voice and participation
- Equal access to services

A Dignity-Centred Response Includes

- Trauma-informed care
- Respectful engagement
- Confidentiality
- Child participation
- Non-discrimination



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MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Measuring Progress:

Indicators

- Cases identified and reported
- Referral and response times
- Awareness campaign reach/coverage
- Access to services
- Community participation

Strengthening Accountability

- Regular reporting
- Intersectoral review meetings
- Continuous learning and improvement

KEY TAKE HOME MESSAGES



- Child protection is a shared responsibility
- Prevention must start early and continue throughout life
- Every child deserves dignity, safety and protection
- Early intervention changes lifelong outcomes
- Strong partnerships strengthen child protection systems
- Protecting children today protects the future of South Africa



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CLOSING REFLECTIONS



Let us stand together in protecting the dignity, safety and future of every child — because every child matters through every stage of life.

Black for Dignity: Protecting Dignity through the Life Course



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