

A public-health campaign to raise awareness of children's wellbeing with images drawn by children

Patricia Frenz, Carolina Videla

Lancet 2005; 366: 1324-29
Ministry of Health, MacIver
541, Santiago, Chile
(P Frenz MD); and Dirección de
Salud, Corporación Municipal de
San Joaquín, Santa Rosa 2606,
Santiago, Chile (C Videla MSc)

Correspondence to:
Dr Patricia Frenz
pfrenz@minsai.cl

Child protection is an important social issue in Chile. In response to the results of a study¹ that showed that, in 2000, 74% of children living in Chile were maltreated in their homes, the Metropolitan South Health Service called on the primary-care units in the municipalities of South Santiago under its control to develop a comprehensive programme of interventions, the objective of which was to strengthen family relationships and to lend support to families and children vulnerable to abuse.

In response to the call for action, the health and education units of San Joaquín began work on a programme called Skills for Life.² Results of preliminary research done as part of the programme showed that one in every four children aged 6-9 years was affected in some way by violence—including family and peer violence—that interfered with their adaptation to the schoolroom setting or with the establishment of good family relationships. The Skills for Life intervention was designed to strengthen the school environment by making it conducive to learning and by protecting children's mental health. As a starting point, and to trigger community awareness of violence against children, the Health Promotion Unit of the municipality undertook a campaign to promote the wellbeing of children.

Through a process of social communication, focused on the most vulnerable sectors, the message the Health Promotion Unit decided to endorse was "*trato digno y respetuoso hacia los niños*". Since *trato* in Spanish means both treatment and contract, the idea was to promote a contract for dignified and respectful treatment between parents and children. The overall objective was "to modify the manner in which significant adults relate to children, by recognising their dignity, guaranteeing their rights and respecting their integrity as autonomous individuals".²

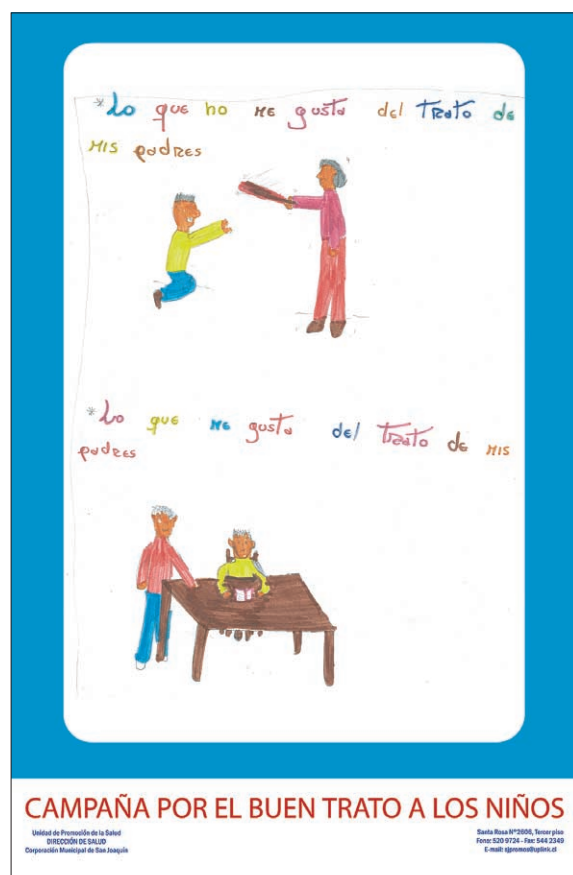
In November, 2003, the programme invited children aged 8-12 years who attended San Joaquín's municipal schools to express, through letters and drawings, their emotions with respect to what they liked and disliked about how their parents treated them. Of the 100 drawings received by the Health Promotion Unit, 30 have been published as posters. From March, 2004, the posters, examples of which are printed here, have been displayed in family health-care centres, elementary schools, and public kindergartens in San Joaquín. The drawings are so expressive and the emotions revealed have such force that the posters were framed with colour, but were otherwise unaltered.

The drawings confirm the findings of the 2000 UNICEF study, in that they illustrate the prevalence, types of abuse, and the effect violence has on family dynamics. The children spontaneously and simply drew pictures to describe their feelings of sadness and pleasure in response to the daily treatment they received from their parents. The aspect they most valued in their



"I don't like it when my parents argue"

"Parents who love their children should not argue in their presence. When the children come closer, they are smiling, they love their family and the day is filled with colour." Marta Sanders, Midwife, Head of the Women's Health Programme, Sor Teresa de los Andes Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

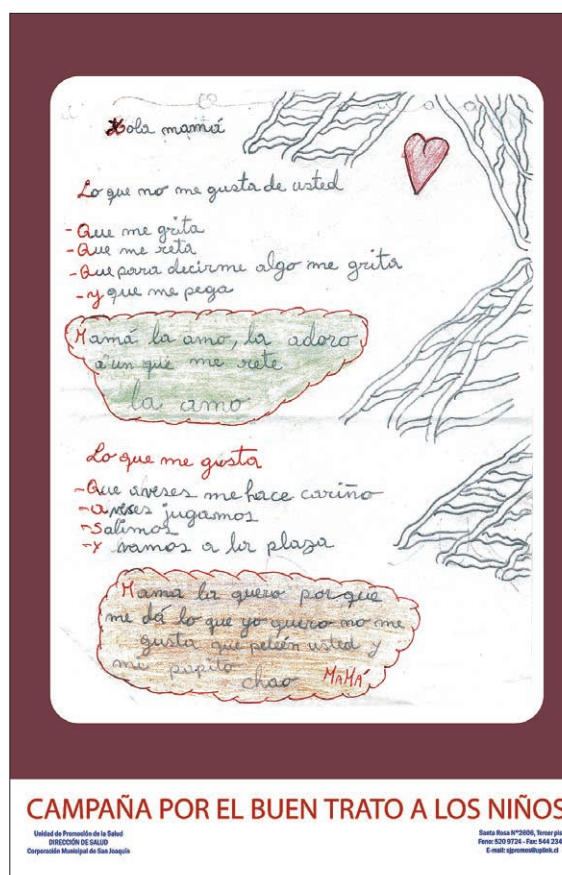


"What I don't like about the way my parents treat me": adult with a bat standing over kneeling child; "What I like about the way my parents treat me": parent standing next to child reading

"This is a double message, because on the one hand the father supports, loves, and wants to help the child, but on the other he punishes him. The child does not understand this and wants good treatment." Gloria Acevedo, Nurse, Head of the Child Programme, San Joaquín Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

relationships with their parents was affection, expressed through touch, words, or day-to-day activities. By contrast, they identified as bad treatment: scolding, shouting, insults, physical blows, lack of confidence in their abilities, and indifference. The children also pointed out family violence, generally by the father against the mother, and abandonment by either parent.

At the same time that these children were asked to take part in the Skills for Life programme, parents, health-care workers, and teachers were asked to sign a moral pledge to look after the wellbeing of the children in their care. In March, 2004, individuals involved with the programme convinced 90% of teachers working with 6–8-year olds to put up campaign posters in their classrooms. In that month, the pledge was distributed to 21 classes, and 397



"Hello, mum. What I don't like about you: you yell at me, you scold me, when you want to tell me something you shout, you hit me. (Mum, I love you, I adore it when you don't scold me.) What I like about you: sometimes you cuddle me, at times we play, we go out, we go to the plaza. (Mum I love you because you give me what I want, I don't like it when you and dad fight. Bye, mum.)"

"For the child, the mother is the pillar of the family, therefore it is important if the mother mistreats them. But the child returns the maltreatment with acts of love (kind words and drawings of hearts). The child needs to feel loved by the parents." Veronica Alvarez, Nurse, Head of the Child Health Programme, Sor Teresa de los Andes Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

of 1097 possible parents enlisted. Between March and October, 2004, the three family health-care centres in the municipality obtained 457 signed pledges. The public kindergartens obtained 221 pledges and are holding workshops with parents on communication and emotional wellbeing.

In 2005, San Joaquín has been rotating the campaign posters in the family health-care centres and schools, and will continue to work with families and community organisations, though a series of interventions, to build a healthier paradigm for family and interpersonal relationships.

"What I most like about my parents is when they take me to the playground. What I don't like is that they hit me and yell at me"

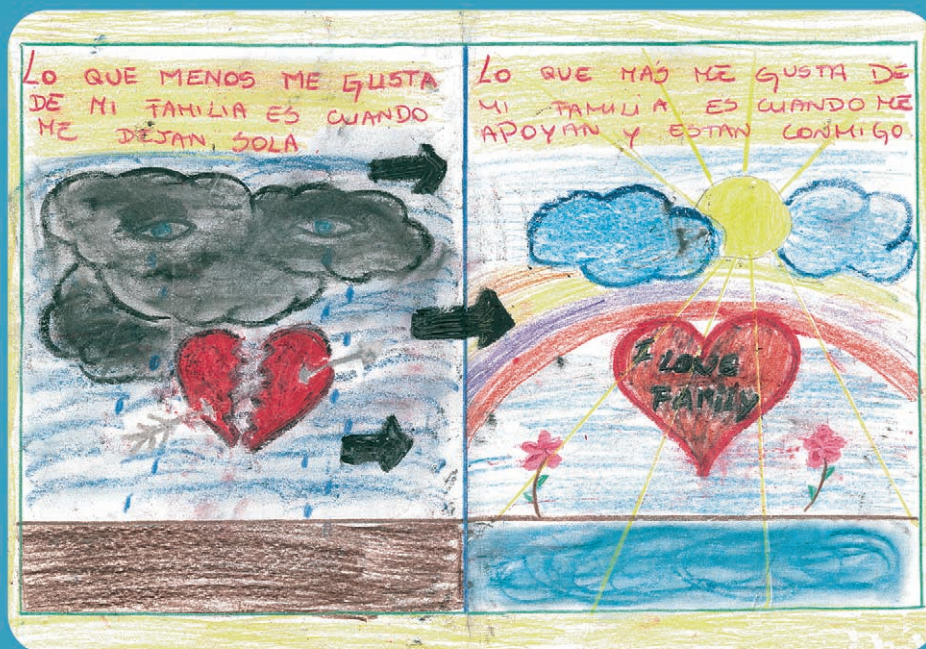
"The child who made this drawing captured two fundamental aspects of growing up; the formative, expressed in recreational activities that permit us to expand ourselves socially, and the corrective, that places us in the normative. In this case, as in many others, it conveys excessive suffering because it is associated with physical punishment. It is so important to understand that the corrective is much more formative if it is realised in a context of good treatment; treatment that is firm but tender." Carolina Valenzuela, Psychologist, Skills for Life Programme, San Joaquín Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.



"I don't like it when my parents scold me and call me stupid"

"This is a direct message in the child's own language, that depicts a daily situation. The child sees more than physical maltreatment, he sees the psychological." Gloria Acevedo, Nurse, Head of the Chile Health Programme, San Joaquín Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.





"What I least like about my family is when they leave me alone. What I most like about my family is when they support me and are with me"

"This picture [...] gives me energy and motivates me to educate as part of my work, because it conveys the need to give people simple tools to enable them to express affection and love. I feel that families sometimes seem 'stormy', but it is easier than one might 'feel' to let the sun shine." Carolina Andaur, Family Physician, Head of the Child Health Programme, Dr Baeza Goni Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

Unidad de Promoción de la Salud
DIRECCIÓN DE SALUD
Corporación Municipal de San Joaquín

CAMPAÑA POR EL BUEN TRATO A LOS NIÑOS

Santa Rosa N° 2006, Tercer piso
Fono: 520 9724 - Fax: 544 2349
E-mail: ajpromos@plink.cl



"What I don't like about my parents": image of adult whipping child

"You see a punishing, destructive, and violent father figure, who probably imposes on the child an impoverished self-image, unprotected and without control. It appears to be a recurrent situation because of the great detail (the intricate tiled floor) and perfection achieved in the drawing. Under these circumstances, what chances exist to build a positive and healthy self-image?"

Carolina Rivera, María Ester González, Florencia Badtke, Psychologists, Skills for Life Programme, San Joaquín Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

Unidad de Promoción de la Salud
DIRECCIÓN DE SALUD
Corporación Municipal de San Joaquín

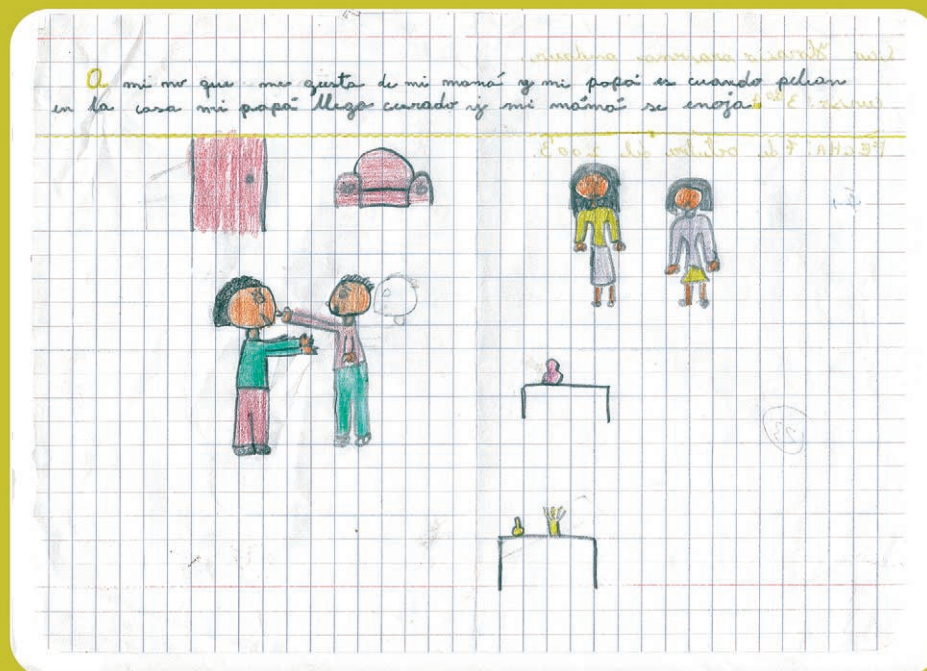
CAMPAÑA POR EL BUEN TRATO A LOS NIÑOS

Santa Rosa N° 2006, Tercer piso
Fono: 520 9724 - Fax: 544 2349
E-mail: ajpromos@plink.cl

"I don't like it when my mum and dad fight in the house my dad arrives home drunk and my mum gets mad"

"The impression is that the children suffer from the violence between the parents.

The message is that children are not indifferent to violence in the home." Gloria Acevedo, Nurse, Head of the Child Programme, San Joaquín Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.



Unidad de Promoción de la Salud
DIRECCIÓN DE SALUD
Corporación Municipal de San Joaquín

CAMPAÑA POR EL BUEN TRATO A LOS NIÑOS

Santa Rosa N°2606, Tercer piso
Fono: 520 9724 - Fax: 544 2349
E-mail: ajpromos@uplink.cl

"What don't I like about the way my parents treat me?"

Mother: "I'll pull your hair until it hurts". Child: "It hurts"

"I feel sad and ashamed by the situation, that I think reflects so clearly how easy it is to learn violence and physical chastisement when one is a child, that surely repeats itself as an adult. Also the child seems so disadvantaged before his mother."

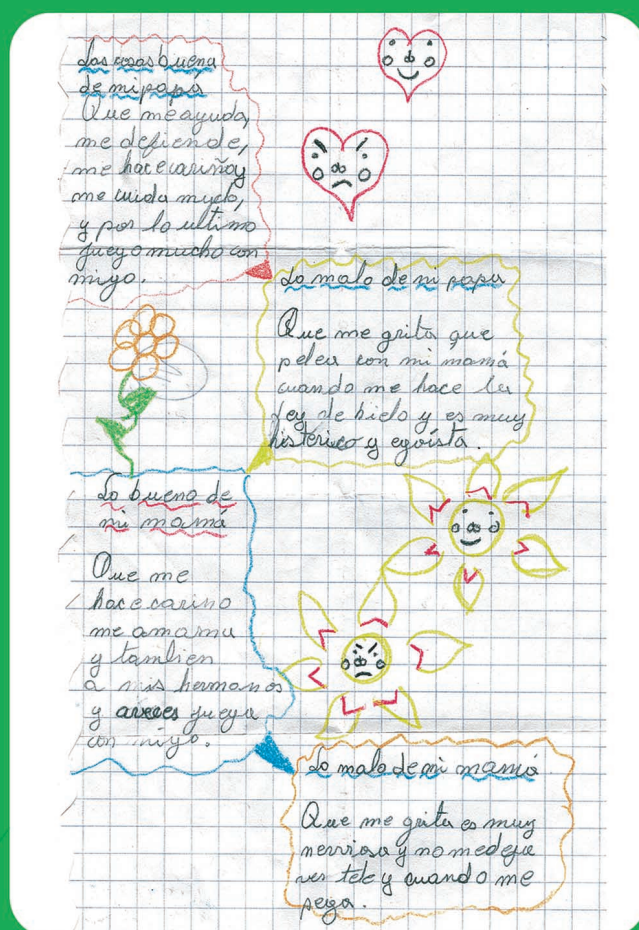
Carolina Andaur, Family Physician, Head of the Child Health Programme, Dr Baeza Goñi Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.



Unidad de Promoción de la Salud
DIRECCIÓN DE SALUD
Corporación Municipal de San Joaquín

CAMPAÑA POR EL BUEN TRATO A LOS NIÑOS

Santa Rosa N°2606, Tercer piso
Fono: 520 9724 - Fax: 544 2349
E-mail: ajpromos@uplink.cl



"The good things about my dad: he helps me, he defends me, he cuddles me, he cares for me a lot, and, finally, he plays with me. The bad things about my dad: he shouts at me, he fights with my mum, when he doesn't speak to me (expressed as the law of ice), and he is hysterical and selfish. The good things about my mum: she cuddles me, she loves me and my brothers, and sometimes plays with me. The bad things about my mum: she shouts at me, she gets very nervous, she doesn't let me watch TV, and when she hits me"

"Observing this drawing, one can measure the importance children assign to the presence of the father and the mother, sharing together with them, and how distressing it is when parents don't speak to children or when they raise their voices to call them to attention."

Consuelo Albornoz, Midwife, Head of the Women's Health Programme, Dr Baeza Goñi Family Health Centre, San Joaquín, Chile.

CAMPAÑA POR EL BUEN TRATO A LOS NIÑOS

Unidad de Promoción de la Salud
DIRECCIÓN DE SALUD
Corporación Municipal de San Joaquín

Santa Rosa N°2606, Tercer piso
Fono: 520 9724 - Fax: 544 2349
E-mail: sjpromes@uplink.cl

The health-care workers who developed the campaign under the coordination of the San Joaquín Health Promotion Unit selected the winning drawings on the basis of the messages transmitted, the feelings evoked, and the images portrayed; some of their comments accompany the posters printed in this essay. The general perception is that the emotions expressed by the children relate to the quality of their relationships with their parents. Good treatment is not associated with money or material elements, but with affection and shared activities, such as going to the playground.

Conflict of interest statement

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

The campaign described was funded by the Ministry of Health through the Metropolitan South Health Service.

References

- 1 Larrain S, Vega J, Degado I. Estudio comparativo sobre maltrato infantil: 1994 y 2000. Santiago: UNICEF, 2001. http://www.unicef.cl/archivos_documento/19/maltrato%20final.ppt (accessed Aug 2, 2005).
- 2 La escuela un contexto protector de la salud mental de los niños: Programa Habilidades para la Vida. Informa Final de Gestión 2003. San Joaquín: Dirección de Salud, Corporación Municipal de Desarrollo Social de San Joaquín, 2004.