

Times Colonist (Victoria)

Project aims to improve children's rights; UVic professor is leading development of new tool to report on child welfare

Sat Aug 27 2016

Page: A3

Section: Capital & Van. Isl.

Byline: Richard Watts

Source: Times Colonist

Canadian children are the focus of so many programs coast to coast that it's almost impossible to know how kids are faring nationwide, says a University of Victoria researcher.

Ziba Vaghri, assistant professor in the school of public health and social policy, said it's difficult to even determine how well Canada complies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

"Our reports are often delayed, and when they are not delayed, they are not done in a comprehensive manner and so those reports will look like they come from 13 different countries," Vaghri said.

"Quebec will talk about child care, B.C. will talk about child health, and the Northwest Territories will talk about foster care. They are not cohesive and they don't make for reports from one nation."

Vaghri was speaking from Calgary, where 1,500 children's rights experts from around the world are gathering for the International Congress for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

It's also where she announced GlobalChild, a five-year project to develop a computer platform to keep track of Canada's performance on child welfare. It was

recently supported by \$1.1 million from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Vaghri said the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a charter establishing the economic, social, civil, health and cultural rights of children, requires regular reporting by signatory nations in upholding those rights.

But there can be problems, including skipped reports, lack of compliance with the reporting guidelines, and gaps in data, all of which make it difficult for the UN committee to recommend improvements.

GlobalChild should help with Canada's reporting requirement. Its developers hope it will help identify strengths and weaknesses in government policies and processes that impact children.

The project will be piloted in B.C., in a First Nation community elsewhere in Canada and in a French-speaking region. Once developed, it will be available for use by other countries.

GlobalChild will be developed in close collaboration with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which receives, reviews and advises on the reports from the signatories.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. B.C.'s

representative for children and youth, welcomed the news of Vaghri's work and the establishment of GlobalChild.

"We need to do more focused reporting on the rights of children in Canada and to be consistent with international metrics," she said.

"Canada and B.C. are not really prepared to do that now."

Vaghri said GlobalChild will establish a multi-layered reporting methodology by asking and answering a series of questions to reveal how well Canada is meeting its responsibilities to children. For example, one layer involves federal and provincial governments: Have they have established policies or laws committing themselves to upholding children's right to education?

If so, what programs or budget allocations have been made to fulfil those commitments? Finally, what is happening to children who interact with those education programs? How many are enrolled in preschool, elementary and high school? What are the graduation rates and how many are successfully transitioning to employment or post-secondary education? Vaghri said she hopes Global-Child will also help identify specific populations of children who are not faring as well and the barriers that prevent them from achieving the same success as children elsewhere in Canada.

By poverty measurements used by the United Nations, Canada's performance as a place for children is mediocre at best, Vaghri said: Of the 41 most affluent nations in the world, Canada ranks 24th in child-poverty levels. The countries behind Canada are either in conflict or in Eastern

Europe.

"We are not doing that well in terms of economic equity for children in Canada," she said. "We could do better.

"For an affluent country, a rich country that is at the top of the game in terms of leadership and being involved in international aid and donation to other countries, we are not meeting the needs of our own children."

rwatts@timescolonist.com