

The Effectiveness of Substantive Criminal Protection for Children Between the Texts of National Legislation and the Specificity of International Conventions

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Received: 25/01/2025 ; Accepted: 14/04/2025 Published: 02/07/2025

Abstract:

This intervention focuses on examining the punitive system directed at protecting children, through a comparison between what was approved by the Algerian legislator and what was stipulated in international conventions (such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989). The study seeks to discover the legal loopholes in criminalizing modern forms of violence, and the extent to which national criminal policy responds to the need to tighten penalties for crimes in which the child is a vulnerable party, leading to providing a legal vision to enhance means of deterrence and protection.

Keywords: children's rights; criminal protection; international agreements; legislative policy; comparative law.

Introduction

Children are considered the fundamental building blocks in the construction of societies and the future of nations. Their upbringing and

development are contingent upon providing a safe environment for their growth. Therefore, national legislations and international conventions have given significant attention to the protection of this vulnerable group, recognizing the sensitivity of childhood and its need for special care. Criminal protection stands out as one of the most important forms of this care, as it aims to criminalize acts that harm the physical, psychological, and moral safety of children, and to impose deterrent penalties on perpetrators.

This protection is embodied in an integrated legal system, starting from constitutional texts that guarantee the fundamental rights of the child, passing through penal laws that define criminalized acts and their prescribed penalties, and finally reaching specialized laws concerned with protecting children from specific phenomena such as violence or exploitation.

In this context, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 emerged as a

fundamental international reference, establishing a comprehensive framework for child rights and obliging signatory states to adopt policies and legislations that guarantee these rights.

This study focuses on examining the punitive system directed at protecting children, through a comparison between what was approved by the Algerian legislator and what was stipulated in international conventions, especially the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. The comparative study aims to discover the extent of the effectiveness of substantive criminal protection for children in national legislation and the extent of this legislation's responsiveness to international obligations. It also seeks to identify potential legal loopholes in criminalizing modern forms of violence and the extent of the national criminal policy's ability to tighten penalties for crimes in which the child is a vulnerable party.

Accordingly, this study raises the following main problem: What is the extent of the effectiveness of substantive criminal protection for children in Algerian legislation compared to the obligations stipulated in international conventions, and what are the legal loopholes that hinder this protection in the face of emerging crimes?

To answer this problem, the study will adopt the comparative analytical method, which allows for the analysis of national and international legal texts and their comparison to reveal similarities and differences, and to

assess the extent of compatibility between them. The descriptive method will also be used to provide a comprehensive overview of the legal framework for criminal protection for children.

To achieve the objectives of the study, it will be divided into two main sections:

Section One: Conceptual and International Framework for Substantive Criminal Protection for Children

Section Two: The Effectiveness of National Criminal Policy in Confronting Modern Crimes Against Children

Each section will be detailed into two requirements, and each requirement into two branches, as follows:

Section One: Conceptual and International Framework for Substantive Criminal Protection for Children

Criminal protection for children is considered a fundamental pillar in building a sound society. It requires a deep understanding of the concepts associated with it, in addition to reviewing the international framework that guides national legislations in this field. This section aims to analyze the nature of substantive criminal protection for children in international conventions and how it is enshrined in Algerian national legislation, through two main requirements.

Requirement One: The Nature of Substantive Criminal Protection for Children in International Conventions

International conventions have given great attention to the rights of the child and have established solid foundations for his substantive criminal protection through general principles and mechanisms of criminalization and punishment aimed at ensuring his dignity and safety. This requirement is considered a review of these foundations, divided into two branches.

Branch One: Principles of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child - Best Interests, Right to Life and Development

The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 is considered one of the most important international instruments that enshrined the rights of the child. It was based on several fundamental principles that formed a cornerstone in the protection of this group. Among the most prominent of these principles are:

1 The Principle of the Child's Best Interests: This principle, stated in Article 3 of the Convention, stipulates that "in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." This

principle obliges all concerned parties to place the child's interest above any other consideration when making decisions that affect him, whether these decisions are legislative, administrative, or judicial. This means that any legal text or procedure related to the child must primarily aim to achieve the maximum benefit for him and avoid any potential harm.¹

2 The Right to Life, Survival, and Development: Article 6 of the Convention guarantees that "every child has the inherent right to life." States Parties undertake to ensure "to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." This right is not limited to mere survival but extends to include the right to healthy physical, mental, psychological, and social development. This principle requires states to take all necessary measures to protect the child from any acts that may threaten his life or hinder his natural development, including providing a safe environment, education, and health care. Crimes that target the child's life or physical integrity are considered a blatant violation of this principle and necessitate strict criminal protection.²

3 The Principle of Non-Discrimination: Article 2 of the Convention stipulates that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present

¹ United Nations. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

² People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. Ordinance No. 66-156 containing the Penal Code, as amended and supplemented.

Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status." This principle implies that criminal protection for children must apply to all children without exception, and there should be no discrimination in providing this protection or in applying the law due to any of these factors. This means that all children, regardless of their circumstances, are entitled to the same level of legal protection from crimes.

4 The Right not to be Subjected to Violence, Abuse, and Neglect: Article 19 of the Convention is considered one of the pivotal articles in the criminal protection of children, as it stipulates that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." This text places a clear obligation on states to criminalize all forms of violence and abuse against children and to provide effective mechanisms for reporting,

investigation, and judicial prosecution of perpetrators of these crimes. It also emphasizes the state's responsibility to protect children from all harmful acts.³

5 Rehabilitation of Victims: In addition to criminalization and punishment, international conventions emphasize the need to provide support and rehabilitation programs for child victims of crimes to help them overcome the physical and psychological trauma they have been exposed to. These programs should include psychological and social support, health care, and legal assistance, as well as reintegration into society. The goal is to ensure that the child victim can resume a normal life and that his future is not affected by the crimes he has been exposed to.

All these mechanisms form a comprehensive framework for states to develop their national legislations, ensuring effective criminal protection for children that is consistent with international standards and responds to the evolving challenges in this field.

Requirement Two: Enshrining Criminal Protection for Children in National (Algerian) Legislation

Algerian legislation, like other national legislations, has been influenced by international conventions related to child rights, and has sought to enshrine its principles

³ Boulehia Shahira. Children's Rights between International Conventions and Algerian Penal Law: A

Comparative Study. Alexandria: Dar Al-Jami'a Al-Jadeeda, 2011. p. 148

and mechanisms in its legal system. This requirement aims to review the constitutional and legal references for criminal protection for children in Algeria and the scope of this protection in the Penal Code, through two branches.

Branch One: Constitutional and Legal References - Law No. 15-12 related to Child Protection

The constitutional and legal references are considered the basis for criminal protection for children in Algeria, as the Algerian constitution guarantees child rights, and special laws have been issued to enhance this protection.⁴

1 Constitutional Reference: The Algerian constitution is considered the supreme document in the country. It has stipulated general principles that guarantee human rights, including child rights. Despite the absence of a detailed and explicit text regarding child rights in previous constitutions, the current constitution (amendment of 2020) has given greater attention to this group. Article 44 of the constitution states that "the family is the basic cell of society. It is protected by law. The state protects childhood and old age." This text is considered a constitutional basis for the state's commitment to child protection, and it obliges

the legislator to issue the necessary laws to achieve this protection.⁵

2 Law No. 15-12 related to Child Protection: Law No. 15-12, dated July 15, 2015, related to child protection, is considered a turning point in the Algerian legal system for child protection. This law came to enhance legal protection for children and to harmonize national legislation with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, which Algeria ratified. This law has defined a child as "any person who has not reached the age of eighteen years," a definition that is consistent with the one stated in the international convention. The law has included comprehensive provisions related to child protection from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and has established mechanisms for prevention, intervention, and care for children at risk. It also stipulated aggravated penalties for perpetrators of crimes against children and established specialized bodies for child protection, such as the National Body for the Promotion and Protection of Childhood.

3 Algerian Penal Code: The Algerian Penal Code is considered the general framework for criminalization and punishment in the country.⁶ It has included many texts that concern child protection. In the second chapter

⁴ Souikat Belkacem. "The Criminal Protection of the Child in Algerian Law." Doctoral Thesis, University of Ouargla, 2014, p. 128.

⁵ Constitutional Amendment 2020 to the 1996 Constitution. People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Law No. 15-12 of July 15, 2015, on the Protection of the Child. Official Gazette No. 39.

⁶ Mesika Mohamed. "The Legal Protection of the Child in Algeria in Light of the 1989 Convention." Journal of Law and Humanities, 2022, p. 91.

of the third book, the Algerian legislator has allocated a section for crimes committed against persons, and it includes texts that criminalize assaults on minors, such as kidnapping of minors, rape, indecent assault, intentional assault, and battery. It also stipulates aggravating circumstances for punishment if the perpetrator is a child or if the crime is committed by one of the ascendants or by someone who has authority over the child. These texts are considered a fundamental part of substantive criminal protection for children in Algerian legislation.

These constitutional and legal references form a solid foundation for criminal protection for children in Algeria. They demonstrate the state's commitment to providing a safe environment for this group. However, the effectiveness of this protection depends on the extent of the application of these texts and their ability to confront new challenges.⁷

Branch Two: Scope of Substantive Protection in the Algerian Penal Code

The Algerian Penal Code defines the scope of substantive criminal protection for children through criminalizing acts that affect their rights and safety, and by determining the penalties prescribed for these acts. This protection can be divided into several aspects:

1 Protection from Crimes Against Persons: The Algerian Penal Code

criminalizes many acts that target the physical and psychological safety of children. For example, in crimes of murder, intentional assault, and battery, the penalty is aggravated if the victim is a child. It also criminalizes acts that expose a child's life to danger, such as leaving a child in an abandoned place or failing to provide assistance to a person in danger if that person is a child. These crimes are considered among the most dangerous crimes that threaten the child's life and safety and necessitate strict penalties.

2 Protection from Sexual Crimes:

The Algerian Penal Code gives special attention to protecting children from sexual crimes, due to their danger and devastating impact on the child's psyche and future. It criminalizes acts of rape and indecent assault. The penalty is aggravated if the victim is a child or if the crime is committed by one of the ascendants or by someone who has authority over the child. It also criminalizes acts related to incitement to debauchery and immorality, and the exploitation of children in pornographic materials. These texts are necessary to combat this dangerous phenomenon and provide effective protection for children.

3 Protection from Exploitation and Neglect: The Algerian Penal Code criminalizes acts that expose a child to neglect

⁷ Hamou Ben Ibrahim. "Criminal Protection of the Child in Algerian Legislation and Comparative Law." Master's Thesis, University of Biskra, 2015, p. 98

or exploitation. For example, the crime of abandoning a family, which deprives a child of maintenance and care, is considered a crime punishable by law. It also criminalizes acts related to the exploitation of children in begging or in dangerous or illicit work. The penalty is aggravated if the exploitation is committed by one of the ascendants or by someone who has authority over the child or is responsible for his care. The penalty is also aggravated if the crime is committed with the use of violence or threat, or if it results in a permanent disability for the child. These aggravating circumstances are necessary to deter perpetrators of crimes against children and to ensure greater protection for children.

Reviewing the scope of substantive protection in the Algerian Penal Code shows that the legislator has given great attention to child protection and has included texts that criminalize many acts that affect their rights and safety. However, the challenge lies in the effectiveness of these texts in confronting modern crimes and their ability to respond to technological and social developments.⁸

Section Two: The Effectiveness of National Criminal Policy in Confronting Modern Crimes Against Children

The forms of crimes committed against children are constantly evolving, which imposes new challenges on national criminal

policies. This section aims to analyze the forms of substantive criminal protection for children from violence and abuse, and to assess the effectiveness of national criminal policy in confronting emerging crimes, through two main requirements.

Requirement One: Forms of Substantive Criminal Protection for Children from Violence and Abuse

The forms of violence and abuse that a child can be exposed to are numerous and each requires special substantive criminal protection. This requirement aims to review the most prominent of these forms and how Algerian legislation addresses them, through two branches.

Branch One: Protection from Physical and Sexual Assaults

Physical and sexual assaults are considered among the most dangerous crimes that target children, due to their devastating effects on their psychological and physical health. The Algerian legislator has given special attention to these crimes and has enacted texts that criminalize them and aggravate penalties for their perpetrators.

1 Protection from Physical Assaults:

The Algerian Penal Code criminalizes acts that cause physical harm to a child, such as intentional assault and battery, and exposing a child's life to danger. The penalty is aggravated

⁸ Souad Ben Ali. "The Effectiveness of Child Protection Under Law 15-12." *Journal of Legal Research and Studies*, 2017, p. 92

if the victim is a child or if the crime is committed by one of the ascendants or by someone who has authority over the child. Torturing a child is considered an independent crime punishable severely, especially if it leads to death or permanent disability. These texts aim to provide strong protection for children from any form of physical violence and to ensure their physical safety.

2 Protection from Sexual Assaults:

Sexual crimes against children are considered among the most heinous crimes. The Algerian Penal Code has stipulated strict penalties for their perpetrators. For example, in crimes of rape and indecent assault, if the victim is a child, the penalty is aggravated to reach life imprisonment in some cases. It also criminalizes acts related to incitement to debauchery and immorality, and the exploitation of children in pornographic materials. The penalty is aggravated if the perpetrator is one of the ascendants or has authority over the child. These texts are necessary to combat this dangerous phenomenon and provide effective protection for children from sexual exploitation.⁹

Branch Two: Protection from Economic Exploitation and Begging

Economic exploitation and begging are considered among the phenomena that deprive a child of his right to education, play, and

healthy development, and expose him to serious risks. The Algerian legislator has sought to combat these phenomena through criminalizing them and determining appropriate penalties.

1 Protection from Economic Exploitation:

Law No. 15-12 related to child protection and the Algerian Penal Code criminalize acts that expose a child to economic exploitation, such as employing children in dangerous or illicit work, or in harsh working conditions that hinder their development and growth. The penalty is aggravated if the exploitation is committed by one of the ascendants or by someone who has authority over the child. These texts aim to ensure the child's right to education, rest, and protection from any form of exploitation that hinders his natural development.

2 Protection from Begging: The Algerian Penal Code criminalizes acts related to the exploitation of children in begging, whether directly or indirectly. The penalty is aggravated if the perpetrator is one of the ascendants or has authority over the child, or if begging is accompanied by violence or threat. These texts aim to combat the phenomenon of begging that exposes children to danger, deprives them of their basic rights, and contributes to the spread of crime.¹⁰

⁹ Hamadou Leila. "Legal Guarantees and Mechanisms for Protecting Children from Cybercrimes." *Journal of Law*, 2025, p. 59.

¹⁰ Fadil Khalifa. *Protecting Children in International Humanitarian Law*. Amman: Dar Al-Fikr, 2010, p. 74.

Requirement Two: Challenges of Criminal Protection for Children in the Face of Emerging Crimes

With rapid technological development, new forms of crimes targeting children have emerged, which impose significant challenges on national criminal policies. This requirement aims to analyze these challenges and to propose recommendations to enhance criminal protection for children, through two branches.

Branch One: Protection from Information Crimes and Exploitation via the Internet

The Internet has become a fertile ground for committing crimes against children, such as sexual exploitation via the Internet, cyberbullying, and the dissemination of pornographic materials for children. These crimes are considered among the most dangerous challenges facing criminal protection for children.

1 Sexual Exploitation via the Internet: This crime is considered a transnational crime that requires international cooperation to combat it. The Algerian legislator has sought to criminalize these acts through amending the Penal Code and issuing special laws to combat electronic crimes. However, the challenge lies in the difficulty of applying the law to these crimes, collecting

digital evidence, and tracking perpetrators, as they are committed in a virtual space.

2 Cyberbullying and Electronic Harassment: Cyberbullying and electronic harassment are among the increasing phenomena that target children via social media and electronic games. These acts cause severe psychological harm to victims, and may even lead them to suicide in some cases. However, criminalizing these acts and determining appropriate penalties for them still faces technical and legal challenges, especially regarding the definition of these acts, collecting evidence, and determining criminal responsibility.¹¹

Branch Two: Assessment of Legal Loopholes and Proposals to Enhance Deterrence

Despite the efforts made in Algerian legislation to protect children, there are still some legal loopholes that hinder the effectiveness of this protection and require amendment and review.

3 Legal Loopholes:

◦ **Lack of Keeping Pace with Technological Development:** Some legal texts are not keeping pace with rapid technological development, which makes it difficult to criminalize new forms of electronic crimes against children and to determine appropriate penalties for them. For example,

¹¹ Al-Muhammadi Hassanein. Criminal Protection of the Child. Cairo: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Qanuniyya, 2008. p. 95

current texts may not cover all forms of sexual exploitation via the Internet or may not provide effective mechanisms to combat cyberbullying.

- **Difficulty in Applying the Law:** Security and judicial agencies face difficulties in applying the law to electronic crimes, due to their transnational nature, the difficulty of collecting digital evidence, and tracking perpetrators. Also, the lack of training and experience in this field hinders the effectiveness of combating these crimes.

- **Lack of Awareness:** There is still a lack of awareness among families and children about the risks of the Internet and electronic crimes, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation. Also, the lack of awareness among some concerned parties about the importance of reporting these crimes hinders their combat.

4 Proposals to Enhance Deterrence:

- **Updating and Amending Legislations:** It is necessary to update and review the Algerian Penal Code and special laws related to child protection periodically to include all new forms of crimes against children, especially electronic crimes. These amendments must be comprehensive and cover all aspects of criminalization and punishment, and provide effective mechanisms to combat these crimes.¹²

- **Enhancing International Cooperation:** It is necessary to enhance international cooperation with other countries and international organizations to combat transnational crimes against children, such as child trafficking and sexual exploitation via the Internet. This cooperation should include the exchange of information, the extradition of perpetrators, and the provision of mutual legal assistance, and the coordination of efforts aimed at protecting children at the international level.

- **Rehabilitation of Cadres:** It is necessary to train and rehabilitate specialized judicial and security cadres in the field of combating crimes against children, especially electronic crimes. This rehabilitation should include training on how to track perpetrators, collect digital evidence, and deal with child victims in a way that takes into account their best interests.

- **Spreading Awareness and Education:** It is necessary to intensify awareness and educational campaigns directed at families, children, and society in general about the risks of the Internet and electronic crimes, and how to protect themselves from them. These campaigns should include information on how to report these crimes and the bodies that can be resorted to for support and assistance.

¹² Zakhmi Taher. "Protecting Children at Risk in Algeria: A Study in Light of the Provisions of Law No. 15-12." *Journal of Legal Studies* - 2017 - p. 58

- **Activating the Role of Civil Society**

Organizations: It is necessary to activate the role of civil society organizations in protecting children from crimes, through providing psychological and social support, legal assistance to child victims, organizing awareness campaigns, and contributing to the formulation of policies and legislations related to child protection.

- **Applying the Principle of the Child's Best Interests:** The principle of the child's best interests should be the primary criterion in all decisions and procedures related to children, whether judicial, administrative, or legislative, to ensure the maximum possible protection for them.

Protecting children from crimes requires integrated and continuous efforts from all concerned parties, and a continuous updating of policies and legislations to keep pace with the evolving challenges and ensure a safe and prosperous future for our children.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of substantive criminal protection for children between the texts of Algerian national legislation and the specificity of international conventions, with a focus on the extent of national criminal policy's response to international obligations and confronting emerging crimes. The study reached several findings and recommendations, which can be summarized as follows:

Findings:

1 Relative Compatibility Between National Legislation and International Conventions:

The study showed that Algerian legislation, especially after the issuance of Law No. 15-12 related to child protection, has made significant progress in harmonizing its texts with the principles of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Fundamental principles such as the child's best interests, the right to life and development, non-discrimination, and protection from violence, abuse, and neglect have been enshrined in the national legal system.

2 Comprehensiveness of Substantive Criminal Protection:

The Algerian Penal Code provides comprehensive substantive criminal protection for children from various forms of crimes, such as physical and sexual assaults, economic exploitation, and begging. It also stipulates aggravating circumstances for punishment in crimes where the child is a victim, which reflects the legislator's concern for the protection of this vulnerable group.

3 Challenges of Emerging Crimes:

Despite the efforts made, national criminal policy still faces significant challenges in confronting emerging crimes against children, especially information crimes and exploitation via the Internet. Legal texts suffer from a lack of keeping pace with rapid technological development, which makes it difficult to criminalize some acts and determine appropriate penalties for them, in addition to

the difficulty of applying the law in the virtual space.

4 Need to Enhance Deterrence

Mechanisms: The study indicates the existence of loopholes in current deterrence mechanisms that require amendment and review to ensure greater effectiveness for criminal protection for children. The lack of awareness of the risks of the Internet and the lack of rehabilitation of specialized cadres hinder the ability to combat electronic crimes effectively.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings reached, the study presents the following recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of substantive criminal protection for children in Algerian legislation:

1 Updating and Amending

Legislations: It is necessary to periodically update and review the Algerian Penal Code and special laws related to child protection to include all new forms of crimes against children, especially electronic crimes. These amendments must be comprehensive and cover all aspects of criminalization and punishment, and provide effective mechanisms to combat these crimes.

2 Enhancing International

Cooperation: It is necessary to enhance international cooperation with other countries and international organizations to combat transnational crimes against children, such as child trafficking and sexual exploitation via the

Internet. This cooperation should include the exchange of information, the extradition of perpetrators, and the provision of mutual legal assistance, and the coordination of efforts aimed at protecting children at the international level.

3 Rehabilitation of Specialized

Cadres: It is necessary to train and rehabilitate specialized judicial and security cadres in the field of combating crimes against children, especially electronic crimes. This rehabilitation should include training on how to track perpetrators, collect digital evidence, and deal with child victims in a way that takes into account their best interests.

4 Spreading Awareness and

Education: It is necessary to intensify awareness and educational campaigns directed at families, children, and society in general about the risks of the Internet and electronic crimes, and how to protect themselves from them. These campaigns should include information on how to report these crimes and the bodies that can be resorted to for support and assistance.

5 Activating the Role of Civil Society

Organizations: It is necessary to activate the role of civil society organizations in protecting children from crimes, through providing psychological and social support, legal assistance to child victims, organizing awareness campaigns, and contributing to the formulation of policies and legislations related to child protection.

6 Applying the Principle of the Child's Best Interests: The principle of the child's best interests should be the primary criterion in all decisions and procedures related to children, whether judicial, administrative, or legislative, to ensure the maximum possible protection for them.

Protecting children from crimes requires integrated and continuous efforts from all concerned parties, and a continuous updating of policies and legislations to keep pace with the evolving challenges and ensure a safe and prosperous future for our children.

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