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AMERICA/COLOMBIA - To survive abuse and violence, many children get mixed up in the crime scene

Bogota (Agenzia Fides) - To be a child in Colombia is a harsh reality. In the first four months of 2012 there were 342 deaths due to violent causes, 60% of which are in the main cities of the country, first of all the city of Cali. Every day 3are killed, more than one million are those who work, equally alarming is the number of those recruited by armed groups and those who are victims of violence and abuse in the family, as well as children who become criminals and perpetrators of murders. According to a report of the Agencia de Periodismo Aliado de la Niñez, el Desarrollo Social y la Investigación (Pandi), last year 1,177 children, children and adolescents were murdered. For many of them, and for the 19,617 who in 2011 suffered abuse and physical assault, the perpetrators were parents and closest relatives. Girls between 10 and 14 years of age are the main victims, about 7,304. The vast majority of cases of violence of this nature are in the cities due to the difficulties that authorities meet, therefore complaints are few. Another serious problem that concerns young people is the recruitment by criminal groups and armed gangs. In a study carried out by ICBF (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar) over the course of four years, shows that about 18 000 children with an average age of 12 are enrolled in mafia wars and criminal gangs. 57% are male, 98% said they had been tortured and had been forced to witness and commit atrocities. Poverty in rural areas also forces many children to work to help their families. Despite government campaigns to limit the phenomenon, last year there was an increase of 39.5%, 1.466 million working minors. Of the total reported, 23% of children between 5 and 17 years of age do not attend school because they are working and more than half of the total, 57%, do not receive any compensation. In such a bleak framework it is not strange to see the increase in the number of petty criminals. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 18/09/2012)

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