THE INTERSECTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Violence against children is ubiquitous. In 2015, at least three out of four of the world's children – an estimated 1.7 billion – had experienced some form of inter-personal violence[1] in a previous year.[2] When the cumulative impact of violence is considered, almost no children – whether they live in rich countries or poor, in the global North or South – experience violence-free childhoods.[3]

Childhood violence can only be prevented if both violence against children and violence against women are addressed simultaneously. Both forms of violence are often rooted in the same patriarchal attitudes, hidden by shame and stigma.[4] The culture of silence around childhood violence can be broken through cooperation between the movements concerned with violence against children and those concerned with violence against women.

Common causes

Violence against women and violence against children are closely linked. Research from high-income countries indicates that children in families in which women are abused are more likely to experience abuse and neglect themselves than children in families where women are not subject to abuse. A US study found that in up to four out of ten households affected by partner violence, children also experienced physical abuse. A smaller but growing literature from low- and middle-income countries also documents co-occurrence of violence against children and violence against women in Hong Kong, India, Iraq, the Philippines, Romania, Taiwan, Thailand, Viet Nam and Uganda. Similarly, Demographic and Health Surveys in many countries find that children in households affected by intimate partner violence are significantly more likely than other children to experience violent discipline.

Alcohol and drug abuse, easy access to firearms, economic stress and adolescent marriage and childbearing exacerbate both intimate partner violence and child maltreatment. Alcohol and substance abuse are often associated with child maltreatment, physical and sexual abuse, and sexual assaults against women, while restricting access to firearms has been shown to reduce lethal violence among children and youth. Inter-personal violence in the home often arises out of strained relationships that are worsened by economic uncertainty and hardship.

Worldwide, about one-fifth of adolescent girls are married or cohabiting with a male sexual partner. In many countries, married or cohabiting adolescent girls experience higher levels of recent partner violence than older women, as do girls who begin childbearing as adolescents. Recent evidence suggests that children of teenage mothers have a higher risk of child maltreatment than other children.

Overlapping impacts

The earliest intergenerational impact of violence against women is often the result of violence during pregnancy. Violence during pregnancy is common and affects both women and girls, as many young mothers are themselves children under 18. Demographic and Health Surveys and the Internation¬al Violence against Women Survey indicate prevalence rates for intimate partner violence during pregnancy for most countries of 4–9 per cent, ranging from 2 per cent in Australia, Cambodia, Denmark and the Philip¬pines to 14 per cent in Uganda.

Violence during pregnancy affects children as well as the women who experience it directly. Pregnant

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1. This estimate includes child homicide, violent discipline (or corporal punishment) at the hands of caregivers, peer violence (including bullying and physical fights), and sexual and physical violence experienced by adolescent girls.
2. See Evidence Highlights 2 in this series. *Violence in Childhood: Key Facts.*
3. This summary draws on the *Ending Violence in Childhood: Global Report 2017.* Know Violence in Childhood 2017. Ending Violence in Childhood. Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.
4. See Evidence Highlights 8 in this series. *Actions to End Violence in Childhood*

women or girls who are victims of abuse are more likely to have pre-term births, and their children are at increased risk of low birth-weight and physical and mental disability. Women in India who faced domestic violence, for instance, were more likely to develop complications during pregnancy.

Witnessing the abuse of their mothers or other women can have a lasting detrimental impact on children. Childhood exposure to intimate partner violence is associated with multiple health issues including anxiety and depression and behaviour problems such as aggression and delinquency. Studies from various countries indicate that men who were abused as children or who saw their mothers being abused are more likely to abuse their own partners later in life. Equally, girls are more likely to fall victim to inter-personal violence if they have witnessed violence against their mother. A United States study found that girls who had witnessed violence in the home were twice as likely to experience intimate partner violence as those who had not.

Norms that shape violence

In many societies, violence against women and violence against children are fueled by powerful patriarchal norms that:

- condone violent discipline, such as wife-beating and corporal punishment;
- promote masculinity based on violence and control;
- prioritize family reputation and blame victims; and
- disregard gender equality

A multi-level analysis of survey data from 44 countries found that norms condoning wife-beating and male control of female behaviour were among the strongest predictors of physical and sexual partner violence against women. Norms that assume that men should have a monopoly on power, and that women and children should submit to their authority, also frame young people's attitudes toward violence from a very early age.
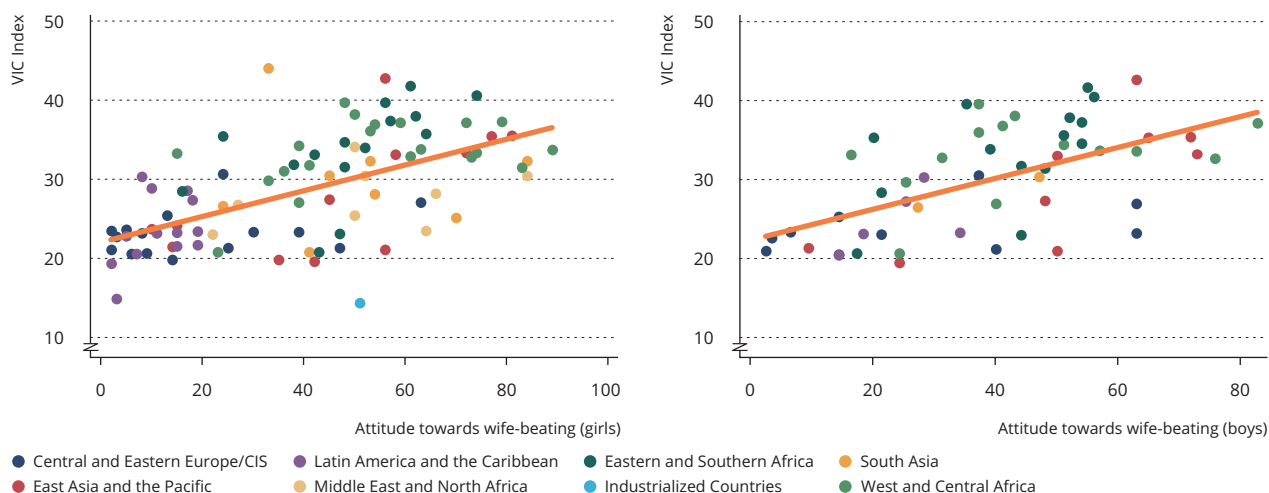
These discriminatory social norms can shape the perspectives of women and girls, as well as those of men and boys (FIGURE 1).

A World Bank analysis of national surveys from 55 countries (representing about 40 per cent of the world population) found that 4 in 10 women agreed wife-beating was justified under some circumstances. UNICEF estimated that 44 per cent of all adolescent girls aged 15–19 (around 126 million girls) believe a husband is justified in hitting his wife under certain circumstances; a proportion that rises to 80 per cent or more in Afghanistan, Guinea, Jordan, Mali and Timor-Leste. In 28 of 60 countries with data on both sexes, a larger proportion of girls than boys believe that wife-beating is sometimes justified. In Cambodia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Rwanda and Senegal, girls are around twice as likely as boys to think a husband is sometimes justified in hitting his wife.

Reports from Kenya and Tanzania indicate that individuals who justified wife-beating were likely to have faced violence themselves before the age of 18. They may also be more tolerant of violence against children. In surveys from 25 low- and middle-income countries, mothers who believed wife-beating was justified were significantly more likely than other women to believe that corporal punishment is necessary for raising children.

Boys who witness violence in the home, or who live in societies in which violence against women

FIGURE 1: Countries where boys and girls (aged 15–19) justify men beating their wives or partners are less likely to end violence in childhood.

Central and Eastern Europe/CIS   Latin America and the Caribbean   Eastern and Southern Africa   South Asia
East Asia and the Pacific   Middle East and North Africa   Industrialized Countries   West and Central Africa

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

is tolerated, may begin to repeat the patterns of violence against women and girls long before the reach adulthood. Bullying and harassment by boys in the journey to and from school, or when they try to use toilets, is a principal reason that girls discontinue their educations. A multi-country study from Asia and the Pacific found that a majority of adult men who ever committed rape had carried out their first assault as teenagers. More than 40 per cent of women who report being raped at some point in their life became victims before their 18th birthday. In most countries, the first episode of sexual violence for girls occurs before the age of 15.

Related social norms that prioritize family privacy over victim well-being make it difficult for women who experience violence to seek help. In five national surveys from Latin America and the Caribbean, between one-quarter and one-half of women said that people outside the family should not intervene when a husband abuses his wife.

Similarly, norms that prioritize family reputation and blame victims also discourage children from seeking help. Data from 30 countries suggest that 7 in 10 girls aged 15–19 who had been victims of physical and/or sexual abuse never sought help. An analysis of seven national surveys found that few child survivors of sexual abuse disclosed their experience, even fewer received services and perpetrators rarely suffered consequences. For example, in Kenya, less than half of children who experienced sexual violence told anyone; less than one-quarter sought services; and less than 4 per cent of girls and 1 per cent of boys actually received services.

Coordinated responses

Several promising programmes are using multiple approaches – such as media campaigns, community mobilization, economic empowerment and support for parents – to mitigate some of the most powerful enablers of violence against women and violence against children.[5] In some cases, macro-level reforms in policing and economic development have been linked to violence reduction. In others, evidence of reduced inter-personal violence has been linked to community-level interventions focused on reducing power inequity, improving health or alleviating economic stress through strategies such as cash transfers.

Recent reviews indicate that pairing community mobilization and economic empowerment initiatives with gender equality training can reduce intimate partner violence. Some of these efforts also address issues that are concomitant with violence

against women and girls, such as HIV, poverty, low education and women's economic dependence on men.

Addressing gender and power norms among boys and girls is a key focus of several promising violence-prevention efforts, many of which take place in schools:

- In Mumbai, India, the *Gender Equity Movement in Schools(GEMS)* trained boys and girls aged 12–14 to shift their attitudes and beliefs on gender roles, violence, and sexual and reproductive health.
- *Coaching Boys into Men* engages male sports coaches in the United States and India as positive role models to deliver messages to male athletes about the importance of respecting women, controlling aggression, preventing violence and promoting respect.
- In the United States, *Safe Dates*, a violence-prevention programme for middle- and high-school students, includes classroom sessions, a student play and a poster contest. Four years after receiving the programme, students in the intervention group were significantly less likely to be victims or perpetrators of sexual violence.
- Also in the United States, *Shifting Boundaries*, a dating violence prevention programme for middle-school students incorporating school-wide interventions and classroom lessons, has been shown to reduce sexual harassment and peer sexual violence.
- In Canada, *The Fourth R*, which promotes relationship knowledge and skills as a core classroom-based curriculum for schools, parents and community organizations, helped reduce sexual violence.

Several fatherhood programmes are also addressing harmful masculine norms that underpin gender-based violence. Among these is *Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers*, a mentoring programme in Uganda that targets young fathers aged 16–25. *REAL Fathers* aims to reduce intimate partner violence and child maltreatment by improving knowledge and skills in positive parenting, communication and conflict resolution; encouraging reflection on the gender roles of parents in childcare; and improving acceptance of non-traditional gender roles.

Other programmes, such as *SASA!* in Uganda, utilize a community mobilization approach that engages community stakeholders (including activists, local government, cultural and religious leaders, and professionals such as the police and healthcare providers) to challenge gender-related social norms and beliefs that contribute to violence.

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5. See Evidence Highlights 8 in this series. *Actions to End Violence in Childhood*

The programme's language focuses on how power can produce positive and negative outcomes. Qualitative data suggest that reductions in inter-personal violence among couples additionally had a positive effect on parent-child relationships through improved parenting and discipline. Some participants also reported that participating in *SASA!* made them less tolerant of violence against children in their community and more willing to intervene when necessary.

Parenting programmes such as *Parents Make the Difference* in Liberia and *Building Happy Families* in Thailand were designed to address child maltreatment, but reported unintended (beneficial) outcomes for intimate partner violence. *Parents Make the Difference*, which targets parents and caregivers of children aged 3–7, uses behavioural theory and is highly skills-based, providing caregivers with specific techniques to promote positive caregiver-child interactions and discipline strategies. In qualitative interviews, caregivers reported that the intervention has had an unintended positive impact on their relationship with their partner, in terms of improved communication and problem solving. *Building Happy Families* is a parenting and family skills intervention for Burmese migrant and displaced families living on the Thai-Burmese border. The programme focuses on helping caregivers to understand their children's development and teaches communication and problem-solving skills to both caregivers and children.
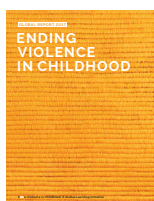
The way forward: building positive synergies

Research, programmes and policies on violence against women and violence against children have historically followed parallel but distinct trajectories, with different funding streams, lead agencies, strategies, terminologies, rights treaties, and bodies of research.

Evidence of common correlates, however, suggests that consolidating efforts to address shared risk factors may help prevent both forms of violence. Researchers have called for more efforts to bridge this divide, citing evidence that focusing attention and services on one form of violence in isolation may overlook important risks, vulnerabilities and consequences of multiple forms of violence within families.

Opportunities to increase the effectiveness of responses to violence against children and violence against women include improving collaboration and coordination among researchers working on both forms of violence; improving coordination between services for women and for children, school-based strategies, parenting programmes and programming for adolescent health and development; and preparing service-providers to address multiple forms of violence.

The push toward more coordinated responses to intimate partner violence and child maltreatment should however ensure both integration and differentiation in order to mitigate the potential risks of a combined agenda. Well-crafted strategies can maximize, and not compromise the best interests of both women and children.

Every day millions of boys and girls around the world experience fear and violence – physical, emotional or sexual. This need not happen. Violence in childhood is preventable – through concerted and collective action that addresses the root causes of violence and lays firm foundations for both sustainable development and more peaceful societies.

To fulfill the commitments to ending all forms of violence that are enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, states and societies must analyze the causes of childhood violence, and invest in preventing violence against women and children.