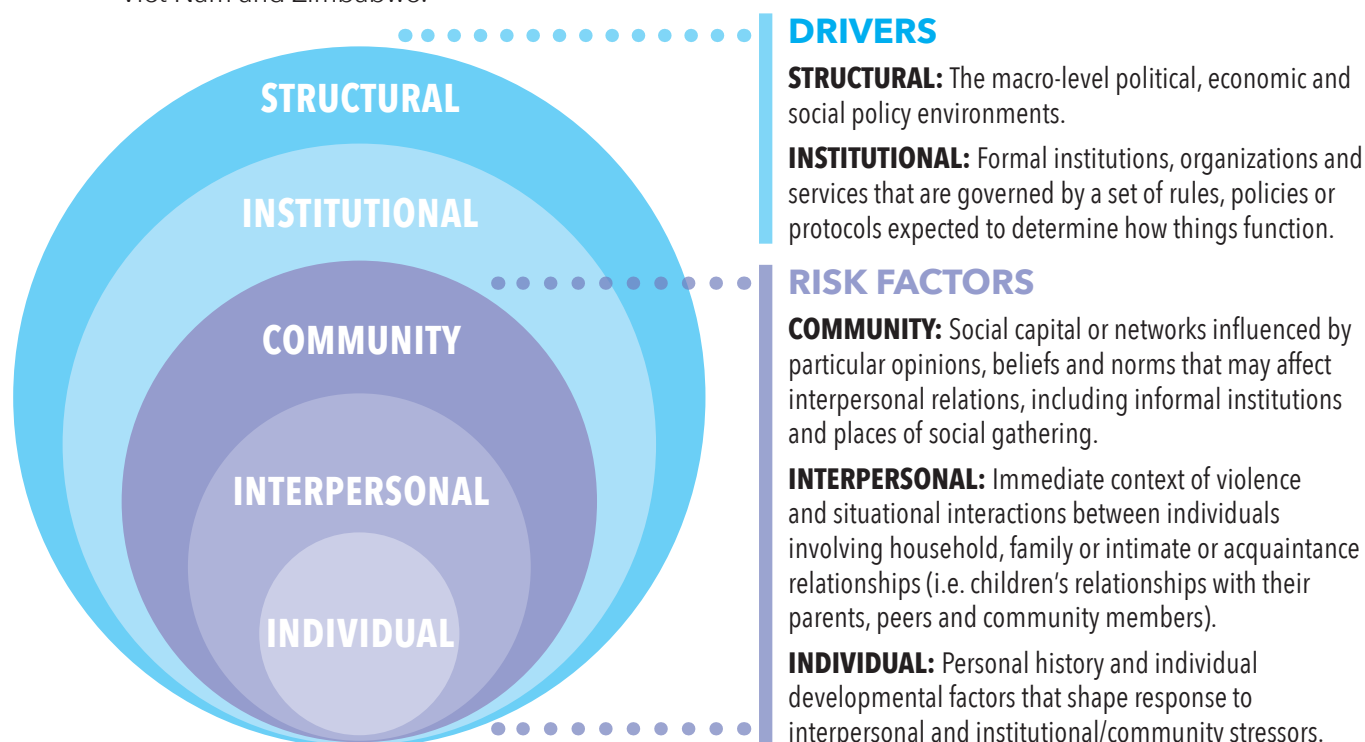# Multi Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children

A Child-Centred Integrated Framework for Violence Prevention

Violence Prevention: Using Data to Drive Change

Ecological thinking has influenced the field of violence prevention for several decades, most notably in understanding intimate partner violence (Heise 1998, 2011). In general, iterations refer to micro-, meso-, and macro-factors that are often labelled as some combination of 'individual', 'interpersonal', 'relationship', 'family', 'community', 'social' or 'societal', and sometimes 'global'. We applied a version of this model in the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe.

DRIVERS

STRUCTURAL: The macro-level political, economic and social policy environments.

INSTITUTIONAL: Formal institutions, organizations and services that are governed by a set of rules, policies or protocols expected to determine how things function.

RISK FACTORS

COMMUNITY: Social capital or networks influenced by particular opinions, beliefs and norms that may affect interpersonal relations, including informal institutions and places of social gathering.

INTERPERSONAL: Immediate context of violence and situational interactions between individuals involving household, family or intimate or acquaintance relationships (i.e. children's relationships with their parents, peers and community members).

INDIVIDUAL: Personal history and individual developmental factors that shape response to interpersonal and institutional/community stressors.

Findings analyzed by our national teams showed that understandings of interpersonal violence towards children typically focus on **risk and protective factors** which reflect the likelihood of violence occurring due to characteristics most often measured at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels. While these factors are important, they cannot be understood in isolation of a child's social ecology, or the child's relationships within differing environments. Our teams expanded their understanding of violence to show how risk and protective factors are intimately connected to **the drivers of violence**, which we defined as the institutional and structural level factors that create the conditions in which violence is more (or less) likely to occur.

The analysis of national data followed by debate and discussion—now in over twelve countries pursuing drivers of violence work in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe—suggests several important points for policymakers and practitioners working on violence prevention:

INTERACTION: The interaction of institutional and structural drivers with risk and protective factors occurring at the community, interpersonal and individual spheres of children's lives delineates how, where, when and why violence occurs. Interventions that consider the interplay of both macro and micro forces on children's well-being, and how these forces affect their enabling environment, are likely to be more effective than simply addressing risk and protective factors alone.

CHANGE: Children's lives are highly dynamic and the social ecology in which they live, learn, play and often work is constantly changing. The predictive value of age and gender as risk and/or protective factors changes depending on a young person's stage of development, social context and other circumstances.
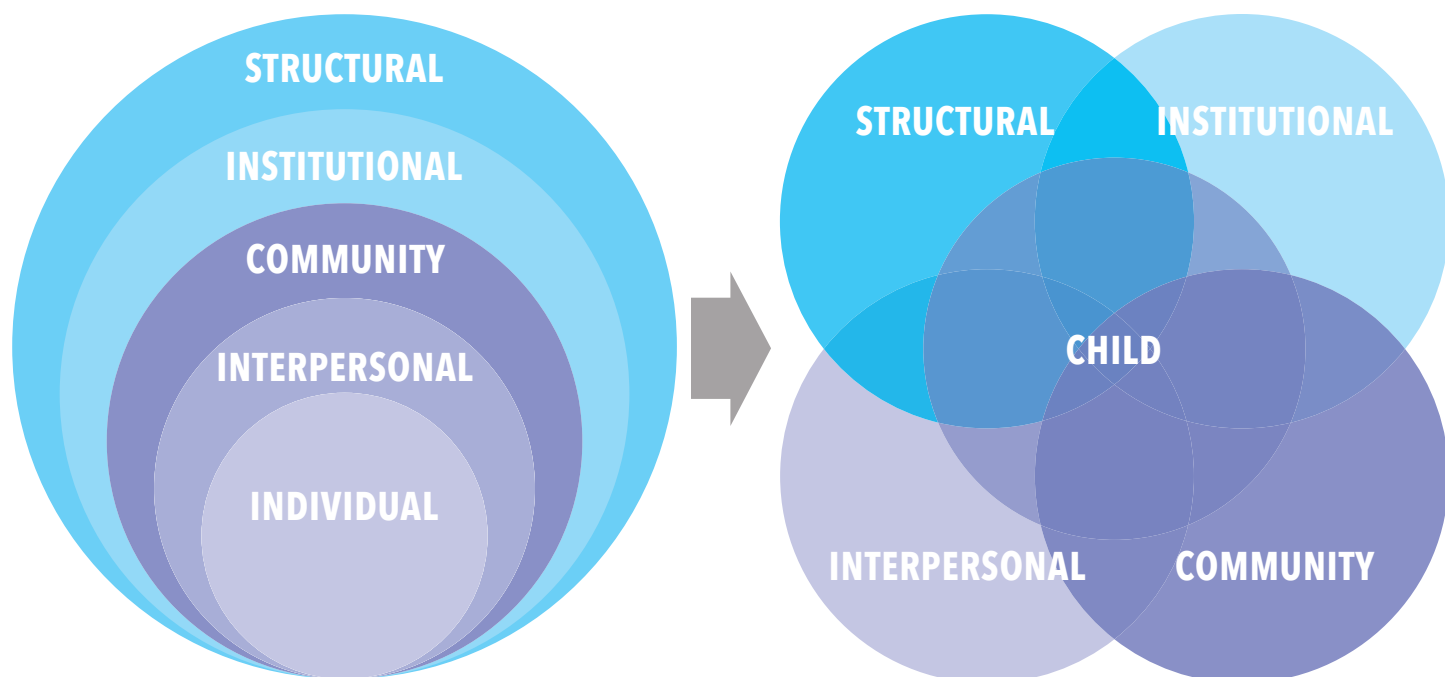
COMPLEXITY: Failing to account for this complexity–or the dynamic and constantly changing and/or overlapping domains that shape violence in children's lives–has created a fractured approach to violence prevention, with the tendency to develop interventions at one level, or in one place, without considering the critical contextual factors that determine if a child is safe from harm.

> **How can we model this complex reality to produce improved knowledge, practice and policy within the field of violence prevention?**

Reflecting and Revising:
An Integrated Framework for Addressing Violence Affecting Children

A child-centered and integrated socio-ecological framework, builds on the work of several scholars and acknowledges that behavior is shaped by multiple, inter-related influences within multiple domains.[1] This child-centred framework is designed to assist practitioners to visualize how drivers and risk and protective factors interact within a child's social ecology. Importantly, it maintains the child (rather than 'the individual' representing a list of risk or protective factors) at the center–interacting, interfacing and overlapping with a variety of drivers, risk and protective factors throughout the lifespan.
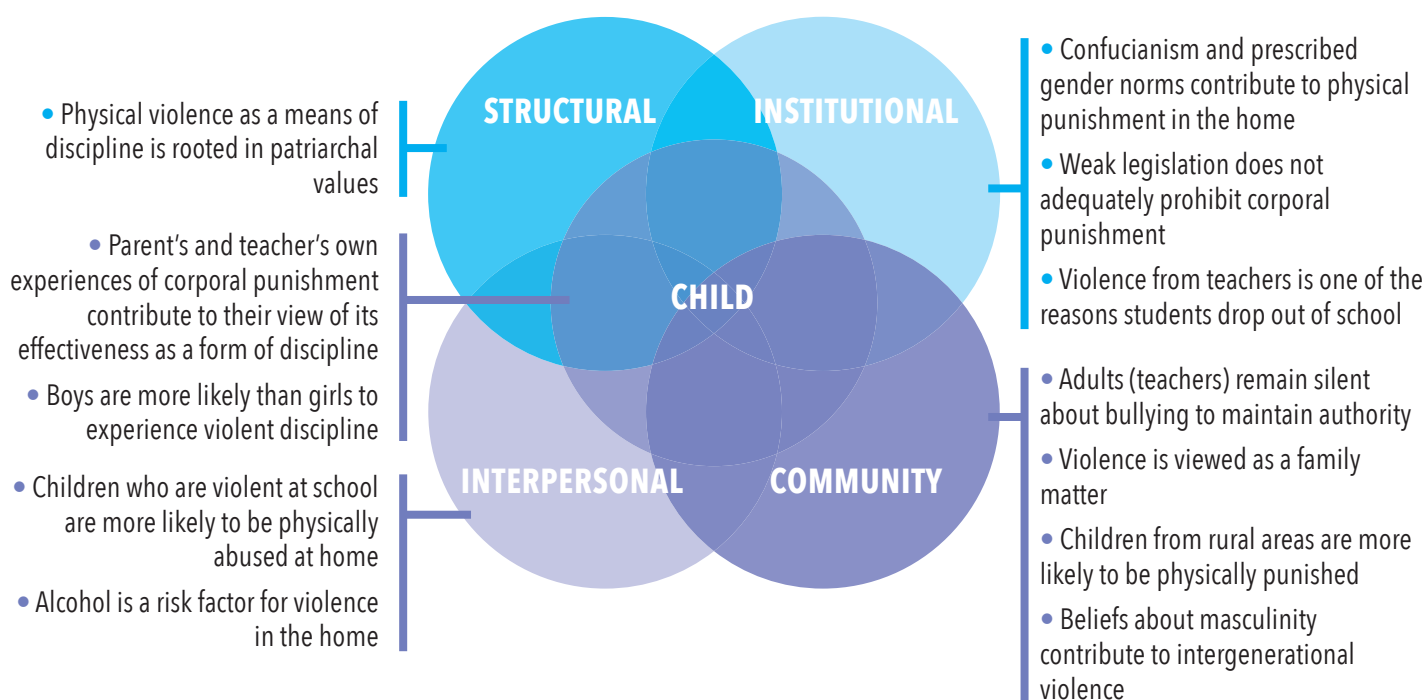

Mapping national evidence–what we know about violence from surveys, research studies, service-based data and other sources, including children's own understandings wherever possible– directly onto the framework helps visualize how a single type of violence is affected by a multitude of factors.

[1]We fully acknowledge that Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) model of hierarchically nested ecosystems is not new and that many scholars have acknowledged that human behavior is shaped by multiple, inter-related influences on multiple levels, and has been applied to complex issues such as child abuse (Belsky 1980), sexual coercion (Brown 1995), gender-based violence (Heise 1998), and application of social norms theory to gender-based violence (Heise and Cislaghi 2016).

Giving Complexity Clarity:
Applying the Child-Centered Integrated Framework in Viet Nam

An example from the *Multi-Country Study* highlights the utility of this approach. In Viet Nam, findings around physical violence indicate multi-factorial reasons why corporal punishment is so widespread—ranging from the structural level to factors relating to the characteristics of the individual child.

• Physical violence as a means of discipline is rooted in patriarchal values

• Parent's and teacher's own experiences of corporal punishment contribute to their view of its effectiveness as a form of discipline

• Boys are more likely than girls to experience violent discipline

• Children who are violent at school are more likely to be physically abused at home

• Alcohol is a risk factor for violence in the home

STRUCTURAL   INSTITUTIONAL

CHILD

INTERPERSONAL   COMMUNITY

• Confucianism and prescribed gender norms contribute to physical punishment in the home

• Weak legislation does not adequately prohibit corporal punishment

• Violence from teachers is one of the reasons students drop out of school

• Adults (teachers) remain silent about bullying to maintain authority

• Violence is viewed as a family matter

• Children from rural areas are more likely to be physically punished

• Beliefs about masculinity contribute to intergenerational violence

Plotting the evidence, collected by each national team, helps clarify which stakeholders need to be engaged to address the myriad of factors occurring within and among each domain in order to inform more effective child protection coordination and systems building. The model shows how a single intervention approach—such as a parenting intervention to reduce discipline in the household—may overlook other important drivers and risk factors.

In this way, technical packages to address violence, such as I*NSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence against Children*[2] , can be adapted in more meaningful ways to address a country's unique historical, cultural, political and economic contexts. The approach is also inclusive, implicating multiple ministries as well as other stakeholders. For example, in Viet Nam the Ministries of Education; Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs; Planning; Home Affairs; and also specific offices such as the Department of Gender Equality and Viet Nam's Social Evils Prevention Division were involved.

Frameworks for violence prevention are useful insofar as they support the successful application of learning. Using data to drive change, our proposed *Child-Centered Framework for Violence Prevention* serves to situate national findings according to a child's social ecology, making clear how institutional and structural drivers and risk/protective factors together shape the many risks and opportunities of childhood around the world.

For further information on the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children*, including a snapshot of Stage 1 findings, country reports, social norms manuals and a how-to guide, visit:

www.unicef-irc.org/research/274/

VIOLENCE AFFECTING CHILDREN

unicef
Office of Research–Innocenti

[2]www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire