

Intersections Between Violence Against Children and Violence Against Women

Identifying Evidence Gaps and Opportunities for Collaboration

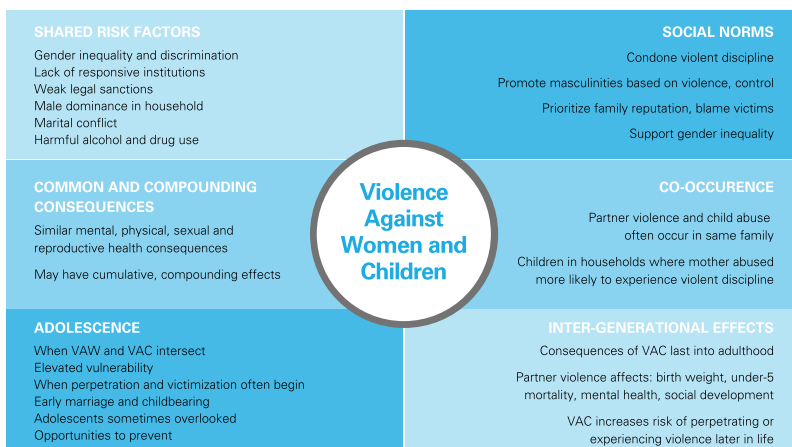


SUMMARY BRIEF

19 OCTOBER 2021 WEBINAR

Over 500 researchers, practitioners, policymakers and activists from around the world gathered to take stock of what we know about the intersections between violence against children and violence against women, identify existing knowledge gaps and discuss opportunities to increase coordination across efforts to prevent and respond to both forms of violence. This summary presents key takeaways from the event organized by UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, in collaboration with the Global Partnership to End Violence, the World Health Organization, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative and the UK FCDO.

FIGURE 1



CONTEXT

In 2016, [Guedes and colleagues](#) argued that research and programmes addressing violence against women and violence against children have followed parallel but distinct trajectories – leaving important gaps. They called for greater attention to the intersections among different forms of violence across the life course and offered a framework (figure 1) for understanding these intersections.

Our joint event called on all colleagues working to end violence against children and violence against women to “build bridges” across these areas of work by “lowering their guards”, “questioning their positions” and looking for opportunities to take “baby steps” towards a more collaborative way of working for the benefit of both children and women. Below are some of the key messages highlighted during the webinar.

WATCH THE RECORDING

1 WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY, BUT THERE ARE IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE GAPS THAT NEED TO BE FILLED

Evidence about the intersections between violence against children and against women has grown significantly, but there are still some important gaps, including limited availability of cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence on the risk factors associated with co-occurrence. And although mounting knowledge of effective interventions to prevent and respond to these forms of violence in a coordinated way remains limited. This means that there are few models, particularly from low- and middle-income countries, to build from. We must address these evidence gaps, including via implementation research that can generate theories that enable us to understand not only if a policy or program is effective, but also why and how. Assessing how interventions to address violence against women may, even if unintentionally, prevent violence against children (and vice-versa) through a “spill over” effect could be a “low hanging fruit” for future research.

“SPACES LIKE THESE ARE REALLY VALUABLE FOR BUILDING TRUST, LISTENING TO EACH OTHER, FOR JOINT LEARNING AND IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE FORWARD MORE DELIBERATELY.”

EMILY ESPEN
HEAD OF ENDING VIOLENCE TEAM, FCDO
(UNITED KINGDOM)

“SEPARATING TYPES OF VIOLENCE MAKES SENSE IF WE ARE TREATING THE SYMPTOMS. IF WE LOOK FOR THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE, WE WILL FIND THE SAME TRAGIC CONTINUUM, JUST MANIFESTED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.”

CHANDRE GOULD
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW, INSTITUTE FOR
SECURITY STUDIES (SOUTH AFRICA)

2 ALL OF US CAN TAKE “BABY STEPS” TO INCREASE ALIGNMENT AND COORDINATION ACROSS THESE AREAS OF WORK

There are still some important gaps in our understanding of how violence against children and against women intersect, but we know enough to say that it is in the best of interest of women and children to increase coordination across these areas of work. At a minimum, we need to make sure that our interventions are not doing harm. This includes ensuring that child protection / violence against children interventions are more gender transformative and informed by an understanding of partner violence. Parenting and caregiver support programs, for instance, can contribute to challenging rigid gender norms that are at the root of both forms of violence. While it is not realistic to expect one policy or program to address all of the needs of both children and women, sometimes it’s a matter of doing things differently and better, and not necessarily “doing everything”. Transforming fields that developed more or less independently from each other is an undertaking that will not be done quickly, however, as Lori Heise reiterated, all of us can take “baby steps” that will incrementally lead to much-needed change. A first “baby step” can include increasing our understanding of how these forms of violence relate and identifying opportunities for partnership and cooperation.

3 SHARED DEFINITIONS OF VIOLENCE ARE NEEDED

Future research should develop more consistent definitions and more precise measurements of violence and its co-occurrence. At the moment, study-based definitions of violence, especially for violence against children, are inconsistent and problematic. For example, studies often fail to measure severity and frequency of violent discipline which means that a parent shouting once at a child would be equated with regular physical abuse or severe forms of discipline. This inconsistency not only impacts our ability to understand the relationship across forms of violence, but makes it difficult to assess the extent of the impact of interventions as nuances or specifics regarding severity, frequency, who experiences and perpetrates different forms of violence, is not captured. Definitions should also take into consideration the structural factors that drive, sustain and create the conditions for violence.

4 DONORS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN FOMENTING COORDINATION AND MINIMIZING COMPETITION ACROSS THE VAC AND VAW FIELDS

Participants highlighted the influence of donors and the opportunity that they have to re-think funding streams both to respond to the evidence and to foment collaboration, rather than competition amongst these areas of work. Emily Esplen shared that UK FCDO recently combined its portfolio on child protection, violence against women and harmful practices under the umbrella of “ending violence” and highlighted that one strategy to break existing silos is to invest in interventions that address shared risk factors and impact on multiple forms of violence.

5 RESEARCHERS MUST QUESTION THEIR ASSUMPTIONS TO ENSURE BIASES ARE NOT INTRODUCED IN STUDY DESIGNS

The systematic review on the co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and violence against children led by Isabelle Pearson found a significant positive association between intimate partner violence (IPV) and violent discipline.

However, almost half of the studies focused exclusively on the co-occurrence of male-to-female IPV and female caregiver-to-child VAC; few authors reported on male caregiver-to-child violence. In other words, researchers’ assumptions seemed to be either that men had no caregiving responsibilities towards children and/or that women experiencing violence were more likely than abusive men to discipline their children harshly. As authors of this systematic review highlighted, studies that focus exclusively on violent discipline by the female parent are likely to diminish or neglect the presence and influence of men’s harsh disciplinary behaviors and further reinforce beliefs about abused women’s violent behavior against their children, particularly when studies ignore that violent men are likely to be violent against both their female partners and their children, leading to an environment characterized by fear and toxic stress.

Bridging VAC and VAW requires us to question gender dynamics and assumptions, including those related to the role of female caregivers. It also invites us to challenge the promotion of children’s and women’s rights in isolation from broader economic factors, including inequalities and limited livelihood options.

6 WE MUST GENERATE KNOWLEDGE IN A MORE INCLUSIVE MANNER AND DO A BETTER JOB OF TRANSLATING EVIDENCE INTO POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

There is a disconnect between the evidence that does exist and the programs that are being implemented on the ground. Researchers, academics and others must do a better job of designing studies and generating evidence that increases collaboration across these areas of work and should disseminate learnings to directly answer practitioners' questions in user-friendly formats that facilitate policy and program change. Improved collaboration between researchers and those working on the ground also requires a willingness to draw on and document the knowledge and experience of practitioners in a way that respects their contribution to knowledge generation. Opportunities should be created so that practitioners are supported to develop and test program approaches that build on existing evidence as they innovate and explore integration of knowledge about VAW and VAC prevention and gender transformative programming.

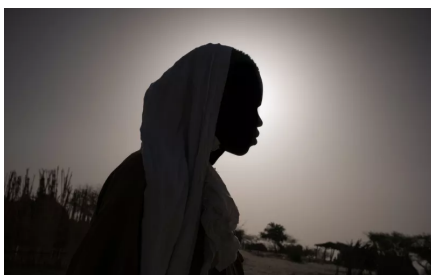
7 COLLABORATION REQUIRES BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

We would be naïve if we didn't acknowledge that collaboration is challenging. We must be willing to question our assumptions, listen to different points of view and connect to create systemic change and break cycles of violence within lifespans and across generations. To this end, it is important to remember that, although we may approach these issues in different ways, we share the goal of promoting safe and caring homes and communities.

As emphasized by Chandre Gould, "We cannot afford to get stuck in endless academic debates - we simply have to show leadership and find ways to connect and work together to cross false divides. We know now that it is difficult or impossible to prevent one form of violence (such as child abuse and neglect) where another (such as intimate partner violence) is prevalent. That means that we have to create spaces to listen to each other, to hear each other's stories, data and concerns, and find how we can work together to create safe homes, communities and countries."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND THE DETAILED AGENDA OF THE EVENT ARE AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

For additional information, please contact Alessandra Guedes, Gender & Development Manager (aguedes@unicef.org)



Download our research, project brief and more from unicef-irc.org/research/violence-against-children/

