# Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children Field Intersections, Gaps, and Tensions Nicole Gonzalez

### Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Children (VAC) are both major public health problems that violate women's and children's human rights.<sup>1,2</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. The WHO also estimates that 6 in 10 children worldwide (aged 2-17) have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year.<sup>1,2</sup>

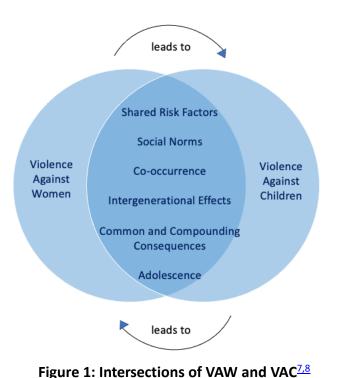
In order to bring greater efforts to end VAW and VAC, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include specific targets to: end all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres (Target 5.2); eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (Target 5.3); and end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children (Target 16.2).<sup>3.4</sup>

The encouragement for interdisciplinary collaboration, however, has not always been the norm. Historically, research, programs, and policies on VAW and VAC have been implemented separately.<sup>5</sup> Independent treaties and specialized UN agencies were created for either women or children as the sole focus.<sup>5</sup> This historical divide continues to drive separate funding streams, strategies, terminologies, rights treaties, and bodies of research.<sup>6</sup> Yet, research and programs on VAW and VAC follow similar paths. Given the substantial evidence of the intersections of VAW and VAC, collaboration between fields is necessary to achieve the SDGs by 2030.<sup>5.6</sup>

# Intersections of VAW and VAC

Researchers have conducted rigorous literature reviews to find the overlapping factors found within each field of research and have come up with six intersections between VAW and VAC.<sup>7</sup> These intersections include: common risk factors, social norms that condone violence and prevent help-seeking, co-occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV) and VAC, intergenerational effects, common and compounding consequences, and adolescence (Figure 1).<sup>7.8</sup>

Figure 2 goes into further depth for each intersection of VAW and VAC.



#### References

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<sup>2.</sup> World Health Organization. Violence against children. https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children. Published 2020. Accessed December 11, 2020

<sup>3.</sup> United Nations. Goal 5 | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5. Published 2020. Accessed December 12, 2020. 4. United Nations. Goal 16 | Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16. Published 2020. Accessed December 13, 2020.

<sup>5.</sup> UNFPA, UNICEF. Women's and Children's Rights: Making the Connection. 2010. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Women-Children\_final.pdf. Accessed December 10, 2020.

# Figure 2: Intersections of VAW & VAC<sup>6-8,11</sup>

# Field Gaps

While there is proof of overlapping factors, previous evidence of working on one form of violence alone may miss risk factors, vulnerabilities, and consequences of experiencing multiple types of violence within the family and across the lifespan.<sup>5.9</sup>

Adolescent individuals are the most likely to be missed by VAW and VAC research and programs.<sup>6</sup> Ironically, adolescence is an intersection of the two fields, yet sometimes adolescents are overlooked by child protective services who typically focus on younger children and by research and programs that focus on women.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, given the evidence behind the intergenerational cycles of IPV and VAC, researchers and programs should also be focused on this area to prevent future occurrences of violence.<sup>8</sup> However, without the sharing of information and efforts toward ending the cycle, addressing one area of the cycle may be difficult in ensuring efficacy.<sup>7–9</sup>

# **Risk Factors**

Unequal power imbalances between men and women and adults and children

Inadequate protections for human rights

Weak institutional response to violence

High levels of criminal violence or armed conflict

Marital conflict

Economic stress

Harmful use of alcohol or drugs

### Intergenerational Effects

VAC elevates the risk of VAW and initiates intergenerational cycles of abuse<sup>6</sup>

Witnessing abuse of the mother is a risk factor for both VAC and IPV during adulthood

Perpetration or victimization are associated with past experiences of VAC

#### **Social Norms**

Common in societies that consider VAW and VAC normal

Condoning, justifying, and excusing violence and supporting gender inequality

Acceptability of wifebeating, male control, and physically disciplining children

Prioritization of family reputation and victim blaming encourage silence

#### Common Consequences

Victims of VAW and VAC share similar consequences of abuse

Similar mental, physical, and reproductive health consequences

Exposure to multiple types of violence may have increasing consequences

#### **Co-occurrence**

Often happen in the same household

Patriarchal family structures maintain male authority and dominance in the family

Use of physical discipline may be driven by own experience of VAC

Parent's use of physical discipline of children reinforce social acceptance of intimate partner violence (IPV) and VAC

#### Adolescence

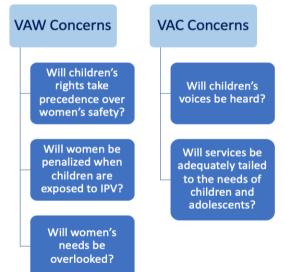
Some forms of violence are often first experienced during this period<sup>6</sup>

Period of elevated vulnerability to some forms of VAC/VAW

Perpetration and victimization usually begins in adolescence

Adolescent marriage and childbearing are risk factors for both IPV and VAC

# Figure 3: Collaboration Risks<sup>2</sup>



#### Tensions and Potential Risk of Collaboration

There are some identified risks of collaboration from either field that may influence fields to work independently (Figure 3).<sup>Z</sup> However, these reasons should be discussed between disciplines and should not deter either field from seeking and engaging in greater collaboration.<sup>Z</sup> Interdisciplinary collaboration will be necessary for ending VAW and VAC and achieving the SDGs by 2030.<sup>7,10</sup>

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