# Applying the child-centred and integrated framework for violence prevention: A case study on physical violence in Viet Nam

Le Hong Loan, Vu Thi Le Thanh & M. Catherine Maternowska

Published online: 20 Oct 2018.

Submit your article to this journal ⬏

Article views: 56

View Crossmark data ⬏

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

 OPEN ACCESS  Check for updates

# Applying the child-centred and integrated framework for violence prevention: A case study on physical violence in Viet Nam

Le Hong Loan[a], Vu Thi Le Thanh[a] and M. Catherine Maternowska[b]

[a]Child Protection, UNICEF Viet Nam, Hanoi; [b]UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence, Italy

**ABSTRACT**

In 1986, the Government of Viet Nam introduced a package of economic reforms known as *Doi Moi* (open door) policy that transformed the previously centrally planned, vertically oriented, largely agricultural economy into a market system in which trade opened up to the rest of the world. By 2013, Viet Nam became a lower middle-income country with a highly diversified economy. This rapid economic development and increasing global connectedness have brought many benefits for Vietnamese children, but also new risks. The Vietnamese Government has already done much to document and mitigate the effects of social and economic change through targeted poverty reduction programmes, expanding formal education and employment, implementing a family planning programme, promoting gender equality and early childhood care and education, introducing social assistance schemes and other support programmes for vulnerable people. Yet, high rates of violence affecting children persist and Viet Nam's social welfare system struggles to keep pace with the rapid growth of related emerging needs. Applying the Integrated Framework for Violence prevention, a revised social ecology framework, provided scholars and practitioners in Viet Nam with a new way to both visualize and translate data into more meaningful plans for effective violence prevention.

## Introduction

In November of 2016, during the 3rd High Level Meeting on South-South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific, Dao Hong Lan, Vice Minister of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), Government of Viet Nam, presented findings from the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* (the Drivers Study). Taking centre stage, and drawing on findings from the Study, the Vice Minister used the evidence to make a powerful point about the outcomes of rapid socio-economic development on children's well-being. Alongside, Viet Nam's celebrated rapid economic growth, she remarked, are the inevitable companions of poverty and inequity, creating a toxic mix for children who need protection.

---

**CONTACT** Mary Catherine Maternowska  ✉ catherine.maternowska@end-violence.org

*Present address for Mary Catherine Maternowska is Global Partnership to End Violence Secretariat, Geneva, Switzerland

Viet Nam was the first country in Asia and the second in the world to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC), on 20 February 1990. Since then, Viet Nam has made great efforts to implement the CRC, including awareness-raising activities on child rights, harmonization of the CRC with national laws, enhancement of state management over children's issues, and provision of increased resources for child development. Providing for children is intimately tied to providing for the nation. For example, as London (2011) points out in his review of education in Viet Nam, 'The pressure on education to serve as a vehicle of individual and collective advancement is more acute than ever as the society becomes more complex and globally integrated' (p. *vii*).

The downside of such growth, however, is inevitable and reducing children's risk factors for violence, in the context of such a rapidly changing economy, has been challenging. Emboldened by the evidence in her hands, Vice Minister Dao Hong Lan effectively acknowledged that one of the key lessons from the study is that violence prevention cannot be tackled in isolation from a deeper understanding of how a country's history, politics, and economics can shape a child's experiences growing up. These 'drivers' of violence, often the very economic and social reforms celebrated as progress, can also be invisible forms of harm. This high-level public acknowledgement, backed by several years of data mining and discussions, has shifted Viet Nam into a regional leader on addressing violence affecting children.

## The political economy of Viet Nam

Viet Nam is a proud country: it has survived not only a war but also life under a rapidly changing socio-economic context. After decades of conflict, poor economic recovery and reconstruction, in 1986, the government introduced a package of economic reforms known as *Doi Moi*, translated as the 'open door' renovation, transforming the previously centrally planned, vertically oriented, largely agricultural economy into a market system opening up trade to the rest of the world. As a result, Viet Nam has rapidly excelled from being one of the world's poorest countries in the mid-1980s to its current lower-middle-income status (World Bank, 2017).

Despite the laudable progress of *Doi Moi*, as Viet Nam moves towards middle-income status, new challenges face the country, such as deepening social stratification, and increased gaps both between the rich and the poor and between the Kinh majority and ethnic minority populations (UNICEF, 2010). Rapid urbanization and industrialization, fuelled by a largely feminized rural to urban migration (Anh, Vu, Bonfoh, & Schelling, 2012), have been accompanied by a host of challenges – including violence affecting children. Recognized by the Government as threats to the society's well-being, the Bureau of Social Evils, within MOLISA, considers children and gender equality as central to its efforts (MOLISA, 2017; UNICEF, 2010).

Focusing on the drivers of violence – that is factors at the structural and institutional levels that create the conditions in which violence is more or less likely to occur – sheds light on how seemingly progressive economic change and legislative action, considered protective of children's well-being can, in fact, manifest as invisible forms of harm. Understanding what drives violence in Viet Nam is the first step to finding solutions to effectively address it.

## Methods

From 2014 to 2016, with technical guidance from the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (OoR), the University of Edinburgh (UoE) and UNICEF Viet Nam, a Vietnamese research team – composed of MOLISA as the lead and host Ministry, civil society and Viet Nam's academic practitioner community – set out to understand what drives violence in Viet Nam as part of the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children*. The study methodology – which embraces the 'recycling' of existing data – involved a systematic literature review of academic and 'grey' literature, secondary analyses of national datasets, as well as an interventions mapping and policy analysis (for more details on the Study's methodology, see Maternowska & Fry, 2015).

A systematic literature review was first conducted, identifying 86 studies and reports, published in English and Vietnamese (see the full national report for more information: UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, & University of Edinburgh, 2017). Relevant information on the drivers, risk and protective factors were extracted into an Excel template and findings were analyzed to establish hypotheses about what might be driving violence affecting children in Viet Nam. These hypotheses were then tested through the secondary analyses.

Four datasets from nationally representative surveys were included in the secondary data analysis (see Table 1): two waves of the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY 2003 and 2009; GSO, 2009), as well as analyses of the 2011 and 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS; General Statistics of Vietnam [GSO] & UNICEF, 2015; General Statistics of Vietnam [GSO], UNICEF & UNFPA, 2011) and the National Domestic Violence Survey (General Statistics of Vietnam [GSO], 2010). As well as conducting analyses to test the hypotheses emerging from the literature review findings, the analysis also explored prevalence trends over time where possible. Vietnamese social scientists and statisticians from Oxford University and the local Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences also reviewed the Young Lives survey in Viet Nam to obtain estimates of the prevalence of corporal punishment, bullying, and access to services. Young Lives is a national longitudinal mixed methods study on childhood poverty, using a pro-poor sample, with the main aim of exploring children's daily experiences in-depth. Attending to the focus on violence in children's everyday lives, Young Lives researchers in Viet Nam mined years of longitudinal data (Vu, 2016; see more about Young Lives and the Drivers Study in Pells, Morrow, Maternowska & Potts in this special issue). Each of these datasets were analyzed separately rather than merged into a master dataset due to the wide variations between the surveys (see Table 1).

These various surveys were selected for analysis because no single study has similar definitions of physical, sexual and emotional violence – the three types of violence the study broadly set out to understand. Bereft of a nationally representative survey on violence affecting children, the initial task in Viet Nam was to piece together, from a variety of studies, a semblance of the violence landscape in order to begin the work of understanding what drives it. While the findings were many, they were mired by different types of measures, varied approaches and topical areas of focus with some studies looking at labour, others sexual trafficking and others corporal punishment.

**Table 1.** Datasets included in the secondary analyses

| Name of dataset | Organization(s) | Year | Sampling (method) | Sample ('n' disaggregated by age/gender) | Main purpose of survey | Type of physical violence measured | Definition/Questions asked |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SAVY (Survey and Assessment of Vietnamese Youth: Rounds 1 and 2) | Government Statistical Office (GSO) | 2003, 2009 | Sampling methods for SAVY 1 and SAVY 2 were the same. Multi-stage and stratified sampling methods, using the 2002 (SAVY 1) and 2008 (SAVY 2) Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey as the sampling frame. Both rounds were nationally representative. The response rate for SAVY 1 was 75.9% and about 80% for SAVY 2. | SAVY 1: 7,584 respondents aged 14–25 years 3,831 females 3,753 males SAVY 2: 10,044 respondents aged 14–25 years 4,981 females 5,093 males | Adolescent health survey | Physical violence victimization and perpetration | Have you ever been injured as a result of violence outside home? (12 month asked of those who answered 'yes') Have you ever been injured as a result of violence from a family member or partner? (12 month asked of those who answered 'yes') Have you ever hurt someone badly enough for them to require medical treatment? (12 month asked of those who answered 'yes') |
| MICS (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey) | GSO, UNICEF and UNFPA (2011) GSO & UNICEF (2015) | 2011, 2014 | The sampling methods were the same for the 2011 and 2014 surveys. Urban and rural areas within each region were identified as the main sampling strata and the sample was selected in two stages. Within each stratum, a specified number of census enumeration areas were selected systematically with probability proportional to size. After a household listing was carried out within the selected enumeration areas, a systematic sample of 20 households was drawn in each sample enumeration area. A total of 510 enumeration areas belonging to 510 communes were selected and visited during the fieldwork period. The sample was stratified by region, urban and rural areas, and is not self-weighted. | 2011 MICS: Parents of 9,257 children aged 1–14 years 4,743 male children 4,514 female children 2014 MICS: Parents of 6,291 children aged 2–14 years 3,338 male children 2,953 female children | To assess the situation of children and women on a number of indicators at the national and regional level | Violent discipline (physical punishment and severe physical punishment) | Physical punishment includes: shaking the child; spanking or hitting the child on the bottom with a bare hand; slapping the child on the hand, arm or leg; hitting the child on the bottom with a hard object; hitting the child on the face, head or ears, or; beating the child with an object over and over as hard as one can. The final two forms of physical punishment are categorized as severe physical punishment. |

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued).

| Name of dataset | Organization(s) | Year | Sampling (method) | Sample ('n' disaggregated by age/gender) | Main purpose of survey | Type of physical violence measured | Definition/Questions asked |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| National Domestic Violence Survey | GSO | 2010 | The quantitative component replicates the methodology developed for the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence. The qualitative component was not included in the secondary analysis. The quantitative component consisted of a cross-sectional nationally representative household survey. The sample selection was conducted by the Social and Environmental Statistics Department in collaboration with the Population and Labor Statistics Department of the General Statistics Office (GSO), which provided the sampling frame, the list of the census enumeration areas (EAs) and the list of selected household members in consultation with the international consultant. It was targeted to interview 5,520 respondents in a sample representing all 63 provinces in the six economic-geographical regions of Viet Nam. These respondents came from households that were selected in a multistage cluster sampling strategy in 460 EAs (from a 15% listing of the 2009 census EAs). Only one woman per household was selected to be interviewed. With precision within a defined 95% confidence level, the sample design allows for reliable estimates of the prevalence of different forms of violence against women for the entire country, for the six economic-geographical regions, and for urban and rural areas. | 4,838 women aged 18–60 years | To estimate the prevalence, frequencies and types of violence against women and children | Physical violence against women by husband or partner; and severe physical | (a) Slapped or threw something at her that could hurt (b) Pushed, shoved her or pulled her hair (c) Hit her with a fist or something else that could hurt (d) Kicked, dragged or beat her up (e) Choked or burned her purposely (f) Threatened to use or actually used a gun, knife or other weapon against her Items c-f were considered to be severe forms of physical violence |

*(Continued)*

**Table 1.** (Continued).

| Name of dataset | Organization(s) | Year | Sampling (method) | Sample ('n' disaggregated by age/gender) | Main purpose of survey | Type of physical violence measured | Definition/Questions asked |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Young Lives | Funded by the Department of International Development (DFID) through the University of Oxford. The Viet Nam team is based at the Centre for Analysis and Forecasting at the Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences | 2002–2013 | Two-cohort longitudinal study following approximately 12,000 children in Peru, Viet Nam, Ethiopia and two states in India. Using a multi-stage sampling procedure, children and their households were randomly sampled within 20 sites, which were selected following a semi-purposive sampling strategy in order to oversample poor areas. Four rounds of quantitative surveys of children, households and communities have been conducted. The Older Cohort follows children born in 1994–95 and interviewed at ages 8, 12, 15 and 19. The Younger Cohort follow children born in 2001–2 and gathered information from children and their families at ages 1, 5, 8 and 12. Four rounds of in-depth qualitative interviews have also been conducted with a nested sub-sample of YL children from both the Older and Younger Cohort, their parents, teachers and community members. This takes place in 3 of the sites in Viet Nam, 4 in Peru and India and 5 in Ethiopia. Sites were selected to explore variations in location, ethnicity and social and economic circumstances. Within the sites children were randomly selected from the larger YL sample. | 1,000 children in the Older Cohort 2,000 children in the Younger Cohort | To investigate the drivers and impacts of child poverty, and generate evidence to help policymakers design programmes | Corporal punishment; Bullying | Corporal punishment: Think about the past week; did you see a teacher use physical punishment on other students? • In that week, did the teacher use physical punishment on you? The term physical punishment was defined as any action that includes 'spanking, beating, punching, twisting child's ears or any other hitting, by using hand or an implement'. Bullying: At age 15 children completed (self-administered) questionnaires in which they were asked whether other young people had bullied them and, if so, how frequently they had experienced each type of bullying during the past year: never, once, two or three times, or four or more times. One-off incidents of victimization were not considered to be bullying. Bullying was defined as repetitive actions taking place two or three times, or four or more times. Physical bullying: Punched, kicked or beaten you up; Hurt you physically in any other way Verbal bullying: Called you names or sworn at you; Made fun of you for some reason Indirect bullying: Tried to get you into trouble with your friends; Made you uncomfortable by staring at you for a long time; Refused to talk to you or made other people not talk to you Attacks on property: Tried to break or damaged something of yours; Took something without permission or stole from you |

Together, the evidence was synthesized by the country team to explore the interplay of factors at the individual, interpersonal and the community levels interacting with the macro structural and institutional changes described in the previous section.

These efforts, the first of their kind in Viet Nam, were also complemented by a national mapping of violence prevention interventions and a policy analysis. Vietnamese colleagues embraced the Study's approach, as human-centred, reflective and participatory – ensuring a national lens (versus that of international agencies') took priority.

## Findings

### *Situating children: a brief overview of physical violence in Viet Nam*

Physical violence, also referred to as violent discipline in Viet Nam, figured prominently in the literature and national data sets.[1] Findings from the 2014 MICS showed that 43% of children aged 1–14 years in Viet Nam suffer from physical punishment at home and that male children tend to be more physically punished than their female counterparts (GSO, & UNICEF, 2015). Parents are seen as having a right to physically discipline children so mistakes are recognized and not repeated. Similarly, the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY) 1 in 2003 and SAVY 2 in 2009 found that the rate of male children in the age group of 14–25 being injured by family members is higher than that of female children, and the level of violence decreases as age increases (Vu Manh Loi, 2015).

For most children, physical violence at home predicts physical violence in the school and community – which usually takes the form of bullying or fighting with peers. Students who are violent at schools are often from families where their parents or other siblings have abused them physically and emotionally. They are quick to anger, see others as aggressive, and tend to use violence in dealing with them (Hoàng Bá Martin, Quyen, Swanton, Achyut, & Fulu, 2013). The poor and long-term outcomes that result from this negative reinforcement in both the home and school are significant. For example, longitudinal quantitative Young Lives data gathered over a period of more than 15 years showed that children in Viet Nam who report experiencing corporal punishment in schools at age 8 have poorer cognitive outcomes, poorer math scores and lower self-esteem and self-efficacy during adolescence than their non-abused peers (Portela & Pells, 2015). The relationship held even when controlling for math scores and similar measures at age 5, suggesting that beating may actually reduce cognitive performance (Portela & Pells, 2015). Other evidence confirms that children who experience violence perform less well in school and in life later on (Pells, Portela, & Espinoza, 2016), and that violence in the home, school and community perpetuates itself from one generation to the next (GSO, 2010; Yount et al., 2015; Rydstrøm, 2006).

### *The drivers of physical violence: the structural, the institutional and cultural conformity*

The **structural drivers** that define Viet Nam's political economy are not unlike those in the other country study sites of Italy, Peru and Zimbabwe also involved in the study: rapid socio-economic transformations, poverty, migration and gender inequity.

As Viet Nam's economy opened 'its doors', rates of labour migration both internationally and within Viet Nam have soared. However, members of ethnic minority groups are much less likely to migrate, other things equal. This lack of mobility may explain the persistence of poverty among Viet Nam's ethnic minority populations, even as national poverty has sharply diminished (General Statistics Office [GSO], 2012). Recent surveys do show that probability of migration is higher for young people and those with post-secondary education (Coxhead, Cuong & Vu, 2015). Gender plays a role too: increased job opportunities for young women have led to a 'feminization of migration' (GSO, 2012; Anh et al., 2012). The result has been an increasing number of 'left behind' children living with single parents, aunts, uncles and other relatives where they can be neglected or subject to other forms of maltreatment (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012). In cases where mothers bring their children with them, anticipating better access to schools and other social support services, hopes are often dashed. With limited social support networks and issues of integration, the new urban settings inevitably put their children at risk. Similarly, children who migrate, with or without a guardian, are faced with numerous challenges. For example, rural children who migrate to cities for work are at risk of sexual exploitation and violence (Rushing, Watts, & Rushing, 2005).

Migration and rapid socio-economic change in Viet Nam ushers in a related factor: rapid urbanization. According to the World Bank (2011), Viet Nam is urbanizing at a rate of 3.4% per year, most of which is in and around Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi. Urbanization, especially in these two large economic centres, has a central role to play in Viet Nam's economic growth and poverty reduction story. However, children's experiences suggest a slightly different scenario than the Bank's indicators of success might suggest (World Bank, 2011).

Studies in Viet Nam indicate that with growing cities and increased work opportunities, poorer children are enticed out of school to earn money to support their families, placing them at risk of labour and sexual exploitation (ILO & IPEC, 2002; MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011; Pells & Woodhead, 2014). A survey by ILO & IPEC (2002) indicates that over 1.7 million children aged 5–17 years are child labourers and many of them experience physical violence while working in often hazardous conditions where physical violence is common. Likewise, in Viet Nam, many child victims of sexual exploitation report being driven from their homes due to physical violence, family and household dysfunction, drug abuse and domestic violence (Australian Aid & World Vision, 2014; MOLISA, & UNICEF, 2011; Nguyen, 2006; Save the Children, 2013).

In Viet Nam, poverty and the unemployment results are associated with increased risk of physical and sexual violence against children (Nguyen, 2006). In Nguyen's study parents shared that they beat their children in order to relieve their stress even when the children make innocent mistakes. In both the 2014 MICS and the Young Lives surveys, data indicate that children from poorer households, compared to children from wealthier households, are more vulnerable to violent discipline in the household (GSO, & UNICEF, 2015) and at school (Hang & Tam, 2013; Portela & Pells, 2015). Narratives from children followed in the Young Lives longitudinal study (Vu, 2016) also make clear that a host of issues related to poverty, often considered a distal factor influencing violence affecting children, in fact, plays a significant role in their everyday lives. Children in interviews consistently mentioned economic hardships of the family as an important factor associated with subsequent violence in the home. According to the

children, when families' needs were not met due to lack of money, the parents blamed each other, leading to confrontations, injuries, cursing, and things being broken, as one young adolescent recounts: '*Parents have quarrels due to 'money issues'. The money issues will make people stressed, they lose self-control, drink alcohol and have bad behaviour*' (Vu, 2016, p. 26).

The Vietnamese government has already done much to document and mitigate the effects of social and rapid socio economic change through targeted poverty reduction programmes, expanding formal education and employment, implementing a family planning programme, promoting gender equality and early childhood care and education, introducing a social protection scheme and other support programmes for children in special circumstances, and operating social protection centres for orphaned and abandoned children (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015). And yet, the social welfare system struggles to keep pace with the rapid growth of emerging needs and to adapt to the challenges of new forms of inequality and vulnerability – all of which can trickle down to children in the household.

### The institutional

Even with institutional policies and reforms in place, in Viet Nam, the **institutional drivers** of violence, such as the weak legal framework, ineffective child protection systems and weak school governance, play a critical role in the State's inability to effectively tackle violence prevention. While significant emphasis has been placed on strengthening the legal and regulatory framework for child protection, less progress has been made in providing quality prevention, early intervention and response services for children and families, and too often there is limited support for families experiencing difficulties (ECPAT, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICE & World Vision, 2014). Adolescents are also at a disadvantage. The Child Law defines a child as a person under 16 years (Socialist Republic of Vietnam National Assembly, 2016). While the welfare and protection system has been established in line with the law to provide support and services for children under the age of 16, teenagers from 16 to 18 years have limited access to protection from violence. Prevention activities addressing violence affecting children are disconnected from family economic policies. Meanwhile, community (including schools) and family caregiving and protection capacity has eroded in the face of rapid development.

Child protection is a new concept in Viet Nam.Viet Nam's child protection work is shifting from vertical projects focusing on categories of children into building a child protection system. The lead Ministry responsible for child protection is MOLISA, which works in coordination with other ministries including Health; Education and Training; Justice; and Public Security – indicating, at least in concept, a multi-sectoral approach. Social work has not developed as a profession in Viet Nam until recently, and there are few dedicated, professionally qualified staff working in child protection, particularly at the district and commune levels to ensure appropriate case management and intervention when cases are detected. The system remains over-reliant on volunteers, and there is a lack of a continuum of services for prevention, early intervention and tertiary protection (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015).

Within schools, where children spend long hours, governance around violence prevention is critical. In spite of being outlawed, corporal punishment continues to

be viewed by some teachers as an effective way of imposing discipline in the classroom and shaping children's behaviour. One study found that 40% of teachers in four schools in Ha Noi believed in the effectiveness of corporal punishment and said the threat of it made children study harder, follow rules, be polite, adopt good habits and self-regulate their personalities (CSAGA, 2004). Teachers' violence against students is also a significant cause of school dropout (Hang & Tam, 2013). Some teachers single out particular students for punishment, and this can affect the climate of the school, making bullying in general seem more acceptable (Horton, 2011; Save the Children Sweden, Plan Vietnam, & UNICEF, 2005). The nationally representative SAVY data, two surveys with 7,584 young people aged 14–25 years in round 1 and 10,044 in round 2, analyzed for this study found that children who experience less violence are far more likely to feel connected to school – meaning a diminished desire to work hard, trust their teachers to be fair, and have ambitions to go to university (Vu Manh Loi, 2015).

While parents may suffer under the strains of limited income, children on the other hand can suffer from intense academic stress generated by their parents – not an uncommon feature in many Asian contexts (Nguyen, Dedding, Pham, Wright, & Bunders, 2013). Key risk factors for increased vulnerability are physical and emotional abuse within the household, poor school performance and high educational stress, making the links between the home and school clear. In a study of 1,648 students aged 16–18 years in three regions of Viet Nam, high academic stress placed on children by their families was associated with being a victim of emotional bullying, physical bullying and cyber bullying among both male and female students (Pham, 2015).

## The cultural: disentangling gender, power and religion

Cultural values underpin many, if not most, of the structural and institutional factors that conspire against children in Viet Nam. Traditionally, Vietnamese family structures were strongly influenced by patriarchy and Taoist and Confucian values conferring men with power over women and children in the family, community and society (GSO, 2010; MOLISA, & UNICEF, 2011; Dao, Hoang, Le, & Kanthoul, 2012; Rydstrøm, 2006). The idea that men are entitled to use violence to reproach their wives and children is still deep-rooted in a large portion of the Vietnamese population, and seldom condemned by the community (Dao et al., 2012). These cultural values, combined with gender norms that favour males are often cited as contributing to domestic violence and physical punishment (Rydstrøm, 2003). Cultural factors, including social norms, attitudes, beliefs and practices that stem from gender inequality, hierarchical parent-child relationships, and acceptance of domestic violence account for the high prevalence of physical abuse in parental relationships (Rydstrøm, 2006). The traditional perspective: 'keep children in order from early ages – keep wives in order from early days' clearly aligns power stemming from cultural ideals to structural issues, such as gender inequality and institutional issues, such as persistent cultural beliefs. All of these put the children and women at risk of violence.

According to Rydstrøm (2006), beating boys reflects 'a masculine discourse that integrates the practices of bringing up boys by means of violence', reinforcing the Confucian ideal of men. The norm of using violence to express masculinity can be a reason why boys are more likely to have violent confrontations with peers than girls. For

boys, bullying is mainly to achieve status or display strength, whereas for girls it is more often linked to expressions of intimacy (UN Viet Nam, 2011). Here too, traditional values play a significant role and are driven mostly by the parents' perceptions on the family education of children. The traditional norm of *'Spare the rod and spoil the child'* is the reason for parents and adults in general to use violent discipline as a method of child education. Parents are seen as having a right to discipline their children physically so mistakes are recognized and not repeated (GSO, UNICEF, & UNFPA, 2011).

## Discussion

Physical violence in Viet Nam is hardly straightforward: powerful structural and institutional drivers are deeply entangled with cultural norms. Rapid economic growth in the past two and a half decades has contributed to tremendous social transformation in Viet Nam. While the global integration and the communications revolution have connected young Vietnamese to outside information and views like never before (CIA, 2014), traditional gender roles remain deeply embedded in Vietnamese society and institutions, permeating work, home, and the public arena (Nguyen Viet Ha, 2013). The analysis of national data followed by debate and discussion suggests several important points for policymakers and practitioners working on violence prevention. Translating these findings with the goal of improving both policy and practice by the Viet Nam team reinforces the very foundations of the Study's framework (see Maternowska & Fry in this special issue).

### *Reflecting and revising: a child-centred and integrated framework for addressing violence affecting children*

A child-centred and integrated socio-ecological framework (see Maternowska & Potts, 2017; Maternowska & Fry in this special issue; Figure 1) builds on the work of several
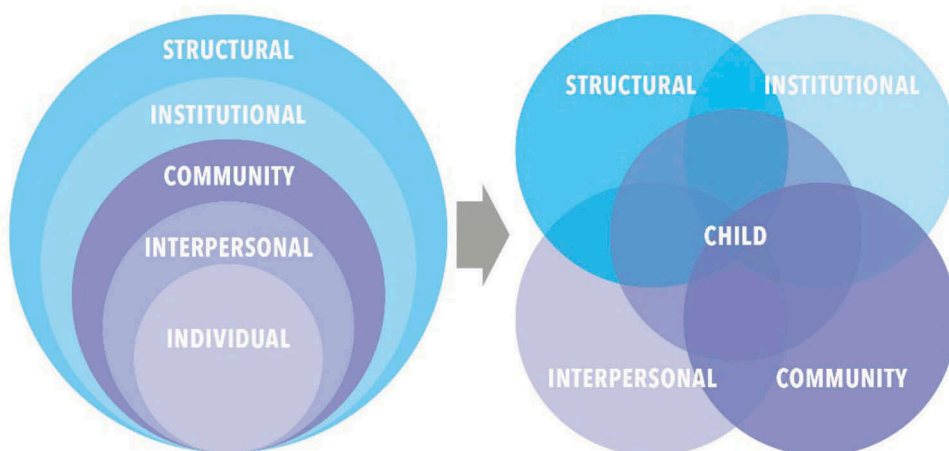


**Figure 1.** Revising the socio-ecological framework.
*Source*: Maternowska and Potts (2017), adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005)
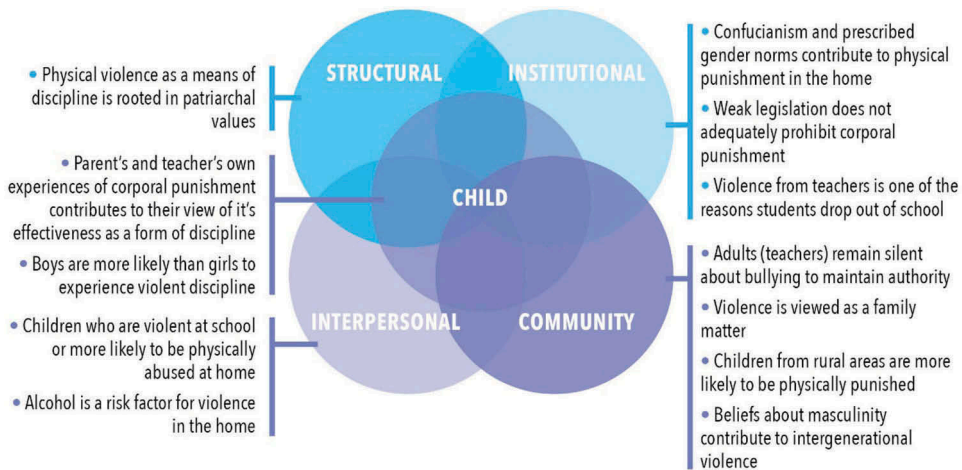
**Figure 2.** Child centred and integrated framework: corporal punishment in Viet Nam.
*Source*: Maternowska and Potts (2017)

scholars and acknowledges that behaviour is shaped by multiple, inter-related influences within multiple domains. Recognizing the child at the very centre of this framework, influenced by migration as much as family stress, helped researchers visualize better the interactive, dynamic and complex nature of violence in children's lives. The child-centred framework that resulted helped Vietnamese scholars plot their data so that practitioners and policy makers could '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 centre – 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 shows how a single type of violence is affected by a multitude of factors. In Figure 2, findings from the analysis of physical violence are plotted onto the framework.

Applying this framework helped Vietnamese nationals visualize the multi-factorial reasons why corporal punishment is so widespread – ranging from the structural level to factors relating to the characteristics of the individual child. Plotting the evidence onto the framework 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, global technical packages to address violence, such as *INSPIRE* (WHO et al., 2016), a set of seven evidence-based strategies to prevent and respond to violence affecting children and adolescents can be nationally adapted in meaningful ways to address a country's unique historical, cultural, political and economic contexts (For recommendations on

how violence affecting children can be prevented in Viet Nam, which were developed using the integrated framework, see: UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF OoR-Innocenti & UoE, 2017).

The inclusive approach implicated multiple ministries, as well as other stakeholders to engage in the analysis. For example, in Viet Nam the Ministries of Education; Labour, 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 Department helped plot the data and as a result understood how their collective contribution would be required to fully address violence prevention.

## Limitations

Several limitations affected our analysis – though none of these uncommon in the field of violence prevention. Importantly, any statistic on violence is likely to underestimate the true prevalence due to strong social stigma coupled with the absence of effective response services or protection should someone report an incident (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014). Second, as described earlier, the definitions used to measure violence differed between surveys and also in the studies included in the systematic review. This may affect prevalence rates, as research shows that *how* questions are asked – including the language used – can influence reporting of violence (Dartnall & Jewkes, 2013). The sampling frames used in each of the surveys also limited the secondary data analysis. For example, SAVY and MICS excludes those who do not live at home, and Young Lives excludes those who do not attend school. Therefore our analysis may under-represent experiences of children and young adults who are homeless, those who live in institutions (such as student dormitories or social protection centres), migrants and those who live in newly built residential areas which do not have official addresses, an increasing issue in rapidly expanding cities, such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (Vu Manh Loi, 2015).

## Conclusion

The connections between a country's history, culture and economic and social progress, as well as the institutional responses to these macro forces loom large for children and their everyday existence. Recognizing this, the Vietnamese team contributed to a model of understanding violence that addresses a child's agency – an issue at the heart of the CRC – while also acknowledging the interlocking structural and institutional factors that shape children's changing social worlds. In the process, the team successfully 'untangled' aspects of physical violence that were previously not well understood.

Using data to drive change, the proposed *Child-Centred and Integrated 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. While this analysis provides only a glimpse into the complexity unveiled, in Viet Nam, focusing largely on the drivers of physical violence. The national report provides copious findings on risk and protective factors which reveal how unequal power dynamics operate across gender, age and other status markers creating the

changing and dynamic circumstances within which violent acts occur (UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF OoR, & UoE, 2017). The findings further reinforce theories of inter-personal violence as not merely an interaction between a child and one or more other individuals but rather a complex socio-ecological phenomenon.

To accomplish this research was not a simple task. The topic of violence in child-hood is both sensitive and politically charged. No government wants to claim that it fails to protect its smallest, youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Recognizing this, the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* provided an alter-native model to understanding violence – a model that was inquiring and inclusive from the start and that engaged Vietnamese stakeholders – the women and men who oversee their country's national institutions designed to protect children – at the heart of the study process. Understanding what drives violence from a decidedly national lens, in the rapidly changing Vietnamese context, sets a new standard for how data and evidence can be used to tackle violence prevention. This, in the end, is the first and most important step to building better violence prevention and response interventions for millions of Vietnamese children – like their peers around their world – who deserve their right to full, productive and violence-free lives.

## Note

1. This paper will focus primarily on findings related to physical violence. What is known on sexual and emotional violence is discussed in detail in the national report (UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF OoR & UoE, 2017).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## References

Anh, L. T. K., Vu, L. H., Bonfoh, B., & Schelling, E. (2012). An analysis of interprovincial migration in Vietnam from 1989 to 2009. *Global Health Action*, 5.

Australian Aid & World Vision. (2014). *Sex, abuse and childhood: A study about knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to child sexual abuse, including in travel and tourism, in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. World Vision Australia*. Retrieved from http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/sex-abuse-childhood-report.pdf

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). (2014). *The world factbook: Country comparison, telephones – mobile cellular*. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2151rank.html

Coxhead, I., Cuong, N. V., & Vu, L. H. (2015). *Migration in Vietnam: New evidence from recent surveys*. World Bank: Vietnam Development Economics Discussion Papers No. 2. Retrieved from https://ssrn.com/abstract=2752834

CSAGA. (2004). A survey report on corporal punishment of children in families and schools. Ha Noi: Center for Studies and Applied Sciences in Gender – Family – Women and Adolescent.

Dao, T. D., Hoang, C., Le, H. T., & Kanthoul, L. (2012). *'Teach the wife when she first arrives' trajectories and pathways into violent and non-violent masculinities in Hue City and Phu Xuyen district, Viet Nam*. Hanoi.

Dartnall, E., & Jewkes, R. (2013). Sexual violence against women: The scope of the problem. *Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, *27*(1), 3–13.

ECPAT International, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, & World Vision. (2014). *National child protection systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region: A review and analysis of mappings and assessments*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

General Statistics of Vietnam (GSO). (2009). *Survey assessment of Vietnamese youth*. Retrieved from https://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=484&idmid=4&ItemID=4152

General Statistics of Vietnam (GSO). (2010). *'Keeping* silent is dying': Results from the *national study on domestic violence against women in Vietnam*. Hanoi: General Statistics of Vietnam.

General Statistics of Vietnam (GSO), & UNICEF. (2015). *Viet Nam multiple indicator cluster survey 2014: Final report*. Ha Noi: UNICEF. Retrieved from https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS5/East%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific/Viet%20Nam/2013-2014/Final/Viet%20Nam%202013-14%20MICS_English.pdf

General Statistics of Vietnam (GSO), UNICEF, & UNFPA. (2011). *Monitoring the situation of children and women. Multiple indicator cluster survey*. Ha Noi: UNICEF.

General Statistics Office (GSO). (2012). *Poverty & migration profile 2012: Data results from the Viet Nam survey on household living standards survey 2012*. Ha Noi: GSO. Retrieved from: http://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=483&idmid=4&ItemID=13889

Ha, N. V. (2013). Despite rapid modernization in Vietnam, survey reveals gender bias persists among youth. Asia Foundation. Retrieved from: https://asiafoundation.org/2013/03/06/despite-rapid-modernization-in-vietnam-survey-reveals-gender-bias-persists-among-youth/

Hang, N. T. T., & Tam, T. N. T. M. (2013). School violence evidence from young lives in Vietnam. *Vietnam Policy Paper, 1*. Oxford: Young Lives.

Hoang, L. A, & Yeoh, Brenda S.A. (2012). Sustaining families across transnational spaces: vietnamese migrant parents and their left-behind children. *Asian Studies Review*, 36(3), 307-325. doi:10.1080/10357823.2012.711810

Horton, P. (2011). *School bullying and power relations in Vietnam*. Linköping: Linköping University.

ILO, & IPEC. (2002). *Vietnam – children in prostitution in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho: A rapid assessment*. Geneva. Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/–asia/–ro–bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_13_en.pdf

Loi, V. M. (2015). *Data analysis of SAVY 1 and SAVY 2*. Ha Noi: UNICEF.

London, J. D. (2011). *Education in Vietnam*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) Publishing.

Martin, P., Quyen, D. L., Swanton, B., Achyut, P., & Fulu, E. (2013). *"The love journey": A school-based approach for primary prevention of gender violence and promotion of gender equity in Danang, Vietnam* (pp. 145). Danang: Paz y Desarrollo (Peace and Development).

Maternowska, M.C., & Fry, D. (2015). *Understanding the drivers of violence. A step-by-step guide to conducting preliminary research around what drives violence*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/440-TOOLKITstep-by-step_28Sept2016_OK.pdf

Maternowska, M. C., & Potts, A. (2017). *The multi-country study on the drivers of violence affecting children: A child-centred and integrated framework for violence prevention*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/448-child-centered-brief.pdf

MOLISA. (2017, February 17). *Decree: Stipulating functions, duties, authorities and organization structure of the ministry of labour - invalids and social affairs*. No. 14/2017/ND-CP. Retrieved from http://www.molisa.gov.vn/en/Pages/Detail-news.aspx?IDNews=1477

MOLISA, & UNICEF. (2011). *An analysis of the commercial sexual exploitation of children in selected provinces and cities of Vietnam*. Ha Noi: UNICEF Viet Nam. Retrieved from http://www.UNICEF.org/vietnam/resources_20191.html

Nguyen, D. T., Dedding, C., Pham, T. T., Wright, P., & Bunders, J. (2013). Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Vietnamese secondary school students and proposed solutions: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1), 1195.

Nguyen, T. H. (2006). *Child maltreatment in Vietnam: Prevalence and associated mental and physical health problems,thesis* (Doctor of Philosophy), Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.

Palermo, T., Bleck, J., & Peterman, A. (2014). Tip of the iceberg: Reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, *179*(5), 602–612.

Pells, K., Portela, M. J. O., & Espinoza, M. (2016). *Experiences of peer bullying among adolescents and associated effects on young adult outcomes: Longitudinal evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam*. Working Paper. Florence: Office of Research – Innocenti.

Pells, K., & Woodhead, M. (2014). *Changing children's lives: Risks and opportunities*. Young Lives, Department for International Development, University of Oxford.

Pham, T. T. B. (2015). *Study burden, academic stress and mental health among high school students in Vietnam* (Doctoral thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Portela, M. J. O., & Pells, K. (2015). *Corporal punishment in schools - longitudinal evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam*. Innocenti Discussion Papers. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti.

Rushing, R., Watts, C., & Rushing, S. (2005). Living the reality of forced sex work: Perspectives from young migrant women sex workers in northern Vietnam. *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health*, *50*(4), e41–e44.

Rydstrøm, H. (2003). Encountering "hot" anger: Domestic violence in contemporary Vietnam. *Violence Against Women*. doi:10.1177/1077801203009006004

Rydstrøm, H. (2006). Masculinity and punishment: Men's upbringing of boys in rural Vietnam. *Childhood*. doi:10.1177/0907568206066355

Save the Children (2013). *Child protection strategy 2013-2015: Prohibition and elimination of physical and humiliating punishment of children*. Retrieved from http://resourcecentre.savethe children.se/library/save-childrens-child-protection-strategy-2013-2015-prohibition-and-elimi nation-physical-and

Save the Children Sweden, Plan Vietnam, & UNICEF. (2005). *Educating or abusing? Physical and emotional punishment of children in Vietnam*. Ha Noi: UNICEF.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam. National Assembly. (2016). Law on Children (No. 102/2016/QH13).

UNICEF. (2010). *An analysis of the situation of children in Vietnam*. Ha Noi: Author. Retrieved from http://www.UNICEF.org/sitan/files/SitAn-Viet_Nam_2010_Eng.pdf

UNICEF Viet Nam. (2015, October). UNICEF Viet Nam Child Protection Programme Outcome Paper, October. Hanoi: UNICEF.

UNICEF Viet Nam, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, & University of Edinburgh. (2017). *Understanding the drivers of violence affecting children in Viet Nam*. Hanoi: UNICEF Viet Nam. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/files/upload/documents/MCSDV_Viet% 20Nam_Understanding%20Drivers%20of%20VAC.PDF

United Nations Vietnam. (2011). *State of the world's children report 2011: Factsheet on young people and protection in Viet Nam*. Hanoi: UNICEF.

Vu, T. T. H. (2016). *Understanding children's experiences of violence in Viet Nam: Evidence from young lives*. Office of Research - Innocenti Working Paper WP-2016-26. Florence: Innocenti. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IWP_2016_26.pdf

World Bank. (2011). Vietnam urbanization review: Technical assistance report. Hanoi: Author. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/225041468177548577/pdf/ 669160ESW0P1130Review000Full0report.pdf

World Bank. (2017). Viet Nam overview. Retrieved from http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ vietnam/overview

World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Together for Girls, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), & the World Bank. (2016). *Inspire: seven strategies for ending violence against children*. Geneva: WHO.

Yount, K. M., Higgins, E. M., VanderEnde, K. E., Krause, K. H., Minh, T. H., Schuler, S. R., & Anh, H. T. (2015). Men's perpetration of intimate partner violence in Vietnam gendered social learning and the challenges of masculinity. *Men and Masculinities*, 1097184×15572896.