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The Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children: An overview

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ABSTRACT

In 2013, UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti and the University of Edinburgh designed the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* in order to explore the question: *What drives violence and what can be done about it?* This paper describes the underpinning principles and frameworks of the Study conducted by national research teams comprising government, practitioners and academic researchers in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe. We review our overall methods and process, which relied heavily on a human-centred design and oriented approach. The learning that accompanied the Study ultimately shaped a new child-centred integrated framework for violence prevention. The framework assists practitioners to visualize how multiple factors may converge and intersect within a child's social ecology to make violence more or less likely to occur. We also share learning on how change happens and how policymakers, practitioners and researchers seeking to prevent violence can have greater impact. We then highlight the papers included in this edited volume, written by national partners in each of their countries. Our aim is that the knowledge and learning generated here will further enhance national, regional and global understandings of what drives violence affecting children and what can be done about it.

Introduction: the context and a changing violence prevention landscape

In 2013, UNICEF launched a global campaign with a powerful tag line: *Ending violence against children is everybody's business.* With over 1 billion children worldwide exposed to violence annually, the truth is that violence *should* be everyone's business – but isn't. In the same year, a small but determined team from UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti (OoR) joined forces with a small team of researchers at the University of Edinburgh to explore a question that policy makers were asking: *What drives violence and what can be done about it?* The process designed to answer this question would come to be called the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* (the Drivers Study).

Current approaches to understanding violence can be extractive in nature with teams of external researchers who identify 'the problem', collect the data, analyze the findings and

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then, help push political agendas forward. While awareness has increased across the field of violence prevention, accelerating action has been generally slow. We set out with the basic assumption that this politically sensitive question required some caution with respect to national understandings of violence. We also assumed that understanding larger-level changes – that is understanding the role of structural and institutional factors that drive violence – might be a more effective way to harness national consensus on how best to respond to violence. We quickly learned that issues of data sovereignty, for example, were critical. Owning the data analysis and the collective interpretations that followed proved powerful and led to a natural – rather than forced – accountability for children's well-being. In the process meaningful research practitioner partnerships were built. Before long, the model and approach were embedded regionally in four corners of the globe.

We worked in tandem with national partners to establish a research infrastructure (year 1), data analysis (year 2) and newly generated evidence (year 3). We documented our efforts and developed a protocol which subsequently enabled twelve other countries to take up the process more efficiently: a 'drivers of VAC study' now takes approximately 12–18 months to complete. The process, however, was not straightforward. The journey that unfolded is analogous, in many ways, to a jigsaw puzzle, but without the box (and therefore the picture) to guide us in putting together the thousands of potentially interlocking pieces that mask the larger forces and dynamics behind why violence happens. More often than not, there were missing puzzle pieces but this did not deter our country teams. Instead, the gaps were questioned and noted and over time, we created a new integrated framework for understanding violence and translating data into action.

Thanks to public health surveys, first conducted in the global north (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; May-Chahal & Cawson, 2005) then the global South (see for example: Reza et al., 2007; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Republic of Haiti, Together for Girls, & the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development, 2014; UNICEF Tanzania, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, & Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (2011)), our understanding of both the prevalence and incidence of violence has increased substantially. Ecological thinking from the field of developmental psychology has influenced the field of violence prevention for several decades, most notably in understanding intimate partner violence (Heise, 1998) building on the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005).

In general, iterations of Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model 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' (Belsky, 1980; Brown, 1995; Heise, 1998). As conceptual frameworks and data collection instruments have matured, understandings of *risk and protective factors* – those that reflect the likelihood of violence occurring due to associations with characteristics at the individual, interpersonal and community levels – are increasingly clear. Less understood are the *drivers of violence* – which we came to define, over the course of the Study, as factors at the institutional and structural levels that create the conditions in which violence is more or less likely to occur. The prioritization of institutional and structural factors related to violence is a timely and important contribution to existing literature on interpersonal violence prevention. Most initiatives to date have focused on individual and relational factors rather than how these interact with larger structural drivers. In the process, we co-created and then applied a new

version of this socio-ecological model (see Figure 1) in the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe – four countries in different regions, with varying historical, political and income contexts (Maternowska, Potts, Fry, & Casey, 2018).

The findings across these four diverse settings are elaborated in the papers that follow demonstrating the strength of this new framework to engage nationally relevant discussions, understandings and ultimately action to end violence affecting children (VAC).

Drivers of VAC

While VAC is a now a widely recognized global challenge, the synergy to create change is greatest at the country level. We anchored the Study within governments of our respective country sites, and specifically within the Ministries charged with children's welfare and wellbeing. As a study on the drivers of violence this made sense: it is within these corridors of power where efforts to own and address the structural and institutional factors that may
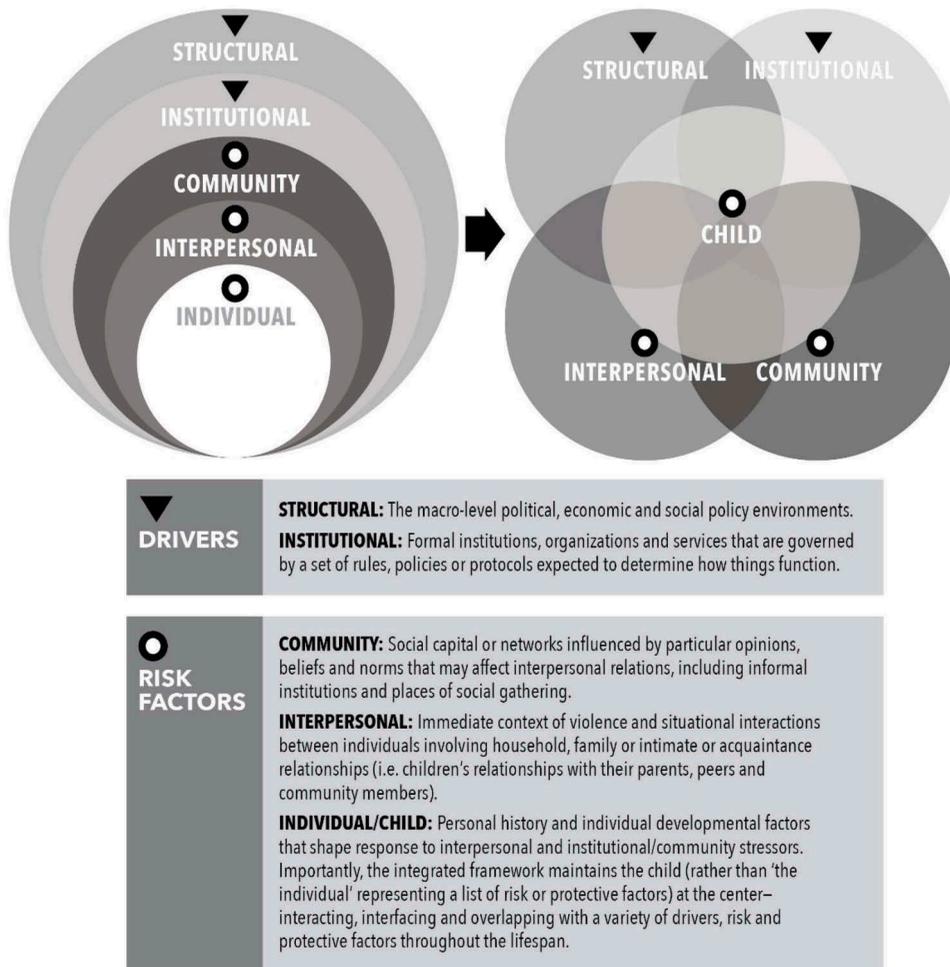

Figure 1. A child-centred and integrated framework for violence prevention.
Source: Maternowska and Potts (2017), adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005)

be enabling violence (or protection from violence) are most likely to gain traction. As the data discussions ensued, the teams across the globe agreed that while risk factors facing children in their homes, schools and communities were alarming, they could not be understood in isolation of a child's social ecology, or the child's relationships to and within differing environments. Casting a national lens onto the existing data and evidence was powerful and led to national interpretations of how risk and protective factors are, in fact, often closely associated with and in some instances, causally-related to factors at the institutional and structural level – what we collectively called *the drivers of violence*.

A driver of violence, for example, across all four national settings is gender inequity. As a factor, gender inequality appears to influence most directly the social roles of men and women, often reinforced by laws and institutions within a given society (Dao, Hoang, Le, & Kanthoul, 2012; Mashiri, 2013; Rojas, V, 2011; Zajczyk & Borlini, 2007). Gender norms, specific to each national context, play out at the community, interpersonal and sometimes individual levels where they manifest as risk factors. Boys and girls observe and experience these differences and expectations and, over time, these practices help embed the power and resource imbalances that often define how men and women are treated in their communities and homes. In this way, gender inequity – as a driver of violence – has profound influences on interactions at the community, interpersonal and individual levels (World Health Organization (WHO), 2010).

When plotted against the framework, what emerges, in all countries, is that drivers of violence, as identified in the literature, are perhaps not as distal as Bronfenbrenner's original model suggests. Ongoing regional debate and discussions – now in twelve countries pursuing drivers of violence work in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe – suggests several important clarifying 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 helps predict 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 implications of age and gender as risk and/or protective factors change depending on a young person's stage of development, social context and other circumstances. This learning highlights that a holistic and nimble approach to prevention is needed – one that recognizes that the laws and institutions designed to protect children must recognize their changing capacities and needs.

Complexity

Failing to account for the complexity of these 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.

The methods and the approach: putting practitioners and policy makers first

The Drivers Study utilized a common process across all four countries and included three separate components all of which build on existing national data and research: (1) a systematic review of peer-reviewed and published academic papers, with defined inclusion criteria, but also including a scoping of existing 'grey literature' – written material often in native languages (such as research reports and research briefing papers) often difficult to locate through conventional literature searches; (2) secondary analyses of nationally representative datasets, and (3) an initial mapping of the interventions landscape, particularly of evaluated prevention programs in each country (See Maternowska & Fry, 2015 for the full methodology, including the search strategy for the systematic reviews and interventions mappings and details about the secondary analysis plan; specific methods for each country are available in the national reports here: https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/violence-affecting-children/). The systematic reviews conducted in each country 'attempted to collate all empirical evidence that fit pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question [using] explicit, systematic methods selected with a view to minimizing bias (Higgins & Green, 2011, section 1.2).' Analyzed together, these sources of information helped build initial hypotheses around what drives violence in each country. Using this approach, we investigated with our national partners nearly 500 published research studies and 10 national data sets addressing VAC across the four country sites.

Because surveys specifically focused on violence can be ethically challenging and costly, the Study promoted the 'recycling' of data and relied exclusively on existing data and research. In fact, a pre-requisite for country engagement in the Study was at least some nationally representative data and/or longitudinal data would be made available to the national teams for analysis. Performing secondary analysis served two purposes: first, it strengthens the argument for using existing data before planning new primary data collection and second, it builds national capacity. Both the methodology and the process that resulted were carefully documented (see: www.unicef-irc.org/research/274; for specific methodological approaches see: Maternowska & Fry, 2015).

The Study drew on human-centred design principles, taking an iterative approach in the field. Human-centred design is defined as 'a multi-stage problem-solving process that optimizes solutions based on users' needs, behaviours, constraints, and operating contexts' (Lee, 2015). Throughout the Study we connected Governments and research practitioners in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe with global discussions while also facilitating and prioritizing national interpretations of violence through dialogue, and joint analysis and synthesis of findings. In addition to an international Advisory Board, the Study's governance structure included forming Steering Committees within each country, often led by gender and/or social welfare ministries – frequently the most under-resourced branches of their governments. Data collection and analysis was led by a team of national researchers, usually nested within Government Statistical Offices, working closely with the UNICEF country office.

Our research question was borne of multiple conversations with Government who acknowledged that VAC was a critical national issue but struggled to understand why and ultimately how to address the issue. These conversations and reflections shaped the main research question: *What drives violence affecting children and what can be done about it?* By placing – and struggling with – the data directly in the hands of nationals, curiosity and accountability for the issue grew naturally at the political, the managerial and the social levels. Dozens of

Table 1. Main principles of the study.

- empowering government counterparts as co-researchers, not passive receptors for policy recommendations;
- collaborating with government statisticians *in situ* to conduct secondary analyses in-country, not exporting the data or outsourcing data analysis to consultants;
- drawing on quality ethnography and other qualitative research;
- pausing to engage in meaning-making exercises at multiple stages of the research process;
- targeting specific messages within mixed audiences (aiming to avoid generic recommendations); and
- allowing for the time that co-creation requires

participatory sessions invited national policymakers, researchers and practitioners to debate, define, refine and address in an iterative way understandings of, and possible solutions to, VAC.

The guiding principles as applied to this study are described in Table 1. These core principles have been shown to characterize successful development initiatives across very different country contexts and program objectives. Nonetheless, these principles in practice do not fit standard donor log and time frames. For example, 'outputs' typically in the form of national reports, the currency of most development endeavours, were generated but slowly and with broad national participation and considerable oversight. At the same time, on-the-ground, nationals were driving their own real-time changes based on their evolving priorities.

The process was transformative personally and politically. First, by allowing each country to define the terms of their research engagement, while maintaining fidelity to the quality research standards set, we fostered both national ownership over the process and a confidence in how to use data to drive change.

> On a personal level I think I have, with my team, improved my capacity to understand violence research…and with my work, to identify what should be the main points of focus. I am more confident to convince others why violence prevention is important and how you should do that.

Participant from Peru Evidence of political success across Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe included a series of impressive government directives, including: high level advocacy efforts, legal reforms, budget reallocations for violence prevention, and support to a newly trained cadre of scientists and practitioners poised to take on the complexities of this study topic (Morton & Casey, 2017). The Study's approach also created new and surprising alliances between ministries.

Most importantly, the approach reflected a more equitable north-south collaboration than is typical when research rich universities and think tanks meet resource poor ministries. Although the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti and University of Edinburgh team provided technical assistance when requested, final control over national products was squarely located within the National Steering Committees. As research practitioners working on violence prevention, this allowed us to reflect on several assumptions about how research and practice can be brokered.

Untangling the assumptions: reframing violence prevention research

In 2014, just one year into the Study, at the invitation of the Government of Swaziland and with support from UNICEF and Together for Girls, a landmark international meeting was held in Ezulwini, Swaziland, entitled the '*Global Violence against Children Meeting: From Research to Action: Advancing Prevention and Response to Violence against Children*' (https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Swaziland_Global_VAC_Meeting_Report.pdf).

The aim was to foster knowledge exchange around using research to mobilize an effective policy and program response to VAC at the national and international levels. The meeting brought together more than 180 participants from 20 countries across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to share evidence and practices on prevention and response to VAC. At this meeting, many colleagues assumed the drivers of VAC were already well-understood.

Three years later, at the close of the first stage of this research, our analysis has shown that in fact we are still discovering what drives violence in countries around the world. Our approach makes clear that identifying factors such as poverty, rapid socio-economic change, migration or gender inequity remains abstract or academic. Too often, the analysis of these factors fails to incorporate and reflect national perspectives and knowledge. So, while a particular driver of violence might be identified and classified as something 'we already know', the Study's national teams in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe insisted on contextualizing and adapting these understandings. In doing this, they successfully challenged a number of assumptions surrounding violence prevention research, even with our relatively small and purposeful selection of countries. It is our hope that these will serve to guide future investments in violence prevention research.

Assumption # 1: We must convince decision makers to use data.

During initial discussions with national teams at the start of the Study, we found that decision makers in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe, understood the power of data and wanted to use data to inform policies and programs on violence prevention but did not necessarily know how or as is typically the case with violence prevention, even where to begin. Often, violence prevention and response for children is housed in the Ministries of Gender and Community Development or Social Welfare – and these ministries are inevitably under-resourced, lacking the human and financial capacity to work with data. We purposely brought weak ministries (such as Gender and Children) together with typically stronger ministries (such as Finance) to collaborate in new and unparalled ways building alliances around violence prevention and strengthening data and analysis.

Without doubt, as a topic violence prevention is overwhelming with: different definitions of violence that change depending on the type of study and the discipline of practice, different types of violence, different places where violence happens, and different children of different ages and genders experiencing violence in different ways. Working in tandem with national teams, we took their lead – we listened to what they needed and co-designed courses addressing the drivers of violence from different ministerial perspectives, weaving their understandings into common consensus and learning. Knowing that their voice was corroborated by years of research drawing from diverse disciplines and using different approaches to understand a complex social problem was empowering.

Assumption #2: Data collection systems on violence – including those that are nationally representative – are politically marginalized or non-existent.

While each of the countries in the Study had at least one nationally representative data set addressing interpersonal violence involving children, no single study (except for the National Baseline Survey of Life Experiences of Adolescents in Zimbabwe) was focused entirely on VAC. Approaching existing datasets with an open mind to understand what they can and

cannot say about the presence or absence of interpersonal violence in children's lives is important. Our teams mined existing surveys for questions related to violence, and by focusing on secondary data analysis we were able to 'recycle' previous research investments. Often useful knowledge and resources may be overlooked due to their status as 'grey literature' or datasets may be overlooked because their primary purpose is in other areas. Even in countries claiming to have little or no data on violence, we were able to uncover findings addressing violence in children's everyday lives, looking through the lens of, for example, the family (and sociology), population trends (demography), land use patterns and migration (and anthropology), finance (and economics), access to health care (and public health) and/or gender inequity (gender studies). Finally, post-graduate work, written or published in local languages, when it met quality criteria, offered rich insights that are frequently overlooked in higher level literature reviews. We triangulated these findings with other research studies to explain phenomenon. In countries where Young Lives longitudinal surveys were being carried out, agreements were made to add violence-related questions to the next round of the surveys, making them even more relevant (Morton & Casey, 2017). In the process, we realized that the data is there, it simply needs to be uncovered. This is how these national sources of information are naturally pulled from the 'political margins' to the centre of discussion and debate.

Assumption #3: Agencies that contract or deliver services are not staffed to substantively participate in and undertake research.

While most senior child protection managers are not researchers by training, they understand taking a solutions-oriented approach and want evidence to inform their programming. The staff with whom we partnered – both in the UN system and among non-governmental organizations (NGO) and civil society organizations (CSO) – were consistently receptive to assistance in finding the right research partners, facilitating engagement with the Steering Committees, and providing content-specific support and review of all major products. In some countries, Child Protection staff at UNICEF reached out to colleagues in other sections such as Monitoring & Evaluation and Social Policy – creating an important internal cohesion across thematic 'silos' and bringing a mix of skillsets to the Study's process. Regional Offices also played an important support role encouraging other country offices to join the process, and by supporting regional training workshops to reinforce learning. In fact, the 'drivers' research methodology has proved to be highly user-friendly. Twelve UNICEF country offices, many of them partnering with local NGOs and their Governments partners have now engaged in a parallel 'Research to Policy and Practice Process' (R3P), effectively drawing on the Study's methodology and approach (Maternowska, 2014; Maternowska & Fry, 2015). Involving NGOS and CSOs in the research as partners from the beginning was an important part of this process and is an important future goal – since these organizations are key to implementing and delivering services on the ground.

Assumption #4: As part of the Sustainable Development Goals, data is being collected to understand and respond to violence – but Governments lack the capacity and/or will to do so.

In 2015, world leaders made a commitment to end all forms of VAC by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This moment presents an historic

opportunity to unite the world behind a global, national and local movement to protect the world's most precious asset – its children. The UN and other international agencies are highlighting the need for increased support to national statistical systems to improve monitoring of the SDGs and evidence-based policy making for sustainable development (Paul, 2017). Our work provides that roadmap. Findings from the Drivers Study show that when national processes are respected, change can happen. Governments in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe are poised to respond to these sustainable development goals and commitments as the Drivers Study moves into the next stage of implementation science.

Putting the puzzle together: the missing frame (work)

Any process of scientific discovery is riddled with concepts of uncertainty and this study was no exception. We grappled with our country teams to make sense of existing theories and frameworks, many of which have been widely used but with uncertain success in the field of violence prevention. A government statistician summed up our frustration eloquently: *The theory we need (for analysis) is the theory we need to build.* Through the course of this first stage of the Study (see: https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/431-multicobrief15.pdf), numerous theories and perspectives helped situate the review, analysis and synthesis of the multi-country findings more effectively. The process included sorting through the meaning of *different types of violence* (emotional, physical and sexual) *happening in different places* (the home, school and community) *at different levels of a child's social ecology* (the structural, institutional, community, interpersonal and individual) while keeping issues of *age, gender and power relations figuring prominently* in our understanding. Within all these variables, it was clear too that the *dynamics of children's lives* (that is, recognizing that children are changing, growing and often moving from one setting to another) made the task at hand even more challenging. The variables that might predispose a child to a violent or violence-free life appear to be moving in multiple and often shifting directions across time – making the job of assembling the puzzle so difficult.

To this end we primarily drew on five different, though overlapping, bodies of knowledge including: complexity science, intersectionality, the realist review methodology, social determinants of health, feminist theory and social norms theory (see: Maternowska et al., 2018). It is from this rich mix of perspectives and months of reflection and revision across the globe in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa that a new framework was produced – one that each country could plot its data onto to understand better how and why violence erupts in both the public and private spheres of children's lives.

The papers in this journal share these findings as well as the processes and outcomes that preceded and followed uncovering them. They support the idea that no single level within the socio-ecological model, and no single factor (drivers and/or risk factors) within or between those levels, determines or explains an act of interpersonal violence involving a child. Instead each factor, when combined with one or more other factors, may lead to a situation where a person perpetrates violence against a child. We acknowledge that this framework is not new – it was first used to explain human development by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and later was used to elucidate the complex

issue of child abuse (Belsky, 1980), sexual coercion (Brown, 1995) and domestic violence (Heise, 1998). But describing an approach for systematically mapping existing qualitative and quantitative data onto it, is indeed a new approach and perspective for the field of violence prevention for children; so too is a very purposeful effort to document the dynamism of children's lives as they develop and how this should be accounted for within an ecological framework.

Too often, child protection practitioners have approached the issue of violence in a reactive manner, based on specific incidents or types of violence and rarely stepping back to consider how incidents of violence map onto a theoretical framework (socio-ecological or otherwise) or to review existing evidence around what drives violence and how it can be prevented. The Know Violence in Childhood Learning Initiative (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017) states this well: 'Approaches to addressing violence have sometimes been limited to dealing with violence primarily as a series of separate incidents, failing to recognize its deep social and economic roots' (p. 65).

An integrated framework shows the potential intersectionality of each level, through the overlap of what we refer to as 'domains' (the structural, institutional, community, interpersonal and the child). Rather than stacking levels as is traditionally done, in a bound and hierarchal manner, the integrated framework demonstrates the overlapping and interacting domains and suggests then the multi-sectoral nature of violence prevention work (see Figure 1). The framework is designed to assist practitioners in visualizing 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.

The time is now

The timing of this study has been opportune. While Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe and subsequently eight other UNICEF Country Offices and their governments adapted the drivers of violence approach and methodology (from 2014 to 2017), the scientific, policy and practice platforms supporting violence prevention have simultaneously burgeoned. Globally relevant yet context-specific solutions to the challenge of violence are slowly emerging and although the road ahead is likely to be difficult, it is certainly possible. The *INSPIRE* framework (WHO et al., 2016), developed by 10 core multilateral agencies, has been instrumental in galvanizing efforts to prevent and respond to VAC at the international and national levels. Its seven evidence-base strategies, in addition to its focus on multi-sectoral engagement and strong measurement, is based on the best available evidence to help countries and communities intensify and improve implementation of the prevention programs and services potential. In several Drivers Study sites, INSPIRE is now being used – and understood – as central to implementation efforts. Efforts to measure interventions around VAC and violence against women (VAW) – and even the intersection of these two previously divergent fields (Fry & Elliott, 2017; Guedes, Bott, García-Moreno, & Colombini, 2016) – further represents a significant shift in both policy and practice uptake.

The Drivers Study is linked to other global initiatives seeking to improve the prevention of and response to VAC – each with its own focus. *Together for Girls,* a global public-private partnership focused on sexual violence has relied largely on population-based surveys as its main source of evidence. These Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS), led in partnership with the CDC, produce detailed, valuable data for programs and have helped move prevention up the policy ladder. Demand for these surveys is high, reflecting a significant shift in the field of violence prevention and evidence generation. Until countries complete this important baseline work, the Drivers Study approach positions them well to understand better what drives violence and what can be done about it. Equally, we recognize the importance of measuring change over time, and are encouraged by the SDG Inter-Agency and Expert Group - VAC, part of the United Nations Statistical Commission's efforts to do so. The *KNOW Violence in Childhood* (2017) global learning initiative, harnessing learning and action across boundaries, stimulating global advocacy, and encouraging greater investment in prevention has been a time-bound initiative which launched in 2014. Our co-learning was simultaneous – with each body of work building off of new understandings of how complex contexts can be, given the interactions between a child, the place where violence happens (versus simply type of violence) and the critical role of childhood as age and gender factors unfold over time (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017).

What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? (http://www.svri.org/WhatWorks.htm), sponsored by the British government and funding innovative approaches to violence prevention has helped inform the Drivers Study, influencing the second stage of research emphasising the need to test different approaches in several different country sites. Finally, the Study findings coincide with the work of *Global Partnership to End Violence* (http://www.end-violence.org/), a global initiative supporting the efforts of 'pathfinding' countries (via their governments) who wish to be at the forefront of designing and implementing new approaches to preventing and responding to VAC. Eight of the current 23 Pathfinding Countries have used the Drivers Study methodology (or several elements of it) to move their countries forward as member to the global movement to end violence.

Outline of this special edited volume

We dedicate this special edited issue of *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* to the children of Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe. Collectively, as a group of applied researchers from four corners of the globe, our experiences demonstrate how the 'science of violence' is indeed a sensitive, complex and unpredictable field of study and practice. This special issue focuses as much on the process of these countries undertaking a 'drivers of VAC' study as it does highlighting learning and outcomes of the Drivers Study. Through the voice of national research-practitioners, and where possible children's perspectives, we offer in this volume constructive lessons about how change happens and how policymakers, practitioners and researchers seeking to prevent violence can have greater impact.

In the papers that follow, we explore the findings across four different countries spanning the high income Southern European economy of Italy (paper 7) to the challenging low-income economic context of Zimbabwe in Southern Africa (paper 6). Worldwide, such economic polarities are now joined by a growing number of what political analysts call 'booming economies'; these too represented in our Study by Peru,

South America's star economic performer (paper 5) and in the rapidly growing Southeast Asian economy of Viet Nam (paper 4). Taken together, these four countries represent far more than divergent economies or even geographies, which in and of themselves make the practicalities of tackling something like violence prevention difficult. Add to this each country's unique history of political violence, economic decline and growth, and culturally embedded practices and beliefs and the concept of 'difficult' transforms into the realm of truly complex.

However, it is in this process of co-creation that complexity is understood, alliances are built and national accountability is born. For example, our collaboration with University of Oxford and the Young Lives longitudinal study teams in Peru and Viet Nam afforded us insights into the value of mixed methods research and understanding violence over time and space (paper 3). While econometric models and sophisticated statistical analyses may shed light on the scope of violence – or even seek to predict where and when it might happen – our work within these national settings confirms that little is linear. In the absence of linearity or causality as it is traditionally measured and explained, multiple sources of knowledge, both quantitative and qualitative are required. Triangulating data turned into triangulating bodies of knowledge and this led to triangulating ministries, researchers and the front line practitioners in all of the countries where we worked. In effect, this is how we collectively uncovered the mechanisms that interact, overlap and reinforce each other to make some children more protected from or at risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence.

It is with the governments of Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe, their national research teams and a hugely supportive audience of activists and advocates from around the world that we conducted the Study detailed in this edited volume. We trust that the knowledge and learning shared here will further enhance national, regional and global understandings of what drives VAC and what can be done to address it.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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