Communication for Development Approaches to Address Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review

SUMMARY REPORT

C4D WORKING PAPER SERIES

DREXEL UNIVERSITY Dornsife School of Public Health

for every child
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Communication for Development Approaches to Address Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review

In the State of Palestine, five-year-old triplets (left-right) Alma, Maryam and Lareen have taken shelter in a mental health clinic, where their father is a nurse, in Gaza City.
FOREWORD

Despite a clear legal and ethical imperative to protect children, Violence against Children (VAC) remains pervasive. It affects millions of children every year, in their homes, communities, schools, workplaces, in detention centres and childcare institutions, and online. It can have long lasting, and often lifelong, negative effects. The vast majority of children never speak out about their experiences and even fewer receive the services they need to recover.

When the global community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, targets were set to eradicate all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking against boys and girls, as well as harmful practices by 2030. There is increasing recognition that VAC places a long-term burden on health and social services, undermines investment and development in other sectors (such as health, early childhood development, nutrition and education) and constrains economic growth. Conversely, investment in ending violence against children and women can accelerate development across all the SDGs.

Violence against children encompasses “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” (Article 19, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Transforming social norms that condone or facilitate VAC or prevent child victims from accessing support, and reinforcing positive norms that protect children from violence, has been increasingly recognized as crucial by the global community – it is, for example, one key strategy of the INSPIRE package for ending violence against children (WHO, 2016).

UNICEF has a critical role to play in ending VAC and achieving the SDGs. It is a leading global agency with the profile, reach, expertise and mandate to achieve impact at scale. Building on its expertise and technical leadership in Communication for Development (C4D), UNICEF is also well placed to lead on innovation and best practice in shifting social norms related to VAC. C4D is indeed integral to UNICEF’s VAC programmatic approach under the Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Changing social norms is also embedded in the VAC Theory of Change, as a stand-alone outcome, and as a cross-cutting strategy that influences all other outcomes.

Even so, the evidence and documentation of C4D best practices to address VAC is limited. There is an urgent need to improve access, dissemination, systematization, and use of data and evidence on social and behavior change and community engagement to promote protective practices. In recent years, several efforts have been undertaken to strengthen this. Yet there are few such efforts focused on VAC.

This report is part of a package of evidence and tools that includes this systematic review of C4D interventions to address VAC, an evidence review of randomized controlled trials, a Technical Guidance for C4D programmes addressing VAC, and training materials related to the Guidance. This suite of materials is a result of UNICEF’s investments in C4D capacity and its collaboration with Drexel University to strengthening the evidence-base on what works for preventing and responding to VAC through C4D. Several UNICEF offices are using these resources to develop country roadmaps and strengthen their strategies to address VAC through robust C4D programming. We hope that more UNICEF offices, governments, partner agencies, and others working in this area will find this package useful. We hope that it will also provide the hard evidence that governments and development agencies need for scaling up efforts to reduce violence against children.

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Contents

Foreword ................................................................. 2
Background ............................................................. 4
   Executive summary ........................................... 5
   Sampling ............................................................. 6
Key findings .......................................................... 7
   SECTION 1: Sampling information ....................... 7
   SECTION 2: Programme design issues .................... 8
   SECTION 3: Programme implementation information .... 9
   SECTION 4: Overall programme evaluation processes .... 11
   SECTION 5: Thematic analysis of key results by type of research 12
Overall recommendations ........................................ 14
Conclusion ........................................................... 20
References ............................................................. 21
Appendix A ............................................................. 21
Appendix B ............................................................. 22
Appendix C ............................................................. 23
This research study, initiated by the Programme Division at UNICEF headquarters in New York, systematically analyses interventions addressing violence against children through the use of communication for development (C4D). It sought to answer the following research question: ‘What are the effects of communication for development approaches to address violence against children (VAC)?’ This summary report is meant for public distribution and accompanies a longer document that provides a full and detailed report of the systematic review and its findings.

1 The term communication for development (C4D) is being used to cover a wide variety of communication approaches and strategies as detailed in Figure 1.
This systematic review examined available peer-reviewed, published and grey literature (reports and programme documents) on C4D interventions addressing issues relating to VAC within a 13-year time period (2000-2013). The systematic review focused on interventions in which children, as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), were either the audience or beneficiaries. There are differences among practitioners and scholars on all the communication approaches and terms that constitute C4D. Therefore, the systematic review included several complementary terms such as behaviour change communication, social mobilization, media campaigns, and advocacy. See Figure 1 for a complete list of communication approaches that typically fall under the domain of C4D. As for types of VAC, a variety of broad and specific issues were included. The systematic review did not include interventions dealing with VAC in conflict settings or during emergency/disaster situations.

FIGURE 1: List of communication approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication approaches and terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication (for/and) development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour change communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community mobilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive communication technologies (ICTs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Executive summary

The number of manuscripts related to the use of C4D approaches to address VAC has steadily increased each year since 2000. Of the 302 manuscripts that were analysed, 44 per cent discuss an intervention implemented in a developing country, which speaks to the geographic robustness of this review.

Roughly half of the interventions reviewed did not explicitly reference a conceptual model to underpin the interventions. Those that did, typically cited individual or cognitive conceptual models and a majority focused on the individual level of change. Few programme objectives utilized SMART or SPICED (see reference on page 8 for criteria description) criteria to write programme objectives or focused on positive changes that individuals could undertake to promote behaviour and social change. All of the C4D objectives were written in ‘cognitive’ terms with no reference to addressing affective and behavioural domains such as attitudes, norms and practices.

Most interventions did not report segmenting audiences into primary, secondary or tertiary groups. Interventions commonly used more than one approach to meet stated objectives, with interpersonal communication and training being the dominant approaches. However, nearly two-thirds of interventions did not select multiple channels to meet the needs of a diverse and segmented audience. New technologies and mobile forms of communication were used to a lesser degree, although cross-tabulations with the year of publication showed a growing reliance on new technologies.

The paucity of robust and rigorous monitoring and evaluation underscores the need to invest more heavily in research, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Few manuscripts described
formative research or process evaluations. Significantly more manuscripts reported on impact evaluations. Qualitative observational data was a commonly utilized evaluation methodology. This type of data on its own, unfortunately, makes a weak case for C4D attribution to programme outcomes. Overall, there is a serious underutilization of participatory research methods for any and all types of evaluations.

In summary, it is essential to expand outcome evaluation studies so as to enhance our understanding of global best practices, which in turn need to be contextualized based on what works at a local level to address VAC.

Moving forward, future research and practice should consider the following 15 overall recommendations. These are categorized under three broad themes relevant to contextualizing and framing the issue, programme design, implementation and evaluation. These themes are elaborated later on in the report.

### Contextualisation and framing of the issue

- Specifically address children within other forms of violence
- Explore linkages between different forms of VAC
- Explore VAC along a spectrum
- Contextualize VAC both as a cause and an outcome
- Start early and continue into adulthood
- Move beyond a place-based approach to a wider norms-based approach to incorporate innovative communication channels and tackle the culture of violence

### Programme design

- Embrace the social ecological model for behaviour and social change
- Broaden conceptualizations of C4D approaches to encompass efforts that involve any form of communication/communicative action and cut across all levels in the social ecological model
- Segment audiences by gender and address gender specific needs and differences
- Clarify direct and indirect linkages between stated programme outcomes and C4D or communication objectives and messages
- Reconfigure programme and C4D/communication objectives of VAC interventions
- Move beyond individually-focused knowledge, attitudes, and practices by addressing social, emotional, and behavioural competencies

### Programme implementation and evaluation

- Position VAC as a ’glocal’ issue through qualitative and quantitative measurement
- Enhance investment in research
- Scale up promising interventions

In order to systematize the review process, the shortlisting of manuscripts involved seven databases and three stages of review:

1. **TITLE REVIEW**: Titles deemed relevant were shortlisted for abstract review.
2. **ABSTRACT REVIEW**: Shortlisted abstracts were scanned for relevance based on their adherence to the inclusion criteria.
3. **FULL TEXT REVIEW**: Full text manuscripts of the relevant abstracts were read and simultaneously entered into a database.

While the key search criteria yielded a total of 80,532 results, only 302 manuscripts made the final cut. In other words, 302 articles were read fully and coded into an excel database for further analysis.
The results from this systematic review were organized into five sections:

- **SECTION 1**: Sampling information
- **SECTION 2**: Programme design elements
- **SECTION 3**: Programme implementation
- **SECTION 4**: Overall programme evaluation processes
- **SECTION 5**: Thematic analysis of the key results by type or research


It is important to note that over 50 per cent of manuscripts from South Asia came from...
India and 39 per cent of manuscripts from industrialized countries came from the United States. Manuscripts categorized as global typically reflected reviews and meta-analyses. A larger proportion of the interventions were implemented in urban locations (81 manuscripts or 27 per cent) as compared to rural locations (12 manuscripts or 4 per cent). Eighty interventions (over 25 per cent) were implemented in multiple locations. The general trend in publications utilizing C4D approaches to address VAC issues is promising, with a steady increase in the numbers of manuscripts published every year since 2000.

SECTION 2: Programme design elements

The analysis of programme design focused on conceptual frameworks, programme and communication objectives, and the level of influence reported in the manuscripts.

ASSESSMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Few manuscripts included an explicit statement of conceptual models to underpin described interventions. Almost 43 per cent of the manuscripts did not clearly reference any conceptual model. Cognitive models (e.g. social cognitive theory and the theory of planned behaviour) were mentioned most often, appearing in 51 of the manuscripts reviewed. Close to a quarter of the manuscripts explicitly relied on individually-based approaches to behaviour change. The utilization of a social-ecological framework\(^3\) to design and implement interventions was largely implicit. Community approaches were explicitly mentioned in 34 manuscripts (11 per cent). There was evidence of additional models as well: 15 manuscripts (5 per cent) referenced social marketing and some 13 manuscripts (4 per cent) reported addressing social norms. In keeping with UNICEF’s strong focus on human rights-based approaches, eight manuscripts (3 per cent) specifically mentioned a human rights, gender or multicultural focus.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMME AND COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

There was little to no evidence of the utilization of SMART or SPICED\(^4\) criteria when describing programme objectives. Moreover, the stated objectives of the individual behaviour change programmes were universally designed to reduce or eliminate harmful practices. Programme objectives made little stated effort to focus on positive changes that individuals could undertake to promote behaviour and social change. Of the 302 manuscripts, 28 (9 per cent) did not provide any specific communication objectives guiding the intervention. Furthermore, it is important to note that all the C4D objectives were written in

\(\text{TABLE 1: Geographical distribution of manuscripts in the systematic review database}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS</th>
<th>PROPORTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30 manuscripts</td>
<td>about 10 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern and Southern Africa</td>
<td>18 manuscripts</td>
<td>about 6 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>15 manuscripts</td>
<td>about 5 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrialized countries</td>
<td>168 manuscripts</td>
<td>over 50 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>31 manuscripts</td>
<td>about 10 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^3\) Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) social ecological model postulates that the entire ecological system in which growth occurs needs to be taken into account in order to understand human development. This system is composed of five socially organized and inter-related subsystems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

\(^4\) SMART is a mnemonic for criteria used to guide the setting of objectives and stands for: Specific – Measurable – Attainable – Relevant and Time-bound. The SPICED approach is a useful tool for thinking about how programme objectives can be set in a participatory and inclusive way with local communities. The letters broadly conform to the words: Subjective - Participatory - Interpreted and communicable - Crosschecked and compared - Empowering - Diverse and disaggregated.
‘cognitive’ terms with no reference to addressing affective and behavioural domains. As far as the cognitive objectives were concerned, the emphasis was on lower-level domains such as knowledge and comprehension; verbs such as ‘understanding’ and ‘increasing’ were more commonly utilized as opposed to the activation of higher-order cognitive skills such as assimilating, examining, assessing and evaluating.

ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF INFLUENCE OF THE INTERVENTIONS

The systematic review included a variable entitled ‘level of influence’, which was conceptualised as the focus of the intervention in terms of seven levels ranging from the individual to the global. The results from the analysis indicate that overall, a majority of the interventions (over 8 out of 10) focused on the individual level (see Figure 4 for more information).

SECTION 3: Programme implementation

The analysis of programme implementation information focused on the intended audiences, the communication approach, as well as the specific communication channels used for interventions.

ASSESSMENT OF THE INTENDED AUDIENCES FOR INTERVENTIONS

Intended audience refers to the audience or individuals an intervention is trying to reach, sometimes also referred to as programme participants. Three core groups of audiences emerged from the review:

1. GENERAL AUDIENCES: children, parents/caregivers, general public, males, females, and, in a few isolated cases, perpetrators.
2. PROFESSIONALS: service providers, teachers, law enforcement officials, and healthcare workers.
3. OPINION LEADERS: community influencers and policymakers.

Seventy-one manuscripts (24 per cent) described interventions targeting one type of audience. Most of these interventions were directed towards one group and did not necessarily consider segmenting audiences into primary, secondary and tertiary groups. A majority of the interventions, 215 manuscripts (71 per cent), directly addressed children and adolescents. Among other audience groups, parents were the focus of 178 manuscripts (close to 60 per cent) while caregivers were mentioned in 63 manuscripts (21 per cent). Among professional categories, teachers were the key intended audience in 119 manuscripts (close to 40 per cent). Key influencers and policymakers

FIGURE 4: Results on levels of influence from the manuscripts included in the systematic review database
were the intended audiences for a quarter of the interventions.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMUNICATION APPROACHES**

The systematic review database focused on six different types of strategic communication approaches (see Figure 5). The results indicate that 254 of the manuscripts (84 per cent) reported using more than one approach to meet the intervention’s objectives. Information on strategic approaches showed that less than a third of the interventions used advocacy or mass media as their main communication vehicle (84 manuscripts used advocacy; 93 manuscripts used mass media). Some 143 manuscripts (47 per cent) were based on community-based approaches.

Interpersonal communication and training as a means to communicate information to intended audiences was used in a majority of the interventions, 230 manuscripts (76 per cent). Campaigns using media channels such as television, radio and print appear to be more commonly utilized in developing countries. United States-based interventions followed training/capacity-building trajectories led by university-based researchers focussing on violence in institutionalized settings (e.g. in schools) or within small community settings. The focused nature of and academic involvement in the interventions from industrialized countries likely allows for higher levels of systematic evaluation and documentation.

**ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS**

Interventions within the systematic review utilized a range of communication channels: mass media sources (e.g. TV/film, radio, print), new communication technologies (e.g. Internet and mobile phones), local media (e.g. street theatre performances), counselling (e.g. expert or peer), and advocacy interventions (e.g. public forums and community dialogue). Some 82 manuscripts (27 per cent) described interventions utilizing only one channel and an additional 96 manuscripts (32 per cent) focussed on two channels of communication. Therefore, almost two-thirds of interventions did not utilize a wide mix of channels to meet the needs of diverse and segmented audiences (see Figure 6 for more information).

A majority of the interventions (223 manuscripts; 74 per cent) employed interpersonal communication and counselling as their primary approach, and in most cases counselling was accompanied by the use of printed materials (179 manuscripts; 59 per cent). New technologies and mobile forms of communication were used to a lesser degree, although cross-tabulations with the year of publication show a growing reliance on new technologies.

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**FIGURE 5:** Results on the strategic communication approaches from the manuscripts in the systematic review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Count (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Media</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity Building</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 6:** Results on the communication channels used in the manuscripts in the systematic review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Count (n)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV/Film</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile technologies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local media</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public forums</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 4: Overall programme evaluation processes

As the primary research question guiding this review focused on effectiveness, substantial attention was placed on the evaluation components of the manuscripts. The following elements were of particular interest: evaluation designs, research methods, analysis frameworks, sampling, and indicators.

The evaluation information was broadly categorized as formative, process or impact. Of the 302 manuscripts included in the database, 51 (17 per cent) discussed formative research, 43 (14 per cent) included information on process evaluation, and 227 (75 per cent) included impact evaluation information.

ASSESSMENT OF OVERALL EVALUATION DESIGN

The data showed that 48 manuscripts (16 per cent) utilized the most widely accepted and most robust evaluation design (randomized controlled trials). A majority of these trials were from school-based interventions, which lend themselves more easily to randomization at the school or classroom level.

An additional 45 manuscripts (15 per cent) relied on the most feasible and still robust programme evaluation methodology (the pre- and post with case-control design) without randomization. This lack of randomization is not surprising given the field-based nature of the programmes being evaluated. An additional 41 manuscripts (14 per cent) used only a pre- and post-test design and an even smaller number, 13 manuscripts (4 per cent), utilized a case-control evaluation design without pre- and post-test measurements. The most common evaluation design consisted of observational studies featuring qualitative data, as noted in 85 manuscripts (28 per cent), hence making a weak case for direct attribution, i.e. change that can be linked back to a programme.

ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH METHODS

The utilization of qualitative methods was more common at the formative and process phases than the use of quantitative methods alone. Mixed methods were also utilized to a fair degree in these two evaluation phases. As for impact evaluations, more manuscripts reported using quantitative methods (116 manuscripts or 38 per cent) as compared to qualitative methods. Of the 302 manuscripts analysed, only 24 (8 per cent) mentioned the use of participatory methods. While there may be a bias on the part of journals to accept more unconventional ‘participatory’ methodological studies, this nevertheless denotes serious underutilization of participatory methods.

ASSESSMENT OF ANALYSIS FRAMEWORKS

Formative research tended to focus on thematic reviews and involved univariate analyses, the simplest form of statistical analyses in which individual variables (e.g. knowledge and attitudes) are described. The lack of comparative
bivariate or multivariate analysis indicates a lack of specificity and sophistication in terms of undertaking any causal or behavioural analysis. In addition, manuscripts often failed to specify how the results from formative research were used to design and implement programmes. When conducted, process evaluations were narrowly defined as a way to measure outputs and not a mechanism for mid-course corrections or tracking outcomes. Close to a third of the impact evaluations utilized multivariate techniques, indicating that mostly quantitative data was being analysed while controlling for background and confounding variables.

ASSESSMENT OF SAMPLING
A majority (51 manuscripts or 17 per cent) of formative research sampling involved youth, whereas only a handful of studies identified influential people or professionals such as teachers as being part of their sample. Most process evaluation results were from within structured school-based interventions and often lacked information on sampling procedures. Sampling data from impact evaluations revealed that over 8 out of 10 manuscripts (80 per cent) relied on primary data collection to make a case for effectiveness. Less than a quarter of the assessments reported involving multiple respondents such as children, parents and community leaders, or students and teachers.

ASSESSMENT OF INDICATORS
In line with the individual-level cognitive conceptual basis of most interventions, the associated indicators were also mostly individually-based and on focused domains, such as knowledge. In addition, 288 manuscripts (76 per cent) included indicators based on data collected from individuals, without any attempt to aggregate at the family (e.g. dialogue), school (e.g. conflict resolution), or community level (e.g. public denouncements).

In general, the manuscripts lacked information on sampling frameworks and included relatively small sample sizes. When combined with simple analysis techniques, this revealed the lack of specificity and sophistication in the evaluation data being collected, leading to questions about quality and effectiveness.

SECTION 5: Thematic analysis of key results by type of research
This section provides information from a detailed thematic analysis of the key results and their discussion in the manuscripts. The information presented in this section is divided into formative, process and impact assessment results. A grounded theory approach was utilized to derive ‘key themes’ from the data extracted from the manuscripts. These themes were further categorized as being theoretical, operational or methodological in nature and are summarized in the section below.

FORMATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS
Of the 302 manuscripts included in the database, 51 (17 per cent) discussed formative research. A summary of the key findings is presented in Figure 7. A list of manuscripts from the systematic review that describe formative research can be found in Appendix A.

PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS
Of the 302 manuscripts included in the database, 43 (14 per cent) included information on process evaluations. A snapshot of the key findings regarding process evaluations is presented in Figure 7. A list of manuscripts from the systematic review that describe process evaluation can be found in Appendix B.
KEY FINDINGS

IMPACT EVALUATION RESULTS:
Of the 302 manuscripts included in the database, 227 manuscripts (75 per cent) included impact evaluations. An overview of the key findings relating to the impact evaluations is presented in Figure 7. A list of manuscripts from the systematic review that describe impact evaluations can be found in Appendix C.

FIGURE 7: Key findings on formative research, process evaluation and impact evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical</th>
<th>Theoretical</th>
<th>Theoretical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The examination of barriers and motivators during formative research are often couched in terms of individual-level barriers and solutions. Unfortunately, there is little reported effort to understand social and structural determinants of change.</td>
<td>• Process evaluation allows programmes to make a clear link between the intervention and impact, which in turn makes a stronger case for employing C4D approaches.</td>
<td>• Impact evaluation data highlight the importance of utilizing an ideation model (Babalola et al., 2006) with intermediate and outcome variables that predict behaviors. Ideation variables include, for example: cognitive (knowledge, belief, values, etc.), emotional (emotional response, self-efficacy) and social (social influence and personal advocacy) factors. • Evidence of social change by interventions is limited, while the need for interventions to address normative factors is imperative.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Operational</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Formative research plays a crucial role in designing interventions that are community-owned and culturally sensitive. • Formative research constitutes an important method of identifying communication channels, which is especially important for interventions that seek to utilize new communication technologies. • Formative research is effective in determining and understanding key audiences, as well as partners who should be involved in programmes addressing VAC. • Formative research serves as a means to identify key issues that must be addressed.</td>
<td>• Process evaluation is especially critical for large-scale programmes where implementation may vary due to external reasons. • Process evaluation can disaggregate measurement among diverse audiences. • Process evaluation can indicate initial success and serve as a means to validate and expand interventions.</td>
<td>• It is important to contextualize interventions based on individual and cultural needs. • Evidence exists regarding the success of interpersonal and community interventions targeting ‘at-risk’ populations. • It is important to keep gender in mind as a key variable both for designing interventions specifically for men and as a potential evaluation confounder. • Place-based programme interventions need to consider where VAC occurs. • Impact evaluations suggest that C4D works in conjunction with other interventions to bring about sustainable change. • There is growing data on the efficacy of new communication technologies as a mechanism for programme implementation as well as for evaluation. • Several impact assessments on various VAC issues highlight the importance of addressing VAC as part of early childhood development interventions. • Impact assessment results showcase the importance of long-running interventions.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological</th>
<th>Methodological</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Community-based participatory research has proven effective in obtaining a comprehensive and complete picture of barriers and motivators when designing interventions.</td>
<td>• Process evaluation is commonly used as a way to examine fidelity of implementation. • Process evaluations can be conducted regardless of the nature and scope of the intervention. • Process evaluation helps identify Type 3 error – when interventions are not implemented according to plan (Basch et al., 1985). • Process evaluation is useful in tracking changes in ‘outcomes’.</td>
<td>• There is a severe lack of evaluation data on effectiveness of interventions and very strong evidence of the need for additional effectiveness evaluations, specifically those from low and middle-income countries. • Interventions driven by methodological rigor alone need to contend with ethical concerns. • The scope of effectiveness evaluation can be expanded to include both qualitative and participatory evaluation.</td>
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“Today, violence results in more than 1.5 million people being killed each year, and many more suffer non-fatal injuries and chronic, non-injury health consequences. Despite the fact that violence has always been present, the world does not have to accept it as an inevitable part of the human condition. Violence can be prevented. This is not an article of faith, but a statement based on evidence.”

— VIOLENCE PREVENTION: THE EVIDENCE. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, 2010

Pictured here are children from the Bhagyanagar Children’s Home for Girls and Boys. The organization runs two homes (one for girls and one for boys) for children aged between 6 and 14 years. They are often orphans, children of migrant workers, and potentially child laborers.
In an overview summarizing the major achievements and remaining challenges of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Doek (2009) reported that national efforts addressing VAC have often been hampered by a lack of financial and human resources or political will. In turn, this has impeded the proper infrastructure to support children’s rights from forming. He concluded that addressing VAC takes more than having the proper infrastructure, it requires having a culture that supports the rights of the child.

C4D approaches can challenge social and cultural norms that perpetuate and condone violence. Approaches to tackle social norms have been successfully used to reduce alcohol misuse and smoking behaviours; also, to change attitudes of young males towards risky sexual behaviours and bullying (WHO, 2009). Within UNICEF, C4D is integrated as a key cross-cutting strategy that promotes long-term behaviour and social change and is defined as: “an evidence-based and participatory process that facilitates the engagement of children, families, communities, the public and decision makers for positive social and behavioural change in both development and humanitarian contexts through a mix of available communication platforms and tools” (UNICEF, 2019). Herein lies the critical importance of exploring the role that a range of communication approaches underlining C4D can play in addressing VAC. Key recommendations from this systematic review that apply specifically to child protection programmes as a whole, and their C4D components in particular, are categorised under the three broad themes below.

I. CONTEXTUALISING AND FRAMING VAC

1. SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS CHILDREN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE. The search term combinations yielded over 80,000 hits. Most of the manuscripts discarded by this systematic review dealt with violence but lacked specificity in terms of their focus on children. For example, interventions addressing other forms of violence mostly acknowledged the nexus of VAC with violence against women (VAW). There is overwhelming agreement that individuals directly engaged in or responsible for violence at some point in time have been victims themselves and that the negative ramifications of VAW are multiplied manifold if and when children are involved. However, strategies dealing with VAW do not often segment by age or address VAC as a correlated issue. For example, there is an absence of age-based disaggregation in programmes addressing human trafficking. Disaggregation by age would allow child trafficking to emerge as a separate issue deserving focused attention.

2. EXPLORE LINKAGES BETWEEN DIFFERENT FORMS OF VAC. The overlap of manuscripts shortlisted across different search criteria highlights that the different types of VAC cannot be pigeonholed by topic. Rather, they must be conceptualized as multiple forms or facets of violence. For example, child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting and gender-based violence are intrinsically linked, as are corporal punishment and child abuse/maltreatment. Similarly, child trafficking and sexual exploitation co-occur. No doubt this overlap complicates both implementation and evaluation of programmes; however, it is important that the interrelationships and complexities between these issues be recognized and addressed holistically. This is especially important given the magnitude of their prevalence, the plethora of mediating and causal factors involved, and the multitude of C4D approaches we have at our disposal to address VAC.

3. EXAMINE VAC ALONG A SPECTRUM. This recommendation relates to the previous one regarding the linkages between different types of VAC. Associated topics such as VAW yield more consistent research and data than when searching for VAC. One potential explanation may be that VAW has been measured...
in discrete, verifiable forms – physical, emotional and sexual -- whereas VAC is often measured across broad conceptualizations. These can range from discriminatory nutrition practices associated with girl children, all the way to interventions addressing female foeticide. Further, the review shows that the response to child labour has largely been in the area of policy change, while at the community and individual levels child labour might be considered a social good (helping poor children in need) rather than as a facet of VAC. Hence, child labour persists on a massive scale but remains virtually unseen. On the other hand, sexual abuse is clearly typified as criminal conduct, and although reporting has become more commonplace, it continues to be considered a deviant behaviour. It is important, therefore, to consider the full spectrum of potential causes and impacts when addressing VAC.

**CONTEXTUALIZE VAC BOTH AS A CAUSE AND AN OUTCOME.** One of the key difficulties during the course of the literature search related to the complexity of understanding the nature of VAC, as it encompasses such a wide and complex range of issues. At one end of the spectrum, the systematic review revealed that programmes are based on a wide range of causal factors, ranging from the social to the psychological that result in VAC. In this regard, a majority of the manuscripts portrayed VAC as an outcome. However, at the other end, violence emerges as a causal factor for adverse educational outcomes and long-term morbidity and mortality. Both ways of understanding VAC are valid, although strategies to address it may differ.

**START EARLY AND CONTINUE INTO ADULTHOOD.** There is evidence of long-term success for early childhood programmes. Both family-based programmes promoting positive parenting and early childhood development programmes can address child maltreatment and neglect starting in infancy. These have the potential to sustain positive effects well into adulthood. Primary prevention efforts fostering generational change are instrumental for creating new norms of masculinity and raising a generation of men who do not accept violence as a norm and girls who refuse to accept violence silently.

**MOVE BEYOND A PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO A NORMS-BASED APPROACH TO INCORPORATE INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TO TACKLE THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE.** Most recent programmes have drawn on the United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on VAC and focused on the settings prioritised in the study. These are: the home and family, schools and educational settings, care and justice systems, work setting, and the community. Many of the programmes associated with these settings rely on techniques that are associated with the location. Therefore, programmes in school and educational settings usually involved elements of teacher (expert or peer) based training. Meanwhile, programmes in the home and family-level often fell within the social work realm. Such narrow conceptualizations result in the replication of ‘tried and true’ approaches for communication that also have a narrowly defined focus. It is important to consider innovative ways to communicate about VAC. There is some evidence of new communication technologies being utilized as a channel for dissemination and also for tracking programme implementation and success in this regard.

Place-based interventions can be implemented and evaluated in a streamlined fashion. For example, conducting a randomized controlled trial and monitoring fidelity of implementation can all take place in an institutional environment such as a school. However, while it is important to begin interventions at one place, it is equally important to branch out to address more complex social contexts. One must consider issues relating to VAC that occur in less concrete or discrete places (such as verbal and sexual harassment that adolescent girls face in public spaces) which are harder to tackle and address. Given the ubiquitous nature of VAC,
it is also important to address it at a broader level. One possibility could be to address VAC through a normative lens and tackle what can be considered a ‘culture of violence’. One relevant example might be child labour. A shift from the traditional policy perspective to a normative approach would help frame this issue as one of VAC and may help address both the supply and demand for child labour. Linking school violence to the normative violence happening outside schools would be another way of broadening the perspective.

II. DESIGNING THE PROGRAMME

7 EMBRACE THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL CHANGE. Much of the published literature on VAC programmes utilized a cognitive and individually-based behaviour change approach. While such approaches are useful and valid in some instances, there is a growing realization that individuals are embedded within a larger social system. Thus, effective programmes have to consider the interpersonal, family and community dimensions to generate and measure change. At the same time, a concerted institutional, policy and overall national level response is also critical to address VAC and create an enabling environment for change. This has proven effective especially in addressing female genital mutilation/cutting in many countries, where a combination of challenging harmful social norms together with legislative and policy level approaches has yielded positive results.

8 BROADEN CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF C4D APPROACHES TO ENCOMPASS EFFORTS THAT INVOLVE ANY FORM OF COMMUNICATION/COMMUNICATIVE ACTION AND CUT ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL. This review included many approaches that intersect with a broad understanding of what C4D is and its integral role in the uptake and maintenance of individual and social change. Much of the information on programmatic responses for VAC reveals that these are inherently communicative: counselling, awareness raising, disclosure, negotiation, public denouncement, resistance and confrontation. Indeed, in the preliminary review of manuscripts, it was often difficult to distinguish between overall programme approaches and discrete C4D components. Interventions were not necessarily
described as utilizing C4D approaches, even when they clearly did. Nevertheless, upon closer examination, C4D techniques dominated in efforts to reduce harmful practices.

**SEGMENT AUDIENCES BY GENDER AND ADDRESS GENDER-SPECIFIC NEEDS AND DIFFERENCES.** A number of points highlighted the importance of gender.

1. Female empowerment is necessary and successful in addressing violence, and it is therefore essential to implement interventions that specifically meet the needs of girls.
2. The need to involve men and boys more often in gender transformative interventions was highlighted.
3. A focus on females must not exclude young boys from VAC issues as they are also affected.
4. There is a need to address both men and boys in terms of their roles both as victims and perpetrators. For example, anti-bullying programmes have been designed to address the needs of boys by examining ‘machismo’ and its role in VAC.
5. There is also a growing demand to address the specific needs of marginalized groups such as gay, bisexual and transgender youth who are often subjected to widespread discrimination and violence.

**CLARIFY THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT LINKAGES BETWEEN STATED PROGRAMME AND COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES AND MESSAGES.** Programmes addressing VAC have often been couched within a ‘harm reduction’ framework and both programme and communication objectives have been listed in negative terms (e.g. reduction of harmful practices). Communication messages, on the other hand, have focused on the positive, for example, through the frequent use of role models for desired behaviours. Clearer linkages and flow of logic between the articulation of objectives and messaging that is designed to address or meet those objectives is needed. Establishing intermediate communication objectives would help determine how communication messages contribute to achieving overall programme objectives. A related issue deals with labelling all traditions as being ‘harmful’. This can lead to negative unintended consequences, most notably by driving a practice underground, rather than creating sustained behaviour and social change.
OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

11 RECONFIGURE PROGRAMME AND COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES OF VAC INTERVENTIONS. Many of the interventions did not use the basic SMART and SPICED criteria when describing programme objectives. It was also challenging to distinguish between overall programme and C4D objectives. VAC is an emotionally charged issue and yet programme and communication objectives were mainly couched in cognitive terms with little reference to the power of emotions to promote behaviour and social change. Cognitive objectives could move beyond enhancing knowledge and comprehension to ensuring the activation of higher-level cognitive changes associated with assimilation and evaluation of information.

12 MOVE BEYOND INDIVIDUALLY FOCUSED KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE BY ADDRESSING SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL COMPETENCIES. Interventions that encompass training, capacity-building, and efficacy approaches – either as the end result or as essential building blocks – have reported positive outcomes. This was especially true of anti-bullying programmes for school children, youth projects to reduce gang violence, or child marriage initiatives that provide economic opportunities for adolescent girls. At the same time, enrichment programmes providing preschool children with both academic and social skills showed promise in addressing child maltreatment and neglect. Even within interventions with narrowly focussed individual level outcomes, it is important to step beyond the cognitive knowledge/awareness dimensions and address emotional, relational and behavioural competencies to effect change.

III. IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING THE PROGRAMME

13 POSITION VAC AS A ‘GLOCAL’ ISSUE THROUGH QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT. Promoting a core understanding of what VAC is in the form of a standardized definition and measurements of incidence and prevalence is an essential first step to gauging the magnitude of VAC as an issue deserving of global advocacy and concerted action. The United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on VAC is a seminal effort to provide a detailed global overview of VAC, where it occurs, and ways to combat it. However, local indicators of VAC are not routinely accessible. This hinders the data comparison at global levels and renders situation analyses for behaviour and social change interventions difficult to undertake.

14 ENHANCE INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH. The grey literature contains many examples of creative interventions addressing VAC, especially implemented in low and middle-income countries. However, much of this creative programming is unaccompanied by information on the effectiveness of these strategies. Much of the published literature, especially when grounded in community-based approaches, tended to focus on the ‘process’ of implementation rather than effectiveness. It is essential to expand the number of outcome evaluation studies to enhance our understanding of global best practices. This needs to be contextualized based on what works at a local level.

15 SCALE UP PROMISING INTERVENTIONS. Much of the robust evidence for effectiveness is based on small-scale pilot projects employing randomized controlled trial designs. This is especially true of programmes dealing with corporal punishment, bullying and gang violence among youth. However, there is scant information on the potential for scale up of promising interventions. A practical way forward might be to develop a road map of such pilot interventions along with scaling up guidelines. After evaluating progress over a reasonable time period, programme planners and implementers can determine whether to continue, adapt or discard the intervention.
The wealth of information included in this systematic review has opened the opportunity to conduct further and more specific analysis of information already collected. In addition to secondary analysis of data collated for the purpose of this review, there is also room for further improvement through more studies. Figure 8 outlines potential avenues for future research and additional studies.

In many ways, this review contains much detailed information on the current status of the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions utilizing C4D approaches to address VAC. It further attempts to synthesize the key findings in order to highlight some key imperatives that intervention planners and evaluators need to keep in mind in order to move the field forward. As such, it serves as the first step. The next steps are clearly to devise a series of practical guidelines that interventionists and practitioners, as well as their research counterparts on the ground, can utilize to plan, implement and evaluate interventions using C4D approaches to address VAC that are grounded in the local realities while being informed by global best practices.

**FIGURE 8: Potential directions for future research and study**

**Future research**
- Conduct an in-depth examination of information raised through issue-specific recommendations.
- Study the existing meta-analyses and systematic reviews to draw broad-based solutions to local problems.
- Focus on specific C4D approaches.
- Compare the differential impact of specific communication approaches.
- Link intervention design with implementation strategies to find commonalities in different types of implementation.
- Compare results associated with specific evaluation designs.

**Additional studies**
- Examine grey literature for information on innovative programming and evaluation methods.
- Examine grey literature within the context of the outcomes of and contributors to VAC (e.g. alcohol abuse, the effects of urbanization, and other environmental factors such as migration and displacement).
- Update the bibliography on an ongoing and periodic basis in order to have easy access to current information.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Manuscripts describing formative research from the systematic review database


**APPENDIX B**

Manuscripts describing process research from the systematic review database


APPENDIX C
Manuscripts describing impact assessments from the systematic review database


Portwood, Shannon G., ‘What we know—and don’t know—about preventing child maltreatment’, *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, vol. 12, no. 3/4, 2006.


