Sexual Violence against Girls and Boys: The Data Conundrum

Combating sexual violence against children in the Caribbean: From isolated actions to integrated strategies
Barbados, 20-21 November 2012

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Questions

• Why do we need data on child sexual abuse?

• What data do we need?

• What data do we have?

• How should we get the data we need?
Why do we need data?
The power of data

• Children are at risk of violence worldwide

• Human right obligation to protect

• Implications for public health = impaired physical, mental and reproductive health, and increased vulnerability to HIV and other diseases

• Implications for economic and social development = impact on learning, productivity, crime, costs associated with treatment and other services

• Need for a catalyst for awareness and action
What do we need to develop effective interventions?

Source: WHO systematic assessments of readiness for child maltreatment prevention in 6 countries
What data do we need?
Comprehensive picture

• Nature and magnitude of violence against children (all forms)

• Risk and protective factors, including information about the underlying attitudes

• What works and what does not work for prevention and response

• Data and information for the monitoring and evaluation of programmes
What data do we have?
Some estimates

• 25-50% of children are subjected to physical abuse, 5-20% to sexual abuse

• 18% of girls and 8% of boys experience child sexual abuse based on studies between 1980 and 2008

• Prevalence of sexual abuse ranges from 5% to more than 30%

• Nearly half of all sexual assaults against females occur when they are children

Underreporting and difficulties related to measurement

Insufficient investments in the collection of high quality and ethically sound data in most countries

Real magnitude remains largely unknown
Current landscape

• Proliferation of different measurement efforts aimed at filling the existing gaps, primarily using large-scale population-based surveys

**Absence of commonly agreed operational definitions of VAC and standardized data collection tools**

**Absence of ethical guidelines on data collection on VAC**
Interagency Technical Working Group on Data Collection on Violence against Children

- Part of the CP MERG
- Established in April 2011
- 8 members: ILO, Save the Children, Pop Council, ChildFund, Plan International, EU FRA, ICF MACRO, UNICEF
- Chaired by UNICEF
- More information available at: http://www.cpmerg.org/
Goal and objectives

Goal: assist countries/partners in their efforts to gather reliable, useful, comparable and ethically sensitive data on VAC

Objectives: Development of guidelines for the collection of data on VAC

- **Technical guidelines** aimed at maximizing the disclosure of actual violence and at guaranteeing high quality data

- **Ethical guidelines** aimed at minimizing the risk of potential harm to respondents, interviewers and others, resulting from the data gathering process
2012 outputs

• Conducted an inventory and a critical assessment of data collection efforts to identify existing self-report survey tools and methods that are being used or are under development in the area of violence against children.

• Conducted a literature review on research ethics and risks associated with data collection on violence against children.

→ Two publications, first released in October (literature review) and to be released in December (assessment).
Inventory and assessment of quantitative studies on VAC: main findings
Components

• Inventory and description of **40 quantitative studies** with focus on VAC and **8 general surveys** with modules on VAC

• Elements covered in the assessment:

  ✓ Commissioning and implementing agencies
  ✓ Definitions and indicators
  ✓ Sample designs
  ✓ Research protocols
  ✓ Ethical protocols
  ✓ Field coordination
  ✓ Quality control and data processing
Studies on VAC: coverage by region

Number of national studies by region

- Caribbean: 1
- Middle East and North Africa: 3
- Eastern Europe: 4
- Central and Latin America: 4
- West and Central Africa: 5
- Eastern and Southern Africa: 10
- Asia and Pacific: 12

Note: This table does not include countries that collected data on VAC through MICS, DHS, GSBS or HBSC.
Types of violence covered

- Physical violence: 34
- Sexual violence: 28
- Emotional violence: 25
- Corporal punishment: 22
- Neglect: 11
- Bullying: 7
## Scope of the studies

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<thead>
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<th>Physical abuse</th>
<th>Corporal punishment</th>
<th>Sexual abuse</th>
<th>Emotional abuse</th>
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Main findings

- Highly fragmented sector
- Overall, the quality of the studies varies to a very high degree
- Key terms defined on an ad-hoc basis, research designs and ethical protocols developed from scratch
- Absence of a clear framework and limited scope
- Most studies conducted only once
General surveys with data on VAC

• Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)
  – collect data on violence in the context of discipline at home only
  – 5 CARICOM countries (Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)

• Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)
  – collect data on emotional, physical and sexual violence among married and unmarried women 15-49 including experience of violence in childhood
  – 2 CARICOM countries (Haiti and Dominican Republic), one only collected data on sexual abuse in childhood

• Global School-based Student Health Surveys (GSHS)
  – collect data on various forms of violence (bullying, physical attacks, gang violence, etc)
  – 9 CARICOM countries, mostly on bullying and physical violence, one questions on sexual violence (dating) asked in two countries
Ethical considerations and review of ethical protocols
A key question

Is it ethical/justifiable to conduct research on child abuse classified as non-therapeutic and with limited, indirect or minor benefits for participants?
Principles

• To be ethical, research must be of sufficient importance, and the benefits must outweigh the risks

• Such risks might include emotional distress or actual harm caused to children by other people as retribution for their participation in the research

• Need to link research and interventions

• Careful measures need to be put in place to make sure risks are reduced/eliminated and research is indeed beneficial
Practices

• Child consent sought in 12 of the 40 studies

• Parental consent sought in 11 of the 50 studies

• Procedures for follow-up and support in 12 of the 40 studies

• Full information on profile and background of interviewers available for 3 studies of the 40 studies
How should we get the data we need?
Concluding considerations

• Comparison of what we need and what we have shows important gaps

• Assessment of what we have raises methodological and ethical concerns

• Need to work together towards strengthening countries’ capacity to develop their own statistical programs on violence

• Need to follow a strong child rights-based framework for ethical research and data collection practices
Thank you

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