Executive summary

Violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2021

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INTRODUCTION

All of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region have adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and made a significant commitment to increasing evidence on, and accelerating action towards, eliminating violence against children (VAC) including harmful practices, eliminating gender-based violence against women and girls, and creating safe, non-violent and inclusive environments, as well as significantly reducing all forms of violence and related deaths in the region over the next decade.

The UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021 details UNICEF’s direction and strategic priorities over four years. It provides a vehicle to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes ensuring that every child is protected from violence and exploitation and that countries have strengthened child protection systems for prevention and response services to address violence against children. This work will be furthered in the upcoming Strategic Plan for 2022–2025, which seeks to ensure that all children and adolescents in all settings are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, and harmful practices.

To inform this plan and work in the region, this study was commissioned by UNICEF LACRO to systematically review the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of violence against children, as well as the evaluated interventions that seek to prevent violence in the 36 countries and territories of the region, where UNICEF works.

METHODOLOGY

The overall research aim was to understand the nature, magnitude and consequences of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean region. To achieve this, the research questions were as follows:

- What is the nature, magnitude, and consequences of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- Has there been any reduction or increase in violence against children over the past 15 years?
- What are the drivers and factors that perpetuate violence and the acceptance of violence?
- What are the protective factors and interventions that are proven or promising to end violence against children?

A mixed methods approach, including a systematic review, secondary analysis of existing datasets and in-depth interviews, was employed to answer the research questions. A systematic review methodology was used to provide a snapshot of the current evidence base on violence against children. Systematic reviews are a highly rigorous and replicable methodological approach to identify and extract data from recent studies.

This review is specifically focused on violence against children from data published since the adoption of the SDGs (2015–2021). The definition of ‘violence against children’ used for this review is the definition used in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) General Comment No. 13, in which violence against children includes “physical or mental violence, injury or
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abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...".4

In addition, this systematic review includes literature related to the violence that children experience throughout their everyday lives, which may include spaces and settings outside of the traditional home and school areas, such as in the community, online spaces, and conflict settings. The built and social environments and networks, as well as the socio-cultural distinctions among these, particularly for indigenous and Afro-descendent groups, were considered. Children living independently and outside of some form of caregiver support, as well as children on the move and contexts of migration, were also included.

The review included studies published between 2015–2021 using primary data on VAC from countries in the region on:

1) prevalence and incidence,
2) risk and protective factors and drivers,
3) consequences and
4) evaluated interventions to prevent or respond to VAC.

The review was conducted in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French and included a systematic search of 7 databases, hand searches of 4 journals, and 18 grey literature sources. In addition, reviewers and UNICEF country offices also contributed studies from their countries.

A total of 262 studies were found in which data was published in the last six years. Of these, 37 studies had overlaps and presented data in multiple areas (between prevalence, drivers, consequences, and interventions). A total of 75 articles and reports had prevalence data, 100 had data on drivers of violence, 64 had data on consequences and 60 presented data from evaluations of interventions. In addition, 4 reviews published between 2000 and 2015 were also included.

In addition to the systematic review, a secondary analysis of existing datasets was employed, including: 30 Global School-Based Student Health Survey (GSHS) datasets and 42 datasets from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICSs), Demographic (and Reproductive) Health Surveys (DHS/RHS), the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE), and Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACSs).

Finally, eight informant interviews were conducted to better understand the changing landscape around violence against children in the past two decades and to inform specific topics, such as specific groups (indigenous) and specific expressions of violence in the region. The interviewees were recruited by UNICEF LACRO and provided information about variations in the nature of, and risks for, violence across the region. They also shared historical data of socio-political changes to shed light on the dynamics of violence against children in the region. These interviews also directed us to additional resources.

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MAGNITUDE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Violence against children is widespread in every Latin American and Caribbean country where it is measured, although prevalence varies by setting and type of violence. Data published in the region in the past six years highlights the frequency with which physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children happens in the home, in school, in the community and online. Studies measured different types of violence in these settings, and it is clear from the data that physical violence is the most frequently occurring form of violence across countries with comparable data (Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras), with a median prevalence estimate for both boys and girls of 31%. Physical violence prevalence estimates also have the highest range across studies, with a range of 42 percentage points. Sexual violence is also prevalent, with a median prevalence estimate for both boys and girls of 14% and a much smaller range across studies with comparable data of 23 percentage points. It is important to point out that among the types of violence, sexual violence is under-measured in surveys across the region, with many countries having no up-to-date data on sexual violence against children. The third most prevalent type of violence in studies with comparable data is emotional violence, with a median of 13% for both boys and girls and a range across studies of 30 percentage points. However, among data relating to psychological aggression in the context of physical punishment, the numbers are much higher, with a median prevalence of 54% for both boys and girls across countries with comparable data, but the range is large at 57 percentage points difference in prevalence from highest to lowest across countries. Bullying occurs frequently in schools, with a median prevalence estimate of 26% for both boys and girls and a range of 37 percentage points across countries with comparable data. Violence within the community (which can be both armed or unarmed and physical, sexual, or emotional), as well as violence that results in injury and homicide perpetrated by individuals or gangs and occurring in both conflict and non-conflict settings, is also widespread, and the LAC region has the highest prevalence estimates in the world.

There are age and gender differences in the forms of VAC that impact on children in different settings. From the data, different types of violence are more prevalent at different periods during childhood, but late adolescence is a key period for sexual violence (for girls), physical violence including armed violence and homicide (for both), and early adolescence for bullying and emotional violence (both boys and girls). Data from the systematic review highlights that, across the region, girls reported experiencing sexual violence more than boys. The perpetrator of the first incident of sexual violence, according to the handful of VACS studies in the region, is more frequently reported as being other children, young people and males. Boys are represented in the prevalence and administrative statistics more frequently for deaths from violence, including homicide and armed violence, however, femicide is still a big issue in the region and is increasing in some countries. Boys also experience bullying in school more frequently, except for exclusionary bullying (being left out, having

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rumours spread), which occurs more frequently among girls. Surprisingly, physical punishment between the ages of 1–14 in the home is experienced by both boys and girls in similar proportions (see Figure 1). \(^9\) Interesting findings have emerged from VACS data in three of the four countries that have conducted these national studies (Honduras, El Salvador and Haiti): girls are reporting more physical violence than boys from a variety of perpetrators (family and caregivers, intimate partners, adult relative or peer). \(^{10}\) This is different from other regions globally and an area to consider for programmatic intervention.

![Figure 1 Prevalence (%) of physical punishment (any and severe), experience by 1–14-year-olds, in 16 Latin America and Caribbean countries—MICS (2011–2019)](image)

Bullying in schools is widespread and some countries have made good strides in reducing prevalence over time. A comparative analysis looking at the prevalence of bullying among 6th graders in 15 countries in the LAC region found that, on average, two in five 6th grade students (11-12 years) were victims of some form of bullying in school. After disaggregating by type of bullying, it was found that 1 in 8 children reported being hit, 1 in 10 reported being afraid of their classmates, and 1 in 12 reported being threatened in school by their classmates. For countries that have at least two time points of data from the GSHS, we can see that the bullying of both boys and girls is declining slightly in the region. The steepest decline was found in Jamaica, with an approximate 15 percentage points decline in bullying prevalence for both boys and girls in the month preceding the survey in 2017, decreasing from 40.3% of boys and 39.1% of girls in 2010 to 26.3% of boys and 24.8% of girls in 2017. Whereas in some countries the difference between the two time periods is less than two percentage points.

Armed violence and homicide have connections, but also differences that are important to note. Homicide, or murder, can be a form of both armed and unarmed violence, depending on the situation. The LAC region has some of the highest levels of armed violence in non-conflict settings, making the region unique globally. The post-2015 literature in the LAC shows that the region has the highest homicide rate in the world, more than double any other region. The data shows that homicides among children and youth may be rising, after a decade of decline. While recent data does not disaggregate data for armed and unarmed homicide among children, trend analyses have shown that over the last two decades firearm control strategies (such as the 2003 Brazilian Disarmament Statute) have influenced the decrease in child and youth homicide rates. The child and youth homicide rate dropped from an average annual increase of 6.2% between 1980 and 2003 to an average decrease of 3.3% after 2004. However, the rate started to increase again in 2006 and has exceeded an increase of 8.9% annually since 2011. Data shows there has been a significant increase in homicide rates of females in a number of countries in the region: the Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru. Research shows that the femicide rate, which refers to homicides of women aged 15 and older killed due to gender-based violence, are particularly high in the LAC region. Many countries in the region do not use the term femicide but it is important to note that homicide rates among females is not the same as femicide which is the fatal outcome of gender-based violence.

There are certain types of violence against children, including children who witness intimate partner violence (IPV) in the home or experience it in their adolescent relationships, where prevalence estimates appear persistent over time. A comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis of data from 15 to 19-year-old adolescents from DHS and RHS in the region found that the prevalence of physical IPV ranged from 13–18% for girls aged 15–19 years. Notably, 15–20% of ever-partnered girls reported experiencing physical violence in the past year, 15–20% reported emotional violence, and approximately 4% reported sexual violence. This echoes findings from the research of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) exploring DHS/RHS data on violence against women in the previous decade and linkages with violence against children in a new report to be published soon. Studies also show that obstetric violence is prevalent in the region, including adolescents experiencing abuse, disrespect, and neglect during childbirth. A recent systematic review found that more than a third of the women interviewed reported having suffered some form of obstetric violence. Data from a national 2018 survey in Costa Rica show that 58% of adolescents between 15 and 19-years-old, with one child born in the 2 years before the survey, said that they suffered obstetric violence during labour.
Very little data exists on VAC in indigenous communities, despite the scale and diversity of these communities throughout the region, and studies that have been conducted point to the intersection of interpersonal and structural violence. The data published in the last five years comes almost solely from country-level administrative data, which we know is only indigenous children seen at services and is not a comprehensive snapshot of prevalence. Furthermore, studies on risk and protective factors, consequences and evaluated interventions were also lacking despite this area being raised by interviewees in the qualitative interviews as being a key concern in the region.

Few studies exist on online violence, but existing data shows that this is a setting in which VAC may be occurring for many children. Nearly a third of children who participated in the Global Kids Online Study in five Latin American countries reported having negative experiences and had been sent unpleasant or hurtful messages online in the month preceding the survey. Although there are small differences between each country, this trend can be found across the five Latin American countries that have completed national Global Kids Online studies.\textsuperscript{21 22 23 24 25}
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**Children who experience violence often experience multiple types of violence across settings.** It is more common for research to measure the prevalence of types of violence than to measure how many types any one child may have experienced. This makes it difficult to understand if children are experiencing multiple types of violence or if it is different children experiencing these different types of violence. There is increasing evidence in the LAC region of the prevalence of polyvictimization, ranging from a quarter to a third of children experiencing more than one type of violence in studies that have measured this in the region. These studies also highlight that girls experience a broader spectrum of victimization than boys, including caregiver victimization and electronic victimization.

**The COVID-19 context has created unique challenges for countries in terms of understanding the potential changes in the prevalence of violence.** Data from the region highlights that in the context of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, violence in the home and towards children may emerge or deepen. While the number of reports of child maltreatment decreased globally in many areas in the first weeks of the pandemic, child helplines reported an increased number of calls in the second quarter of 2020, compared to previous quarters, including calls about violence in many countries. However, while help-seeking through hotlines has seen both highs and lows during the pandemic, how the unique context around COVID-19 has impacted on the prevalence of different forms of violence is still unknown.
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Drivers of violence often have intergenerational effects. Several intergenerational effects emerged in the data, including parents’ own childhood experiences of violence and beliefs, as risk factors for using violence against their own children, as well as experiencing violence as an adult and strong linkages between violence against women and violence against children. Recent data has also highlighted the links between children’s perceptions of previous armed conflict, violence and coups and their justification of violence as necessary for ‘social progress’ and for using violence in their own interpersonal relationships.

There are links between violence in the community and violence against children in several settings. The literature provides strong evidence as to how living in neighbourhoods with high levels of violence increases the odds of violence against children, not only in public spaces, but also in their schools and homes. The review also highlights that witnessing violence or being a direct victim of violence at the community level is a risk factor for perpetrating violence during adolescence, including at school. Evidence also suggests that community risk factors not only increase
the probability of violence at a community level, but also influence the use of corporal punishment in the home. For example, a study carried out with a representative sample of 11,759 mothers of children under five in Colombia found that municipal homicide rates, presence of armed violence, household poverty, and poverty of the municipality were associated with mothers hitting their young children with an object.37

High levels of crime creates environments characterized by living with fear, distrust, and poor social capital and networks. The review found that insecurity reduces the use of public spaces and causes the displacement of people and communities, as well as weakening or disarticulating social networks.38 According to the results of the global survey ‘Globalbarometro’, Latin America and the Caribbean region was the most distrustful region in the world in 2018 and had a record low level of interpersonal trust.39 Living in such environments could increase the odds of violence against children.40 Furthermore, data shows that living in scenarios with high rates of insecurity may lead people to ‘adapt’, which could influence their attitudes and beliefs around violence and increase the possibility of normalizing the use of violence as a method of resolving conflict.41

Several entrenched drivers are present in the recent literature that are also frequently mentioned in older reviews, while some drivers are new and emerging. Certain structural and institutional drivers of violence, such as machismo and negative gender norms, and histories of armed violence, as well as conflict and insecurity and humanitarian crises, often due to disasters and emergencies, are long-standing drivers of VAC in the region. Other drivers, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn (exacerbated by the pandemic), are steadily increasing social and economic disparities, which had been improving previously. These new trends in drivers are also influencing other drivers, such as migration and the infrastructure of child protection systems.

Migration is a central issue in the region and can increase a variety of risks for children, including their vulnerability to exploitation. Both violence and the growing economic disparities in LAC countries has led to forced displacement and internal and external migration. The most notable migratory movement includes the displacement of people from Central America and many Caribbean countries to the United States, which has risen steadily since 2011. More recently, there has also been significant intraregional migration within sub regions. Climate change and the increase in climate-related emergencies in the past few years has led to an increase in internal migration and displacement in the region, leading to more than 4.2 million people internally displaced across 18 countries in LAC.42 The risks that displacement creates occur at all moments in the migration movement, ranging from mobility issues and difficulties when transiting from one city or country to another, to challenges in the destination country.43

Geographic distances and boundaries are important spatial considerations for environments that increase the risk for violence. For instance, in 2012, a study found that the distance to the nearest birth registration centre is a significant barrier to birth registration in Bolivia and the Dominican Republic.44 The lack of childbirth registration increases risks for children, as it limits their recognition before the law and, as a consequence, their access to social protection, increasing the likelihood that a violation will go unreported.45 While the levels of birth registration in Latin America and the Caribbean have been rising steadily since the early 2000s, national birth registration prevalence estimates may hide important geographic disparities.46

At the interpersonal level, understanding what is happening in care environments is important for understanding risk and protective factors. The evidence shows that having strong positive bonds, such as healthy relationships characterized by dialogue and friendship, both in school and in the community, as well as strong attachments with parents and caregivers, can act as a protective factors...
against experiencing violence. Recent data also highlights how having a higher number of children or other family members living in the household or having young caregivers increases the occurrence of violence against children.49

Few studies explore protective factors that disrupt or reduce the likelihood of violence. Very few studies measured protective factors against the use of violence, with most focusing on risk factors for experiencing or perpetrating violence. While protective factors can be the opposite of risk factors, more research is needed in this area. Similarly, research is more abundant on the risk and protective factors around victimization and much less research has been conducted around risk and protective factors related to the perpetration of violence against children in the region.

Other drivers, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn (exacerbated by the pandemic), are steadily increasing social and economic disparities, which had been improving previously.
CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Studies conducted in the past six years provide strong evidence on the impacts of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean region. Sixty-four of the studies provided evidence of the impacts of violence against children in four key areas:

- (1) physical and mental health,
- (2) behaviour,
- (3) education and
- (4) social consequences.

Two sets of impacts stand out in the region: health impacts, particularly mental health and suicide among adolescent girls and education impacts of experiencing or witnessing violence during childhood. The post-2015 literature in the region also provides further evidence of the multidimensionality of the impacts of violence at a community level, such as armed violence, armed conflict and gangs, on children, their families and their communities.

The post-2015 studies in Latin American and the Caribbean region provide strong evidence that experiencing or witnessing violence during childhood increases the likelihood of suicidal ideation or suicide attempts among children, as well as among adults with a history of childhood abuse. For instance, a study with students between the ages of 10 and 17 in Colombia found that school bullying was highly associated with depressive symptoms and levels of suicidal ideation. Similarly, research carried out in Peru with pregnant women found that 22.6% of participants had suicidal ideation, 22.4% reported a lifetime history of suicidal ideation or thoughts, 7.2% reported a history of actively planning suicide, and 6.0% reported attempting suicide. History of childhood abuse was most strongly associated with suicidal ideation, accounting for a 2.57-fold increase in the odds of suicidal ideation, nearly 3-fold increase in the odds of suicide planning, and 2.43-fold increase in the odds of attempting suicide. Other studies echo this and have found that women with a history of violence at an early age are more likely to report a history of suicide attempts.

Students who reported being bullied in the last month also had a higher prevalence of reporting suicide ideation in Latin America and Caribbean countries. In all 27 countries in the region where it was measured through the GSHS, bullied students reported statistically significant higher levels of suicide ideation than non-bullied students, ranging from every 1 in 3 to every 1 in 4 bullied students actively thinking about taking their own lives. The highest prevalence was in Anguilla, with 41.6% of bullied students also reporting suicide ideation. This data highlights the tremendous burden that bullying may have on adolescent suicide in the region, see Figure 2.

Indeed, self-harm is among the top five causes of death among younger and older adolescents in the region. Among younger female adolescents, it is the top cause of death for countries that measure this data. Self-harm ranked in the top five causes of death for older adolescent boys (aged 15–19 years) in eight countries in the region. Notably, self-harm ranked at the top (rank 1 or 2) among four Caribbean countries (Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, St Vincent and Grenadines, and Guyana) among younger adolescent girls (aged 10–14 years). While the ‘causes’ of this self-harm are not recorded in the WHO data, when compared with the GSHS data presented above we can hypothesise that violence and bullying may be a contributing factor.
The post-2015 literature shows that being a victim of any type of violence increases the odds of poor learning and education outcomes. Findings from a secondary analysis of TERCE data on the prevalence of bullying among 6th graders in 15 countries in the LAC region found a child’s self-reported fear in school was the most robust and consistent bullying indicator associated with lower reading scores. The association between bullying and reading scores was weakest for physical bullying and strongest for psychological bullying. Research carried out in violent contexts at the community level, such as armed conflict and gangs, also shows associations with low academic performance outcomes for children. For example, a study analysed students’ performance level in national learning standardized tests in communities exposed to armed violence in Colombia. The results suggest that armed violence increases the percentage of students with unsatisfactory academic performance. Furthermore, this analysis found that students who were more advanced in their education trajectory in secondary school and in contexts that were exposed to armed violence for the longest time had the most impact and worst academic performance, compared to students in primary school. The analysis also found that armed violence negatively affects language skills more than mathematics.

The impacts of VAC on education go far beyond the effects on learning processes and outcomes, particularly when violence is perpetrated at a community level. Research was carried out in the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala) on the impacts of gangs on children’s education. The analysis shows that gangs generate a climate of generalized fear, which affects the quality of relationships and students’ academic performance. The study highlights the occurrence of fights, theft, robbery, coercion, acts of vandalism, harassment and drug dealing perpetrated by gang members at schools. For instance, the researcher cited data from the Violence Observatory of the Autonomous University of Honduras, which states that in 2017 at least 400 Honduran schools reported serious incidences of internal violence due to bullying, as well as armed robberies by gangs. Schools are also under threat of gang attacks, shootings and murders, which occur at and near schools, threatening the lives of children and staff.
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PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

While the challenge of addressing violence is daunting, evidence shows that preventing violence is possible, although not necessarily straightforward. The post-2015 era saw the greatest advancement in the area of initiatives for preventing violence against children. Preventing violence against children is now embedded in the SDGs, which have several targets that address violence against children directly as well as targets that address the risk factors and drivers of violence. In addition, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children was established to work alongside countries globally in using data, evidence and learning to develop solutions to prevent violence against children. In addition, three specific data initiatives post-2015 have been significant in strengthening the evidence base in the region: the Know Violence in Childhood Initiative, the PAHO INSPIRE Regional Status Report and the Campbell Collaboration and UNICEF INSPIRE Evidence Gap Map initiative, all of which are strongly represented in the data highlighted in this review.

International agencies have also demonstrated unprecedented agreement on creating a common framework—INSPIRE: Seven Strategies to End VAC—along with handbooks and indicators. The INSPIRE package is our current best understanding of ‘what works’ in the field—or interventions that are proven or highly likely to prevent violence against children.

INSPIRE’s seven recommended strategies are:
- Implementation and enforcement of laws
- Norms and values
- Safe environments
- Parent and caregiver support
- Income and economic strengthening
- Response and support services
- Education and life skills

While INSPIRE is one of the most significant achievements in the field of violence prevention to date, the original publication includes largely northern-developed and tested interventions. This systematic review identified 60 studies on evaluated interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean region since 2015 that add to the regional and global evidence-base for prevention.

Among the INSPIRE strategies, the region has a strong evidence-base for three of these strategies. The strongest recent evidence for prevention of VAC comes from:
- Parenting/caregiver support programmes
- Cash transfer programmes
- Education and life skills programmes

Weaker areas of INSPIRE strategies from among the recent evidence-base include a lack of robust and up-to-date legislative and policy reviews, safe environments programme evaluations in terms of impact on VAC, despite the number of programmes in the region to reduce community violence, and evaluations of response and support services, particularly around systems evaluations (although several individual studies on specific therapeutic interventions exist). In terms of norms and values programming, very few standalone programmes exist that have been evaluated; rather, such programmes are often embedded across INSPIRE strategies in the region.

In the LAC region, there is a growing body of evidence that programmes targeting parents and caregivers are effective in preventing and reducing violence against children. Post-2015 examples include the Roving Caregiver Programme in Grenada, the Nobady is Perfect (NEP) programme in Chile as part of the Chile Crece Contigo system, the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) in Colombia, the Day by Day programme in Chile, the Lobi Mi Pikin (LMP) parenting programme in Suriname, Projeto Parceria’s positive parenting unit in Brazil, and the Triple P programme in Chile, among others.
Several high-quality evaluations of cash transfer programmes have also been conducted throughout the region. These tend to focus on IPV, child labour, sexual violence and homicide, with evaluations showing reductions in all three of these areas across multiple countries as a result of cash transfer programmes. Evaluations have also found that conditional cash transfers in schools led to less crime in neighbourhoods near schools and a larger number of students staying in schools, which has also reduced youth involvement in crime. However, a few studies highlight some findings that are important to keep in mind for programming, such as the fact that positive impacts of cash transfers on addressing IPV are strongest for women with high education levels and IPV may actually increase after cash transfers in families with a large number of children. Both unexpected evaluation findings require further research for programme adaptation.

Evaluated studies have shown strong evidence that reducing and preventing violence against children in the region comes from education and life skills interventions, which frequently focus on changing norms and values; this is particularly true for interventions intended to reduce bullying and intimate partner violence. The Active-Start program in Chile, the True Love programme in Mexico, use of Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil, the IRIE Classroom Toolbox in Jamaica have all been evaluated and found to be effective in reducing violence against children, including intimate partner violence, bullying, and physical aggression. Further evaluated experiments in education settings have also been shown to shift children’s attitudes, norms, and values around violence and to increase their knowledge of self-protection strategies against violence.

Programmes intended to address armed violence against children have been shown to be effective in preventing and reducing violence as well as mitigating some of the impacts of violence. Certain policing methods—in particular hot-spots policing (which focuses resources on a small number of areas with high crime rates) and problem-oriented policing (a preventive strategy that tailors response to increase the chances of apprehending an offender and reducing opportunities for criminal behaviour)—have been shown to be effective at reducing community violence. Evidence also shows that school-based interventions may also be effective in preventing and responding to community violence and armed conflict, such as the Aulas en Paz (Classrooms in Peace) programme in Colombia. Furthermore, social norms interventions, such as Cure Violence in Honduras, have also been shown to be effective in reducing armed violence.

Overall, the findings from this systematic review strengthen the knowledge base and knowledge solutions to inform child protection programming in the region and to measure progress towards achievement of the SDGs to ensure that all children in the Latin America and Caribbean region can live a life free from violence.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

All neglected areas have poor data and there are still gaps in the evidence base in the region. For example, there are gaps in research on structural violence and its relationship with interpersonal violence against children and how they are jointly addressed. There is also limited data on interventions to address structural violence.

This review found an urgent need to develop systematic data collection systems that provide disaggregated subnational, urban/rural, age and gender specific data on VAC and gaps in child protection services. This review has highlighted that systematic data collection efforts are piecemeal—only measuring parts of the puzzle. More disaggregated data is needed.

Similarly, there are gaps in measuring violence against children in the early years and among ‘younger’ children. While there are methodological and ethical challenges to conducting research among young children, it is still crucial to building the evidence base. Similarly, more evaluations on prevention programmes with younger children and on linking the prevention of VAC to parenting for early childhood development are needed.

There is also an increasing need to identify protective factors for violence against children. Globally, risk factors are much more frequently measured than protective factors. However, several large initiatives in the region have started to bring children’s voices and agency to their research, which will hopefully generate more data on what creates resilience and protects especially high risk children from violence.

Finally, new and emerging areas require attention, such as the impact of COVID-19 as a humanitarian crisis in the region to add to our understanding of how health pandemics impact on violence against children.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

Policymakers and programmers in Latin America and the Caribbean should address violence against children, and the intersection of violence against women and violence against children, given the widespread prevalence of VAC and the significant negative health, behavioural and education consequences that result from violence in childhood.

The work of WHO, UNICEF and others on the INSPIRE strategies highlights how specific approaches have the potential for preventing violence against children.

There is a need to ensure that prevention programmes are addressing the drivers of violence against children.

The close link between different types of violence, including evidence of high levels of polyvictimization and that violence has strong intergenerational effects, suggests there might be value in comprehensive strategies that address multiple types of violence and multiple generations simultaneously.

Finally, programmes need to take account of research showing the unintended negative consequences of interventions and adapt programmes for VAC specifically.

Given the diversity of laws and policies related to VAC, further work can be done to learn across countries and review these through a systems lens for improving child protection, prevention and response.

Evidence from the LAC region highlights that violence against children can be prevented. While violence against children was reported by a substantial proportion of children in all settings in the region, prevalence varied according to setting, gender and age (including between first and second decades of life), highlighting how programmes need to be adapted by age, ethnicity and gender.

Evidence from this systematic review shows how violence against children is prevalent and can be deeply damaging to children and adolescents in the region. Analyses show how violence conspires unevenly to create and maintain inequalities between and within countries. Strong evaluation data from the region also shows that violence against children is preventable.
ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES CITED IN THE TEXT

1. Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Uruguay, Venezuela, Virgin Islands (UK).


5. From Violence Against Children Youth Surveys (VACS) data from the region, <https://www.togetherforgirls.org/violence-children-surveys/).


7. From Global School Based Student Health Survey (GSHS) data from the region, https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/surveillance/data.

8. Highest homicide prevalence


17. Ibid.


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