Violence against children is ubiquitous. In 2015, at least three out of four of the world’s children – an estimated 1.7 billion – had experienced some form of inter-personal violence\(^1\) in a previous year.\(^2\) When the cumulative impact of violence is considered, almost no children – whether they live in rich countries or poor, in the global North or South – experience violence-free childhoods.\(^3\)

The requirement of countries to report on progress towards the SDGs provides an excellent opportunity for governments to strengthen their data gathering systems on violence. Ideally, however, such measurement should cover boys and girls across different age groups and record all forms of violence in different settings.\(^4\)

A newly constructed composite Violence in Childhood (VIC) Index seeks to do precisely this. To begin with, a small number of reliable and representative indicators have been used to create the global VIC Index. While it is always tempting to include as many variables as possible, this can also confuse the picture.

The Index combines available and imputed data on the prevalence rates of indicators covering two dimensions: violence against children and violence against women. The inclusion of the latter is in recognition of the harmful effects on children of witnessing violence against women, and reinforces the importance of ending domestic violence as a necessary component of efforts to end violence in childhood.

(Figure 1) shows the ways in which the dimensions, components and indicators used in the construction of the Index are combined and weighted.

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**Figure 1: Constructing the Violence in Childhood (VIC) Index**

- **Violence against children (VAC)**
  -  Weightage 2/3
  -  Corporal punishment at home **WEIGHTAGE 1/4**
  -  Index of Peer violence in schools **WEIGHTAGE 1/4**
  -  Index of Violence against adolescent girls **WEIGHTAGE 1/4**
  -  Child homicide **WEIGHTAGE 1/4**

- **Violence against women (VAW)**
  -  Weightage 1/3
  -  % of women aged 15 and above who experienced any intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months
  -  Number of homicide victims among children aged 5-19 per 100,000 population

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\(^1\) This estimate includes child homicide, violent discipline (psychological aggression and/or physical punishment) in the past month, and sexual and physical violence experienced by adolescent girls.

\(^2\) See Evidence Highlights 1 in this series. Violence in Childhood: Key Facts.

\(^3\) See Evidence Highlights 8 in this series. Actions to End Violence in Childhood.
Violence against children – four forms of violence in different settings have been included: corporal punishment at home; peer violence in schools; violence against adolescent girls; and child homicide. Ideally, a composite index should include violence against both boys and girls. Unfortunately, nationally representative and comparable data on physical violence against boys are only available for six countries, and on sexual violence for only four countries. Hence, the Index includes violence only against adolescent girls.

Violence against women – intimate partner violence has been used as the surrogate measure of violence against women. The indicator used as a proxy is the percentage of women aged 15 and above who experienced any intimate partner physical and/or violence in the previous 12 months.

The Index gives two-thirds weight to violence against children and one-third to violence against women. The reason for assigning a higher weight to violence against children is simply that the focus of the Index is on childhood – the intention is not to convey that violence against children is more important or more serious than violence against women.

A few qualifications

A country can attain a value of 0 on the VIC Index by ending all forms of childhood violence. It is important to note, however, that the VIC Index is not comprehensive, since the choice of indicators is constrained by the overall lack of data on many forms of violence. The use of imputation methods for some data points also limits precision.

The Index cannot overcome the limitations posed by the data it uses, such as the likelihood of under-reporting that stems from the culture of fear and silence surrounding the reporting of violence, and limitations pertaining to definitions, age groups, and reporting periods. Further, the indicators tell us very little about polyvictimization of children or the same child facing multiple forms and incidents of abuse. There may be some double-counting of acts of violence as the age groups overlap: 1-14 years for corporal punishment at home, 13-15 years for peer violence, and 15-19 years for adolescent girls. Also, some acts of violence may take place in settings which are not covered by the specified age groups. For example, children below 13 and above 15 might also experience peer violence in schools (and outside schools) or in their communities.

The VIC Index and its associations

Significant associations between the VIC Index computed for countries and different macro-level indicators are discussed below.

Commitment to human development: The likelihood of ending violence has much to do with the expansion of social and economic opportunities, attitudes towards wife beating, social norms regarding corporal punishment, political stability, the practice of democracy, efficiency of government performance, and overall civic behaviour in society. Some of these associations are captured in the graphs that follow. Childhood violence is lower in countries that are committed to a human development agenda and that give a high priority to child health and education, particularly for girls.

**FIGURE 2: Childhood violence tends to be lower in countries where more children under-5 survive.**

**FIGURE 3: Childhood violence tends to be lower in countries where more girls complete secondary education.**
FIGURE 4: Childhood violence tends to be lower in countries that are politically stable, better governed and where rights are better assured.

Notes:
- Political stability: average rank for each country 2012–2014 (World Governance Indicators 2015). Measures perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically motivated violence, including terrorism.
- The Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace 2016) assesses states’ vulnerability to conflict or collapse.
- The Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence Unit 2015) scores countries on five criteria: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation and political culture, and categorizes as one of four types of regime: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.
- Control of corruption: average rank for each country 2012–2014 (World Governance Indicators 2015). Reflects perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests.
- Rule of law: average rank for each country 2012–2014 (World Governance Indicators 2015). Reflects perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society.

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.
Violence in childhood thus tends to be lower in countries that have higher rates of child survival. (FIGURE 2) Lower the under-five mortality rate (USMR), higher is the likelihood of a country ending violence in childhood. If USMR can be considered as a proxy for the efficacy of a country’s health system, then the association suggests that strengthening health systems is likely to contribute to ending violence in childhood. Childhood violence also tends to be lower in countries where more girls complete secondary school. (FIGURE 3)

**Attitudes to wife beating and raising children:** It is not surprising that countries where boys (15-19 years) think that a husband/partner is justified in hitting or beating his wife or partner for at least one of the specified reasons, i.e. if his wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children or refuses sexual relations. What is somewhat more surprising is that countries where girls (15-19 years) justify men beating their wives or partners for similar reasons are even more less likely to end childhood violence. Similarly, we find that countries where more adults think that physical punishment is necessary to raise children are less likely to end childhood violence.

**Democracy, political participation and political stability:** We find from the associations shown in (FIGURE 4) between the VIC Index and indicators of governance, democracy and political stability that levels of childhood violence are likely to be lower in countries that are politically more stable and less fragile; in countries with full democracies as opposed to authoritarian regimes; where citizens are able to participate freely in elections; in countries with higher quality services and better policy implementation; in countries with low levels of corruption and elite capture; and in countries where citizens abide by rules and rights are enforced.

**Potential uses and policy implications**

The VIC Index offers a handy tool that enables comparisons to be made between countries and regions of the world. Calculated in future years, it could show how levels change over time as more specialized data become available. The Index could also be disaggregated by sex, age and location, and incorporate specific data for different categories of vulnerable children.

The VIC Index can become an important tool for mobilizing public action in the hands of media and civil society organizations to draw attention to the urgent need to end violence. Trends in the VIC Index over time can be used by the civil society to track progress towards eliminating childhood violence and make a case for increased resource allocations for the prevention of childhood violence. Ranking countries of the world can mobilize the global media and highlight the universal nature of the problem of violence in childhood. Over time, if sub-national reports on ending violence in childhood are prepared (like with the Human Development Reports), the Index can mobilize public action within countries as well.

Finally, two clear messages emerge from the analysis using the VIC Index to highlight the close linkages between childhood violence and human development across countries. One, violence in childhood cannot be ended unless human rights and human development are accorded greater priority by nation-states. Two, development cannot be sustained unless the world makes a concerted effort to end childhood violence.

Every day millions of boys and girls around the world experience fear and violence – physical, emotional or sexual. This need not happen. Violence in childhood is preventable – through concerted and collective action that addresses the root causes of violence and lays firm foundations for both sustainable development and more peaceful societies.

To fulfill the commitments to ending all forms of violence that are enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, states and societies must analyze the causes of childhood violence, and invest in preventing violence against women and children.

Know Violence in Childhood is a learning initiative dedicated to informing and supporting a global movement to end violence in childhood. Established in 2014 for a three-year period, the Initiative analyzed existing data, commissioned new research and synthesized knowledge on the causes and consequences of childhood violence worldwide. Its work highlights the impact of childhood violence on individuals, families, communities and societies, expands the research base on this global crisis and promotes evidence-based strategies to prevent violence.

The full report and related outputs are available at: www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org