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Committing to Complexity: The Changing Nature of Childhood in Peru and Viet Nam

Deborah Fry
University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education, debi.fry@ed.ac.uk

M. Catherine Maternowska
Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, catherine.maternowska@end-violence.org

Tabitha Casey
University of Edinburgh, Moray House School of Education, Tabitha.casey@ed.ac.uk

Introduction

In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth a global mandate for countries to provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. The reality is that for many children, schools remain sites of violence, and experiencing violence negatively impacts on children's educational outcomes – from lower grades and test scores to dropout (Fry et al., 2018). Recent research highlights how different forms of violence in childhood contribute to inequalities in education—for both boys and girls and that an increased investment in prevention is needed in order to meet the SDGs.

The INSPIRE framework – seven strategies proven or highly likely to prevent VAC developed by the WHO, UNICEF, CDC, Together for Girls, PEPFAR and other stakeholders suggests that multiple types of interventions implemented simultaneously are the most successful (WHO et al., 2016). The seven strategies--Implementation and enforcement of laws; Norms and values; Safe environments; Parent and caregiver support; Income and economic strengthening; Response and support services; and Education and life skills— are less understood in Low and Middle-Income Country (LMIC) contexts. For example, of all child maltreatment and youth violence prevention outcome evaluation studies published from 2007–2016, just 9% of those on child maltreatment, and 6% of those on youth violence, related to prevention programmes in LMICs (Hughes et al., 2014).

Perhaps INSPIRE's most widely cited and best available school-based intervention for preventing violence against children in LMICs is 'The Good Schools Toolkit', the only African developed school-based intervention to prevent violence against children (developed by Ugandan NGO Raising Voices). The intervention, randomly tested in 42 schools in Luwero District, Uganda, was found to be effective in reducing past week physical violence against children by 40% in the participating schools (Devries et al., 2015). No adverse events related to the intervention were detected, but 434 children were referred to child protective services because of what they disclosed in the follow-up survey (Devries et al., 2015). This intervention includes a package of activities

implemented by the whole school community effectively integrating numerous stakeholders (KNOW Violence in Childhood, 2017). The Toolkit intervention is open access and freely available.

Recent studies suggest that understanding what drives violence, essentially why and how violence manifests in children's lives is important (KNOW Violence in Childhood, 2017). In 2014, the *Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children* in Italy, Peru, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe set out to understand these dynamics in children's homes, schools and communities, and what can be done to prevent it. The Study analysed the structural and institutional forces, or drivers of violence, in relation to a variety of risk factors identified at the community, interpersonal and individual levels. Employing a child-centred integrated framework, the Study results show how structural factors such as rapid socio-economic change and migration, can shape how violence in schools manifests for both girls and boys. The same Study also demonstrates how children's vulnerability and ability to protect themselves from violence changes as they move through childhood and into adolescence and that experiences of violence may be very different for boys than for girls.

Mapping Violence: The Changing Nature of Society and Childhood

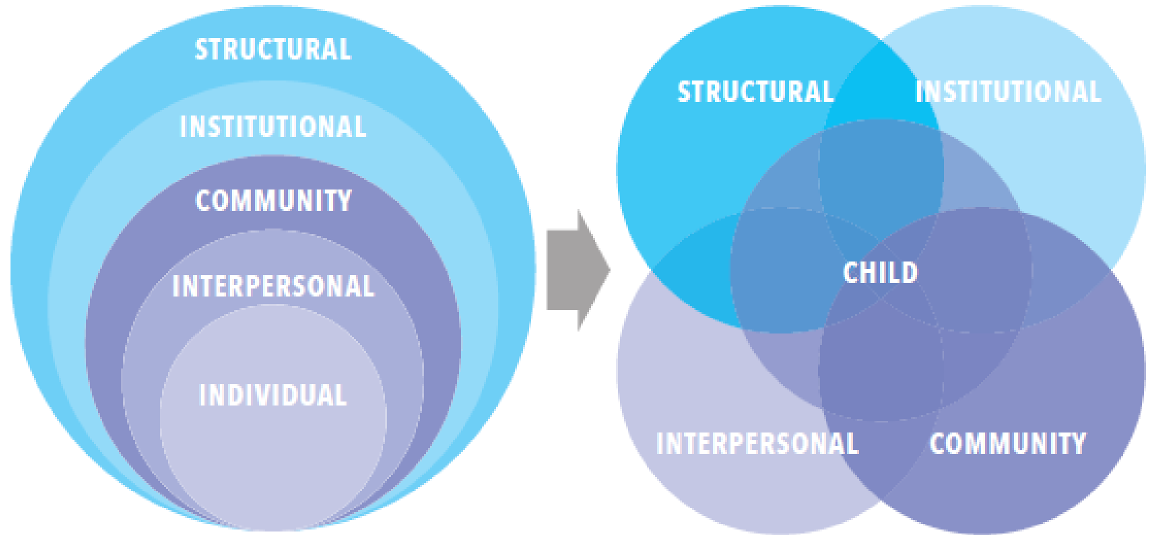
The *Drivers Study* approach relies on national engagement with and discussion around secondary analyses of national data sets triangulated with national and international literature to assist policymakers, NGOs and other actors to understand the greatest threats to children. When data is analysed and interpreted on national soil, stakeholders gain confidence and an important sense of accountability.

During the course of the study we applied and subsequently adapted two frameworks – the socio-ecological model and an age/gender framework – to show how violence conspires unevenly across childhood to create and maintain inequalities between and within societies. Using a revised version of the socio-ecological framework, the study explores the how the **drivers of violence** or the institutional and structural level factors that create the conditions in which violence is more (or less) interact with the **risk and protective factors** which reflect the likelihood of violence occurring due to characteristics most often measured at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels (Maternowska & Potts, 2017). Our findings support the idea that no single level within the socio-ecological model, and no single factor (drivers or risk/protective factors) within or between those levels, determines or explains an act of interpersonal violence involving a child. Instead each factor, when combined with one or more other factors, can put children at risk. One of the most important findings is that violence is a fluid and shifting phenomenon in children's lives as they move between the places where they live, play, sleep and learn.

The child-centered and integrated socio-ecological framework, builds on the work of several scholars and acknowledges that behavior is shaped by multiple, inter-related influences within multiple domain (Maternowska & Potts, 2017). Designed to assist practitioners in visualizing how drivers and risk and protective factors interact (see Figure

1), it maintains the child at the center—interacting, interfacing and overlapping with a variety of drivers, risk and protective factors throughout the lifespan.

Figure 1. A Child-Centred Framework for Violence Prevention



Too often understanding of violence dynamics fail to take into account of the extraordinary implications of age and its nexus with gender: ***children grow, their capacities and vulnerabilities evolve and change***. For example, what drives violence against a two-year old girl may be quite different than that which affects a 14-year old boy, with different societal and individual consequences.

Figure 2. Age and Gender Analyses

GIRLS | Age | BOYS

9
PRE-ADOLESCENCE (GIRLS)
10
PRE-ADOLESCENCE (BOYS)
11
12
EARLY ADOLESCENCE (GIRLS)
13
14
EARLY ADOLESCENCE (BOYS)
MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE (GIRLS)
15
16
MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE (BOYS)
LATE ADOLESCENCE (GIRLS)
17
18
LATE ADOLESCENCE (BOYS)
19
YOUTH (GIRLS) / YOUTH (BOYS)
20
21
22
YOUNG ADULTHOOD (GIRLS) / YOUNG ADULTHOOD (BOYS)
23
24

A child's vulnerability and ability to protect herself from violence changes over time with her evolving capacities. It is important to recognise how girls and boys may develop differently especially as they move through childhood and into adolescence. There is no global consensus around categorizing children's and young people's stages of life, and regional or sub-regional variations may also be expected. The timeline used here is based on a classification by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to illustrate how boys and girls may proceed through the stages of adolescence at different times.

The *Drivers Study* gathered, analysed and synthesized available existing data across four study sites including over 500 primary research studies and 10 datasets on violence against children with multi-disciplinary national teams to interpret the findings (for detailed methodology see

Maternowska & Fry, 2015). The dialogue that ensued allowed stakeholders to clarify their national findings acknowledging national contextual issues. Rather than focus on topical issues—such as child labour or sex trafficking--national teams were encouraged to step back and analyse what factors might be *driving* children into such unsafe conditions. Secondary analyses of surveys measuring and the prevalence of violence in different settings were of value, but ultimately understanding how and when violence takes place requires more than what traditional surveys can offer. In each country, national teams employed a mixed methods approach to yield a deeper understanding of the processes and patterns of violence, the findings of which are presented here.

The following section presents findings from two countries – Peru and Viet Nam. Our findings from Peru focus on the changing nature of age and gender while our findings Viet Nam demonstrate how particular structural and institutional factors have created the environments where violence is more likely to occur with risk factors at individual, interpersonal and community levels. Analysing findings guided by these frameworks provides important contextual information so that the adaptation of interventions is effectively planned.

Applying the age and gender framework to understand children's changing risk of violence in Peruvian schools

Corporal punishment is illegal in Peruvian schools, but evidence suggests it is still highly prevalent. Several data sets and studies—including Young Lives and the National Survey on Social Relations (ENARES, by its Spanish acronym) - were analysed to understand the ways in which age and gender may affect children's outcomes in school. The Young Lives Study, led by a team at the University of Oxford, is an international longitudinal study of childhood poverty following the changing lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Viet Nam over 15 years. This study collected quantitative and qualitative data on the same children over multiple survey waves. A secondary analysis of this data, particularly on the intersections of children's experiences of violence in schools, informed our findings.

In Peru, corporal punishment appears to decline as children grow older. Over half of 8-year-old respondents reported that they had witnessed a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week (51%) and 30 per cent reported they had experienced corporal punishment themselves (Portlea & Pells, 2015). This declines sharply among the same respondents at age 15, when only 19 per cent reported they had witnessed a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week and 7 per cent had experienced it themselves in the past week. These findings are important because corporal punishment at age 8 was also found to have negative associations with cognitive outcomes (measured by scores on math and vocabulary tests) at age 12. Children from rural areas, poorer children, and boys were more likely to report corporal punishment.

Bullying also appears to be common in Peruvian schools. According to the ENARES study in Peru, about 70 per cent of girls and boys reported ever experiencing psychological abuse such as teasing from peers, and about half reported experiencing physical violence from their peers (INEI, 2013; 2015). Comparatively, the *Young Lives*

study found that about a third of students at age 15 reported they had been verbally (34%) or indirectly (32%) bullied, such as being humiliated or shamed (Pells, Portela, & Espinoza, 2016). Less than one in ten reported they had experienced physical bullying (8%). In general, boys are more likely to be involved in physical bullying compared to girls, whereas girls are more like to experience forms of indirect bullying, such as having their personal belongings stolen or having other children refuse to talk to them (Pells, Portlea, & Espinoza, 2016). When looking at age, older boys are more likely to perpetrate physical violence against their peers compared to younger boys aged 9-11 years. For girls, they experience psychological and physical violence from peers more frequently when they are young compared to girls over the age of 12.

This data shows how boys and girls experience violence in schools differently and how this changes as they move through childhood and into adolescence. This is an important layer of analysis for understanding how to build effective age and gender appropriate prevention interventions.

Applying the Child-Centred Integrated Framework: Children's experiences of violence at Vietnamese schools

Corporal punishment and bullying are also prevalent in Vietnamese schools—in fact, the Young Lives study found that experiencing violence in schools was children's number one reason for not liking school. Our analyses demonstrate how these experiences of violence in schools are connected to larger institutional and structural factors that shape children's lives (see Figure 1).

Over 40 per cent of Viet Nam's roughly 93 million people are under the age of 24 (World Bank, 2017), a potentially dynamic youthful force for national development. However, Vietnamese children are growing up in a very different world than their parents and grandparents did. Over the past thirty years, Viet Nam has experienced significant socio-economic transformation. In 1986, the government introduced a package of economic reforms known as *Doi Moi*, or renovation, which transformed the previously planned, vertically oriented, largely agricultural economy into a market system in which trade was opened up to the rest of the world. By 2013, Viet Nam became a lower middle-income country with a highly diversified economy and per capita income of US$1,960 (Viet Nam Academy of Social Science, 2014).

But the effects of Doi Moi were not only economic; it also opened the country up to new ideas and attitudes. Traditional values have shifted, including concepts of gender and violence. This process has been accelerated by Viet Nam's fast-growing ICT industry, rapid expansion of internet access and one of the highest rates of mobile phone saturation in the world (CIA, 2014). This rapid economic development and increasing global connectedness have brought many benefits for children, but also new risks. Numerous scholars of Viet Nam show, how traditionally, Vietnamese family structures were strongly influenced by patriarchy and Confucian values conferring upon men power over women and children in the family, community and society (GSO, 2010; MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011; Dao The Duc et al., 2012; Rydstrøm, 2006a). While these traditional values have been challenged by socialist ideologies of equality, and, since Doi Moi,

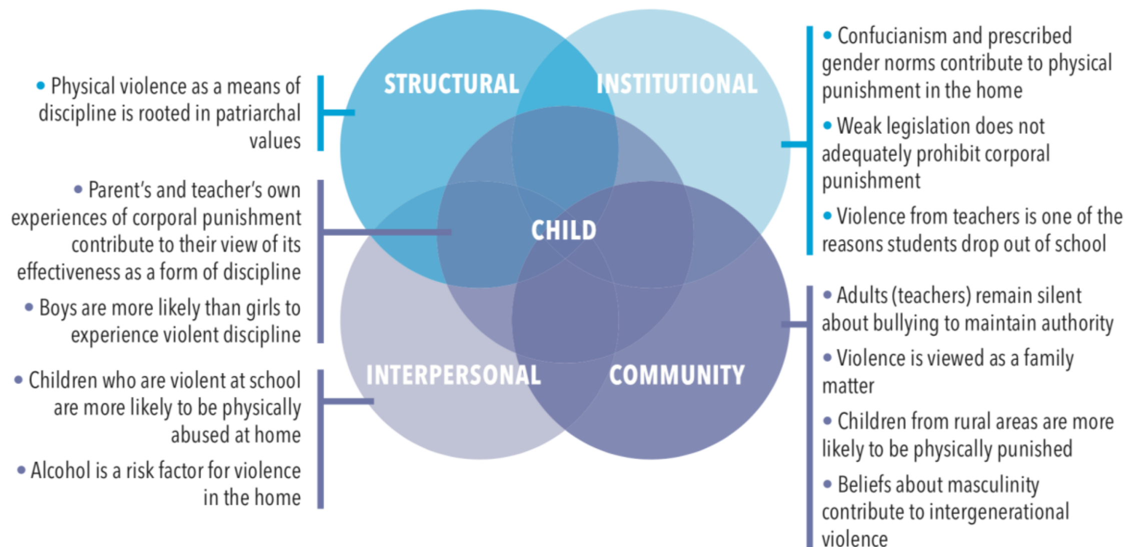
greater economic opportunities for women and exposure to global social movements for gender equity social norms in Viet Nam are deeply rooted.

Relatively rapid socio-economic change, which has catapulted Viet Nam into an emerging middle-income country (Viet Nam Academy of Social Science, 2014) has fueled a number of significant shifts at the structural and institutional levels of society and these appear to be linked to risk factors for violence against children. For example, rapid urban migration, diminished community cohesion and traditional values, increased commercialism, and changes in the nature of social relationships are posing new threats to children's wellbeing (UNICEF, 2010a; Rydstrøm, 2006b; Emery, Trung, & Wu, 2013; Save the Children, 2005; CSAGA, 2004; Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2015). According to Young Lives analyses, urban children report more corporal punishment than rural children.

International and rural-urban migration has had significant implications for children. While increased job opportunities for young women in the textile and hospitality sectors has led to a "feminization of migration" (Anh, Vu, Bonfoh and Schelling, 2012, Resurreccion & Ha, 2007), this migration of young mothers has created a generation of "left behind" children who are living with single parents or other relatives (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Hoang, Lam, Yeoh, & Graham, 2015, Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2015). The effects of parental stress—due to changing family structures - appears to be contributing to violence in the home.

Findings also show that for most Vietnamese children, violence in one setting impacts on experiencing violence in other settings. For example, violence at home is a risk factor for physical violence in other settings including schools—which usually takes the form of bullying or fighting with peers. And vice-versa, students who are violent at schools are often from families where they have been abused emotionally or physically abuse by their parents or other siblings (Hoàng Bá Thịnh, 2007; Martin et al., 2013). **Figure 3** below shows how findings from Viet Nam, plotted against the integrated child-centred framework makes clear the way violence manifests in children's lives—*at all levels.* Accounting for this complexity is likely to create more effective interventions that address the dynamic and contextual factors that are the backdrop of Viet Nam today.

Figure 3: The Integrated Child-Centred Framework: Viet Nam



Conclusion

The ambitious post- 2015 commitments on children's education, health and wellbeing set high standards for the field of education. We argue that an increased investment of evidence-based prevention interventions which address the key drivers of violence affecting children is needed in order to meet the SDGs. While scholars and practitioners agree that prevention requires an understanding of all the factors that influence violence, too frequently these factors are ascribed to one level or another of society or one domain or another in children's lives, creating a static, if not simplistic interpretation of a very complex social phenomenon. Using two different but related frameworks—the integrated child-centred framework and understandings of age and gender—we demonstrate how violence manifests in children's lives. Drawing on studies from the Americas and Asia makes clear that children's inclusive education is at risk as 'ever changing external influences and uncertainties threaten the nature of society'. The 'impact of this uncertainty on schools, teachers and families' during the first decade of children's lives and throughout children's learning transitions are profound.

While the challenge of addressing violence is daunting, recent evidence shows that preventing violence *is* possible, though not necessarily straightforward. In some cases, macro-level reforms in policing and economic development have been linked to violence reduction (Finkeholr & Jones, 2006). In other cases, evidence of reduced interpersonal violence has been linked to community-level interventions focused on health, economic support and power inequity (Kim et al., 2007). Finally, interventions targeted towards individuals and families in the areas of education, awareness raising and behavior change have, in some cases, also shown reductions in violent crime, partner violence and negative parenting practices (Allen, 2011; Kerr, Gardner & Cluver, 2011). Committing to this complexity is the first step in ensuring change in homes and schools around the world.

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