

Protection of Children against Sexual Violence in South Sudan

(National Conference on Protection of Children against Sexual Violence in South Sudan
Theme: Working together to protect children against sexual violence
Trends and progress on sexual violence against children)

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Abstract: *Sexual assault against children affects millions of young lives and is still a horrifying problem with major long-term psychological, emotional, and social implications. This study uses case report of the National Conference on Protection of Children against Sexual Violence in South Sudan with the Theme of Working together to protect children against sexual violence and Trends and progress on sexual violence against children. The author presents among others, the Sexual Violence against children in Sudan, the Prevalence of Sexual Violence, 1.5. Conflict related sexual violence (CRSV). The study emphasises the importance of comprehensive support networks, community awareness campaigns, education campaigns, and legal changes in addition to early intervention. The purpose of this initiative is to teach stakeholders and politicians on effective ways to stop, address, and ultimately outlaw child sexual abuse. It accomplishes this by encouraging collaboration across sectors and child-centered methodologies.*

Keywords: Children, Sexual Violence, South Sudan

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1.0. Situational Analysis of children In South Sudan

- 2.2 million children are living as refugees
- 2.4 million are forced from their homes
- 2 million children out of school
- Almost 3 Million children severely food insecure
- More than 1 Million acutely malnourished
- 900,000 children suffering from psychological distress
- 1 child in 10 dies before their age of 5
- More than 2,300 killed or injured
- Over 19, 000 recruited by forces or groups
- Hundreds of incidents of rape and sexual assault
- Household study indicates that 45% of South Sudanese girls enter marital union before the age of 18, increasing by 4% between 2006 and 2010 (NBS 2010).
- 52% of girls are married below the age of 18, South Sudan being one of the countries with high prevalence of child marriage
- 7.2% are married off before the age of 15
- 2 out of 3 children are now in desperate need of Humanitarian assistance

- A teenage girl in South Sudan today is more likely to die in child birth than to complete her primary education
 - South Sudan has a very young population, with 16% under the age of five years old, 32% under the age of 10 years old, 51% under the age of 18 years old and 72% under the age of 30 years old
 - 76% of children live in rural areas compared to 24% in urban areas
 - The lack of protective environment has led to high levels of abuse of child rights, including grave violations in conflict as per the UN Resolution 1612
- SOURCE:** Buechner. M, Nov. 2021. UNICEF in Emergencies, South Sudan Household Health Survey (2010), GOSS, EMIS, National Statistical Year Booklet 2011, 2008 Census, South Sudan Centre for Statistics &Evaluation

1.1. Violence against children (VAC)

The World Health Organisation's definition of violence against children:
"All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or

commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. (WHO,)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines violence against children as "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, Violence Against Children (Article 19, CRC, 1989)

1.2. Sexual Violence against children

Sexual violence against children is a global problem. It is widespread and goes unreported especially if it occurs within the family context.

Until recently, very little was known about the true nature of sexual violence against children. However, over the last two decades, a growing number of research efforts to document and understand the dynamics and prevalence of sexual violence against children have started to shed light on its magnitude and consequences. **Sexual violence** is the involvement of a child in sexual activity with another person that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or else that violates the laws or social taboos of society (The Bantwana Initiative of World Education, 2020).

Sexual violence against children and adolescents does not occur in isolation. It often intersects with other forms of gender-based violence and violence against children. Further, different forms of violence against children share common drivers and risk factors. Thus, holistic approaches that target all forms of violence are important to address these intersections, consider polyvictimization, and maximize the use of scarce resources. At the same time, the nuanced experiences of sexual violence also require focused interventions during specific points in the life course. Therefore, both holistic and focused approaches are important and should be complementary (UNICEF, 2017). Children are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation online. There has been an increase in live-streaming of sexual abuse online, sexual extortion, and grooming. Children are also increasingly exposed to child sexual abuse material, and inappropriate content such as pornography, online

Children are sexually abused by both adults and other children who are in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the victim. Sexual violence against children takes different forms including: verbal utterances that are sexual in nature, touching or fondling the child in a sexual manner or being forced to look at sexual scenes (pornography), and stringent gifts especially from men to girls or from women to boys in return for sexual pleasure.

1.3. Common Myths related to sexual violence

Norms that limit disclosure of sexual violence

- Sexual violence is shameful
- For girls: Experiencing sexual violence decreases a girl's value and desirability • For boys: Men cannot be victims of sexual violence — it makes them less manly
- Victims of sexual violence caused or incited the violence
- People don't talk about sexual violence
- Children lie and cannot be believed.
 - Family matters are private, and family members should not disclose them
 - Community matters are private, and community members should not disclose them -Norms that increase acceptance of violence
 - Women/girls do not challenge a husband's/intimate partner's behaviour
 - Children do not challenge a parent's or an adult's behaviour, -Norms that limit intervention to stop violence
 - Family/intimate relationship matters are private; others should not intervene
 - Community matters are private; others should not intervene Norms that increase prevalence of sexual violence
 - Men's sexual urges cannot be controlled
 - Women should not desire or refuse sex

- Children may not tell you if something bad happens to them.
- Boys do not experience sexual abuse.
- Sexual abusers do not have to be drunk or crazy.
- Teasing about sex or making sexual comments is sexual violence.
- Girls who wear short skirts are asking to be abused.
- Children lie about sexual abuse to get attention.
- You cannot tell just by looking at a child that the child has been sexually abused.
- If a girl doesn't say no, then it means she wants to have sex

1.4. The Prevalence of Sexual Violence

Fragmented but growing international evidence indicates that high proportions of girls, boys and experience some form of violence. A 2016 global meta-analysis estimated that more than three-quarters of the world's children had experienced moderate or severe physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse during the past year, affecting nearly 1.5 billion boys and girls aged 2-17.

- Globally, sexual violence has been **reported in 51 countries** in conflict in the last 25 years.
- In Liberia's 14 year war 40% of population affected by sexual violence (Swiss)
- In **Sarajevo** Canton, **80% of the 5,000 male inmates** at a concentration camp reported being raped (UNIFEM)
- In **Colombia**, **36% of internally displaced women** in the country had been forced to have sex by men (UNIFEM)

In recent years, **mass rape in war** has been documented as a weapon of warfare i.e Bosnia, Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and

- Trafficking of humans world-wide grew almost 50 percent from 1995 to 2000 and (IOM) estimates that as many as 2 million women are **trafficked across borders** annually
- More than 90 million African women and girls are victims of **female genital mutilation**.
- Furthermore, child marriage remains a global menace, with South Sudan being one of the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage. Globally, twelve million young girls are married each year. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 40% of girls marry before age 18 years. ¹Social, cultural, religious, and economic factors drive child marriage globally.
- At least 60 million girls who would otherwise be expected to be alive are **missing** from various populations, mostly in Asia, as a result of **sex-selective abortions, infanticide or neglect**
- In mid-2006 in Darfur, 200 women experienced sexual violence in a single five-week period. Earlier in 2005, 500 rape survivors received medical care.
- **Internally displaced** women and girls from Sierra Leone have suffered an extraordinary level of rape, sexual violence and other gross human rights violations during their country's civil war
- During the last civil conflict in Liberia, local media reported on the massive increase of sexual violence, with nearly 50 per cent of the 658 rape survivors aged between 5 and 12 years. In 90 per cent of the cases involving children, the attacker was someone known to the victim
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped. UN

officials in just one part of eastern Congo, North Kivu, estimate there are 25,000 cases of sexual violence against women and children. An estimated 16–20% of girls and 7–9% of boys experience sexual violence in childhood globally (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011), with severe impact on mental, physical and sexual health (Devries et al., 2014; Kessler et al., 2017; Loeb et al., 2002; Maniglio, 2009; Spataro et al., 2004).

In South Sudan, there is no national prevalence data on Sexual Violence against children. However, GBV incidence is gathered through service provision:- The inter-agency GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS). According to programmatic reports, the most common types of reported cases of GBV in South Sudan are physical violence (36%) followed by emotional abuse (24%), sexual violence (23%).

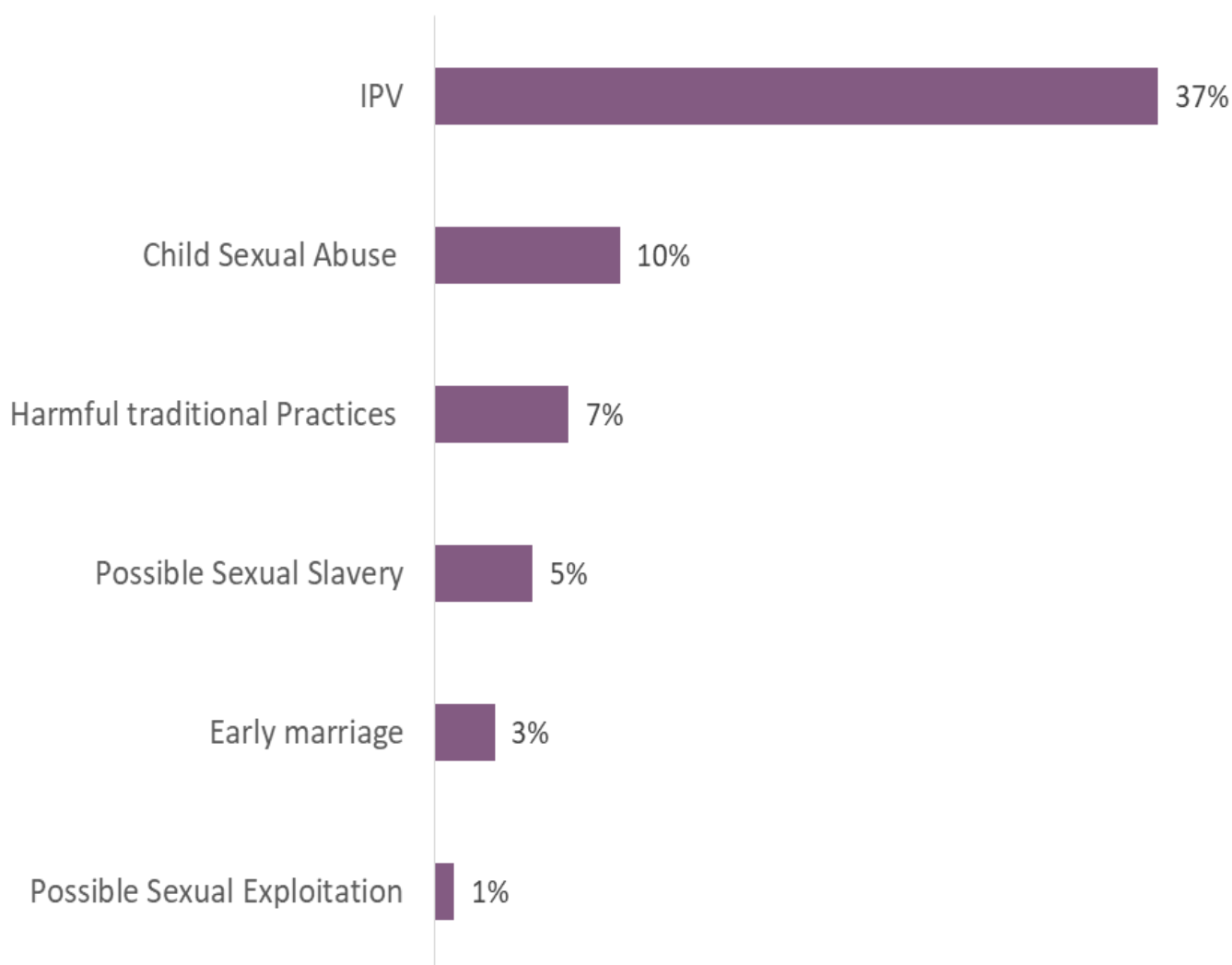
Forced and child marriage is also common. Regionally, South Sudan has the highest prevalence of IPV among married women aged 15-49, estimated at 49.6% for physical and/or sexual; Uganda comes second in the ranking. For example, one out of four South Sudanese who suffer conflict related sexual violence is a child. Violence permeates all sectors of the South Sudanese society (i.e., children, women, men are all victims of violence). Perhaps many years of conflict have made violence a hallmark of life in South Sudan.

IN CASE CONTEXT

37 of reported cases happened in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV), 10 % of the reports incidents were child sexual abuse

¹ UNFPA, 2020. Costing the Three Transformative Results.

Case Context

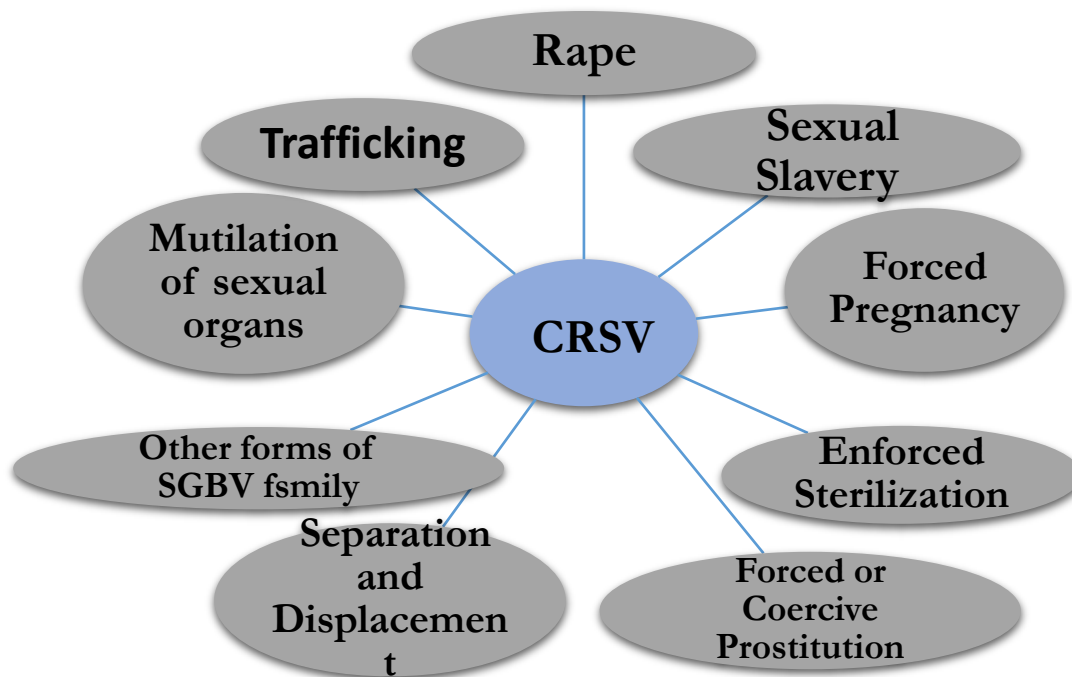


Source: Joint Government and UN programming on GBV (2018)

1.5. Conflict related sexual violence (CRSV)

Sexual violence against children during conflict is one of the six grave violations identified and condemned by the UN Security Council. The six grave violations form the basis of the Council's architecture to monitor, report and respond to abuses suffered by children in times of war. Ending and preventing these violations is also the

focus of the Special Representative's work and advocacy. Sexual violence is increasingly a characteristic of conflict and is often perpetrated against girls and boys in a rule of law vacuum. In some instances, sexual violence has been used as a tactic of war designed to humiliate a population or to force displacement.



Source: (Wangamatti, S. Aleso, 2020)

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) documented 193 cases of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 142 women, 46 girls and 5 men. A further 25 cases, which occurred between 2014 and 2019, affecting 14 women, 8 girls and 3 men, were also verified in 2020. Perpetrators included community-based militias, civil defence groups and other armed elements. The South Sudan People's Defence Forces were implicated in 27 per cent of the incidents. Cases were also attributed to members of the South Sudan National Police Service and the National Security Service (*Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (S/2021/312) issued on 30 March 2021*)

1.6. Conceptual framework

Understanding sexual violence against children

The framework for understanding sexual violence in childhood incorporates research on the following:

- Gender (including gender inequality and gender norms), both as a driver for sexual violence and with

respect to the different, gendered experiences of boys and girls

- Age and power imbalances between adults and children as a driver of sexual violence
- Developmental differences in experiences of sexual victimization, as both young children and adolescents are at risk of sexual violence in the family, but adolescents are typically exposed to a wider range of perpetrators outside the family, including peers and intimate partners
- Developmental differences in the impact of sexual violence, especially in terms of trauma and coping responses

Violence against children is a multifaceted problem with causes at the individual, close relationship, community and societal levels. Important risk factors are:

Individual level:

- biological and personal aspects such as sex and age
- lower levels of education
- low income
- having a disability or mental health problems

- identifying as or being identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- harmful use of alcohol and drugs
- a history of exposure to violence.

Close-relationship level:

- lack of emotional bonding between children and parents or caregivers
- poor parenting practices
- family dysfunction and separation
- being associated with delinquent peers
- witnessing violence between parents or caregivers
- early or forced marriage.

Community level:

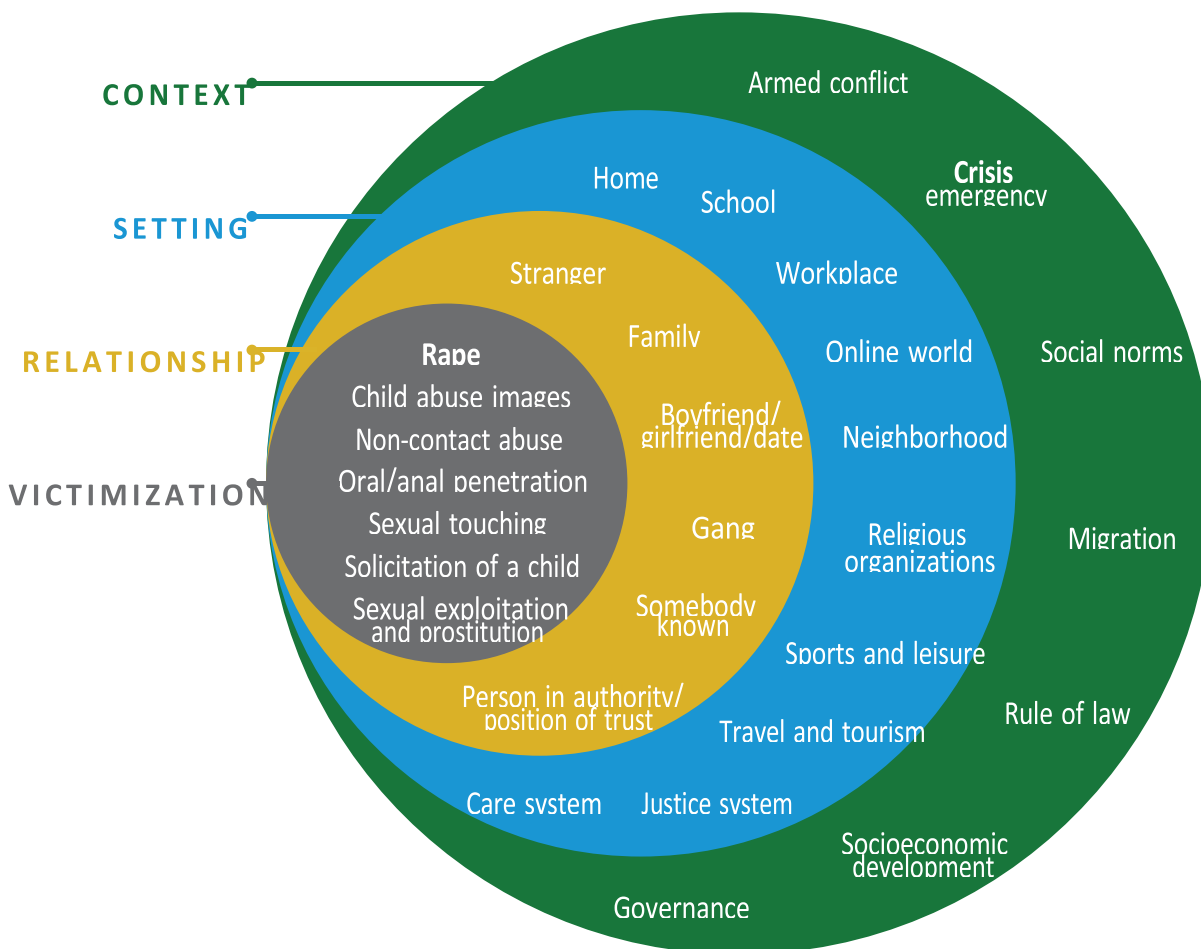
- poverty

- high population density
- low social cohesion and transient populations
- easy access to alcohol and firearms
- high concentrations of gangs and illicit drug dealing.

Society level:

- social and gender norms that create a climate in which violence is normalized
- health, economic, educational and social policies that maintain economic, gender and social inequalities
- absent or inadequate social protection
- post-conflict situations or natural disaster
- settings with weak governance and poor law enforcement.

7. SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



1.7. why children stay silent

- Not being believed
 - Not being responded to or complaints concealed
 - May decide that it is better to keep their suffering to themselves rather than risk retaliation from the adults who have power over their lives.
 - Children often feel great shame over being abused and fear it will become known.
- Fear of HIV and other SITs
- Fear of being shunned and unable to be marry, or being punished for what happened in the case of rape
 - Children think it's normal or that they don't have a choice
 - fear that the abuser will hurt them or their family
 - threats from the abuser
 - anger
 - shame
 - guilt
 - they may think it was their fault
 - fear of having to leave school (pornography), and stringent gifts especially from men to girls or from women to boys in return for sexual pleasure

What are some of the physical, emotional and behavioural signs that a child might exhibit if they are experiencing sexual violence?

Examples:

- physical signs such as pain or itching in the genital area, STDs, pregnancy
- emotional signs such as changes in behaviour, withdrawal, irrational fears, depression
- Behavioural signs such as fear of going to certain places, poor performance in school, alcohol or drug use, poor relationships with friends, sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate to their age, nightmares, excessive anger or sadness, fear of touch and distrust of people, a change in hygiene (too much or too little bathing)

1.8. CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE

All forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse against girls and boys may have serious negative short-term and long-term physical, mental and reproductive health consequences.

These include physical injury, sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, unplanned pregnancy and in some cases death. Evidence suggests that toxic stress associated with exposure to

violence in childhood can impair brain development and damage other parts of the nervous system, with lifelong consequences. Violence may also have serious social and economic consequences for individuals and society, including reduced school performance and long-term economic costs

- **Result in negative coping and health risk behaviours.** Children exposed to violence and other adversities are substantially more likely to smoke, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behaviour. They also have higher rates of anxiety, depression, other mental health problems and suicide.
- **Lead to unintended pregnancies,** induced abortions, gynaecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- **Contribute to a wide range of non-communicable diseases** as children grow older. The increased risk for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and other health conditions is largely due to the negative coping and health risk behaviours associated with violence.
- **Impact opportunities and future generations.** Children exposed to violence and other adversities are more likely to drop out of school, have difficulty finding and keeping a job, and are at heightened risk for later victimization and/or perpetration of interpersonal and self-directed violence, by which violence against children can affect the next generation.

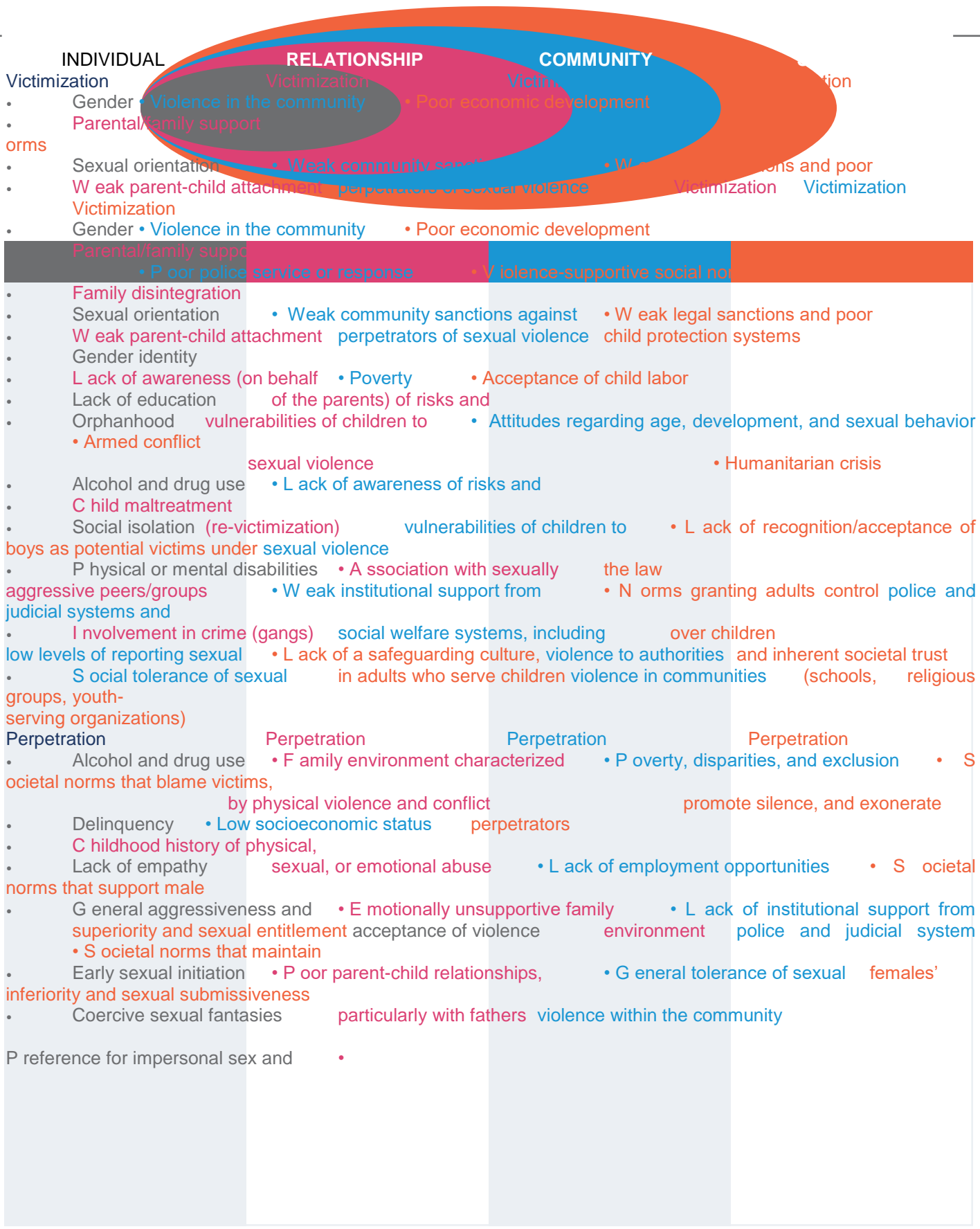
➤ . What are some of the consequences for a child who is experiencing sexual violence?

Examples:

- drops out of school
 - pregnancy
 - HIV&AIDS
 - STIs
 - distrust of people
 - poor performance in school
 - develops unhealthy relationships
 - drug or alcohol abuse

1.9. RISK FACTORS FOR VICTIMIZATION AND PERPETRATION

Drawing on this framework, on violence against children the diagram below illustrates some of the risk factors for sexual violence victimization and perpetration at each level of the socio-ecological framework



How can we respond when a child comes to us who has experienced sexual violence?

Examples:

- pay attention to indirect hints from children
- talk to them in private
- keep it in confidence and do not tell other teachers who do not need to know (do not promise the child you won't tell anyone as it is your keep it in confidence and do not tell other teachers who do not need to know (do not promise the child you won't tell anyone as it is your responsibility to do something about it)
- tell the child you believe them
 - reassure the child that it is okay to tell what happened
 - reassure them that it is not their fault
 - explore options, consult school policy or seek advice from other knowledgeable teachers.

1.10. WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Violence against children can be prevented. Preventing and responding to violence against children requires that efforts systematically address risk and protective factors at all four interrelated levels of risk (individual, relationship, community, society).

Under the leadership of WHO, a group of 10 international agencies have developed and endorsed an evidence-based technical package called *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*. The package aims to help countries and communities achieve SDG Target 16.2 on ending violence against children. Each letter of the word INSPIRE stands for one of the strategies, and most have been shown to have preventive effects across several different types of violence, as well

as benefits in areas such as mental health, education and crime reduction

INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children

The seven strategies are:

- **Implementation and enforcement of laws** (for example, banning violent discipline and restricting access to alcohol and firearms);
- **Norms and values change** (for example, altering norms that condone the sexual abuse of girls or aggressive behaviour among boys);
- **Safe environments** (such as identifying neighbourhood "hot spots" for violence and then addressing the local causes through problem-oriented policing and other interventions);
- **Parental and caregiver support** (for example, providing parent training to young, first time parents);
- **Income and economic strengthening** (such as microfinance and gender equity training);
- **Response services provision** (for example, ensuring that children who are exposed to violence can access effective emergency care and receive appropriate psychosocial support); and
- **Education and life skills** (such as ensuring that children attend school, and providing life and social skills training)

2.0. ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IS KEY TO ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS(SDGs)

Target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children". Evidence from around the world shows that violence against children can be prevented.



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Key Links

- [UNICEF: Sexual violence against children](#)
- [Together for Girls: preventing sexual violence against children](#)
- [World Health Organization: Responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused](#)
- [WePROTECT Global Alliance to end child sexual exploitation online: Global Threat Assessment 2019](#)
- [Interpol: action to tackle sexual crimes against children](#)
- [ECPAT: a worldwide network of organizations working to end the sexual exploitation of children](#)
- [INHOPE: global network of hotlines working to tackle Child Sexual Abuse Material \(CSAM\) online](#)