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DRIVERS OF **VIOLENCE AFFECTING CHILDREN** IN SERBIA: A SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

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VIOLENCE affecting children (VAC) manifests differently in every society. Violent acts not merely as an interaction between a child and one or more individuals, but rather as a socio-ecological phenomenon. Harmful acts and practices that endanger children's survival, undermine their well-being, and prevent their development are the consequence of numerous factors. These factors come from multiple levels – individual characteristics, interpersonal relationships, and the communities in which people live – and interact with institutional and structural drivers, backed by cultural factors. These multiple factors determine the risks of violence and vary across gender, age and other status markers, creating the circumstances within which violent acts occur.[1]

VIOLENCE CAN BE:[2]

Physical – the intentional use of physical force against a child that may result in harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity.

Emotional – acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child, including but not limited to restricting a child's movements, ridicule, threats and intimidation, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

Sexual – the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or which the child is not developmentally prepared for, or which otherwise violates the laws or social taboos of society.

Neglect – failure to meet a child's basic needs – physical, psychological, socialization – in an extent, duration and manner likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Exploitation – harmful use of a child for the purpose of profit, labour, or sexual or other activity that results in cruel or harmful treatment and prevents child development and well-being.

Child trafficking – a crime involving the movement of children for the purpose of their exploitation.

Child labour – the employment of children in any work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children.

Child marriage – forcing a child into a marital union, formal or informal.

Structural violence – indirect violence embedded in social structures that are characterized by inequality and discrimination, including unequal opportunities for education, healthcare or employment; hunger; poverty; racism; gender inequality; and other institutionalized forms of injustice that harm children and prevent their development.

RESEARCH TO POLICY AND PRACTICE PROCESS (R3P) is an approach designed by the UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti that aims to build an evidence base upon which to ground interventions designed to prevent and respond to violence against children, with a focus on the underlying drivers of violence. Serbia is one of the countries that initiated this process under the guidance of the Innocenti Office, with the support of UNICEF in Serbia and under the coordination of SeConS Development Initiative Group, and with the expert support of Zurich University of Teacher Education. The aim of this process is to better understand what drives different forms of violence against children in different settings and to provide good evidence for better institutional responses and prevention. During the initial stage, the national study on drivers of violence against children in Serbia was produced.[3] As in other countries, the results are powerful and they confront policymakers with questions such as: "What is driving this?" and "How can we address it?", thus providing a better starting point for the planning of national policies for preventing and protecting children from violence.*

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The socio-ecological framework a critical tool for understanding how factors that influence a child's likelihood of experiencing interpersonal violence interact within and between a number of social and ecological "levels". The integrated framework represented overlaps all the domains that influence a child's social world (rather than the traditional stacking of levels with the individual at the bottom) and allows for recognition that a driver, such as migration, is not as distal as represented in the traditional socio-ecological model. It clarifies the realities which children may find themselves in due to interlocking structural and institutional factors that shape their social worlds.[4]

Drivers refer to factors at the institutional and structural levels that create the conditions in which violence is more or less likely to occur. **Risk and protective factors** reflect the likelihood of violence to occur due to characteristics most often measured at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels.

Identifying and mapping these factors both within and between the levels of the socio-ecological framework can help policymakers and practitioners to better support children and reduce the likelihood of their becoming perpetrators or victims of violence, now and in the future. It is equally important to bolster protective factors to reinforce the resilience of children, families and communities. Interventions targeting multiple factors (at the intersection areas of the graph) are the most cost-effective, providing higher returns on investments.*

See: Maternowska and Potts (2017) https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/449-child-centered-brief.pdf[5]
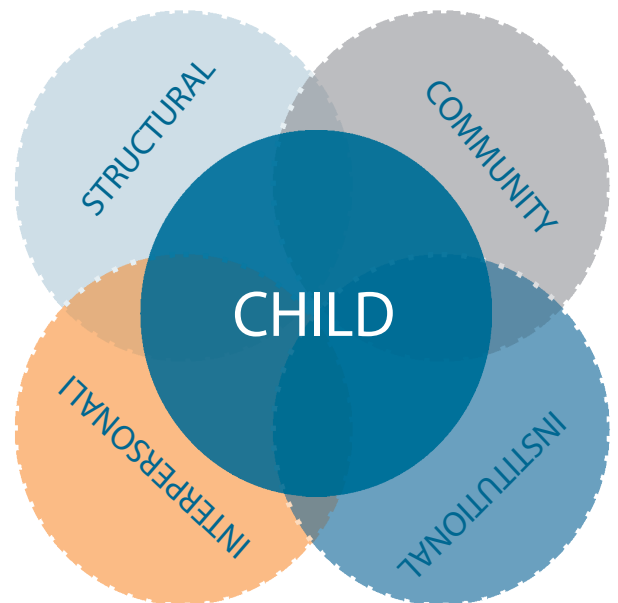
STRUCTURAL DRIVERS

- Economic underdevelopment is found to be an important driver of violence against children on an international scale. As the study on child marriage of Roma girls in Serbia finds, this practice is more frequent in low and middle income countries.[6]

- Social exclusion, poverty and inequality are forms of indirect, structural violence but they also drive interpersonal violence in diverse ways – increasing the risks of neglect of children, preventing their development, or creating frustration among parents that manifests through violence against children.[7]

- Wars and social conflicts themselves represent forms of violence that affect children living in these areas, but they are also drivers that influence other forms of interpersonal violence even long after the conflicts have ceased, whether through cultural factors (such as increased tolerance to violence) or family and individual factors (war trauma and frustrations reflected in violence in the family).[8]

- Migration, and particularly that which is forced and poorly managed, increases risks of various forms of violence against children, especially when they are not accompanied by adults.[9]

- Gender regimes based on asymmetrical power and rooted in patriarchal values provide ground for gender-based violence and violence against women and children in the family.[10]

- Cultural drivers appear in different forms: as high tolerance for violence resulting from wars, crisis, and social unrest; as discriminatory attitudes towards minorities; and as norms and values related to gender roles and relations.[11]

- Digitalization, development of information and communication technologies, Internet, and social media are linked with new forms of violence against children using new technologies as a means of violence.[12]

- Discriminatory attitudes towards children with disabilities are more widespread in rural than urban areas. While in urban areas 40% of respondents in the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (MICS) expressed positive attitudes towards children with physical and sensory disabilities, in rural areas such positive attitudes were found among 30% of respondents.[13]

- A higher prevalence of early marriage is found in rural areas, in the poorest households, and in households with the highest number of household members. Among women living in Roma settlements (aged 20–49), 17% were married before the age of 15 and 57% before the age of 18. In the general population the prevalence of child marriage is much lower (0.8% before age of 15 and 6.8% before age of 18).[14]

- Only some 20 years after the devastating civil war in the ex-Yugoslavia, the Balkan region was again faced with a massive influx of refugee and migrants during 2015, mostly from Syria, but also from Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly 100,000 unaccompanied or separated children moved along the so-called Balkan Route towards the EU. Although the number of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans after the EU-Turkey deal has significantly dropped, it is estimated that about one third of the thousands still passing through the region are unaccompanied or separated children. These children are exposed to high risks of violence traveling with smugglers, being exposed to physical or sexual abuse or exploitation.[9]

- High school male students show more gender-biased attitudes than female students. Half of all male students think that looking after the family and household is the primary responsibility of women, while 39% of female students agree. At the same time, 21% of male students agree that sometimes it is acceptable for a man to slap his girlfriend, while only 4% of girls agree with this statement.[15]

Drivers and factors listed are based on the national study's literature review and are supported by at least one study in a peer-reviewed journal. Factors are placed, by level, according to how the studies' authors characterized them.

INSTITUTIONAL DRIVERS

- Ineffective instruments of coordination, identification and treatment in cases of violence.[16]
- Weak system of support to the family, which is important for prevention; a dominant focus on foster care and removal of children from the family.[17]
- Weak instruments related to the protection of children witnessing family violence within the judicial procedures.[18]
- Ineffectiveness of centres for social welfare in addressing violence in the family and other settings.[19]
- Absence of complaint mechanisms and surveillance of residential institutions for social protection of children where violence is present.[20]
- Inadequate human resources, low capacities of professionals.[20]

> The architecture of the system for preventing and protecting children from VAC
> The system of preventing and protecting children from violence in Serbia is a top-down system in which the roles of institutions and procedures are defined by laws, by-laws, strategies, and general and specialized protocols.

COMMUNITY RISK FACTORS

- Attitudes about corporal punishment, legitimacy of violent disciplining methods, and parenting methods.[21]
- Regional factors that impact the prevalence of various types of violence, such as more prevalent child labour in agriculture in rural areas, or higher prevalence of peer-to-peer violence in schools in urban areas.[22]
- Weak informal networks for social support, low social capital in the community.[23]
- Low awareness and taboo on sexual violence and exploitation of children.[24]

> In Serbian culture, corporal punishment of children as a method of discipline is a widespread and deep-rooted practice, as suggested by many folk sayings: "Beating has come straight down from Heaven"; "Spare the rod and spoil the child"; "Not beaten, not taught"; "A child not beaten is badly brought up", and many others.[25]

INTERPERSONAL RISK FACTORS

- Frustration in the family due to unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion increases risks of domestic physical abuse in the family, and risks of child labour exploitation.[26]
- Family dysfunction, drug and alcohol abuse, family members with psychological problems due to the participation in wars[27], family composition (e.g. single-parent families)[28]
- Low educational achievements of parents.[29]
- Experience of violence, the presence of domestic violence against mothers.[30]
- Gender relations among peers nested in patriarchal gender regimes.[31]
- Norms and values creating a specific "school culture/atmosphere" in regard to violence.[32]
- Inadequate facilities and insufficient resources in residential institutions, which lead to deprivation of children's needs and neglect.[33]
- Competences and attitudes that legitimize violent disciplining methods among professionals from institutions and organizations working with children – schools, residential institutions for social protection, sports clubs, etc.[34]

> **Evidence from research**
> - In research on violence in schools (2013), 44% of students reported that they had been exposed to peer-to-peer violence in the three-month period preceding the survey. Every fifth child perpetrated violence, more frequently boys than girls.[35]
> - During research with developmentally challenged children from 11 institutions for social protection, 62% of children reported they had witnessed cases of violence against other children by staff.[36]

INDIVIDUAL RISK FACTORS

Studies show exposure to violence is connected to certain characteristics of the child, such as gender, age, disability or other vulnerability. However, these personal factors are not "real" factors of violence. If girls (or boys) are more exposed to violence in the family, this is not due to the fact that they are girls (or boys), but rather the fact that cultural norms defining legitimate or desirable child-rearing and disciplining methods determine the gendered patterns of violence.

> - Children at 2 years of age are at the highest risk of violent discipline.[37]
> - According to the testimonies of parents, 47% of children with disabilities experienced some form of violence outside of the family (in a preschool institution, at school, at day care, in gathering places).[38]

AGE AND GENDER

Age and gender are also central to this study. A child's vulnerability and ability to protect him/herself from violence changes over time with his/her evolving capacities. It is important to recognize 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 Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and adjusted to UNICEF classification to illustrate how boys and girls may proceed through the stages of adolescence at different times, expanded to encompass earlier childhood stages.*

GIRLS	Age	BOYS
EARLY CHILDHOOD	0	EARLY CHILDHOOD
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	5	MIDDLE CHILDHOOD
	6	
	7	
	8	
PRE-ADOLESCENCE	9	
	10	PRE-ADOLESCENCE
	11	
	12	
EARLY ADOLESCENCE	13	
	14	EARLY ADOLESCENCE
MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE	15	
	16	MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE
LATE ADOLESCENCE	17	
	18	LATE ADOLESCENCE
YOUTH	19	YOUTH
	20	
	21	
	22	
YOUNG ADULTHOOD	23	YOUNG ADULTHOOD
	24	

EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE AFFECTING CHILDREN

What is emotional violence?

'Emotional or psychological abuse includes isolated incidents but also a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or caregiver to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment. Acts in this category may have a high probability of damaging the child's physical or mental health or his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Abuse of this type includes rejecting, degrading, blaming, threatening, frightening, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting, discriminating against or ridiculing, exploiting and non-physical forms of rejection or hostile treatment. It also includes denying emotional responsiveness. The long-term consequences of psychological abuse and neglect can sometimes be more negative than exposure to physical or sexual abuse.'[39]

Prevalence of psychological aggression as a disciplining method in families in Serbia

The Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey conducted in Serbia on a national sample and sample of population living in Roma settlements indicates a high prevalence of psychological aggression as part of disciplining practices. Findings indicate that younger children (2-4) are more often exposed to psychological aggression than older children (5-14), children living in Roma settlements more often than children in general population and children from urban areas more often than children from rural areas.

Percentage of children age 1-14 exposed to psychological aggression - general population and Roma settlements, 2014.

Age	General population		Roma settlements	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
2-4	43%	43%	60%	69%
5-14	38%	40%	64%	68%

Source: MICS Serbia and Roma Settlements, 2014.

Percentage of children age 1-14 exposed to psychological aggression by living area, Serbia 2014.

Living area	
Urban	41%
Non-urban	36%

Source: MICS Serbia and Roma Settlements, 2014.

Serbia in comparative perspective

The Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect (BEKAN) found a high prevalence of life-time experience of psychological aggression among first grade university students across the Balkan countries. Gender differences are most visible in Albania and Serbia, where young women more frequently reported the experience of psychological aggression than young men.

Measuring violence

Prevalence of violence is very sensitive to the number of indicators used to measure it. Differences in prevalence of psychological aggression between different surveys do not come only from different samples but also from the use of different instruments. While in MICS psychological aggression is registered by 2-3 items, in the BEKAN study the number of items is much higher (17-19) and therefore more diverse experiences may be recognized as psychological aggression.

MAPS:
Percentage of children reporting having experienced at least 1 behavior that is classified as psychological violence during their entire life time, by gender

FYRoM

Girls	64%
Boys	66%
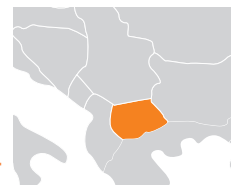
Albania

Girls	71%
Boys	67%

Greece

Girls	84%
Boys	83%

B&H

Girls	73%
Boys	72%

Serbia

Girls	71%
Boys	66%

Croatia

Girls	74%
Boys	73%

Bulgaria

Girls	69%
Boys	70%

Romania

| Girls	77%
Boys	77%
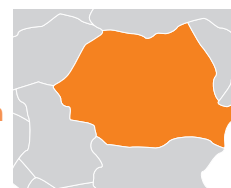
Turkey

Girls	70%
Boys	71%

Source: Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2013.

Use of physical violence in disciplining children has significantly decreased in Serbia during 2005-2014. A part of this trend could be attributed to the intensive and broad campaign against corporal punishment, and discussions on legal changes that prohibit such a practice.

Percentage of boys and girls exposed to physical punishment, Serbia, 2005, 2010, 2014.
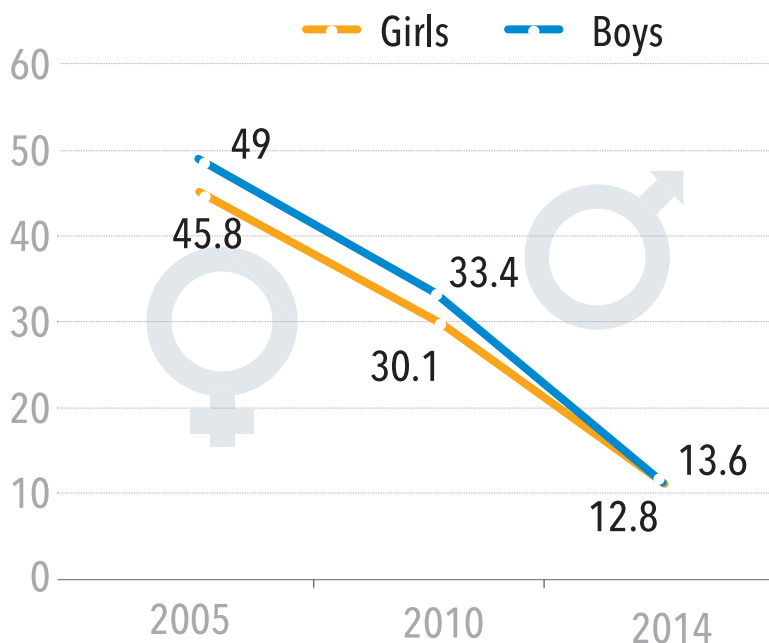
Source: MICS Serbia, 2005, 2010, 2014.

It is a worrying fact that small children at the age of 2 are much more exposed to physical punishment than children of other ages. Studies on violence against children in Serbia shed little light on violence in the family against small children (0-4). This age group is also mostly 'below the radar' of the public system for protection. Therefore, the last decade saw efforts to improve the system for monitoring, including patronage nursing services, pediatric surveillance and others.

Percentage of children exposed to physical punishment by age, Serbia, 2014.

Age	
1	21%
2	29%
3-4	27%
5-9	18%
10-14	8%

Source: MICS Serbia, 2014.

Although there are generally no significant differences between boys and girls in the prevalence of physical punishment as a disciplining practice, when severe physical aggression is in the focus, a difference appears in the form of higher exposure of girls to this form of violence in family.[40]

According to the results of the first National study on the social problem of child sexual abuse in Serbia, 10.8% of children aged 10 to 18 years reported experiencing sexual violence, and 10.6% of children know someone who experienced sexual abuse. The authors of this survey believe that this is likely to be the case when the respondents say they know someone who experienced sexual violence, they talk about personal experience. The rate of personally experienced sexual violence is higher among girls (12.6%) than among boys (8.6%), and it increases with age.[41]

Consequences of emotional violence

A study on adverse childhood experiences conducted among the student population in Serbia indicated strong links between violence and health-risk behaviours. Psychological neglect slightly increased the chances of smoking (Odds ratio-OR=1.30) and almost doubled the potential for illicit drug use (OR=1.73), but raised the possibility of drunk-driving (OR=2.26) and running away from home (OR=2.38) by more than double and attempting suicide by more than 3.5 times (OR=3.66). Each was of high statistical significance except smoking, which was insignificant and not high.[39]

Consequences of violence in the family

Exposure to violence in the family hinders the successful psychological, emotional and cognitive development of the child. The consequences can be physical (disability, somatic disorders), emotional disorders, a distorted perception of oneself (depression, anxiety, aggressiveness, anger, hostile attitude, low self-confidence, guilt, shame, post-traumatic stress), cognitive disorders (impaired development of cognitive functions as a generalised disorder, e.g. delayed mental development and selective disorders such as developmental disharmony, intellectual inhibition, concentration problems), and impaired social functioning (anti-social and criminal behaviour, alcohol and drug abuse, underage pregnancy, repeat victimization). Children exposed to violence have difficulties in achieving social relations, they socialize less with their peers, they exhibit violent behaviour toward peers or are victims of abuse by their peers.[42]
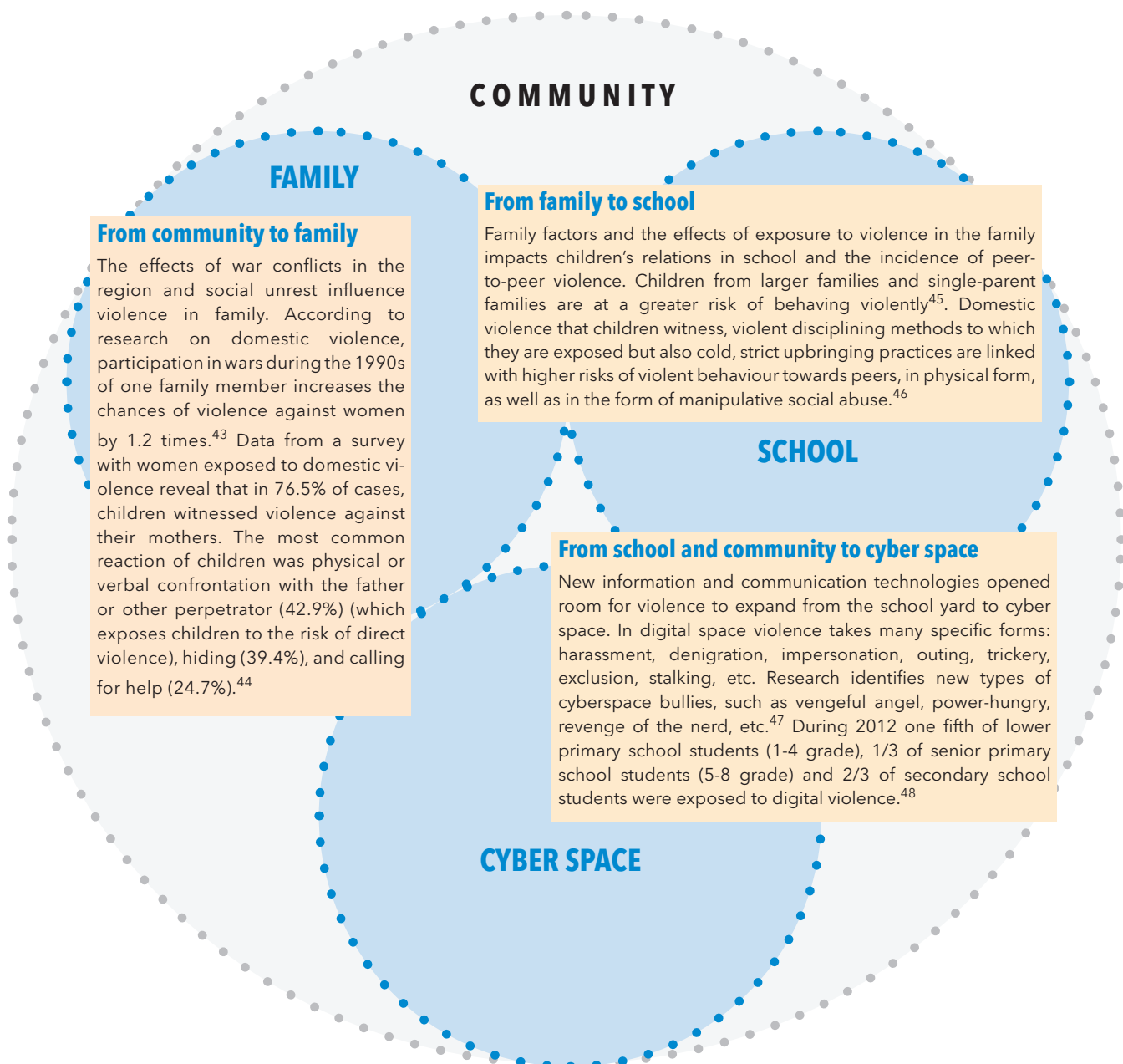
It should be taken into account that sexual violence can be especially difficult to measure and likely to be underestimated in surveys due to strong social stigma/culture of silence in reporting, lack of services as a disincentive to report, children likely self-blaming.

Violence is 'contagious' – it is transferred from one context to another and through time (generations).

Transfer of violence between contexts

Violence against children occurs in different settings: family, school, digital space, specific institutions, even those whose primary function is to protect children (such as residential institutions for protection of children without parental care, or children with disabilities), and the wider community. The effects of violence affecting children in one context often spill over into another context.

COMMUNITY

FAMILY

From community to family

The effects of war conflicts in the region and social unrest influence violence in family. According to research on domestic violence, participation in wars during the 1990s of one family member increases the chances of violence against women by 1.2 times.[43] Data from a survey with women exposed to domestic violence reveal that in 76.5% of cases, children witnessed violence against their mothers. The most common reaction of children was physical or verbal confrontation with the father or other perpetrator (42.9%) (which exposes children to the risk of direct violence), hiding (39.4%), and calling for help (24.7%).[44]

From family to school

Family factors and the effects of exposure to violence in the family impacts children's relations in school and the incidence of peer-to-peer violence. Children from larger families and single-parent families are at a greater risk of behaving violently[45]. Domestic violence that children witness, violent disciplining methods to which they are exposed but also cold, strict upbringing practices are linked with higher risks of violent behaviour towards peers, in physical form, as well as in the form of manipulative social abuse.[46]

SCHOOL

From school and community to cyber space

New information and communication technologies opened room for violence to expand from the school yard to cyber space. In digital space violence takes many specific forms: harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, stalking, etc. Research identifies new types of cyberspace bullies, such as vengeful angel, power-hungry, revenge of the nerd, etc.[47] During 2012 one fifth of lower primary school students (1-4 grade), 1/3 of senior primary school students (5-8 grade) and 2/3 of secondary school students were exposed to digital violence.[48]

CYBER SPACE

Transfer of violence through time - through life course and between generations

Violence experienced in childhood affects social relations and behavior at a later stage of life and it is transferred from one generation to another. Research found that exposure to violence in the family during early childhood increases the probability of violent criminal behavior in later life and violent behavior in intimate partner relationships. [49]

Violence that affects girls to a greater extent

Some forms of violence against children affect girls more than boys: child marriage, sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Every year, thousands of children in Serbia are forced into marriage before the age of 18, notwithstanding the fact that such practice is prohibited by the law and constitutes a gross violation of the child's rights. The practice of child marriages in Serbia is commonly associated with the Roma population and, to a lesser extent, also the Vlach population; it is more common among girls than among boys. In the Roma population, most of these marriages involve bride-buying. Marriage is justified by customs, but these customs are often just an excuse for abuse, coercion, violence or some other gross violation of a child's rights. The laws which outlaw underage marriage are not adequately enforced and the responsible services, including in particular the police and centres for social welfare, tend to turn a blind eye towards underage marriages of Roma children, believing it to be a tradition and deeply-rooted custom in the Roma population.[50]

Prevalence of child marriage – MICS data

Country	Married by 15		Married by 18	
	General population	Roma settlements	General population	Roma settlements
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.4%	14.6%	9.5%	48.3%
Kosovo*	0.8%	11.6%	10.0%	42.7%
FYR Macedonia	1.4%	11.9%	10.7%	47.0%
Montenegro	0.5%	18.2%	6.2%	56.4%
Serbia	0.8%	16.9%	6.8%	57.0%

Source: national MICS data

Girls are more often victims of sexual violence than boys. According to the first national study on sexual violence against children, 11% of children reported experiencing sexual violence. Sexual violence is more prevalent among girls than boys (12.6% vs. 8.6%), and increases with age. Girls also experienced more diverse forms of sexual violence.[51] Based on the national study, a broad campaign for awareness raising on sexual violence was implemented and educative content in school curricula was introduced.

Excluded and isolated

Two groups of children are particularly exposed to risks of violence: children living and working on the street and children living in residential institutions for protection.

Multiple forms of violence, from structural to direct ones, affect children living on the street. There are no accurate data about the size of this group, but according to the records of the Shelter for Children Living on the Streets, established by the Centre for Youth Integration, the shelter has helped 513 children since 2007. These children become victims of exploitation, particularly sexual exploitation and risk being involved in human trafficking.[52]
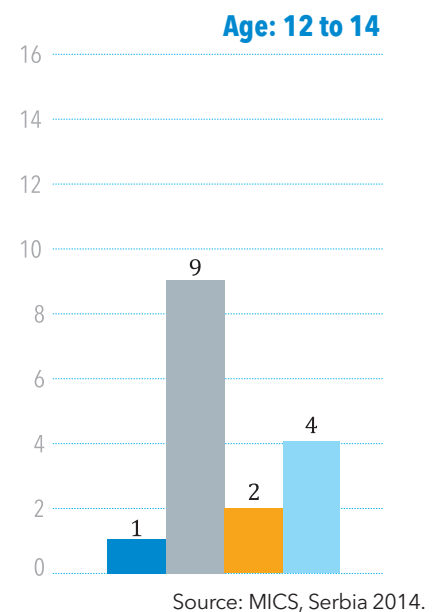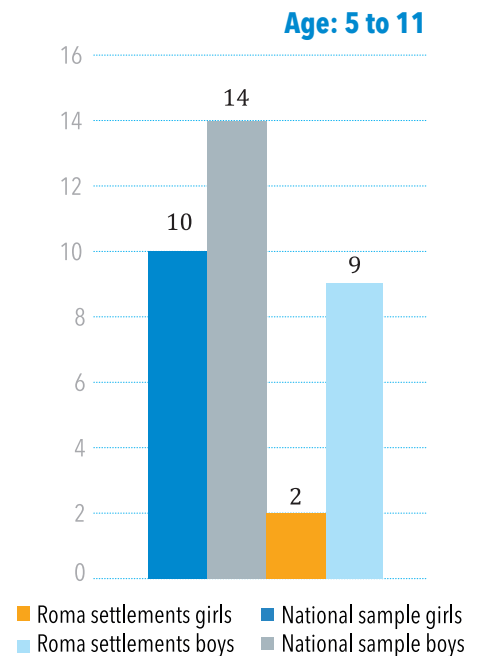
Despite processes of deinstitutionalization, many children are still placed in big residential institutions for social protection, such as institutions for children without parental care, for children and youth with disabilities and for children and youth in conflict with the law. A study on the neglect, deprivation, violence and abuse of children with disabilities placed in these institutions revealed that 62% of children had witnessed cases of violence against children by staff, including insults, cursing, intentional disregard, slapping, pushing and pulling, throwing objects at children, beating with objects, deprivation of food and sleep.[53]

Male specific forms of violence against children

Forms of violence affecting boys more than girls include child labour and physical violence among peers.

Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls, in rural more than urban areas and among the poorest households. The share of children working under hazardous conditions is highest among boys aged 12-14 in the general population and among boys living in Roma settlements who are 5-11 years old. A major part of child labour is related to agriculture.[54]

Child labour by sex and age groups, Serbia and Roma settlements, 2014.

Age: 5 to 11

Roma settlements girls: 2
National sample girls: 10
Roma settlements boys: 9
National sample boys: 14

Age: 12 to 14

National sample girls: 1
National sample boys: 9
Roma settlements girls: 2
Roma settlements boys: 4

Source: MICS, Serbia 2014.

A comparative study conducted in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade and Pristina as part of the 'Be a Man' initiative has shown that young men are surrounded by high levels of violence, regardless of whether they are perpetrators, victims or witnesses. Of concern is the fact that 41–59% of male students said they had committed some form of violence against another boy/man during their lifetime. In the same vein, of extreme concern is the fact that 15–31% of young men in the region said that they forced their girlfriends/ex-girlfriends to engage in sexual intercourse against their will or when they were under the influence of alcohol, thus being unable to consent to such an act. Half of the young men involved in the study agreed with the use of violence as a legitimate method of disciplining children.[55]

The process

Countries engaging in the Research to Policy and Practice Process demonstrate a desire to understand why violence is happening and how it might be addressed. Prevalence and incidence surveys capture a static understanding of the scale of the problem but do not necessarily inform better prevention and programming. Unpacking the drivers of violence and how they interact with the risk or protective factors that children face on a daily basis begins to explain the complexities of – as well as potential solutions to – violence prevention. * The R3P process in Serbia has lasted for over one year and involved many stakeholders. The process was coordinated and implemented by SeConS Development Initiative Group, backed by the guidance of the UNICEF office in Serbia and UNICEF Office of Research–Innocenti, and under the mentoring support of the Zurich University of Teacher Education. It was financially supported by the Swiss National Committee. The whole process was initiated at the request of relevant government ministries and supported by a technical group comprised of leading experts and practitioners. The process was organized through several stages:

- adjustment of methodology to the national context;
- extensive literature review of studies and reports on violence against children;
- mapping of interventions in the area of preventing and protecting children from violence; and
- consultations with diverse stakeholders in order to validate findings and propose recommendations for the next policy cycle.

What has been done[56]

Stage 1: Literature review

The analysis of determinants and risk and protective factors of violence against children in Serbia encompassed 265 studies, including 131 non-empirical studies (theoretical and conceptual papers) and 134 texts containing empirical data about violence against children.

265 studies

131 theoretical and conceptual papers

134 publications with empirical data
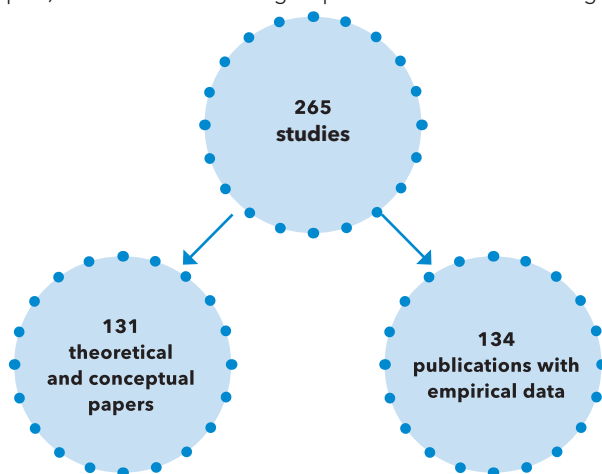
Stage 2: Mapping interventions

An intervention is understood as a specific action or set of actions aimed at causing the desired changes. In the broadest sense, interventions encompass laws and policies, but since such a definition would be too broad of a task, analysis was restricted mainly to programmes and actions. Three categories of interventions were identified, depending on the target of the intervention and the means used to produce change:

1) interventions aimed at improving institutional/organizational mechanisms (e.g. the adoption and application of protocols, setting up appropriate working groups and bodies implementing protocols);

2) interventions aimed at changing values, attitudes, and awareness (e.g. education and training, awareness campaigns); and

3) interventions aimed at prevention and protection (various support services for children at risk of or exposed to violence).[57]

These types of interventions were observed at different levels (macro, meso, and micro), as well as within different systems (education, healthcare, social protection, police, judiciary) and implemented by different actors: public and civil society.

Key priorities for the next stage of policy interventions based on R3P results

As an outcome of our research, mapping, and consultations with key stakeholders, nine key priorities were identified:

1. Better contextualisation of interventions and policy interlinks, particularly with anti-poverty and social inclusion policies, strategies that design the development of certain areas (e.g. rural development), or certain sectors (e.g. social protection, employment, education, public health, etc.).

2. Strengthening key institutional mechanisms. Main central mechanism for coordination, monitoring, and evaluation of VAC policies should be strengthened.

3. A firmer and more regular monitoring system of the implementation of protocols, the effectiveness of multi-sectoral teams in local communities, and functioning of all parts of the system vertically with regards to VAC is needed as well as an early warning system.

4. Strengthening the local level of the protection system through local action plans and local budgets.

5. Continuation of awareness-raising and changing social norms, values, and attitudes, particularly for zero tolerance to violence, prohibition of violent disciplining of children, and promotion of gender equality and non-discrimination.

6. Family support package with diverse measures that will enable prevention, early detection, and response before a situation reaches severe forms of dysfunction, including the family outreach worker service, an early warning system through the paediatric and patronage nursing service; programmes for treatment to perpetrators, etc.

7. Development of prevention and direct support services to particularly vulnerable children in regard to child labour, child marriages, support to children in migration, and particularly unaccompanied minors.

8. Acceleration of deinstitutionalization, but with concomitant strengthening of surveillance of residential institutions.

9. Securing and strengthening funding for the VAC prevention and protection system and related programmes.

Recommended strategies for responding to and preventing violence against children and adolescents by 10 global agencies are available in INSPIRE. INSPIRE is an evidence-based resource that presents seven strategies to help countries and communities intensify their focus on prevention programs and services with the greatest potential to reduce violence against children. [58]

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