UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE AFFECTING CHILDREN IN VIET NAM

“Mother, without you I am nothing”
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Violence against children occurs everywhere, but manifests differently in every society. Children who experience violence are at greater lifetime risk of mental, physical and behavioural problems, have lower rates of school achievement and higher rates of unemployment, incarceration and disability (Wind & Silvern, 1992; Paolucci, Genius, & Violato, 2001). It is a grave threat to our common future. The drivers of violence are triggers that increase or reduce a child’s risk of violence, such as her age and gender, the quality of her family relationships, the cohesion of her community and the commitment of her government to child protection. The drivers of violence are shaped by institutions such as schools and the justice system, and by the state of the economy and political life. The Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children is an on-going, four-country study in Peru, Italy, Zimbabwe and Viet Nam, led by UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti. It uses evidence to inform the design of effective violence prevention policies and interventions that are grounded in history and culture, based on sound research, and feasible given available resources. The purpose of the Multi-Country Study is to assist policymakers, NGOs and other actors to understand the greatest threats to children and to plan interventions that address the factors that shape those threats. This report synthesizes key findings available in the literature and from secondary analysis of national data sets on violence affecting children in Viet Nam.¹

This initiative is closely linked to others concerning violence against children including: Together for Girls², a global public/private partnership focused on sexual violence; the KNOW Violence in Childhood³, a global learning initiative designed to stimulate global advocacy and encourage greater investment in prevention; What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls⁴, a British government sponsored initiative to fund innovative approaches to violence prevention; and the Global Partnership to End Violence⁵, supporting ‘pathfinder’ countries (and their governments) at the

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2 www.togetherforgirls.org
3 www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org
4 http://www.svri.org/WhatWorks.htm
5 http://www.end-violence.org/
forefront of developing new responses to violence against children.

Discourse about violence among policy makers is shifting from “this does not happen here” to “what is driving this” and “how can we address it”? The evidence base to answer these questions remains weak, and largely drawn from high-income countries. Since acts of violence against children are often shrouded in secrecy, data collection is challenging. Only very recently have some low- and middle-income countries begun to gather and examine data of their own. Viet Nam’s participation in this study has already served as a catalyst to other government and UNICEF Country Offices in the region, namely the Philippines and Indonesia, to use a similar approach to understanding the drivers of violence.

While the challenge of addressing violence is daunting, recent evidence shows that preventing violence is possible. In some cases, policing reforms and social programs such as home visiting⁶ have been linked to violence reduction. In other cases, evidence of reduced interpersonal violence among adults has been linked to community dialogues about violence.⁷ Finally, interventions targeted towards individuals and families in the areas of education, awareness raising and behaviour change have, in some cases, also shown reductions in violent crime, partner violence and negative parenting practices.⁸ Taken together the global evidence for violence prevention policy and programmes is encouraging but the evidence base is limited and largely adult-focused. The current interventions package designed with leading violence prevention agencies including UNICEF, the CDC and WHO for children, called INSPIRE, recommends seven ‘priority prevention strategies’ designed to protect children, including: parental strengthening, education and life skills, norms and values changes, response services implementation and enforcement of laws, monitoring and evaluation with multi-sectoral coordination, income strengthening and the promotion of safe (physical) environments for children.⁹

A combined lack of reliable data and an understanding of what drives violence, especially in low and middle-income countries, makes effective prevention programming challenging. To date, interventions tend to be narrowly focused and don’t take into account or attempt to mitigate the effects of broader structural forces, such as demographic shifts or political factors that may fuel interpersonal violence.

The four Multi-Country study sites—Zimbabwe, Viet Nam, Peru and Italy—were selected for several reasons:

- Diversity—the four countries lie on different continents and differ culturally and economically. Zimbabwe is low-income; Viet Nam is emerging middle income, Peru is solidly middle income and Italy is high income. This diversity enables us to explore how factors that may be common to all human societies may influence the enactment of violence in different circumstances.

- Data—each country has strong quantitative data on violence affecting children, providing a basic starting point for further research.

- Government—all four governments are committed to deepening understanding of the drivers of violence affecting children and seeking innovative methods to prevent it.

The Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Prevention

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⁹ PEPFAR; Together for Girls; UNICEF; UNODC; USAID; US CDC; WHO, World Bank in anticipation of the Sustainable Development Goals have co-produced the package of recommended interventions scheduled for final rollout in July 2016.
The Study Process

Violence Affecting Children is a four-year action-research project carried out by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti with UNICEF Country Offices in Peru, Zimbabwe, and Viet Nam; with the Istituto degli Innocenti in Italy; and in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh as its global academic partner. The study seeks to increase understanding of what drives violence affecting children and how best to address it by translating quality research into evidence, and turning evidence into effective and meaningful interventions. The study consists of three interrelated stages: 1) Grounding the Programme, 2) Applied Research and Intervention Development, and 3) Intervention Science and Evaluations. Each stage has a distinct set of objectives, activities and milestones that feed into the main outcomes and outputs of the study, and inform both ongoing country programming and the emerging global evidence base on violence prevention (Figure 1).

In the first year of Stage 1, the Office of Research focused on building the needed research infrastructure—including establishing Ministry-led oversight and teams of statisticians and social scientists. During year two of Stage 1, activities focused on training in secondary data analysis and systematic literature review methodologies within government statistical offices and local universities. Ministry led steering committees worked closely with these national teams. Keeping the data in country created a robust platform for discussions around both the analysis and interpretation of the findings while also building national capacity. This report is the product of these Stage 1 activities in Viet Nam.

From 2014-2015, with technical guidance from the UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti and the University of Edinburgh, a Vietnamese research team conducted a systematic literature review on violence against children in Viet Nam. Researchers from the Vietnamese Government Statistics Office (GSO) conducted a secondary analysis on two waves of the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY; 2003 and 2009), a nationally representative survey of young people 14-25. Statisticians from Oxford University then used data from Viet Nam's Young Lives survey (see box) to obtain estimates of the prevalence of corporal punishment, bullying,
and access to services. Young Lives Viet Nam Office also completed another paper exploring children’s experiences of violence drawing on longitudinal qualitative data covering 7 years of a Vietnamese cohort. Finally, an inventory of current interventions carried out by government institutions, multilateral organisations and NGOs was carried out.

In recent years, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and UNICEF have published several important documents analysing the state of child protection in Viet Nam, including but not limited to an assessment of child protection laws and policies (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2009), an analysis of the child and family welfare and protective services system in Viet Nam (2010a) and finally a child protection outcome paper providing a snapshot situation analysis of children and violence in Viet Nam (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015). In this report we synthesize these publications as well as nearly 130 other relevant research studies meeting quality assurance standards of the systematic review process. The analysis also includes secondary analyses in Viet Nam and on several national data sets, including the Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY) from 2003 (round 1) and 2009 (round 2) and relevant Young Lives data. Finally, the report considers outcomes from some of the current violence prevention interventions underway in Viet Nam.

The drivers outlined in this report are not mutually exclusive but rather reinforce each other, reflecting the complexity of studying violence. The report not only identifies violence trends, gaps and avenues for future research, but also illuminates how violence is locally understood. It provides, for the first time ever, a national synthesis of violence affecting children, so that Viet Nam can identify potential

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**Figure 1: Stages of the Study**

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<td><strong>Applied Research and Intervention Development</strong></td>
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<td>Identify Country Trends and Research Priorities</td>
<td>Conduct Primary Field Research and Test Intervention Components</td>
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Emerging Theories of Change

Emerging Evidence of Change

Young Lives: an International Study of Poverty in Childhood is an international study following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana only), Peru and Viet Nam over 15 years. Because Young Lives measures children’s outcomes, from infancy to 19 years old, and at multiple points in time, the data is powerful in suggesting when, where and how risk and protective factors manifest in children’s lives. Data from Viet Nam and Peru contributed to the Multi Country Study. Working with national Young Lives affiliates in the field, UNICEF—Innocenti explored 1) corporal punishment and bullying in schools and the home; 2) children’s experiences of violence and outcomes later in life; and 3) children’s access to social support services addressing violence. A series of publications generated from this work are available. The joint study of corporal punishment demonstrating that violence experienced in early childhood correlated with poorer math and verbal scores as well as decreased self-esteem later on was widely circulated in the international media. See: https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/426-Young-Lives.pdf; https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/804/ and http://www.younglives.org.uk/

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11 Data from all studies that met the quality assessment threshold were extracted across 56 variables. These data were then synthesised according to the study frameworks. For a detailed discussion of the methodologies used in all countries during Stage 1 see: https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/pdf/432-MCS_Stage-1-How-to-Guide-2015.pdf. For a detailed discussion of the evidence from Viet Nam, and a table of included studies, see the longer Technical Report: http://www.unicef-irc.org/reapro/activities_22009.html
Most violence affecting children occurs in families, communities and schools and is committed by people the children know (Pinheiro, 2006). This report views violence affecting children not merely as the interaction between a child and one or more other individuals, but as a socio-ecological phenomenon that takes place within specific social and ecological contexts. For example, a parent’s behavior is influenced by such contextual factors as the parent’s financial security and/or level of education, the family’s connections to formal and non-formal support systems in their community, and prevailing beliefs concerning the discipline and supervision of children within the society in which the family lives. Social cohesion—meaning the willingness of unrelated people to offer informal help to others—has been found to protect children from violence (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1997). The quality of formal institutions such as social services, the police, and the judiciary also shape children’s experiences of violence, as does the history and current economic and political situation of a country, and the commitment of its policymakers to child protection. The diagram (Figure 2) below illustrates these various socio-ecological levels of influence (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Heise, 1998).
Understanding the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in Viet Nam

Figure 2: The Socio-Ecological Framework

The second critical concept employed by the study addresses age and gender (Figure 3): how boys and girls grow and change as they move through childhood and into adolescence. Commonly referred to as the child’s developmental life course, this concept emphasizes that a child’s vulnerability and ability to protect herself from violence changes along with her evolving capacities over time (Lansdown, 2004; Chong, Hallman, & Brady, 2006).12

12 Lansdown notes that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a principled framework for promoting this process.
Definitions

Ultimately, all forms of abuse overlap, both in definition and in reality. Children who are abused in one way are often abused in others, both through separate acts and because suffering an act of sexual or physical abuse, for example, often leaves emotional scars as well. While ‘types’ of abuse are in reality hard to disentangle, these categories are useful for understanding and responding to the complex problem of violence affecting children. The United Nations defines violence affecting children as “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” (Article 19, UNCRC, 1989). The report aligns to this definition as well as those of the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control.* However, legal and cultural definitions of and responses to violence may vary between and within countries. The terms ‘violence’ and ‘abuse’ are used interchangeably in this report.

Child violence and abuse are considered acts of commission—that is words or actions that cause harm, potential harm or threat of harm. Acts of commission are deliberate and intentional although harm might not be. For example, a caregiver might intend to hit a child as punishment, but not intend to cause a concussion. In this report, the following types of violence involve acts of commission:

- Physical violence or abuse resulting in actual or potential physical harm for example hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort or injury.

- Sexual violence or abuse involving a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. It may include unwanted sexual comments or advances, attempts to traffic a person’s sexuality through the use of force, coercion or threats, completed, threatened or attempted violence of a sexual nature including rape, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation.

- Emotional violence or psychological abuse meaning the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her potential in the context of her society. It includes acts that harm or threaten the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development including restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, and denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

Acts of Omission are different than acts of commission. Rather, they refer to the failure to provide for a child’s basic physical, emotional, or educational needs or to protect a child from harm or potential harm, which are frequently referred to as different forms of neglect. Harm to a child might not be the intended consequence. The following types of maltreatment involve acts of omission: failure to provide medical or dental care, ensure school attendance, provide adequate supervision, prevent exposure to violence, and failure to address physical and emotional needs. The analysis in this report does not generally include neglect.

*http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/definitions.html
Overview

Over 40 per cent of Viet Nam’s roughly 93 million people are under the age of 24 (World Bank, 2014), a potentially dynamic youthful force for national development. However, today’s 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 Vietnamese children, but also new risks. As studies in the following sections will show, 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). Since the 1960s, 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. Although patriarchy remains strong in Viet Nam, women now have greater decision-making power within the family than in the past and there has also been an increase in the number of female-headed households. New laws on gender equality, stronger sanctions against domestic violence, and the expansion of health and education services for women have contributed to a rise in the number of women in the workforce. This has helped to reduce child marriage and early childbearing.

13 Vietnam has a two child policy with the official family-size goal to be một hoặc hai con, which means “one or two children” (Goodkind, 1995). Fines and other sanctions are on families with three or more children.
of education and employment for women have contributed to changes in the nature and constellation of the Vietnamese family.

However, according to the evidence, these economic and social changes are also contributing to an erosion of the extended family which traditionally protected children from violence (Pells & Woodhead, 2014). Intergenerational households are increasingly giving way to nuclear families, and economic liberalisation has widened disparities between rich and poor and between rural and city dwellers (Rubenson, Hanh, Höjer, & Johansson, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2006). Rapid urban migration, diminished community cohesion and traditional values, increased commercialism, and changes in the nature of social relationships all pose 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).

Increased job opportunities for young women in the textile and hospitality sectors has also led to a “feminization of migration” (Anh, Vu, Bonfoh and Schelling, 2012, Resurreccion & Ha, 2007) which has had significant implications for child protection. Some of the females migrating are children themselves and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The migration of young mothers has also 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). Other women may bring their children with them, but limited social support networks in these new urban settings puts these children at risk as well.

The Vietnamese government has already done much to document and mitigate the effects of social and economic change through targeted poverty reduction programmes, expanding formal education and employment, implementing a family planning programme, promoting gender equality and early childhood care and education, introducing a social protection scheme and other support programmes for children in special circumstances, and operating social protection centres for orphaned and abandoned children (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015). Viet Nam has attained six of its eight original Millennium Development Goal targets, including poverty eradication, universal primary education and gender equality and is expected to meet its targets on maternal and child health in the next four years (World Bank, 2015).

However, Viet Nam’s social welfare system struggles to keep pace with the rapid growth of emerging needs and to adapt to the challenges of new forms of inequality and vulnerability. It is estimated that about 3.3 million Vietnamese children are living with disadvantage, including about 1.3 million children with disability, 5,700 children who are HIV positive and 300,000 affected by HIV/AIDS, 126,000 orphaned or abandoned children, 21,000 children living in the streets, and approximately 1.75 million child labourers working in hazardous conditions (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015). These figures likely underestimate the number of children in need of protection because reliable data on child trafficking, sexual exploitation and child labour are scant (GSO and UNICEF, 2011). Families frequently fail to report child abuse because of shame, lack of awareness, or the belief that child neglect, abuse and exploitation are private family matters (UNICEF, 2010a; Pells, Wilson & Hang, 2015).14

The evidence shows that children who experience violence perform less well in school and in life later on (Pells, Portela & Espinoza, 2016), and that violence in the home, school and community perpetuates itself from one generation to the next (GSO, 2010; Yount et al., 2015; Rydstram, 2006a). Comprehensive action would benefit the welfare of millions of Vietnamese children as Viet Nam claims its rightful place in the global economy. Ensuring the wellbeing of Vietnamese children is the most effective investment the country can make to secure its future.

14 Achievements include full primary school enrolment and high completion rates, as well as gender balance between boys and girls in primary, lower and upper secondary school. The country has also made significant progress in the remaining MDGs, MDG 4 to reduce child mortality rate and MDG 5 to improve maternal health. Nonetheless, there are remaining differential between rural and urban and between the mountainous areas and deltas area as well, with poor rural mountain communities least effected by gains.
Types of Violence in Viet Nam

Child Physical Abuse

Physical abuse of children, which includes slapping, hitting or beating, is widespread in Vietnam. UNICEF’s 2011 National Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) found that, according to their caregivers, over half of children aged one to 14 years were punished physically at least once in the month before the survey (GSO, UNICEF, & UNFPA, 2011). Data from the more recent 2014 MICS showed that three in four children in Vietnam are disciplined physically—a fifty per cent increase compared to the 2011 survey (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2014). Further study is needed to better understand the reasons for this increase. A survey of 269 families in Hanoi revealed that 21 per cent of parents reported their children had been harshly punished in the past year (Emery, Nguyen, & Kim, 2013). School-based physical abuse is discussed below.

Reasons given within studies for physical punishment include children being beaten for rule-breaking, lying, stealing, fighting, having love affairs, appearing not to listen to parents or teachers, making mistakes, obtaining poor academic results and not doing homework (CSAGA, 2004; Nguyễn Phương Thảo, 2009; Nguyễn Thị Nguyệt, 2007). Some parents say they beat their children in order to relieve their own stress about work, money or problems in their social lives (Save the Children, 2005). Zhai and Gao (2009) note that child abuse in the West most commonly results from perceived misbehaviour, while child abuse in East Asian families is often a result of school failure, and is seen as being healthy for the child.
Violent disciplinary practices are strongly associated with positive attitudes toward corporal punishment. Parents are seen as having a right to discipline children physically so mistakes are recognized and not repeated (discussed further below). In Vietnamese, the term “violence” (“bao luc”) is considered a very strong term and people are reluctant to use it to label the behaviour of their family members unless the abuses cause serious physical injury. Yet we know from the two nationally representative Surveys of Adolescent Vietnamese Youth – known as SAVY 1 (2003) and SAVY 2 (2009), that physical violence from family members that results in injury is a severe form of violence experienced by 3 to 4 per cent of young people ages 14-25 years.

For most children, physical violence at home predicts physical violence in the school and community—which usually takes the form of bullying or fighting with peers. Students who are violent at schools are often from families where they have been abused physically and emotionally by their parents or other siblings. They are quick to anger, see others as aggressive, and tend to use violence in dealing with them (Hoàng Bá Thịnh, 2007; Martin et al., 2013). In this way, violence shapes children's personalities, peer networks and environments, suggesting that the key to a less violent society may begin in the home.

Child Sexual Abuse

Internationally, child sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of children in sexual activity that he or she is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared (WHO, 1999). It also includes forced sexual acts, sexual coercion, sexual exploitation, and child trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In Viet Nam, sex with any child under age 16 years, whether he or she expresses willingness or not is considered sexual abuse.

Viet Nam lacks comprehensive data on the nature and extent of child sexual abuse—only one nationally representative survey exists, the National Study on Domestic Violence in Viet Nam (NSDVVN), which found that 3 per cent of women had experienced sexual violence prior to the age of 15 years (GSO, 2010). According to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) administrative data, approximately 1,000 children were sexually abused per annum between 2007 and 2012, but as in most countries, the number of reported cases likely underestimates the true scale of the problem (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Since then, the number of annually reported cases of child sexual abuse increased to 1,544 in 2014, but it is not known if this is a real increase in incidence or a result of increased reporting in response to improved services, increased confidence that reports will be taken seriously, reduced stigma or greater awareness.

A number of cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices also contribute to children's vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation. These include gender inequality, hierarchical parent-child relationships and acceptance of male infidelity (GSO, 2010; Cappa & Dam, 2013; Dao The Duc et al., 2012; GSO, UNICEF, & UNFPA, 2011; United Nations & World Bank, 2005; Pells, Wilson & Hang, 2016). According to studies in Viet Nam there is a strong emphasis on female virginity, family honour and community reputation, and girls who are raped are often blamed for it (GSO, 2010; Australian Aid & World Vision, 2014; UNICEF, 2010a). This contributes to a culture of silence and denial (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011; Private Sector Partnership, 2014).

A lack of knowledge as well as cultural taboos against discussing sexual issues inhibit open talks with children about sexuality and how to avoid sexual abuse. An Australian Aid and World Vision (2014) study found that many parents and teachers fear that sex education encourages sexual experimentation and inappropriate behaviour. Most children therefore obtain

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15 NSDVVN used the same methodology as the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women (2005), including its survey instrument. Participants were asked whether anyone had ever touched them sexually, or made them do something sexual that they did not want to before the age of 15 years.
information of dubious accuracy from informal channels such as peers, television and the internet. Awareness of new risks associated with online sexual exploitation and grooming is low amongst both children and their parents (Australian Aid & World Vision, 2014)

**Sexual Exploitation of Children**

Viet Nam has somewhat more information than other countries in the region on sexual exploitation of children generally and in the context of travel and tourism. According to MOLISA, of the 31,000 sex workers that were estimated to be working in Viet Nam from 2003 to 2008, 14 per cent—or roughly 4,300—were sexually exploited children under 18 years (UNICEF, 2010a). In addition to the sexual violence experienced by children, sexual exploitation places them at an increased risk of other forms of violence. An investigation by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that 12 per cent of children involved in sexual exploitation had been subjected to torture or beaten up by customers, employers or pimps (ILO & IPEC, 2002). Many had undergone repeated abortions, and some had been forced to have sex with customers immediately afterwards. The threat of HIV has led to an increased demand for child prostitution as children are seen as being less likely than adults to carry the virus (UNICEF, 2009). Boys as well as girls are sexually exploited, but the Vietnamese Government Statistics Office notes a lack of official statistics or government records on boys (GSO, 2012), even though large numbers of boys are known to be involved in street begging, vending and other forms of child labour that put them at risk of multiple types of violence (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011).

While poverty is often cited as a key cause of child sexual exploitation, studies have found that family dysfunction and past experience of physical, emotional and sexual abuse are also significant drivers of sexual exploitation (Nguyen, 2006; UNICEF, 2008). Many child victims of sexual exploitation report being driven from their homes due to physical violence, family and household dysfunction, drug abuse and domestic violence (Australian Aid & World Vision, 2014; Save the Children, 2013; UNICEF, 2008; CEOP, 2011; Nguyen, 2006; MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011). One study of child prostitution in Viet Nam found many said they joined the trade to help their families out of economic difficulties (UNICEF, 2011). Some children victims of incest or rape may run away to escape sexual abuse at home, only to fall into the hands of pimps (UNICEF, 2010a). Some children originally sought legitimate work and were tricked into prostitution, while others found they could earn more selling sex than doing other jobs (Rushing, Watts, & Rushing, 2005). Though accurately measuring sexual exploitation remains a challenge, it could be argued that there have been gains in reducing sexual exploitation through poverty alleviation (abject poverty being one of the main drivers of child prostitution) as well as noticeable reductions in street based begging and sexual solicitation and progress in development of services for at-risk youth in recent years (IOM, 2014). Continued monitoring and collection of data alongside conducting comprehensive evaluations of policy and programmatic initiatives is key to understanding the situation of sexual exploitation of in Viet Nam.

**Trafficking**

From 2008 until June 2013, Vietnamese authorities detected 2,390 children involved in sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism cases involving 3,961 traffickers and 4,721 victims. Of these, 285 cases (12%) involved victims under age 16. The true number of cases could be far higher. Although the authorities detected 4,721 trafficking victims between 2008-mid 2013, 17,870 women and children were reported missing without reason during this period. Many of them might have been trafficked (Report No.571/BC-BCD; Steering Committee 138/CP 2013).

Viet Nam also faces the challenge of both internal and cross-border trafficking of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced marriage. Some children are trafficked from rural areas into cities where they became involved in street hawking, begging, forced labour or sexual exploitation. Others cross national borders with promises of jobs but instead end up in a form of sexual exploitation,
forced marriage and other exploitative forms of labour, all which are risk factors for further violence (Rushing, Watts, & Rushing, 2005). A 2014 study documented 500 cases of trafficking related to marriage involving 1,100 victims between 2008–2014 (UNODC, 2014). This report also found that one third of documented human trafficking cases between 2007–2010 involved children. Often child victims of trafficking are illegally bound to repay the trafficker for their transportation and remain in debt bondage. If the victim refuses to work, her family may be subjected to violence (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011). In a study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) of 1,102 men, women and youth aged 10 years and older who were receiving post-trafficking assistance services in Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam. Thailand and China were cited as the most common trafficking destinations (41% and 30% of participants, respectively), followed by Indonesia (12%) (IOM, 2014).

The government of Viet Nam has begun to introduce measures to foster awareness about cyber-safety and to empower children to be safe and responsible digital citizens. However, awareness amongst children of the risks of on-line grooming, sexual exploitation and “sextortion” is reportedly low. Similarly, parents generally do not provide their children with adequate supervision or information about the risks that ICT poses (Pells & Woodhead, 2014; Australian Aid & World Vision, 2014). Cyber-bullying is discussed further in the section below addressing violence in the community.

Child Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is defined earlier in this report as acts that harm or threaten the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social
development. It manifests from all the types of abuse, and also provides a platform for the other forms of abuse to occur. As it is not immediately apparent, it is difficult to define, difficult to understand and difficult to address readily, this may be due to missing elements in the research to date, including scant focus on the problems on the problems of emotional abuse and neglect (Nguyen, Dunne, & Le, 2009).

There is limited understanding and data in Viet Nam on the nature and extent of emotional abuse of children yet several studies have highlighted associations between financial and family stress and emotional abuse of children. According to the latest Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey or MICS (2014), 58 per cent of Vietnamese children aged 10 to 14 years experienced psychological aggression from caregivers, which included being shouted at, yelled at or screamed at, or insulted (GSO & UNICEF, 2015). One study found that parents subjected to poor working conditions, with limited support networks and those unable to afford childcare were more likely to be emotionally abusive to their children (Ruiz-Casares & Heymann, 2009). A study by Nguyen (2006) found that adolescents from divorced families or who had lost one or both parents were at greater risk of emotional maltreatment by an adult relative. Other risk factors included being an only child, having a step-parent, having a self-employed mother and having parents with drug and alcohol problems. Girls were more likely to report emotional maltreatment and neglect than boys. Analyses conducted specifically for this study with the national representative SAVY 1 and SAVY 2 datasets found that for adolescents aged 14-25 years who experienced early trauma such as parent(s) died, divorced, separated, or lived away from home, had significantly higher proportions of experiencing injury from violence perpetrated by family members, partners or community members (Vu Manh Loi, 2015).

Witnessing domestic violence between parents is also a form of emotional abuse (UNICEF, 2008). Data from the National Study on Domestic Violence in Viet Nam also highlights that domestic violence occurs in more than 58 per cent of households—where women report experiencing at least one type of physical, sexual or emotional violence from a partner, many of these households may include children (GSO, 2010). The implications of children’s exposure to domestic violence are discussed further on the section below addressing violence in the home.

The rate of labour migration, both international and within Vietnam, has soared in the past decade, resulting in an increasing numbers of “left behind” children living with single parents, aunts, uncles and other relatives where they are sometimes neglected or subject to other forms of maltreatment (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2015). “Left behind” children frequently become detached from parents working abroad (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012). In a 2008 study of roughly 1000 “left behind” households in Viet Nam, Hoang and colleagues found that unless parents phone home very often, their left-behind children tend to withdraw from them, sometimes refusing to speak to them at all (Hoang, Lam, Yeoh, & Graham, 2015). When parents visit, their children frequently react with shyness, embarrassment or even fear. Some migrant parents try to compensate for the growing emotional distance by lavishing gifts and food on their children, but this is not seen by children to compensate for their difficult experiences (Hoang & Yeoh, 2012).

Vietnamese society places great importance on education, and many children face pressure to succeed academically (Truc et al., 2015; Pham, 2015). When excessive, this can undermine children’s mental health and contribute to suicidal ideation and attempts, and behavioural problems (Le, Nguyen, Tran, & Fisher, 2012; Huong, 2010; Michaelson, 2004; UNICEF, 2006). Results from the nationally representative SAVY 1 and 2 surveys revealed that about one fifth of youth feel hopeless about their future, and about one fourth of those children feel so sad that they stop doing usual activities (Vu Manh Loi, 2015). Children who felt poorly connected to their families—meaning they felt unfairly treated and tended to turn to non-family members for support – were more likely to experience such negative feelings.16

16 In both waves, the participants (aged 14-25 years) were asked 8 statements about their family situation when they were 12 to 18 years old. The statements, such as “When I had difficulties, I felt more comfortable sharing with non-family members” and “Family members treated one another equally”, reflect various degree of family connectedness. Based on these questions an index of family connectedness was developed with the value ranged from 8 to 24 (the smaller the value, the stronger the family connectedness); from this variable, a two-categories variable was built “strong family connectedness” and “weak family connectedness”.
Children in Viet Nam are most commonly disciplined non-violently in the home, with adults explaining why certain behaviour is wrong (UNICEF, 2010b). However, violent forms of discipline remain prevalent, and are supported by cultural norms and traditions including Confucian notions of hierarchy and patriarchy (GSO, 2010; MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011).

Traditionally, children are expected to obey their fathers, younger brothers their elder brothers, and wives their husbands, and if parents love their children they must give them the “whip of love” (Segal, 2000; Emery, Nguyen & Kim, 2013). The saying “spare the rod, spoil the child” (Thuong cho roi, cho vot) has been a prevailing child-rearing belief for centuries in Viet Nam (Cappa & Dam, 2013). Corporal punishment is seen as a means of helping children realise their mistakes and adapt to society (Nguyễn Thị Hoa, 2007). A small mixed methods study conducted in 2004 in Hanoi with children and parents found that parents expressed beliefs about the effectiveness of corporal punishment, stating that their own childhood experience of corporal punishment convinced them of this (CSAGA, 2004).

According to secondary analysis of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS4) data (Cappa & Dam, 2013), boys were slightly more likely to experience violent forms of discipline than girls (OR = 1.2), but caregivers’ attitudes toward corporal punishment emerged as the strongest risk factor for violent discipline. Children whose caregivers said corporal punishment was a necessary part of child-rearing were three
times more likely to be physically punished than others. Analysis from the first and second nationally representative Survey and Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY 1 and SAVY 2) also indicated that males (aged 14-25 years) have significantly higher rates of injury by family members than females, and levels of violence decrease with age (Vu Manh Loi, 2015).

Women are more involved in controlling children's behaviour than men, but when men do discipline children, they are more likely to do so ‘abruptly and loudly’ (Rydstrøm, 2001). According to anthropological fieldwork conducted in Viet Nam by Rydstrøm (2006a), beating boys crystallizes “a masculine discourse” reinforcing the Confucianist ideal of the war-like, ‘hot’ character (nóng tính) of men. Some of the boys in Rydstrøm’s study were severely threatened and/or beaten with electric cables or other objects. In most cases, corporal punishment was elicited not because of ‘anger’ or ‘impulses’. Rather, many fathers and grandfathers said physical punishment was planned in order to correct a child’s misbehaviour. Violence also established male hierarchies (Dao The Duc et al., 2012).

Interestingly, according to UNICEF’s 2011 MICS, children who live with their biological mothers only or with both parents were also more likely to experience violent discipline than children living only with their biological fathers. This finding seems to challenge the argument that fathers, rather than mothers, are mostly responsible for violent discipline (Knodel, Loi, Jayakody, & Huy, 2005; Cappa & Dam, 2013). It’s possible that in violent families, children may be victimized not only by men but also by women who may be victims themselves (Lê Thị Quý, 2000; Nguyễn Phương Thảo, 2009, p. 13). It’s also possible that children are simply caught in the crossfire of their parents’ conflicts. Or, that parenting falls along gender lines—where fathers may be more responsible for harsh discipline and mother’s responsibility for less harsh, day-to-day discipline. Another explanation may be that mothers and grandmothers assume primary responsibility for child-rearing, including disciplining, and are the perpetrators more often than fathers or grandfathers.

### Children’s exposure to domestic violence

Exposure to intimate partner violence is emotionally and psychologically traumatizing for children and is a strong risk factor for low academic achievement and delinquent behaviour (Shonkoff et al., 2004). The nationally representative study on domestic violence found that the study found that 34 per cent of ever-married women reported that they had suffered physical or sexual violence from their husbands at some time in their lives (GSO, 2010). A 2015 survey also found that more than one-third of married Vietnamese men report physical, psychological or sexual violence against their wives (Yount et al., 2015). A similar percentage of men said they had witnessed domestic violence against their own mothers (27%) and nearly three quarters said they had been hit or beaten themselves as children (72%), reinforcing the concept of an intergenerational cycle of violence.

Men exposed in childhood to these forms of violence were far more likely, to perpetrate violence in their own marriages. Substance abuse may also contribute to intimate partner violence perpetration, as the Vietnamese Family Survey found that alcohol abuse was the leading reason why a husband would beat his wife (38% of reported cases; UNICEF, 2008).

A small but in-depth qualitative analysis of women domestic violence victims and their children conducted by Young Lives found that children’s responses vary, from accepting their ‘fate’, to earning money for their mother to lessen her dependence upon her husband, to actively intervening and seeking support from peer networks (Pells, Wilson, & Hang, 2016). Younger children tend to exhibit confusion and uncertainty about how to respond to violence and may shut down emotionally by keeping silent and refusing to communicate. Others may flee to a relative’s house to ask for consolation and help. Older children are better able to negotiate and challenge violence by trying to shield their mothers, either physically or via their own economic contributions. Many children also see violence as a private matter that should be kept secret in order to maintain a façade of family harmony (Pells, Wilson, & Hang, 2016).

Research suggests that individual men’s and women’s experience of violence in the past
is a far more important driver of violence in the home than are socio-economic variables. Violence in the home promotes harmful forms of masculinity that, without intervention, may sustain violence in the population, generation after generation. A nationally representative survey of women aged 18 to 60 years revealed that, when asked whether they had been beaten or sexually abused by their husbands, the strongest risk factor for recent victimization was victimization in childhood—of the woman, her husband, and/or their respective mothers (GSO, 2010). Rural or urban residence, whether the family had other relatives living nearby, or whether the woman felt she could count on a support network in the community did not affect a woman’s risk of intimate partner violence.

In Viet Nam, adolescent and young adult women also experience intimate partner violence. Nearly one in four married girls and women aged 14 to 25 years reported some form of physical, sexual or emotional violence at the hands of their spouse: 6 per cent said they were hit, 3 per cent were forced to have sexual intercourse and 23 per cent were yelled at or cursed at highlighting that physical violence at the hands of a partner also impacts on adolescent girls (Le et al., 2014).

Many studies conclude that the root of intimate partner violence in Viet Nam is inequality in gender relations (GSO, 2010; Krantz & Nguyen, 2009; Pells, Wilson & Hang, 2016; Loi et. al. 1999). Vietnamese social norms are slowly changing, but family relationships continue to be influenced by patriarchy and traditional notions of male and female roles within the family. Taoist and Confucian principles promote ideals of femininity that emphasize appearance, housework and gentleness, in contrast to male ideals of physical strength and hot temper (Dao The Duc et al., 2012). The idea that men are entitled to use violence to reproach their wives and children is deep-rooted in a portion of the Vietnamese population, and seldom condemned by the community (Le Thi Quy & Vu Manh Loi, 2004). For example, women who believe that wife beating is sometimes justified are more likely to be abused by their own partners/husbands (GSO, UNICEF & UNFPA, 2011).

Despite the passage of legislation including the Law on Gender Equality (2006), the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control (2007), and the development of national strategies to prevent domestic violence (2011-20) dominant social norms continue to exacerbate the problem. Few women victims seek help from authorities because they do not want to bring shame upon the family, seek to avoid the stigma associated with seeking support, and believe the violence was not really serious enough to warrant assistance (Pells, Wilson, & Hang, 2016; Krantz & Nguyen, 2009). Domestic violence victims may seek divorce under the Law on Marriage and Family, but reconciliation is the culturally preferred solution (Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2014). Measures to change social norms, promote gender equality and models of positive manhood, and community-based programmes to remove the stigma surrounding domestic violence so that more victims seek help are all greatly needed (Pells, Wilson, & Hang, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2015).

**VAC – In Schools Bullying**

Between 2013 and 2015, over 1,600 incidents of students fighting in and outside school were reported to Viet Nam’s Ministry of Education and Training, but the true number of cases is likely to be considerably higher. Most reported cases involved kicking, slapping and punching, though some involved weapons, resulting in serious injury to classmates. According to official sources, three students were killed in school fights during the 2013-2014 school year (MOET, 2015).

The strongest data on bullying comes from the Young Lives longitudinal study which showed that indirect bullying, such as being humiliated or socially excluded, was the most prevalent.
form of bullying among 15-year olds (27%), followed by verbal bullying (20%). Physical bullying was the least prevalent, with 7 per cent of 15-year-olds reporting they had been hurt physically or punched, kicked or beaten up. Out-of-school children are more likely to be verbally and physically bullied, and poorer children are more likely to be physically bullied or have their property attacked (Pells, Portela & Espinoza, 2016). Qualitative data from Young Lives also indicates that ethnicity may make children vulnerable to bullying. Being made fun of or indirectly bullied at age 15 was associated with poorer relationships with parents at age 19 (Pells, Portela & Espinoza, 2016).

Other risk factors for bullying victimisation include stress, depression and suicide ideation (Pham, 2015). In a study of 1,648 students aged 16-18 years in three regions of Viet Nam, high academic stress was associated with emotional bullying, physical bullying and cyberbullying among both male and female students (Pham, 2015). Bullying also varies between genders. Boys are significantly more likely to experience physical bullying than girls (Pells, Portela & Espinoza, 2016). For boys, violent bullying is mainly a tool to achieve status or display strength. Girls are less likely than boys to fight physically against those they dislike, but they sometimes ask their male friends to fight for them, reinforcing gendered stereotypes. This type of bullying is considered evidence of true love or friendship (UN Viet Nam, 2011). Groups of girls may also gang up to humiliate others using social media or taunting them in person (Elgar et al., 2013; Pells, Portela, & Espinoza, 2016).

While bullying may be intentional and students who engage in it may be fully aware that they are inflicting harm on others, their actions may be influenced by contextual factors in the social and institutional environment. Intimidating others into changing seats, for example, may be a reaction to the seemingly arbitrary rules and constraints of institutionalisation. Ethnographic research in three lower secondary schools in the northern Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Haiphong found that children often use the term ‘meek’ (hiền lành) when describing those they bullied (Horton, Lindholm, & Nguyen, 2015). Consistent with this, some students join violent confrontations not because they dislike the students they are abusing but to support their friend and perhaps protect themselves (Trang, 2012).

Students are more likely to speak out about bullying if they believe that it is seen as unacceptable and if they feel that teachers will deal with it constructively. Studies highlight that this may not be the norm, as such, issues around bullying are generally not addressed (Pells, Portela, & Espinoza, 2016; Horton, 2011). Boys seldom report bullying because they fear being seen as ‘meek’ (Horton, Lindholm & Nguyen, 2015). Girls tend to remain silent because their very presence and gentle demeanour is supposed to help control the behaviour of boys. Teachers often remain silent out of concern to maintain their own positions of authority (Horton, 2011).

**Corporal punishment**

Corporal punishment in schools is against the law in Viet Nam but remains common. The strongest evidence of corporal punishment in schools also comes from the Young Lives Longitudinal study, which found that corporal punishment in schools is more commonly inflicted on primary school children. Over half of 8-year olds had witnessed some form of it in the week before they were interviewed. Cases involved spanking, beating, punching or twisting a child's ears. In some cases, an implement was used. Seventy-two per cent of 10 year olds said they were afraid of their teachers (Portela & Pells, 2015). A study in Danang found that 27 per cent of 818 students interviewed reported being beaten by a teacher with a hand, and 26 per cent reported being beaten by a teacher with an object in the semester before the survey (Martin et al., 2013). A study in Danang found that 27 per cent of 818 students interviewed reported being beaten by a teacher with a hand, and 26 per cent reported being beaten by a teacher with an object in the semester before the survey.
Despite being outlawed, corporal punishment continues to be viewed by some teachers as an effective way of imposing discipline in the classroom and shaping children’s behaviour. One study found that 40 per cent of teachers in four schools in Hanoi believed in the effectiveness of corporal punishment and said the threat of it made children study harder, follow rules, be polite, adopt good habits and self-regulate their personalities (CSAGA, 2004). However, a growing body of research suggests corporal punishment is harmful. For the first time, with data from Viet Nam, longitudinal data has also shown that children’s experiences of violence also directly impacts on having lower ‘foundation skills’ of reading, maths and vocabulary. The Young Lives longitudinal data has shown that children in Viet Nam who report experiencing corporal punishment in schools at age 8 have poorer cognitive outcomes, poorer math scores and lower self-esteem and self-efficacy during adolescence than their non-abused peers (Portela & Pells, 2015). The relationship held even when controlling for math scores and similar measures at age five, suggesting that beating may actually reduce cognitive performance (Portela & Pells, 2015).

Teachers’ violence against students is also a significant cause of school drop-out (Hang & Tam, 2013). Some teachers single out particular students for punishment, and this can affect the climate of the school, making bullying in general seem more acceptable (Save the Children Sweden, Plan Vietnam, & UNICEF, 2005; Horton, 2011). The nationally representative SAVY data, two surveys with 7,584 young people aged 14-25 years in round 1 and 10,044 in round 2, which was analysed for this study found that children who experience less violence are far more likely to feel connected to school—meaning they say they work hard, trust their teachers to be fair, and have ambitions to go to university (see Fig 4).

Figure 4  SAVY 1 (2003) and SAVY 2 (2009) findings on incidence of violence by school connectedness

Participants in both waves were asked 8 ‘Yes/No’ questions about their perception of their schools: 1) I try hard to study; 2) Teachers treat every student equally; 3) Sometimes I do not want to go to school; 4) Teachers praise me when I perform well; 5) I really want to enter university; 6) Disabled students are given access to my school; 7) Study work load is too heavy; 8) Students have opportunity to give comments about school. Based on these 8 questions, a school connectedness index was built with two categories of “weak school connectedness” and “strong school connectedness.”
Stigma, denial and fear cloud appropriate responses to corporal punishment. There is a great need for alternatives to corporal punishment for parents and teachers, who sometimes maintain that even if they wanted to stop using violence, they would not know how else to manage their children or classrooms. Schools in particular need clearer guidelines as to what constitute punishable offenses and acceptable forms of punishment. Schools also need to make it easier for students to report abuse by teachers confidentially, without the risk of retaliation for ‘squealing’ (Horton, 2011).

**VAC – In the Community**

Violence in the community refers to acts of violence affecting children in any space used or occupied by children other than homes, schools, and institutions (Pinheiro, 2006). Community is not only a physical space, but also a social environment (Pinheiro, 2006). Children living or working on the streets alone or with family members are particularly vulnerable to such abuse. While poverty is a significant factor driving children to leave home to work on the streets, others leave because of family or social problems such as the death of a parent, domestic violence, alcoholism, divorce, abandonment and peer pressure (ILO & IPEC, 2002).

In Viet Nam, some studies indicate that with growing cities and increased work opportunities poorer children may be enticed out of school to earn money to support their families, placing them at risk of labour and sexual exploitation (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2011; Pells & Woodhead, 2014; ILO & IPEC, 2002). It is estimated that 16 per cent of children age five to 17 years are involved in child labour, which presents risks for experiencing violence (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2014). Measures of who qualifies as a street child are difficult to ascertain anywhere in the world because some live on the street while others live between home and street. However, it is believed there are about 20,000 street children in Viet Nam (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2014)\(^\text{18}\). Children work in parks, markets, bus and train stations, and near temples and tourist attractions. While some support themselves by pick-pocketing and petty theft from shops, many more sell newspapers, postcards, and lottery tickets, beg, shine shoes, scavenge garbage, and serve as porters in markets. The primary occupation for boys is shoe shining and for girls, street vending or working in factories. As noted earlier, an unknown number are involved in child prostitution (UNICEF, 2010a). Rural children who migrate to cities for work are at great risk of sexual exploitation and violence (Rushing, Watts, & Rushing, 2005).

The internet can be a platform for community violence. There is widespread concern around issues related to cyber-bullying and safety online in Viet Nam (Pham, 2015; Le et al., forthcoming). UNICEF’s Digital Citizenship and Safety Survey asked children whether anyone had ever used the Internet or phone to bully, threaten or embarrass them. Fourteen per cent of respondents in urban areas and 20 per cent in rural areas indicated that they had experienced some form of bullying in the digital world. Of those, 40 per cent reported being cyber-bullied through gaming websites, 43 per cent from instant messaging/chat/calling mobile phones. Cyber-bullying via SMS and by receiving phone calls was three times higher for females than males (UNICEF, 2012). In a recent longitudinal study of 1,424 middle school and high school students, it was found that approximately 90

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18 According to the LAW ON CHILD PROTECTION, CARE AND EDUCATION (No. 25/2004/QH11 of June 15, 2004) **Street children mean children, who leave their families and earn a living by themselves with unfixed places of livelihood and residence; children wandering with their families.**
and 92 per cent of children who experienced cyberbullying at time 1 or time 2 respectively also experienced traditional forms of bullying (Le et al., forthcoming) (for more studies on traditional forms of bullying see ‘VAC in schools’ section). This longitudinal study also found that cyberbullying has significant mental health consequences for children. Students who experienced cyberbullying often and those who were classified as highly involved as both victims and bullies at one or both survey times showed significantly higher levels of depression, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation than other students (Le et al., forthcoming). In addition, gender differences were found such that girls experienced more suicide ideation than boys as a result of low level but frequent involvement in cyberbullying (Le et al., forthcoming).

ICT has also exposed children risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. Information about this is covered under “Sexual Abuse” above.

**Viet Nam’s Child Protection System** 19

In recent years, Viet Nam has made significant progress in strengthening measures to prevent and respond to violence against children and improving the legal framework for child protection. The Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children guarantees children’s rights and outlines responsibilities of the family, community and government to support and protect children. The Penal Code, Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control and Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat prohibit all forms of physical, sexual and emotional violence against children.

Viet Nam’s child protection system is centrally managed and organized vertically and horizontally from central to local levels. At the central level, the lead Ministry responsible for child protection is the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), which works in coordination with other ministries including Health; Education and Training; Culture, Sports and Tourism; Justice; and Public Security. At the provincial and district levels, child protection services are managed by Departments of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA), which are supervised by People’s Committees (the executive branch of local government). People’s Committees are responsible for execution of laws and policies, strengthening interagency coordination and mobilizing resources.

Social work was not developed as a profession in Viet Nam until recently, and there are few dedicated, professionally qualified staff working in child protection, particularly at the district and commune levels. The government has taken measures to address this gap through the National Project on Social Work Profession Development (2011-2020) which aims to build a network of 60,000 skilled social work professionals and para-professionals. The government has also established provincial-level social work centres throughout the country, children’s advisory offices at the district level, and community and school advisory points. These centres, a relatively new initiative, offering counselling services for children and families, including services for children who are at risk of or who have experienced abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect (BCCP, 2015). The distribution of these services is inconsistent and they have not yet been evaluated.

One of the strengths of Viet Nam’s child protection system is the tradition of community collaboration and solidarity. Child protection activities are generally characterized by a spirit of inclusiveness, with all stakeholders, including ministries, local government authorities, mass organizations, the private sector and mass media engaged in interventions with communities, children and families (MOLISA & UNICEF, 2010; Final report on Program 267 in Ho Chi Minh City). Village leaders and the heads of local mass organisations organise awareness and education campaigns; mobilise financial and material support for families in times of crisis; conduct family mediation, counselling and civic education; and sometimes temporarily take women and children escaping abuse into their homes (ECPAT International et al., 2014; MOLISA & UNICEF, 2010). However, there is a lack of trained child protection officers at the district and commune levels who are dedicated to the task of guiding and mobilising these community efforts and ensuring appropriate

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19 This section of the report draws heavily on and with permission of the UNICEF Viet Nam Child Protection Programme Outcome Paper, October 2015, a document internal to the Viet Nam County Office.
case management and intervention when cases of violence against children are detected. The system remains over-reliant on volunteers.

Until recently, Viet Nam’s response to child protection was largely issue-specific, with laws, policies and programmes targeting specific categories of children in special circumstances (e.g. street children, orphans, child victims of trafficking, etc). With the introduction of the National Program on Child Protection 2011-15, the government signaled a shift away from vertical programmes targeting specific vulnerable groups to a more comprehensive approach aimed at building a child protection system capable of reducing the risks of harm to all children (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2014). This shift in approach is also being incorporated into the new revised children’s law,\(^{20}\) which is expected to provide a more solid legal basis for a comprehensive child protection system providing prevention, early intervention and response services to children and their families.

Prevention of all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation of children has been promoted through a variety of communication activities and social advocacy campaigns on various child protection issues. This has included mass media campaigns through television, radio and print media, as well as direct communication through village meetings and community consultations. Awareness raising and IEC activities have also been integrated into the structure and meetings of the community groups/clubs (UNFPA, 2012). Local governments in various parts of the country have supported communication activities to popularize knowledge of laws and intervention procedures to assist abused children (Oxfam Quebec, 2005), to improve children’s life skills and ability to protect themselves against risks of abuse, and to help children, parents, and caregivers to better understand child care and protection (BCCP, 2015). The Ministry of Education and Training has also implemented a number of initiatives aimed at building child-friendly schools; strengthening coordination amongst school, family and society; changing family behaviour and preventing domestic violence; and establishing school consultation points and school security teams to resolve conflicts (MOET, 2015).

However, there is a lack of research on the extent to which current approaches have been successful in reducing violence against children. The practice of setting targets for reductions in child abuse may encourage under-reporting by local officials without changing behaviour. Communication and advocacy activities are often event-based, such as the International Day of Children, and not sufficiently sustained to address entrenched harmful social norms towards children (ECPAT International et al., 2014). While significant emphasis has been placed on strengthening the legal and regulatory framework for child protection, less progress has been made in providing quality prevention, early intervention and response services for children and families, and too often there is limited support for families experiencing difficulties (ECPAT International et al., 2014). Prevention activities addressing violence against children are not well-linked with family economic policies.

A key challenge for the effective implementation of national child protection policies has been limited budgetary allocation. There is no separate budget line allocated for child protection services at the national and sub-national levels. Resources for these activities have been largely programme-based, and funds are generally modest and do not fully support the services that are needed for children (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015).

\(^{20}\) The new law will replace the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children, 2004 and is expected to be approved by the National Assembly in 2016.
Conclusions

The table below summarizes the drivers of violence against children in Viet Nam paying attention to all of the levels of the socio-eco framework.

### Summary of findings from Viet Nam Technical Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers/Risk factors</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>• The ‘feminization’ of interprovincial migration has significant implications for the wellbeing of mothers and their children (Anh et al., 2012)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Children migrating from rural to urban and become involved in street work, forced labour or sexual exploitation (Rushing, Watts &amp; Rushing, 2005)</td>
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<td>• Children, especially boys, sometimes migrate on their own, especially when they feel their families can’t support them; some fall into the hands of traffickers (GSO, 2012)</td>
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<td>Traditional values</td>
<td>• Physical violence as a means of discipline and domestic violence are rooted in patriarchy (Rydstrøm, 2006a; Dao The Duc et al., 2012)</td>
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<td>• Gender discrimination increases children’s vulnerability to sexual violence, including commercial sex (UNICEF, 2010a)</td>
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<td>Shifts from traditional to modern societies</td>
<td>• Rapid development presents new challenges, such as Internet safety (Australian Aid &amp; World Vision, 2014)</td>
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<td>• Internet pornography and “grooming” exposes children to sexual abuse by strangers. (CEOP, 2011)</td>
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<td>Economic and social policies that inadvertently increase poverty, inequality and migration</td>
<td>• Economic liberalization has widened gap between rich &amp; poor and urban and rural dwellers (Rubenson et al., 2005)</td>
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<td>Institutional</td>
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<td>Poor school governance</td>
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<td>• School management and supervision can be inadequate. To protect a school's or</td>
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<td>a child's reputation, instances of violence may go unreported</td>
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<td>(Horton; 2011; Anh, 2012)</td>
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<td>Under-developed child protection systems</td>
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<td>• The child protection system suffers from inadequate training of NGO and</td>
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<td>local officials and community volunteers; weak law enforcement; and</td>
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<td>logistical challenges such as communication, transportation and human</td>
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<td>resources. Lack of resources and coordination between departments and</td>
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<td>units, and lack of knowledge of laws and procedures also hinder appropriate</td>
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<td>responses to reported abuse (UNICEF, 2010a)</td>
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<td>• Most funding sources for child protection are still derived from foreign</td>
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<td>sponsors and local civil society organizations rather than the national</td>
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<td>government, leading to a patchwork system that works relatively well in</td>
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<td>some places but not others (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2015).</td>
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<td>Legal structure</td>
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<td>• Enforcement and implementation of existing laws is inconsistent (UNICEF,</td>
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<td>2010a).</td>
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<td>• Legislation does not adequately prohibit corporal punishment (Portela &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pells, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of school relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Violence from teachers is one of the reasons students give for dropping</td>
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<tr>
<td>out of school (Hang &amp; Tam, 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Weak school connectedness is a risk factor for being hurt or injured</td>
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<tr>
<td>(SAVY; Vu Manh Loi, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sexual exploitation of boys is not considered a serious issue. Lack of</td>
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<tr>
<td>awareness and recognition presents a major risk to boys (Australian Aid &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Vision Australia, 2014), affecting both documentation and response</td>
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<tr>
<td>of local authorities toward trafficking (GSO, 2012)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strong emphasis on female virginity, family honour and community</td>
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<tr>
<td>reputation leads to the widespread propensity to blame girls for pre-marital</td>
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<tr>
<td>sex, even when they are victims of rape (GSO, 2010; Australian Aid &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>World Vision Australia, 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Confucianism and gender norms may contribute to domestic violence and</td>
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<tr>
<td>physical punishment (Rydstrøm, 2006a; Rydstrøm, 2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children in rural areas are more likely to be physically punished (GSO,</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF, &amp; UNFPA, 2011), to be involved in physical violence at school,</td>
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<tr>
<td>regardless of economic status (Hang &amp; Tam, 2013), and to experience sexual</td>
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<tr>
<td>violence (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of community relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Rapid social changes may diminish community cohesion and values (Pells &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woodhead, 2014).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Code of silence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Taboos against discussing sexual issues prevent education about avoiding</td>
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<tr>
<td>sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2010a; Australian Aid &amp; World Vision, 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Violence is viewed as a family or civil matter (Pells, Wilson &amp; Hang, 2015;</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF, 2010a). Children often do not report abuse to adults as a result</td>
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<td>of guilt and shame. Parents do not report abuse to authorities, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>authorities tend to deny the existence of child abuse within their</td>
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<tr>
<td>communities (Australian Aid &amp; World Vision Australia, 2014).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teachers remain silent about bullying in order to maintain their positions</td>
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<td>of authority (Horton, 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family structure</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children from divorced families or living only with their birth mother are more likely to report physical violence. Divorce was also associated with sexual and emotional violence (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children living with a stepfather are more likely to report sexual and emotional violence (Nguyen, 2006). Children sexually abused by a step-parent cited the abuse as a reason for engaging in sexual exploitation (MOLISA &amp; UNICEF, 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Boy victims of trafficking reported lack of parental care (GSO, 2012). Adolescents whose parent or parents had died were at increased risk for emotional violence (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family context</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lower parental education was associated with physical and emotional violence (Nguyen, 2006). Conversely, children in households where the head had tertiary education were less likely to be subjected to psychological aggression (GSO, UNICEF, &amp; UNFPA, 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Alcoholism is a risk factor for domestic violence and child physical violence (UNICEF, 2008). Alcohol and drug use were also associated with increased risk of sexual and emotional violence (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<td><strong>Family stress</strong></td>
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<td>• Poverty drives children to withdraw from school in search of employment, increasing their vulnerability to labour and sexual exploitation (MOLISA &amp; UNICEF, 2011). Kinship obligations and the need to support their families are sometimes cited as the reason girls entered the commercial sex sector. Some children reported that their parents encouraged, forced or even deceived them to engage in a form of sexual exploitation for economic purposes (ILO &amp; IPEC, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Parental unemployment is associated with physical and sexual violence (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children with parents who have conflictual relationships are at increased risk of sexual abuse (Nguyen, 2006).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Early experience of violence and conflict</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children who are violent at school are more likely to have been physically or emotionally abused at home by parents or siblings (Anh, 2012; Hoang, 2007), or to have witnessed domestic violence at home (Martin et al., 2013).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Women who experience domestic violence are more likely to report experiencing violence as a child (Martin et al., 2013). Witnessing domestic violence as a child was also associated with becoming a victim or perpetrator of sexual violence (GSO, 2010).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Children engaged in sexual exploitation or sexual exploitation in the context of travel and tourism were more likely to have been raped or sexually abused before entering the trade (MOLISA &amp; UNICEF, 2011).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of peer relationships</strong></td>
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<td>• Secondary school students may engage in physical violent confrontations to support their friends, not because they dislike or disagree with the person they fight. This indicates the existence of a peer network of violence on which a student can rely when s/he needs support to win a fight (Trang, 2012).</td>
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<td><strong>Sex selection</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sex selection is usually a decision between a couple; sons are preferred over girls. Because of prenatal sex selection, there is an imbalance in the newborn sex ratio (United Nations &amp; World Bank, 2005).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Understanding the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in Viet Nam

**Individual**

**Beliefs**

- Beliefs about masculinity contribute to intergenerational violence among males (Rydstrom, 2006a)
- Children who are considered to be ‘meek’ are more likely to be bullied (Horton, Lindholm & Nguyen, 2015)
- Parents and teachers consider corporal punishment or shouting at and scolding children not as forms of violence, but as effective ways to educate and discipline children (CSAGA, 2004). Children with caregivers who believe physical punishment is a necessary disciplinary method are more likely to experience violent discipline (Cappa & Dam, 2013).
- Parents’ and teachers’ experiences of corporal punishment as children contributed to their belief in its use (CSAGA, 2004)
- Women and girls aged 15 years and older who believe male partners are justified in beating their partners are more likely to report abuse (GSO, UNICEF, & UNFPA, 2011)

**Gender**

- Boys are more likely to experience violent discipline than girls (Cappa & Dam, 2013)
- Boys are more likely to use physical violence while girls are more likely to use name-calling or to destroy the victim’s clothing (Pells, Portela, & Espinoza, 2016).
- Girls are more likely to report emotional violence and neglect (Nguyen, 2006)

**Vulnerability due to individual characteristics such as age, ethnicity or disability**

- Severe punishment is more common in ethnic minority households (GSO, UNICEF, & UNFPA, 2011)
- Poorer children are more likely to experience corporal punishment at school (Portela & Pells, 2015)

National studies underscore the inter-connected nature of various forms of violence against children and the common drivers underpinning all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation of children. Analysis of the SAVY data for this study, for example, found that children who were victims of one type of violence—such as harsh disciplinary beatings—also tended to suffer other forms as well, such as bullying at school, harsh punishment by teachers and fights with peers in the community (Vu Manh Loi, 2015). These findings highlight the importance of an integrated approach to child protection addressing the multiple factors that may underpin different forms of violence affecting children in the many spheres in which they live.

While it is clear that Child Protection policy and programming alone cannot possibly address all of the issues presented in this Study, unpacking the drivers of violence is essential to improving current responses to violence prevention. The Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in Viet Nam and in other participating countries forwards two inter-related concepts. Firstly, understanding violence affecting children requires a holistic, gender sensitive approach attuned to children’s evolving capacities. Acknowledging the dynamic nature of age and the importance of gender differences sheds new light on both the significance of power in children’s lives and the importance of critical relationships in determining a child’s risk and protective factors. Secondly, recognizing and subsequently tackling historically entrenched norms and patterns of behaviour are vital steps forward, combining both top-down (social policies and laws) and bottom-up approaches (working with children, families, teachers, and communities). Despite much progress, Viet Nam’s child protection system remains under-developed and is not fully resourced for addressing the complex and inter-related drivers behind violence against children. A largely voluntary system of child protection, the shrinking extended family support system, increasing economic migration and new threats such as trafficking, call for an urgent strengthening of the institutions of child protection, including a cadre of trained social workers at district and commune levels who are dedicated to preventing and detecting violence against children and contributing to the
provide more uniform prevention, referrals and services throughout the country.

**Potential Recommendations for the Period 2016 to 2020**

The Viet Nam government has demonstrated its commitment to combating violence against children and is well-placed to become a regional leader in mobilization for children. This will require the concerted effort of government, families, schools, mass organisations and children themselves and more intensive efforts to address the drivers of violence identified in this report, including:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Ministries, UN partner and or other partners responsible</th>
<th>Plans or existing activities relevant to the recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening and supporting families in their child rearing responsibilities by assisting those experiencing economic stress, improving the quality and availability of child care and early childhood education, and reinforcing family and community cohesion as the foundation of modern Vietnamese society.</td>
<td>MOLISA, MOET, People's Committee at all levels, mass organisations, UNFPA, UN Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, Plan International. World Vision, Child Fund, Save the Children</td>
<td>National Programme on Child Protection, 2016-2020</td>
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<td>Challenging the normalisation of violence in homes and schools and promoting positive forms of discipline. National sensitisation campaigns are needed to challenge the notion that violence is an effective means of disciplining children. These campaigns could catalyse community-level conversations about the negative effects of violence on school achievement, delinquency and other outcomes. Community dialogues could include training for parents and teachers in alternative methods of discipline and strengthen links between schools and families so as to create consensus on the underlying causes of violence against children and the need for change.</td>
<td>MOLISA, MOET, Ministry of Information and Communication, People's Committees at all levels, mass organisations, UNFPA, UN Women Union, UNESCO, Plan International. World Vision, Child Fund, Save the Children</td>
<td>National Programme on Child Protection, 2016-2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting open discussion and reporting of violence against children. Violence against children must be seen as an issue of public concern and not simply a private family matter. Government institutions such as MOLISA must investigate why violence against children continues to be under-reported and urgently create more child-friendly reporting mechanisms and protection services. Improving reporting mechanisms in schools and community could also help children deal with school-based violence, whether perpetrated by teachers or peers. Policies that encourage under-reporting by local governments seeking to report favourable statistics should be revised.</td>
<td>MOLISA, MOET, WU, People's Committee, MPS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women Union, UNESCO Plan International. World Vision, Child Fund, Save the Children</td>
<td>The recently approved Children's Law introduces a provision to regulate the responsibilities for “all individuals, agencies and organizations shall be responsible to detect and report cases of children at risk of or being in need of special protection” to MOLISA/DOLISA and People's Committees. The recommendation should refer to further development of guidelines on promoting the under-reporting through sub-law documents.</td>
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</table>
**Understanding the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in Viet Nam**

**Involving children:** Children themselves have a crucial role to play in fighting against all forms of violence. Education on violence prevention and child rights should be included in the new school curricula from kindergarten to university, which is currently undergoing reforms. These reforms should be linked to new mechanisms enabling children to speak out about violence through school-based children’s organizations, the mass media, and family and community meetings involving children, teachers, and parents.

| MOLISA, MOET, UNICEF, Youth Union, Women’s Union, People’s Committee at all levels | National Program on Promotion of Child Participation, 2015-2020 |
| Plan International, World Vision, Child Fund, Save the Children |

**Increasing investment in a strong national child protection system:** Addressing the drivers of violence against children in a systematic and effective manner will require a child protection system that is as robust as the health care and education systems. This needs to be a coordinated effort and should include: a clearly designated authority to manage prevention and response services from the national level to the grass roots; skilled and committed social workers with the mandate to coordinate and deliver services to children and their families; and mobilised contributions from state agencies and NGOs; adequate infrastructure for delivery of prevention and response services at all levels; mechanisms for monitoring and accountability; and sufficient financial resources to make the system function effectively. Such a system is an essential component of modern social welfare systems the world over, wherever governments recognize that the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of children is both a moral obligation of the state and a necessity for economic prosperity and social peace in the future.

| MOLISA, MOET, MOH, MPS, MOJ, People’s Committee, Women’s Union UNICEF, Plan International, World Vision, Child Fund, Save the Children |
| National Programme on Child Protection, 2016-2020 |

**Continue promoting gender equity.** Gender-based inequalities— from son preference to male domestic violence put many women and girls at risk of violence. This could be achieved through national and local campaigns, as well as school-based programs to encourage children to develop attitudes and behaviours conducive to more equal gender relations later in life.

| MOLISA, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, MIC, Women’s Union, UNICEF, UNFPA |
| National Action Plan on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control up to 2020 |
References


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and emotional punishment of children in Vietnam.


