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Collecting Data on Sexual Violence against Children in Surveys

A scoping review of available questions

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Overview

Despite a proliferation of measurement activities over the past two decades to address persistent data gaps on violence against children, some forms of violence have not received sufficient investment to standardize their measurement, including sexual violence. The different approaches, definitions and methodologies used to gather data have made it challenging to monitor sexual violence against children across countries and over time.

To respond to these challenges, UNICEF has embarked on work to develop and validate a dedicated survey module on sexual violence against children. As the first step in its development, UNICEF conducted a scoping review of data collection tools that measure sexual violence against children.[1] The review facilitated the creation of an inventory (or bank) of items (or questions) for further testing and validation.

This document summarizes the findings of the scoping review and the resulting item inventory. The review did not include all existing data collection tools. Rather, it focused on: 1) tools used in studies and surveys on violence implemented between 2000 and 2023; 2) reasonably recent and widely used tools, defined as those which have been used in several studies or surveys and/or implemented in more than one context or high-quality national or international prevalence studies on violence; and 3) the content of such tools, particularly the items used to collect information. The review did not evaluate or assess aspects of the implementation of the tools within studies or surveys (e.g., sample size and design, field team selection and composition, content and length of interviewer training, data quality control procedures, ethical practices). Similarly, it did not summarize the development, validation or psychometric properties of individual tools, which are documented in detail in other papers and articles. The list at the end of this report includes key reference documents and articles for each of the 19 reviewed tools.

Using the inventory bank as a foundation, the objective is for the new survey module to generate robust and comparable data for monitoring purposes and for informing national violence prevention efforts. The module will aim to cover all forms of sexual violence against children, including rape, sexual assault and non-contact forms, such as online sexual violence. It will be designed for population-level measurement of the prevalence of sexual violence in childhood among both boys and girls and will be recommended for inclusion in national household surveys.

Review methodology

The review process started with the selection of 47 data collection tools, including validated and/or widely used adaptations of such tools,[2] identified through prior reviews and expert knowledge. A total of 520 items from all 47 tools were then extracted and input into an inventory spreadsheet. A critical aspect of the review was evaluating the alignment of the item wording with the definitions put forward by the International Classification of Violence against Children (ICVAC).[3] The ICVAC includes operational definitions for all forms of violence against children, including sexual violence, with the aim of creating a standardized and consistent approach to classifying cases of violence for statistical purposes.[4]

The inventory recorded the items used to measure sexual violence, the ICVAC level each corresponded

to (i.e., 301, 302, 303 or 309) and the specific act each item measured (e.g., unwanted touching, forced penetration, etc.). It also included items on frequency (e.g., how many times respondents experienced an act, including in a specified time period), victim characteristics (e.g., age of onset and cessation, impact of experience), perpetrator characteristics (e.g., identity/relationship to the victim, age, gender), setting characteristics (e.g., location, time of day) and disclosure and help-seeking (e.g., reporting the incident to authorities, telling other people about the incident).

The following criteria, drawn from similar past assessments,[5] were applied to identify the most important of the 47 tools for further detailed consideration:

- Rigour of the tool: It has undergone some testing or validation work or some analysis of its psychometric properties as part of its development.[6]
- Feasibility of the tool: Its likelihood of global utility is high, as it has been used in several contexts, and the likelihood of participant completion without undue burden is high.
- Alignment with the objectives of the item inventory and eventual module: It covers at least two types of sexual violence outlined in the ICVAC, it can be repeated over time to track trends in prevalence, and it can involve young adults and adolescents globally.

The initial longlist of 47 tools was screened using the above criteria, with each tool rated on a scale of 1 to 5. Instruments were retained if they met a minimum overall score (greater than 9 out of a possible total of 15) and satisfied core substantive requirements (e.g., experience-based measurement, relevance to adolescents and young adults and suitability for repeat use). Tools were excluded if they measured attitudes only, were one-off country studies without a reusable instrument, lacked sufficient documentation or were not aligned with trend-monitoring objectives. This process resulted in a shortlist of 21 instruments: 15 of these tools were tagged as 'Tier 1' with scores of 13 or above, and the remaining 6 tools (scores between 10 and 12) were tagged as 'Tier 2' based on their partial alignment with the aims of the review and assessment criteria.

Tier 1 tools included the following: the Demographic and Health Survey domestic violence (DHS DV) module; the Disrupting Harm child questionnaire (second round); the Global Kids Online questionnaire (version 2); the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect's Child Abuse Screening Tool Children's Version (ICAST-C) and Retrospective Version (ICAST-R); the International Violence Against Women Survey; the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire: 2nd Revision (JVQ-R2); JVQ-R2 – Adapted Version, as used in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS); the Survey on Women's Well-being and Safety in Europe (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA] study); the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Adverse Childhood Experiences module of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (ACE-BRFSS), Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ) and Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire – Abuse Short Form (ACE-ASF); the US National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence III, 1997–2014 (which uses the JVQ); the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) core questionnaire; and the World Health Organization's Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women.

Tier 2 tools included the following: the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW); the Global School-based Student Health Survey; the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey; the Sexual and Physical Abuse History Questionnaire; the US National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey; and the US Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

Based on the tier classification, 183 individual items from Tier 1 tools were extracted from the larger pool of 520 items and compiled into a spreadsheet. Each item was tagged against a specified level of the ICVAC (i.e., 301, 302, 303 or 309) and a specific act. A subsequent assessment was then conducted at the tool and item levels within each level of the ICVAC. For instance, Level 303 categorizes non-contact sexual violence against a child and includes

acts such as unwanted exposure of sexual organs, sexual harassment and image-based sexual abuse. For each such act, the Tier 1 tools that contained items on the respective act were identified. The items were then further reviewed against some basic considerations, such as clarity and wording of the item and psychometric properties of the item, where available. The items in Tier 1 tools were prioritized; however, items in Tier 2 tools were still reviewed if no Tier 1 item was identified.[7]

The scoping exercise and review also benefited from consultations with an established reference group, including experts directly involved in the development and testing of the reviewed tools, who provided inputs and feedback as well as key reference materials.

Item assessment

This section summarizes the key results and considerations that emerged while undertaking item-level assessments and preparing the inventory. The results and reflections from the item-level review that follow are organized around the three main sub-categories of sexual violence defined in the ICVAC: rape of a child (301); sexual assault of a child (302); and non-contact sexual violence against a child (303).

Rape of a child

The ICVAC defines rape of a child (301) as "vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of a child with any bodily part or object, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given". Illustrative examples (which represent common acts belonging to the category) of rape in the ICVAC include physically forced rape ("If anyone ever physically forces vaginal, anal or oral penetration"), pressured or coerced rape ("If anyone ever uses verbal harassment or other means of coercion to engage in vaginal, anal or oral penetration"), drug and/or alcohol-facilitated rape, non-consensual sexual penetration without physical force or threat ("Instances when penetration was obtained as a result of fraud, deception, manipulation, or abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability"), rape in the context of armed conflict (rape as defined in 301, inclusive of the use or commissioning of rape in some situations as a tactic of war) and gang-perpetrated rape (rape as defined in 301, by organized criminal groups for multiple purposes, including terrorizing a community or other criminal groups).

The following tools include items that aim to capture respondents' experiences of forced penetration: ACE-ASF; ACE-IQ; DHS DV module; ICAST-C and ICAST-R; JVQ tools, including the JVQ-R2; and the VACS. The VACS include a greater number of items compared to the other tools, and they are structured around individual perpetrators and circumstances in which the rape occurred (physically forced, through harassment or threats, etc.).

The review found that there were significant variations in how tools sought to capture information on penetration. The ACE-ASF and ACE-IQ use the phrase "oral, anal or vaginal intercourse", while the DHS DV module, ICAST-C, ICAST-R, JVQ and VACS use "sex" or "sexual intercourse". The DHS DV module also asks about "other sexual acts" in the same question as forced sexual intercourse.

While the concept of 'rape' might seem straightforward, the review revealed the many different ways this concept has been operationalized in existing data collection tools. Table 1 includes some illustrative examples of items designed to capture rape across some of the most widely used tools included in the review. None of them directly ask about forced penetration; instead, most use phrases such as 'sex' or 'sexual intercourse', which may have different meanings for different participants based on their knowledge, cultural background and experience with sex. The ACE-ASF and ACE-IQ come closest to being specific about

describing forced penetration by asking about oral, vaginal or anal intercourse.

The reviewed tools also employed a variety of phrases to capture the unwanted nature of the act. For instance, the ICAST-C and JVQ use the phrase "forced you", while the ACE-ASF, ACE-IQ and ICAST-R use the phrase "when you did not want them to". While the phrases "when you did not want" or "when you did not want them to" ask about the victim's unwillingness, the phrase "against your will" distils the lack of consent into more direct language. To capture lack of consent, the phrase "force you" could imply the use of physical force. The VACS include separate questions about different non-consensual circumstances, i.e., "physically forced sex" or "pressured you to have sex through harassment and threats".

Table 1

Illustrative examples of items intended to capture rape across various tools included in the review

ACE-ASF and ACE-IQ	JVQ-R2	DHS DV module	VACS
Did someone actually have oral, anal or vaginal intercourse with you when you did not want them to?	When you were a child, did a grown-up you know touch your private parts when they shouldn't have or make you touch their private parts? Or did a grown-up you know force you to have sex?	At any time in your life, as a child or as an adult, has anyone ever forced you in any way to have sexual intercourse or perform any other sexual acts when you did not want to?	Has anyone ever physically forced you to have sex against your will and did succeed?

Sexual assault of a child

The ICVAC defines sexual assault of a child (302) as "touching the private parts of a child (not including penetration) or making a child touch the private parts of someone else, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given". The two main illustrative examples of acts under Level 302 are attempted penetration and unwanted groping, fondling or other touching.

Attempted penetration

In the ICVAC, attempted penetration is defined using the same criteria as rape, except that the act is not completed. Items in the following data collection tools are found to capture attempted penetration: ACE-ASF, ACE-IQ, DHS DV, ICAST-C, ICAST-R, JVQ-R2 and VACS. The ACE-ASF and ACE-IQ use the phrase "oral, anal or vaginal intercourse". The JVQ, ICAST-C, ICAST-R and VACS use "sex" or "sexual intercourse". Attempted penetration is captured using a variety of phrases: "try to force you" (DHS DV, JVQ), "try to have sex with you" (ICAST-C), "try to make you have sex" (VACS) and "attempt to have intercourse" (ACE-ASF and ACE-IQ). To capture lack of consent, the DHS DV, ICAST-C and JVQ use the phrase "forced you" or "tried to force you", while the ACE-ASF, ACE-IQ and ICAST-R use the phrase "when you did not want them to", and the VACS use the phrase "against your will". The JVQ reiterates the attempted nature of the act by adding "even if it didn't happen".

Unwanted touching

Items in the following data collection tools are found to capture unwanted touching, namely in the ACE-ASF, ACE-BRFSS, ACE-IQ, ICAST-C, ICAST-R, JVQ-R2 and the VACS.

There are variations in how these tools seek to capture the concept of 'touching', and some tools

ask about both being touched and being made to touch. The ICAST-C and ICAST-R use the phrase "touch your private parts in a sexual way". The JVQ captures both being touched and being made to touch by asking "touch your private parts when you didn't want it or make you touch their private parts". The ACE-IQ includes two items with the phrases "touch or fondle you in a sexual way when you did not want them to" and "make you touch their body in a sexual way when you did not want them to". The ACE-ASF and ACE-BRFSS use "touch or fondle your body in a sexual way" and "have you touch their body in a sexual way". The VACS ask if anyone had ever "touched you in a sexual way without your permission but did not try and force you to have sex" with a note saying that "touching in a sexual way without permission includes fondling, pinching, grabbing or touching you on or around your sexual body parts". Sexual organs are referred to using various phrases across the tools, including "private parts", "sexual body parts" or simply "you".

Non-contact sexual violence against a child

Non-contact sexual violence (303) is the broadest of the sub-categories and is defined in the ICVAC as "any form of verbal or non-verbal non-physical conduct, whether isolated or persistent, that involves unwanted references to any part of the body used for sexual activity or to the sexuality of the child, including conduct facilitated via technology". By its very nature, it includes a wide range of acts. Drawing on the review, inventory and illustrative examples outlined in the ICVAC, the following acts of non-contact sexual violence were identified by the reference group as critical to include in the item inventory: 1) unwanted exposure of sexual organs; 2) sexual harassment; 3) image-based sexual abuse; 4) sexual extortion; 5) online solicitation; 6) sexual grooming; 7) unwanted sexting; 8) stalking of a sexual nature; and 9) sexual rumours.

Unwanted exposure

Items in the European FRA study, ICAST-C, ICAST-R and JVQ capture unwanted exposure of sexual organs. The European FRA study uses the phrase "indecently expose themselves" and "expose their genitals to you". The ICAST-C and ICAST-R ask about both unwanted exposure of the victim as well as the perpetrator by asking if anyone made "you look at their private parts or looked at yours when you did not want to". The JVQ similarly asks if anyone made the victim look at "their private parts by using force or surprise, or by 'flashing' you".

Sexual harassment

The ICVAC defines sexual harassment as "contact or communication with unwanted sexual attention". Items on sexual harassment are found in the European FRA study, ICAST-C, ICAST-R and JVQ. The VACS ask a series of questions about acts of violence that take place online, some of which could be considered sexual harassment, such as being "sent messages that you did not want with advertisements for or links to X-rated websites". However, this item is considered to more directly capture exposure to sexual images on the Internet.

The JVQ-R2 asks if anyone "hurt your feelings by saying or writing something sexual about you or your body", while the JVQ-R2 (ACMS), asks if anyone ever "said, wrote or did something sexual to you that was offensive or intimidating". The ICAST-C and ICAST-R ask if anyone ever "made you upset by speaking to you in a sexual way or writing sexual things about you". The European FRA study includes questions about the following eight topics to ask about sexual harassment:

- Inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated
- Sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended
- Somebody sending or showing you sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts that made you feel offended
- Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates
- Intrusive questions about your private life that made you feel offended
- Intrusive comments about your physical appearance that made you feel offended
- Unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages that offended you

- Inappropriate advances that offended you on social networking websites, such as Facebook, or in Internet chat rooms

Both the Global Kids Online (GKO) and Disrupting Harm (DH) include a question about whether, in the past year, "Someone made sexual comments about me (for example, jokes, stories or comments about my body, appearance or sexual activities) that made me feel uncomfortable". In GKO, respondents are asked whether this happened online or on a phone whereas in DH, there is a follow-up question to understand if this occurred in-person or online.

Broadly, sexual harassment as a concept includes words, speech or actions that are sexual in nature, as well as inappropriate staring or leering (as noted in the ICVAC). Sexual harassment can occur either in person or online, and there is wide variation across tools in whether only one or both settings are measured.

There is an added element in the case of sexual harassment of the victim's perceptions of the act as being offensive and/or intimidating, reflected in the use of phrases such as "hurt feelings", "made you upset" or "offensive or intimidating" across the tools reviewed.

Image-based sexual abuse

This is a broad category that includes acts such as:

- Exposure to sexual images and videos
- Non-consensual image-taking of the sexual organs of, or sexual activities with, a child
- Sharing images, including livestreaming sexual abuse of a child

During the course of the review, another tool about online child sexual abuse was identified and added (referred to as the 'Finkelhor tool').[8] In addition to items on unwanted sexual questions, sexual talks and sexual act requests, the Finkelhor tool's conceptualization of forced image recruitment was also adopted to produce estimates for online grooming. The study defines forced image recruitment as a situation in which a perpetrator tried to coerce a child into providing images when she/he was unwilling or reluctant to do so (an image need not have been provided, however). Unwanted sexting and online solicitation are addressed separately in subsequent sections.

Items found in the European FRA survey, ICAST-C, ICAST-R and JVQ measure various dimensions of image-based sexual abuse. The VACS include a generic item asking if the respondent did something "sexual on the Internet" when she/he did not want to. The ICAST-C asks about exposure to sexual images, asking if anyone "made you watch a sex video or look at sexual pictures". The ICAST-C and ICAST-R also combine exposure to sexual images and non-consensual image-taking of sexual organs or activity, asking if anyone "made a sex video or took photographs of you alone, or with other people, doing sexual things".

The JVQ-R2 (ACMS) includes an item about sharing sexual images, asking if "anyone ever used the Internet or a mobile phone to share sexual images of you without your consent". The European FRA survey has an item about exposure that asks if "somebody made you watch or look at pornographic material against your wishes". It also measures non-consensual image-taking, asking if anyone made you "pose naked in front of any person or in photographs, video or an Internet webcam when you did not want to do this".

The GKO and DH include similar questions on exposure to sexual images or videos online, and sharing of naked images or videos online. Disrupting Harm also includes questions about whether the respondent has taken naked pictures or videos of her/himself and whether she/he has allowed others to take naked pictures or videos of her/him online within the past year. Disrupting Harm also includes a dedicated question on whether someone used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create fake sexual images or videos of the respondent.

Some tools include brief definitions for terms that appear repeatedly, such as sexual photographs or videos, given the need to ask about multiple

forms of image-based sexual abuse. This prevents the need for adding a definition of these terms to each item; however, it also adds another concept to introduce to respondents prior to the start of the interview. This is another structural decision that should be explored further as part of the validation work.

None of the tools reviewed included items on livestreaming child sexual abuse.

Threats to share sexual images and sexual extortion

The ICVAC includes a definition of sexual extortion as the "production and/or use of sexual images and/or videos depicting a child for the purposes of sexual, financial or other personal gains". Sexual extortion can include sexual images taken or obtained without consent, and images obtained consensually and used to humiliate or extort the victim for money, favours or other sexual images. The Finkelhor tool captures sexual extortion using a single question: "Has someone ever threatened to share a sexual picture or video of you to get you to do something—like take or send other sexual pictures of yourself, have a sexual relationship with them, pay them money, or something else?" The question captures threats to share sexual images as well as extortion. The DH also includes a question on whether someone had threatened to share sexual images or videos of the respondent with a follow-up to determine if this occurred online or in-person.

However, to capture sexual extortion, another approach could be to ask a follow-up question about whether certain behaviours that amount to extortion occurred before or after the act of sexual violence. For example, the question could ask if the perpetrator had used threats to try to get the victim to send other sexual photos or had paid her/him (see Appendix 3).

Online solicitation

The ICVAC includes the following definition for online solicitation: "use of ICTs [information and communication technologies] to ask a child to talk about sex (unwanted sexual talks), to share sexual information about her/himself (unwanted sexual questions) or to do something sexual she/he does not want to do (unwanted sexual act requests)". The JVQ-R2 (ACMS) and VACS ask about online solicitation. The JVQ asks if "an adult ever asked you over the Internet or a mobile phone to talk about sex or send sexual images". Therefore, the JVQ measures unwanted sexual conversation and unwanted requests for sexual images, and thus does not address all dimensions of online solicitation.

The VACS and GKO include three items about online solicitation. The following questions are asked to the respondent regarding experiences within the past year:

- Were you asked for sexual information about yourself on the Internet (like what your body looks like without clothes on or sexual things you have done) when you did not want to answer those questions?
- Were you asked to talk about sexual acts with someone on the Internet when you did not want to?
- Were you asked by someone on the Internet to do something sexual when you did not want to?

These three items from the VACS and GKO map closely onto three acts considered to be forms of online solicitation as outlined in the ICVAC. The GKO also includes an item on whether the respondent has been asked on the Internet for a photo or video showing his/her private parts. Disrupting Harm also includes items on solicitation, more specifically, whether the respondent was asked to talk about sex or sexual acts with someone when she/he did not want to and whether the respondent was asked to share an image or video showing her/his private parts when she/he did not want to. Differently from GKO, these questions in Disrupting Harm are not only about online solicitation but rather include a follow-up question to determine if the experience happened in-person or online.

Sexual grooming

The ICVAC includes an adapted definition of sexual grooming as "making contact with a child, including via ICTs, followed by material acts for sexual purposes". The ICVAC further defines cyber-

grooming or online grooming as "when a person or group uses digital media to build a relationship with a child, with the aim of getting the child to share sexual material such as images or videos and/or engage in sexual activities".

It is worth noting that the Finkelhor tool defines online grooming as unwanted solicitation and forced image recruitment, but only when it involves presumed or known adults. Based on this definition, a possible approach to capture online grooming is to identify those respondents who report that they have experienced online solicitation or forced image recruitment and also indicate that the perpetrator was a known adult as part of a follow-up question on perpetrator identity.

Unwanted sexting

The ICVAC includes the following definition of unwanted sexting: "non-consensual sharing or receiving of unwanted sexually explicit photos, videos or messages by known or unknown persons trying to make contact, put pressure on or groom a child".

While the above items on online solicitation capture the solicitation of sexual information and forced recruitment of images, they do not measure whether the victim actually sent sexual information about her/himself. Notably, the item on forced image recruitment only covers images, while sexting is broader and could involve other material as well.
The CSEW, JVQ and VACS all capture sexting in different ways. The VACS and GKO use two items, as follows:

- Did you send sexual information about yourself (like what your body looks like without clothes on or sexual things you have done) when you did not want to?
- Did you send someone a photo or video showing your private parts when you did not want to?

The JVQ-R2, as used in the ACMS, asks if "an adult ever asked you over the Internet or a mobile phone to talk about sex or send sexual images". This item measures both online solicitation and unwanted sexting. The CSEW asks if the respondent had ever received or sent someone a "sexual message", which could be "instant messages, images or videos" or involve "words, pictures or video". It then follows up with a detailed set of options about where the respondent received these messages on the Internet.

While the VACS are behaviourally specific, they do not completely capture unwanted sexting. Proposed modifications could include clarifying that sexting does not necessarily involve the sharing of images or videos (as the VACS imply); rather, it could involve "instant messages, images or videos" as the CSEW describes. Another potential modification is to include both the sending and receiving of messages as was done in the case of Global Kids Online.

Stalking of a sexual nature

The ICVAC defines stalking broadly as "unwanted communication, following or watching a child, including via ICTs or cyber-stalking, which refers to instances of stalking through electronic forms of communication". "Stalking of a sexual nature" is included in the ICVAC as an illustrative example of non-contact sexual violence against a child. None of the Tier 1 tools in the review and inventory capture stalking of a sexual nature. The US National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, however, measures stalking more generally using nine items, as does the CSEW, using two items. The content of these items does not directly capture the 'sexual nature' of such stalking but rather asks about unwanted or persistent behaviours with a sexual undertone. As a result, none of these items on stalking are included in the inventory; instead, 'stalking' behaviours could be asked about as part of follow-up questions capturing the contextual factors surrounding a violent act.

Sexual rumours

None of the data collection tools include specific items on sexual rumours. Therefore, this is a type of sexual violence not measured by any of the existing tools and questions.

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation of children is not a separate sub-category of sexual violence against children in the ICVAC. This is because manifestations of sexual exploitation can overlap with rape, sexual assault or non-contact sexual acts. Instead, forms of child sexual exploitation are included among the illustrative examples of non-contact sexual acts against a child in the ICVAC. One way to capture whether a specific act included an element of exploitation could be to ask a follow-up question (adapted from the VACS wording for sexual exploitation) along the lines of: "When these incidents happened, were you offered or given anything, such as food or money?" Another option could be to follow the example from Disrupting Harm (which has been replicated in the GKO) which includes three items about whether the respondent was offered money or gifts in exchange for sexual images or videos; whether the respondent was offered money or gifts to meet someone in person to do something sexual; and whether the respondent was threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual activities. In DH, these items include follow-up questions to understand if this happened in-person or online. In DH, there is an additional question about how often, in the past year, the respondent accepted money or gifts in exchange for sending sexual images or videos of her/himself.

Response options

While the reviewed tools have their own convention of response options, the majority use response options that capture whether the respondent experienced the act ("Yes"), did not experience it ("No"), did not know how to respond to the question or did not know if she/he experienced the act ("Don't know"), or did not wish to respond ("Refuse to answer"). Some tools such as the ICAST-C and ICAST-R incorporate frequency of experiencing the act in the responses by providing the options: "Yes, around 50 times or more in the past year (once a week or more)", "Yes, around 13–50 times in the past year (several times a month)", "Yes, around 6–12 times in the past year (once a month)", "Yes, around 3–5 times in the past year", "Yes, around 1–2 times in the past year", "Not in the past year, but it has happened before", "Never happened in my life", "Prefer not to say". The ACE-IQ similarly embeds frequency within response options by using the convention: Many times/A few times/ Once/Never/Refused.

Follow-up questions on circumstances surrounding experiences of sexual violence, disclosure and help-seeking

The items outlined above will generate data to estimate the prevalence of sexual violence in childhood. However, to calculate other estimates and indicators, additional follow-up items are needed (e.g., on frequency, victim and perpetrator characteristics, location, disclosure and help-seeking). Therefore, the review also explored potential follow-up items collected from the various data collection tools, and it categorized these as Tier 1 and Tier 2 (see Appendix 2). Tier 1

items provide critical additional information about the circumstances surrounding experiences of sexual violence and are particularly important for informing policy and programmatic responses. These include the following: whether the incident occurred in the past year; victim age at occurrence; identity, sex and age of the perpetrator; and frequency of occurrence. A second set of items (classified as Tier 2) was identified, which captures additional details about the circumstances that are useful to collect for further detailed analyses. These include characteristics such as location, resulting injuries, etc.[9]

An additional set of follow-up items on disclosure and help-seeking was extracted from the VACS, as they include extensive response options (see Appendix 3). While information about disclosure and help-seeking does not strictly relate to the circumstances surrounding the incident, it generates valuable and useful insights for programmatic and policy responses to violence.

Conclusions

This review and scoping exercise provide a useful starting point for the development of a dedicated survey module on sexual violence against children. Some practical insights that arose and will be important to consider in the follow-up validation work include:

- *For most tools, published documentation on whether (and to what extent) validation work was completed is very limited*. Some complex and culturally driven concepts, such as 'sex' and 'consent', do not seem to have been adequately tested in terms of respondent understanding and comprehension from a suitable cross-section of countries and cultures. As a result, it is not possible to determine which items will generate the most valid and reliable information on the basis of the review alone.

- *Item formulations for capturing different acts of sexual violence across existing data collection tools are varied and inconsistent*, suggesting a need to thoroughly consider and test different approaches to item structure.
  - One approach is to start with a broad or generic statement and then follow up with an explanation or a list of examples. For instance, the VACS include the following question: "In the past 12 months, have any of these ever happened to you on the Internet? (a) You were sent a message that you did not want with advertisements for or links to X-rated websites; (b) You opened a message or a link in a message that showed pictures of naked people or of people having sex that you did not want to see; (c) You saw or received a sexual message, image or video about someone else that you did not want to see".
  - Another approach is to embed examples within the item itself. An example of this item structure, also from the VACS, is: "In the past 12 months, were you asked for sexual information about yourself on the Internet (like what your body looks like without clothes on or sexual things you have done) when you did not want to answer those questions?"
  - Each approach has its advantages and drawbacks. The former approach is more specific by asking about each act separately, but it also tends to render each item very long. The latter approach often results in shorter items because it integrates examples of the act within the item itself. However, because it includes multiple examples of the act, it might be confusing to respondents or result in them focusing on only one of the examples provided.

- *While some forms of violence (like rape) have been covered by all the tools, others (particularly those related to non-contact acts like livestreaming) are not captured by existing items*.

- *Most items in the final inventory employ the*

simple response option convention of 'Yes/No/Don't know/Refuse to answer'. To ease respondent interpretation, it is ideal to maintain a consistent set of response options across all items, where feasible. Follow-up validation work should include testing of response options, probe for effective recall and explore respondent preferences for the most suitable response options.

Given the overall lack of detailed documentation regarding the validation of existing items, as well as the need to introduce additions and adaptations,[10] a complete validation will need to be undertaken. In particular, the sensitive nature of the topic means the validation draft items should be included in cognitive testing, as many of the concepts are open to multiple interpretations. The validation work will need to explore which follow-up items can reasonably and feasibly be included in the final module, as well as the final structure of such items and response options. The selection of follow-up items to include in the module should carefully balance the need to collect important and relevant data with the need to minimize respondent burden.

One approach to minimize respondent burden could be to include follow-up items for each type of sexual violence experienced (i.e., once for ICVAC Level 301, once for 302 and so on). The disadvantage of this method is that it will not be possible to obtain estimates of victim and perpetrator characteristics for each separate act. Alternatively, the number of follow-up items can be minimized and asked after each main item. However, this should be implemented carefully, using only the most essential follow-up items, as the respondent burden could otherwise increase significantly. The follow-up items could also potentially be structured as a 'menu' of options that can be selected when the module is being implemented, taking into consideration relevance, importance, respondent burden and administration protocols.

Appendix 1

Background note on the ICVAC

This review and inventory is guided by the framework of the ICVAC, which is the first-ever statistical standard on violence against children. The ICVAC responds to the lack of agreed-upon standard operational definitions of violence against children, which has long hindered measurement in the field and global monitoring and tracking of progress towards international goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Due to the lack of consistent statistical standards, international estimates of the prevalence of violence against children are also not comparable, as countries have developed and used their own definitions in line with their legislations and evolving social norms.

The ICVAC builds on a framework developed by Hamby[11] to define violent acts based on four critical elements: deliberate, unwanted, non-essential and harmful. All four characteristics must be present simultaneously for an act to amount to violence.

The unit of classification in the ICVAC is a violent act committed against a child (or children). Violent acts are, therefore, classified into mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, aggregated into two hierarchical levels: Level 1 and Level 2. Level 1 contains six categories, which reflect all acts of violence against children, namely homicide, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, neglect and other acts of violence against a child not elsewhere classified. The ordering of categories in Level 1 does not imply any ranking of severity or seriousness. Level 2 represents sub-categories of Level 1 acts of the same nature but categorized according to additional elements and criteria. Level 1 categories are the broadest and have a one-digit code (1, 2, 3 and so on), and Level 2 categories have a three-digit code (102, 201, 301 and so on). Taken together, Level 1 and Level 2 categories are intended to encompass all acts of violence against children.

The ICVAC defines sexual violence against a child (coded as 3 in ICVAC) as any "deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act of a sexual nature, either completed or attempted, that is perpetrated against a child, including for exploitative purposes, and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain or psychological suffering". The category of sexual violence has four Level 2 sub-categories: rape of a child (301), sexual assault of a child (302), non-contact sexual violence against a child (303) and other acts of sexual violence against a child not elsewhere classified (309). Table 2 summarizes the definitions and illustrative examples as described in the ICVAC.

Table 2

Definitions and illustrative examples of sexual violence sub-categories in the ICVAC

ICVAC sub-categories of sexual violence against a child	Illustrative examples
301 Rape of a child Vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of a child with any bodily part or object, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given	Physically forced rape; pressured or coerced rape; drug- and/or alcohol-facilitated rape; non-consensual sexual penetration without physical force or threat; rape in the context of armed conflict; gang-perpetrated rape
302 Sexual assault of a child Touching the private parts of a child (not including penetration) or making the child touch the private parts of someone else, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given	Attempted rape; unwanted groping, fondling or other touching
303 Non-contact sexual violence against a child Any form of verbal or non-verbal non-physical conduct, whether isolated or persistent, that involves unwanted references to any part of the body used for sexual activity or to the sexuality of the child, including conduct facilitated via technology	Sexual harassment, including via ICTs; threat of a sexual nature; exposure of a child to sexual abuse and pornography, including via ICTs; online solicitation; sexual grooming, including cyber-grooming; sexual bullying and/or unwanted sexual jokes, taunts or comments; exposing of sexual organs; trapping a child and subjecting him/her to sexual advances; subjecting a child to sexual rumours; persistent leering looks; stalking of a sexual nature; unwanted sexting; livestreaming sexual abuse of a child; sexual extortion, coercing and blackmailing a child for sexual purposes; non-consensual image-taking of the sexual organs of or sexual activities with a child, including when amounting to sexual violence
309 Other acts of sexual violence against a child not elsewhere classified Acts of sexual violence not described in categories 301–303	

Note: Refer to the ICVAC for the complete statistical classification and relevant footnotes.

Appendix 2

Review and inventory methodology

The scoping review involved several steps:

1. Internet searches for data collection tools on sexual violence and/or intimate partner violence among persons under 18 years of age, and studies designed specifically to measure violence against children.
2. Database searches (e.g., PubMed) of studies or survey results published from January 2021 to October 2023.
3. Search of the International Household Survey Network's Central Survey Catalog (<www.ihsn.org>). The Central Survey Catalog is maintained in collaboration with the World Bank and several national and international agencies. It provides a searchable list of surveys conducted in low- and middle-income countries. The Catalog provides rich metadata, including survey questionnaires, manuals and reports, and a list of related citations. The International Household Survey Network also has a Citation Catalog to search and browse citations, including journal articles, working papers, books, chapters and dissertations.
4. Review of the UNICEF report entitled *Measuring Violence against Children: Inventory and assessment of quantitative studies*, which identified and referenced several studies and surveys, including those related to sexual violence against children.
5. Consideration of recent systematic reviews[12] to ascertain the measures that were widely used across several studies. These systematic reviews involved a comprehensive search and critical appraisal of adult retrospective self-report, child and adolescent self-report and caregiver self-report measures.

To be considered for inclusion in this review and inventory, data collection tools had to meet the following criteria:

1. Collected information on any form of sexual violence against children, including but not limited to children's lifetime and recent experiences, perpetrators of sexual violence, help-seeking behaviours of child victims, and knowledge, attitudes and practices related to sexual violence against children
2. Was implemented between 2000 and 2023
3. Was quantitative (or based on mixed methods with a strong quantitative component)
4. Had as one of its goals the collection of prevalence and/or incidence data on sexual violence against children
5. Was large scale, either at the national or sub national level
6. Was publicly available, with some written documentation, or was available upon request.

The above inclusion criteria are subject to the following caveats:

1. The review did not capture all prevalence studies or surveys on violence against children, as the focus was on identifying those for which the questionnaire or measure used to collect the information was readily available and published.
2. The review did not typically capture adaptations of standardized tools, as they were too numerous (e.g., the ACE-IQ alone has been used in 63 studies, with each study making some adaptations to the original tool), and documentation was not always clear on whether, or how, tools had been adapted. However, key adaptations of widely used tools were included, e.g., the JVQ-R2 as used in the ACMS.
3. The review only recorded reasonably recent and widely used data collection tools, defined as those which had been used in several studies or surveys and in more than one context. It is not intended as a comprehensive review of all measures on violence against children, which are captured elsewhere.[13]
4. The review was only conducted on materials and documentation produced in English, or for which a translation in English was available, due to the composition and capacity of the review team. Tools and questionnaires that

were identified in other languages were not prioritized in this inventory but have been stored for future review.

To the degree that information was available, the review also documented some basic characteristics of the data collection tools, including how sexual violence was defined or conceptualized and operationalized, and steps taken to validate the tools.

Notably, the review included the survey questionnaire from Global Kids Online which is an international collaborative research initiative between UNICEF, the London School of Economics and Political Science and EU Kids Online Network.[14] The Global Kids Online questionnaire has been widely adapted and used in more than 30 countries. The Disrupting Harm questionnaire was developed by UNICEF Innocenti as part of a joint research project with ECPAT International and INTERPOL.[15] Among other things, the research project includes a household survey of internet-using children aged 12 to 17 years and their parents. While several of the questions are based on Global Kids Online, Disrupting Harm captures additional forms of online child sexual abuse, including online sexual exploitation. The first round of Disrupting Harm surveys was completed in 2022 in 13 countries and a second round of surveys is expected to take place in an additional 12 countries.

The review revealed an overlap in some tools that capture both intimate partner violence and sexual violence against children. This is because some data collection tools, such as the DHS DV and the World Health Organization's Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence, include women and girls of reproductive age (typically defined as aged 15 years and older). These data collection tools measure lifetime and past-year experiences of intimate partner sexual violence, as well as sexual violence by non-partners. Such an approach allows for an analysis of linkages and intersections between experiences of sexual violence in childhood and in adulthood, and between childhood sexual violence and intimate partner sexual violence.

The review also revealed an overlap in tools that captured information on sexual and reproductive health and traumatic experiences, including in conflict settings. Most of these tools were not included because they were intended for clinician assessment and not for use in self-report surveys (e.g., the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire; the University of California, Los Angeles Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Index), assessed sexual violence using behaviourally non-specific items (e.g., the War Events Questionnaire, Adolescent Complex Emergency Exposure Scale) or were not developed recently.

Appendix 3

Inventory of follow-up items

Tier 1 follow-up items

Variable	Item	Source
Past year	Did these incidents happen to you in the past 12 months? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	Multiple questionnaires
Victim age of onset	How old were you the first time any of these incidents happened? __ years old	JVQ
Identity of perpetrator	Who did this? • Brother, sister or other child who lived with you (cousin, foster sibling, etc.) • Biological or adoptive father • Step-father or live-in boyfriend • Biological or adoptive mother • Step-mother or live-in girlfriend • Foster parent • Relative who lived in your home (uncle, grandparent, etc.) • Relative who did not live with you • Parent's boyfriend, girlfriend, date or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend who did not live with you • Adult you knew from some organization, such as a teacher, coach or youth group leader • Boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend • Anyone else you knew, such as a friend, neighbour or schoolmate • Stranger (a stranger is someone you don't know) • Other _____ (write in who it was) • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ
Sex of perpetrator (ask only when gender is not already clear)	Was this person a man, woman, boy or girl? • Man • Woman • Boy • Girl • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ

Age of perpetrator	• 0–14 years old • 15–17 years old • 18–29 years old • 30–44 years old • 45–59 years old • 60 years old and over • Age not known	Adapted
Frequency (only for rape and attempted rape items)	In your life, did this happen to you… • Once • More than once • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	

Tier 2 follow-up items

Variable	Item	Source
Victim age of cessation	How old were you the last time any of these incidents happened? __ years old	JVQ
Frequency	In your life, did these incidents happen… • Daily • Weekly • Monthly • Once or twice a year • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	Multiple questionnaires
Stalking	Did the person who did this also repeatedly give you unwanted sexual attention, such as following you, sending you unwanted gifts or messages or showing up at your home or school, when she/he knew you did not want her/him to? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	New item, adapted from the US National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey
Sexual extortion (if respondent answers yes to item on threats to share sexual images)	Did she/he threaten to share sexual photographs or videos of you to try to get you to… • Take or send other sexual photographs or videos of yourself • Have a sexual relationship with her/him • Pay her/him money • Something else • No, she/he didn't try to get me to do anything else • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	Adapted from the Finkelhor tool

Sexual exploitation	When these incidents happened, were you offered or given anything? • Food, money or gifts • A place to stay • Good grades • School fees • Employment • Another person got food, gifts, money, a place to stay or employment • Other things not listed • No, I was not offered or given anything • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	Adapted from the VACS
Location (Level 301 and 302)	Where were you when these incidents happened? • At or near home • At school (inside, in a school yard or on a bus) • At daycare or an after-school programme • Somewhere else • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ
Location (Level 303)	Where did these incidents happen? • At or near home • At school (inside, in a school yard or on a bus) • At daycare or an after-school programme • Via a texting or messaging service, e.g., SMS, WhatsApp, iMessage, Signal, Telegram, Viber • Social media website online, e.g., Facebook, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat • Somewhere else in real life • Somewhere else online • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ and CSEW
Victim physical injury	Were you physically hurt when this happened? Hurt means you could still feel pain in your body the next day. You are hurt when you have a bruise, a cut that bleeds or a broken bone. • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ
Victim emotional impact	Thinking back to when it happened, how afraid did you feel? Would you say you felt… • Not at all afraid • A little afraid • Very afraid • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ

Impact on victim school attendance	Did you miss any days of school, or were you unable to complete your schoolwork, because of what happened? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	JVQ
Time of day	At about what time of day did this happen? • Morning (sunrise to noon) • Afternoon (noon to sunset) • Evening (sunset to midnight) • Late at night (midnight to sunrise) • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS

Follow-up items on disclosure and help-seeking

Variable	Item	Source
Disclosure	Did you tell anyone about these experiences? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS
Disclosure	Who did you tell? • Parent or caregiver • Brother, sister or sibling • Boyfriend, girlfriend or romantic partner • Ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend or ex-romantic partner • Other relatives • Friend • Neighbour • Traditional healer • Doctor, nurse or other medical personnel • Non-governmental organization worker • Teacher • Employer • Community leader • Religious leader • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS

Reasons for non-disclosure	What was the main reason you did not tell anyone? • Did not know who to go to • Afraid of getting in trouble • Embarrassed for self or family • Dependent on the person who did this to me • The person who did this threatened me • Did not think it was a problem • Felt it was my fault • Afraid of being abandoned • Did not need or want to tell anyone • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS
Help-seeking	Did you try to seek help for any of these experiences? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS
Help-seeking	Where did you go for help? • A doctor, nurse or other health-care worker • Police or other security personnel • A lawyer, judge, magistrate or other legal professional, other than police • A social worker or counsellor • A helpline • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS
Help-seeking	Did you receive help from any of these places? • Yes • No • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS
Reasons for not seeking help	What was the main reason you did not seek help? • Did not know who to go to • Afraid of getting in trouble • Embarrassed for self or family • Could not afford services • Dependent on the person who did this to me • The person who did this threatened me • Did not think it was a problem • Felt it was my fault • Afraid of being abandoned • Did not need or want services • Afraid of community violence • Services too far away • Don't remember • Refuse to answer	VACS

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Endnotes

1 The terms 'data collection tools', 'measurement tools' or simply 'tools' are used interchangeably in this report as umbrella terms to describe questionnaires, measures and instruments that were used (once or repeatedly) in surveys on violence against children.

2 For example, an adapted version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ), as used in the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS), was included as a separate tool from the standard JVQ.

3 United Nations Children's Fund, International Classification of Violence against Children, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

4 For a more detailed description of the ICVAC and its structure, see Appendix 1.

5 Mathews, Ben, et al., Scoping Study for Research into the Prevalence of Child Abuse in Australia: Report to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Queensland University of Technology, Australian Centre for Child Protection (University of South Australia), 2016.

6 Given the critical importance of content validity, the possibility of rating the tools separately based on cognitive testing results was considered. However, this rating was ultimately not implemented, as the infrequent publishing of cognitive testing results would have made it difficult to accomplish and may have resulted in unclear ratings for most tools.

7 For a more detailed description of the review methodology and inclusion criteria, see Appendix 2.

8 Finkelhor, David, Heather Turner and Deirdre Colburn, 'Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses against Children in the US', JAMA Network Open, vol. 5, no. 10, 2022, e2234471, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.34471>.

9 The age and sex of respondents have not been included as it is assumed these would be collected as part of a separate demographic/background module or set of items within the larger survey framework.

10 For example, the experts involved in the reference group for the module development considered it important to capture livestreaming as a manifestation of online sexual violence because respondents may think of livestreaming as different from non-consensual image-taking and, therefore, a separate item may promote recall. Because this type of sexual violence is not measured by any of the existing tools and questions, it requires the drafting of an entirely new item.

11 Hamby, Sherry, 'On Defining Violence, and Why It Matters', Psychology of Violence, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 167–180.

12 Meinck, Franziska, et al., 'Measuring Violence Against Children: A COSMIN systematic review of the psychometric properties of child and adolescent self-report measures', Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 152483802210821, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221082152>; Steele, Bridget, et al., (2023). 'Measuring Violence Against Children: A COSMIN systematic review of the psychometric and administrative properties of adult retrospective self-report instruments on child abuse and neglect', Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 1524838022114591, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221145912>.

13 Ibid.

14 For more information about Global Kids Online, see <http://globalkidsonline.net/>.

15 For more information about Disrupting Harm, see <https://safeonline.global/disrupting-harm-2/>.

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