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**Citation**
Executive Summary

The SVRI is a global south based, women-run organisation, focusing on supporting practitioner research partnerships for evidence-building around the issue of violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC), committed to building a gender equitable world, where we can all live free from violence driven by gender inequality. Through our strategic plan we contribute to regional and global evidence building on what works to end violence against women and violence against children, with a focus on low and middle income countries (LMICs) where the burden of gendered violence is greatest, yet where the least resources are available for research and evidence based response and prevention efforts.

Over the past 12-18 months, SVRI has undertaken a series of processes, including a scoping review of work done by SVRI on VAC and child sexual abuse (CSA) along with a series of dialogues with the field and SVRI Leadership Council and Board using multiple platforms and methods, to frame our work on VAC and CSA moving forward.

Overall findings:

- SVRI has a long history (since 2006) of work on CSA.
- SVRI has skills within the team, SVRI advisors and partners to guide and support this work.
- The field supports SVRIs expansion of our VAC work, with a particular focus on CSA.
- SVRI is a trusted and respected voice in the field and can leverage our convening power to bring the VAC and VAW fields together, jointly co-create priorities, challenge hierarchies of knowledge, introduce feminist approaches, and strengthen research on CSA in LMICs.
- Maintain current work and contributions to the VAC and CSA field, focusing in on CSA.

What this might look like in terms of our current strategy is summarised below:

**Building evidence:**
- Expand our grant making funds for CSA research in LMICs
- Dissemination and communication of research and tools through SVRI network and knowledge hub

**Strengthening capacity:**
- Support and strengthen capacity of LMIC researchers on CSA research and efforts.
- Develop research tools and guidelines to strengthen CSA research e.g. guidance on definitions, terminologies and participatory research methods.
- Create and support the use of ethical guidance for impactful CSA research especially in LMICs.

**Promoting partnerships:**
- Create spaces for cross field dialogue and discussion to address challenging issues and develop a uniting lens, framework, or language for the field.
- At the SVRI Forum, deepen the focus on VAC and CSA and support, invite more researchers from LMICs working on these issues to attend.

**Influencing change:**
- Track funding for research on CSA and VAC in LMICs
- Co-develop an inclusive and representative research agenda on CSA
- Develop guidance with funders on ethical funding and ethical research on CSA.

Based on the findings and recommendations, the SVRI plans to secure additional funding to put the recommendations into action in a strategic and sustainable way.
I. Background

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) is the largest global network for advancing research on violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC). Data show that more than 50% of children have experienced some form of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse or neglect in their lifetimes and that this violence can have wide-ranging and lifelong consequences for the individuals concerned.1 Continuing research is essential, particularly in LMICs, to learn how to effectively prevent and respond to VAC and child sexual abuse (CSA) and to inform policies and practice. There is a growing call from both the VAC and VAW fields to work more closely together to address the multiple linkages and intersections between these forms of violence including: shared risk factors, common underlying social norms, co-occurrence, intergenerational effects, common and compounding consequences, and adolescence.2 Additional knowledge on intersections is critical to inform programme design and to examine how integrated programming would work in practice and how best to monitor progress.3

In 2021, SVRI initiated a project to explore whether and how to strengthen our specific contributions towards ending violence against children (VAC) and child sexual abuse (CSA) and advance our work in these areas in line with our broader strategy goals; namely: building evidence, strengthening capacity, promoting partnerships, and influencing change. As SVRI explored how to fortify and expand this work, one of the aims was to think through the question of focusing on CSA exclusively. Throughout the consultative processes and therefore this report, we use the phrase VAC and CSA to indicate that whilst we recognise that CSA is part of the broader field of violence against children we also know that this is an area that needs to be specifically prioritised because it is a significantly under-researched area. SVRI is ideally placed to promote, support, and strengthen research collaborations on VAC, including a strong focus on CSA, led by researchers in LMICs as well as to contribute to getting CSA onto the agendas of both VAW and VAC researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders.4

4 SVRI. Oak Foundation- Core Funding Proposal.
II. Where are we now? Key findings from the scoping review

To successfully embark on this work, we reviewed SVRI’s past and current VAC and CSA work which provided a deep dive into the focus, depth and strength of our VAC and CSA work and a starting point for evolving a strategy around future work on these issues. For this review, a total of 1273 products were reviewed from the website as well as a further 41 entries from the SVRI Forum programmes. In addition, a key informant interview was held with the Executive Director of SVRI, Elizabeth Dartnall, on 17 March 2021. Resources were categorised according to their underlying VAC theme, SVRI strategic goal area, type of resource, and region of focus.

The review revealed that SVRI has a long history (since 2006) of addressing VAC, with a focus on intersections and CSA, and has capacity both in the team and on the Leadership Council to strengthen this work. Specific areas where most SVRI work has been focused were identified as:
- VAW/VAC intersections including parenting and adolescence work (30%)
- CSA (25%)
- Adolescence (17%) – including sexual violence focused work
- General (17%) – indicating broader focus on VAC

The review showed that SVRI has the reach and network to ensure that the VAC and CSA work already being done in LMICs is supported and amplified, and that participation from and inclusion of voices from LMICs continues this topic. Other specific strengths included methodological work on child participation in research. SVRI platforms such as the Forum were also highlighted in terms of the ability to connect, expand, and increase collaboration between diverse individuals from the VAW and VAC fields. Potential obstacles and challenges to expanding this work were identified, including:
- Lack of shared definitions, tools and methods in the VAC field
- Ensuring continued funding dedicated to VAC and CSA work & retaining capacity in the team
- Tensions between VAW and VAC field

This review provided us with a strong understanding of where SVRI currently was in terms of work, positioning and perception.
III. Consultative Processes: Scope and Methodology

Online Facilitated Dialogues
Seven live conversation events were held via Zoom. The first of these was an internal dialogue held with SVRI staff and the Leadership Council (LC). Six subsequent events were held with external stakeholders from the VAC and CSA, VAC-VAW Intersections, and VAW(Girls) fields during July and August 2021 in English and Spanish. Dialogue sessions with external stakeholders were planned to accommodate both EAP and LAC region time zones.

Dialogues were divided into themes as shown in Figure 1.

- **Theme One**
  - Dialogues 1 a,b,c
  - SVRI’s VAC AND CSA Strategy
    - Pros and cons of strengthening SVRI’s VAC and CSA work and agenda.
    - SVRI’s key strengths and contributions to advancing the VAC and CSA field.
    - Areas within VAC and CSA that SVRI should focus on.

- **Theme Two**
  - Dialogues 2 a,b,c
  - Politics of working across VAC AND CSA Fields
    - Bringing the VAC/VAW fields together
    - Actions that could lead to more coordination, collaboration or integration.
    - Approaches that the VAC/VAW fields can share with each other

Figure 1. Dialogue Themes

Semi-structured inquiry guides were developed for each session, and these were reviewed by external reviewers before being used in the sessions. Each session included a brief plenary during which participants were introduced to the project followed by small group discussions in breakout rooms facilitated by an SVRI team member. Small group work enabled participants to consider the questions from the inquiry guide in greater depth. Jamboard was used to provide different participation options.
Recruitment and participation: In May 2021, the SVRI published a blog introducing the project and encouraging people to sign-up to SVRI’s member mailing list to stay up to date with invitations on the Update. A dedicated email address was provided so that people could email enquiries about the project or processes through which they could engage. A hybrid model was used to recruit participants including broad invitations to register via SVRI social media channels. Each session was advertised several times in the weeks preceding each dialogue (see figure 2) via Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

![Figure 2: Example of SVRI Post on Twitter for Dialogue 1](image)

To leverage SVRI’s extensive network of over 8000 members globally, information about the external consultations was also sent out weekly via the SVRI Update. In addition, given SVRI’s roots in feminist movement and VAW work, additional efforts were required to ensure that stakeholders from the VAC field were engaged, and targeted invitations were sent to key partners to try ensure participate of VAC experts. Registered participants received reminders for the sessions, 1 week, 1 day and 1 hour before the event. They also received an email from SVRI one day before which shared key discussion questions as well as practical information about the session.
**Participation Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Registered</th>
<th>Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>2b</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, of 183 people that registered for the events, 66 people (36 percent) attended. Most of those that registered and/or attended indicated that they were involved in VAC/VAW intersections work, in addition to their primary focus of VAW or VAC/CSA work.

**Flexible approach:** During the inception phase, the team had agreed that this would be an evolving process and that SVRI would adapt the methodology as necessary depending how the process evolved. Dialogue sessions initially had limited spaces to allow for maximum, in-depth participation within the smaller breakout rooms that could be made available. However, when actual participation did not match the numbers of people that registered for sessions, the team increased the number of places available for registration for dialogue 2, recognising that less than 50 percent of registrants were consistently attending the sessions.

To ensure as much engagement as possible, the team also tried to accommodate requests from stakeholders. For instance, only 2 sessions per theme were planned. However, since dialogue 1b was unintentionally scheduled for a day that clashed with Eid-al Adha, an important religious day of observance for Muslims, another date was added on August 3. Similarly, when registrations for Dialogue 2 filled up, the team received a request from the LAC region to hold an additional session. The team therefore added another session, especially for these stakeholders and was conducted in Spanish.

Flexibility was also key in terms of people not being limited to one mode of engagement. Participants could respond to questions and contribute to the project through using the moderated discussion board (discussed below) or by email. In addition, they could also request to speak to a member of the team if they preferred to share their thoughts in a one-on-one
interview. Follow up emails were sent to all participants who had registered but were unable to attend the sessions and the key discussion questions were included, to allow responses to be gathered via email.

Finally, although facilitation guides were prepared for each session, the structure of these sessions was adapted in response to how many people were in attendance and the way the discussion flowed. For instance, if there were fewer people, the team spent the time in plenary and did not divide the group into breakout rooms.

Consent: At the beginning of each session, consent to record was requested to assist with notetaking and reporting. All participants were informed that recordings would be used by the project team to enhance accuracy and understanding during the data analysis process. All data were anonymised in notes and in any reporting, concluding with this final report, to protect the confidentiality of all participants. All recordings were deleted after key points were documented.

Online discussion boards
The moderated discussion board (via Forums using Website Toolbox) was open to all stakeholders between June to October 2021. New questions were posted onto the board at regular intervals and in total six key questions were posted between June 14th and September 3rd, 2021. The questions were adapted from the inquiry guides for the dialogues and followed the same sequence- i.e., key questions from theme one was posted earlier and key questions from theme two were posted later. The questions were also translated into French and Spanish and responses in these languages were welcomed.

Recruitment and participation: The discussion board was publicised via SVRI social media channels, as shown in Figure 2. When new questions were posted on the discussion board, these were advertised on SVRI social media channels (see Figure 3) and reminders and links to the questions were also included in the weekly SVRI Updates. For broader dissemination, the whole SVRI team used customised email signatures that provided links to the discussion board. Eight individuals posted on the discussion board in total.
Our online discussion board aims to explore how to strengthen specific contributions towards ending #ViolenceAgainstChildren and #ChildSexualAbuse is still live. We want to advance our work in these areas, while also building evidence, strengthening capacity, promoting partnerships, and influencing change. Your contributions will help us achieve our goals. Please join the ongoing conversation: https://bit.ly/35DJr5l.
#EndVAC #EndCSA

Figure 3: Example of linked in post for discussion board

Discussion board questions
- What strengths and unique contributions could SVRI bring to the VAC / CSA field?
- What are SVRI’s ‘blind spots’ when it comes to SVRI’s VAC and CSA work?
- What specifically within VAC / CSA should SVRI focus on?
- What VAC and CSA stakeholders should SVRI reach out to during this process and to explore future partnerships?
- What are the pros and cons (advantages and disadvantages) of the violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC) fields working together more closely?
- How do we work together more – can we share examples and ideas of solutions and actions that could lead to more coordination, collaboration, partnership, or integration between the two fields?
Limitations: what obstacles, restrictions did we note?

“I really admire SVRI for doing these consultations and doing them in many different ways and getting that feedback, but it is important to consider those that didn’t engage...will SVRI be doing more targeted outreach to actors in the field whose buy in would be really very necessary?” (Participant, Dialogue)

One key limitation was levels of participation. Despite concerted efforts to reach out to stakeholders through several channels and a high level of registrations, actual participation in the events and on the discussion boards did not meet expectations. During the events participation from people working in the VAC field was particularly limited. This could be attributable to SVRI’s reputation as a feminist organisation focused on VAW and possible assumptions about the orientation of the sessions. As one stakeholder noted, “As SVRI develops their future strategy on this work, this question of who needs to be engaged and how to do so successfully should be considered”. Participation was also probably impacted by general fatigue and overload of virtual sessions, meetings, and events due to COVID.

In terms of levels of engagement from attendees, we had a broad range of participants including many from LMICs, and we were able to learn a great deal from their inputs. However, some attended purely to listen and wanted to hear presentations of solutions to bridging the gaps between the VAW and VAC fields. Again, during this time of webinar overload, it is possible that people perceived the consultations sessions as learning events, whereas the sessions were structured as dialogues. All the publicity prior to events and the emails that went to all the registered participants explained that the event was aimed at hearing diverse viewpoints and learning from the field.
IV. Consultations: What did we learn?

Theme One: SVRI’s VAC and CSA Strategy

Views on SVRI strengthening VAC and CSA work and agenda
Participants were positive – and even enthusiastic – for SVRI to strengthen their work on VAC and CSA, noting that it is an especially urgent and widespread issue and needs more people working on addressing it. They saw this expansion as a logical extension of SVRI’s work (because of the many intersections between VAC and VAW) as well as being an area that would benefit from SVRI’s contributions in alignment with the organisation’s four strategic goals. Awareness of SVRI’s long history of VAC work was mixed with some unaware of it, others believing it was part of earlier work but not current work, and others engaging with SVRI’s current work on the topic. Participants expressed that SVRI is a trusted voice and partner in the field and expanding this area of work fits well with what SVRI already does. They also saw an opportunity for SVRI to leverage their own existing networks and convening power to be able to link these areas.

When asked what strengths and unique contributions SVRI could bring to the VAC / CSA field, participants identified that the SVRI is:

- A trusted and respected voice in the field
- Able to act as a convenor/networker that can bring different groups together to help find common ground, address the tensions between the fields, and potentially coordinate a global conversation
- Known for its work on priority and agenda setting
- Known for its work on research uptake
- Known for supporting, growing, and amplifying LMIC-based research and researchers
- Known for embracing various sources of evidence and challenging hierarchies of evidence
- Deeply committed to a feminist approach

Key areas where SVRI can contribute to the VAC field
During the consultations participants discussed key areas wherein SVRI could play a significant role directly related to their strengths and the strategic goals of the organisation.
**Do no harm:** As mentioned above, SVRI already has a long history of engaging with VAC and CSA work, capacity and expertise in the area, and the reach and opportunities to further strengthen and amplify work being done in LMIC’s in this field. When discussing the potential to strengthen and expand SVRI’s role in this space, it was clear that ‘doing no harm’ was important as was engaging with the field in ways that contribute and do not reinforce existing siloes or tensions and / or create new ones.

**Convenor and container for different perspectives and approaches:** Participants reinforced the importance of acknowledging that people in the field often approach the issues from very different standpoints without a shared or common understanding. This separation makes the creation of coherent policies and practice approaches challenging.

> “One of the things SVRI may need to do is to encourage a deeper understanding of interconnections, encourage a deeper way of thinking, encourage more nuance and more acknowledgement of these tensions and that is doing work” (Participant, Dialogue 2 A)

An important role for SVRI raised during the dialogues is that of convenor, creating more opportunities for thinking, discussion and reaching common ground with diverse groups of stakeholders who have different approaches from both the VAW and VAC fields. There was also broad agreement that SVRI’s position as a network and its focus on research means that SVRI can advocate towards decolonised, impactful VAC research in the area especially from LMICs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal</th>
<th>Specific Roles and Opportunities for SVRI Identified by Consultation Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building Evidence</strong></td>
<td>• Building evidence through the grant-making mechanism to grow VAC and CSA research in LMICs including more nuanced research on VAC-VAW intersections and overlaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Operationalising and aligning the RESPECT and INSPIRE frameworks with a view to thinking about joint solutions and tackling challenges related to scale up and adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address evidence gaps related to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Prevention of VAC and prevention of CSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Priority setting and agenda setting with a focus on CSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Building a better understanding of interventions and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Understanding the intergenerational impact of VAC and CSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Root causes of various forms of VAC and CSA
- Response interventions, especially for CSA survivors in humanitarian settings (supporting both boy and girl survivors)
- Multisectoral / intersectoral collaboration / coordination and impact on survivors

| Strengthening Capacity | • Support an increase in ethical and impactful research with children and adolescents on VAC and CSA in LMICs
• Strengthen capacity of LMIC researchers around VAC-VAW intersections work
• Support improved methodological approaches such as:
  - Guidance on definitions and terminologies so that there are common understandings related to what VAC and CSA refers to and includes
  - Improved measurement when it comes to assessing and measuring VAC and especially CSA
  - Develop guidance on specific issues such as the inclusion of criminalised populations into mainstream policy discussion |

| Promoting Partnerships | • SVRI could play a role in bringing the VAC and VAW fields together, addressing challenging issues and developing a uniting lens, framework, or language for the field
• Convening opportunities for “cross-learning”
• Convening opportunities for researchers and practitioners across these fields to connect
• Identify and amplify synergies across the fields
• Help the two siloes to learn from one another – for example, develop resources and amplify learning related to best practices on preventing VAW and how this could be tested with VAC programmes and vice versa
• Amplifying LMIC research and voices including research and resources in different languages |

| Influencing Change | • Bridge the gap between research and policy/practice
• Improve research uptake
• Help to develop inclusive and rigorous priority/agenda setting especially in relation to CSA |
Gaps in the field
During the dialogues, stakeholders also provided many suggestions related to gaps that they had observed in VAC and CSA fields where SVRI could potentially do more work.

“One area I see that the field really needs to improve upon is measuring online CSA. This is really complex and deserves a focused effort- because it’s a growing problem. SVRI could really help to facilitate how we measure and respond to online CSA.” (Dialogue, 1B)

Participants identified the following as key knowledge gaps in the field:

- The needs and experiences of groups and issues that fall through the cracks in both VAW and VAC fields such as adolescents, and early/forced marriage, and CSA perpetrated upon girls and boys by armed groups
- Parenting programme research to understand best practices that address both VAW/IPV and VAC, processes of change, lessons learned, adaptations during COVID, gender and parenting, intergenerational parenting or non-traditional families/homes, etc.
- VAC related to child-headed households and abandoned/orphaned children
- Technology assisted violence especially in LMICs including data on prevalence and the nature of this violence, and the measurement and impact of online violence as well as connections between online and offline worlds to better understand the ecosystem of harm that exists
- People working to address different forms of CSA share learnings
- Trafficking of children as a form of VAC and CSA (in the case of children trafficked into commercial sexual exploitation)
- Addressing childhood adversity/abuse and neglect as a risk factor for later IPV
- Female genital mutilation (described as an “orphaned” topic with both VAW and VAC organisations avoiding it)
- Intersectional VAC research and programming that improves our understanding of the needs and experiences of marginalised/minority groups including LGBTIQ+ groups
- Comprehensive sexuality education and the links with IPV prevention and reproductive health and rights for adolescents
- Adult perpetrated vs peer perpetrated VAC and CSA
- Impact of CSA on sexual development
- Longitudinal data on VAC and CSA contextualised by region and country
- CSA in LMICs and in humanitarian settings
Concerns related to SVRI expanding their work on VAC and CSA

SVRI’s niche: Concerns raised include that an expanded focus could alienate or exclude SVRIs existing network and members, dilute the existing work, or overstretch staff and resources. In addition, participants valued SVRI’s specific niche as a feminist organisation and that increasing VAC work should not dilute this approach.

Siloed: Despite all the strong linkages and shared risk factors between VAW and VAC, siloes between (and within) the fields persist. In terms of concerns, participants raised the need to be conscious of existing siloes and avoid inadvertently creating further siloes and perpetuating problematic divisions between VAC and VAW field.

“SVRI is very impactful but not a huge organisation – what happens when you stretch the mission out more, will you dilute impact in one of these areas? Since both of the areas are so important, it stands to reason that there needs to be a way to ensure that this [dilution] doesn’t happen.” (Dialogue, 1B)

The VAC field is huge and complex: Dialogue participants highlight the many organisations, networks and initiatives working on VAC at global, regional, and national levels, noting that should SVRI expand / deepen their work on violence against children, we must ensure that the work is additive and complementary, focusing on amplifying existing work and finding synergies and not duplicative, tokenistic, or “reinventing the wheel.” People noted that a potential challenge for SVRI is working out where they add the most value to this field.

Lack of common understanding and definitions: A challenge in the VAC field (and the VAW field) generally is the lack of common definitions. Terms are often used seemingly interchangeably – for instance child maltreatment vs harsh parenting vs violence against children, or child sexual abuse vs sexual violence against children – but the choice of a specific term has various implications. In addition, definitions about who is a child both in legal terms at national levels and at policy and practice levels (within organisations) are often different. This lack of common ground impacts how people work and how violence is measured, compared, and assessed. The need for broader discussions about terminology and language related to VAC was noted as important - as shared understandings are helpful in creating connections instead of divisions or fragmentation. This impacts SVRI in terms of the specific complexities that will need to be navigated as they strengthen their work in this area. At the same time, it is a potential area where SVRI can contribute to the field, creating tools or guidance that specifically address this problem using a participatory, consultative approach.
Theme Two: Politics of working across VAW and VAC fields

The objective of planning these dialogues was to understand the field/s more broadly and help to identify a strategic position and approach for SVRI that would ensure a coherent and thoughtful way forward that is informed by and takes account of inputs from the field.

Bringing the VAC and VAW fields together: should it happen?

“There is a desire in the field for there to be more connectedness between the work that is being done whether in research institutions or people working more in practice and programming. I think the desire is there, but the big question is do we need to push it? Expand it? Do we need to let it evolve?” (Dialogue 2, A)

A valuable discussion took place on the tensions that exist between the fields. Overall, there was broad agreement that acknowledging and naming the tensions is valuable but that whilst it is important to acknowledge that these exist it should also be recognised that tensions exist in all fields and not all of them can or need to be resolved.

The polarisation and tension within each field was also noted - with increasing fragmentation between issues and interest groups picking one issue and focusing on it to the exclusion of others. For example, there is often a distinct separation within the VAC field of those who work on online vs in-person VAC and/or CSA despite growing understanding of the links between these two forms of violence. Within VAW, participants pointed out that there is a strong focus on IPV but much less on femicide or other forms of GBV related to specific communities such as LGBTIQ people. Indeed, research has shown that “many sexual violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) services are not adequately responding to the unique needs of transgender and gender-diverse survivors of violence.”

Participants also reflected on how resolving tensions at a theoretical level is only one step and follow through is needed to ensure practical implementation in the field. All participants were

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clear on how challenging this is, particularly when there is pressure in both fields to be solution-focused, address urgent and overwhelming needs of women and children, and considering that surfacing problems can delay progress. The above notwithstanding, many participants mentioned that they were happy that SVRI was bringing people together to have these conversations allowing the opening up of a historically contentious issue within a safe space context.

One aspect that clearly came out of the discussions was that a nuanced understanding of the tensions is needed and that to move the discussion forward we must avoid being entrenched within existing binaries and stereotypes. For example, the feminist (VAW)/protectionist (VAC) stereotype is generally used to explain the fundamentally different approaches within the two fields, but the fields are not monolithic and all who work in VAW may not be feminist just as all VAC work is not protectionist. A nuanced understanding allows for absolutes to be questioned such as exploring the view that children have agency and evolving capacities whilst still acknowledging that they are vulnerable in a way that women are not.

“I want to highlight that in the children’s field, yes there is a strong emphasis around protection often but there are also really strong voices on the agency and participation of children. There is a strong child rights, agency, sexuality and participation movement as well. I think it’s important that that we don’t reinscribe the binary of children’s organisations are all protection focused and women’s are all feminist and agency focused”.

(Dialogue, 2A)

Participants also discussed what ‘bringing the fields together’ really means and pointed out that separations and distinctions can be as valid and useful as coming together. While many drivers of violence overlap, some are different and to some extent responses need to be different and age appropriate. Currently there is no clarity on when it is most beneficial for the fields to come together and when it does not make sense. More understanding of when, how, and why joint efforts succeed, and when, how, and why they don’t is needed.

Being clear on what we are advocating for, i.e., collaboration between the fields vs complete integration is also important in terms of operational and practical considerations. Participants encouraged more conversations to consider who should come together, how, when, and why, as well as the converse, to get toward a more nuanced understanding and way forward.
Positives of the fields coming together

“Power needs to be really central to the work that we are doing and different manifestations of power- it’s not about bringing everyone together, it’s about grounding ourselves in the theory and understanding how different individuals and groups are impacted simultaneously by different systems of oppression and forms of discrimination-overlapping power relations.” (Dialogue 2,A)

The following were identified during the dialogues as positives of the fields coming together:

A feminist approach \(^6\) could positively contribute to the VAC field by:

- applying a gendered understanding of violence from early on;
- bringing intersectional analysis to recognise how systems of power and oppression interact;
- considering the overlapping forms of discrimination (e.g. Gender, race, class, disability, sexual orientation, and identity) that impact the experiences of violence both for children and women;
- analysing and challenging structures, systems, and norms that perpetuate VAC and CSA including inadequate response and prevention efforts; and,
- centre those with lived experience and critically evaluate assumptions underlying research and practice.

Participants also pointed out that over the years there has been a shift in the VAC field from a protectionist-dominant approach to more of a rights-based approach. This shift marries well with the VAW field’s right-based approach and could be a space for facilitating integrated VAC and VAW work.

Collaboration regarding specific populations or issues may be a useful approach to inspire more and broader collaborations across the two fields, especially with regards to addressing gaps in terms of skills and capacity on the delivery of services that address more than one issue or population. For instance, community health workers and case managers dealing with orphans and vulnerable children (especially those living with HIV) often do not have the training to deal

with child survivors of sexual violence. Integration of VAC and VAW services and support could assist with a range of issues for both fields—such as dealing with younger children vs older children, helping women’s shelters to better address the needs of boy as well as girl children and providing services related to supporting sexual violence survivors. Support for programming that takes a life course or other “joint” approach could be a useful outcome of more collaboration between the two fields. Joint funding for primary prevention of violence through reducing risk factors and promoting protective factors over the life course would spur more development in this area.

Engaging in a multi-layered power analysis could provide an opportunity to develop a common understanding of how individuals and groups are impacted simultaneously by different forms of power and could increase cohesion between the fields. Recognising patriarchal and other forms of power hierarchies as central and approaching both VAW and VAC with this understanding could guide strategy, help to address intersectionality, and encourage a social inclusion approach that opens an analysis of systems and structures of oppression and inequality.

“For me I come from the child sector and am also working with the VAW sector. Within the feminist wing of the VAW movement you get a focus on core drivers and the need to speak about patriarchy. Obviously SVRI has been a prominent figure on the need to engage with patriarchy and for me this offers a very important lens back into violence against children - in terms of a holistic understanding of patriarchy....it is the multi-dimensional age and gender related nature of patriarchy that is important. If we come in via core drivers and have a commitment to patriarchy.....we need as we explore it in practical ways through parenting programmes for instance, to be able to follow it through into all its dimensions - including the rule of the father over children and the ways in which the woman gets caught up in that - whether it is a displaced aggression cycle or whether it is power within her marriage vs power over her children.”

(Dialogue 2, A)
Concerns about the fields coming together

Despite all the positives, a number of important concerns were also raised:

Limited resources within both fields and siloed funding, usually guided by donor priorities from high income countries, often forces organisations, practitioners, and researchers to focus on one population or issue. Whilst it is acknowledged that funding has increased, “a stubbornly consistent problem is that VAW and VAC programming receives significantly less funding than programs addressing other issues facing women and children.”7 Competition for this limited pool of money acts as a deterrent to an integrated approach and in different contexts one field may be prioritised over another. In this context, careful consideration must be given to the impacts of inequitable funding for joint research, programming, services, or interventions.

Specific groups could be side-lined if joint programmes and interventions don’t carefully approach and monitor the various groups of stakeholders involved and how they are experiencing and being impacted by the programming or services. It is important to think carefully about the lens through which violence is viewed when women and children’s needs and problems are addressed together, as well as reflecting on whether and how the space to address groups that don’t fit neatly into either of these two categories may be constricted. For instance, adolescent girls are not women, but the nuances of their experiences in terms of agency and consent and their needs for specific services differentiates them from younger children as well. There is also a bias towards a heteronormative approach in the VAW and VAC fields with both being structured in a way that may exclude sexual and gender minorities. In addition, the focus on “VAWG” (violence against women and girls) can exclude boy children unfairly and treat “girls” like little women rather than pursuing understanding and approaches that are developmentally sensitive and specific to girl children across the age spectrum. This framing can also feed into patriarchal bias that reinforces men’s position in society and infantilises women. The issue of specific groups being left out is also important to consider with respect to contexts wherein sexual and gender minorities are criminalised. VAC-VAW joint programming would need to be sensitive to the risks facing specific populations of even just participating in certain spaces due to normative and legislative constraints.

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Potential solutions related to better coordination/partnership and integration: Suggestions from the field

The fields have a long history of separation, and their approaches are often very different in many ways, with few practical links. Therefore, the challenges in terms of programming and implementation of a ‘life course’ approach are considerable and, at this point, evidence that helps us to understand how to do joint programming in an ethical and effective way is limited. Thus, whilst there is general agreement that the fields should collaborate more, these practical and logistical challenges are real. During the consultations several ideas on how the fields could think about practical solutions were shared and these are summarised here.

Adapt family-based interventions with VAW and VAC reduction as a specific outcome: There are many existing family level interventions and services already and there is potential to integrate some of the core components of violence prevention interventions (both VAW and VAC) into these interventions. For instance, examples/models exist for successful family-based interventions working with men on alcohol dependence, drug use, mental health that also involve children and adolescents, but they do not consider reduction of violence as a health outcome, in its own right.

Organisations need experts or expertise in both VAC and VAW fields on staff: A collaborative and critical thinking space is needed to reflect on each aspect of the work and how it addresses or compromises the needs of women, of adolescents, and of children. Different perspectives need to be shared and considered, and all work needs to be monitored for both successes and mistakes or harms.

Explore opportunities for joint funding: Funders could help by encouraging partnerships and collaborations for the field while not depleting resources for those areas where separation is necessary. Researchers could begin to think about how to take a joint approach or how to contribute to understanding both VAW and VAC implications within their study. For example, in a parenting programme evaluation, questions for IPV could be added.

Family/parenting/household space is a useful area for collaboration: The field knows that parenting is a key intervention space and that changing norms that sustain child maltreatment – as one form of VAC – and intimate partner violence – as one form of VAW – is a key
opportunity area. There is a minimum level of response that needs to be offered to children in a household where a woman is experiencing IPV because we know these children are a high-risk group; however, who does this and what they do is less clear especially in ways that are sensitive to the context of IPV.

**Reconceptualise the three levels of prevention:** Working at VAC-VAW intersections might be a way to dismantle public health siloes that have created sometimes unhelpful distinctions between response and prevention programmes, especially when so many people lack access to services. It is increasingly understood in the prevention field that ethical prevention work cannot be done without quality response services in place. Focusing on reduction of violence overall, rather than focusing on one form of violence, and acknowledging VAW/VAC shared risk factors can help reconceptualise the concept of prevention.

**Recognise arbitrary separations and actively build connections:** Each field has aspects to contribute to the other. A very practical way to collaborate more is for organisations from the different fields to proactively invite each other to and attend virtual events that are unfolding. For example, if a VAC organization is a launching a new program tool, they can reach out to VAW groups to join, and perhaps make space for them to reflect and share implications for their own approaches (and vice versa). In addition, because relationships are so central to form effective partnerships, building up these connections between organizations could be fruitful in terms of more collaboration.

**Develop more sharing and learning spaces for the fields to interact and learn from each other:** There is a need to have more conversations together which also include those working on gender-based violence in different spheres such as in the context of sexual harassment in the workplace. Lessons on how to apply a survivor-centred and trauma-informed lens should be shared and the development of a common vision for safety in all spheres – including workplaces, families and communities would be valuable.
V. Final Reflections

What key opportunities have emerged?
SVRI is a recognised global leader in the violence against women and sexual violence field. In addition, we have a strong track record of violence against children and childhood sexual violence work. We are a trusted presence with strong relationships and networks and an ability to bring diverse stakeholders to the table to have conversations, find synergies and create opportunities for collaboration.

Overall, consultations with the field indicate that it is strategic to continue the work on VAC and CSA as we have been doing within the existing strategy and theory of change of the organisation and aim to do this in a way that is transparent about our priorities and approach to the work. Just as SVRI works on violence against women (in all their diversity) broadly, work on violence against children (in all their diversity) should continue. The SVRI’s roots are in strengthening work on sexual violence and thus we strategically prioritise sexual violence against women and, similarly, sexual violence against children (girls, boys, and other diverse gender identities), but this priority is not exclusive to other forms of both VAW and VAC.

These findings were presented back to SVRIs Leadership Council and Board – who supported SVRIs continued work in the field and felt that, given our historical work on sexual violence before expanding our scope to include VAW more broadly, we should first deepen and focus our work on CSA before expanding to VAC. As such, based on these findings and the views of SVRIs Leadership Council and Board, the following specific opportunities for strengthening or expanding our work in the field emerged, with a focus on CSA:

Building Evidence
What we already do:
- The review showed that 28 percent of all the grants that SVRI has allocated so far are related to VAC with a total resource allocation of more than USD 2 million.\textsuperscript{8}
- The SVRI knowledge hub has a section devoted to VAC and CSA.

\textsuperscript{8} USD 2,054,085.60
• We include resources / materials on VAC and CSA research, programmes and events in the Update which is disseminated weekly to a membership of more than 8000 people globally.
• SVRI’s first research agenda identified CSA as a key priority area for research.

How we could strengthen or expand in relation to CSA work:
• Expand our funding pool to include more grantmaking on CSA research and continue to support and amplify LMIC based VAC researchers’ work.
• Continue and strengthen SVRI’s knowledge and learning hub for CSA research and the VAC research field more broadly by working on tools and guidelines, and curating resources that would strengthen the work.

Capacity Strengthening

What we already do:
• The review found that 8 percent of the knowledge exchange resources aim to strengthen capacity in the VAC and CSA field and are focused on methodological guidance pieces such as tools to ensure children’s participation in research; ethical standards for research on VAC and CSA with children; and prevention-oriented toolkits and manuals with practical guidance for agencies that work with children.
• SVRI hosts virtual learning events where their grantees and other experts from the field engage with participants on key issues related to VAC and CSA research.
• In partnership with a consortium led by Prof. Franziska Meinck at the University of Edinburgh, SVRI is currently developing a course on VAC measurement for research studies. This course will be launched by Q3 of 2022.

How we could strengthen or expand in relation to CSA work:
• Expand support and strengthen capacity of LMIC researchers on CSA research and efforts.
• Expand and support improved methodological approaches such as creating guidance on definitions and terminologies and participatory research methods.
• Create and support ethical guidance for impactful CSA research especially in LMICs.
Promoting Partnerships
What we already do:

- The review found that VAC and CSA have been core themes or sub-themes at the SVRI Forum since 2009. Child sexual abuse has been on the agenda at SVRI Forum 10 times since 2009 and has been included as a sub-theme twice and as the main title of sessions 8 times.
- The Forum provides safe spaces for difficult conversations as well as being a platform through which new research and findings from the field are disseminated. In the past, the Forum sessions have highlighted important methodological approaches related to VAC and CSA and critical findings from new studies have also been disseminated via pre-conference workshops, satellite sessions, launches, exhibition stands, poster displays, and performances. For instance, in 2019, critical findings from the ‘Out of the Shadows Index’ (OOSI), a study measuring how 60 countries are responding to sexual violence against children, was shared at the Forum with a special exhibition stand devoted to raising awareness and understanding of the findings of the study.

How we could strengthen or expand in relation to VAC work:

- SVRI’s strength as a convenor means that SVRI could play a role in bringing the two fields together for more collaboration and partnerships, addressing challenging issues and developing a unifying lens, framework, or language for the field. This could be done through creating safe spaces for engagement and more opportunities for thinking, discussion, and reaching common ground with diverse groups of stakeholders who have different approaches from both the VAW and VAC fields.
- At the SVRI Forum, SVRI could expand the focus on CSA through inviting, supporting, and encouraging more researchers from LMICs working on these issues as well as prominent voices from the CSA field to join in the sharing, connecting, and learning at the event. In addition, the Forum is a space that could lend itself to convening groups, hosting dialogues, and bringing the fields together in creative ways.

Influencing Change
What we already do:

- SVRI is a partner in a consultative, inclusive research priority setting process among VAW and VAC stakeholders to identify areas where research can enhance understanding, practice, and coordination to address the intersections in innovative and effective ways.
- SVRI has created a set of advocacy resources in dialogue with the field with the aim of
enhancing and increasing funding for research on violence against women and violence against children. This includes a study tracking investment in research on VAW; a global shared research agenda to guide research and investment along with a guide for funders on funding ethically.

- **Advisory groups:** SVRI staff serve on different advisory groups related to VAC and CSA research.

**How we could strengthen or expand in relation to VAC work:**

- Contribute to more decolonised, impactful VAC and CSA research from LMICs SVRI’s by building on SVRIs role in advocating for more and better research funding through their ethical funding and tracking funding work.
- Track funding for research on CSA and VAC in LMICs
- Co-develop an inclusive and representative research agenda on CSA
- Develop guidance with funders on ethical funding and ethical research on CSA.

**VI. Recommendations**

The overall sentiment from SVRIs Board, Leadership Council and consultations with stakeholders in the field was one of enthusiasm and encouragement for SVRI to continue investing in what we offer to the field and expand – in feasible and sustainable ways – the contributions to VAC research – with strong support from the Board and Leadership Council to focus first on research on CSA in LMICs. Based on this, the specific and nuanced feedback from the consultations, and team reflections on the findings, the following recommendations can guide SVRI’s future work on CSA:

*Maintain current work and contributions to the VAC and CSA field, focusing in on CSA:* We recognise that we are already doing a lot on both VAW and VAC so any expansion would need to be approached mindfully and with additional resource mobilisation. However, even with additional resources, an integrated approach within SVRI where CSA work is conducted within our overall organisational strategy and theory of change is essential to avoid creating VAW and VAC siloes within SVRI. This approach is outlined above highlighting the current work and key opportunities per strategic pillar of SVRI’s work and should similarly play a role in future strategic plans.
Secure additional strategic funding opportunities to resource and advance SVRIs work on CSA across all our strategic goals and particularly within SVRI’s current grant making program. This resource mobilisation is an essential first step to any expansion of SVRI’s CSA work.

Pursue a strong focus on child sexual abuse, building on SVRI’s expertise and roots in this area as well as responding to specific needs arising from the field such as more research on boys’ experiences of different forms of violence (particularly emotional abuse and neglect), the pathways to later perpetration of VAW, and how interventions could disrupt and change these pathways for more positive outcomes.

Co-facilitate a research priority setting process with strategic partners around CSA research in LMICs. The results of this would not only be valuable for the field but could also guide more specific work for SVRI to undertake.

Clarify our commitment to working on both VAW and VAC and what that means in practice (including explaining our terminology and approach) through blogs and articles for the field.

Create and manage courageous spaces that allow the field to push boundaries recognising that the process of change that moves the field forward could, in and of itself, cause tensions and that one unique role for SVRI could be to hold space for discomfort in growth.
VII. Next steps

Based on the findings and recommendations, the SVRI plans to secure additional funding to put the recommendations into action in a strategic and sustainable way:

1. Mobilise more resources to expand and strengthen our work on CSA in LMICs.

2. Expand invitations to more CSA stakeholders to participate in SVRI Forums and secure bursaries for CSA researchers from LMICs.

3. Co-facilitate a research priority setting process for CSA research globally including systematic literature reviews and follow up regional priority setting processes.

4. Expand the grant-making and capacity strengthening work with grantees work with (specifically for CSA research in LMICs).

5. Develop and disseminate guidance for CSA research in LMICs including on topics such as ethics, definitions, tools, and methodologies.

6. Build partnerships with key CSA stakeholders globally and expand the knowledge hub with curated resources.

7. Expand the CSA focused capacity strengthening work including additional online learning events on CSA research topics (crowd source these topics from SVRI members, partners, and Leadership Council).
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Registrations:
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