



When Numbers Demand Action:

Confronting the global scale
of sexual violence against children

“At 5:15 I got a call from **Liza** (name changed) telling me, ‘Mom, come home quickly, now come home.’ I then asked the neighbour what was going on and the neighbour said, ‘Your daughter has been raped,’” recalled **Silvia** (name changed), the mother of 12-year-old **Liza**, who was sexually abused by her stepfather in the Republic of Moldova.

Eleven-year-old **Kamran** (name changed) lives in a poor neighbourhood in Pakistan. He was raped at age 8 by a man who then paid him. He has never been to school. **Kamran** recently moved with his mother into the apartment of an ‘uncle’, who was himself raped as a child. The ‘uncle’ and another man run a massage business that is a front for soliciting sexual customers for themselves and a few children, including **Kamran**, who works for them.

Sam (name changed), now age 18, lived in a dormitory in Timor-Leste as a child, where he was sexually assaulted by a worker. The abuser was sent to prison.

Analyn (name changed), 12 years old, was rescued from her home in the Philippines and brought to a government shelter, along with her two sisters. At the age of 10, **Analyn** began participating in live streaming of child sexual abuse for foreigners online after a neighbour approached her with an offer of money.

Salay (name changed), age 7, was sexually abused by her teacher in a school toilet in Sierra Leone during school hours. The matter was reported to the police and the teacher was tried in court.

Angely (name changed), age 11, and her sister **Brittany** (name changed), age 9, now live with their biological father and his family in Honduras. **Brittany** was groped and forced to watch while **Angely** was being abused by her stepfather. The news spread and **Angely** started to be bullied at school.

“In the [Ethiopian] village where I lived, I was a shepherd,” explained **Xume** (name changed), age 15 and the mother of a 1-year-old daughter. “The cows were dying because of the drought, but people said it was my fault because I am a bad person. That was because I was raped, and didn’t tell anyone out of shame and fear. But when I turned out to be pregnant, I was excluded from the community and accused of the death of the cows.”



AROUND THE WORLD, CLOSE TO 90 MILLION BOYS AND GIRLS ALIVE TODAY HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE. MORE THAN A BILLION WOMEN AND MEN WERE SUBJECTED TO SUCH VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD.

The scale of this human rights violation is abhorrent in its magnitude, and has long been difficult to quantify, due to stigma, measurement challenges and limited investments in data collection.

This publication presents the first-ever global and regional estimates of the number of children and adults who have lived through experiences like those of **Analyn**, **Angely**, **Brittany**, **Kamran**, **Liza**, **Salay**, **Sam** and **Xume**. It narrates through numbers the tragic reality of sexual violence, amplifying victims’ voices.¹

While this quantification exercise represents an important step, it is not without its flaws. One of the limitations inherent in any attempt to document violence against children is what it leaves out: the presumably large numbers of children unable or unwilling to report their experiences. This report also suffers from that constraint, but the story it does tell is motivation enough to spur a response: If even one child is harmed through an act of violence, it is one child too many.

The process of understanding and addressing sexual violence against children will continue to be ridden with stumbling blocks. Nevertheless, it is clear that systematic investments in data generation are vital. The fact that many countries still lack basic data demonstrates that sexual violence against children has rarely received the same priority as other issues on which statistics are regularly generated by governments. Future efforts should focus not only on documenting the prevalence of sexual violence among all children and in all its forms, but also on exploring the underlying factors that fuel it. Monitoring and evaluating interventions aimed at preventing and responding to sexual violence are also essential. Broad dissemination of data in accessible formats will continue to be needed to raise awareness and to foster the political will required to develop and implement effective strategies and action – at all levels of society.

GLOBAL MONITORING OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

In 2015, the global community committed to ending all forms of violence against children through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs include Target 16.2, which aims to, by 2030, “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.” UNICEF was appointed custodian agency for indicator 16.2.3, which measures the proportion of young women and men aged 18 to 29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18. In this capacity, UNICEF is mandated to maintain global databases, compute global and regional aggregates, and submit internationally comparable national estimates for inclusion in official SDG reporting. This work is undertaken in consultation with, and on behalf of, UN Member States. The process of compiling and verifying official national statistics used for global reporting is accomplished through an annual country consultation

that solicits feedback and inputs directly from national statistical authorities and other government agencies responsible for official statistics.

To make meaningful comparisons of how widespread an issue is across contexts and over time, international monitoring and the production of global and regional estimates require that underlying country data are broadly comparable and standardized. Global monitoring of violence against children is especially challenging given the overall lack of consistency in how such violence is defined and measured. So, while the inclusion of the SDG indicator has generated much-needed attention to preventing and responding to violence against children, the availability of robust internationally comparable data remains limited.

To address the absence of operational definitions of violence against children, UNICEF developed the International Classification

of Violence against Children (ICVAC),² with inputs from over 200 experts from national statistical offices, academia and international organizations. The ICVAC was endorsed at the 54th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2023 and included in the International Family of Classifications. It is the first statistical standard ever developed on violence against children. The ICVAC outlines agreed concepts, definitions and principles to ensure a standardized and consistent approach to producing statistics on violence against children, thus enhancing data comparability both within and across countries.

While transformative in many ways, the existence of this global standard is not, in itself, sufficient to improve the availability of data on sexual violence in childhood. UNICEF is leading an effort to translate these operational definitions into tools to support the generation of comparable data.



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THE COMPLEXITIES OF QUANTIFYING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of measurement activities aimed at filling existing data gaps on sexual violence against children. These efforts have succeeded in collecting different types of data for different purposes, but they have remained sporadic and limited in coverage. And while more data are now available, they are often not comparable, employing a plethora of approaches.

Collecting reliable data on sexual violence against children is a complex undertaking that raises various methodological challenges and demands careful planning and execution.³ Underreporting of experiences of sexual violence is common for several reasons, including social norms and stigma around sexual violence, discomfort during the interview process on the part of the interviewer and/or respondent, and concerns

over safety, particularly when the perpetrator is known or even present in the household. All of these factors are likely to play a combined role in hindering disclosure of sexual violence in childhood within the context of data collection.⁴ Even when victims do disclose past experiences, many are unable (or unwilling) to report the exact age at which sexual violence occurred for the first time. The way in which such cases are treated in the data analysis process can significantly affect reported prevalence levels.

On the other hand, detailed questionnaires that are act-based and that involve specialized training of interviewers and adherence to ethical and safety standards are known to yield higher prevalence estimates.⁵ Substantial differences have also been found in reported levels of child sexual abuse when respondents were

questioned in traditional face-to-face interviews compared to completing anonymous self-administered questionnaires.

Typically, shortcomings in terms of data quality, comparability and coverage are addressed by adjusting and harmonizing the data through various modelling techniques, all of which have limitations. While modelling can help overcome certain data constraints, it cannot replace the fundamental and imperative work of strengthening the availability, quality and comparability of country-level data. Such data should be collected at regular intervals and generated by national official authorities to promote country ownership and government accountability.



THE CURRENT DATA LANDSCAPE AND AVAILABILITY

To assess current availability, data sources were classified into three categories. Tier 1 includes nationally representative and broadly comparable data sources included in the official global database for SDG indicator 16.2.3. Within this tier, the majority of sources were either Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). These leading international household survey programmes collect data on experiences of sexual violence in childhood using the same definitions and sets of questions about contact sexual violence and employ similarly standardized implementation protocols. Tier 2 includes other nationally representative surveys that fall within certain predefined parameters.⁶ These include domestic violence surveys, general social surveys, school-based surveys, surveys on child maltreatment and violence, including the Violence against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS),⁷ and

regional surveys on violence against women.⁸ The third category includes sources that do not meet the criteria for tier 1 or 2.⁹

This assessment was conducted on the basis of 202 countries and areas grouped according to the seven geographic regions used for official SDG reporting.¹⁰ Due to overall limitations in data availability, the assessment was conducted only for data sources pertaining to contact sexual violence in childhood for males and females separately.

At the global level, around 60 per cent of countries (a total of 120) had an available data source on sexual violence against girls; a slightly higher proportion of those sources were classified as tier 1 rather than tier 2. Of those countries with an identified data source, just over half were from either sub-Saharan Africa or Europe and Northern America. However, the distribution of the types of data sources

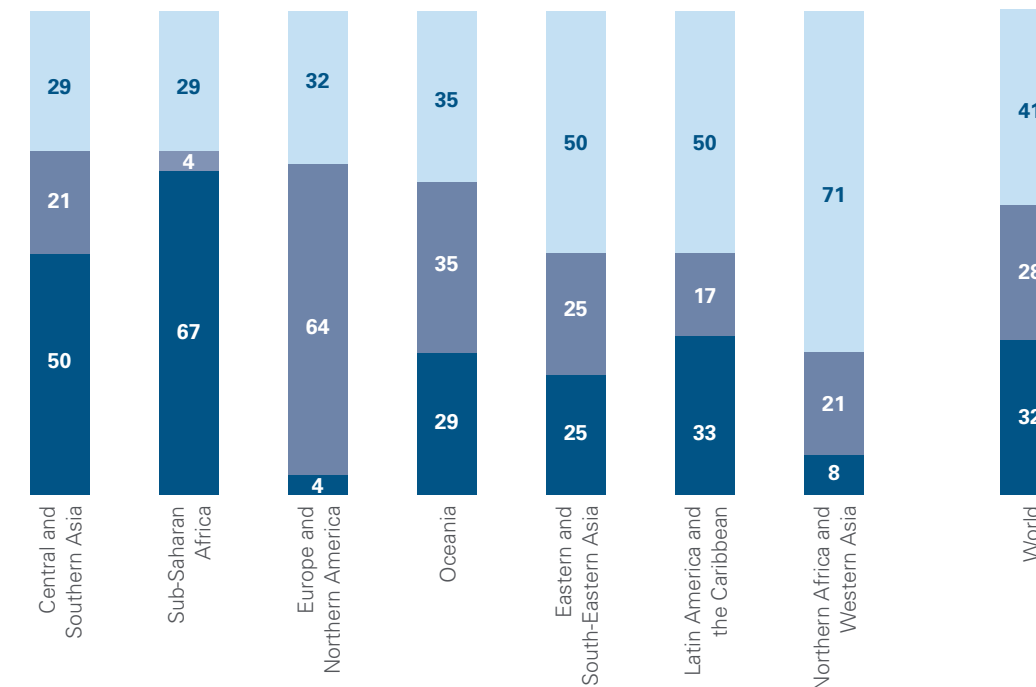
differs substantially between these two regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, the majority of countries conducted a DHS or MICS (i.e., tier 1 data sources), which are primarily carried out in low- and middle-income countries. In Europe and Northern America, over half the countries had data produced through national, or regional, surveys (i.e., tier 2 data sources) as opposed to surveys that are part of international programmes.

One illustration of persistent data gaps is the finding that only 1 in 6 countries (a total of 34) have an available data source on sexual violence against boys. Half of the countries with an identified data source were from sub-Saharan Africa. Information for most other regions with some data on boys was based on tier 2 data sources.

Four in 10 countries around the world lack national data on girls' experiences of sexual violence

Percentage distribution of countries and areas by data source tier classification for contact sexual violence in childhood among females

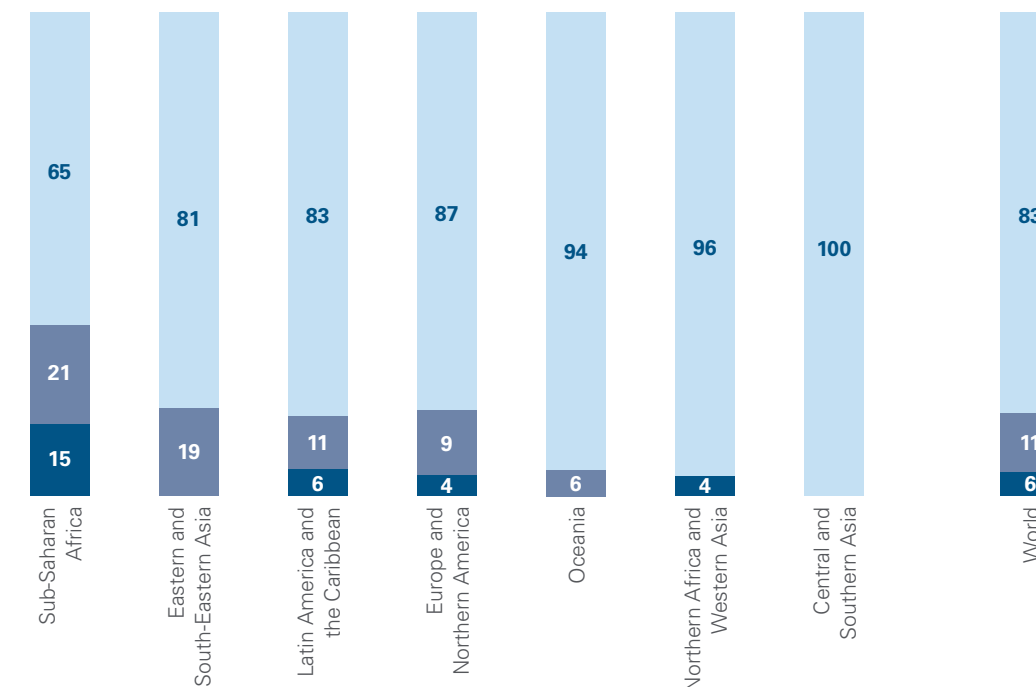
- Countries with tier 1 data source
- Countries with tier 2 data source
- Countries with no tier 1 or 2 data source



Only 1 in 6 countries around the world have national data on boys' experiences of sexual violence

Percentage distribution of countries and areas by data source tier classification for contact sexual violence in childhood among males

- Countries with tier 1 data source
- Countries with tier 2 data source
- Countries with no tier 1 or 2 data source

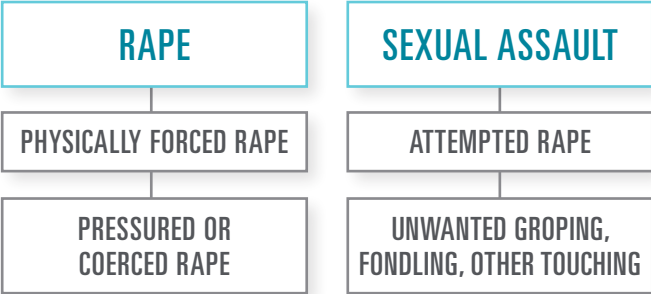


Note: Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD REFERS TO
“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.”¹¹

For the purposes of this publication and estimation work, sexual violence was broadly categorized into two types – contact sexual violence (including rape and sexual assault) and non-contact sexual violence – aligned with the categories outlined in the International Classification of Violence against Children.¹²

CONTACT



NON-CONTACT

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES INCLUDE:



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THE EVOLVING, WIDE-RANGING NATURE OF NON-CONTACT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Estimating the prevalence of non-contact forms of sexual violence in childhood is complex. One reason why is the breadth of acts that fall within this category. Non-contact sexual violence against a child 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.”¹³ Within the ICVAC, examples of common acts of non-contact sexual violence include a wide variety of forms, from unwanted sexual jokes or comments to exposure to sexual abuse and pornography, to persistent leering looks and exposure of sexual organs.

Another complicating variable, made explicit within

the ICVAC definition, is the fact that non-contact sexual violence can take place in person as well as online, facilitated through the use of technology. Since the start of the millennium, the widespread boom in access to the Internet and use of digital and mobile technology at a global scale has created new forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.¹⁴ And even within the last two decades, the platforms and modalities through which technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation can take place are evolving. These dynamics have implications with respect to accurately and reliably estimating the scale of non-contact sexual violence.

While the scope of non-contact forms of sexual violence has been changing rapidly, systematic production of data on its magnitude has not yet caught up; in fact, it remains very much in

its infancy. The prevalence data that currently exist are partial and fragmented, and are largely informed by individual country studies or surveys that have applied various typologies and methodologies.¹⁵ Unfortunately, data on the relationship between contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence (as well as non-contact forms occurring online versus offline) were also difficult to come by. Indeed, the available literature and evidence on the subject are filled with inconsistencies and ambiguities, are of limited geographic coverage, and are often narrow in their measurement of only some forms and types.

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF ESTIMATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN WORLDWIDE

The global and regional figures are based on a broad pool of available data sources and the application of adjustments to align them (as far as possible) with a common definition and set of parameters. When interpreting the estimates, it is critical to keep in mind that they reflect an effort to generate figures that are as robust as possible at this moment in time, based on available country-level data.

Several challenges were encountered in generating the estimates. The first set of issues are a direct result of the varied approaches taken to data collection. One clear example relates to age, both of the population surveyed and the period of life reported on. To obtain a comprehensive estimate of sexual violence against children, data need to be collected on the entire childhood period. However, very few surveys collected data according to this specific

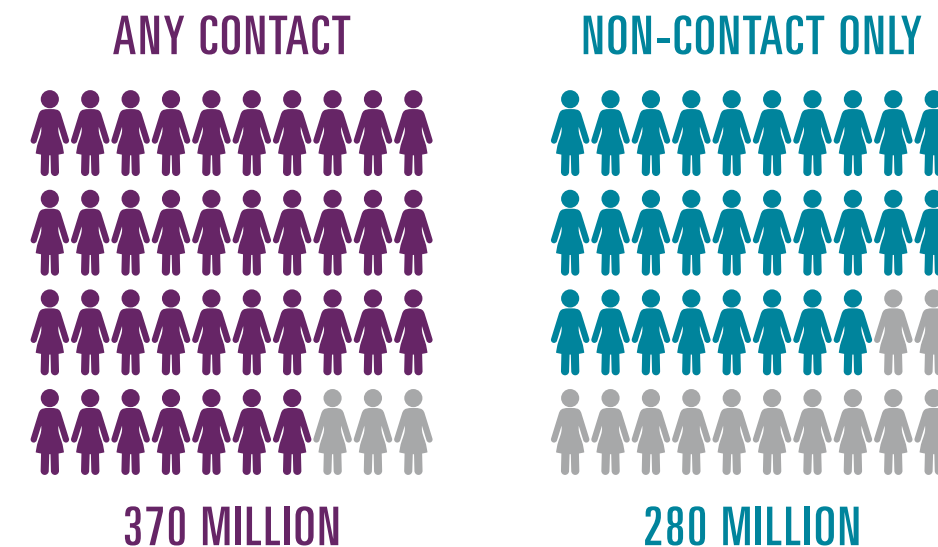
parameter. Many data sources only captured information on sexual violence that occurred at certain ages (for instance, before age 15, or at any point in life). Others collected information from respondents in a selected age or population group, for instance only children, only young adults or married girls. It was therefore necessary to introduce some adjustment of how much more violence is likely to occur before age 18. These sources still contributed to the overall estimation work, either by directly recalculating the underlying data or by applying an adjustment factor that took into account established age patterns.

Another example relates to the types of sexual violence that each source captured. Some surveys applied narrow definitions, such as only physically forced or coerced sexual intercourse by a spouse. Others used broader


definitions, including a variety of contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence by any perpetrator. A variety of sources were ultimately used to derive the estimates, either by directly recalculating underlying country data to conform to a standard definition, or by applying an adjustment factor based on observed patterns in the relative prevalence of various types of sexual violence.

Serious data gaps on sexual violence against boys and non-contact forms of sexual violence also presented significant hurdles. As a result, estimates on boys and non-contact forms of sexual violence for both sexes were inevitably informed by a broader range of sources. The more restricted and incomplete data availability for these indicators thus allowed for the calculation of global figures only.

Globally, 650 million (or 1 in 5) girls and women alive today have been subjected to sexual violence as children. This includes more than 370 million (or 1 in 8) who have experienced rape or sexual assault in childhood



Of these 650 million females, 50 million are girls who have already been victimized, and 600 million are adult women who were subjected to sexual violence as children

 = 10 million females

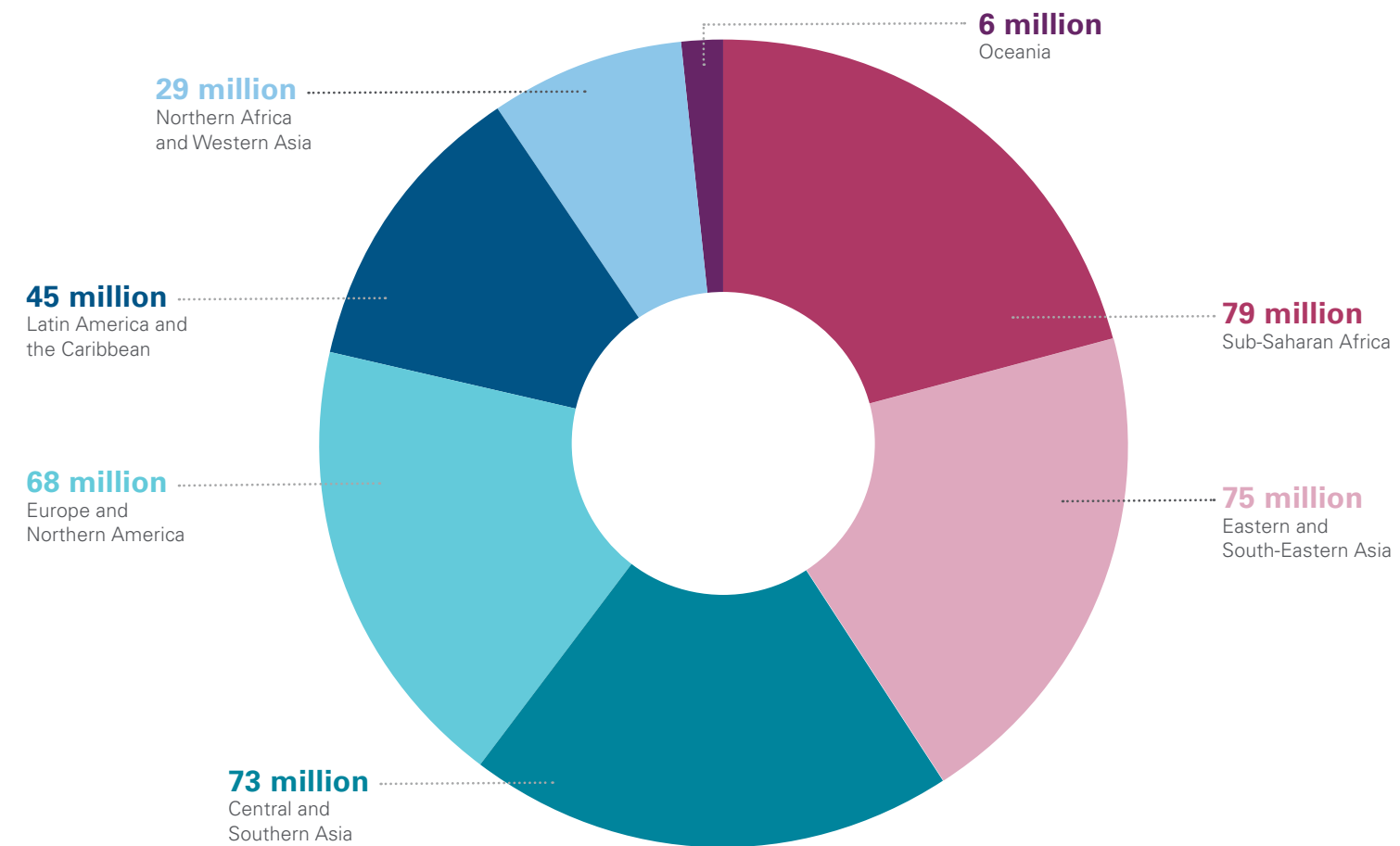
Notes: The estimate for 'Any contact' refers to those who experienced any contact forms of sexual violence in childhood (i.e., rape or sexual assault), inclusive of those who also experienced any non-contact forms such as verbal or online abuse. The estimate for 'Non-contact only' refers to those who experienced only non-contact forms. The two categories are mutually exclusive, and their sum represents all those who experienced any type of sexual violence in childhood.

Children who experience sexual violence are at risk of being revictimized or becoming perpetrators of such violence as adults. Childhood is therefore a critical period in which to intervene to interrupt a trajectory of violence throughout the life course. An analysis of data from 60 countries reveals that nearly half (42 per cent) of adult women who have ever been subjected to contact sexual violence experienced it for the first time in childhood.

Comparable data on non-contact forms of sexual violence, such as verbal or online abuse, are limited and of varying scope and quality. For these reasons, the remaining estimates for girls and women refer only to contact sexual violence.

The largest number of rape and sexual assault victims is found in some of the most populous regions – namely sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and Central and Southern Asia

Number of girls and women of all ages who experienced contact sexual violence before age 18, by region

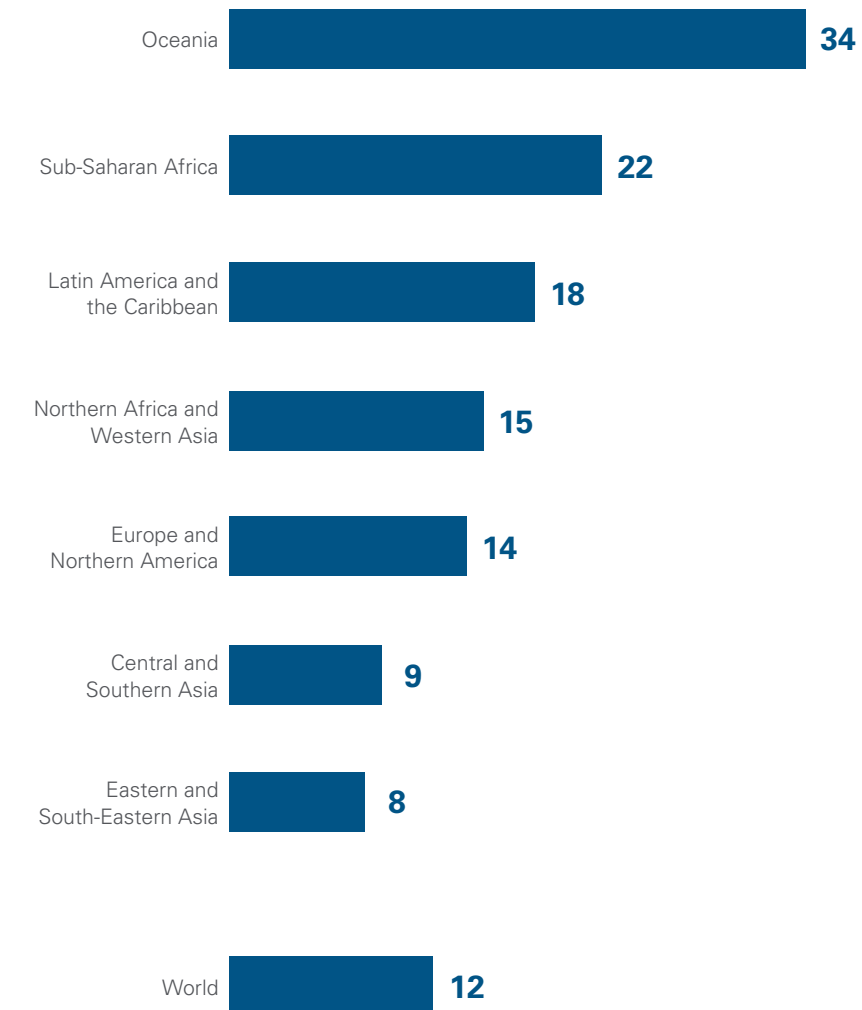


Sexual violence against children is pervasive, cutting across geographic borders, economic contexts and cultural boundaries. But risks are not borne equally

Note: The total does not add up to the figure on page 9 due to rounding.

In Oceania, 1 in 3 women report experiences of rape and sexual assault in childhood

Percentage of women aged 18 and older who experienced contact sexual violence before age 18, by region



All regional estimates represent data covering more than 70 per cent of the adult female population in each region, with the exception of Northern Africa and Western Asia, where population coverage is under 50 per cent. This region also had the fewest number of countries with eligible data for the production of modelled regional estimates on two indicators related to violence against women.¹⁶

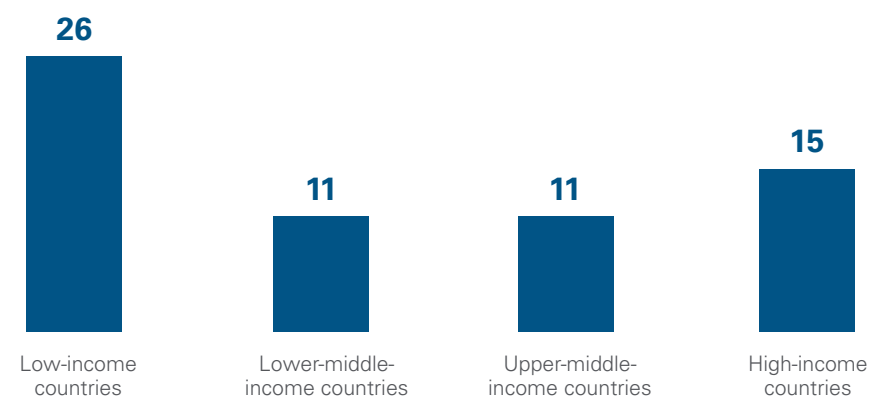
It may be tempting to compare prevalence levels across regions. Real differences in the prevalence of sexual violence against children across geographic regions undoubtedly exist. However, the relative magnitude of such differences is likely explained by a number of variables that cannot easily be quantified – from the level of underreporting, to data availability and quality, to societal and cultural norms around sexual violence in childhood. Therefore, comparing levels across regions should be done cautiously, as the estimates carry a level of uncertainty.

It is worth mentioning that, for some regions, including Oceania, for example, a certain level of convergence in reported prevalence levels across data sources and countries was found. For other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, a more pronounced variation was found in the range of national values.

The prevalence of contact sexual violence in childhood is highest in low-income countries

Percentage of women aged 18 and older who experienced contact sexual violence before age 18, by national income group

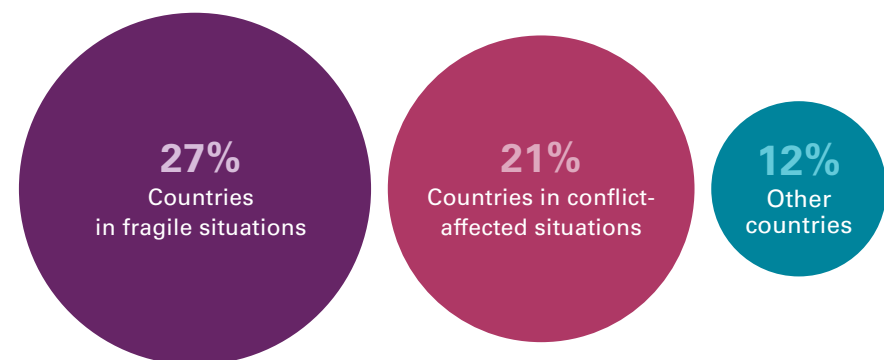
Notes: These estimates are based on the classification of economies by income groups according to 2023 gross national income per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method and produced by the World Bank Group as of 2024. Population coverage is above 60 per cent for all income groups.



In fragile situations, the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in childhood is over two times higher than the world average

Percentage of women aged 18 and older who experienced contact sexual violence before age 18, by classification of fragility and conflict situations

Notes: For more details on how countries in fragile situations and countries in conflict-affected situations are defined, see Technical notes. Population coverage is above 50 per cent for both conflict-affected countries and those in fragile situations.



USING DATA TO UNDERSTAND THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Adolescence is widely acknowledged as a period of heightened vulnerability. Estimates based on a subset of the 60 countries with available data indicate that around 8 in 10 young women (aged 18 to 24) who experienced contact sexual violence in childhood reported that it happened for the first time between the ages of 14 and 17; the remaining 2 in 10 victims said it occurred when they were 13 or younger.¹⁷ This pattern of increased risk during adolescence is also observed in boys: On average, in the subset of 15 countries with data, around 7 in 10 young men (aged 18 to 24) who experienced contact sexual violence as children said it occurred for the first time between the ages of 14 and 17, while the remaining 3 in 10 said it happened when they were 13 or younger.¹⁸

Available evidence clearly indicates that the most

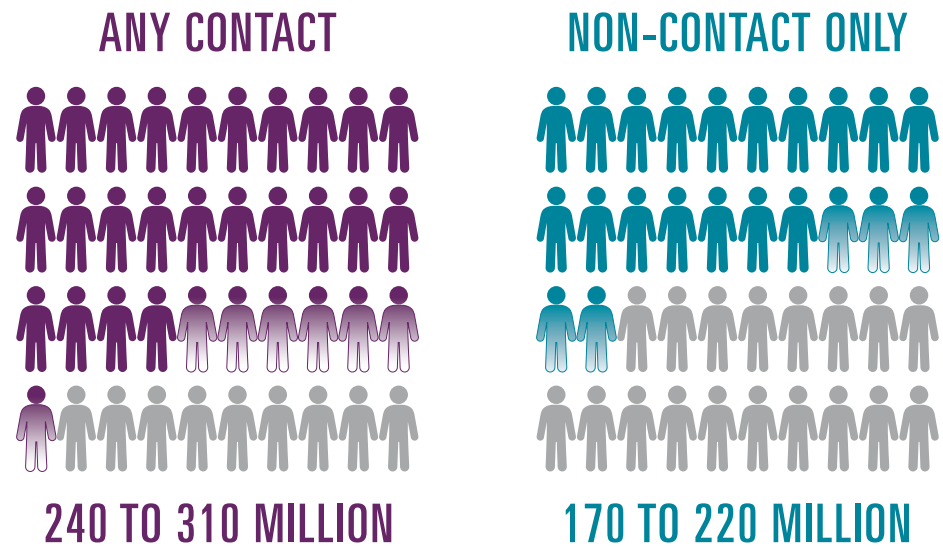
likely perpetrators of sexual violence against children are those closest to them – family, friends and intimate partners.¹⁹ Estimates based on the subset of 10 countries with data show that among young women (aged 18 to 24) who experienced contact sexual violence in childhood, the most commonly reported perpetrator of the first incident was a current or former intimate partner; for young men of the same age, it was a classmate or friend.²⁰ Strangers were the reported perpetrators for 14 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men.

Regardless of the type of sexual violence experienced or the circumstances surrounding it, research consistently shows that most children either delay disclosing the abuse, sometimes for long periods, or keep it secret and never tell anyone.²¹ On average, among a subset of the 60 countries with data, around 7 in 10

young women (aged 18 to 24) who experienced only contact sexual violence in childhood said they never told anyone. One in 10 said something but did not ask for help, and 2 in 10 reached out for support.²² When victims do seek help, most turn to those they know personally, with very few seeking formal support and assistance. Available data from a subset of countries indicate that only around 1 per cent of young women who experienced sexual violence in childhood reached out for professional help. Less cross-country comparable data are available on help-seeking among boys. Some studies, however, suggest that boys are even less likely to report sexual violence than girls for a variety of reasons, including the fear of being viewed as vulnerable or helpless.²³



Globally, between 410 and 530 million (or around 1 in 7) boys and men alive today have been subjected to sexual violence in childhood. This includes 240 to 310 million (or around 1 in 11) who have experienced rape or sexual assault during childhood



Of these 410 to 530 million males, close to 40 million are boys who have already been victimized, and the rest are adult men who were subjected to sexual violence as children

 = 10 million males

Notes: The estimate for 'Any contact' refers to those who experienced any contact forms of sexual violence in childhood (i.e., rape or sexual assault), inclusive of those who also experienced any non-contact forms such as verbal or online abuse. The estimate for 'Non-contact only' refers to those who experienced only non-contact forms. The two categories are mutually exclusive, and their sum represents all those who experienced any type of sexual violence in childhood.

As a result of existing data gaps and the varying scope and quality of the available information, the estimates on boys are presented at the global level only and with a range rather than single point estimates.

While both boys and girls are subjected to sexual violence, girls are generally known to be at higher risk in most contexts.²⁴ That said, recent research has suggested that there may be a less pronounced gender difference than previously thought.²⁵ Further work is needed to understand if such a shift is the result of a true increase in the level among boys, in certain regions of the world, for certain forms of sexual violence (such as online or technology-facilitated abuse), or a combination of these factors. And while progress has been made to close the knowledge gap, there continues to be a persistent lack of investment in the collection of robust, representative and comparable data to accurately document the true scale and nature of sexual violence against boys.²⁶



THE EXTENT TO WHICH GIRLS AND BOYS AROUND THE WORLD ARE SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT SOCIETIES ARE NOT DOING ENOUGH TO PROTECT THE MOST BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS OF CHILDREN.

Ensuring that such violence, in all its forms, is documented through solid data is a first step towards its elimination, because with numbers comes responsibility. While intensified efforts are needed to strengthen the availability of reliable and comprehensive statistics on the issue, the estimates presented in this publication are a wake-up call.

When victims are counted, they are no longer invisible, and the promise of protection becomes a real possibility. But it will take sustained and concerted action to become a reality.

Ending sexual violence against children is a global imperative. With reliable data, we will know when this goal is finally achieved.



UNICEF CALLS ON STATES AND STAKEHOLDERS TO TACKLE THIS ISSUE SYSTEMATICALLY AND HOLISTICALLY.

This includes work to challenge and transform the social and cultural norms that allow sexual violence to occur and that discourage children from seeking help. Key issues to target include gender inequalities, social norms related to masculinity and male sexual entitlement, and the prevalence of hostile, disbelieving, and stigmatizing attitudes towards victims.

Interventions that encourage reflective discussions to collectively transform these beliefs can be catalysed through social movements, educational campaigns and community-based dialogues. Parents, caregivers and schools also play a vital role in equipping children with accurate, accessible and age-appropriate information that empowers them to recognize predatory or harmful behaviours and seek help. School and community-based interventions that promote positive masculinities and encourage peer support through effective bystander actions are also essential components of prevention.

States have an obligation to ensure that every child who is a victim of sexual violence has access to services that support justice and healing and reduce the risk of further harm. Addressing the needs of victims requires a multidisciplinary response, including social services, health-care services and justice. Integrated service models such as 'one-stop centres' can provide comprehensive support.

Finally, States must strengthen laws to protect children from all forms of sexual violence, in line with international standards, and invest in the people, resources and systems to implement them. This includes legal frameworks that protect children in organizational settings such as schools and care facilities, and all other organizations and entities in contact with children. In addition to criminalizing child sexual abuse and exploitation, States must introduce measures to support victims and witnesses in the justice system and ensure they have access to redress.

Technical notes

Indicators on sexual violence against children

Two types of indicators – burden and prevalence – are used in this publication. Burden refers to the total number of girls and women (and boys and men) alive today who have experienced sexual violence in childhood; prevalence refers to the proportion of adult women (and men) who experienced sexual violence for the first time during childhood. While prevalence is an indication of the risk of sexual violence in childhood, the burden indicates the magnitude of its impact on society.

Burden estimates represent the total count of victims of sexual violence in childhood, including those under age 18 who have already experienced it as well as those of all ages who first experienced it during childhood. For prevalence estimates, the use of a reference group of adults (aged 18 and older) has the benefit of indicating complete prevalence – that is, all the women (and men) in the group have lived through the period in which they were at risk of sexual violence in childhood. Thus, this cohort bears no further risk of being exposed to sexual violence as children.

Data sources, coverage and methods for the global and regional estimates of contact sexual violence against girls

The prevalence of contact sexual violence against girls at the global and regional levels represents population-weighted averages of national estimates for countries with available data. Burden figures reflect global or regional prevalence, applied to the relevant population.

The estimates of contact sexual violence against girls are based on data collected between 2010 and 2022 for a subset of 120 countries and areas covering 81 per cent of the global female population. Population coverage is above 70 per cent for all SDG regions, except Northern Africa and Western Asia, where coverage was below 50 per cent. While coverage is high globally and in most regions, it is important to note that the quality of data is not uniform. Most data sources that informed the estimation required some level of re-analysis or adjustment, as explained later in the text.

The data sources used to derive estimates of contact sexual violence against girls include two categories (referred to as tier 1 and tier 2). Tier 1 data sources are nationally representative household surveys with broadly comparable data that are included in the official global database for SDG indicator 16.2.3. Tier 1 data sources for the majority of countries are either DHS or MICS, both of which are multi-topic household surveys implemented as part of a standardized international survey programme. To complement this, available data from other nationally representative surveys were used (that is, tier 2 sources). These included domestic violence surveys, school-based surveys, surveys on child maltreatment and violence, and regional surveys on violence against women, which also met some predefined criteria.

SDG REGION	POPULATION COVERAGE
Central and Southern Asia	93%
Sub-Saharan Africa	93%
Oceania	86%
Latin America and the Caribbean	86%
Europe and Northern America	79%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	74%
Northern Africa and Western Asia	41%
World	81%

Several corrections and adjustments were applied to the data to improve accuracy and comparability.

Even in data sources using standardized methods, there was often a significant share of respondents who reported experiences of sexual violence for whom the age at which the violence first occurred was unknown for various reasons. Such cases were recorded as ‘don’t know’ or missing the age. The aggregate effect of such cases is an underreporting of the total level of sexual violence in childhood, since, though the age at the time of violence is unknown, the cases are all treated as not having occurred in childhood. This systematic pattern of underreporting was observed across all ages and was not restricted to older respondents, for which a certain level of recall bias is to be expected. In the 60 countries in which this issue was identified among adult females who said they experienced sexual violence, the average proportion who did not know the age at which it occurred, or for whom information on age at occurrence was missing altogether, was 30 per cent. In several countries, it exceeded 60 per cent. This was corrected by allocating an age response to those with missing data on a sliding scale, depending on the current age of the respondent.

Since the estimation work took into account a large breadth of data sources designed with different purposes in mind, several adjustments were applied to allow for the inclusion of the available information – to the greatest extent possible. These adjustments included accounting for data collection on respondents of varying ages, for different types and categories of violent acts, and for different threshold ages (that is, not the 18th birthday) for the experience of sexual violence. For instance, some of the available data, particularly in certain regions, only captured experiences of sexual violence before age 15. It was therefore necessary to introduce some adjustment of how much more of the population was likely to experience sexual violence before age 18, taking into account the observed patterns of exposure by age.

A systematic adjustment was also applied to account for differences in levels of violence captured by large-scale multi-topic surveys (with more limited questions on violence of a narrower scope) versus dedicated surveys on violence (with more detailed and comprehensive questions on violence and employing specialized interviewer training and elaborate ethical protocols).

It is worth noting that, even with these corrections and adjustments, some inconsistencies and data quality issues remained for which no systematic statistical adjustment could be applied.

The number and nature of adjustments used to produce regional estimates differ across regions, depending on the coverage and quality of the available data within each region.

Data sources, coverage and methods for the global estimates of contact sexual violence against boys

The data sources used to derive estimates of contact sexual violence against boys were also categorized as either tier 1 or tier 2. The coverage and quality of the available data on sexual violence against boys were insufficient to inform the production of regional estimates with an appropriate level of precision for reporting. The estimates of contact sexual violence against boys are presented within a range as a result of the more limited data availability, even at the global level.

The global estimates were informed by data for a subset of over 30 countries and areas representing 33 per cent of the global male population. Despite the relatively small number of countries, they were geographically diverse and included high-, middle- and low-income countries. This subset of countries had nationally representative data on both sexes, allowing for a comparison of the levels of sexual violence among boys to those among girls and the calculation of a male-to-female ratio. The ratio was then applied to the global estimate for contact sexual violence against girls in order to derive a global estimate for boys. In other words, the approach grounded the estimate for boys in the larger body of evidence on sexual violence against girls.

Data sources, coverage and methods for the global estimates of non-contact sexual violence against boys and girls

As mentioned previously, the available data and evidence on non-contact forms of sexual violence are partial and fragmented. The coverage and quality of available data on non-contact sexual violence against girls and boys were therefore insufficient to inform the production of regional estimates with an appropriate level of precision for reporting.

As a result of limited data coverage and the varying scope and quality of available information, the global estimates were informed by a small number of nationally representative sources as well as several smaller-scale studies for over 20 countries representing 42 per cent of the global population. These data allowed for a comparison of levels of non-contact sexual violence to levels of contact sexual violence and the calculation of a non-contact-to-contact ratio. The ratio was then applied to the global estimates for contact sexual violence to derive a global estimate for non-contact sexual violence. This approach grounded the estimates on non-contact forms in the larger body of evidence on contact sexual violence against children.

Classification of fragility and conflict situations

According to the Revised Classification of Fragility and Conflict Situations for the World Bank Group, countries in fragile situations are defined as those with a systemic condition or situation characterized by an extremely low level of institutional and governance capacity that significantly impedes the State’s ability to function effectively, maintain peace and foster economic and social development. Countries in conflict-affected situations are defined as those with a situation of acute insecurity driven by the use of deadly force by a group – including state forces, organized non-state groups, or other irregular entities – with a political purpose or motivation. For more details on the specific indicators used for the classification, see: <www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/classification-of-fragile-and-conflict-affected-situations>.

While this classification of countries reflects those currently experiencing conflict or fragility as of 2024, the data on the prevalence of violence were collected from 2010 to 2022. Thus, the timing of data collection may not align with the timing of the conflict or fragility, which differs by country depending on the date of the latest data collection and the duration of the crisis. Estimates should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Rounding conventions

Values above 100 million are rounded to the nearest 10 million, and values below 100 million are rounded to the nearest million.

SDG regional classification

A full listing of countries and areas by SDG regional groupings can be found at: <unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/regional-groups/>.



Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this report, the term ‘victim’ has been used systematically throughout to refer to girls and women and boys and men who have experienced sexual violence in childhood. While acknowledging that different terminology has been used to refer to children who have been subjected to violence, it is important not to assign a label to children that they themselves may not identify with. Within legal and medical contexts, the term ‘victim’ is typically applied while the term ‘survivor’, borrowed from the field of violence against women and gender-based violence, has increasingly been used in the child protection sector either interchangeably, or in combination, with ‘victim’. See: Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children, *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, ECPAT International and ECPAT Luxembourg, Rachathewi, Bangkok, June 2016.

2 United Nations Children’s Fund, *International Classification of Violence against Children*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

3 United Nations Children’s Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

4 Collin-Vézina, Delphine, Isabelle Daigneault and Martine Hébert, ‘Lessons Learned from Child Sexual Abuse Research: Prevalence, outcomes, and preventive strategies’, *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2013, p. 22; Mathews, Ben, et al., ‘Improving Measurement of Child Abuse and Neglect: A systematic review and analysis of national prevalence studies’, *PLoS ONE*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-22; Pereda, Noemí, et al., ‘The International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse: A continuation of Finkelhor (1994)’, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2009, pp. 331-342.

5 Certain fundamental principles need to be applied to ensure the ethical collection of data, regardless of whether children are being interviewed directly or whether adults are being asked to report retrospectively about their experiences in childhood. Key considerations include: asking questions in a sensitive manner; securing informed consent or, if applicable, assent; taking reasonable steps to protect respondents from potential dangers due to their participation, such as the risk of retraumatization or retaliation; maintaining confidentiality; and instituting clear procedures for follow-up support or referrals for victims. See: CP MERG, *Ethical Principles, Dilemmas and Risks in Collecting Data on Violence against Children: A review of available literature*, Statistics and Monitoring Section/Division of Policy and Strategy, UNICEF, New York, 2012; Turner, Heather A., ‘Collecting Child Victimization Information from Youth and Parents: Ethical and methodological considerations’, in *Handbook of Interpersonal Violence and Abuse across the Lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence across the Lifespan*, edited by Robert Geffner, et al., Springer, New York, 2021, pp. 1851-1879.

6 These parameters included the following: conducted after 2010; based on samples that are representative at the national level; used an acts-based measure of sexual violence against children; included data on experiences of sexual violence in childhood either self-reported by children or adolescents or reported retrospectively by adults; and had published supporting material and documentation.

7 The Violence against Child and Youth Surveys are nationally representative household surveys of adolescents and young people (aged 13 to 24) that capture information about violence in childhood and young adulthood. To date, VACS have been implemented in 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South-Eastern Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

8 Namely two surveys conducted among European Union Member States. The first was carried out by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights from 2011 to 2012 in 28 countries. The second was conducted by national statistical institutes coordinated by Eurostat between 2020 and 2021 in 18 countries.

9 This does not mean that such countries and areas are not represented in global and regional estimates. The treatment of countries falling into this category is detailed in the Technical notes.

10 These regional groupings are based on geographic regions defined under the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (known as M49) of the United Nations Statistics Division. Details can be found here: <unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>. The full M49 classification also includes 47 territories, overseas areas and islands.

11 *International Classification of Violence against Children*.

12 Despite the fact that the ICVAC includes statistical definitions, it is important to note that this international standard has only existed since 2023. Therefore, the data sources available for this estimation work have used different types of acts and behaviours to measure sexual violence. Some surveys, for instance, only partially capture contact sexual violence by solely including questions on rape.

13 *International Classification of Violence against Children*.

14 See, for example: Gámez-Guadix, Manuel, et al., ‘Persuasion Strategies and Sexual Solicitations and Interactions in Online Sexual Grooming of Adolescents: Modeling direct and indirect pathways’, *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 63, 2018, pp. 11-18; Finkelhor, David, Heather Turner and Deirdre Colburn, ‘Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses against Children in the U.S.’, *JAMA Network Open*, vol. 5, no. 10, 2022, article e2234471; Krieger, Michelle A., ‘Unpacking “Sexting”’: A systematic review of nonconsensual sexting in legal, educational, and psychological literatures’, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, vol. 18, no. 5, 2017, pp. 593-601.

15 That said, important research initiatives have recently been undertaken to collect cross-country comparable data. These include ‘Disrupting Harm’, which aims to generate evidence on online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and ‘Global Kids Online’, which collects information on children’s online risks and opportunities.

16 World Health Organization, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women*, WHO, Geneva, 2021.

17 These weighted averages are derived from a subset of the 60 countries with available data covering 41 per cent of the global population of women aged 18 to 49 years based on DHS and MICS conducted between 2005 and 2022.

18 These weighted averages are derived from 15 countries based on VACS conducted between 2012 and 2019. Only those countries with complete information on age at first experience of sexual violence were included.

19 Devries, Karen, et al., ‘Who Perpetrates Violence against Children? A systematic analysis of age-specific and sex-specific data’, *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-15; Ferragut, Marta, Margarita Ortiz-Tallo and María J. Blanca, ‘Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse: Abusive contact and penetration experiences’, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, no. 18, 2021, pp. 1-14; Gallagher, Bernard, Michael Bradford and Ken Pease, ‘The Sexual Abuse of Children by Strangers: Its extent, nature and victims’ characteristics’, *Children and Society*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2002, pp. 346-359.

20 These weighted averages are derived from 10 countries based on VACS conducted between 2012 and 2018. Only those countries with complete information on the different categories of perpetrators and a sufficient number of unweighted cases were included. Respondents could report more than one perpetrator.

21 McPherson, Lynne, et al., ‘What Helps Children and Young People to Disclose Their Experiences of Sexual Abuse and What Gets in the Way? A systematic scoping review’, *Child & Youth Care Forum*, published online 18 September 2024; Paine, Mary L., and David J. Hansen, ‘Factors Influencing Children to Self-Disclose Sexual Abuse’, *Clinical Psychology Review*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2002, pp. 271-295.

22 These weighted averages are derived from a subset of the 60 countries with available data covering 40 per cent of the global population of women aged 18 to 24 years based on DHS and MICS conducted between 2012 and 2022. Only those countries with a sufficient number of unweighted cases were included.

23 Alaggia, Ramona, ‘Disclosing the Trauma of Child Sexual Abuse: A gender analysis’, *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, vol. 10, no. 5, 2005, pp. 453-470; Hietamäki, Johanna, et al., ‘Differences between Girls and Boys in the Disclosure of Sexual Violence’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 39, no. 11-12, 2024, pp. 2629-2654; Sorsoli, Lynn, Maryam Kia-Keating and Frances K. Grossman, ‘ “I Keep That Hush-Hush”’: Male survivors of sexual abuse and the challenges of disclosure’, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, vol. 55, no. 3, pp. 333-345.

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25 Kohn Maikovich-Fong, Andrea, and Sara R. Jaffee, ‘Sex Differences in Childhood Sexual Abuse Characteristics and Victims’ Emotional and Behavioral Problems: Findings from a national sample of youth’, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 34, no. 6, pp. 429-437; Rechenberg, Theresia, and Georg Schomerus, ‘The Stronger and the Weaker Sex-Gender Differences in the Perception of Individuals Who Experienced Physical and Sexual Violence in Childhood. A scoping review’, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 140, 2023, pp. 1-11.

26 Josenhaus, Valentine, et al., ‘Gender, Rights and Responsibilities: The need for a global analysis of the sexual exploitation of boys’, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 110, no. 1, 2020, article 104291.

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Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Telephone: +1 212 326 7000
Email: data@unicef.org

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UNICEF

Data and Analytics Section
Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Telephone: +1 212 326 7000
Email: data@unicef.org
Website: data.unicef.org