Violence Impacting Children and Youth
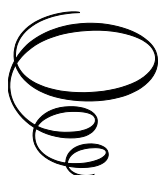
Violence Impacting Children and Youth:

Perspectives from the Global South

Edited by

Icarbord Tshabangu and
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PREFACE

Violence manifests in different forms and is conceptually complex. In its multifaceted forms violence can be described as the intentional or unintentional use or threat of force against an individual, oneself, a group of people, a community, or a government, which can result in death, injury or deprivation that impacts the physical, social, and psychological (United Nations Office for Disaster and Risk Reduction, 2021; WHO, 2022). These forms and typologies of violence are often motivated by forces such as political, religious, social, economic, ethnic, racial, and gender-based, committed to inflict harm, injury, or death directly or indirectly (Krug et al., 2002).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as an "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation". This indicates the broadness and complexity of the concept of violence, arising from varied power dynamics and relationships. Violence can also be direct, structural, and cultural (Galtung, 1969, 1996). Direct violence may include physical and behavioural typologies of violence such as war, domestic violence, bullying, exclusion, and torture. The structural notions of violence include deprivation, lack of rights and access to resources, oppressive regimes, enslavement, intimidation, abusive treatment and violation of the poor and marginalised persons or communities. Cultural notions of violence entail the dehumanisation and attack on identities, and people's way of life, such as violence motivated by sexism, racism, religion, ethnocentrism, and apartheid ideologies of exclusion that promote inequalities, aggression, oppression, and domination.

While much of the global North has experienced relative peace after World War 2, the same cannot be true about the Global South, where there have been numerous colonial and post-colonial wars of liberation and dispossession. Out of these violent wars and subsequent forms of deprivation, there have been several spinoffs of other forms of violence, including those impacting children and youth in homes, schools, street life of gangs and child soldiers in some war zones. The number of deaths caused by violence ranges from over 1.6 million people dying annually, which is

nearly 8% of all deaths globally. Violence costs governments around the world billions of dollars annually, especially in healthcare, injuries and death resulting in lost productivity, and ineffective law and order enforcement. Such costs grossly undermine the social fabric of society and the economic development of nations, culminating in further violence.

This book provides valuable information about the global south perspectives on violence impacting children and youth. It examines trends, dimensions, and prospects in varied parts of the globe to help learn from these diverse cultural settings. It enables policymakers and practitioners to develop practical strategies to protect children and youth. The future of every society lies in the quality of life given to its children and youth. Many societies find their future bleak due to the level of decadence and squalor among children and the youth, leading to involvement in gangs and other crimes of a violent nature. The book addresses the nature of violence through theories in social psychology and further assesses varied perspectives and practical situations on how and why violence, in its many forms, occurs among children and youth and the impact this has on their life prospects. These terrible events are discussed in different chapters, noting the perpetrators, the victims and the brutal impact thereof. The areas covered by the book include violence in the city, gang violence, violence in the home environments, violence in schools/education, theories on violence, exclusionary violence which may arise from antisemitism, racism and resulting in ethnic cleansing and genocidal experiences impacting children and youth. Given broader global perspectives and experiences in different countries, other areas covered in the book include urban and street violence, gun violence among youth, social media influences on violence, terrorism, etc.

Violence of every kind has far-reaching consequences on the developmental agenda of any country, particularly urban violence, because urban societies often have higher populations and several forms of violence tend to be driven by acute levels of poverty, squalor, deprivation, and broken families, unable to care for children and the youth. Some dimensions of violence lead to terrorist activities and the recruitment of other dangerous groups, such as drug cartels across the globe, among others. More violence has led to uncertainty in sustaining the level of development in many countries. In recent times, the levels of violence have generally increased in many parts of the world, and this is due to the explosion in global gangster syndicates and terrorism, of which children and youths are victims. There is therefore the need to understand the depth of the crisis, its effects on society, how violence impacts children and youth, and how perpetrators of violence negate children's rights and their ability to become responsible citizens. The

book is essential for audiences such as government policymakers at all levels, including United Nations agencies involved with children and youth. It may also be helpful for teachers, students, educators, social workers, parents and guardians in youth facilities. Academic scholars and researchers may also utilise it to broaden their understanding of violence impacting children and youth.

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SECTION 1

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

CHAPTER 1

THE ROOTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUTH: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIETAL FACTORS

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Abstract

Violence against children and youth constitutes a pervasive and distressing reality with profound implications for individuals and societies globally. Its multifaceted presence underscores the urgent need to comprehend the intricate web of societal factors contributing to its perpetuation. This chapter embarks on a journey to unravel these complexities, exploring the interplay of cultural norms, socio-economic disparities, family dynamics, and community structures shaping violence against the most vulnerable. It aims to elucidate the diverse typologies of violence, delve into the root causes, and examine the implications for prevention and intervention efforts. The chapter navigates through an overview of violence against children and youth, highlighting its pervasive nature and far-reaching consequences. It delves into the definition and scope of violence, emphasising its various forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect. Drawing upon case studies and examples, it underscores the complex interplay of societal factors contributing to violence, such as cultural influences, socio-economic disparities, family dynamics, and community structures. Intersectionality emerges as a critical lens, illuminating the differential impacts of violence based on intersecting identities and power structures. Strategies for prevention and intervention are explored, advocating for evidence-based approaches that address root causes and promote resilience. Policy implications and recommendations underscore the imperative for legislative action, resource allocation, and multi-sectoral collaborations to safeguard the rights and well-being of children and youth. Conclusions advocate for

collective efforts to create nurturing environments that empower children and youth to thrive free from the scourge of violence.

Keywords: Violence; Societal Factors; Prevention; Intervention; Children's Rights

Introduction

The prevalence of violence against the youngest members of our communities speaks to a deeper, more complex set of societal dynamics that underpin and fuel this crisis. Understanding these factors is essential if community members develop meaningful and sustainable solutions to prevent, intervene in, and heal the wounds inflicted by such violence. The impact of such violence is far-reaching, affecting not only the immediate victims but also their long-term development, social stability, economic progress, and public health. It perpetuates cycles of abuse, inequality, and societal dysfunction across generations. The chapter emphasises that the prevalence of violence reflects deeper societal dynamics, including cultural norms, economic disparities, familial stress, and institutional failures, which often normalise harm. Factors such as gender, race, and class also shape children's vulnerability to different forms of violence. The introduction stresses the importance of addressing these root causes through a holistic approach that examines the intersections of culture, social structures, and policy. Effective prevention, intervention, and recovery strategies can be developed by understanding these underlying factors. The goal is proactively empowering communities and governments to protect children's rights and well-being, ultimately fostering environments where children can thrive and contribute to a more just, compassionate, and equitable society.

Violence against children and youth encompasses a broad spectrum of harmful behaviours and actions that result in physical, emotional, or psychological harm to individuals below the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). This definition acknowledges that violence can manifest in various forms and contexts, including but not limited to homes, schools, communities, and online spaces (WHO, 2021). The scope of violence against children and youth is extensive, encompassing acts of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional maltreatment, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence or armed conflict (CDC, 2019). It is crucial to recognise that violence against children and youth transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries, affecting millions of young lives worldwide (UN, 1989).

Violence against children and youth is a global crisis that transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries, affecting millions of young individuals and posing significant threats to their development and well-being. According to UNICEF (2020), violence against children and youth is a pervasive and alarming phenomenon that takes many forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological harm. It has far-reaching consequences, not only for the individuals directly affected but also for families, communities, and society at large. The psychological and emotional scars left by violence can have long-term effects on young people's cognitive development, social relationships, and future opportunities. Moreover, as WHO (2021) asserts, the impact of violence on children extends far beyond immediate physical injuries, often leading to chronic health issues such as depression, anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can persist well into adulthood.

The repercussions of violence against children are not limited to the individuals who experience it directly; they extend throughout society, perpetuating cycles of trauma and contributing to broader social inequities. The Centres for Disease Control (CDC) (2019) highlights how exposure to violence, whether in the home, community, or during armed conflicts, can create long-lasting effects that hinder the ability of children to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. As Finkelhor et al. (2009) note, children who experience violence often struggle to form healthy relationships, and they are more likely to face challenges such as poor academic performance, substance abuse, and engagement in violent behaviour as they grow older. Systemic issues like poverty, inequality, and lack of access to quality education and healthcare often reinforce this cycle of violence. Moreover, violence against children and youth can significantly impede progress toward achieving sustainable development goals, particularly in areas such as gender equality, poverty eradication, and peace and justice (United Nations, 2015).

A comprehensive understanding of the complex societal factors that contribute to violence against children and youth is essential for developing effective strategies to prevent and mitigate its impact. The exploration of these root causes—including social norms, family dynamics, economic disparities, and institutional neglect—is crucial to designing interventions that can disrupt the cycles of violence that many children and youth experience. Sedlak et al. (2010) emphasise that the interplay between individual, familial, community, and societal factors must be understood nuanced, as this intersection of factors often determines the level of vulnerability a child faces. Social norms, for example, can perpetuate harmful behaviours such as child marriage or corporal punishment, while cultural expectations

and gender roles can dictate how violence is normalised within specific communities. To truly address the root causes of violence, policies and programs must engage with these complex and multi-dimensional drivers.

The diverse forms of violence that children and youth endure require an equally multifaceted approach to both prevention and intervention. According to Pinheiro (2006), violence against children can manifest in multiple contexts, such as the home, school, workplace, and online environments. Physical violence, such as hitting, shaking, or kicking, can leave noticeable physical marks, but WHO (2021) also points out that the long-term emotional and psychological impact of such violence is often more challenging to measure and more devastating for the child. Sexual violence, including assault, exploitation, trafficking, and harassment, continues to be a widespread problem, with particularly devastating effects on girls. According to UNICEF (2020), the prevalence of child sexual abuse and exploitation has reached alarming levels globally, with many children facing long-term trauma, including early pregnancies, sexualised behaviours, and a heightened risk of HIV/AIDS. Sexual violence often intersects with other forms of violence, such as trafficking and child marriage, which increase vulnerability by stripping children of their autonomy and rights.

In addition to physical and sexual violence, emotional or psychological violence also plays a significant role in harming children. This form of violence includes verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, rejection, and emotional manipulation. The damage caused by psychological violence is profound, as it often undermines the child's sense of self-worth and emotional well-being, which can have long-term effects on their development (Pinheiro, 2006). This is especially true when emotional violence is experienced within the family unit, where the child may also be exposed to neglect or physical violence. Neglect—when a caregiver fails to provide for a child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and emotional care—is one of the most common but least recognised forms of violence. Sedlak et al. (2010) point out that neglect can have equally detrimental effects on a child's development as other forms of abuse, as it deprives the child of the necessary resources for healthy growth, both physically and emotionally.

Moreover, exposure to community violence, such as gang violence, neighbourhood crime, and armed conflict, further exacerbates the vulnerability of children and youth. According to Finkelhor et al. (2009), children who are exposed to violence in their communities are more likely to experience fear, stress, and trauma, which can affect their emotional regulation and cognitive development. This is particularly the case for children who grow up in conflict zones or war-torn regions, where violence becomes a daily occurrence, and the safety of children is compromised. WHO (2021)

underscores that children in conflict areas are at risk of becoming not only victims of violence but also perpetrators, as exposure to such environments may normalise aggressive behaviour. Children who experience violence may also become vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, further perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Understanding the diverse typologies of violence that children and youth face is essential for developing appropriate interventions and support systems. Each form of violence—whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful—requires different types of responses tailored to the age, circumstances, and needs of the child. Effective interventions must be holistic, addressing both the immediate and long-term consequences of violence. As Krug et al. (2002) note, interventions that focus solely on one type of violence or one specific population group are unlikely to yield sustainable results. Instead, a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, early intervention, and post-trauma care is essential to safeguarding children and youth. This may involve collaborative efforts between schools, community leaders, law enforcement, and mental health professionals to create safe spaces for children, provide early warning systems for abuse, and deliver recovery support.

Background: Definition and scope of violence

The definition and scope of violence encompass a multifaceted phenomenon that requires a nuanced understanding across various contexts and dimensions. Violence is defined as any behaviour, action, or situation that causes physical, emotional, psychological, or social harm to oneself or others (WHO, 2002). This harm can manifest in different forms, including but not limited to physical assault, sexual abuse, emotional manipulation, bullying, discrimination, and structural violence.

Violence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a broad range of behaviours and actions intended to cause harm, injury, or suffering to oneself or others. It extends beyond physical aggression and can manifest in various forms, including psychological, emotional, sexual, and structural violence. The scope of violence encompasses interpersonal violence, which occurs between individuals, as well as structural violence, which is embedded within social, political, and economic systems.

Interpersonal violence includes acts such as physical assault, sexual abuse, verbal harassment, bullying, and domestic violence. It can occur within intimate relationships, families, communities, schools, workplaces, and other settings. Interpersonal violence can have devastating consequences

for victims, perpetrators, and communities, leading to physical injuries, psychological trauma, social isolation, and long-term health issues.

Interpersonal violence, occurring between individuals or groups, encompasses acts such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, child abuse, sexual assault, and interpersonal conflicts (CDC, 2019). It involves direct harm inflicted by one person upon another and can occur in various settings, including homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. Interpersonal violence often results from power imbalances, social norms, and cultural attitudes that perpetuate aggression and exploitation within relationships and social dynamics (Krug et al., 2002).

On the other hand, structural violence refers to systemic injustices, inequalities, and forms of oppression embedded within social, political, and economic structures (Galtung, 1969). It encompasses poverty, racism, sexism, discrimination, and unequal access to resources and opportunities (Farmer, 2004). Structural violence manifests through policies, institutions, and societal norms that marginalise and disadvantage certain groups based on their identity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics. It perpetuates disparities in health, education, employment, and social participation, contributing to cycles of inequity and social injustice (WHO, 2019).

Understanding the definition and scope of violence requires an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach that considers individual experiences, relational dynamics, and broader societal contexts. Addressing violence necessitates comprehensive strategies prioritising prevention, intervention, and policy reforms to promote human rights, social justice, and equitable opportunities for all individuals and communities (Pinheiro, 2006).

Types of violence experienced by children and youth
Physical Violence

Physical violence against youth encompasses a range of behaviours that result in bodily harm or injury. This can include hitting, punching, kicking, and other forms of physical aggression. In some cases, physical violence may occur within the home, perpetrated by family members or caregivers. In some other cases, youth may experience physical violence in school settings or within their communities. Such violence can have lasting physical and psychological effects on young individuals, impacting their overall well-being and sense of safety (CDC, 2019).

Sexual Violence:

Sexual violence against youth involves non-consensual sexual acts or behaviours perpetrated by individuals in positions of power or authority. This can include sexual assault, rape, molestation, and exploitation. Youth may be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence due to factors such as age, gender, and social circumstances. Perpetrators of sexual violence may be family members, intimate partners, peers, or strangers. The trauma resulting from sexual violence can have profound and long-lasting effects on youth, affecting their mental health, relationships, and sense of self-worth (UNICEF, 2020).

Emotional and Psychological Violence

Emotional and psychological violence against youth encompasses behaviours that undermine their emotional well-being and sense of self. This can include verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, manipulation, and emotional neglect. Emotional violence can occur within familial relationships, peer groups, or online environments. The impact of emotional violence on youth can be significant, leading to issues such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and difficulty forming healthy relationships (WHO, 2021).

Neglect

Neglect refers to the failure of caregivers to provide for the basic needs of youth, including food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and emotional support. Neglect can occur due to various factors, including parental substance abuse, mental illness, poverty, and family dysfunction. Youth who experience neglect may suffer from malnutrition, poor physical health, educational difficulties, and emotional trauma. Neglect can have long-term consequences for youth, impairing their development and well-being into adulthood (Sedlak et al., 2010).

Societal Factors Contributing to Violence Against Children and Youth

Cultural influences and norms

Cultural influences and norms play a significant role in shaping attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions surrounding violence against children and youth (UNICEF, 2020). In many societies, cultural beliefs and traditions

may condone or normalise certain forms of violence, perpetuating cycles of abuse and silence (WHO, 2021). For instance, cultural norms that prioritise discipline through physical punishment may contribute to higher rates of physical abuse within families and communities (CDC, 2019). Moreover, gender norms and expectations embedded within cultures can exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for girls who may face heightened risks of sexual violence, early marriage, and exploitation (Pinheiro, 2006). Understanding the context is essential for designing culturally sensitive interventions and promoting community-led efforts to challenge harmful norms and foster environments that uphold children's rights and dignity (Sedlak et al., 2010).

Socioeconomic disparities

Socioeconomic disparities emerge as significant determinants of violence against children and youth, exacerbating vulnerabilities and inequalities within communities (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and increased risks of violence within families and neighbourhoods (Krug et al., 2002). Socioeconomic stressors can strain familial relationships, limit access to essential services and resources, and undermine caregivers' ability to provide safe and nurturing environments for children and youth (UN, 1989). Moreover, disparities in access to education, healthcare, and social support systems further compound the challenges faced by marginalised communities, perpetuating cycles of violence and marginalisation (UNICEF, 2020). Addressing socioeconomic disparities requires comprehensive approaches that prioritise equitable access to opportunities, resources, and social protections for all children and youth, regardless of socioeconomic background (WHO, 2021).

Family dynamics and parenting practices

Family dynamics and parenting practices exert profound influences on the risk of violence against children and youth within the household (CDC, 2019). Family environments characterised by high levels of stress, conflict, substance abuse, and mental health issues are often associated with increased incidences of violence directed towards children and youth (Pinheiro, 2006). Parental factors such as parenting styles, attitudes towards corporal punishment, and caregiver-child attachment patterns significantly impact the likelihood of abusive behaviours and neglect (Sedlak et al., 2010). Moreover, intergenerational transmission of violence, where indi-

viduals who have experienced or witnessed violence in their childhood perpetuate similar patterns in their own families, underscores the complex interplay between family dynamics and the perpetuation of violence (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Interventions aimed at promoting positive parenting practices, enhancing parental resilience, and providing support services to families experiencing stress or crisis are crucial for preventing and addressing violence against children and youth within familial contexts (UN, 1989).

Community and societal structures

Community and societal structures encompass a wide array of factors that contribute to the prevalence and perpetuation of violence against children and youth at broader social levels (UNICEF, 2020). Communities characterised by high levels of social disorganisation, limited social cohesion, and weak informal support networks may lack protective mechanisms and resources for at-risk children and families, increasing their vulnerability to violence (WHO, 2021). Moreover, the normalisation of violence within specific communities, coupled with the presence of gangs, organised crime, and substance abuse, further heightens the risks faced by children and youth (Krug et al., 2002). Societal factors such as gender inequality, discrimination, and structural violence intersect with community dynamics to create environments where certain groups of children and youth are disproportionately exposed to violence and exploitation (CDC, 2019). Strengthening community resilience, fostering collective efficacy, and mobilising community resources are essential strategies for creating safer environments and promoting the well-being of children and youth within their broader social contexts (Pinheiro, 2006).

Intersections of Societal Factors in Perpetuating Violence

1. Case studies and examples highlighting the complex interplay of societal factors

Case studies provide essential insights into the multifaceted nature of violence against children and youth, helping to unravel the complexities of societal factors that fuel this pervasive issue. By examining real-life scenarios, case studies help reveal how cultural norms, socioeconomic disparities, family dynamics, and community structures intersect in ways that create environments conducive to violence. Such studies provide valuable

lessons for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners aiming to develop more effective interventions and responses.

Gender-Based Violence and Child Marriage

Gender norms rooted in patriarchal societies play a central role in perpetuating gender-based violence (GBV), especially for girls in specific cultural contexts. One glaring example is the practice of child marriage in communities across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where deeply ingrained gender norms limit girls' opportunities and expose them to heightened risks of sexual violence, early pregnancy, and limited educational attainment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), over 12 million girls under 18 are married every year, often against their will, leaving them vulnerable to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. In many cases, the onset of child marriage is influenced by socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, that push families to marry off daughters in exchange for dowries or perceived financial stability. As gender inequality is perpetuated through these practices, interventions targeting the social norms surrounding marriage and empowering girls through education and economic opportunities have been identified as critical strategies to reduce child marriage (UNICEF, 2020).

Systemic Racism and Its Impact on Vulnerability to Violence

Systemic racism is a deeply entrenched issue that perpetuates inequality across various sectors, contributing to significant disparities in the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) about violence and victimisation. In countries like the United States, systemic racism intersects with socioeconomic inequality, exacerbating the vulnerability of minority youth to various forms of violence, both interpersonal and structural. The impact of systemic racism is multi-dimensional, spanning education, healthcare, law enforcement, and economic opportunity, and it compounds the risks that BIPOC youth face in both public and private spaces.

A growing body of research indicates that BIPOC communities are disproportionately impacted by violence. According to a report from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2019), children of colour in the U.S. experience violence at higher rates compared to their white counterparts, including physical abuse, bullying, sexual exploitation, and violence within their communities. Structural factors, such as racism embedded in social, political, and economic systems, heighten these risks by

limiting access to opportunities and resources that might otherwise serve as protective factors against violence. Racial minorities face greater exposure to both interpersonal violence (e.g., domestic violence, community violence) and state-sponsored violence, including police brutality and discriminatory criminal justice practices (Ritchie, 2017; Kaba, 2019).

The intersection of systemic racism with socioeconomic inequality also plays a pivotal role in amplifying vulnerability to violence. Historical and ongoing racial discrimination often manifests in unequal access to quality education, employment opportunities, and healthcare. These disparities perpetuate cycles of poverty and social marginalisation, which in turn contribute to higher levels of exposure to violence for minority youth (Bashir, 2020). For example, BIPOC youth are more likely to attend underfunded schools with fewer resources, which often creates environments where violence, bullying, and neglect are prevalent. Furthermore, limited access to healthcare services, including mental health support, exacerbates the trauma of victimisation, hindering recovery and increasing susceptibility to future violence (Williams & Mohammed, 2009).

Moreover, systemic racism in law enforcement disproportionately impacts BIPOC youth, further contributing to their vulnerability to violence. Studies have shown that Black youth are more likely to be arrested, incarcerated, or subjected to police brutality compared to white youth, even when controlling for other factors (Goff et al., 2016). This over-policing and criminalisation of minority youth can create hostile environments in which young people feel unsafe and are at greater risk of experiencing both direct violence and systemic neglect. Police violence, in particular, has been linked to significant psychological distress for youth, eroding trust in institutions that are meant to protect them and contributing to a sense of alienation and disenfranchisement (Smith, 2020). For example, the killing of Black youth such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Tamir Rice, and the subsequent movements like Black Lives Matter have highlighted how racialised violence extends beyond interpersonal interactions and reflects deeply embedded racial inequalities in the broader system of justice and law enforcement (Crenshaw, 2015).

Addressing the impact of systemic racism on the vulnerability of children and youth to violence requires comprehensive policy interventions that target the root causes of these disparities. Structural inequalities need to be addressed through targeted policies that promote equity in education, healthcare, and employment, aiming to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate disadvantage for marginalised communities (Gilliam & Stevenson, 2017). Moreover, there is an urgent need to reform law enforcement practices to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure the protection of

youth from state violence, particularly within communities of colour. This could involve increasing accountability within police departments, investing in community-based violence prevention programs, and promoting restorative justice practices that prioritise healing and community engagement over punitive measures (Kaba, 2019).

In addition to policy reform, efforts to reduce the vulnerability of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth to violence must include community-driven initiatives that empower local organisations and leaders to tackle violence at the grassroots level. For instance, community-based violence intervention programs that engage families, schools, and regional institutions can provide immediate support for at-risk youth and work to prevent future violence. These initiatives often focus on conflict resolution, emotional support, mentorship, and the development of alternative pathways for youth who might otherwise be exposed to violence and criminalisation. Programs like Operation Peacemaker Fellowship in Richmond, California, or Cure Violence in Chicago have shown promise in reducing violence by using public health models to interrupt cycles of violence and trauma (Butts et al., 2015).

Finally, fostering an anti-racist culture across institutions, especially in schools and law enforcement, is essential for creating environments where BIPOC youth feel safe and valued. Racial equity training for educators, police officers, and social workers can be a key strategy in dismantling the biases that perpetuate violence and discrimination. Additionally, youth-led advocacy and activism, such as those spearheaded by the Black Lives Matter movement, can play a crucial role in challenging the status quo and pushing for societal and institutional change that addresses the root causes of violence against minority youth (Patton, 2020). In conclusion, systemic racism not only increases the risk of violence for BIPOC youth; it also perpetuates cycles of trauma and inequality that affect generations. As such, addressing these issues requires sustained and multifaceted efforts aimed at reforming both social structures and cultural norms to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and youth.

Violence in Conflict Zones: Gender-Based Violence in the DRC

The ongoing armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) provides a stark example of how the breakdown of societal structures in war zones amplifies violence against children, particularly girls. Armed groups exploit the vulnerability of children, using abduction, sexual violence, and forced marriage as tactics of war. As Human Rights Watch

(2020) notes, girls are often kidnapped, sexually assaulted, and subjected to sexual slavery, with the added layer of being forced into early marriages. The intersection of conflict, gender inequality, and poverty leaves these children without recourse, as weak governance and cultural stigmas prevent them from accessing justice, healthcare, or psychosocial support. While international efforts continue to address the consequences of these abuses, much more needs to be done to dismantle the deeply embedded cultural and institutional structures that sustain this violence (Amnesty International, 2019).

Cyberbullying in Affluent Societies

In wealthier societies, the rise of cyberbullying underscores the intersection between technology, social dynamics, and mental health. Social media platforms provide young people with both a sense of connection and a space where harassment can thrive. Smith et al. (2020) highlight that, in some instances, the anonymity of online spaces allows cyberbullies to cause greater harm than traditional bullying, with a significant impact on the victim's emotional and psychological well-being. Patchin and Hinduja (2021) explain that cultural norms around popularity and status on digital platforms can fuel aggressive behaviour, with children and youth facing intense peer pressure to conform to socially constructed ideals of beauty, success, and dominance. The consequences of cyberbullying include depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, especially for those who may already be vulnerable due to factors such as social isolation or previous trauma. Addressing cyberbullying requires collaboration across schools, parents, and technology platforms, as well as a more robust framework for digital citizenship and conflict resolution (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Child Labor in Low-Income Communities

In parts of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, child labour remains a persistent issue driven by socioeconomic disparities, inadequate legal frameworks, and cultural practices. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) reports that around 152 million children are engaged in child labour globally, with a significant portion involved in hazardous work. Poverty, compounded by caste systems and gender inequality, forces families to send children to work rather than school, perpetuating cycles of exploitation. The failure to enforce labour laws and the lack of education infrastructure in rural areas make children particularly vulnerable to abuse, trafficking, and physical harm. Addressing child labour requires compre-

hensive multi-sectoral approaches, including economic empowerment for families, education initiatives, and more vigorous enforcement of child protection laws (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, international efforts, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlight the need to promote inclusive education and economic opportunities to break these entrenched cycles of poverty and exploitation (UN, 2017).

Indigenous Youth Suicide Rates

High suicide rates among Indigenous youth reflect a combination of historical trauma, cultural marginalisation, and systemic discrimination. Kirmayer et al. (2017) identify the role of colonial histories, including forced assimilation and cultural disruption, in shaping the mental health of Indigenous communities. Contemporary factors such as economic deprivation, poor educational outcomes, and the lack of culturally relevant mental health services contribute to high suicide rates among Indigenous youth. According to Cwik et al. (2016), Indigenous youth in North America are 3 to 4 times more likely to die by suicide than their non-Indigenous peers. Tackling this crisis requires culturally tailored mental health services, community-driven resilience programs, and structural interventions to combat systemic racism and poverty (Wexler, 2014).

Intersectionality and Its Impact on Vulnerability to Violence

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), explores how various aspects of an individual's identity—such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic status—intersect and compound to influence their experiences of violence. This lens is particularly crucial for understanding the vulnerability of children and youth to violence, as overlapping systems of oppression often increase exposure to harm.

For instance, LGBTQ+ youth, especially transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals, face heightened risks of violence due to compounded forms of gender-based violence and discrimination (Hughes et al., 2010). Studies show that these youths experience disproportionately high rates of bullying, physical assault, and exclusion in schools and online spaces. The intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity with socioeconomic status further exacerbates their vulnerability. LGBTQ+ youth in marginalised communities may face additional barriers, such as a lack of supportive networks, mental health care, or protective resources, which compounds their exposure to violence (Kelley et al., 2020).

Moreover, the intersection of poverty and race creates a unique set of challenges for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) children, who are often subjected to systemic discrimination and unequal access to resources. These children may face restricted educational opportunities and limited access to social services, further increasing their susceptibility to violence. Recent reports by organisations like UNICEF (2022) highlight the disproportionate risks faced by children in marginalised communities, including refugees, migrants, and those living in poverty. These groups are more likely to experience exploitation, including sexual trafficking, labour exploitation, and physical violence.

Recognising and addressing these intersecting systems of discrimination is key to developing inclusive policies and interventions that can better support vulnerable children and youth. As Krug et al. (2002) emphasise, an intersectional approach allows practitioners to design more targeted and practical strategies that not only address the direct causes of violence but also challenge the broader socio-cultural, political, and economic systems that perpetuate inequality.

Intersectionality provides a vital framework for understanding how multiple identities and systems of oppression shape experiences of violence. By adopting this lens, policies and interventions can more effectively meet the needs of marginalised and at-risk groups, fostering a more equitable and just society.

Implications for Prevention and Intervention

Strategies for addressing societal factors contributing to violence

To effectively combat violence against children and youth, strategies must target the societal factors that perpetuate such violence, addressing both the root causes and the contributing factors. These strategies require a multi-level approach involving collaboration between governments, communities, and international organisations. The root causes of violence often lie in poverty, gender inequality, cultural norms, and discrimination. For example, UNICEF (2020) highlights that poverty and social exclusion are central to understanding the vulnerability of children to various forms of abuse and exploitation, including child labour, trafficking, and domestic violence. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive interventions that aim not only to protect children but also to transform the socio-economic conditions that perpetuate violence.

A primary prevention strategy focuses on transforming harmful cultural norms and challenging entrenched gender inequalities. Programs aimed

at raising awareness about the consequences of gender-based violence and child marriage, as well as the importance of gender equality, are critical in reducing the incidence of these harmful practices. According to the CDC (2019), education programs that promote positive masculinity, respect, and equality can be transformative in reshaping societal attitudes toward violence. At the community level, such strategies can include workshops, social media campaigns, and collaborative partnerships with local leaders to promote non-violent conflict resolution and healthy relationship dynamics. Empowering communities to shift attitudes around the acceptability of violence against children is a powerful tool for societal change.

Additionally, promoting family-oriented interventions is crucial in preventing violence. Providing support for parents through parenting skills programs, which focus on non-violent discipline techniques, emotional regulation, and building positive relationships with children, can help reduce incidents of domestic violence and child abuse. Programs that offer economic support to low-income families are also essential, as financial stress is often a trigger for violence in the home. Studies, such as those by Finkelhor et al. (2009), show that enhancing family resilience through these programs can significantly reduce the risk of children being exposed to violence. Interventions that address substance abuse, mental health issues, and relationship dynamics in families also contribute to the reduction of violence by improving overall family functioning.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Strong and comprehensive policy frameworks are essential in the prevention and intervention of violence against children and youth. Governments have a critical responsibility to create, implement, and enforce laws that not only criminalise violence but also establish protective systems for children and youth at all levels. Krug et al. (2002) argue that policy should focus on integrating child rights into national legislation and development agendas. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) provides a global standard for governments, urging the enactment of policies that ensure children's safety, dignity, and access to education, healthcare, and protection from harm.

Effective policy also demands multi-sectoral collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations, healthcare providers, educational institutions, and international organisations. WHO (2021) emphasises the need for these sectors to work together to create integrated child protection systems that not only respond to violence but also prevent it through education and community engagement. Government invest-

ments in programs that support families, including those that target poverty reduction, social services, and gender equality, can go a long way in addressing the socioeconomic factors that contribute to violence. Social protection programs aimed at vulnerable families—especially those living in poverty—are crucial for providing economic stability and reducing the pressures that can lead to violence in the home.

Moreover, robust legal frameworks that criminalise violence against children, enforce child protection laws and establish child-friendly legal systems for responding to violence are essential. As Finkelhor et al. (2009) highlight, adequate legal protections are critical to both preventing and responding to violence. These protections should also include policies that guarantee access to education, mental health services, and community-based support for children and families affected by violence.

Promoting Resilience and Protective Factors

Building resilience in children and youth is a key strategy for mitigating the impact of violence and promoting long-term well-being. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt positively in the face of adversity, and it is essential for helping children cope with the trauma of violence and break free from the cycle of abuse. Sedlak et al. (2010) emphasise that interventions that promote protective factors, such as strong social networks, mentorship, and access to quality education, can serve as buffers against the adverse effects of violence.

Providing children and youth opportunities for personal development, education, and skills training is one of the most potent resilience-building strategies. Programs focusing on life skills training—particularly for high-risk communities—can significantly improve youth outcomes by fostering a sense of purpose, increasing self-esteem, and providing young people with the tools to navigate difficult situations without resorting to violence. According to WHO (2021), promoting mental health literacy and providing access to mental health services for both children and caregivers can also strengthen resilience and help children recover from trauma.

Moreover, trauma-informed care is an essential component of resilience-building interventions. Children who have experienced violence often have complex emotional and psychological needs that require specialised support. Mental health services that offer psychosocial support, counselling, and therapy can significantly reduce the long-term impact of trauma. Programs designed to address the needs of children exposed to domestic violence, sexual abuse, or war-related trauma must prioritise healing and recovery through culturally appropriate and community-based models