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RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Reflections from a Data-to-Action Workshop based on the First-Ever Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey



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By: Gloria Seruwagi

It's not new that humanitarian crises are associated with heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV) as well as disruption in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) service delivery and access. The evidence on this is overwhelming—historically, currently, and globally. Focusing on Uganda and Ethiopia, the [Baobab Research Programme Consortium \(RPC\)](#) is bringing well-regarded, rigorous SRHR-related surveys into humanitarian settings for the first time, such as the [Violence Against Children and Youth Survey \(VACS\)](#). While 23 countries globally have conducted the nationally representative VACS, the survey has never been conducted in humanitarian settings ... that is, until Baobab conducted the first-ever Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (HVACS) survey in Uganda in 2022.

Among other issues, the HVACS estimates the prevalence of sexual, physical, and emotional violence against children and youth in humanitarian contexts. In Uganda, the HVACS was conducted in all 13 of the country's refugee settlements in collaboration with the [Office of the Prime Minister \(Department of Refugees\)](#) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and with technical support from the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and [Together for Girls](#).

From June 14 to 16 2023, the Office of the Prime Minister and Baobab co-convened a Data-to-Action (D2A) Workshop in Kampala, Uganda. This dissemination event for showcasing the HVACS findings brought together key policymakers, practitioners, and other partners working to prevent and respond to violence against children in refugee settings in Uganda.

The grim statistics presented at the workshop confirmed children's high vulnerability to multiple forms of violence in refugee settings. For Uganda, this had been confirmed with regard to the general population of children earlier, through the 2015 national [Violence Against Children Survey](#), which showed that, on average, one in three children had experienced some form of violence during their childhood (before the age of 18), with the prevalence of sexual violence being higher among girls, while the prevalence of physical violence was higher among boys. However, among refugee children, the stakes were likely to be even higher, and children's vulnerability heightened in part due to the tumultuous periods before, during, and after arrival in the settlements.

As the first in a series of studies to be conducted by Baobab, the Ugandan HVACS laid bare the reality and extent of violence perpetrated against children in refugee settings in a country that has rightly received global recognition for its progressive refugee policy. The study indicated that half (50%) of males and 43% of females aged 18 to 24 years experienced any type of violence (sexual, physical, or emotional) during their childhood years (i.e., prior to age 18), while among children currently aged 13 to 17 years, 65% of males and 49% of females reported ever experiencing any type of violence (Obare et al. 2023). Findings also revealed an intersection between violence and disability, with children and young people with disability being up to four (4) times more likely to experience violence than their counterparts without a disability. Broken down to granular details (for example, by sociodemographic characteristics, type of violence, perpetrator type, and location of incident), it was very clear that the complexities were multiple—including the fact that violence was a cause, driver, or risk factor and consequence of poor health outcomes among refugee children.

Everyone present at the D2A workshop wanted to do something in response to the HVACS findings, to contribute to preventing and responding to violence against children. Fortunately, the delegates in that room were the most appropriate stakeholders for this cause, positioned for impact. D2A workshop delegates included humanitarian stakeholders from the child protection, education, GBV, and health sectors in Uganda. The VACS Data-to-Action workshops are designed to help countries identify evidence-based violence prevention priorities through a participatory process of linking VACS data to the suite of evidenced-based and prudent practices in the [INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children](#) technical package. The outcomes of the D2A workshop are data-driven, evidence-based priorities and actions to prevent and respond to violence against children.

The Uganda meeting represented the first D2A workshop around VACS data derived from a humanitarian setting. And what fantastic and impactful engagement the humanitarian delegates demonstrated! Stirred to action and drawing not only from their expertise but also from their roles and responsibilities as policymakers, implementing partners, administrators and leaders, the Government of Uganda, civil society organizations, funders, development stakeholders, and other partners identified key priority areas to address and determine next steps by linking the HVACS data

to the INSPIRE framework as well as to the [Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#).

It was heartwarming to see policymakers, practitioners, and researchers at this “meeting of minds” workshop, making sense of robust proven frameworks like INSPIRE and the [CPMS](#), making commitments to harmonize actions and ensure that contextualized evidence is used in programming for violence against children in humanitarian settings. Workshop delegates sounded upbeat and optimistic about the survey results and their own participation in the workshop, seeking to translate these findings to action:

The [HVACS] findings confirm many of the things we see in the Settlements. But in terms of response, every [implementing] partner has been coming in with their own strategy and [standard operating procedures] on how to address this matter. Through this workshop we have now realized that we have actually been implementing some of the INSPIRE principles without even knowing it... but now what we need is aligning better to these national and internationally recognized frameworks for service delivery for both refugees and host communities. It has been a good eye opener for me and most of my colleagues. —Abdul Ramadhan, Commandant, Adjumani Refugee Settlement, Office of the Prime Minister)

Baobab is honored to provide support and extend the work of the Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR, alongside other humanitarian actors in protecting children in Uganda, especially within the context of resource and data constraints as highlighted below:

That this study was conducted in refugee settings is very important because right now we [UNHCR] are supporting the integration of refugees into national systems. Increasingly, we see shrinking funding for humanitarian work compared to development-leaning interventions, yet child vulnerability remains high. So, this data is timely; it directly informs our child protection and integration of refugees into national systems—to ensure that refugees are found within the budgets and plans of government. —Jane Asiimwe, UNHCR

Delegates’ enthusiasm and engagement was confirmed by the facilitators as shown in remarks by [CDC’s Andres Villaveces](#) during one of breaks:

This is the very first time we are going through this exercise of working through multiple tools with this type of data for this type of population. The Sector Working Groups are very engaged, clearly knowledgeable and drawing clear linkages with their own work. This is important.

The D2A workshop was a meeting of minds, with clear actions to follow. It was remarkable how the diverse and multilevel stakeholders approached the data and tried to make sense of it, drawing linkages to their own day-to-day roles and responsibilities. It truly was a “Data-to-Action workshop.” Worth noting is that the workshop’s last day fell on the annually-celebrated *Day of the African Child 2023*—a wonderful coincidence not lost on us all.

References

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This post is part of [Rooted Reflections](#), a special series from the [Baobab Research Programme Consortium](#) documenting reflections, experiences, and learnings that are often left uncaptured by researchers in their implementation of research studies, and by the peer-reviewed literature.

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