



SAFE FUTURES HUB

Building Safe Futures

Solutions to end childhood
sexual violence

Executive Summary

Evidence from low- and
middle-income countries
on childhood sexual
violence prevention



Every child deserves to grow up with dignity, free from fear, and with their dreams intact.

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Safe Futures Hub. (2024). Building Safe Futures: Solutions to end childhood sexual violence. Evidence from low- and middle-income countries on childhood sexual violence prevention. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Together for Girls, WeProtect Global Alliance. www.safefutureshub.org

Access additional resources and the full-length “Building Safe Futures: Solutions to End Childhood Sexual Violence” at safefutureshub.org.



The stakes are high, and the time for action is now. Let us build safe futures for our children — futures where they are free to be just that: children.



01 Introduction and Call to Action

Every child deserves to grow up with dignity, free from fear, and with their dreams unshattered. Yet for millions of children around the world, this is not the reality.

Childhood sexual violence continues to harm countless young lives, leaving scars that can last a lifetime. It is a hidden crisis that cuts across all boundaries — geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic.

The global community has a shared responsibility to protect our youngest and most vulnerable from harm. Our goal is not only to acknowledge the challenges but also to present practical, evidence-based solutions that can be effectively implemented, scaled up, and sustained. By leveraging this knowledge, we can shape a future in which every child is free from the threat of sexual violence.

This executive summary complements the full systematic review of evidence, [Building Safe Futures: Solutions to End Childhood Sexual Violence](#). It is structured around the INSPIRE framework, which outlines seven strategies to prevent and respond to violence against children. This executive summary also explores the cross-cutting themes of coordination and monitoring and evaluation, which are critical to the integration and success of these strategies.

We envision a world in which every child can learn, play, and grow without the fear of violence. A world where child survivors and/or victims receive the support they need to heal and reclaim their futures. We have enough evidence to act now for all children affected — what we need is political will, commitment, and investment.

This is not a time for incremental change; it is a time for bold, decisive action.

Let us mobilize in this mission. Whether a researcher, policymaker, practitioner, activist, community leader, social worker, or other service provider, whether a survivor and/or victim or an ally, we all have a role to play. The solutions are within our reach, but it will take all of us working together to make them a reality. The stakes are high, and the time for action is now. Let us build safe futures for our children — futures where they are free to be just that: children.

Purpose and objectives

The “Building Safe Futures” evidence review aims to:

- **synthesize evidence** of what works to prevent childhood sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries, from a wide range of studies published between 2018 and 2024;
- **recommend strategies** to prevent childhood sexual violence that align with the broader goals of promoting child rights and well-being;
- **identify gaps** and challenges that need to be addressed to enhance interventions’ effectiveness and build a more robust evidence base;
- **inform decision-making** by offering evidence-based guidance for governments, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, donors, and other stakeholders to effectively shape policy, programs, and funding priorities; and
- **call for action** and urge immediate and decisive action from all stakeholders, because while more research is needed, there is already sufficient evidence to implement effective strategies now.

This research provides an actionable roadmap to address childhood sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings.



02 Background: Childhood Sexual Violence

A. Prevalence and impact of childhood sexual violence

Childhood sexual violence — children being anyone under the age of 18 — is prevalent worldwide.¹ It affects children from **all** backgrounds, of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, and of all ages. According to the International Classification of Violence Against Children, sexual violence against children is “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.”²

The true scale of childhood sexual violence is likely underestimated due to barriers to reporting, including stigma, concerns of possible retaliation, cultural taboos, and inadequate reporting mechanisms. The digital age has only intensified these challenges, creating new avenues for abuse that traditional prevention and response methods struggle to address. We need a comprehensive approach that tackles real-life, offline risks and online threats head-on.

The impact of childhood sexual violence is profound, far-reaching, and multidimensional. For children, the experience of sexual violence can lead to immediate physical injuries, exposure to sexually transmitted infections, and in some cases, unintended pregnancies. The psychological impact is equally severe, with many survivors and/or victims suffering from trauma, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health problems.³ These effects can disrupt a child’s development and have lasting consequences throughout their lifetime and on the lives of future generations.

B. Evidence on addressing childhood sexual violence

Addressing the global crisis of childhood sexual violence requires evidence-based solutions that are grounded in rigorous research. Adopting an evidence-based approach enables stakeholders to design, implement, and scale up programs from intervention types that have been proven to work. Robust evidence supports the strategic allocation of resources, ensures that investments are made in programs that provide the greatest impact for children, enhances advocacy efforts, mobilizes political will, and strengthens policy frameworks.

While significant progress has been made in understanding and addressing childhood sexual violence, there are still substantial gaps in evidence. This is particularly true regarding the ability to replicate interventions in different cultural and socioeconomic environments.

Interventions must be informed by data that reflects the reality of the specific setting and the intersecting discrimination-based risks and barriers to access faced by diverse children in that setting – for example, girls; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, plus (LGBTIQ+) children; black, indigenous, children of color; children from marginalized or oppressed ethnic groups or castes; and children with disabilities or specific age groups, among others.

In this study, we focus specifically on studies of programs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including settings affected by humanitarian or refugee crises.

C. The evidence review process and content

This executive summary complements the full 2024 systematic review of evidence, *Building Safe Futures: Solutions to End Childhood Sexual Violence*⁴, which identified and synthesized research findings from January 2018 to June 2024. It builds upon the 2019 *Together for Girls* report *What Works to Prevent Sexual Violence Against Children: Evidence Review*.⁵ An initial literature search using key terms identified 4,811 studies. After removing duplicates and screening according to established criteria, 72 studies remained for the systematic evidence review.

The programs described in the studies were then categorized according to the seven strategies and two cross-cutting activities of the *INSPIRE framework*. These seven strategies are the **implementation and enforcement of laws, norms and values, safe environments, parent and caregiver support, income and economic strengthening, response and support services, and education and life skills**. The two cross-cutting areas are **multisectoral coordination** and **monitoring and evaluation**.

The programs were then clustered into intervention types and these intervention types were classified using a slightly modified version of the INSPIRE classification criteria used in the 2019 evidence review: “effective,” “promising,” “prudent,” “conflicting,” “no effect,” “harmful,” or “needs more evidence.”⁶

Based on this systematic review, the evidence review report and this executive summary identify successful approaches, pinpoint challenges, and provide actionable recommendations to address childhood sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings.

INSPIRE

Seven strategies for ending violence against children



1 | Implementation and enforcement of laws



2 | Norms and values



3 | Safe environments



4 | Parent and caregiver support



5 | Income and economic strengthening



6 | Response and support services



7 | Education and life skills

We know we have more
to learn. But we also
know we have enough
evidence to act now for
millions of children.



A comprehensive,
coordinated effort is
key to stopping sexual
violence, creating safer
futures for children
everywhere.



03 Solutions to end childhood sexual violence: evidence highlights

Summary of intervention types by effectiveness

Table 1 provides a summary of the review’s findings, organized by classification, intervention type, and strategy. Notably, no studies were found that

focused specifically on multisectoral coordination or monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, we relied on broader discussions from the screened literature and additional materials shared with the research team to extract key insights on these cross-cutting activities.

Table 1. Summary of intervention types by level of effectiveness

| Effective intervention types, when well-designed and implemented | INSPIRE strategies |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Adolescent development clubs | Safe environments |
| Skills development for preschool children and their parents in preventing childhood sexual violence | Parent and caregiver support |
| Parent skills for preventing childhood sexual violence in pre-adolescents and adolescents | Parent and caregiver support |
| Multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting women and adolescent girls | Income and economic strengthening |
| Broad-based prevention modules embedded in school curricula | Education and life skills |
| School-based self-defense interventions for sexual violence prevention | Education and life skills |
| Curriculum design and educator training for delivering childhood sexual violence prevention modules | Education and life skills |

| Promising intervention types | INSPIRE strategies |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Small group interventions for children and adolescents outside of schools | Norms and values |
| Parent counselling approaches for preventing childhood sexual violence | Parent and caregiver support |
| Government-run, multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting adolescent girls and boys. | Income and economic strengthening |
| Child- and adolescent-friendly response and support services | Response and support services |

| Prudent intervention types | INSPIRE strategies |
|--|--|
| Domestic legislation and national action plans on technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence | Implementation and enforcement of laws |
| Child-friendly justice responses | Implementation and enforcement of laws |
| International safeguarding policies and approaches | Implementation and enforcement of laws |
| School-based prevention interventions for children and adolescents with disabilities | Education and life skills |

| Conflicting intervention types | INSPIRE strategies |
|---|---------------------------|
| Child-friendly safe spaces in humanitarian settings. | Safe environments |
| School-based interventions to prevent harmful or problematic sexual behavior by children and adolescents. | Education and life skills |

| No effect intervention types |
|------------------------------|
|------------------------------|

No groups of studies under one intervention type were classed as no effect⁷

Harmful intervention types

No groups of studies under one intervention type were classified as harmful⁸

| Intervention types needing more evidence | INSPIRE strategies |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Stand-alone media and technology-assisted norms change campaigns | Norms and values |
| Sports-based interventions for the prevention of childhood sexual violence | Norms and values |
| Safeguarding systems to prevent childhood sexual violence in child-serving organizations | Safe environments |
| Savings programs | Income and economic strengthening |
| Recognition, screening, and reporting and disclosure of childhood sexual violence | Response and support services |





INSPIRE

1 | Implementation and enforcement of laws

The implementation and enforcement of laws to prevent childhood sexual violence encompasses a range of actions, including:

- drafting and enacting laws that specifically address childhood sexual violence;
- establishing policies and guidelines aligned with these laws to outline proactive prevention procedures (e.g., enforcing codes of conduct, screening measures);
- training and raising awareness among law enforcement, judicial officials, healthcare providers, educators, and community members so that they understand these laws and apply them in a child-friendly way;

- providing the necessary tools for preventing, investigating, and responding to reported incidents of childhood sexual violence;
- ensuring there are sufficient financial and human resources dedicated to enforcing these laws; and
- continuously assessing the implementation of these laws and related actions to ensure effectiveness.



Table 2. Implementation and enforcement of laws: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|--|------------------------------|--|--|----------|---|
| International safeguarding policies and approaches | Prudent | Descriptive study or expert report (n=1) | Addressing 'Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' in the UN system | Global | May be relevant to all age groups and gender identities if appropriately worded. No disaggregation given in studies |
| Domestic legislation and national action plans on technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence | Prudent | Descriptive study or expert report (n=2) | National Center for Missing & Exploited Children CyberTipline, WeProtect Model National Response | Global | |
| Child-friendly justice responses | Prudent | Descriptive study or expert report (n=1) | Victim-friendly courts | Zimbabwe | |

Effectiveness of existing types of interventions for the implementation and enforcement of laws

The implementation and enforcement of laws are a foundation for efforts to prevent childhood sexual violence.

- **International safeguarding policies and approaches** are considered **prudent**, leading to better case management and reduced tolerance for abuse.
- **Domestic legislation and national action plans on addressing technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence** are also classified as **prudent**, especially when supported by well-trained professionals and robust child protection services. These initiatives have resulted in increased reporting and faster removal of harmful online content.
- **Child-friendly justice responses** are considered **prudent**, having raised awareness and enhanced the reporting and handling of cases.

Effective laws and safeguarding policies strengthen reporting, case management, and combat technology-facilitated child sexual violence.

Enhancing the implementation and enforcement of laws

The impact of laws is difficult to measure, meaning there is limited evidence on how laws affect rates of childhood sexual violence. Research does indicate that significant challenges in this area include insufficient resources and social norms that hinder enforcement. Misalignment among customary, national, and international laws further complicates the enforcement of laws.

Rapid technological advancements outpace the legal system's ability to address new forms of technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence. The cross-border

nature of this form of violence, combined with inconsistent legal frameworks across countries, is a particular concern. Another challenge is that gender-biased language in legislation can reduce protections for individuals of certain gender identities. Additionally, there is little discussion regarding how the justice system treats children who display harmful or problematic sexual behaviors or who are convicted of committing sexual violence against other children, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, including those affected by humanitarian crises. The potential benefits of complementary restorative and transformative justice mechanisms at the community level are also underexplored.

Based on these results, we see that a coordinated, multifaceted approach is essential. This would involve aligning global regulations, particularly to address technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence; providing resources to support legal frameworks; and collecting comprehensive data to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, among other international legal frameworks.



2 | Norms and values

Norms and values play an important role in preventing childhood sexual violence. Harmful norms may include discriminatory attitudes, promotion of violence to control behavior, victim-blaming, and taboos around discussing sexual health. These can encourage childhood sexual violence, while positive norms offer protection. Positive norms include gender and racial equity, and children being able to speak out and express their views. Norms change interventions include strategies that:

- challenge attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate discrimination and violence to **reduce the risk** of childhood sexual violence;
- reinforce attitudes and behaviors that **protect children** from sexual violence; and
- break down taboos to **promote reporting of incidents and help-seeking behavior**.

Effectiveness of existing norms and values intervention types

Some intervention types aimed at changing norms and values show promise in preventing childhood sexual violence.

- **Small group interventions for children and adolescents outside of schools**, particularly those facilitated by trained professionals and involving both boys and girls, are considered **promising** in addressing harmful attitudes. However, they have not significantly changed behaviors or reduced the incidence of childhood sexual violence.
- Stand-alone **media and technology-assisted norms change campaigns** and **sports-based interventions for the prevention of childhood sexual violence** are important, but **more evidence is needed** to determine their effectiveness.

Enhancing norms and values interventions

Norms change interventions must be culturally sensitive, inclusive, and adaptable. They should aim to transform and dismantle all forms of discrimination. Strategies should incorporate diverse approaches, such as media and technology-assisted campaigns, community mobilization, and direct engagement with key influencers like religious leaders, educators, and media personalities. By committing to long-term engagement and tailoring interventions to local contexts, we can shift harmful norms, foster environments of respect and protection, and significantly reduce the incidence of childhood sexual violence.



Table 3. Norms and values: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Small group interventions for children and adolescents outside of schools | Promising | Randomized controlled trial (n=1); Systematic review (n=1) | Growing Up Safe and Healthy (SAFE); Your Moment of Truth (YMOT)/ IMPower | Bangladesh, Sub-Saharan Africa | Age: Adolescents and young people Gender: Girls, boys, women, and men |
| Stand-alone media and technology-assisted norms change campaigns | Needs more evidence | Qualitative with pre-post (n=1); Pre-post (n=1) | Learning Initiative on Norms, Exploitation, and Abuse (LINEA) radio drama; HappyToto digital game | Tanzania | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls and men |
| Sports-based interventions for the prevention of childhood sexual violence | Needs more evidence | Pre-post (n=1) | SKILLZ Street | South Africa | Age: 11–16 Gender: Girls |



INSPIRE

3 | Safe environments

Safer⁹ environments protect children from childhood sexual violence by creating physical, social, institutional, and digital spaces where children are protected from harm and can thrive. Safer environment strategies target both the physical design of spaces and the social and policy norms that govern behavior within them. Strategies in this area focus on:

- enhancing the structural safety of physical and technology-facilitated spaces and creating child- and adolescent-friendly spaces for empowerment activities, **to reduce the potential for perpetration and the risk** of sexual violence against children;
- implementing inclusive and equitable governance, safeguarding policies, systems, protocols, and adult training **to strengthen the protective layers** around children and **improve reporting and response**.



Effectiveness of existing safe environments intervention types

Interventions aimed at creating safer environments are crucial in preventing childhood sexual violence.

- **Adolescent development clubs** that provide comprehensive and sustained economic and social empowerment programs for adolescent girls have been **effective**, showing reductions in sexual violence victimization and positive secondary outcomes.
- **Child-friendly safe spaces in humanitarian settings** have yielded **conflicting** results, with some improvements in psychosocial well-being and social support, but no clear reduction in childhood sexual violence rates.
- **Safeguarding systems to prevent childhood sexual violence in child-serving organizations** are essential and show good results, though **more evidence is needed** to draw strong conclusions about their effectiveness.

A holistic approach that integrates multiple strategies to create safer environments for children is important.

Safe environments can prevent childhood sexual violence, but conflicting outcomes in humanitarian settings highlight gaps. Safeguarding systems are vital but need better evidence for full effectiveness.

Table 4. Safe environments: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Adolescent development clubs | Effective | Randomized controlled trial (n=2) | Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA) | Uganda, Sierra Leone | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls |
| Child-friendly safe spaces in humanitarian settings | Conflicting | Randomized controlled trial (n=1); Systematic review (n=3) | Creating Opportunities through Mentorship, Parental Involvement, and Safe Spaces (COMPASS) | Ethiopia, Humanitarian contexts | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls |
| Safeguarding systems to prevent childhood sexual violence in child-serving organizations | Needs more evidence | Qualitative program evaluation (n=1); Case study (n=1). | Sexual Violence in Schools in South Africa (SeVISSA); End School-Related Gender-Based Violence Program | South Africa, Sierra Leone | Age: Adolescents Gender: All |

Enhancing safe environments interventions

Safe environment strategies often face challenges such as inconsistent implementation, inadequate resources, and lack of cultural adaptation; programs that succeed in one context may not easily transfer to others. Additionally, rapid technological changes demand continuous updates to digital safety measures, and we are still learning how to balance the supervision of technology use with respect for children's autonomy and privacy. There is also limited evidence from humanitarian settings.

To enhance implementation quality, programs must prioritize training and resource investment and promote community engagement. It is also crucial to tailor interventions to local contexts, strengthen digital safety measures, and invest in research, especially in humanitarian settings. Implementing packages of interventions, such as adolescent development clubs that combine economic empowerment and life skills in one space, has been shown to be effective, particularly for adolescent girls. Furthermore, engaging boys and men, and ensuring safeguarding policies are systematically implemented, may enable safe environment strategies to more successfully prevent childhood sexual violence and secure child well-being.





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4 | Parent and caregiver support

Parents and caregivers are crucial in creating safe, nurturing, and protective home environments, and supporting them is a critical strategy for preventing childhood sexual violence. These interventions aim to equip parents and caregivers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to:

- recognize and respond to signs of childhood sexual violence;
- practice positive parenting;
- educate their children about personal safety, boundaries, and consent; and
- strengthen family relationships, providing a supportive environment for children.



Effectiveness of existing parent and caregiver support intervention types

Parent and caregiver support interventions are vital in preventing childhood sexual violence.

- Research has found that **skills development for preschool children and their parents in preventing sexual violence** to be **effective**. These programs work well when they improve communication between parents and their children. They increase children's knowledge and self-efficacy and, in some cases, lead to disclosures of sexual abuse.
- Interventions targeting **parental skills for preventing childhood sexual violence in pre-adolescents and adolescents**, especially those involving parent-adolescent pairs and incorporating technology, have also been shown to be **effective**. They improve knowledge, attitudes, and communication, and in some cases, reduce childhood sexual violence victimization.
- **Parent counselling approaches for preventing childhood sexual violence** delivered by skilled facilitators are **promising**, enhancing parental awareness, self-efficacy, and sustaining positive changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

Engaging parents is essential in preventing childhood sexual violence. Empowered parents foster safer environments, improve communication with children, and play a critical role in reducing risks and promoting long-term protection.

Table 5. Parent and caregiver support: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|---|------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Skills development for preschool children and their parents in preventing childhood sexual violence | Effective | Randomized controlled trial (n=1); Pre-post (n=1); Quasi-experimental (n=5) | Body safety training; Sexual abuse prevention program among pre-schoolers; Educating children through their parents | Iran, Türkiye | Age: Young children (ages 3–6) and parents Gender: Boys and girls |
| Parent skills for preventing childhood sexual violence in pre-adolescents and adolescents | Effective | Randomized controlled trial (n=1); Systematic review (n=1); Quasi-experimental (n=2); Pre-posed (n=1); Cross-sectional (n=1) | Parenting for Lifelong Health/ ParentApp; “My Mother Is My Best Friend” DREAMS HIV prevention intervention; Protection motivation theory-based ‘child sexual abuse’ prevention; Families matter! | Tanzania, India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Humanitarian settings | Age: Children and parents Gender: Girls, women, gender unspecified in some studies |
| Parent counseling approaches for preventing childhood sexual violence | Promising | Randomized controlled trial (n=1) | Group counseling sessions | Iran | Age: Parents Gender: Women |

Enhancing parent and caregiver support interventions

Efforts to prevent childhood sexual violence through parent and caregiver interventions face several challenges. Cultural norms and religious beliefs often hinder open discussions about sexuality, and patriarchal dynamics can limit participation. Fathers are frequently excluded, reducing the potential impact of these activities. Program designs that fail to adequately consider parents and children with disabilities risk excluding this especially vulnerable group. Additionally, there are concerns about the effectiveness of transferring interventions developed in high-income countries to different cultural contexts without proper adaptation. The strength of the studies identified in this review is also limited by small sample sizes and a lack of focus on outcomes for children, particularly among boys and other marginalized groups.

To overcome these challenges, future efforts should prioritize early intervention when children are young, contextualization, and the inclusion of both male and female caregivers. Parenting interventions can target preschool children by educating parents and incorporating role-play and props. Structured, culturally relevant programs that engage the parents of pre-adolescents and adolescents have shown potential in preventing victimization.

A holistic approach that integrates parenting support with other strategies will provide comprehensive protection against childhood sexual violence. We need to better understand the impacts of these interventions on diverse children, and future research must measure how any knowledge and skills gained translate into behavior change.



We envision a world where every child can learn, play, and grow without the fear of violence—a world where survivors receive the support they need to heal and reclaim their futures. A world where justice prevails and no child is left behind.





INSPIRE

5 | Income and economic strengthening

Poverty and economic stress can increase the risk of childhood sexual violence by creating situations where children are more vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and abuse. Income and economic strengthening interventions may address underlying economic vulnerabilities that contribute to the risk of sexual violence against children and aim to:

- reduce economic stress and improve financial stability within families to decrease the likelihood of neglect or exploitation;
- empower individuals, particularly women and girls, giving them the skills and resources needed for economic independence;
- enhance the resilience of families and communities to resist economic pressures that may contribute to childhood sexual violence; and
- provide alternative pathways for families that might otherwise rely on harmful practices (such as child marriage or child labor) as economic coping strategies.



Effectiveness of existing income and economic strengthening intervention types

Income and economic strengthening interventions show encouraging results in preventing childhood sexual violence.

- **Savings programs** have shown potential in reducing risky sexual behavior and the likelihood of sexual victimization, though **more evidence is needed** to confirm their overall benefits.
- **Multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting women and adolescent girls** that link with existing services and include long-term strategies have been **effective** in enhancing protective factors and reducing risks of intimate partner violence, although their outcomes tend to diminish after the intervention ends.
- **Government-run, multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting adolescent girls and boys**, and interventions that combine skills and asset transfers with access to services, are **promising**. They have been shown to reduce sexual victimization risks, promote sexual health-seeking behaviors, and increase the likelihood that male survivors will seek help from formal sources.

Income and economic strengthening is vital in preventing childhood sexual violence. When combined with skills training, these interventions empower individuals, lower risks, and create protective environments for children and families.

Table 6. Income and economic strengthening: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|---|------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------|---|
| Savings programs | Needs more evidence | Pre-post (n=1) | YouthSave | Ghana | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls, boys, women, and men |
| Multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting women and adolescent girls | Effective | Randomized controlled trial (n=3); Systematic review (n=3) | Girl Empower, Adolescent Girls Initiative-Kenya (AGI-K) | Kenya, South Africa, Liberia | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls |
| Government-run, multi-component (“cash-plus”) interventions targeting adolescent girls and boys | Promising | Randomized controlled trial (n=1) | Ujana Salama | Tanzania | Age: Adolescents Gender: Girls and boys |

Enhancing income and economic strengthening interventions

Income and economic strengthening interventions face several challenges in preventing childhood sexual violence. It remains unclear if the risks are too great to provide transfers directly to unaccompanied adolescents, and concerns from donors and service providers about the use of cash assistance hinder implementation. Payment delays impede impact, and questions persist about the sustainability of youth-owned enterprises. We also lack evidence on how the impact of these interventions varies for children with diverse identities. Additionally, economic interventions could reinforce harmful gender norms if not carefully designed.

Comprehensive approaches that address both economic empowerment and broader social issues are critical. Some of these challenges can be addressed by delivering multi-component, “cash-plus” programs, in which economic strengthening is accompanied by support services and/or norms change. More research is needed to understand how income and economic strengthening activities specifically affect sexual violence, as distinguished from other forms of violence against children.



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6 | Response and support services

Response and support services mitigate the negative impacts of childhood sexual violence, support the resilience and healing of survivors and/or victims, and can prevent revictimization. Appropriate, accessible, and inclusive response and support services are crucial for addressing the needs of diverse children who have experienced childhood sexual violence. Specifically, response and support services:

- provide immediate medical, psychological, and legal support to survivors and/or victims;
- facilitate the healing and recovery process through trauma-informed care;
- ensure survivors and/or victims have access to justice and legal redress;
- promote a supportive environment where survivors and/or victims feel safe and able to disclose abuse; and
- link survivors and/or victims to long-term support systems that help them rebuild their lives.

Effectiveness of existing response and support services intervention types

Response and support services play a crucial role in preventing childhood sexual violence.

- Facilitating the **recognition, screening, reporting, and disclosure of childhood sexual violence cases** is important, though **more evidence is needed** to draw strong conclusions about the effectiveness of this type of intervention.
- **Child- and adolescent-friendly response and support services**, especially those accessible to diverse children and integrated into formal structures, are considered **promising**. These services have enhanced children's self-efficacy, improved access to reporting mechanisms, and increased referral to services.

Enhancing response and support services interventions

The effectiveness of interventions in this area is often hampered by limited coverage, capacity, and quality. Insufficient funding, lack of well-trained staff, and community resistance can result in inadequate services that fail to meet the needs of diverse child survivors and/or victims, including those with disabilities. Barriers such as physical distance, cultural sensitivities, stigma, and discriminatory attitudes can restrict access to reporting and support services. Additionally, the lack of clear standards for child-friendly services and logistical challenges complicates evaluation efforts. More research is needed to understand effective response programming for children displaying harmful or problematic sexual behavior and the impacts of response services on diverse children.

To overcome these challenges, efforts should focus on increasing reporting. Programs that integrate recognition and screening with accessible, child-friendly services have shown promise, as seen in Kenya's proactive identification initiatives. Linking response services with other INSPIRE strategies, such as

Table 7. Response and support services: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|--|------------------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Recognition, screening, reporting, and disclosure of childhood sexual violence cases | Needs more evidence | Mixed-method case study (n=1) | Screening for Sexual Violence Against Children | Kenya | Age: 11-17 and parents Gender: Girls and boys, men, and women |
| Child- and adolescent-friendly response and support services | Promising | Quasi-experimental (n=1); Qualitative case study (n=1) | Empowering Communities to Protect Children; Mobile Service Delivery Model | Uganda, Lebanon (Syrian refugees) | Age: 0-18, caregivers Gender: Girls, boys, men, and women |

education and life skills, norms and values, and income and economic strengthening, has improved knowledge and service utilization. Establishing child-friendly services, like victim-friendly courts in Zimbabwe, can enhance awareness and reporting, though resource limitations remain a challenge. Creative solutions, such as mobile services and safe spaces, can help overcome barriers in humanitarian contexts.

To be effective, response and support services must be integrated into formal protection, health, and justice systems; include an outreach component; and

be tailored to meet the needs of all children, including those with disabilities and from marginalized or discriminated groups. Expanding government budgets and enhancing the social service workforce are crucial steps in strengthening these systems. Additionally, providing support for non-offending individuals with a sexual interest in children is a critical opportunity to prevent potential harm. Since the efficacy of response and support services in preventing childhood sexual violence is under-researched, indicators should be developed, and actions should be more systematically reviewed.





7 | Education and life skills

Education and life skills interventions may empower children with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to protect themselves and others from childhood sexual violence. They are critical components of a comprehensive strategy to prevent childhood sexual violence. These interventions aim to:

- equip children and adolescents with knowledge about their rights, bodily autonomy, and the nature of childhood sexual violence;
- develop skills such as assertiveness, communication, and self-defense to help children recognize, resist, and report unsafe situations;
- foster safe and supportive school environments where children feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics;
- challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes; and
- engage educators, parents, and communities in supporting children's education on the subject.



Effectiveness of existing education and life skills intervention types

- Broad-based prevention modules embedded in **school curricula** that use inclusive, transformative, anti-discriminatory approaches led by trained facilitators have been shown to be **effective**. They have led to positive outcomes for children including enhanced knowledge, skills, and help-seeking behaviors, and sometimes reducing rates of self-reported sexual violence experiences.
- **School-based self-defense interventions for sexual violence prevention**, particularly within comprehensive prevention efforts, have been found to be **effective** at significantly reducing childhood sexual violence victimization in both humanitarian and stable settings.
- Additionally, **prevention interventions tailored to children and adolescents with disabilities** have been identified as **prudent** but require further research.
- **School-based interventions to prevent harmful or problematic sexual behaviors by children and adolescents** have shown **conflicting** results, but when implemented effectively, they may alter behaviors and reduce victimization.
- **Curriculum design and educator training for delivering childhood sexual violence prevention modules** are critical and have been shown to be **effective**, demonstrating reductions in self-reported experiences of sexual violence.

When combined with well-designed curricula and trained facilitators, education programs may empower children. Continuous refinement is needed for lasting impact.

Table 8. Education and life skills: Current effectiveness of intervention types

| Intervention type | Effectiveness classification | Types of studies evaluating intervention | Program names (where available) | Contexts | Age/gender of program participants |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Broad-based prevention modules embedded in school curricula | Effective | Systematic review (n=6); Randomized controlled trial (n=3); Quasi-experimental (n=3); Pre-post (n=3); | I Have the Right to Feel Safe at All Times; Doll program; Peer Education; Mi sol; School-based Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Programme (Program Prevensi Pelecehan Seksual Berbasis Sekolah); Safe Schools for Teens; Right to Safety and Space Bubble; Tackling Online Child Sexual Exploitation Project (TOCSE); Reshaping Adolescents' Gender Attitudes; Body Safety Training). | Ecuador, China, Peru, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Viet Nam. | Age: 7 – 18 and teachers Gender: Girls and boys, male and female teachers |
| School-based self-defense interventions for sexual violence prevention | Effective | Randomized controlled trial (n=3); Qualitative case study (n=1) | IMpower; Sources Of Strength; Your Moment of Truth; Empowerment Transformation Training (ETT). | Malawi, South Sudan (Kakuma refugee camp), Kenya | Age: Primary and secondary Gender: Girls, boys, and women |
| Curriculum design and educator training for delivering childhood sexual violence prevention modules | Effective | Systematic review (n=1); Quasi-experimental (n=2) | Don't Touch My Body! Body Safety Training | Türkiye | Age: 3-6 years, university students Gender: Girls and boys, male and female university students |
| School-based prevention interventions for children and adolescents with disabilities | Prudent | Pre-post (n=2) | Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Intervention, DeafKidz Defenders | Pakistan, South Africa | Age: 5 – 15 years Gender: Girls and boys |
| School-based interventions to prevent harmful or problematic sexual behaviors by children and adolescents | Conflicting | Randomized controlled trial (n=1); Quasi-experimental (n=1); Pre-post (n=1); Systematic review (n=1) | Gender-based Intimate Partner Violence Program'; Comprehensive Sexuality Education; #Tamojuntó | Colombia, Mexico, Brazil | Age: 7 - 17 Adolescents Gender: Girls, boys, women, one man |

Enhancing education and life skills interventions

While education can play a critical role in preventing childhood sexual violence, schools can also be potential sites of harm. Potential perpetrators of childhood sexual violence in school settings may include students, school staff, parents, and others. School-based interventions may also exclude marginalized children, such as those with disabilities, unaccompanied children, those living on the streets, or those in humanitarian settings. Additionally, evidence gaps remain in effectively tailoring programs for children with intersecting vulnerabilities. The review identified the need to test strategies that move beyond the gender-binary approach to program implementation to ensure programs are accessible and inclusive of nonbinary, intersex, and transgender children. Research is also needed on how to adapt programs to specific contexts and avoid harmful implementation of interventions that have worked well in other settings.

Challenges may be overcome by providing gender-transformative and broader discrimination-transformative education—addressing deep-seated social and cultural norms. Programs should address the needs of, and be tailored for, all children, including those of diverse gender identities and children with disabilities. Additionally, careful, multisectoral design, along with constant monitoring and adaptation, are necessary for programs to prevent and address harmful or problematic sexual behaviors by children and adolescents. To maximize impact, interventions should be co-designed with input from children, parents, and teachers. Interactive and peer-learning methods can enhance engagement and knowledge retention. A whole-school approach that engages all stakeholders, integrates into the school environment, and is supported by national frameworks can drive transformative change.



Cross-cutting activities

The cross-cutting activities named in the INSPIRE framework are multisectoral actions and coordination and monitoring and evaluation. These activities may enable all the interventions mentioned earlier to be complementary, integrated, responsive to the needs of children and communities, sustainable, and ultimately, effective.

Multisectoral coordination

Effective coordination requires bringing together government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, and international partners for a common goal. Key functions include:

- **ensuring activities are complementary** and not duplicative, aligning policies, resources, and actions to create a cohesive response to childhood sexual violence;
- **promoting a coordinated and comprehensive multisectoral approach** across health, education, social services, and justice;
- **strengthening governance and accountability** with clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability; and
- **mobilizing resources**, seeking joint funding opportunities, and appropriately allocating resources to maximize impact.

Multisectoral coordination is crucial to preventing childhood sexual violence. By aligning policies, resources, and actions across sectors, we create a cohesive, accountable response that maximizes impact and ensures sustainable solutions.



Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for assessing the effectiveness of childhood sexual violence prevention strategies, identifying best practices, and informing policy and program decisions. The key functions of monitoring and evaluation in preventing childhood sexual violence include:

- **tracking interventions' progress** and measuring outcomes and impact to confirm that programs are meeting their goals;
- **improving program quality** by identifying strengths and weaknesses, providing feedback that can enable timely adjustments and improve program quality;
- **promoting accountability**, as monitoring and evaluation provide evidence of what works, holding stakeholders accountable and allowing for responsible resource use; and
- **building evidence and learning**, as monitoring and evaluation generate data and evidence that inform policy and practice.

The evidence has a hopeful message: We know what works to prevent childhood sexual violence. A safer future for all children and youth is possible.



04 Implications for Preventing Childhood Sexual Violence

Childhood sexual violence is a global crisis that requires urgent and clear action. While the path to prevention presents challenges, it is filled with opportunities for transformative impact.

We know enough to be able to act decisively to prevent all forms of childhood sexual violence, protecting those under the age of 18 everywhere.

For more in-depth conclusions and recommendations, please see the full systematic review of evidence, *Building Safe Futures: Solutions to End Childhood Sexual Violence*.

What we now know

Successful interventions can prevent childhood sexual violence.

The evidence brings hope. The review has identified a number of intervention types proven to prevent childhood sexual violence across several INSPIRE strategies. Success has been seen in areas such as adolescent clubs, income and economic strengthening activities targeting women and girls, skills for parents of pre-adolescents and adolescents, broad-based prevention modules embedded in school curricula, curriculum design and educator training for delivering childhood sexual violence prevention modules, and school-based self-defense interventions for sexual violence prevention. Many more interventions are promising, and with further testing and adaptation, they may prove even more successful.

Comprehensive programming approaches enhance effectiveness.

Interventions are strengthened by multisectoral, community-led, inclusive, anti-discriminatory approaches that actively engage all ages, all genders, all gender identities, all sexual orientations, and children with disabilities. Successful programs often combine risk reduction, protection, and response strategies, supported by strong legal and policy frameworks and well-resourced service providers.

Systemic and nuanced evaluation must inform practice.

It is critical to measure childhood sexual violence outcomes, employ systemic monitoring frameworks, and gather disaggregated data by age, gender, disability, race, and other identity markers, from diverse knowledge sources.

Many challenges and gaps remain.

Significant obstacles to achieving greater impact include under-resourced child protection and justice systems, a lack of intersectoral coordination, and insufficient rigorous evaluation of outcomes. Additionally, the absence of disaggregated data obscures program impacts for diverse children.



A. Recommendations for bold action in programming and practice

This section describes key factors crucial for preventing childhood sexual violence, applicable across various contexts.

Practice accountability to children and communities.

- **Engage children and communities from the start.**

Programs should involve communities, including children, in design, implementation, and monitoring to ensure relevance and foster local ownership.

- **Make evidence-based decisions.** Programs should be grounded in the latest, context-specific, research that identifies discriminatory dynamics, determinants of risks, at-risk groups, and perpetrator contexts to develop effective action. Establish clear mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating interventions and for getting feedback on what is going well, where the problems lie, and if any harm is being done. Flexibility is key to addressing changing risks and needs.

- **Be guided by the context.** Interventions must be adapted to different contexts to avoid unintended negative outcomes.¹⁰

- **Acknowledge and adapt when mistakes are made.** Practice open learning and reflection about what is working and what is not. Adjust and ensure accountability to children, families, and funders.

Leverage multisectoral, multilevel, holistic approaches.

- **Engage all levels in the system.** Engage stakeholders across all levels of the ecological model, from children themselves to national- and international-level stakeholders.

- **Work across sectors.** Collaborate across health, education, justice, and social services to create a holistic response to childhood sexual violence.

- **Build comprehensive approaches with multiple areas of focus.** Ensure all programming focuses on reducing risks, boosting protective factors, and enhancing response. Deliver simultaneous activities to address the multiple root causes and achieve desired outcomes.¹¹

- **Build strong program foundations.** When possible and relevant, ensure programs support legislation reform and enforcement alongside dismantling discrimination individually and systemically.

- **Deliver broad-based and targeted interventions.** Use both community-wide and tailored approaches to ensure reach and inclusion.

- **Address sources of harm.** Address perpetrator prevention at the level of individual responsibility and at the systemic level of the broader context which may enable or fuel perpetration. For adults, focus on trauma-informed perpetrator prevention alongside promoting protective actions, such as mental health support, to prevent repeat offenses. For children and adolescents, develop specialized, trauma-informed programs to address harmful or problematic sexual behaviors towards peers.¹²

Strengthen legal and policy frameworks.

- **Work with government and international entities.**

Strengthen legislative reform and the enforcement of comprehensive laws protecting children, ensuring international cooperation on cross-border and technology-facilitated childhood sexual violence.

- **Use a rights-based approach.** Root programs in the promotion of children's rights, as outlined in international conventions and national laws.

- **Create accessible, inclusive, anti-discriminatory**, trauma-informed programs.

- **Design for equitable access and inclusion.** Ensure all children have access to prevention and support. Give special attention to the inclusion of children at heightened risk due to discrimination, such as girls; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, plus (LGBTIQ+) children;¹³ black, indigenous, children of color; children from marginalized or oppressed ethnic groups or castes;¹⁴ and children with disabilities;¹⁵ among others.

- **Tackle discrimination-based childhood sexual violence across all programs.** Systematically incorporate program content to challenge societal norms that discriminate against certain groups of children that cause gender-based, homophobic, transphobic, anti-disabled, racist childhood sexual violence (specific to each context). This includes gender-transformative programming¹⁶ and unconscious bias training for those in service provision.¹⁷

- **Consider diverse experiences.** Design interventions grounded in evidence of the diverse lived experiences of children, considering the risks all children face and difference in program access and suitability.

- **Focus on children with disabilities.** Design targeted interventions for children with disabilities, who are particularly at risk.¹⁸



- **Engage across genders.** Engage people of diverse genders, including boys and men, in prevention activities to shift norms and reduce risks.¹⁹

- **Deliver trauma-informed programs.** Work with care and acknowledgment of the likely widespread experiences of sexual trauma among adult and child program participants and among implementers. This includes among adults and children who may display harmful or problematic sexual behavior themselves.

- **Develop age- and ability-sensitive content.** Adapt programs for different age groups,²⁰ literacy levels, learning abilities,²¹ and levels of maturity and understanding.

Enhance training and capacity.

- **Invest in training.** Allocate resources to equip educators, justice actors, healthcare providers, and community members with the skills to deliver interventions sensitively and effectively.

- **Train social service workers.** Train frontline workers to respond appropriately to cases of childhood (not only adult) sexual violence.

Harness innovation, adaptation, and technology.

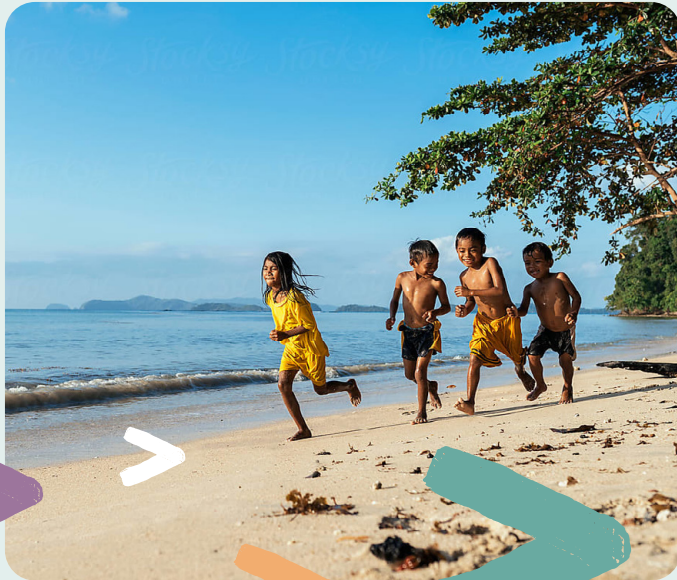
- **Future-proof.** Use new technologies and adaptive designs to stay ahead of evolving risks; consider children's evolving access to and use of technology.

- **Test innovative approaches and harness digital platforms.** Use technology for education, awareness, and reporting to enhance reach, while remaining mindful of access limitations.

Invest in transformative impact.

- **Invest in phased, incremental, and sustainable programs.** Focus on long-term solutions and reinforce messages to change norms.²² Introduce programs and messaging gradually to build trust on strong foundations.

- **Scale up proven models.** Replicate successful interventions within countries to reach a larger population and across various contexts to expand their impact.²³



B. Recommendations for bold action in research

Based on the systematic review, the following research approaches are considered essential for evaluating the prevention of childhood sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries, including humanitarian settings.

Build better science.

- **Promote diverse research methods.** Combine qualitative and quantitative methods to capture diverse experiences and enhance understanding of program impacts.
- **Develop shared definitions.** Establish consistent definitions for key terms like “childhood sexual violence”²⁴ to improve data comparability across settings.
- **Develop and evaluate programs with implementation and scale up in mind.** Focus on interventions that can be scaled up for coverage²⁵ and adapted to different contexts, testing their applicability and replicability. Indicate the pre-conditions to inform adaptation and implementation in other contexts.
- **Disaggregate data.** Analyze data by gender, age, disability, race, and other identity markers to better understand the impact on diverse groups of children.

Agree standard methods for disaggregation to improve data analysis across settings.²⁶

- **Engage children and communities in research.**

Ensure meaningful engagement of children in research to influence study design and subsequent interventions.

- **Invest in addressing research gaps.** Evidence and rigorous evaluations are needed on prevention strategies for specific groups of children, looking more deeply at certain under-studied intervention areas and how well these strategies work in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings. Building a strong evidence base will support effective policy and program decisions.

- **Put a spotlight on what is often overlooked.**

Very few studies of childhood sexual violence prevention interventions considered gender identity, sexual orientation, or race, or assessed intersectional, discrimination-based risks or program impacts. Few studies focused on children who exhibit harmful or problematic sexual behavior. These oversights may be partially explained by the underrepresentation of these identities among academics and decision-makers.²⁷

Build better monitoring systems.

- **Strengthen routine data collection and capacity.**

Invest in routine, disaggregated data collection to inform policy and evaluate outcomes, including all forms of violence, and ensure national ownership and capacity-building.²⁸

- **Strengthen monitoring and evaluation frameworks.**

Establish systems to monitor legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,²⁹ test proxy indicators,³⁰ and systematically evaluate program innovations.

There is sufficient evidence on what works to prevent sexual violence against children to take informed and decisive action now.

What we need is strong engagement for urgent action at all levels — local, national, and global — to drive the large-scale changes needed to protect children worldwide. We all have a role to play.

Together, we can build a safe future for all children.



Endnotes

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⁸ Whilst individual studies identified programs that, alone, would be classed as harmful once these were grouped with other similar programs for classification, the quality of the other studies moved the classification to “conflicting.”

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This report, *Building Safe Futures: Solutions to End Childhood Sexual Violence, Executive Summary*, was developed by the Safe Futures Hub, co-led by Together for Girls, WeProtect Global Alliance, and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), in collaboration with multiple partners and endorsing organizations. It synthesizes evidence from low- and middle-income countries on childhood sexual violence prevention, offering practical recommendations for stakeholders across sectors.

Suggested Citation:

Safe Futures Hub. (2024). *Building safe futures: Solutions to end childhood sexual violence, Executive summary*. Evidence from low- and middle-income countries on childhood sexual violence prevention. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Together for Girls, WeProtect Global Alliance

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