

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND YOUTH SURVEYS (VACS)



2017 UPDATES TO THE CORE QUESTIONNAIRE

WHAT ARE THE VACS?

The Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) are nationally representative household surveys of sexual, physical and emotional violence among children, adolescents and young adults ages 13 to 24 years. At the global level, they are led by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the Together for Girls (TfG) partnership. At the national level, the implementation of the VACS is led by national governments, with technical assistance from CDC and support from other TfG partners.

WHY UPDATE THE VACS?

The original core questionnaire was finalized in 2013, building on experience implementing the VACS in five countries. Given the ground-breaking and innovative nature of this work, in 2015-2016 TfG partners came together in an inclusive process to ensure ongoing learning and better alignment with other important global efforts.

THE REVIEW INCLUDED:

- Internal and external expert consultation on measurement of violence against children (VAC) and violence against women (VAW) to ensure greater harmonization between the two fields
- Regular coordination and input from all TfG partners
- Commissioned review of other violence-related surveys, modules and measures, with recommendations for improved measurement and alignment
- Cognitive testing in Colombia of new questions and concepts in 2016
- Develop and test improved questions on sexual exploitation/transactional sex across different survey tools, including the VACS
- Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and accompanying monitoring framework
- Alignment with the technical package INSPIRE¹: Seven Strategies to Prevent Violence Against Children and its accompanying monitoring framework

This process was finalized in 2017, and the updated core questionnaire continues to represent a “gold standard” in measuring violence against children, adolescents and young adults, while increasing comparability with violence measures in other surveys, and ensuring the VACS contributes toward both national- and global-level monitoring of progress on violence prevention and response.

WHAT'S NEW?

REGION-SPECIFIC QUESTIONNAIRES

Region-specific core questionnaire tools were developed for Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, allowing for specificity of measurement as geographic coverage of the VACS increases.

UPDATED HIV MODULE

Starting with the VACS in Botswana in 2016, the module on HIV was updated to reflect the current best practices on measures around HIV. The VACS in Botswana and others funded by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) now also include questions on rapid HIV testing, which will greatly improve our understanding of the links between violence and HIV.

¹ www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/

UPDATED MEASURES

Measure	Details
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) alignment	The updated questionnaire contributes to the measurement of SDG Targets 5.2 (elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls), 5.3 (eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation), 16.1 (reduce all violence related to death rates), and 16.2 (end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children).
Intimate partner violence (IPV)	A broader range of experiences with physical violence are now included to capture more experiences and improve consistency. New partner-specific questions on sexual violence were also added, based on evidence from the field of violence against women. Additionally, the questionnaire encourages national adaptations of questions on different types of relationships, to capture intimate partnerships in more holistic, context-specific ways.
Information communication technology	Questions on online sexual exploitation, abuse and bullying were updated and included to align with new INSPIRE indicators. Questions on emotional violence now include an online dimension.
Violent discipline	The terms 'slapped', 'pushed', 'shoved' and 'spanked' were added to the questionnaire to allow for the inclusion of a wider range of acts of physical violence.
Sexual exploitation/ transactional sex	Questions were updated to better measure the exchange of sexual activities for goods, services and money.
Exposure to IPV	Questions were updated to better capture participants' awareness of violence taking place in the home but not witnessing it.
Marriage and cohabitation	Questions were updated to better capture informal unions by measuring age at first union (including both marriage and cohabitation).
Comparability	Questions on gender norms and attitudes were updated. Measures on attitudes towards violent discipline were also added to align with UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) measures.
Substance abuse	Updated measures now capture drug abuse, in addition to alcohol abuse.

NEW MODULES FOR LATIN AMERICA

WEAPON CARRYING: Eight new questions were added to the Latin America version of the VACS core questionnaire, focused on weapon carrying and use.

MIGRATION: Eleven questions were added to the Latin America version of the questionnaire on participants' experiences moving abroad and within their home country, including reasons for migration.

COMMUNITY/GANG VIOLENCE: Questions were added throughout the Latin America version of the core questionnaire to better understand how often reported perpetrators of emotional, physical and sexual violence were also engaged in community violence. For safety of the field teams and participants, questions on participants' engagement in community violence were not included.