

SVRI sexual
violence
research
initiative

DECOLONISING FUNDING

Shifting How We Think about Funding
Research on Violence Against Women and
Violence against Children in Low- and
Middle-Income Countries

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¹Mago, A. and Dartnall E. (2022)



Sverige

Wellspring
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Why is change needed?

To strengthen our understanding of violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC), and ultimately prevent it, dedicated investment is needed into research that is priority-driven and carried out in such a way that it provides sound, practical and empirical guidance for interventions, programmes, policy and advocacy. To ensure these efforts are effective, appropriate and contextually relevant, much more research needs to be led and undertaken by researchers and practitioners in and from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs); where the burden of VAW and VAC is highest. However, the reality is that investment in responses to VAW and VAC do not match their severity or impact and even less money goes into research.² Existing research investment remains highly concentrated in high income countries (HICs) and research done in LMICs is often led by HIC institutions and/or researchers. Similarly, research agendas are generally set by too few, usually the most recognised, senior or loudest in the room. This has meant that funding may be misdirected, serving academic researchers' own agendas rather than the communities that the research is meant to serve.³

Research partnerships are widely acknowledged to play a critical role in facilitating researchers' capacity strengthening and knowledge exchange, working with new collaborators, gaining access to resources and equipment, and conducting mutually beneficial research. However, more work needs to be done on ensuring that these partnerships are equitable.⁴ The principle of equity applies to all aspects of the partnership from setting research agendas and defining research questions to analysing and interpreting data as well as authorship and dissemination of research products. In addition to striving towards more equitable partnerships, more resources need to be allocated to building partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and activists in LMICs. In order to address these needs and examine power imbalances in funding and research, the SVRI has developed resources that address the issue of how and what research on VAW and VAC in LMICs is funded, along with the participatory creation of research agendas, aiming to influence funding practices and encourage new ways of thinking about funding research, in community with funding partners.

The Advocacy Toolkit

We all need to advocate for more and better funding for research on VAW and VAC. The resources in our Advocacy Toolkit highlight the inequities and power imbalances in how research is conceived, conducted and resourced, and provide knowledge to advocate for rebalancing power and shifting resources, in better ways, to LMICs and LMIC-based researchers.

These are the:

- [Tracking funding for research on VAW in LMICs](#) study that examines who is funding VAW research, and by how much.
- [Global Shared Research Agenda \(GSRA\)](#), which details research questions identified by the field as key knowledge gaps.
- [Funding Ethically Guidelines](#) that look at how to fund research on VAW and VAC in LMICs.⁵

¹ Mago, A. and Dartnall E. (2022). Decolonising Funding. Shifting How We Think about Funding Research on Violence Against Women and Violence against Children in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. SVRI, Pretoria.

² SVRI (2022). 'Tracking the Funding Flows: Funding for Research on Violence Against Women in Low- and Middle-Income Countries' Sexual Violence Research Initiative. Pretoria, South Africa. <https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022-03-15/Trackingfunding.pdf>

³ SVRI & EQI (2021). Global shared research agenda for research on violence against women in low and middle-income countries. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Pretoria. <https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-09-15/GSRA%20VAVG%20ExecSum%20Sept%202021.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.ukcdr.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/equitable-partnerships/>; and Raising Voices and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (2020). Learning Together: A Guide for Feminist Practice in Violence Against Women and Girls Research Collaborations. Kampala, Uganda and Pretoria, South Africa. <https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2020-10-08/Learning%20together%20brief.pdf>

⁵ Mago, A, & Dartnall, E. (2021). Funding Ethically: Better funding for Violence against Women and Violence against Children Research in Lower- and Middle-Income Countries. Sexual Violence Research Initiative: Pretoria, South Africa.



These tools together provide a picture of who is being funded, what is being funded, what should be funded and how funding is being done from a perspective of promoting equity, diversity and inclusion. For SVRI, part of this process has involved clarifying what decolonised funding means to us and what the implications of working towards this are for us as a grant-making organisation and in terms of our relationships with both our grantee and funding partners.

“For SVRI better funding for research is funding that is grounded in feminist principles, acknowledges, and addresses power dynamics, involves honest, transformative relationships between donors and grantees and creates accessible and equitable processes that support priority-driven and impactful research.”(Funding Ethically Guidelines) ⁴

SVRI works strongly in collaboration and partnership with others in the field and we developed these tools in partnership and community with multiple stakeholders from across the globe including researchers, practitioners, activists, funders, and policy makers. This was reflected in the participatory consultative processes which took place during the development of the resources.

I. Tracking Funding for Research on VAW: Where is the money and who is it going to?

Our study mapped the distribution of resources for and explored who has access to funding for research in LMICs through Overseas Development Aid (ODA) in 2019. It was a first step in attempting to understand how much funding was funnelled to VAW research in LMICs.

How we did it:

We used a multi-pronged research methodology including:

- A keyword-search analysis of the global Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database, documenting the resources allocated to LMICs towards the purpose code “ending violence towards women” by Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries and other donors (including private and multilaterals).
- A globally disseminated online survey targeted at both funders and researchers.
- Four case studies of the funding ecosystems in South Africa, Colombia, Papua New Guinea, and Lebanon, where ten interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in each country.

What we found:

The study confirmed that the VAW field is generally underfunded with research on VAW in LMICs being especially underfunded; with only 0.05 percent of total ODA in 2019 being disbursed to VAW research. Funding for VAW research comes mainly from HICs and from a small number of donors with little or no funding from LMIC national governments. The top bilateral donors to VAW research are Sweden (which accounts for 55 percent of the total with disbursements of USD 42.46 million), Canada, United Kingdom, United States, Norway, Switzerland, Spain, and Australia.

We found widespread agreement among funders that more research on VAW is needed and that levels of funding towards research on VAW does not currently meet the need.

Moving forward:

- National governments, international bodies, civil society, and research institutions should lobby for both VAW programming and research to be seen as a funding priority and **call for a sharp increase in the investment into research on VAW.**
- Injection of funding needs to be coupled with dedicated **monitoring** of the ethics, rigor, and **implementation** of such research.



- Improvements are required in the accessibility of transparent and **disaggregated funding data** from donors more clearly showing the amounts dedicated to research - without this, it is uniquely challenging to determine whether research on VAW is a priority issue for funders or the levels of investment made in VAW research.
- Donors need to be encouraged to **share information about their investments** on global databases (that are refined to ensure accuracy and completeness) including more comprehensive descriptions of projects.

II. Global Shared Research Agenda: What should be funded?

The GSRA was a global priority setting exercise steered and facilitated by the SVRI and the Equality Institute (EQI), with support from funding partners and in partnership with the field. The GSRA drew on the collective wisdom of multiple stakeholders to establish research priorities for the next five years for fair, effective and relevant research on VAW.

“The focus is on decolonising the research process – challenging the ways we define research and being directed by historically excluded and unheard groups in the research field as to what they think is important.” (SVRI Blog)⁶

Priority setting is important as it helps us to:

- Identify evidence gaps and highlight priority areas for research that can guide research expenditure and ensure precious resources are spent effectively.
- Assist researchers, funders, practitioners, and policymakers with research planning and fundraising.
- Guide SVRI grant-making.

It also serves as:

- An advocacy tool to signal to stakeholders which areas of research have been identified as important.
- A monitoring tool for the field, including monitoring actual research and expenditure against priorities.

How we did it:

The GSRA was developed over more than two years, through a six-step highly participatory and iterative process that included facilitated, research-informed dialogues and discussion with over 400 stakeholders from across the field. The methodology was adapted from the Child Health and Nutrition Initiative (CHNRI) method as a new type of democratic methodology that ‘crowd sources’ the views of multiple stakeholders on an issue and treats all views equally.

This method is based on the idea that many voices produce better outcomes or decisions than relying on just a few. The global advisory group for the GSRA was made up of approximately 400 researchers, practitioners, funders and policy makers in both LMICs and HICs, working on VAW prevention and response. For the first time in such a process, the voices of practitioners, and activists sat equally alongside academics and other specialists in co-creating research priorities for violence against women in LMICs. Efforts were made to ensure that the opportunities for engagement were maximised by translating the surveys into seven languages and splitting it into two shorter surveys rather than one very long survey.

⁶ The Global Shared Research Agenda: Learning about the ‘how’ as much as the ‘what’. (May 2020) @ <https://www.svri.org/blog/global-shared-research-agenda-learning-about-how-as-much-as-what>



What we found:

The most highly ranked questions fell under the area of intervention research suggesting that this domain is viewed by the field as the most needed at this point. Whilst there was a lot of consistency across priorities, variations by occupation or geographical location were noted. For example, practitioners gave preference to questions related to the intervention development and prevention research whilst researchers, in addition to intervention questions, also included questions on understanding VAW and methodology domains. The process revealed important research gaps in the VAW field including research on new and emerging forms of violence, and violence among populations that have been previously overlooked, for example women with disabilities or women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Moving forward:

Key recommendations from the process relate to effective use of the GSRA including:

- Funders should increase investment in high-quality and ethical research aligned with the GSRA.
- Researchers should use the GSRA to inform their own research agendas.
- Practitioners should use the agenda as a guide for partnerships with researchers on the evaluation of their interventions.
- The GSRA should be used by the field together as a tool to advocate for more and better research funding that addresses critical research gaps in the field.⁷

Top five questions on intervention research - in order of overall ranking:

1. What types of interventions can effectively prevent multiple forms of violence, and why?
2. What types of interventions are most effective for preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) (including 'honour'-based violence) against women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (including age, poverty, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality)?
3. How are new feminist social movements positively or negatively influencing individual, social and policy perspectives related to the experience and perpetration of violence?
4. What interventions work to prevent sexual harassment in institutional settings (in-person or online), including in the workplace and educational settings, and why?
5. What are the impacts (including disability-related impacts) of under-researched forms of IPV on women and girls, including emotional and economic IPV, revenge porn and 'honour'-based violence?

III. Funding Ethically Guidelines: How should resources be allocated?

The key objective of this project was to create guidance in consultation with funders, researchers and practitioners, that could contribute to better funding for research on VAW and VAC in LMICs.

What we did:

The guidance was developed over several months using a multi-step participatory process which included:

- A scoping review of the available literature to highlight key issues and ensure that we did not duplicate work that already exists in the field.
- Seven focus group discussions (including two in Spanish) with stakeholders including funders, researchers, and practitioners working in the field of VAW and VAC research.
- An online survey in French, English and Spanish that was widely disseminated to more than 7000 of SVRI's members and regional networks.

⁷ SVRI & EQI (2021). Global shared research agenda for research on violence against women in low and middle-income countries. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Pretoria. <https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2021-09-15/GSRA%20VAWG%20ExecSum%20Sept%202021.pdf>



What we found:

Four key principles emerged out of the consultative processes as being central to ethical funding for VAW and VAC research in LMICs.

Decolonising knowledge and methods of learning: Decolonising knowledge as a principle applies to rethinking the questions of what constitutes evidence and expertise, how knowledge is created, whose voices are heard, and whose data counts. Investment in practice-based knowledge is important in VAW and VAC research because it can help us to understand the nuances of why certain programmes work or not and how those that do work could be scaled-up. Practice-Based Knowledge documents and provides insights into how strategies are playing out on the ground and accounts for shifting power relations, behaviours, and norms.

Creating equity in research partnerships: Different aspects of equity in partnerships were highlighted including the importance of localisation, diversity and inclusion, translation of research into relevant languages, authorship, and dissemination. Key issues include ensuring understanding of local country contexts, taking an intersectional approach, supporting work incubated and led by LMIC researchers and involvement of local researchers and implementing partners from the beginning of the research process including in setting the research agenda, questions and methodology.

Ensuring funding is flexible, adaptive, and long term: For researchers and implementing partners in LMICs, flexibility within existing funding and programmatic arrangements is critical to allow partners to adapt their project, services, and activities to changing contexts and to extenuating circumstances that might arise. This approach allows for innovation to truly take place and ensures space and freedom to experiment, document, innovate and learn from failures.

Transforming the funder/grantee relationship: Funders and grantees are both very aware of the importance of addressing power and building equity in philanthropic relationships. There is increasing knowledge about and advocacy for ‘trust-based philanthropy’, described as “an approach to giving that addresses the inherent power imbalances between funders, non-profits, and the communities they serve. At its core, trust-based philanthropy is about redistributing power—systemically, organizationally, and interpersonally—in service of a healthier and more equitable non-profit ecosystem.”⁸

Based on an analysis of the core principles the guidance provided [practical recommendations and considerations](#) for ‘better funding’ at each stage of the research funding process and these are summarised in the figure below.⁹ Although these are aimed at funding for research on VAW and VAC in LMICs, many of the suggestions are broadly applicable and relevant to funding human rights and women’s rights organisations more generally across a range of contexts.

⁸ Trust Based Philanthropy Project. Trust Based Philanthropy- An Overview. 2021.

⁹ Funding Ethically: Putting Principles into Practice, 2021.

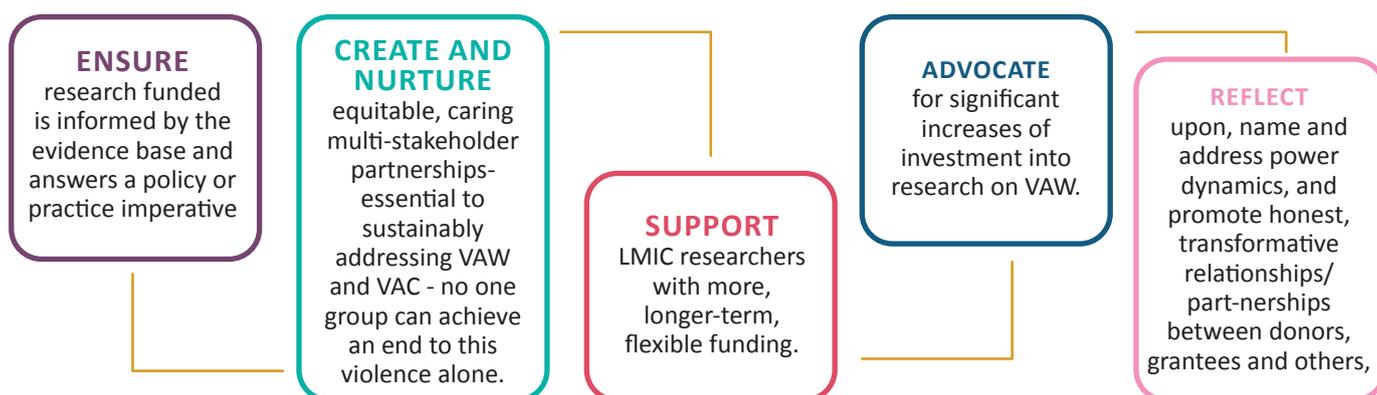
https://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022-01-20/PrinciplesToPractice_Ethical_Funding.pdf



Why are the resources in the Advocacy Tool Kit important?

The Advocacy Tool Kit help us better understand who is funding research, what research is important to the field and how to fund research in ways that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion and challenge what constitutes knowledge and evidence. The way in which research and knowledge building is funded in LMICs can be a powerful lever for change. How the projects and partnerships are resourced lays the foundation for the creation of effective, impactful and contextually based research as well as for the scaling up of programmes that work at the level of public policy, programming and services delivering a bigger impact for more women and children.

Using the resources that we have developed and co-created with the field, we hope to shift practices to encourage 'more and better funding'. All three tools help us to critically reflect on who and what gets funded and why – and all three advocate for more localisation and decolonisation of research. Together they encourage all of us working on knowledge creation to:





Transforming knowledge into action

Of course, for any of these resources to be effective they must be used and SVRI is committed to facilitating engagement with these tools and finding ways to track and receive feedback on how this is happening. We want to **strengthen** how these are used and their usefulness to the field, **expand** their accessibility so that as many people as possible can use them and **encourage** engagement that leads to action. Ensuring engagement and action will include planning activities to influence policy by ensuring that our knowledge generation work reaches those who have the power and resources to use it effectively. Diverse strategies to achieve this will include:

- Creating coalitions of action and planning joint advocacy with partners doing similar work.
- Engaging with a broad range of decision-makers (e.g., policy makers, political advisors, lobbyists, donors, government staff) from various regions through targeted web-events, dialogues, and workshops.
- Creating spaces for engagement between donors, researchers, and knowledge-based practitioners to look at how funding approaches can be transformed.
- Identifying opportunities for researchers working on key issues to connect with key decision-makers and funding streams and seek out ways to build collaboration between and with donors.
- Ongoing monitoring of funding allocated to research on VAW and advocacy to ensure that governments allocate funding to research in national action plans.

These efforts will support the work of the [VAW Prevention Accelerator](#) – a global initiative underway to develop a shared advocacy agenda to raise funds for violence against women prevention efforts. Over time we hope that the tools will form the basis of a call to action for donors to fund LMIC researchers ‘better’- with more resources provided in empowering ways that support equitable, priority driven research in LMICs conducted by LMIC researchers and leading to knowledge that will inform effective solutions for women and children’s lives.

