

# Jamaican Children's Exposure to Violence in the Early Years



Charlene Coore Desai  
JA KIDS Birth Cohort Study  
University of the West Indies

# What we know about violence in childhood.....

- ▶ <http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/>

# Background

- »» Exposure to Violence in the Early Years

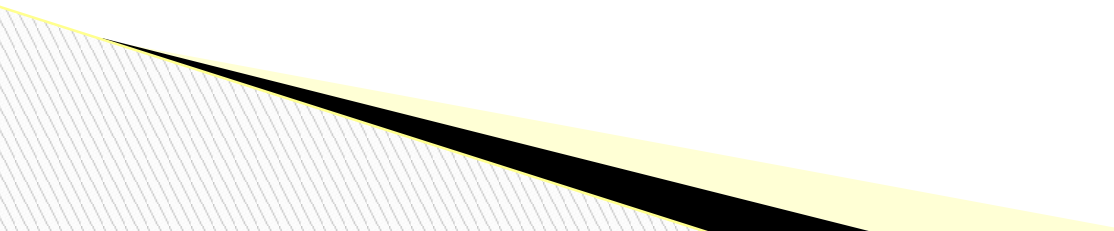
# Violence Exposure in the Early Childhood Period

- ▶ Infants and young children are particularly at risk of violence by primary caregivers and other family members because of their dependence and limited social interactions outside the home (UNICEF, 2014).

# Definitions of Violence Against Children (VAC)

- ▶ Child maltreatment encompasses all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment. Including:
  - corporal punishment
  - physical torture
  - verbal abuse
  - belittling
  - threatening behaviour

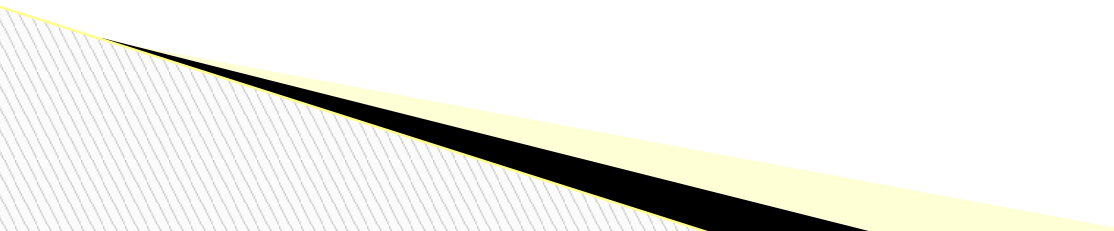
# Definitions of Violence Against Children (VAC)

- ▶ The definition of child maltreatment also incorporates sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment and commercial or other exploitation of children (Krug et al., 2002).
  - ▶ Children can also be exposed to violence by witnessing the violence suffered by others in their families and communities.
- 

# Consequences of Exposure to Violence in Early Childhood

- ▶ Research shows that VAC has especially serious consequences for children who experience or witness violence during the Early Childhood period (Fox & Shonkoff, 2011). Including:
  - Toxic stress
  - Cognitive impairment
  - Developmental and learning delays
  - Greater susceptibility to physical problems
  - Illness and mental health problems
  - Increased risk of mortality
  - Increased risks for stress-related diseases
- ▶ There are also social and economic development consequences

# Violence in Childhood: A Global Problem

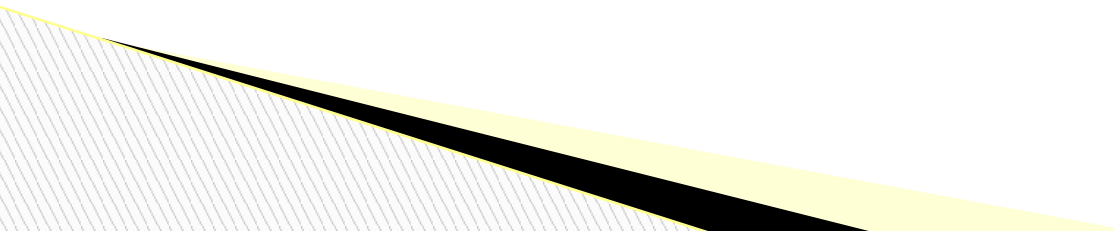
- ▶ VAC is a global problem affecting both high income countries (HICs) and low- to middle- income countries (LMICs).
  - ▶ However, children are more likely to suffer from violence if they live in:
    - the world's poorest countries
    - communities (especially in cities) that are impoverished and isolated
- 



# Aim

- »» Exposure to Violence in the Early Years

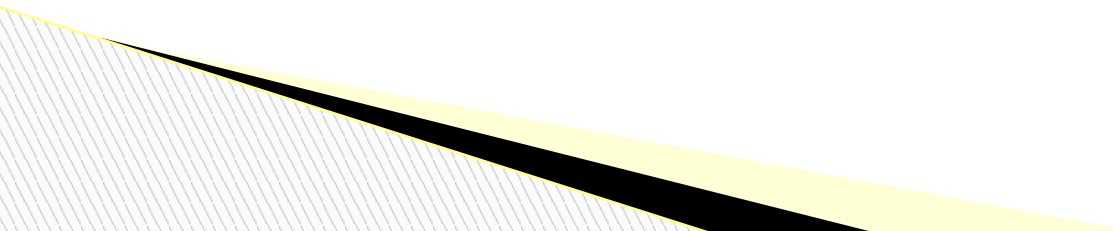
# Research Aim

- ▶ This study explores child maltreatment and other forms of exposure to violence for children enrolled in the JA KIDS Birth Cohort Study.
  - ▶ The study considers different forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, as well as the witnessing of violence suffered by others in their families and communities.
- 

# Violence exposure in the JA KIDS cohort

»» Exposure to Violence in the Early  
Years

# Method

- ▶ JA KIDS Questions related to violence at each contact:
    - Antenatal
    - 9 – 12 months
    - 18 – 22 months
    - 4 – 5 years
  
  - ▶ Comparisons by gender
- 

# Antenatal Questions

- ▶ Q1 – My expectations of my pregnancy, my parenting and my partner
- ▶ BEFORE THE PREGNANCY
  - Does your baby's father get angry with you?
  - Do you get angry with your baby's father?
  - Do you have arguments
- ▶ Asked both mother and father (Father Questionnaire)

# Antenatal Questions

- ▶ My life, my home, my community
  - Children have a say in their discipline
    - Yes, No, Sometimes?
    - Important because it speaks to children's rights (Attitudes)
  - Community variables
    - I feel safe in my community
    - In the last 3 months, in your community/or your family member:
      - Robbed
      - Raped
      - Murdered
      - People held up
      - People fighting

# Antenatal Questions

## ▶ My Health

### ◦ Physical Safety

- Since pregnant have you been physically hurt (slap, hit, kicked)
- Who did it?
- How often?

# Accidents & Injuries

- ▶ Asked at 9 – 12 months, 18 – 22 months
  - Possible indicators of child abuse and neglect
    - Serious fall without hitting head
    - Serious fall with hitting head
    - Broken bones
    - Burns or scalds
  - 4 –5 years
    - Road Traffic Accident
    - Accident at School
    - Near Drowning
    - Poisoning
    - Unconsciousness



# Children's exposure

- ▶ 9 – 12 months; 18 – 22 months; 4 – 5 years:
  - When you feel frustrated with the baby do you:
    - Shout
    - Slap
    - Pinch
    - Shake
    - Bite
    - Beat
    - Other
  - At 18 – 22 months we asked this of father as well
- ▶ 4 – 5 years
  - Time Out/Naughty Corner
  - Reasoning Withdrawal of privileges
  - Explain why something is wrong
- ▶ We also asked about reactions to temper tantrums such as slapping and shouting

# Children's exposure – Life events

- ▶ At 18 – 22 months; 4 – 5 years
  - Asked mother:
    - Your partner physically hurt your children
    - Your partner physically hurt you
    - Your partner was emotionally cruel to you
  
  - Asked if the child had been:
    - Physically hurt
    - Sexually abused
    - Taken into state care

# Findings – Antenatal Exposure

»» Exposure to Violence in the Early  
Years

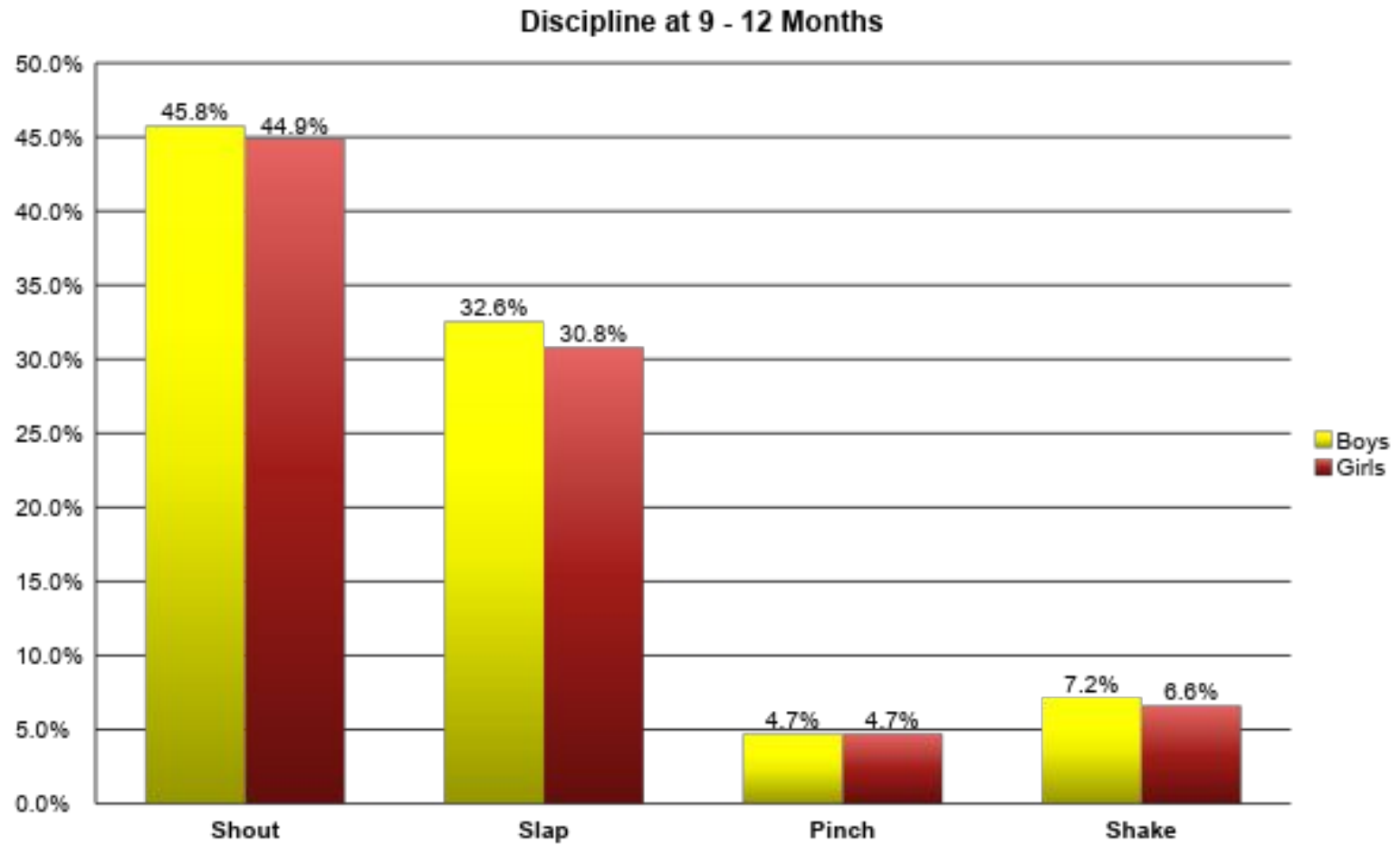
# Findings – Antenatal

- ▶ Physical Safety
  - 6% of women said that they were physically hurt (slapped, hit, kicked) since they became pregnant
  - The majority (66%) of these women reported being hurt by their partner
  - Another 16% reported that they were hurt by another family member
  - Only 5% reported being hurt by a stranger
  - According to Know Violence – On average between 4 and 12 percent of women had been physically abused by an intimate partner during pregnancy in a majority of countries for which data was available.

# Findings – Children’s Exposure

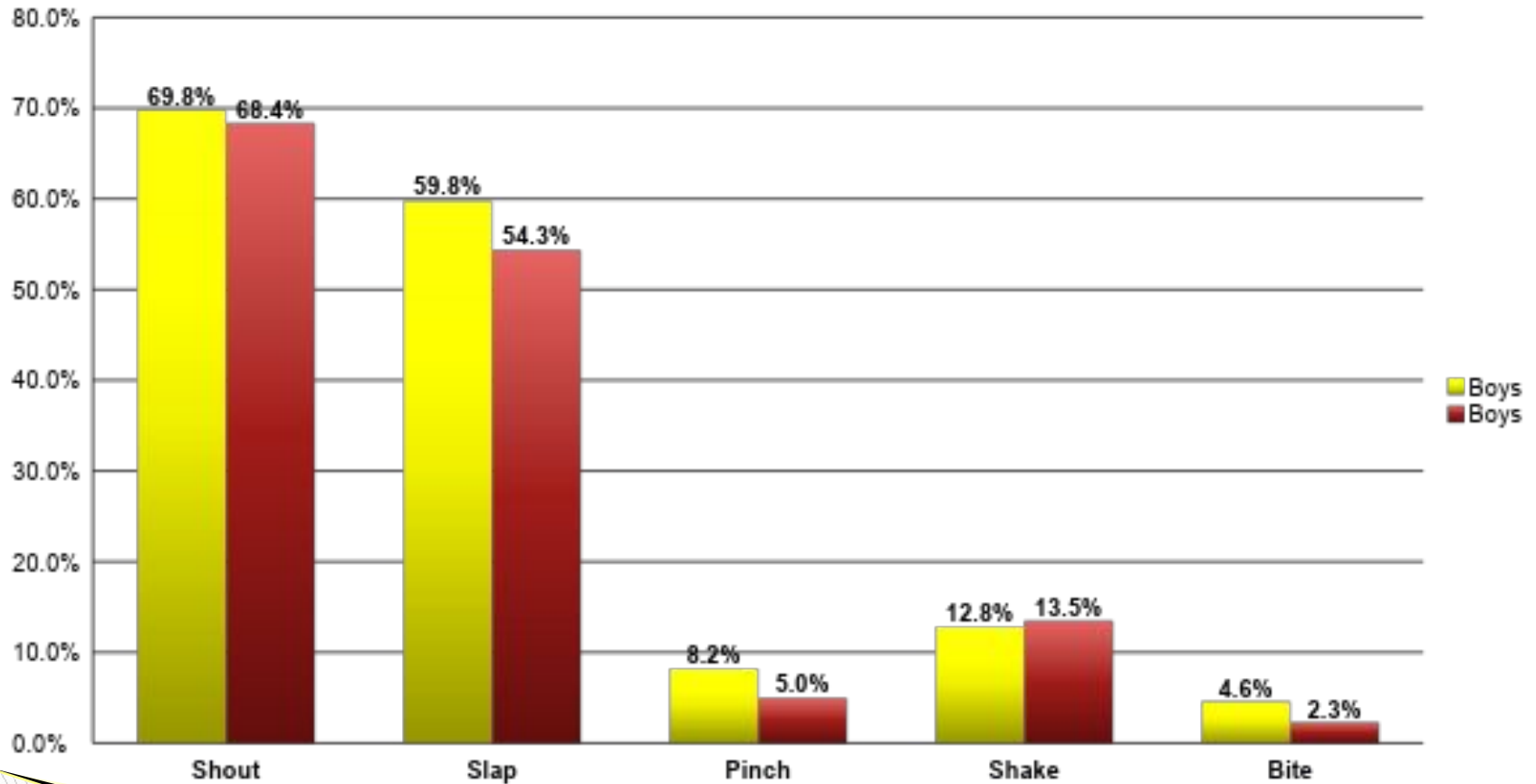
»» Exposure to Violence in the Early  
Years

# At 9 – 12 months



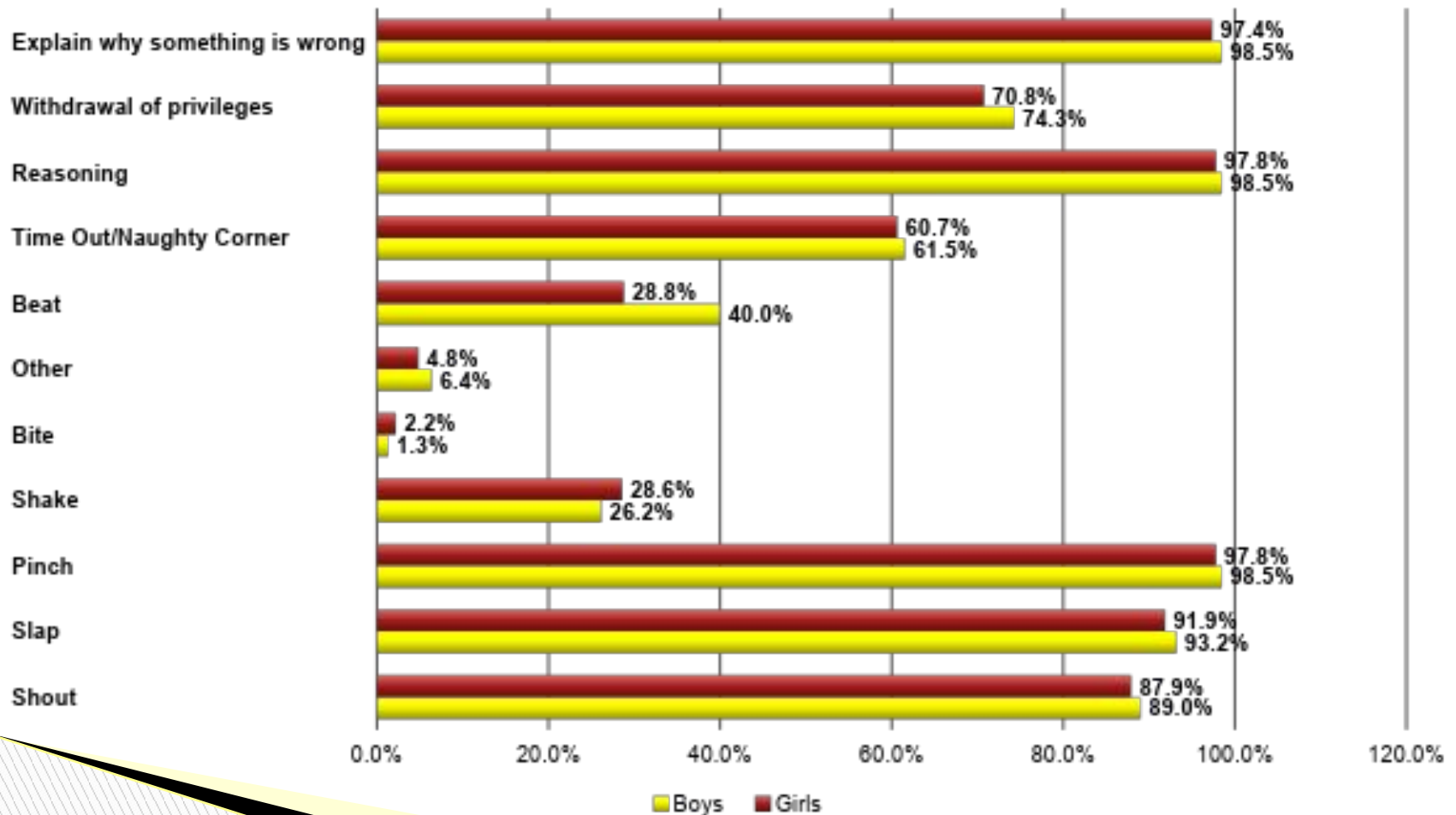
# At 18 – 22 months

## Discipline at 18 - 22 Months



# At 4 – 5 years

Discipline at Four Years Old

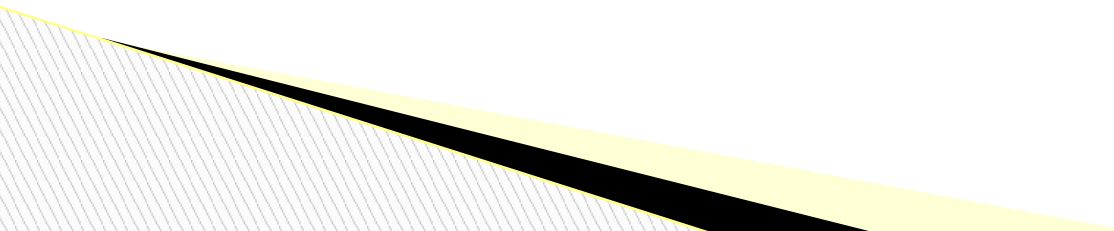




# Findings – Life Events

- ▶ At 18 – 22 months and 4 – 5 years less than 1% of parents reported that their child was physically hurt or sexually abused. One child was reported to have been taken into state.

# What have we learned about the Jamaican context...

- ▶ Boys and girls can be exposed to violence at every stage of their growth.
  - ▶ Need to start considering exposure to violence from the antenatal period.
  - ▶ Boys are experiencing more physical punishment from the first year of life.
  - ▶ In the early years, children are exposed to physical and emotional violence from their caregivers.
  - ▶ By 4 – 5 years, caregivers are also using many non-physical forms of punishment.
- 

# Policy Implications

- » Exposure to Violence in the Early Years

# Prevention Strategies



Source: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017

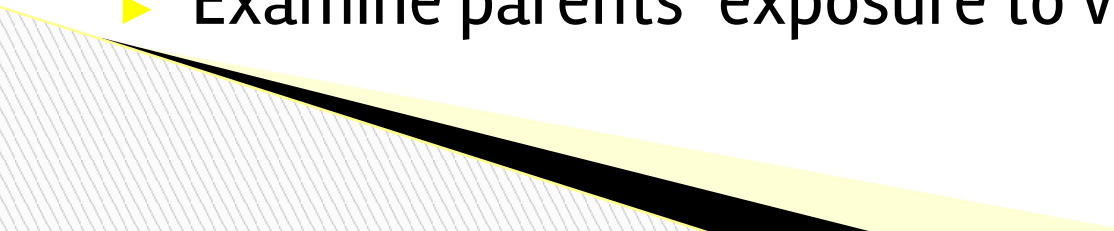
# A Call to Action



Source: Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

- ▶ Advocacy
- ▶ Improve knowledge and evidence
  - Role of research such as JA KIDS

# Future Research

- ▶ Collect more targeted data on violence exposure in follow-up contacts
  - ▶ Examine the risk/protective factors at each stage of development
  - ▶ Examine polyvictimization and violence that occurs in different settings
  - ▶ Examine parents' exposure to violence
- 

# For more information

- ▶ To learn more about violence in childhood, please visit:
- ▶ <http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org/>

**THANK YOU!!!!**