The ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool-Child Version

Manual and Proposed Guidelines for Pilot Administration

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About the ICAST Child Questionnaire
The International Society for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have been working together to improve knowledge about the occurrence of violence against children in all parts of the world. To do this, we have developed three questionnaires (one for adults with children—the ICAST-P; one for young adults, the ICAST-R; and one for children, the ICAST-C) to examine types of victimizations of childhood around the world. The intent is to provide an instrument that has been developed by an international group of scholars from all portions of the globe that will be
made available to investigators seeking to find appropriate instruments for studies examining the occurrence of violence against children.

The current status of the child instrument is that it has been developed and reviewed by over 60 scholars from both developed and developing countries and is now ready for pilot testing. The goals of the pilot testing of the child instrument are to ensure that it is easily translated, easy to understand, safe to administer, and appropriate in a variety of cultural contexts.

**Why is the instrument important?**

Family violence is increasingly recognized around the world as a significant social problem that has serious health and economic consequences. There is a need to increase our awareness of the actual prevalence in some places, as well as a need to increase our understanding of risk and protective factors through cross-country comparisons. Data from other countries is often not sufficiently compelling to ensure that a problem that is hidden in shame within families and communities is recognized. Data from countries with histories of studying the problem suggest that it is epidemic. Indeed, limited data suggest that lesser developed countries, without the infrastructure to recognize and intervene, may have a more serious problem that has been presented in data from developed countries. Local data are needed to drive education, policy, and service development. Data gathered will help document the existence of the problem and inform decision makers and educators.

Children’s knowledge and perspective are infrequently attended to in research on family violence. Developmental status or limitations in intelligence may limit some children’s ability to tell us what they have experienced. However, where children can be asked, their perspective can be helpful in understanding the full extent of the problem. A child’s rights perspective supports efforts to understand what children have experienced form their own perspective.

Reporting laws in some countries require that suspicions about possible abuse or neglect of children must be reported to legal or social service authorities. However, these reports themselves may lead to criminal prosecution of a child’s parents or removal of the child from his or her home. **Careful consideration must be given to respecting the gift of information from research participants and permitting informed consent.** Involving children in research in which the children provide information that may result in risk for others requires careful consideration of whether the children even have the capacity to understand informed consent. It is important to note that many research projects have been conducted in an ethical manner while asking children about exposure to family or school violence. Typically these have involved anonymous completion of questionnaires. However, without standardized instruments, it has been difficult to compare or contrast children’s reports across studies or across cultures. The development of an instrument that can be used across cultures and facilitate research asking children about maltreatment in a safe and ethical manner will improve the knowledge base about the occurrence of violence against children.

This children’s version of the instrument may not be able to be used safely and ethically in some countries where there are policies or laws that might compromise confidentiality or limit the respect for the autonomy of the child providing the information. It is our intent to provide a standard instrument that can be used by those investigators who can safely and ethically inquire about experiences among children.
**How is violence or abuse defined in this instrument?**

People in different cultures have differing views on what constitutes violent or abusive behavior. In the survey questionnaire, children will not be asked about broad terms such as “violence” or “abuse.” Instead, the questionnaire asks about the occurrence of specific behaviors. Interpretation of the results will be in the context of local community norms for acceptable behavior as well as using more standardized definitions for the purpose of cross-country comparison.

**Who is developing this instrument?**

The ICAST-C and two associated instruments (the ICAST-R and the ICAST-P) measuring violence against children have been developed through a series of meetings and reviews conducted by the International Society of the Prevention of child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN). This work has been conducted in conjunction with the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Children. More than 130 experts from 43 countries have participated in the development and review process. The process for the development of all three ICAST instruments has been coordinated by ISPCAN leadership and researchers from Queensland University of Technology, Australia and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA.

**Human subjects protection**

The subject matter for this instrument is sensitive and potential harm to health and life may be identified or even precipitated through survey questions. The safety and well-being of the research participants is paramount. Because child abuse reporting laws, and even the existence of agencies able to intervene, varies by country, this instrument for children must not be used in countries or in research studies in which the child’s autonomy and confidentiality cannot be assured. Wherever this instrument is used, the investigators need to carefully develop their protocol with respect to recruitment, participation, consent, incentives, and provision of child protection within the context of the legal, social, and medical systems where the study is performed.

All pilot projects must be reviewed by a committee on human subjects protection (institutional review board). If an investigator adopting this instrument does not have a local institutional review board, the study may be reviewed by the ISPCAN Committee on Human Subjects or by a review panel at a cooperating university. No pilot study data should be collected without approval of an organized review committee that considers the needs and provisions for the protection of research participants. Individual research participants (both children and adults) must be able to secure assistance to prevent further violence when they make this request.

Because of the complex competing demands posed by the ethical principles of non-malfeasance (“Do No Harm”), beneficence, and the autonomy or respect for the will of the participants, research staff need to be well prepared to address ethical issues. All staff should have basic training in research ethics. If a local university does not provide such training, there are training modules available on the world wide web. ISPCAN is currently making arrangements to join a network of universities providing web-based education on research ethics that will provide certification of having been taught the basic principles of human research.
**Participant Incentives**

A pilot protocol may be designed to include a small incentive for voluntary participation upon completion of the questionnaire. This approach may increase rates of participation. It is appropriate that this incentive be for the child participant in most cases. However, even very small sums of incentive money may be seen as coercive in some counties. Further, in some countries, it may be inappropriate to give this amount of money directly to a child. Investigators must review plans for offering incentives with a local institutional review board or other authorities.

**Instrument Translation**

International Instruments such as all of the ICAST instruments are intended to be used in multiple languages and ask similar questions in a variety of cultures. Some languages have terms that are similar to terms in other countries but carry connotation. Some languages do not have exactly equivalent terms. It is our experience that, with some effort, the meaning of a term in one language can be expressed in a phrase or term from a different language. Translations should be made to capture the meaning when there is a choice between alternate possible terms. Translation should be accompanied by an independent back translation to English by a different person than accomplished the original translation. During the pilot phase, investigators are instructed to send the back translation back to ISPCAN for review.

When the instruments are translated, every effort should be made to preserve the numbering of the questions. If an investigator wishes to add additional questions, these should be numbered in a distinctive way or added to the end of the instrument so that all data entry for the instrument, in any language, will be similar. This will permit the data from the different countries to be compared even if the person using the data is not familiar with the language that the instrument was administered to the participants. An EPIINFO data entry program is currently under development for this instrument.

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<th>Research Staff Qualifications and Job Description</th>
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<td><em>Research staff are key to a successful studies of family matters. They are the heart and soul of such studies. Women and children may not be comfortable participating in research or opening up and talking about their experiences in the presence of family members or with research staff of a specific gender. Staff must be chosen with care and must conform to the following qualifications. Staff should be well acquainted with the nature of the study and job expectations before being hired.</em></td>
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**Qualifications**

1) Must believe in importance of study.
2) Must be comfortable with the subject matter and not easily shocked.
3) Must be comfortable with study procedures.
4) Must be able to easily develop rapport with different types of people (different personality types, different backgrounds).
5) Must be trustworthy; able to maintain confidentiality.
6) Must be meticulous in coding and following established procedures.

7) Must be familiar with setting for interviews and local customs.

8) Must be able to remain neutral and non-judgmental. Cannot act as “counselor” or “advisor” to study participants.

**Sampling Plan**

At this stage, the goal is to pilot the newly developed instruments in multiple countries and languages. Data from this study will not be generalizable to the locations that the study are piloted and we do not suggest that any attempts be made at defining a probability based sample. The suggested sample size for this pilot study is 110 children >11 and <18 years of age. Despite the small sample size, it is essential that the survey be implemented among children from different social classes or social groups. It is important that respondents vary by income, class, race, ethnicity, and dialect to ensure that unique challenges to completion of the questionnaire that vary by those factors.

**Group Administration**

- It is anticipated that this pilot study will be administered to a group of children at the same time in such a manner that children’s answers will be anonymous. Classrooms and social organizations provide the most common opportunities for group administration.
- Permission from leaders of the school or youth group must be obtained. Some organizations may require that individual permission be obtained from all participants’ parents. This issue will need to be reviewed for each country and by the local committee reviewing the work for the purpose of protecting human subjects.
- Children completing the instrument in group settings must be prohibited from asking other children how they answered questions or from seeing how other children answer specific questions. This means that talking must be limited during administration and that participants must be far enough from each other to provide privacy.
- Children must be able to return the questionnaire to the investigators without having other children see their answers.
- Questionnaire responses must be kept confidential and no child’s name should appear on the instrument.

**Refusal to participate**

Children must have the right to choose not to participate without any consequences. There must be no adverse consequences of choosing not to participate.

**Debriefing**

While having a child become distressed about the questions in this type of research is rare in our experience, the instrument does ask about experiences that may have been painful or disturbing for a child. A participant child may want to talk about or get help related to some experience that is included in the questions in the instrument. The investigators must be prepared to offer a general debriefing or advice to all subjects about how they can get help or
have someone to talk to about issues that the questionnaire covers. A standard statement should be read to the class that says that the questionnaire may cover topics that are upsetting or disturbing and that any student having questions may talk to the person bringing the instrument into the classroom. The investigator may also choose to provide information about other resources, such as children’s rights organizations or community agencies, that can provide help.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

The following questions may be asked by participants. Here are some suggested answers.

**Who is sponsoring this survey?**

*This study is sponsored by << local university>>. The same study is being carried out in other countries around the world. All of these countries are working together to try to better understand the problems affecting the health of children.*

**Will you use my name? / How do I know that this is confidential?**

*Do not put your name on the questionnaire. We are interested only in combining the answers of all children or adolescents that we will talk to. Individual responses will not be reported. All of us working on the project are required to follow certain steps that have been developed to ensure that the information provided by each participant is kept secret.*

**What will happen if I don’t participate?**

*You do not have to participate. However, we do hope that you will take part, as it is important that we hear from as many children as possible. Your answers will be used to help develop services for children in <<COUNTRY>>. If you do participate, you can refuse to answer any question that you do not want to answer, or stop the interview at any point.*

**How long will this take?**

*The interview should take about 20-30 minutes. You can end the questionnaire at any time, but we hope that you will not stop before answering all of the questions.*

**After Administration**

1) After retrieving the forms from the participants, make sure each form has a unique number identifying it.

2) Review instruments again for completeness and clarity.

3) Either enter the data or make photocopies of all of the forms and send the originals to Desmond Runyan at the University of North Carolina (drunyan@unc.edu). The results will be summarized and returned to you.

**Ethical and Safety Issues**

1) Guarantees of safety to participants
   a. care with how subject matter of survey is described in school or to other person in the community
   b. confidentiality of responses (information retrieval systems must safeguard data)
c. safeguard privacy
   1)  make sure children’s responses are not observed by other children.
d. remember that participants have the right to refuse to answer and the right to stop
e. provide a debriefing offering participants a chance to get support and help if they report distress
g. ensure access to crisis intervention- have a plan to address crises.
h. service referral- prepare a resource list and distribute at the end of the interview

2) Training interviewers
   a. confidentiality
   b. protection of data (how will data be stored to protect confidentiality?)
c. sensitivity to issues of family violence
d. supervision/ debriefing
e. ongoing support- research team members may be affected. Plan for crisis intervention or psychological counseling if necessary. Regular team meetings with opportunity for debriefing are important.

3) Safety for Interviewers
   a. staff should meet with local official(s) to insure authorization, protection, & support.
   c. Staff should wear badges identifying themselves as staff of <<customize by site>>.
   d. Staff may describe project as one related to health of children. They also advise child to discuss project in the same way, if asked.
   e. Interviewers never administer the questionnaire when others may be privy to the answers.

4) Is there a need to report suspected abuse to authorities?  <<This will be customized by site.>>

5) Stress importance of candor and honesty to participants. The study does not have value and wastes time and resources if we are gathering false information. It is better to refuse to answer than to give a false answer.

6) Keep the safety of participants in mind when thinking about how study will be described to community partners and community officials.

Address the following questions:

**Logistical Issues**

*Timing for conducting the survey*
1) best time of year- school year
2) best time of week
3) best time of day
4) will school schedule have an impact on staff’s ability to travel and collect data

**Data Management**

*Data Transfer from Field to Research Office*
Data will be transferred from the schools to the country data entry office on a regular basis, as per detailed instructions given by the Principal Investigator. In each country the investigator will need to plan for either data entry or transfer of completed instruments.

**Check for completeness**
Staff will check all forms daily for completeness and internal consistency. If she or he notices missing data or a need of clarification, she or he should immediately contact the investigator who may need to replace the subject with other subjects.

**Data entry and data cleaning**
Data entry may be done in each country or at the University of North Carolina. The data will be entered twice into a special EPIINFO data entry system. The second time is to verify accurate data entry.
Contributors: (to be a comprehensive list)

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