



# A FAMILIAR FACE

Violence in the lives of children and adolescents

Key findings

For further information on the data and methods of calculation, see United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

1. All these key facts were calculated on the basis of data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other nationally representative surveys conducted between 2005 and 2016. The estimate of children without full legal protection was calculated on the basis of information taken from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.
2. The estimates of bullying are based on data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) and Global School-based Student Health Surveys (GSHS) conducted between 2003 and 2016. The estimate of school-aged children without full legal protection was calculated on the basis of information from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children. The estimate of attacks on schools was calculated on the basis of information from the 2017 Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict. The estimate of school shootings was calculated on the basis of research conducted by Dr. Laura E. Agnich, Georgia Southern University (originally cited in Gupta, Samarth, *School Shootings: An American problem?*, Harvard Political Review, 19 April 2015, available at <harvardpolitics.com/special\_features/gun.html#fn1>). Figures were updated for the report through correspondence with Dr. Agnich. For more information on definitions and data collection methodology, see: Agnich, Laura E., 'A Comparative Analysis of Attempted and Completed School-Based Mass Murder Attacks', *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 40, no. 1, March 2015, pp. 1–22.

3. All these key facts were calculated on the basis of the WHO *Global Health Estimates 2015*. The homicide rates among adolescents in the United States were calculated on the basis of data from the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
4. All these key facts were calculated on the basis of data from DHS and MICS conducted between 2005 and 2016. The estimate of contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence before age 15 was calculated on the basis of data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Violence against Women Survey 2012*, available at <<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>>.
5. Pais, Marta Santos, *Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children*, A/HRC/31/20, United Nations, New York, 5 January 2016, para. 9, open PDF from <<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/000/90/PDF/G1600090.pdf?OpenElement>>.

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# A FAMILIAR FACE

## Violence in the lives of children and adolescents

All children have the right to be protected from violence inflicted on them by anyone in their lives – whether parents, teachers, friends, romantic partners or strangers. And all forms of violence experienced by children, regardless of the nature or severity of the act, are harmful. Beyond the unnecessary hurt and pain it causes, violence undermines children's sense of self-worth and hinders their development.

Yet violence against children is often rationalized as necessary or inevitable. It may be tacitly accepted due to the familiarity of perpetrators, or minimized as inconsequential. The memory or reporting of violence may be buried due to shame or fear of reprisal. Impunity of perpetrators and prolonged exposure may leave victims believing violence is normal. In such ways, violence is masked, making it difficult to prevent and end.

The paucity of reliable data only exacerbates this problem. Data collection on violence against children is a complex undertaking

that raises considerable ethical and methodological challenges. That said the last several years have seen important progress in documenting the scale and severity of childhood violence.

*A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents* uses the most current data to shed light on four specific forms of violence: violent discipline and exposure to domestic abuse during early childhood; violence at school; violent deaths among adolescents; and sexual violence in childhood and adolescence.

The statistics reveal that children experience violence across all stages of childhood, in diverse settings, and often at the hands of the trusted individuals with whom they interact on a daily basis.

Ensuring that violence in all its forms is documented through solid data is a first step towards its elimination.



# VIOLENT DISCIPLINE AND EXPOSURE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Close to **300 MILLION** (3 in 4) children aged 2 to 4 worldwide experience violent discipline by their caregivers on a regular basis; **250 MILLION** (around 6 in 10) are punished by physical means.

Worldwide, **1 IN 4** (176 million) children under age 5 live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence.

Based on data from 30 countries, **6 IN 10** children aged 12 to 23 months are subjected to violent disciplinary methods. Among children this age, almost half experience physical punishment and a similar proportion are exposed to verbal abuse.

Globally, around **1.1 BILLION** (slightly more than 1 in 4) caregivers say that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children.

Only 60 countries have adopted legislation that fully prohibits the use of corporal punishment against children at home, leaving more than **600 MILLION** children under age 5 without full legal protection.

# VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

Worldwide, close to **130 MILLION** (slightly more than 1 in 3) students between the ages of 13 and 15 experience bullying.

About **3 IN 10** (17 million) young adolescents in 39 countries in Europe and North America admit to bullying others at school.

**732 MILLION** (1 in 2) school-age children between 6 and 17 years live in countries where corporal punishment at school is not fully prohibited.

**59** school shootings that resulted in at least one reported fatality were recorded in 14 countries during the past 25 years. Nearly **3 IN 4** of these occurred in the United States.

Close to **500** attacks or threats of attacks on schools were documented or verified in 2016 in **18** countries or areas around the world.





# VIOLENT DEATHS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

Every **7** minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent is killed by an act of violence. In 2015 alone, violence took the lives of around **82,000** adolescents worldwide. Those aged 15 to 19 are particularly vulnerable, being three times more likely to die violently than younger adolescents aged 10 to 14.

More adolescent deaths result from interpersonal than collective violence.

In 2015, nearly **2 IN 3** victims died of homicide, while the rest were killed by conflicts.

While only about **6%** of the world's adolescents live in the Middle East and North Africa, more than **70%** of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence were living in this region – with mortality rates having risen dramatically since 2011. If all adolescents faced the same risk of dying due to collective violence as those in the Syrian Arab Republic, there would be an adolescent death in the world every **10** seconds.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region that has seen an increase (albeit relatively small) in homicide rates among adolescents aged 10 to 19 since 2007. Slightly less than **10%** of the world's adolescents live in the region, but nearly half of all homicides among adolescents in 2015 occurred there. The five countries with the highest homicide rates among adolescents are all located in Latin America.

In the United States, the homicide rate among non-Hispanic Black adolescent boys aged 10 to 19 is almost **19** times higher than the rate among non-Hispanic White adolescent boys. If the homicide rate among non-Hispanic Black adolescent boys was applied nationwide, the United States would be one of the top 10 most deadly countries in the world. In 2015, the risk of being killed by homicide for non-Hispanic Black adolescent boys in the United States was higher than the risk of dying due to collective violence for adolescent boys living in a number of conflict-affected countries. Non-Hispanic Black girls in the United States also face an increased risk of homicide, with a rate that is around **FIVE** times greater than that of non-Hispanic White adolescent girls.

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

In 38 low- and middle-income countries, close to **17 MILLION** adult women report having experienced forced sex in childhood. In 28 countries in Europe, around **2.5 MILLION** young women report experiences of contact and non-contact forms of sexual violence before age 15.

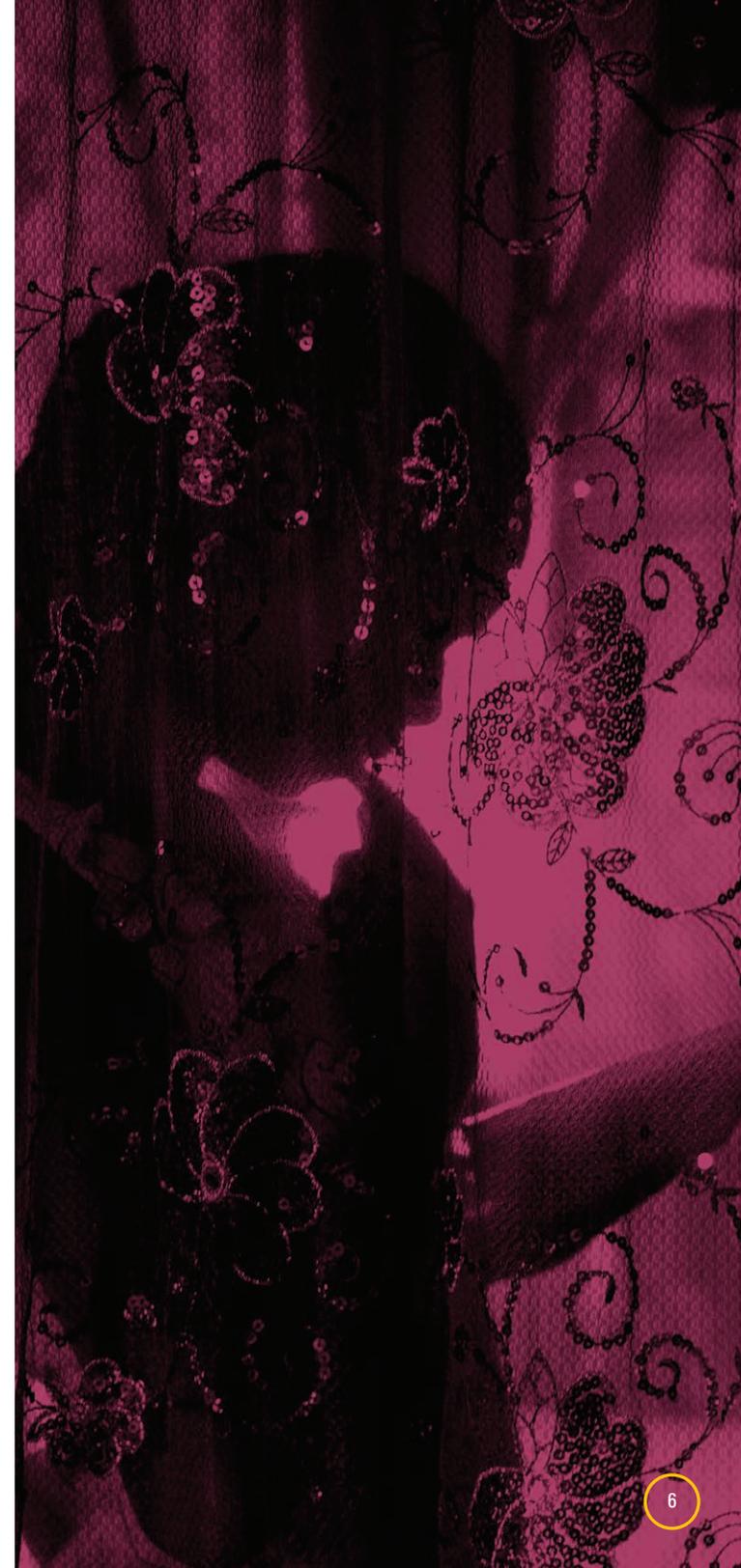
Worldwide, around **15 MILLION** adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex in their lifetime; **9 MILLION** of these girls were victimized within the past year.

In 20 countries, nearly **9 IN 10** adolescent girls who have been victims of forced sex say this happened for the first time during adolescence.

Based on data from 30 countries, only **1%** of adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex reached out for professional help.

Data from 28 countries indicate that **9 IN 10** adolescent girls who have experienced forced sex report being victimized by someone close/known to them.

**FRIENDS/CLASSMATES**  
and **PARTNERS** are among the most commonly reported perpetrators of sexual abuse against adolescent boys in 5 countries with data.



# VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN THE SDGS



## GOAL 5

**Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

**5.2** Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

**5.2.1** Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to **physical, sexual or psychological violence** by a current or former **intimate partner** in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age

**5.2.2** Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to **sexual violence** by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence



## GOAL 16

**Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**

**16.1** Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

**16.1.1** Number of victims of **intentional homicide** per 100,000 population, by sex and age

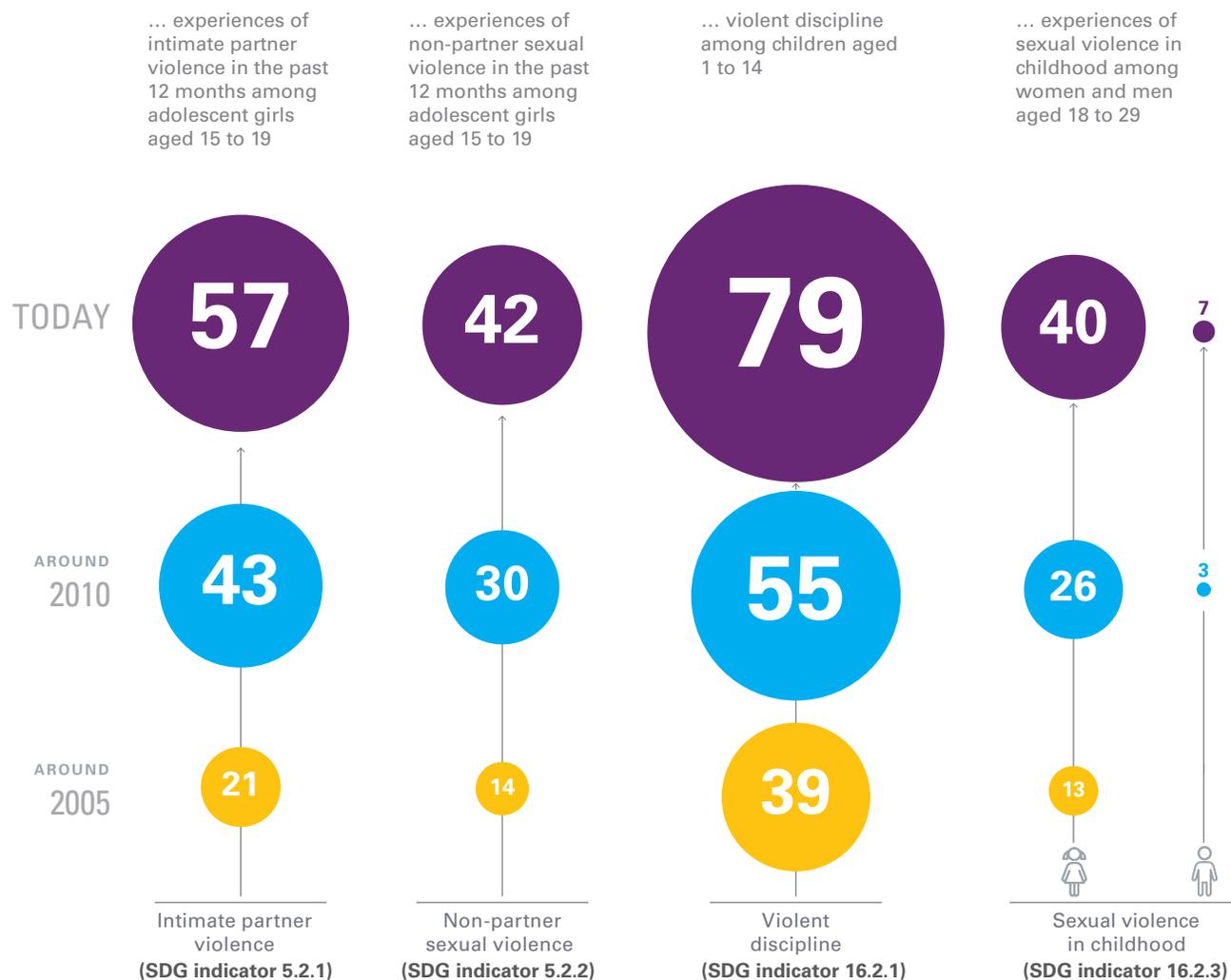
**16.1.2** **Conflict-related deaths** per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause

**16.2** End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

**16.2.1** Proportion of children aged 1 to 17 years who experienced any **physical punishment** and/or **psychological aggression by caregivers** in the past month

**16.2.3** Proportion of young women and men aged 18 to 29 years who experienced **sexual violence** by age 18

## NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH COMPARABLE DATA ON...



Despite recent progress, the **AVAILABILITY** of **COMPARABLE DATA** on violence against children remains **LIMITED**, hindering the ability of most countries to report on the **SDGs**



# PROTECTING A GENERATION AT RISK

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains a bold and ambitious call to end violence against children, acknowledging its eradication as a key component of sustainable development. A crucial step towards achieving this universal imperative is the mobilization of political will and the promotion of evidence-based strategies to address multiple contributing factors, including social and cultural norms that condone violence, lack of adequate policies and legislation, insufficient services for victims, and limited investments in effective systems to prevent and respond to violence. Central to these efforts is the creation of strategic partnerships, such as the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, to accelerate action, leverage resources, build commitment, facilitate exchange of knowledge and implement work at scale.

Sound data and analysis are needed to provide a solid underpinning for evidence-based policies to address these factors. This will require dedicated investments for collecting quality data to assess the magnitude and circumstances surrounding violence against children, evaluating the impact of interventions, and working towards filling information gaps. In addition, societies that have greater awareness of the issue can hold governments accountable to their commitments.

Specific actions and strategies that UNICEF has embraced to prevent and respond to violence against children include the following:

## SUPPORT NATIONAL COORDINATED PLANS AND ACTION TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Coherent and well-coordinated national plans and subsequent action are needed to reduce the persistently high rates of violence against both girls and boys from early childhood through adolescence. Sustained prevention of violence demands comprehensive, coordinated multisectoral initiatives engaging both government and civil society.<sup>5</sup> These need to be informed by the evidence on what works to prevent and respond to the multiple forms of violence that children experience in their daily lives.

## STRENGTHEN THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Governments need to strengthen the legal and policy frameworks that protect children from the various forms of violence, exploitation and abuse they face throughout childhood – and to back these efforts with solid monitoring and enforcement. Governments that have not already done so should be encouraged to enact and enforce legislation to protect children from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment in all settings, even in the home, and by all perpetrators, including teachers and other school personnel. Governments are also advised to criminalize all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls and boys.

## SHIFT NORMS THAT PERPETUATE VIOLENCE

National approaches should address systemic societal beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate violence against children, in any setting, including the home, school, community or online. This will require altering deeply ingrained social and cultural norms and behaviours, in particular, the idea that some forms of violence are not only normal, but even justifiable and thus tolerated. Gender inequalities also help sustain norms that perpetuate various types of violence. And gender norms can shape certain parenting practices and relations that may affect children's development.

Because parenting programmes have shown promise in shifting norms around violence, a national focus on comprehensive, high-quality early childhood development programmes that help create positive parent-child relationships and reduce harsh parenting practices is critical. Essential elements include education and counselling for parents and caregivers on positive parenting practices, such as the use of non-violent methods of discipline and effective and sensitive communication techniques for dealing with children and adolescents. Ideally, support would be integrated into the lives of families through home visits, community groups, or local social welfare and health systems.

In addition, countries can support school-based programmes that engage with local communities to prevent and respond to incidents of violence. Given the growing importance of virtual communication in the lives of children and adolescents, national policies and programmes to reduce

bullying by peers should address both online and offline communities. At the same time, education systems should strengthen their gender-responsive policies to foster safer learning environments for girls and boys alike. Participation in training on life skills and conflict resolution have been found to help children solve problems in non-violent ways, deal positively with their emotions, empathize with others and safely manage abusive situations.

## IMPLEMENT POLICIES TO CURB VIOLENCE AND IMPROVE SERVICES

Making communities safer and fostering protective environments for children and adolescents is critical. To achieve this, national policies should focus on violence prevention strategies including limiting access to firearms and other weapons. Improved social services are also needed to respond to the diverse needs of children and adolescents. These should include a range of options across different sectors, from the sensitive treatment of child abuse victims by law enforcement and justice systems to the physical and psychosocial support provided by health and social welfare systems.

Functioning social service systems with trained social workers are vital to provide referrals, counselling and therapeutic services for children who have experienced violence. Children and adolescents at risk should have access to safe spaces when they are not at home or in school, with opportunities to participate in recreation and sports activities. Finally, children and their parents should be empowered with the information and tools they need to report violence safely, both in person and online.

## IT IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

The data and analysis presented in *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents* aim to influence the way we think and talk about the all-too-familiar faces of childhood violence. It is hoped that the findings will encourage governments, organizations and individuals everywhere to acknowledge the extent of violence against children, and intensify their efforts to end it both as a matter of basic human rights and fundamental justice, and as a way to create more peaceful societies.

Ending violence against children is everyone's responsibility.

unicef  | for every child

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