



## 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

### TARGET 16.2

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

---

### Target overview

#### SDG monitoring

SDG Target 16.2 is tracked by the following indicators:

- 16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month
- 16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation
- 16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18

This note focuses on the first and third indicators, which specifically concern children and for which UNICEF is the custodian agency.

#### Broader monitoring context

All children have the right to protection from all forms of violence inflicted on them by anyone in their lives. The right of children to protection from all forms of violence is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols. The multifaceted nature of violence against children makes measurement particularly challenging. Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse. It can occur in many settings, such as the home, school, community and over the Internet, and can be perpetrated by both adults – family members, teachers, neighbours and strangers – and also by other children.

Two of the indicators selected to monitor target 16.2 represent specific forms of violence against children: the most widespread (violent discipline) and one of the gravest (sexual violence). The availability of comparable data on caregivers' use of violent discipline has significantly increased in the past two decades, mainly through the inclusion of a module on disciplinary methods in international household surveys such as MICS. Although household surveys

such as DHS have been collecting data on sexual violence in low- and middle-income countries since the late 1990s, comparable, nationally representative data for this indicator are sparse, particularly for young men.

#### UNICEF role in monitoring

In UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-2021, children's protection from violence and exploitation is the dedicated focus of Goal Area 3.

UNICEF is the custodian agency for SDG indicators 16.2.1 and 16.2.3 and is undertaking a number of activities to improve the availability, quality, timeliness and use of data on violence against children that includes: developing tools for the collection of reliable, comprehensive and comparable data on various forms of violence against children within existing data collection efforts; developing a set of methodological and ethical guidelines for the collection of data on violence against children; building/enhancing country capacity to collect, analyze and use data on violence against children; and increasing data availability by promoting knowledge and through the provision of technical assistance for the collection, analysis and use of data on violence against children. As custodian agency for global reporting on two of the indicators under target 16.2, UNICEF is in the process of establishing a global inter-agency expert group (IAEG-VAC).

Target 16.2 is closely linked to Target 16.1, significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. The following indicators are of particular interest to UNICEF, as they are to be broken down by age:

- 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

#### General information and resources

- UNICEF data: <https://data.unicef.org/>
- UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): <http://mics.unicef.org>
- SDG indicators: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

For further information, please contact the Child Protection and Development focal point at the Data & Analytics Section at UNICEF HQ via: [data@unicef.org](mailto:data@unicef.org)



## INDICATOR 16.2.1

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

---

### Description

#### Definition and key terms

This indicator is currently being measured by the proportion of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression at home in the past month. The rationale for using a proxy indicator is because comparable data are currently only available for a subset of children aged 1-14 years.

#### SDG indicator:

Numerator: Number of children aged 1-17 years who have experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month

Denominator: Total number of children aged 1-17 in the population

#### Proxy indicator:

Numerator: Number of children aged 1-14 years who have experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression at home in the past month

Denominator: Total number of children aged 1-14 in the population

#### Key terms:

The following definitions come from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) programme, the principal source of data for this indicator:

- Physical (or corporal) punishment is an action intended to cause physical pain or discomfort, but not injuries. Physical punishment is defined as shaking the child, hitting or slapping him/her on the hand/arm/leg, hitting him/her on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with a hard object, spanking or hitting him/her on the bottom with a bare hand, hitting or slapping him/her on the face, head or ears, and beating him/her over and over as hard as possible.
- Psychological aggression refers to the action of shouting, yelling or screaming at a child, as well as calling a child offensive names, such as 'dumb' or 'lazy'.
- The term "violent discipline" encompasses any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression.

### National data sources

Household survey programmes such as MICS and DHS have been collecting data on this indicator in low- and middle-income countries since around 2005. In some countries, such data are also collected through other national household surveys.

MICS, the source of the majority of comparable estimates, collects these data through the inclusion of a module on disciplinary methods. The module, developed for use in MICS, is adapted from the parent-child version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTSPC)<sup>1</sup>, a standardized and validated epidemiological measurement tool that is widely accepted and has been implemented in a large number of countries, including high-income countries. The module includes a standard set of questions covering non-violent forms of discipline, psychological aggression and physical means of punishing children. Data are collected for children ranging from age 1 to age 14. Some DHS have included the standard, or an adapted version of, the MICS module on child discipline.

### Data collection innovation

UNICEF is currently undertaking work that will improve the availability, quality, timeliness and use of data on violence against children, including methodological work towards the development of a new set of survey modules on violence against children that can be included in existing data collection efforts, in support of monitoring of SDG target 16.2. In relation to 16.2.1 specifically, further work is needed to develop a measure of disciplinary methods that captures information relevant also for older adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17.

---

### Using the indicator

#### Interpretation

This indicator captures current levels of violent discipline used at the household level with children. Specifically, it measures the use of a range of violent methods, both physical and psychological, to address behavior problems within the month preceding the interview, whether by the caregiver or any other adult in the household.

Standard measurement of this indicator does not capture who is administering the discipline or the frequency of use during the preceding month. Neither does it capture discipline methods that may be used by a non-adult sibling. Furthermore, it does not address the issue of physical punishment or psychological aggression by adults outside the home, such as teachers.

<sup>1</sup> Straus, M. A., et al., 'Identification of Child Maltreatment with the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales: Development and psychometric data for a national sample of American parents', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 22, 1998, pp. 249–270.



One might expect respondents to underreport the use of violent discipline with children in the household due to a social desirability bias; while this may occur, reported levels of the use of violent discipline are consistently high across countries, due to the fact that violent disciplinary methods are widely used and often condoned. It is also important to note that the respondent is reporting about the disciplinary methods used by all adult members of the household and not necessarily about the methods he/she used with the subject child.

For all countries, the recommended target for violent discipline is elimination (0%). National estimates that might be considered low can potentially mask persistent pockets of violent discipline within certain sub-populations.

Caution should be used when interpreting changes in violent discipline practices over time due to changes in the data collection methods. (See Common Pitfalls section below.)

## Disaggregation

As a minimum, data should routinely be disaggregated by age and sex, which are key stratifiers for this indicator. Additionally, survey data often allow for disaggregation by other standard sociodemographic factors such as household wealth, place of residence, and geographic location. In addition to these standard levels of disaggregation, this indicator can be usefully disaggregated in some surveys by mother's level of education, ethnicity, religion, child functional difficulty and mother's functional difficulties.

## Common pitfalls

Changes in data collection approaches over time mean that trend data must be interpreted with caution. There are two specific changes to consider:

- **Respondent to the Child Discipline module:** When it was first implemented in MICS3, the child discipline module was administered only to mothers/primary caregivers, who were asked whether any of the disciplinary methods covered in the module had been used by any member of the household during the month preceding the interview. In MICS4 and MICS5, the methodology was changed: Any adult household member, not just the mother or primary caregiver, could respond to the questions on child discipline. Beginning with MICS6, the module forms part of the separate questionnaires for children under age 5 and children aged 5-17 which is administered to mothers/primary caregivers. This means that data on child discipline collected in MICS4 and MICS5 are not directly comparable with data collected in MICS3 and subsequent rounds beginning with MICS6 since there have been changes to the respondent across rounds.
- **Age range of children:** In the third and fourth rounds of MICS, the standard indicator referred to the percentage of children aged 2-14 years who experienced any form of violent discipline (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression) within the past month. Beginning with the fifth round of MICS (MICS5),

the age group covered was expanded to capture children's experiences with disciplinary practices between the ages of 1 and 14 years. Therefore, current data availability do not capture the full age range specified in the SDG indicator since data are not collected for adolescents aged 15-17 years.

---

## Monitoring and reporting

### National

National Statistical Offices (for the most part)

### Global

**Agencies:** UNICEF

**Process:** UNICEF maintains the global database on violent discipline that is used for SDG and other official reporting. UNICEF HQ updates the database annually through its collaboration with Country Offices, through the CRING process. Before the inclusion of any data point in the database, it is reviewed by sector specialists at UNICEF headquarters to check for consistency and overall data quality. This review is based on a set of objective criteria to ensure that only the most recent and reliable information is included in the databases. UNICEF HQ also updates the database on a rolling basis throughout the year by searching for additional sources of data that are vetted by the COs before they are included in the global database.

**Timing:** New country level data, together with global and regional averages, are released annually both as part of State of the World's Children and on UNICEF's dedicated website for statistics (data.unicef.org). The Secretary-General's report on the SDGs, which includes latest available country, regional and global estimates on 16.2.1, is typically released every year in May/June.

**Discrepancies with national estimates:** The estimates compiled and presented at global level come directly from nationally produced data and are not adjusted or recalculated.

## Key resources

Indicator information and cross-country comparable estimates:

- UNICEF Data: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>

Tools and measurement guidance:

- MICS surveys have a standardized module on child discipline, split into two components for asking about children of different ages:
  - » Children under age 5: <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MICS6-Child-discipline-module-under-5.pdf>
  - » Children 5-17: <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MICS6-Child-discipline-module-5-17.pdf>



### INDICATOR 16.2.3

## Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18

### Description

#### Definition and key terms

Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18. This indicator is always reported on separately for women and men.

Numerator: Number of young women and men aged 18-29 years who report having experienced any sexual violence by age 18

Denominator: Total number of young women and men aged 18-29 years in the population

#### Key terms:

- 'Sexual violence' is often used as an umbrella term to cover all types of sexual victimization.<sup>2</sup> According to General Comment Number 13 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, sexual violence against children 'comprises any sexual activities imposed by an adult on a child against which the child is entitled to protection by criminal law.'<sup>3</sup>
- 'Sexual violence' is operationally defined in the indicator as sexual intercourse or any other sexual acts that were forced, physically or in any other way.

This indicator captures all experiences of sexual violence that occurred during childhood (i.e. prior to the age of 18 years) irregardless of the legal age of consent stipulated in relevant national legislation.

### National data sources

Household surveys such as DHS have been collecting data on this indicator in low- and middle-income countries since the late 1990s. The DHS includes a standard module that captures information on a few specific forms of sexual violence. Respondents are asked whether, at any time in their lives (as children or adults), anyone ever forced them – physically or in any other way – to have sexual intercourse or to perform any other sexual acts against their will. Those responding 'yes' to this question are then asked how old they were the first time this happened. It is important to flag that the DHS module was not specifically designed to capture experiences of sexual violence in childhood and further methodological work is needed to develop standard questions that can use used to capture child sexual abuse.

However, many data collection efforts have relied on different study methodologies and designs, definitions of sexual violence, samples and questions to elicit information. This has made the aggregation or comparison of data on sexual violence against children extremely difficult.

### Data collection innovation

UNICEF is currently undertaking work that will improve the availability, quality, timeliness and use of data on violence against children, including methodological work towards the development of a new set of survey modules on violence against children that can be included in existing data collection efforts, in support of monitoring of SDG target 16.2.

<sup>2</sup> Interagency Working Group on Sexual Exploitation of Children, *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, ECPAT International and ECPAT Luxembourg, Rachathewi, Bangkok, June 2016, p. 16, open PDF from <[www.unicef.org/protection/files/Terminology\\_guidelines\\_396922-E.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/protection/files/Terminology_guidelines_396922-E.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> This definition has been adapted from: United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 13 (2011): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence*, United Nations document CRC/C/GC/13, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, 18 April 2011.



---

## Using the indicator

### Interpretation

Experiences of sexual violence in childhood hinder all aspects of development: physical, psychological/emotional and social. Apart from the physical injuries that can result, researchers have consistently found that sexual abuse of children is associated with a wide array of mental health consequences and adverse behavioural outcomes in adulthood.<sup>4</sup> The psychological impact can be severe due to the intense shame, secrecy and stigma that tend to accompany it.<sup>5</sup>

There are several definitional components to this indicator that should be considered when using these data. First, this indicator is not constructed to measure “current” levels of sexual violence against children but rather is based on retrospective recall spanning a number of years preceding the survey. One implication of such a recall period is that the indicator is not sensitive to rapid changes over time. [Note, however, the advantages of asking adults about their experiences, including avoiding ethical issues pertaining to interviewing children and having the potential to capture a more accurate picture of sexual violence in childhood because the period of exposure has been completed (i.e., everyone in the reported age group has completed childhood).]

Another important definitional component of the indicator is the term “sexual violence”. As noted above, existing data are often derived from methods based on differing definitions so it is essential to have a clear understanding of the data collection instrument when interpreting these data.

For all countries, the recommended target for sexual violence against children is elimination (0%). National estimates that might be considered low can potentially mask persistent pockets of sexual violence against children within certain sub-populations.

### Disaggregation

Survey data often allow for disaggregation by some standard sociodemographic factors including age, household wealth, place of residence and geographic location. In addition to these standard levels of disaggregation, this indicator can be usefully disaggregated in some surveys by marital status, employment status, number of living children and education level.

4 Brown, J., et al., ‘Child Abuse and Neglect: Specificity of effects on adolescent and young adult depression and suicidality’, *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 38, no. 12, 1999, pp. 190–196; Dinwiddie, S., et al., ‘Early Sexual Abuse and Lifetime Psychopathology: A co-twin-control study’, *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2000, pp. 41–52; Widom, Cathy Spatz, ‘Childhood Victimization: Early adversity, later psychopathology’, National Institute of Justice, Washington, D.C., 2000.

5 Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence against Children*, United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, United Nations, Geneva, 2006.

### Common pitfalls

The availability of comparable data remains a serious challenge in this area as many data collection efforts have relied on different study methodologies and designs, definitions of sexual violence, samples and questions to elicit information. Data on the experiences of boys are particularly sparse. A further challenge in this field is underreporting, especially when it comes to reporting on experiences of sexual violence among boys and men.

---

## Monitoring and reporting

### National

National Statistical Offices (for the most part) or line ministries/ other government agencies that have conducted national surveys on violence against women and men.

### Global

**Agencies:** UNICEF

**Process:** UNICEF maintains a global database on violence against young women and men that is used for SDG and other official reporting. UNICEF HQ updates the database annually through its collaboration with Country Offices, through the CRING process. Before the inclusion of any data point in the database, it is reviewed by sector specialists at UNICEF headquarters to check for consistency and overall data quality. This review is based on a set of objective criteria to ensure that only the most recent and reliable information is included in the databases. UNICEF HQ also updates the database on a rolling basis throughout the year by searching for additional sources of data that are vetted by the COs before they are included in the global database.

**Timing:** The Secretary-General’s report on the SDGs, which includes latest available country, regional and global estimates on 16.2.3 by age 18, is typically released every year in May/June.

**Discrepancies with national estimates:** The estimates compiled and presented at global level come directly from nationally produced data. However, data are recalculated in order to obtain the standard age group for reporting (i.e., ages 18-29 years).

### Key resources

Indicator information and cross-country comparable estimates:

- UNICEF Data: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>

Tools and measurement guidance:

- DHS domestic violence module: [https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/DHSQMP/domestic\\_violence\\_module.pdf](https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/DHSQMP/domestic_violence_module.pdf)