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# **VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS, BOYS AND WOMEN**

## **IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A STATISTICAL PROFILE**

IN COLLABORATION WITH



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The analysis in this publication is focused on the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a Regional Economic Community comprising 16 Member States: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The mission of SADC is to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth and socioeconomic development through efficient, productive systems, deeper cooperation and integration, good governance and durable peace and security, so that the region emerges as a competitive and effective player in international relations and the world economy.

The UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa collaborates with SADC in addressing violence, which has been identified as a collective priority within a collaboration framework for children and women in the region.

# Foreword

Violence against girls, boys and women is a grave violation of their fundamental rights and an issue of concern worldwide. It is an affront to their dignity, safety and well-being with long-lasting, often intergenerational, consequences. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are committed to addressing this urgent issue and working towards a world in which every child and woman can live free from violence.

This publication represents a joint effort by SADC and UNICEF to compile and present the latest data from national surveys to document the prevalence of violence against children and women in the SADC region. The findings shed light on the nature and magnitude of the problem as well as the factors that contribute to its continuation.

The results reveal that violence against children and women in the region is pervasive and persistent, affecting millions of lives. This violence takes many forms, including physical, sexual and emotional violence along with neglect and exploitation. The report also shows that such violence is often hidden, underreported and perpetuated by harmful social norms, gender inequality, poverty, conflict and other structural factors. It makes apparent that beyond the so-called three 'C's' – COVID, climate change and conflict – violence against children and women represents a clear threat to national economies, mental health and educational outcomes.

As we approach 2030, the deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the targets to end all forms of violence against women and children (SDGs 5.2, 16.1 and 16.2) loom large. In advancing towards these ambitious goals, we draw inspiration from the African Union Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2040 on the importance of ending violence as a critical step towards creating a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Africa. These agendas are consistent and aligned with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2016), the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (2020-2030), and UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and Child Protection Strategy (2021-2030). Inclusive partnerships can ensure our success, along with a focus on universal prevention of violence against girls, boys and women, leaving no one behind. Towards this end, we are scaling up adequate and appropriate response mechanisms and child protection systems for the prevention of and response to violence.

Now, more than ever, we are called upon to strengthen partnerships for coordinated regional and national action; bolster legislation, policies, budgets and accountability to protect women and children; engage with communities, women's organizations, caregivers, children and adolescents on violence prevention; build our capacity for scaled-up service delivery; and generate data and research to inform programming and track progress towards the SDGs.

We thank SADC Member States, all stakeholders and partners of UNICEF, and women and children themselves for their collective contributions towards ending violence against girls, boys and women in our communities. Let us seize the moment to use the findings on the following pages to inform our efforts, and therein strengthen our regional economic integration mandate.

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# VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS, BOYS AND WOMEN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Violence is a preventable, life-threatening and costly human rights violation for millions of girls, boys and women across all contexts and settings in Eastern and Southern Africa and within the countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). When it comes to protecting children and women and ensuring they realize their full potential, one victim of violence is one too many. SADC countries have a strong evidence base on the subject of violence. Still, the prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence in some of these countries is among the highest in the world.

The root causes of violence against children and violence against women are grounded in power imbalances. Abuse of power occurs along the dimensions of both age and gender. The status of children as dependent on adults, along with their evolving capacities, render them highly vulnerable to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Violence against women is underpinned by social norms that reinforce gender-based inequalities. Girls and women face specific types of violence that are both a consequence of this inequality and that act as a mechanism through which their subordinate status in society is perpetuated. Violence against boys and girls and violence against women often occur together and have shared multiple risk factors.

Evidence shows that strongly held gender and social norms can contribute to violence against children and women. They include attitudes about violence against women in the home, norms that promote male superiority, and the perceived necessity of violent discipline in raising a well-behaved child and successful adult. Similarly, as in all parts of the world, social norms that seek to preserve community and family cohesion can unfortunately also act to prevent survivors from reporting abuse and accessing the social, legal and/or medical services they may need.

Additional drivers of violence against children and women include structural and systemic factors such as poverty, unemployment, weak legal frameworks, armed conflict and humanitarian crises. In the context of weak legal frameworks, laws, policies, and justice and social welfare systems, children and women often fall through the cracks and are not able to access or receive the care



and support required to prevent and respond to violence. These factors, coupled with an absence of implemented policies, adequate services and social action in the region, have contributed to a situation in which violence against women and children is often normalized, and thus risks intergenerational transmission.<sup>1</sup>

In the SADC region, around 3 in 10 young women were married before the age of 18 – one of the highest prevalence rates for child marriage in the world.<sup>2</sup> Among these young brides, nearly half (45 per cent) view wife-beating as justified under certain conditions, and more than 1 in 3 (39 per cent) have experienced intimate partner violence in the past year.<sup>3</sup> Girls who marry in childhood also face heightened risks of early pregnancy, social isolation and an end to schooling.

To end violence within the region, SADC and the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa (ESARO) have established, as a collective priority, the prevention of and response to violence against girls, boys and women. SADC has set out its commitments to addressing such violence in its Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender-Based Violence (2018-2030).<sup>4</sup> In 2022, UNICEF ESARO launched the Regional Collaboration for Children to articulate an approach for advancing a set of critical results for children and adolescents, which include ending violence against boys, girls and women as one of five focus areas.

This publication offers an overview of the current levels of violence against girls, boys and women in SADC countries. It focuses on selected forms of violence for which there are comparable data: sexual violence, intimate partner violence, violent discipline (physical punishment and psychological aggression), bullying and violent deaths. It also presents data on help-seeking behaviour and features a set of analyses exploring the intersection between violence against children and violence against women. The publication concludes with specific strategies and actions that SADC, UNICEF and partners are prioritizing in preventing and responding to violence against children and women in the region.





**BOX 1****Consequences of violence against children: An overview**

Any form of violence can affect children in a myriad of ways. Researchers have termed this effect the ‘cascade of consequences’.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, children can experience short- and/or long-term consequences related to their physical, mental or emotional health and cognitive development and to later outcomes, such as academic performance and social and behavioural issues. Evidence on the intergenerational effects of violence against children are outlined in Box 4. Children often experience multiple and overlapping consequences and varying impacts, and some children, under certain circumstances, fare better than others.

**Physical health**

In the most extreme cases, violence can intentionally or unintentionally lead to the death of a child. In fact, homicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents worldwide.<sup>6</sup> More typically, physical violence against children results in immediate bodily injuries and harm or long-term health problems. For example, research conducted in Eswatini found that girl victims of sexual violence were more likely to report having sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy complications, miscarriages and pre-term births as adults.<sup>7</sup> Other literature has documented significant associations between certain forms of child maltreatment and sexually transmitted infections.<sup>8</sup>

What’s more, violence against children can lead to long-term neurobiological changes, especially in children’s bodily response to stress.<sup>9</sup> One study, for instance, found that child sexual abuse was tied to long-term alterations in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and norepinephrine systems, the body’s mechanisms for responding to perceived threats or danger.<sup>10</sup> Changes in these systems were linked to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) triggered by abusive experiences. Another study showed that physical, emotional and sexual violence, as well as neglect, all led to heightened cortisol production, heart rate and blood pressure in adolescents.<sup>11</sup> These changes, in turn, affected adolescents’ ability to regulate anger and develop interpersonal competence. Other studies have documented how especially severe and/or chronic violence experienced in childhood can quite literally alter the neural circuitry of the brain.<sup>12</sup>

**Mental or emotional health**

Given that violence against children can affect the body’s stress response and brain development, it is not surprising that numerous studies have found a strong correlation between children’s experience of violence and subsequent symptoms of depression or anxiety.<sup>13</sup> More severe forms of violence, such as severe sexual abuse or severe neglect, are also associated with PTSD.<sup>14</sup> Both longitudinal and retrospective research finds that when children experience physical, sexual or psychological violence or neglect, they are more likely to have low self-esteem, display nervousness, be unhappy, and sometimes even report suicidal ideation.<sup>15</sup> Associations between experiences of childhood abuse and mental health outcomes have also been

found in many of the Violence against Children Surveys (VACS) conducted in SADC countries. In the 2019 VACS in Namibia, for instance, women aged 18 to 24 years who experienced either sexual, physical or emotional violence in childhood were significantly more likely than those who did not to report mental distress in the past month, to ever intentionally hurt themselves or to have ever thought of suicide. Men of the same age who experienced childhood sexual violence were significantly more likely to report mental distress in the past 30 days compared with men without such experiences in childhood.<sup>16</sup>

Violence outside the home, such as bullying by classmates, have also been found to have a devastating effect on children’s mental health, with consequences documented well into adulthood.<sup>17</sup>

**Cognitive development and academic performance**

Children who show symptoms of PTSD due to maltreatment have been found to perform worse than their non-maltreated peers on verbal, memory, attention, language, mathematics and IQ tests.<sup>18</sup>

Results from the VACS have documented how experiences of violence can negatively impact school attendance in some countries. For example, the 2016 VACS in Botswana showed that around 1 in 10 girls aged 13 to 17 years and about the same proportion of boys of the same age who reported experiences of physical violence in the past year said they missed school as a result of the violence.<sup>19</sup> Zambia’s 2014 VACS indicated that 17 per cent of girls aged 13 to 17 years and 7 per cent of boys the same age who experienced physical violence reported missing school as a result.<sup>20</sup>

Existing research has also documented the impact of childhood maltreatment on future academic performance as well as earning potential and employment. For instance, one study found that adults with a history of physical or sexual abuse as children had lower levels of education, employment and earnings than their non-abused peers.<sup>21</sup> It also found that abusive experiences in childhood had a stronger effect on economic outcomes for women than men.

**Social and behavioural issues**

In adolescence, experiences of physical and sexual violence during childhood have been associated with risky behaviours, including infrequent condom use, multiple sexual partners, transactional sex as well as excessive drinking, drug use or delinquency.<sup>22</sup> In the 2019 VACS conducted in Mozambique, for example, 72 per cent of males aged 19 to 24 years who reported experiences of sexual violence in childhood said they used condoms infrequently in the past year compared with 46 per cent of males who did not experience childhood sexual violence.<sup>23</sup> The 2018 VACS in Lesotho indicated that females aged 19 to 24 years who experienced childhood sexual violence were significantly more likely to report having multiple sexual partners in the past year compared with young women who reported never experiencing such violence.<sup>24</sup>

# VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS, BOYS AND WOMEN IN GLOBAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

For the first time, a universal call for action against violence has become an official part of the global development agenda: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have established specific and aspirational targets to end violence against girls, boys and women by 2030. As custodian or co-custodian for four of the indicators related to violence, UNICEF is responsible for global monitoring and reporting on progress and facilitating country-level data collection to strengthen data availability.



**SDG 5**

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

**Target 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

**Indicator 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 forms of violence and age

**Indicator 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



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

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

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

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

**Indicator 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

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

**The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**, adopted in 1990, is a regional treaty that sets out rights and defines principles for the status of children. It has been ratified by all 16 Member States of SADC. Article 16(1) affords children protection from “all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of a parent, legal guardian or school authority or any other person who has the care of the child.”

**The 2040 Africa We Want** elaborates on the vision outlined by Agenda 2063 with respect to children. This agenda contains 10 aspirations and a corresponding set of goals to nurture and nourish the children of Africa by 2040. Specifically, Aspiration 7 states that every child should be protected against violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse. Taken together, these two regional agendas prioritize ending violence in Africa and emphasize the need to address the root causes of conflicts, promote good governance, and invest in human capital development to build social and economic resilience.

**Agenda 2063** is a strategic framework for the social and economic transformation of Africa. It lays out seven aspirations for shared prosperity and well-being, unity and integration. It envisions a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons where the full potential of women and youth are realized, and where there is freedom from fear, disease and want. One of the aspirations of Agenda 2063 is to create a peaceful and secure Africa, free from all forms of conflict and violence.

Within SADC specifically, there is the **Protocol on Gender and Development** that entered into force in 2013 and was subsequently revised in 2016. It aims to empower women and eliminate discrimination in order to advance gender equality in the SADC region. The **Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender-Based Violence (2018-2030)** was developed as an overarching strategy to ensure the effective implementation of the relevant articles in the Protocol specific to addressing gender-based violence.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Violence remains pervasive in the lives of girls, boys and women in the SADC region. Certain forms of violence that are considered 'normal', such as violent discipline at home, are particularly widespread**

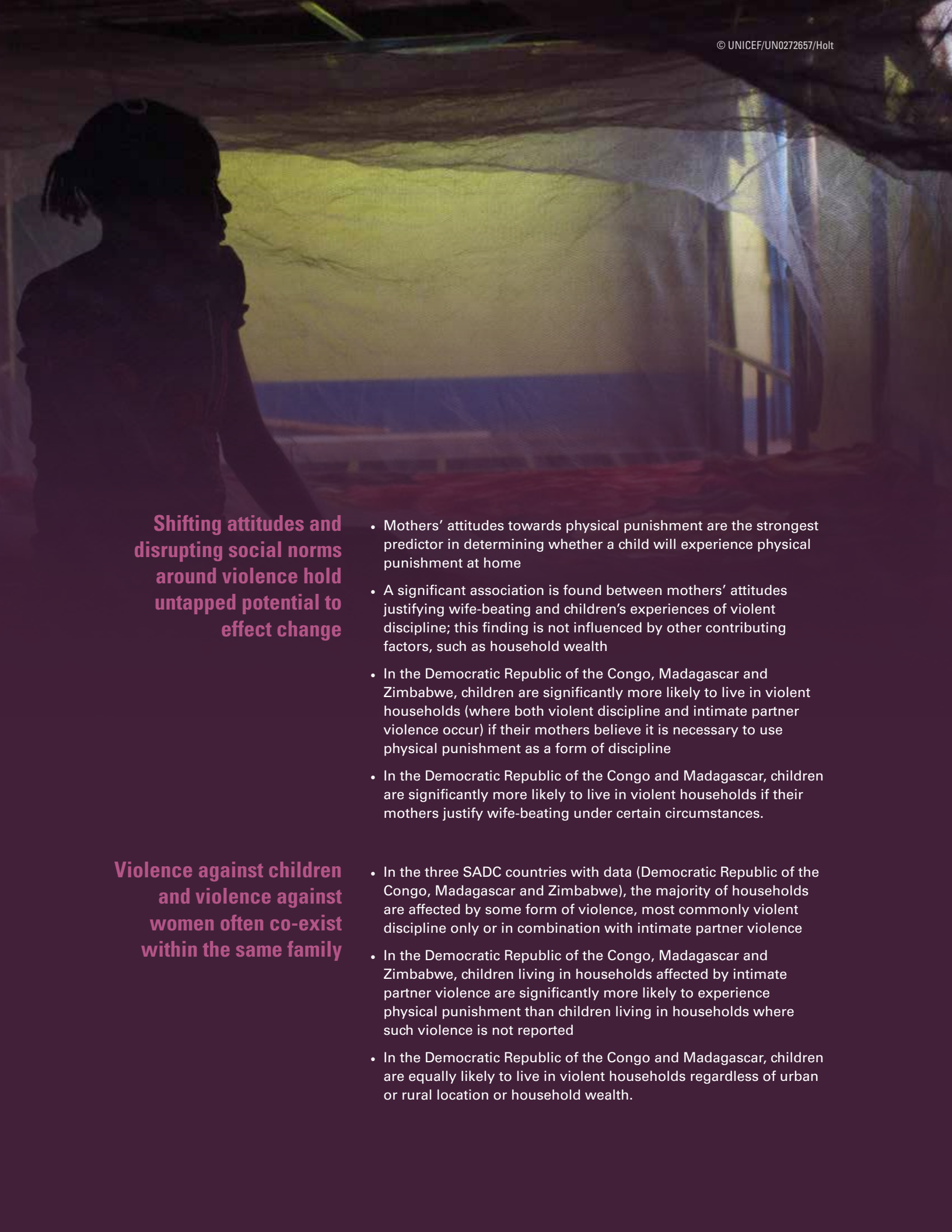
- Around 120 million children aged 1 to 14 years (over 8 in 10) in the SADC region experience violent discipline at home; levels exceed 60 per cent in all SADC countries with data
- Nearly 30 million ever-partnered girls and women aged 15 to 49 (around 1 in 3) have experienced some form of violence by a partner
- Around 10 million adolescent students (about 4 in 10) have experienced bullying
- Across most SADC countries, at least 1 in 5 children live with a mother who has experienced intimate partner violence.

**Sexual violence in childhood and among girls and women in the region remains a reality, most often occurring in the context of close and familiar relationships**

- Around 6 per cent of young women aged 18 to 29 in the SADC region (2.5 million) report experiences of forced sexual intercourse and other forced sexual acts in childhood
- Unwanted sexual touching and attempted sex are the most commonly reported forms of sexual abuse experienced during childhood across SADC countries with data
- The prevalence of lifetime experiences of forced sex among girls and women varies widely among SADC countries – from 6 per cent to 27 per cent
- The most likely perpetrators of forced sex against girls and women within SADC countries are those closest to them – most commonly intimate partners and friends.

**Existing legal and policy frameworks on corporal punishment are insufficient, and most children and women experiencing violence never seek help or support services**

- Only four SADC countries have adopted legislation that fully prohibits the use of corporal punishment against children at home and in school: 156 million children live in countries that have not completely outlawed corporal punishment at home, and 47 million school-aged children do not have full legal protection from this form of violence at school
- In nearly all SADC countries with data, more than half of girls and women who experienced violence never sought any form of help
- When girls and women do seek help for experiences of violence, most look to their informal networks; very few seek assistance from professional sources.



**Shifting attitudes and disrupting social norms around violence hold untapped potential to effect change**

- Mothers' attitudes towards physical punishment are the strongest predictor in determining whether a child will experience physical punishment at home
- A significant association is found between mothers' attitudes justifying wife-beating and children's experiences of violent discipline; this finding is not influenced by other contributing factors, such as household wealth
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, children are significantly more likely to live in violent households (where both violent discipline and intimate partner violence occur) if their mothers believe it is necessary to use physical punishment as a form of discipline
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar, children are significantly more likely to live in violent households if their mothers justify wife-beating under certain circumstances.

**Violence against children and violence against women often co-exist within the same family**

- In the three SADC countries with data (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Zimbabwe), the majority of households are affected by some form of violence, most commonly violent discipline only or in combination with intimate partner violence
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Zimbabwe, children living in households affected by intimate partner violence are significantly more likely to experience physical punishment than children living in households where such violence is not reported
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar, children are equally likely to live in violent households regardless of urban or rural location or household wealth.

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE

## Key definitions used in this section

- **DHS definition of forced sex:** Sexual intercourse or any other sexual acts that were forced, physically or in any other way.
- **VACS definition of sexual abuse:** Includes unwanted sexual touching, unwanted attempted sex, pressured sex and physically forced sex.
- **VACS definition of sexual intercourse:** Includes vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- **VACS definition of unwanted sexual touching:** Unwanted touching on or around the victim's sexual body parts in a sexual way, including kissing, grabbing, pinching or fondling.
- **VACS definition of unwanted attempted sex:** Situations in which a victim was either physically forced or pressured (through harassment, threats or tricks) to have sexual intercourse when he or she did not want to, but the attempt was unsuccessful and sexual intercourse did not occur.
- **VACS definition of pressured sex:** Situations in which a victim was pressured (through harassment, threats or tricks) to have sexual intercourse when he or she did not want to and sexual intercourse occurred.
- **VACS definition of physically forced sex:** Situations in which a victim was physically forced to have sexual intercourse and sexual intercourse occurred.

## Data sources

Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have been collecting data on sexual violence since the late 1990s through a standard module that captures information on a few specific forms. 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. It is important to note that the DHS module was not specifically designed to capture experiences of sexual violence in childhood and that the module has only been administered to men in a very limited number of DHS surveys. Some recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) have included the standard DHS module. Comparable data on sexual violence collected through DHS (or the previous AIDS Indicator Surveys) and MICS are available for 11 countries in the SADC region.

The Violence against Children Surveys (VACS), led by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under the Together for Girls initiative, are nationally representative household surveys of multiple forms of violence in childhood and young adulthood. The surveys also collect data on risk and protective factors as well as on the consequences of violence. Under this initiative, nine surveys have been completed in SADC countries to date.<sup>25</sup>

# Sexual violence in childhood

**FIGURE 1.1**

**Around 6 per cent of women aged 18 to 29 years report experiences of forced sexual intercourse and other forced sexual acts in childhood; levels are similar across countries with the exception of the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

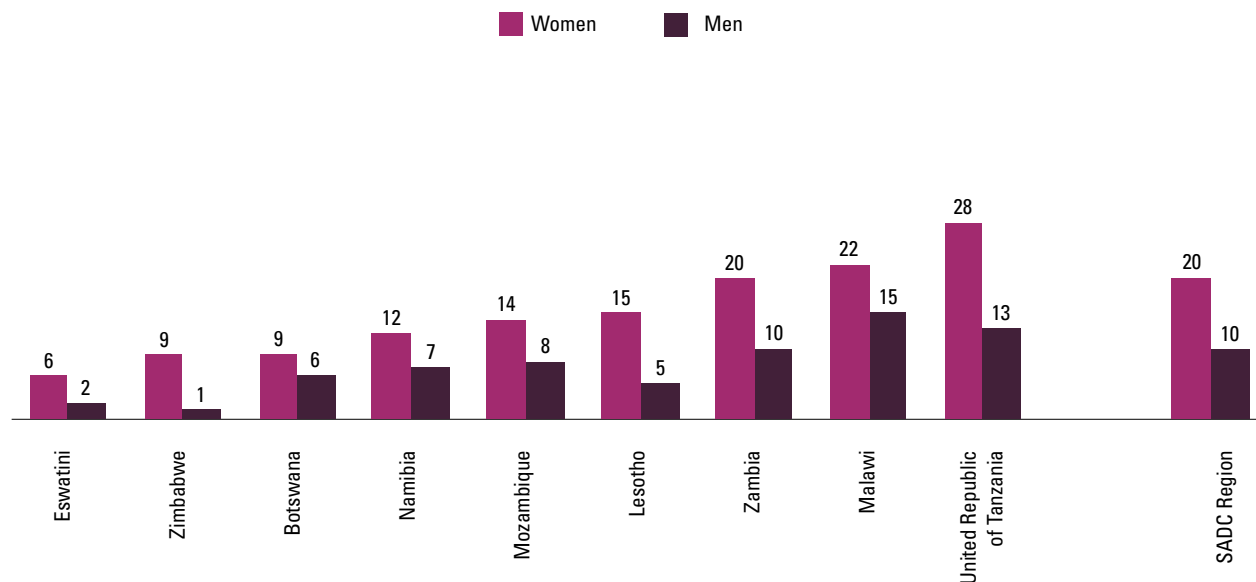


Percentage of women aged 18 to 29 years who experienced forced sex (DHS definition) before the age of 18

Notes: Data presented in this chart are those used for official global monitoring and reporting on SDG indicator 16.2.3. The SADC estimate is based on a subset of 11 countries with available data between 2012 and 2021, covering 98 per cent of women aged 18 to 29 years in SADC countries. Data for South Africa refer to ever-married women. Data on sexual violence in childhood among men are only available for Mozambique and are therefore not presented here. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and the AIDS Indicator Survey.

**FIGURE 1.2**

**In all countries with data, women are significantly more likely to report childhood experiences of sexual abuse than men, with the exception of Namibia and Mozambique**



Percentage of women and men aged 18 to 24 years who experienced sexual abuse (VACS definition) before the age of 18, by sex

Notes: 'n/a' indicates that data are not available. Levels reflect the more inclusive definition of sexual abuse used in the VACS. The SADC estimates are based on a subset of nine countries covering 44 per cent of women aged 18 to 24 years and 43 per cent of men aged 18 to 24 years in SADC countries. Data for the United Republic of Tanzania refer to girls and women and boys and men aged 13 to 24 years and are representative of the mainland only. Source: VACS conducted between 2009 and 2022.

## BOX 2

**How definitions and survey implementation can affect prevalence levels of sexual violence**

Reported prevalence levels of sexual violence are affected by the way in which questions are formulated and definitions applied. A broad concept of sexual violence, for example, which includes a wide range of acts – from forced sexual intercourse to unwanted sexual comments – will yield higher prevalence estimates. On the other hand, surveys such as the DHS, which restrict questions to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts, will naturally produce lower prevalence estimates since these are not likely to be reported as often. Indeed, research confirms that higher rates of sexual violence are obtained in studies that apply a more comprehensive definition and detailed questionnaires.<sup>26</sup> Differences in survey design, implementation and administration, from the training of interviewers to ethical protocols, are also likely to have an impact on reported prevalence levels, even when surveys attempt to measure the same, or a similar, underlying concept. While these challenges are not unique to measuring sexual violence, they tend to be particularly pronounced for this topic.

Prevalence levels of sexual violence captured by VACS tend to

be much higher than those produced through DHS given that the VACS definition covers a wider range of acts, including unwanted sexual touching and pressured sex, compared to the more limited definition employed in the DHS. However, a mixed picture emerges when comparing levels of physically forced sex reported in VACS to levels of forced sex reported in DHS across the six countries<sup>27</sup> in the region that have conducted both surveys. In all but one country (United Republic of Tanzania), the reported level of physically forced sex in childhood among women aged 18 to 24 years in the VACS is higher than what is found in the DHS. For instance, in the case of Zambia, the reported prevalence of physically forced sex in the 2014 VACS is around four times higher than the level reported in the 2018 DHS. On the flip side, the level of physically forced sex as reported in the 2009 VACS for the United Republic of Tanzania was around 3 percentage points lower than the results on forced sex generated by the 2015-2016 DHS. This illustrates the need to carefully interpret prevalence estimates of sexual violence reported by different surveys.





**FIGURE 1.3**

**Available data from VACS confirm that unwanted sexual touching and attempted sex are the most commonly reported forms of sexual abuse during childhood**



Percentage of women and men aged 18 to 24 years who experienced sexual abuse (VACS definition) before the age of 18, by type

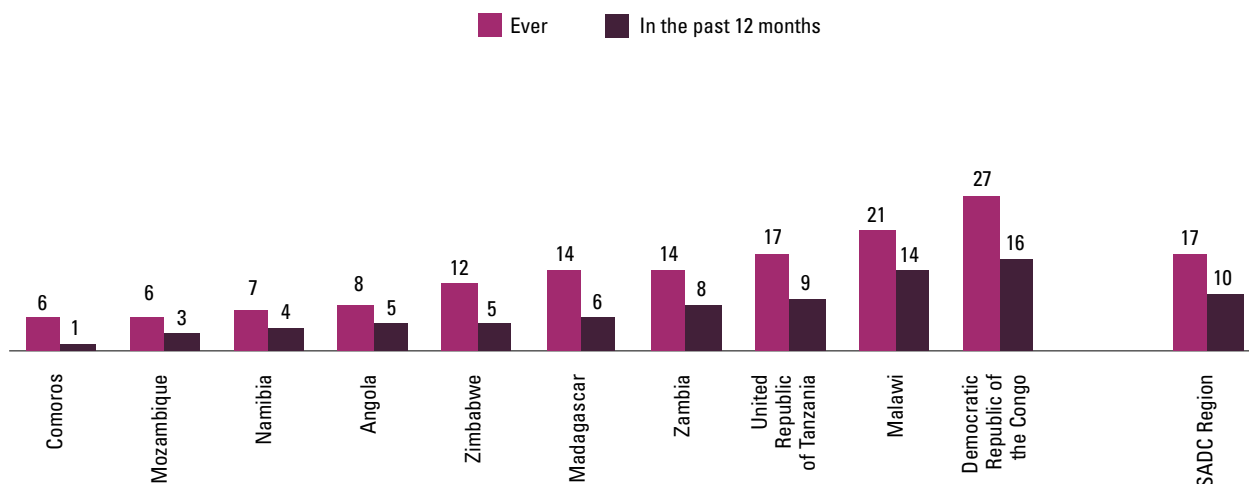
Notes: 'n/a' indicates that data are not available or that there were too few cases to reliably report an estimate. The SADC estimates for women are based on a subset of eight countries covering 38 per cent of women aged 18 to 24 years in SADC countries. The SADC estimates for men are based on a subset of seven countries covering 37 per cent of men aged 18 to 24 years in SADC countries. Zambia was not included in the aggregates since data are not available on pressured sex. Data for the United Republic of Tanzania refer to girls and women and men aged 13 to 24 years and are representative of the mainland only. Data for Eswatini for men were not included because an estimate is only available for unwanted sexual touching.

Source: VACS conducted between 2009 and 2022.

# Sexual violence against adolescent girls and women

**FIGURE 1.4**

The lifetime prevalence of forced sex among girls and women varies widely among countries – from 6 to 27 per cent – with a SADC regional average of 17 per cent

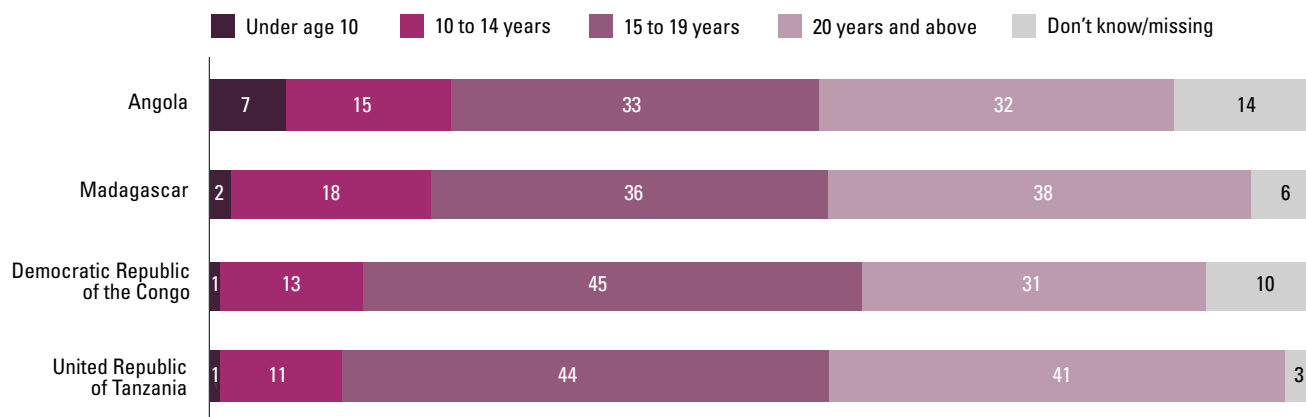


Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced forced sex (DHS definition) ever in their lifetime and in the past 12 months

Notes: SADC estimates are based on a subset of 10 countries with available data between 2012 and 2021, covering 81 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries. Data for Mozambique refer to women aged 18 to 49 years.  
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

**FIGURE 1.5**

In countries with available data, girls and women are most likely to experience forced sex for the first time before age 20



Percentage distribution of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced forced sex (DHS definition), by age at first incident

Notes: Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. These data should be interpreted with caution since significant proportions of girls and women could not recall the exact age at which they first experienced sexual violence or due to missing data. Only those countries where the proportion of the 'don't know/missing' response was less than 20 per cent are included in the chart.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on DHS 2013-2021.

TABLE 1.1

### The most likely perpetrators of forced sex against girls and women are those closest to them – usually intimate partners or friends

	Current husband/ partner	Former husband/ partner	Current/former boyfriend	Father/stepfather	Brother/ stepbrother	Other relative	In-law	Own friend/ acquaintance	Family friend	Teacher	Employer/ someone at work	Police/soldier	Religious leader	Stranger	Other
Angola	52	17	8	1	2	4	0.3	10	3	0	1	-	-	7	0.2
Comoros	18	21	4	1	2	9	2	3	6	2	2	-	-	32	9
Democratic Republic of the Congo	60	21	13	0.2	1	1	0.1	7	2	1	-	1	0.2	5	0
Madagascar	42	25	9	0.3	1	5	0.1	11	2	0.4	1	0	-	12	0.1
Malawi	57	28	7	1	1	3	1	6	2	0.3	0.3	0.1	0	8	3
Mozambique	37	43	6	3	2	1	-	3	1	0.2	0.4	1	-	5	1
Namibia	34	18	5	2	2	10	1	5	2	1	-	-	-	16	11
United Republic of Tanzania	42	34	11	1	0.1	2	0.2	12	2	1	1	0.2	-	3	3
Zambia	56	27	7	1	0.3	7	0.3	4	1	0.4	-	-	-	4	2
Zimbabwe	55	22	7	1	1	5	1	1	2	0.3	0.3	1	1	6	2
SADC Region	50	27	10	1	1	3	-	8	2	1	-	-	-	6	1

Among girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced forced sex (DHS definition), percentage who report specific perpetrators of the violence

Notes: SADC estimates are only included for those categories of perpetrators for which data are available between 2012 and 2021 for the full subset of 10 countries, covering 81 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries. Data for Mozambique refer to women aged 18 to 49 years. Ever-married girls and women could report multiple perpetrators, but never-married girls and women could only report the perpetrator of the first incident of sexual violence.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

## Key definitions used in this section

- **Attitudes towards wife-beating:** A husband/partner is justified in hitting or beating his wife or partner under at least one of the following circumstances: if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children, if she argues with him, if she refuses sex with him or if she burns the food.
- **Emotional violence:** Said or did something to humiliate her in front of others; threatened to hurt or harm her or someone close to her; or insulted her or made her feel bad about herself.
- **Physical violence:** Being pushed, shaken or having something thrown at her; being slapped; having her arm twisted or hair pulled; being punched with a fist or with something that could hurt; being kicked, dragged or beaten up; tried to choke or burn her on purpose; or being threatened or attacked with a knife, gun or any other weapon.
- **Sexual violence:** Sexual intercourse or any other sexual acts that were forced, physically or in any other way.

## Data sources

The main source of comparable country data on intimate partner violence is the DHS, which includes a standard module on domestic violence administered to all girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have ever been married or cohabited. Respondents are asked whether they have experienced various forms of physical, sexual or emotional violence perpetrated by a current or former spouse or partner in their lifetime and in the 12 months preceding the survey. Some recent MICS have included the standard DHS module. Comparable data on intimate partner violence collected through DHS and MICS are available for 11 countries in the SADC region.

Comparable data on attitudes towards wife-beating are derived mainly from MICS and DHS, in which women and men (regardless of their marital status) are asked whether they think a husband (or partner) is justified in hitting or beating his wife (or partner) under certain circumstances. Comparable data on attitudes towards wife-beating from DHS and MICS are available for 13 countries in the SADC region.

TABLE 2.1

### One in three ever-partnered girls and women have experienced some form of violence by a partner in the past year, with emotional and physical violence most commonly reported

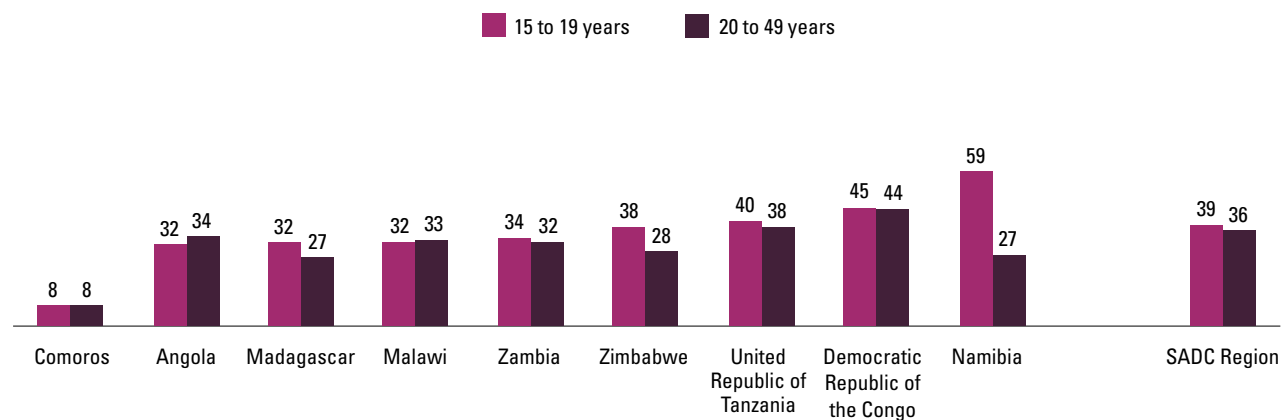
	Emotional	Physical	Sexual	Physical and/or sexual	Physical, emotional and/or sexual
Angola	24	24	7	26	34
Comoros	6	4	1	5	8
Democratic Republic of the Congo	29	30	20	37	44
Madagascar	22	12	7	16	27
Malawi	23	16	16	24	33
Mozambique	12	15	3	16	20
Namibia	21	19	7	20	28
South Africa	11	9	4	11	16
United Republic of Tanzania	28	27	11	30	38
Zambia	23	21	11	25	32
Zimbabwe	22	17	6	19	29
SADC Region	22	21	10	24	31

Percentage of ever-partnered girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced violence by any partner in the past 12 months, by type of violence

Notes: SADC estimates are based on a subset of 11 countries with available data between 2012 and 2021, covering 98 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries. Data for Mozambique and South Africa refer to girls and women aged 18 to 49 years.  
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

FIGURE 2.1

### In Namibia and Zimbabwe, adolescent girls are more likely to experience partner violence than older women; in all other countries, no significant differences are found by age

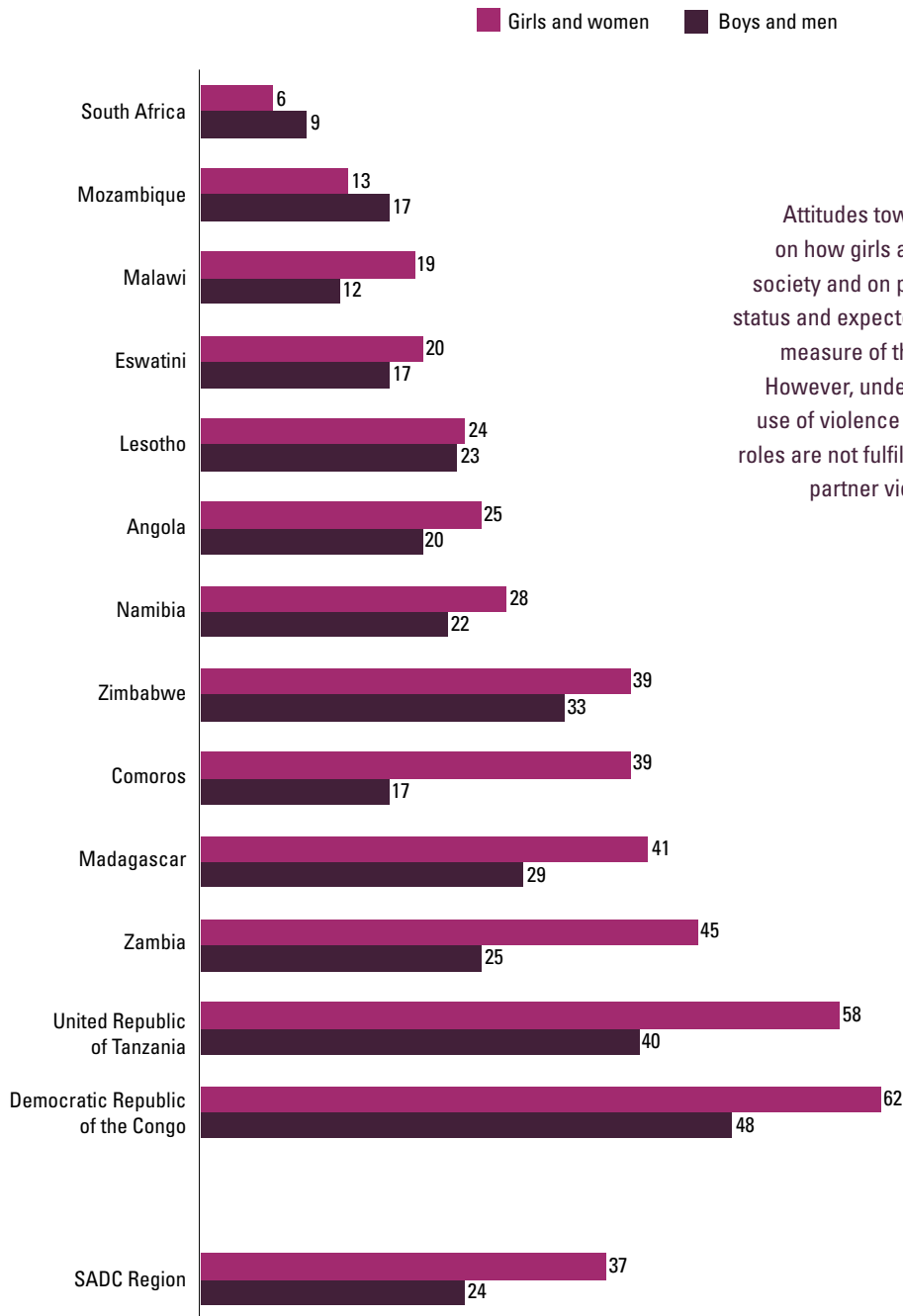


Percentage of ever-partnered girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual violence by any partner in the past 12 months, by current age

Notes: SADC estimates are based on a subset of nine countries with available data between 2012 and 2021, covering 77 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 years and 71 per cent of women aged 20 to 49 years in SADC countries. SADC estimates presented in this chart cannot be compared with those presented earlier because Mozambique and South Africa are not included; data in these two countries were only collected for women aged 18 to 49 years. Data for Namibia for girls aged 15 to 19 years are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases and should be interpreted with caution.  
Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

**FIGURE 2.2**

**Girls and women in most countries are more likely to justify wife-beating than boys and men**



Attitudes towards wife-beating can offer clues on how girls and women are perceived within a society and on prevailing social norms about their status and expected roles. Attitudes are not a direct measure of the prevalence of partner violence. However, understanding attitudes that justify the use of violence when traditionally defined gender roles are not fulfilled may help explain why intimate partner violence persists in many countries.

Percentage of girls and women and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances

Note: SADC estimates are based on a subset of 13 countries with available data between 2012 and 2021 for both girls and women and boys and men, covering 99 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years and 99 per cent of boys and men aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries.  
 Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.



# DISCLOSING EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE AND HELP-SEEKING

## Key definition used in this section

**Help-seeking:** Among girls and women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence, those who never told anyone, those who never sought help to end the violence but told someone, and those who sought help from any source to end the violence.

## Data source

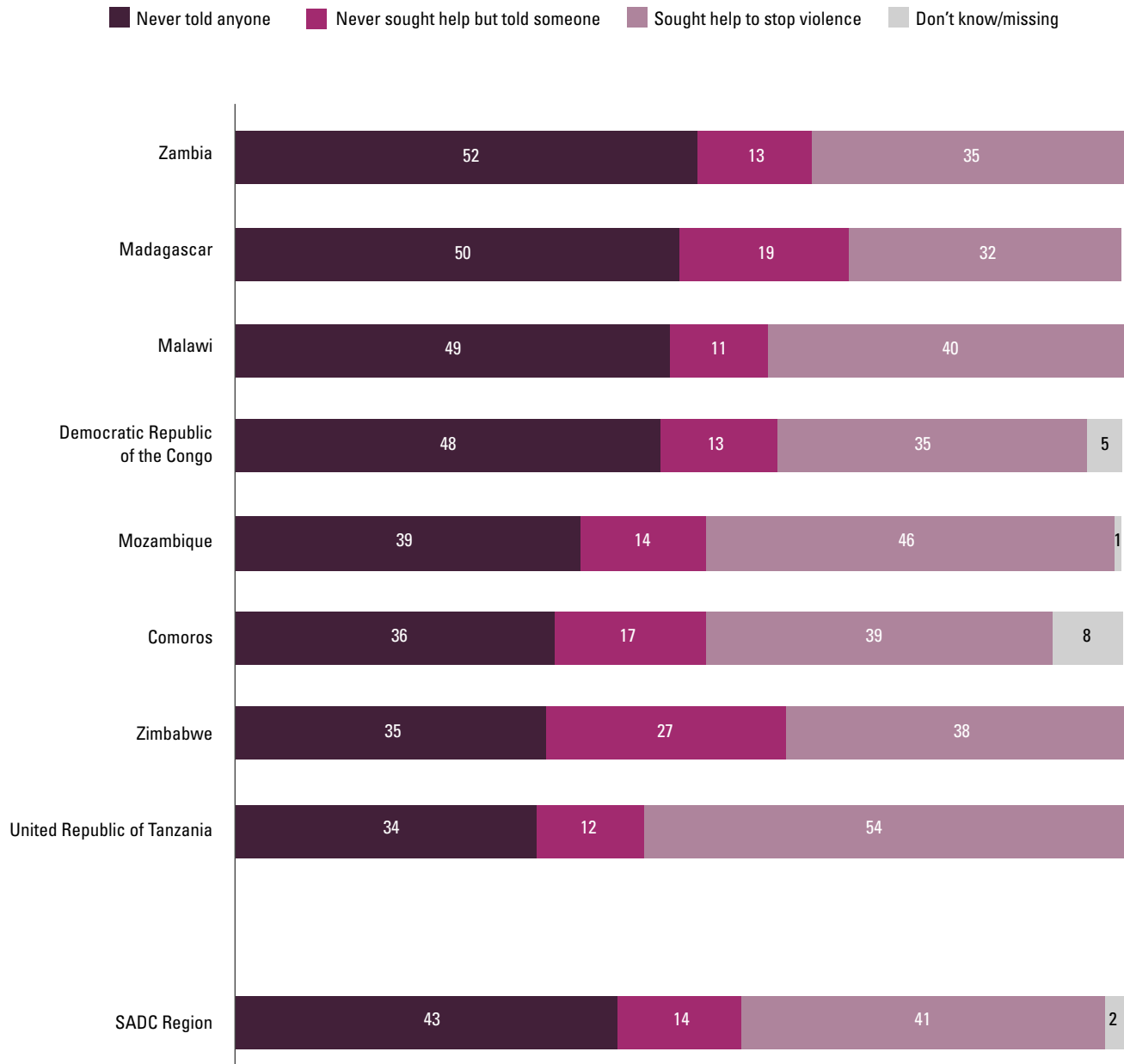
The main source of comparable country data on disclosure and help-seeking behaviour is the DHS. Girls and women who reported experiences of physical and/or sexual violence are asked whether they ever told anyone about the abuse and whether they sought help from any source to end the violence (and, if so, from whom). Some recent MICS have included the standard DHS module on domestic violence, which captures these data on help-seeking behaviour. Comparable data from the DHS and MICS are available for eight countries.

Data on disclosure and service-seeking among women and men who have specifically experienced sexual abuse in childhood are collected in the VACS.



**FIGURE 3.1**

**In nearly all countries with data, more than half of girls and women who experienced violence never sought help**



Percentage distribution of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced physical and/or sexual violence, by help-seeking behaviour

Notes: Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. SADC estimates are based on a subset of eight countries with available data between 2012 and 2021, covering 71 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

TABLE 3.1

### When girls and women seek help for experiences of violence, most look to informal networks such as family and neighbours; very few seek professional assistance

	Own family	Husband/ partner's family	Current/former husband/partner	Current/former boyfriend	Friend	Neighbour	Religious leader	Doctor/medical personnel	Police	Lawyer	Social service organization	Other
Angola	64	20	1	1	10	15	4	2	7	0	3	3
Comoros	64	11	0.3	1	14	25	7	-	4	1	-	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo	56	36	2	1	16	29	10	2	2	1	1	3
Madagascar	66	18	-	0.4	17	8	1	2	5	0.1	1	7
Malawi	62	33	0.1	0.1	10	3	2	2	10	1	2	12
Mozambique	63	45	1	0	8	9	8	0.2	12	1	1	6
Namibia	48	2	0.3	-	8	2	1	7	15	-	5	20
United Republic of Tanzania	56	42	1	0.3	6	14	4	1	9	2	2	22
Zambia	63	45	1	0.2	5	6	7	4	15	1	3	4
Zimbabwe	51	43	2	0.1	10	7	7	4	28	1	3	6
SADC Region	59	35	-	-	11	15	6	-	8	-	-	9

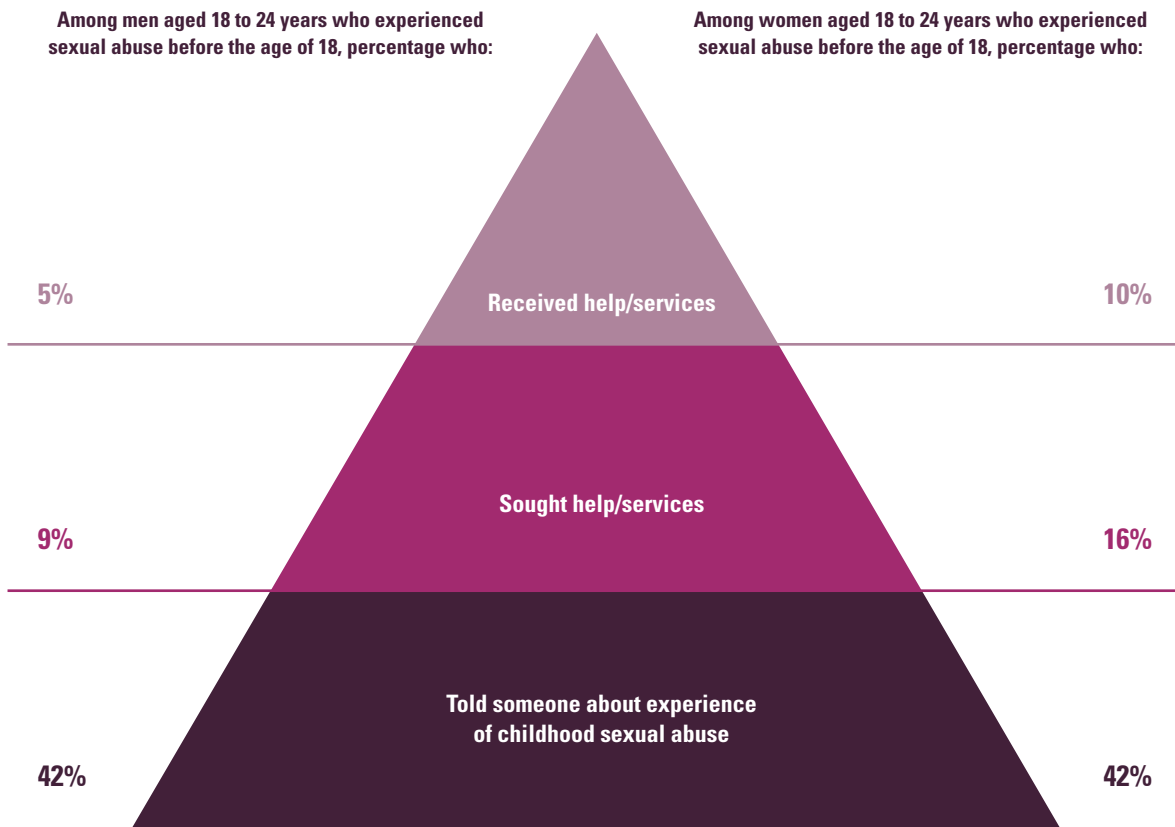
Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced physical and/or sexual violence and sought help, by source of help

Notes: SADC estimates are only included for those sources of help for which data are available between 2012 and 2021 for the full subset of 10 countries, covering 81 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years in SADC countries. Data for Mozambique refer to women aged 18 to 49 years.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS, DHS and AIDS Indicator Survey.

**FIGURE 3.2**

**Among both women and men who experienced childhood sexual abuse in countries with data, few sought help or services and even fewer reported actually receiving them**



Percentage of women and men aged 18 to 24 years who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18, by whether they told someone, sought help/services or received help/services

Notes: Estimates for women are based on a subset of seven countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) with available VACS data covering 34 per cent of women aged 18 to 24 years in SADC countries. Estimates for men are based on a subset of four countries (Botswana, Malawi, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia) with available data covering 28 per cent of men aged 18 to 24 years in SADC countries. These are population-weighted estimates from countries with available data and should not be interpreted as representative of SADC countries as a group. Data from the Eswatini VACS 2022 could not be included since the published survey report only includes estimates on these indicators for women and men aged 13 to 24 years.

Source: VACS conducted between 2009 and 2019.

# VIOLENT DISCIPLINE

## Key definitions used in this section

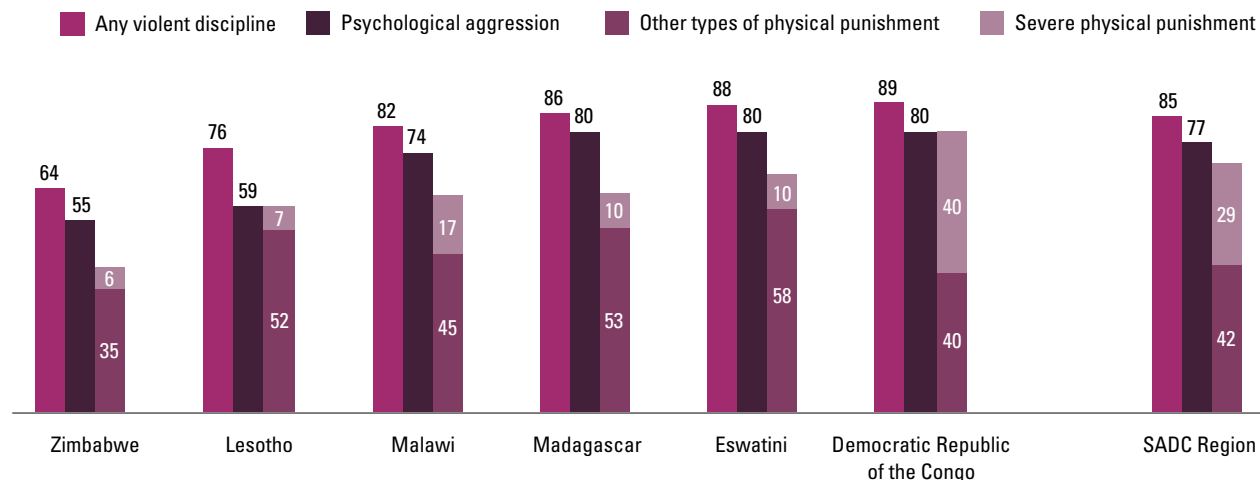
- **Physical punishment:** Shaking, hitting or slapping a child on the hand/arm/leg; hitting on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with a hard object; spanking or hitting on the bottom with a bare hand; hitting or slapping on the face, head or ears; or hitting or beating hard and repeatedly.
- **Severe physical punishment:** Hitting or slapping a child on the face, head or ears or hitting or beating a child hard and repeatedly.
- **Psychological aggression:** Shouting, yelling or screaming at a child as well as calling a child offensive names such as 'dumb' or 'lazy'.
- **Violent discipline:** Any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression.
- **Physical violence since age 15:** Being hit, slapped, kicked or hurt physically in some other way.

## Data sources

MICS is the main data source for the majority of comparable country prevalence estimates of violent discipline. Data on child discipline are collected in MICS through a dedicated module on disciplinary methods adapted from the parent-child version of the Conflict Tactics Scale, a standardized and validated epidemiological measurement tool that is widely accepted and has been implemented in a large number of countries.<sup>28</sup> The MICS module includes a standard set of questions covering non-violent forms of discipline, psychological aggression and physical means of punishing children. Some DHS have included the standard, or an adapted version, of the MICS module on child discipline. Comparable data on violent discipline collected through DHS and MICS are available for six countries in the SADC region.

FIGURE 4.1

## Over 8 in 10 children experience violent discipline at home; levels exceed 60 per cent in all countries

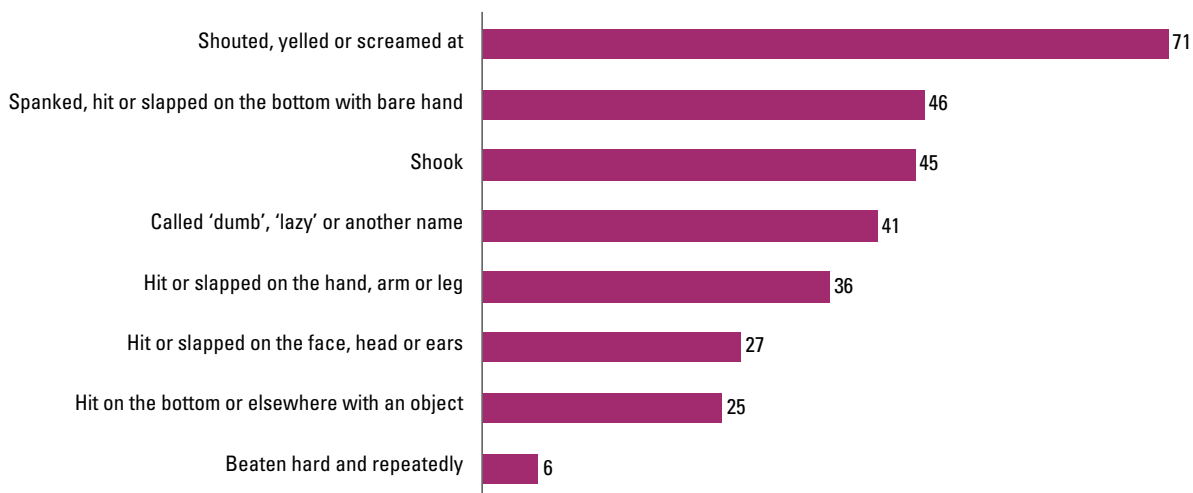


Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced violent discipline in the past month, by type

Notes: SADC estimates are based on a subset of six countries with available data between 2014 and 2020, covering 46 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years in SADC countries. Data disaggregated by sex are not presented since no significant differences were found by a child's sex in the levels of violent discipline for any of the countries with available data. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS and DHS.

FIGURE 4.2

## Nearly three in four children experience shouting, yelling or screaming as a form of discipline, and close to half are subjected to spanking and shaking

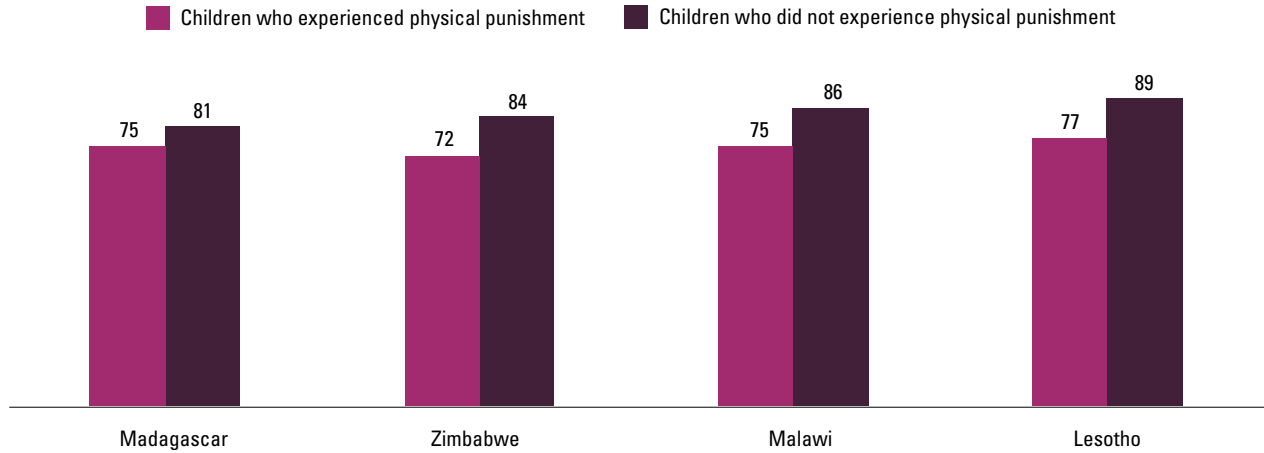


Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced violent discipline in the past month, by type

Note: Estimates are based on a subset of six countries with available data between 2014 and 2020, covering 46 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years in SADC countries. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS and DHS.

**FIGURE 4.3**

**In some countries, children who are subjected to physical punishment are less likely to reach certain social-emotional development milestones**

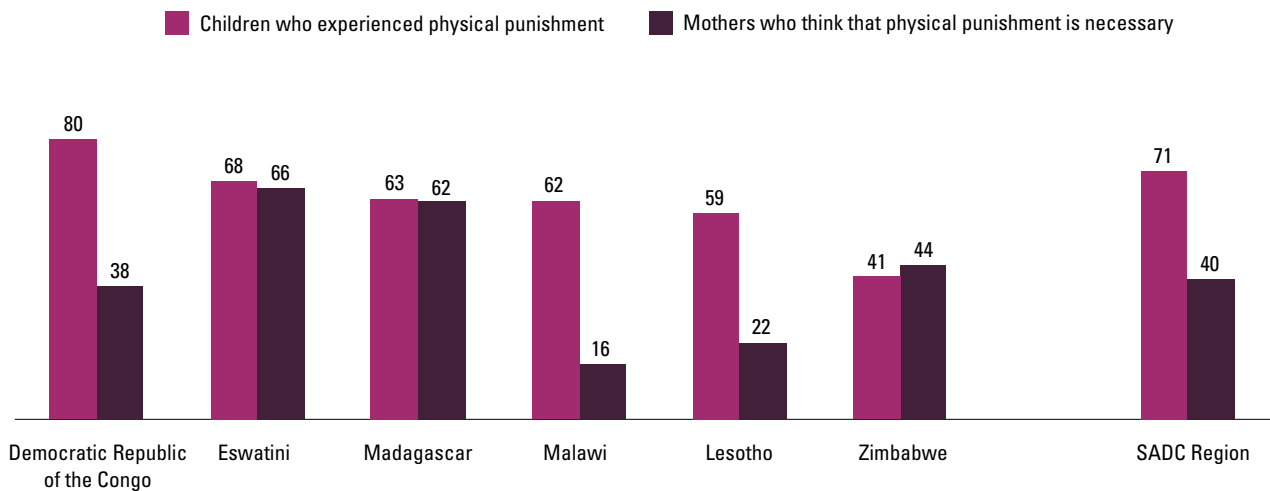


Percentage of children aged 36 to 59 months who have achieved at least two of three social-emotional development milestones, by whether or not they experienced physical punishment in the past month

Notes: This chart includes only those countries where a statistically significant difference was found in the achievement of social-emotional milestones between children who experienced physical punishment and those who did not. The social-emotional development milestones are: the child gets along well with other children; the child does not kick, bite or hit other children or adults; and the child does not get distracted easily. Source: UNICEF analyses, based on MICS and DHS, 2016-2020.

**FIGURE 4.4**

**A higher proportion of children who are subjected to physical punishment than the share of mothers who think it is a necessary form of discipline**



Percentage of mothers who think that physical punishment is necessary to properly raise or educate children and percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced physical punishment in the past month

Notes: SADC estimates are based on a subset of six countries with available data between 2014 and 2020, covering 41 per cent of the female population aged 15 years and older and 46 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years in SADC countries. Data for Eswatini refer to attitudes about physical punishment among any adult household member who responded to the child discipline module. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS and DHS.



TABLE 4.1

### Ten SADC countries fully prohibit corporal punishment in schools, but only four have adopted legislation that fully prohibits its use against children in both school and at home

	At home	In school
Angola	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited
Botswana	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited
Comoros	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Eswatini	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited
Lesotho	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Madagascar	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Malawi	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Mauritius	<b>Fully prohibited</b>	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Mozambique	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited
Namibia	Not fully prohibited	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Seychelles	<b>Fully prohibited</b>	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
South Africa	<b>Fully prohibited</b>	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
United Republic of Tanzania	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited
Zambia	<b>Fully prohibited</b>	<b>Fully prohibited</b>
Zimbabwe	Not fully prohibited	Not fully prohibited

Status of the prohibition of corporal punishment at home and in schools

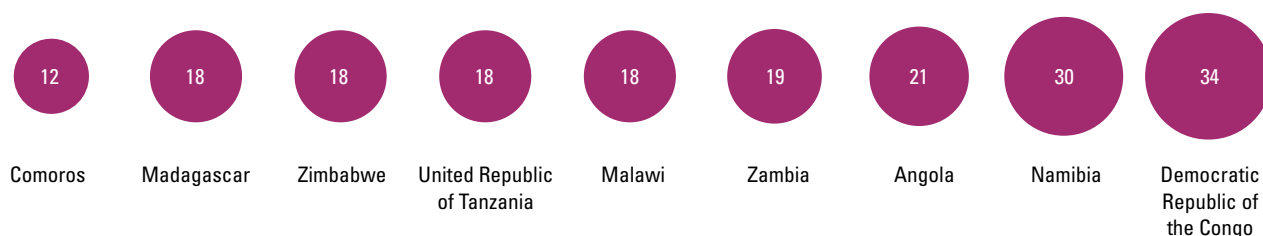
Note: In Lesotho, Madagascar and Malawi (for private schools), the status of the prohibition of corporal punishment in school has not been confirmed by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.

Source: Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, as of December 2022.



FIGURE 4.5

### Adolescent girls who have never married are also exposed to physical violence



Percentage of never-married girls aged 15 to 17 years who experienced physical violence since age 15

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS and DHS, 2012-2021.

TABLE 4.2

### It is not known if such violence occurs within the context of discipline, although the most common perpetrators are family members and teachers

	Current boyfriend	Former boyfriend	Father/step-father	Mother/step-mother	Sister/brother	Other relative	Teacher	Other
Angola	2	4	30	35	12	18	4	8
Comoros	3	-	20	31	23	9	10	11
Democratic Republic of the Congo	10	5	35	33	31	10	26	3
Madagascar	2	9	27	20	20	14	-	14
Malawi	3	1	16	14	25	11	3	42
Namibia	-	1	18	29	15	18	12	19
United Republic of Tanzania	-	3	8	15	21	17	20	14
Zambia	2	3	12	29	21	22	15	12
Zimbabwe	1	-	10	18	12	24	23	21

Among never-married girls aged 15 to 17 years who experienced physical violence since age 15, percentage who report specific perpetrators of the violence

Notes: This table includes only the most commonly reported perpetrators. Data for the Comoros are based on 25 to 49 unweighted cases and should be interpreted with caution. Respondents can report more than one perpetrator.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on MICS and DHS, 2012-2021.

## BOX 3

## What risk factors are associated with children's experience of violent discipline?

To explore the relative influence of different risk factors for violent discipline among children – while controlling for other factors – a series of statistical models were run for six countries with available data (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi and Zimbabwe). The analysis focused specifically on children's experiences of only one form of violent discipline (physical punishment). In Model 1, a set of demographic background characteristics of the child, his/her mother and father, and the household were included, as outlined below. In Model 2, two additional variables were added: mothers' attitudes about the necessity of using physical punishment on children and their justification of wife-beating under certain circumstances. In Model 3, the interaction between these two attitudinal variables was added. Finally, in Model 4, a variable was added that represents whether the child's mother had experienced any type of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months.

The tables on the following page present the results of these analyses for the most complete/final model for each country. For the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho and Malawi, Model 3 was the most complete, while for Madagascar and Zimbabwe, it was Model 4.

In the final model for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho and Malawi, some background factors emerged as significant predictors of children's experiences of physical punishment, but patterns are largely inconsistent across countries. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, children living in smaller households (that is, with fewer members) are less likely to experience physical punishment, while in Malawi the opposite is true. In the latter country, children living in smaller households are more likely to be exposed to physical punishment by caregivers. Some factors, such as the sex of the child, place of residence and maternal marital status, were not significant predictors in any of the countries.

The most striking finding, however, is that the strongest predictor of children's experiences of physical punishment (after controlling for other background characteristics) is mothers' attitudes towards physical punishment: A child whose mother disagrees with physical punishment as a necessary form of discipline is less likely to experience physical punishment.

In the final model for Madagascar and Zimbabwe, some background factors remained significant predictors of children's experiences of physical punishment. For instance, in both countries, children living in smaller households are more likely to experience physical punishment while, somewhat surprisingly, children living in poorer households are less likely to be exposed to physical punishment by caregivers at home. The sex of the child, place of residence and maternal education were not significant predictors in either of the countries.

As with the previous set of countries, in both Madagascar and Zimbabwe the strongest predictor of children's experiences of physical punishment (controlling for all other factors) is mothers' attitudes towards such punishment. In both countries, mothers'

experiences of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months were also a significant factor: A child whose mother has not experienced any form of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months is less likely to experience physical punishment.

The implications of these findings are that programming and interventions to address violence against children should include a focus on shifting attitudes and altering deeply ingrained social and cultural norms that perpetuate violence, given their potential to impact changes in behaviour.

For more details on the analytical approach, see the 'Technical notes'.

### MODEL 1

Sex of the child

Maternal education (no education, primary, secondary or higher)

Paternal education (no education, primary, secondary or higher)

Maternal marital status (currently married/in union, formerly married/in union, never married)

Children's living arrangements (lives with both biological parents versus not living with one or both biological parents)

Parent survival status (both biological parents alive versus one or both biological parents deceased)

Place of residence (urban, rural)

Household wealth quintile

Household size (less than 3 household members, 4-5 household members, 6 or more household members)

### MODEL 2<sup>29</sup>

Variables from Model 1

Mother's agreement with physical punishment as a necessary form of discipline

Mother believes wife-beating is justified under certain circumstances

### MODEL 3

Variables from Model 1 + Model 2

Interaction between attitudes towards physical punishment and attitudes towards wife-beating

### MODEL 4<sup>30</sup>

Variables from Model 1 + Model 2 + Model 3

Mother's experiences of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months (emotional, physical and/or sexual violence)

## MODEL 3

		Democratic Republic of the Congo	Eswatini	Lesotho	Malawi
Socio-demographics	Sex of child				
	Maternal education	lower, more	lower, more		
	Paternal education	lower, more			lower, less
	Wealth	poorer, less			
	Place of residence				
	Mother's marital status				
	Children's living arrangements	x	x	x	
	Parent survival status				both alive, more
	Household size	smaller, less			smaller, more
Biological mother does not agree that physical punishment is a necessary form of discipline		less	less	less	less
Biological mother does not justify wife-beating			less		
Biological mother agrees that physical punishment is a necessary form of discipline and justifies wife-beating			more		

Notes: 'x' indicates that the variable was excluded from the model due to small sample sizes. The variable in red is the strongest predictor. An empty cell indicates that the variable is not a significant predictor.

## MODEL 4

		Madagascar	Zimbabwe
Socio-demographics	Sex of child		
	Maternal education		
	Paternal education	lower, more	
	Wealth	poorer, less	poorer, less
	Place of residence		
	Mother's marital status	currently married, less	
	Children's living arrangements	x	x
	Parent survival status	x	both alive, more
	Household size	smaller, more	smaller, more
Biological mother does not agree that physical punishment is a necessary form of discipline		less	less
Biological mother does not justify wife-beating		less	not available
Mother has not experienced any intimate partner violence in the past 12 months		less	less

Notes: 'x' indicates that the variable was excluded from the model due to small sample sizes. The variable in red is the strongest predictor. An empty cell indicates that the variable is not a significant predictor.

# BULLYING

## Key definition used in this section

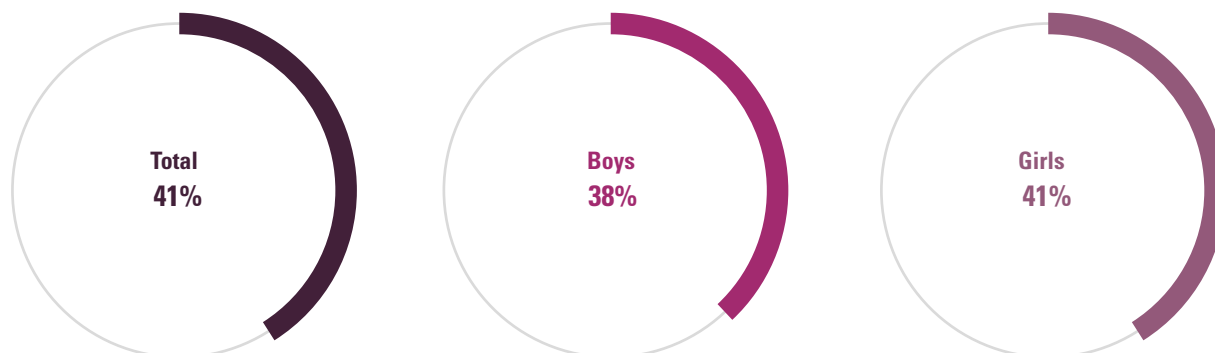
- **Bullying:** Occurs when a student, or group of students, say or do bad, nasty or unpleasant things to another student. It is also bullying when a student is teased a lot in an unpleasant way or when he or she is deliberately left out of things. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight or when teasing is done in a friendly or fun way.

## Data sources

The main source of comparable country data for bullying is the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS), a collaborative surveillance project of the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>31</sup> The GSHS is a school-based survey that measures behavioural risk and protective factors in 10 key areas among young people aged 13 to 15 years (more recent surveys now also include students aged 16 and 17 years). The core module on violence and unintentional injuries includes a series of questions on students' experiences of bullying. Comparable data on bullying from the GSHS are available for nine countries in the SADC region.

**FIGURE 5.1**

**Around 4 in 10 adolescent students have experienced bullying; boys and girls are equally likely to be victimized**

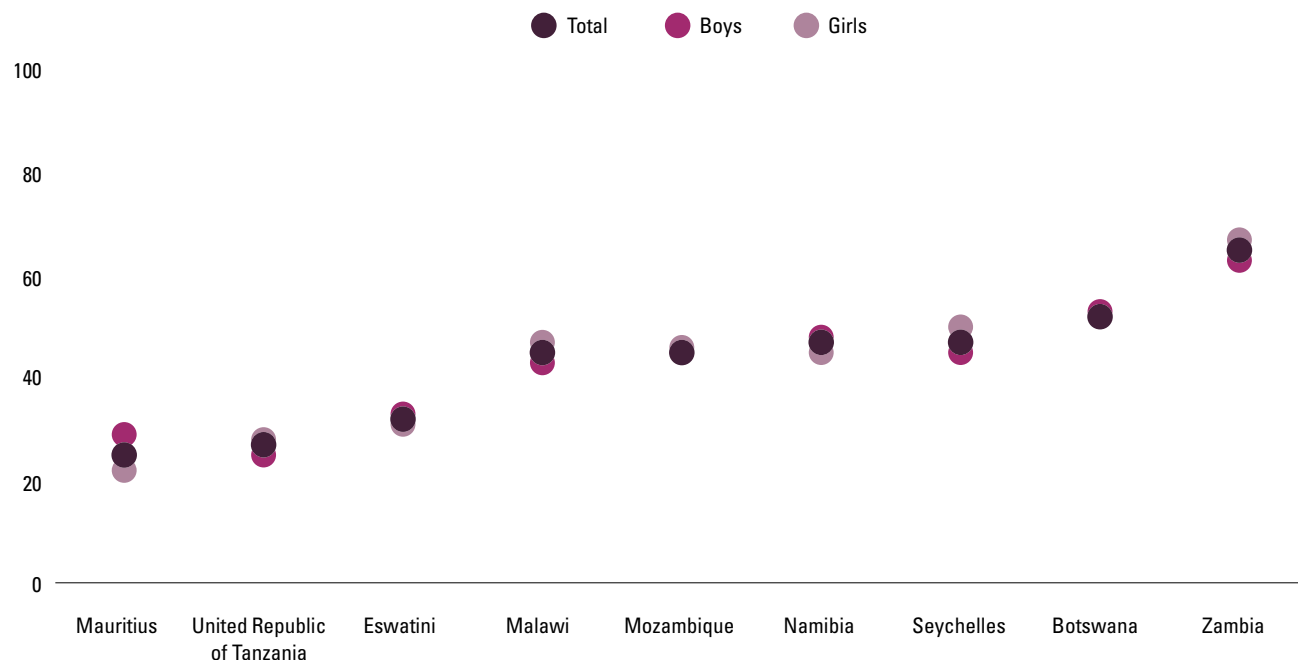


Percentage of students aged 13 to 15 years who reported being bullied on one or more days in the past 30 days

Note: Estimates are based on a subset of nine countries with available data between 2004 and 2017, covering 40 per cent of adolescents aged 13 to 15 years in SADC countries. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on Global School-based Student Health Surveys (GSHS).

**FIGURE 5.2**

**Levels of bullying vary across countries – ranging from 25 per cent in Mauritius to 65 per cent in Zambia, with no differences by sex**



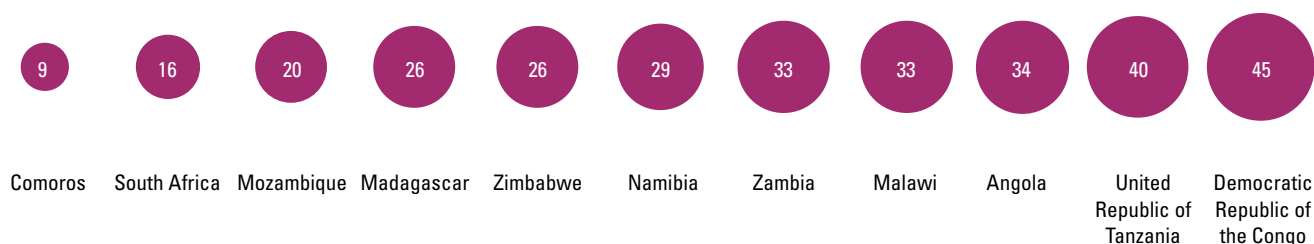
Percentage of students aged 13 to 15 years who reported being bullied on one or more days in the past 30 days, by sex

Note: Data for the United Republic of Tanzania are representative of the mainland only. Source: UNICEF global databases, 2023, based on GSHS conducted between 2004 and 2017.

**THE INTERSECTION OF  
VIOLENCE AGAINST  
CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN**

**FIGURE 6.1**

**Across most countries, at least one in five children live with a mother who has experienced intimate partner violence in the past year**

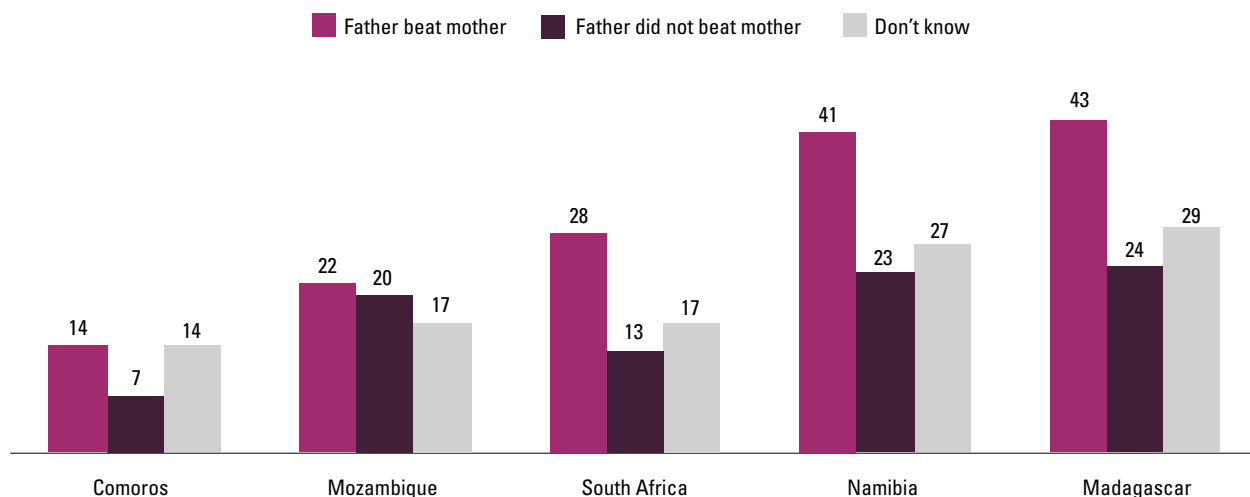


Percentage of children under age 18 living in households with a biological mother who has experienced any physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by any partner in the past 12 months

Note: Data are presented here on children living in households where the mother has experienced intimate partner violence in the past year (rather than ever in her lifetime). These children are likely to have been exposed to or to have witnessed such violence given the more restricted reference period for experiences of intimate partner violence. Source: UNICEF analyses, based on DHS, MICS and AIDS Indicator Survey, 2012-2021.

**FIGURE 6.2**

**In Madagascar, Namibia and South Africa, women are significantly more likely to experience partner violence if they witnessed such violence between their parents**



Percentage of ever-partnered girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who experienced any physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by any partner in the past 12 months, by whether their father beat their mother

Notes: Only countries where the proportion of 'don't know' responses was below 30 per cent are included in this chart. However, since levels of 'don't know' are still high in all these countries, results should be interpreted with caution. Data for Mozambique refer to ever-partnered girls and women aged 18 to 49 years and data for South Africa refer to ever-partnered girls and women aged 18 years and older. Source: UNICEF analyses, based on DHS and MICS, 2012-2021.

## BOX 4

**Violence against children and violence against women: Where they intersect**

Growing evidence suggests that violence against children and violence against women intersect in a number of ways.<sup>32</sup> First, these forms of violence may share risk factors such as gender inequality at home and in society, weak institutions or legal sanctions, marital conflict and substance abuse. Both forms of violence are also reinforced by similar social norms, such as condoning violent discipline, promoting violent and toxic masculinity, prioritizing family reputation, or supporting gender inequality. Both violence against children and violence against women can occur in adolescence, and adolescents can be both perpetrators and victims of violence. Finally, both forms of violence share common and compounding consequences and can lead to similar negative outcomes, especially in cases of poly-victimization. Moreover, while most children who experience violence do not become perpetrators of violence, evidence suggests a cyclical effect: Those who perpetrate or experience violence later in life are more likely to have experienced violence in childhood. Indeed, studies (including some conducted in SADC countries) have found that young women exposed to childhood violence of any type had significantly higher odds of experiencing intimate partner violence.<sup>33</sup> Research among a community-based sample of adults in rural South Africa found that both women and men who had experienced physical and/or sexual violence during childhood were significantly more likely to experience non-partner sexual violence in adulthood. The likelihood of experiencing and perpetrating intimate partner violence in the past year was also higher among those who had experienced childhood violence, but these findings were only marginally significant.<sup>34</sup>

Violence against children and violence against women also intersect when they occur together within the same family or household during the same period of time. There is a relatively large body of literature, primarily from high-income countries, indicating that children living in households affected by intimate partner violence are indeed more likely to experience certain forms of violence themselves, particularly violent discipline, including corporal punishment.<sup>35</sup> This is supported by a growing body of research from low- and middle-income countries, including countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, providing further evidence for the co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and violence against children.<sup>36</sup>

Attitudes and opinions about intimate partner violence seem to be associated with attitudes about violence against children. For instance, women who believe that men are justified in beating their wives under certain circumstances are also more likely to say that corporal punishment is necessary to properly raise a child.<sup>37</sup> Both men and women who justify corporal punishment, in turn, are more likely to live in households where children experience corporal punishment.<sup>38</sup>

A number of working theories have attempted to explain the association between intimate partner violence and violent discipline. Some researchers argue that it is because intimate

partner violence negatively impacts maternal mental health – mothers who experience violence are more likely to also experience stress, anxiety, depression or trauma, and are therefore more prone to harshly disciplining their children.<sup>39</sup> Some scholars focus instead on violent men: When male caregivers are violent towards their partners, they are more likely to be violent towards children as well.<sup>40</sup> Many researchers propose a ‘spillover hypothesis’ – whereby violence in intimate partner relationships can spill over into the relationship of a caregiver and a child. Male and female caregivers learn to normalize violence in several areas of their lives.<sup>41</sup> Others theorize that shared risk factors such as gender inequality, discrimination against women, male dominance in the household, marital conflict, substance or alcohol abuse, weak responsive institutions or weak legal sanctions against violence might increase the likelihood of both intimate partner violence and violence against children.<sup>42</sup>





TABLE 6.1

**There is a significant, but weak, association between mothers' attitudes justifying wife-beating and children's experiences of violent discipline. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Malawi, this relationship is not influenced by other factors such as household wealth**

			Mother believes a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances	
			Before controlling for other factors	After controlling for other factors
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Any violent discipline method	Correlation	0.02	0.02
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Lesotho	Any violent discipline method	Correlation	0.04	0.06
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000
Madagascar	Any violent discipline method	Correlation	0.05	0.05
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Malawi	Any violent discipline method	Correlation	0.03	0.03
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
Eswatini	Any violent discipline method	Correlation	0.05	0.03
		Significance (2-tailed)	0.001	0.022

Correlation between children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced violent discipline in the past month and mothers who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances, controlling for household wealth, place of residence, maternal education and maternal age

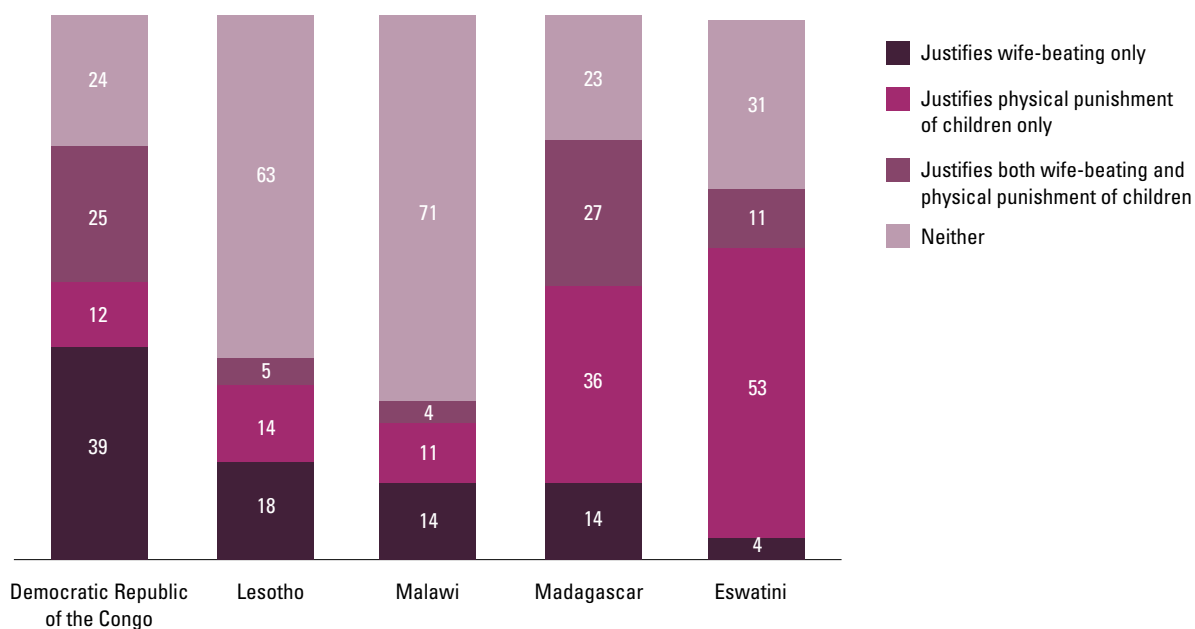
Source: UNICEF analyses, based on MICS, 2014-2020.



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**FIGURE 6.3**

**In three countries, about half of mothers justify either wife-beating or physical punishment of children, but not both forms of violence**

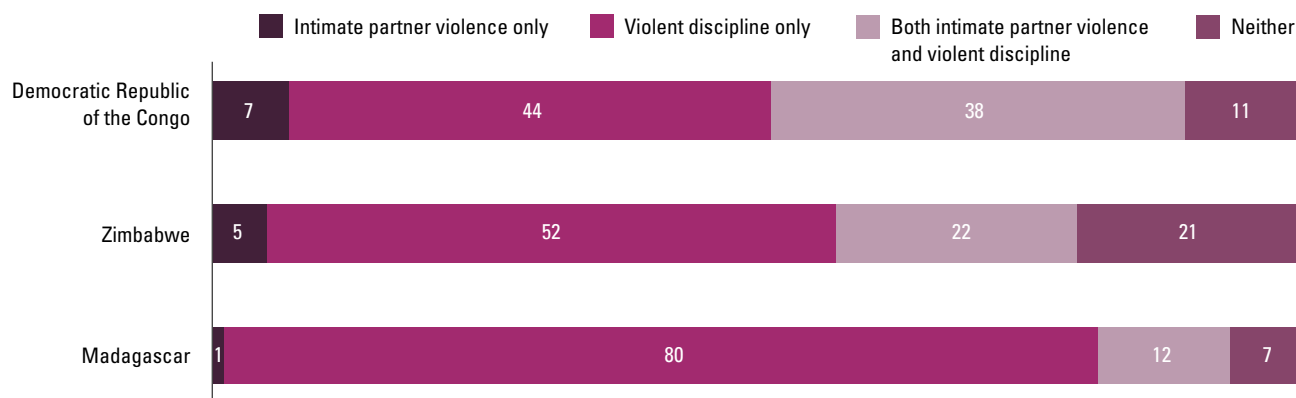


Percentage distribution of mothers aged 15 to 49 years according to different opinions about violence

Notes: Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. These analyses are based only on mothers who responded to the child discipline module and to questions on attitudes towards wife-beating.  
 Source: UNICEF analyses, based on MICS, 2014-2020.

**FIGURE 6.4**

**In the three countries with data, the majority of households are affected by violence, most often violent discipline only or in combination with intimate partner violence**

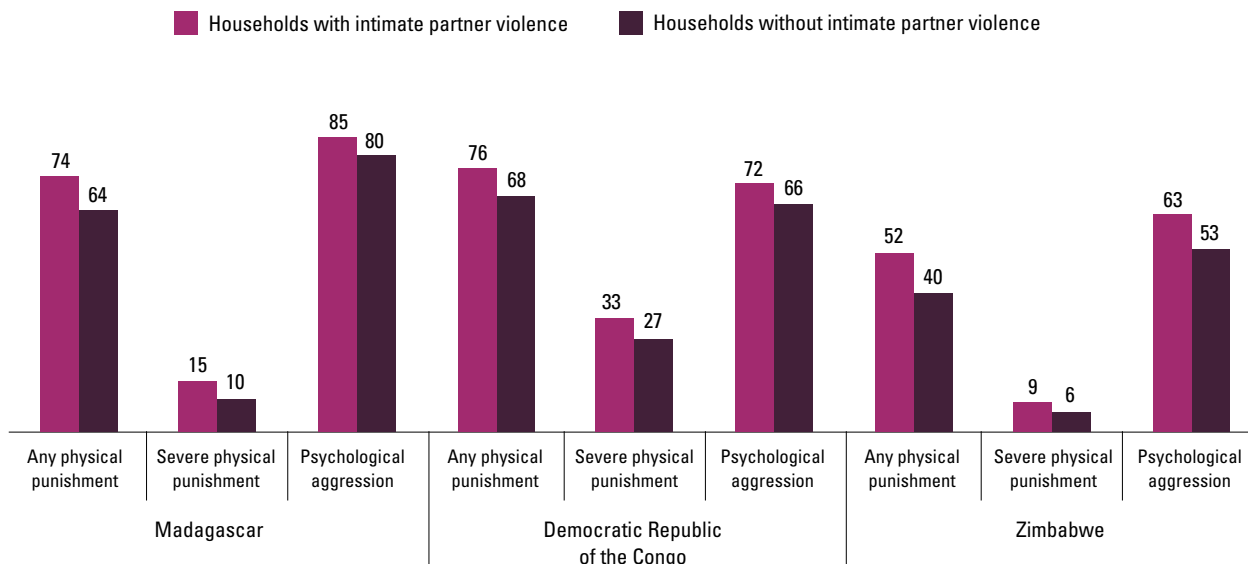


Percentage distribution of households according to different patterns of violence

Note: These analyses are based only on households with data on both child discipline and intimate partner violence.  
Source: UNICEF analyses, based on DHS and MICS, 2013-2019.

**FIGURE 6.5**

**Children living in households affected by intimate partner violence are significantly more likely to experience all types of violent discipline**



Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years living in households where mothers have experienced any emotional, physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence by any partner in the past 12 months and percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years living in households where mothers have not experienced any emotional, physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence by any partner in the past 12 months, by type of violent discipline experienced in the past month

Note: For the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zimbabwe, these results are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level; for Madagascar, only the results on any physical punishment are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level.  
Source: UNICEF analyses, based on DHS and MICS, 2013-2019.

**BOX 5**

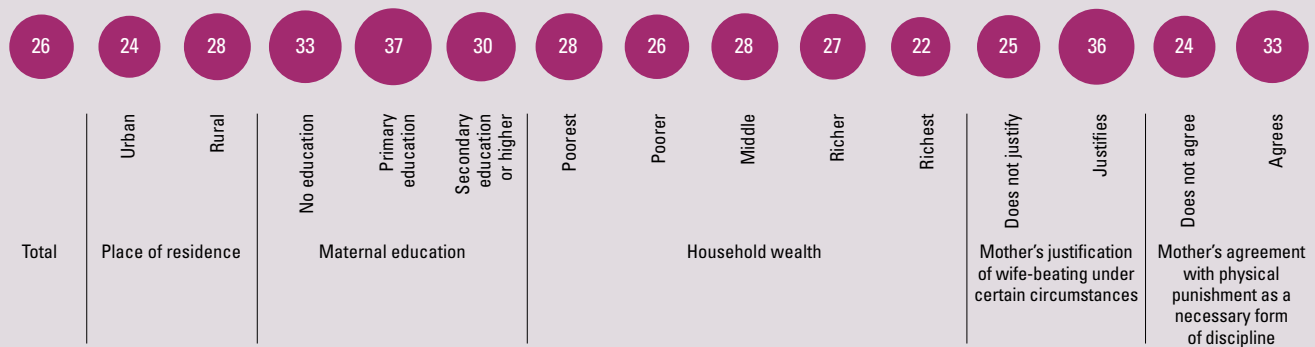
**What are the characteristics of violent households?**

For the purposes of this analysis, violent households are considered those in which both violent discipline and intimate partner violence occur. The analysis was restricted to just three countries due to data availability. The results are therefore considered illustrative, but it is plausible that the same or similar patterns are evident in other SADC countries:

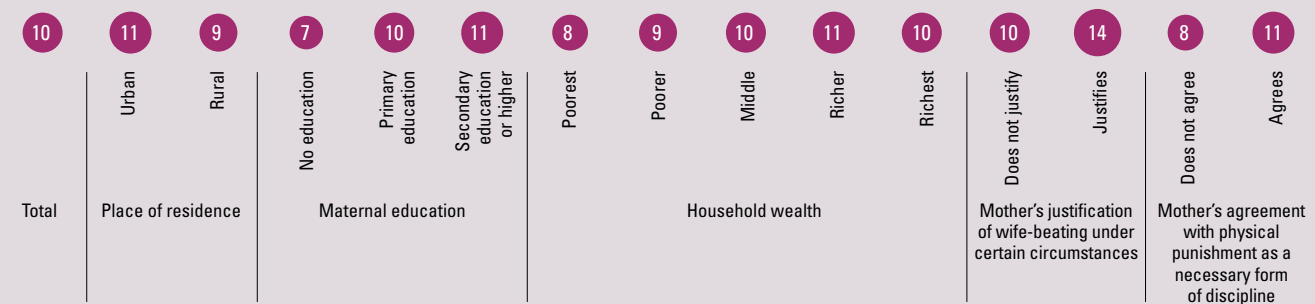
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar, children are equally likely to live in violent households regardless of urban or rural location and household wealth.

- Results on the role of maternal education are inconsistent across countries.
- In all three countries, children are significantly more likely to live in violent households if their mothers agree it is necessary to use physical punishment as a form of discipline.
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar, children are significantly more likely to live in violent households if their mothers justify wife-beating under certain circumstances.

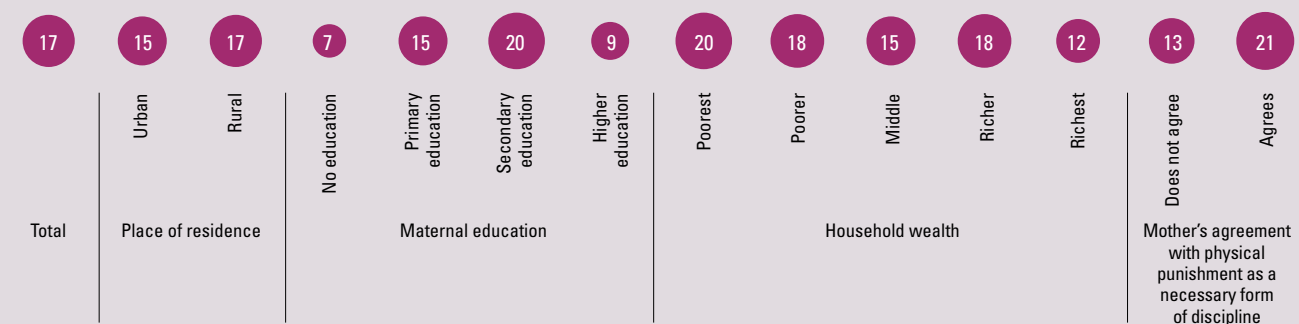
**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO**



**MADAGASCAR**



**ZIMBABWE**



Percentage of households in which both intimate partner violence and violent discipline have been reported, by background characteristics

Notes: Data on mother's justification of wife-beating were not collected in Zimbabwe. For the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Madagascar, it was not possible to further disaggregate maternal education by secondary and higher education due to small sample sizes within the category of higher education. For Zimbabwe, data on 'no education' are based on less than 50 unweighted cases.

Source: UNICEF analyses, based on DHS 2013-2014 (Democratic Republic of the Congo), MICS 2018 (Madagascar) and MICS 2019 (Zimbabwe).



# VIOLENT DEATHS

## Key definitions used in this section

- **Homicide:** Injuries inflicted by another person with intent to injure or kill by any means.
- **Other intentional injuries:** Deaths due to self-harm or collective violence and legal intervention.

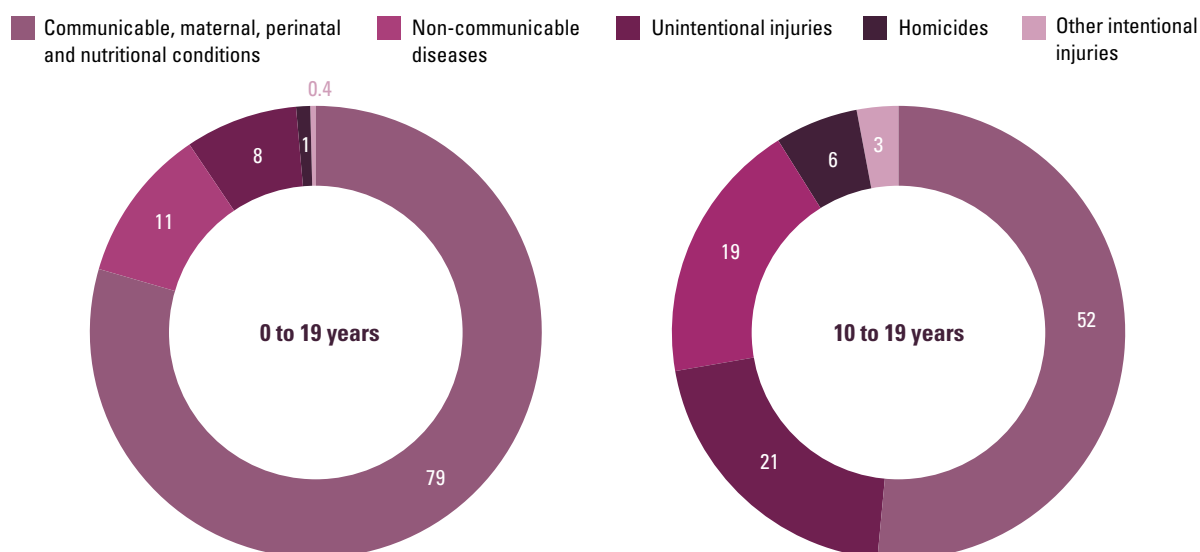
## Data sources

Estimates of mortality are derived from the Global Health Estimates for 2019 produced by the World Health Organization. These figures are obtained through a standardized set of statistical analyses using data from multiple sources, including national death registration records and the Global Burden of Disease Study, among others. All data presented in this section were recalculated by UNICEF on the basis of the 2019 Global Health Estimates.<sup>43</sup>

# Violent deaths in childhood and adolescence

**FIGURE 7.1**

**Homicide is not a leading cause of mortality among children and adolescents in SADC countries or globally; however, the risk does increase during adolescence**



Percentage distribution of deaths among children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 years in the SADC region, by age and cause, 2019

Note: Totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

**TABLE 7.1**

**In 2019, the mortality rate from homicide among children and adolescents in the SADC region was nearly double the average for the rest of the world. Boys' risk of dying from homicide is over three times higher than that of girls**

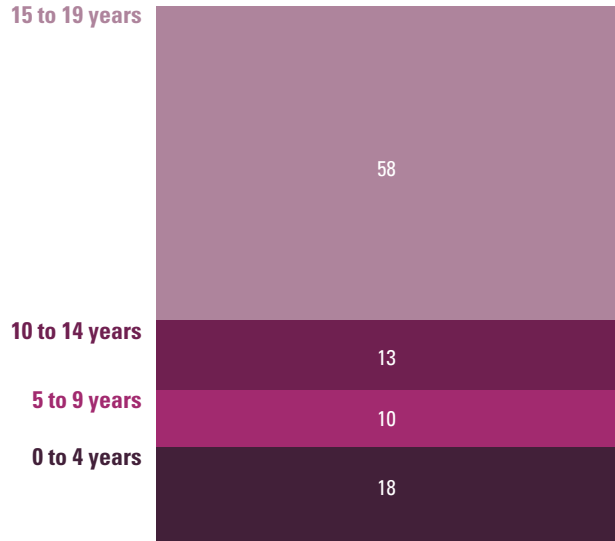
	Number of deaths	Rate per 100,000		
		Total	Boys	Girls
SADC Region	8,700	5	7	2
Rest of the world	61,100	3	4	1

Number of deaths and mortality rate (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide among children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 years in the SADC region and rest of the world, by sex, 2019

Note: Figures in this table have been rounded.

**FIGURE 7.2**

**More than half of the children and adolescents who died from homicide are between the ages of 15 and 19; alarmingly, nearly one in five were under age 5**



Percentage distribution of deaths due to homicide among children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 years in the SADC region, by age, 2019

Note: The total does not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

**FIGURE 7.3**

**Adolescent boys between the ages of 15 and 19 are at the greatest risk of dying from homicide**



Mortality rate (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide among children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 years in the SADC region, by sex and age, 2019

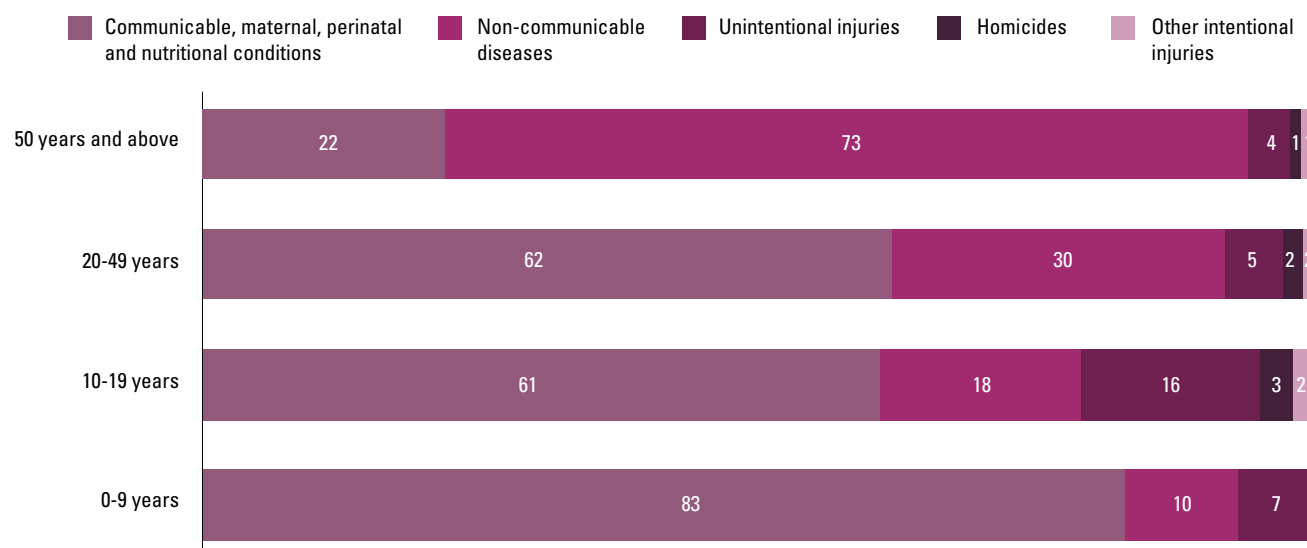
Note: Some of the dots are overlapping and therefore not visible.



# Violent deaths among girls and women

**FIGURE 7.5**

**Homicide is not a leading cause of mortality among girls and women; however, the homicides that do occur peak during adolescence**



Percentage distribution of deaths among girls and women in the SADC region, by age and cause, 2019

Notes: Some totals do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. Values for homicides and other intentional injuries for ages 0-9 years are below 1 per cent.

**TABLE 7.2**

**In 2019, nearly 10,000 girls and women in SADC countries died from homicide, a rate that is more than double that of the rest of the world**

	Number of deaths	Rate per 100,000			
		Total	0-19 years	20-49 years	50 years and above
SADC Region	9,900	6	2	8	13
Rest of the world	83,400	2	1	3	2

Number of deaths and mortality rate (deaths per 100,000) due to homicide among girls and women in the SADC region, by age, 2019

Note: Figures in this table have been rounded.

# PROTECTING EVERY CHILD AND WOMAN FROM VIOLENCE: A CALL TO ACTION

UNICEF AND SADC  
COUNTRIES ARE  
WORKING TOGETHER  
AT THREE LEVELS  
TO SEEK AN END  
TO VIOLENCE  
AGAINST GIRLS,  
BOYS AND WOMEN

Preventing and responding to violence against children and women has long been at the core of UNICEF's child protection programming. UNICEF and SADC countries are working together to address the intersections of violence against children and violence against women through programming that seeks to transform gender norms. This approach is aligned with the SADC Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender-Based Violence (2018-2030) and guided by UNICEF's current Strategic Plan (2022-2025). It is also informed by a growing regional evidence base on what works to address violence against children and women.

In line with its Child Protection Strategy (2021-2030),<sup>44</sup> UNICEF is working with SADC countries at three levels to achieve the violence-related SDG targets, which call for an end to violence against girls, boys and women:

**1. Universal prevention:** Preventing violence is of utmost importance and requires partnerships to scale up evidence-based interventions for all who need them. These efforts are informed by a regionally adapted application of the global INSPIRE framework<sup>45</sup> of proven strategies to end violence against children and the RESPECT framework for ending violence against women.<sup>46</sup> Core interventions include:

- Scaling up gender-transformative initiatives to support parents and caregivers. These efforts are intended to promote nurturing care, reduce family violence and create more gender-equitable household structures.
- Building healthy, non-violent and gender-equitable relationship skills among adolescent girls and boys through evidence-based initiatives that foster social and behaviour change.
- Making sure all schools are 'Safe to Learn' by adopting policies and systems that protect children.
- Supporting comprehensive legislative, social and educational measures to protect children from violence in digital environments, including online sexual exploitation and abuse.

## UNIVERSAL PREVENTION IN PRACTICE

The Government of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** has implemented a strategy called 'Learning in Complete Security' to combat violence in schools. The approach, carried out with support from UNICEF, uses the school system to deliver interventions on violence against children. Over 100,000 students have been sensitized to the prevention of violence and offered referral pathways for reporting to ensure a continuum of care.

In collaboration with UNICEF, **Mozambique** has undertaken an 'Art for Change' initiative that has trained 33 young artists from Nampula and Zambezia provinces. These artists produced evidence-based content relevant to adolescent well-being in three artistic categories: poetry, theatre and music. Their creations were widely shared on social media platforms: One song, in fact, had more than 1.5 million viewers, highlighting the effectiveness of using art as a tool to convey important messages and capture the attention of young people. In 2022, UNICEF Mozambique played a central role in convening more than 15 partners to reflect on approaches to promoting positive masculinity. The forum created space for intergenerational dialogue on masculinity paradigms, intergender dialogue on gender socialization and on building awareness of the critical role of men in childcare and maternal health. Community mobilization and parenting interventions implemented by partners across sectors focused on the engagement of men and boys in moving towards gender equality.

In 2022 in **Namibia**, the Cybercrime Bill was submitted to the Cabinet with increased provisions for addressing online child sexual exploitation and abuse. UNICEF provided support to the Ministry of Justice to strengthen its approach to addressing the issue. These efforts will inform comprehensive legislative reform on the issue of online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

In **South Africa**, UNICEF continues to explore the use of digital and other innovative means to change social norms and support gender-equitable care and positive parenting. In partnership with Heartlines, a South African NGO, a six-part short film series was screened on the South African Broadcasting Channel to highlight the role of fathers in the care and protection of children. This has been complemented by the development of facilitation guides that will be used across the 200 Father Connect Groups that have been established nationally.

In the **United Republic of Tanzania** to date, some 114,000 caregivers have been equipped with positive parenting skills to help prevent violence against children and create a safe home environment. The initiative is part of a government-led Parenting Education Programme for child protection that is being supported by UNICEF. Informed by the results of an assessment of the programme's effectiveness, a more evidence-based and gender-responsive parenting programme, *Furaha Teens*, is being piloted. This new programme aims to establish stronger connections to the prevention of HIV and intimate partner violence while promoting communication about sexual and reproductive health among parents and adolescents.

PREVENTING  
VIOLENCE IS OF  
UTMOST IMPORTANCE  
AND REQUIRES  
PARTNERSHIPS TO  
SCALE UP EVIDENCE-  
BASED INTERVENTIONS

**2. Responding to and preventing recurrence:** Where children and women are already experiencing violence, UNICEF and SADC Member States are working closely to ensure that response and support services are available to mitigate harm and provide care, support and justice. This includes:

- Supporting the development of national child protection frameworks, interoperable case management systems, and the establishment of referral pathways and child-friendly spaces for reporting violence.
- Improving the coordination of response and support services for violence against women and violence against children. Given the frequent co-occurrence of child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in families, it is essential that social

workers dealing with domestic violence and child protection coordinate their responses to ensure the well-being of entire households.

- Strengthening frontline support to survivors of physical and sexual violence by working with partners to provide mental health and psychosocial support, legal aid, medical care and protection services.

RESPONDING TO  
AND PREVENTING  
THE RECURRENCE OF  
VIOLENCE REQUIRES  
THAT SERVICES  
ARE AVAILABLE TO  
MITIGATE HARM  
AND PROVIDE CARE,  
SUPPORT AND JUSTICE

## PREVENTION AND RESPONSE IN PRACTICE

In **Botswana**, UNICEF and the Government of Japan supported the relaunch of the *E seng Mo ngwaneng* campaign in August 2022. The aim is to raise awareness of violence against children and address social norms and practices that make children vulnerable to violence. Through communication and advocacy initiatives as well as community engagement, the campaign has reached over 250,000 people, including caregivers, parents and children. Campaign platforms included community dialogues, radio and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. The campaign was coupled with interventions to strengthen the capacity of village child protection committees and District Children's Consultative Forums to prevent and respond to cases of violence against children. In addition, community dialogues were held in Okavango, Northeast and Boteti districts, reaching over 3,500 people, including children, village chiefs and child protection committees, religious leaders, social workers, teachers and health workers. UNICEF sought the contributions of various stakeholders in rolling out the campaign, including government officials, civil society organizations, the Botswana Police Services and the private sector.

In the **United Republic of Tanzania**, UNICEF collaborated with the Tanzania Interfaith Partnership to develop a pocketbook on violence prevention for Muslim and Christian faith leaders. More than 4,000 religious and traditional leaders along with other influential community members were provided with an orientation on preventing violence against women and children. As a result, they are now raising awareness in religious settings and the wider community and referring victims to services. In Zanzibar, community sensitization on the prevention and reporting of child abuse was conducted through community meetings, religious settings, theatre groups and community radio across all 11 districts.

**3. Leaving no one behind:** UNICEF and SADC Member States are focusing on prevention and response mechanisms to reach boys, girls and women at greatest risk of violence. These include children in crisis settings, children on the move, children with disabilities, those deprived of parental care and/or experiencing other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Across the region, this work prioritizes:

- Supporting initiatives that empower women and girls, especially the most marginalized. UNICEF is working with SADC Member States and partners to promote and increase girls' access to education and other life opportunities. They are also addressing harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, with the aim of reducing the risk of violence against women and girls.
- Engaging with partners in humanitarian settings characterized by armed conflict, natural disasters or public health emergencies. The aim is to ensure that responses are safe, accessible and accountable to women and children by mitigating the immediate risks of violence.

## 'LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND' IN PRACTICE

Given the complexity of reducing the vulnerability of children – particularly girls – in **Angola**, UNICEF has continued to invest in a comprehensive approach that combines systems strengthening with social and behaviour change. In collaboration with World Vision International and the National Institute for Children, UNICEF conducted qualitative research in 2022 to understand the drivers of violence against children in Angola, including knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, social norms and environmental factors. The aim was to identify the underlying factors that perpetuate sexual violence and child marriage, as perceived by children, adolescents, young people, parents and caregivers. The findings (expected to be published in 2023) will be central to the design and implementation of national social and behaviour change strategies as well as action plans to address harmful norms that contribute to violence against children.

In **Zambia**, major strides have been made to ensure that national legal frameworks on child protection are aligned and consistent with the country's Children's Code and international standards. Towards this end, the social welfare Community and Statutory Case Management guidelines and handbook on violence against children, gender-based violence, migrant children, child offenders, children in alternative care and child marriage were completed in June 2022.

In **Zimbabwe**, UNICEF is providing assistance to strengthen the country's social welfare system. To date, case management officers have been placed in 23 districts, and nearly 4,000 community case workers have been mentored. As a result, 68,000 children, including 7,000 with disabilities, have accessed care and protection services, surpassing the initial target of 65,000. In partnership with civil society organizations, a comprehensive package of services was provided to 38,000 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 who were survivors of gender-based violence.

FOCUS ON PREVENTION  
AND RESPONSE  
MECHANISMS AND  
INITIATIVES TO REACH  
BOYS, GIRLS AND  
WOMEN AT GREATEST  
RISK OF VIOLENCE

## A call to action

SADC Member States are called upon to support progress in ending violence against girls, boys and women through the following high-level actions:

- Generating data and research to inform programmes and track progress. Data from household surveys and administrative sources, underpinned by research, can help in understanding the nature and prevalence of violence against children and women as well as the effectiveness of prevention strategies. States should prioritize filling existing data gaps in order to monitor and report on progress towards violence-related targets of the SDGs.
- Strengthening legislation, policies, budgets and accountability to protect women and children. This includes updating and aligning laws with international and regional standards; clearly mandating the role of line departments in national policy frameworks; and ensuring core violence prevention and response interventions are costed and incorporated into national budgets.
- Building capacity for scaled-up service delivery across sectors. Comprehensive prevention and response to violence requires multisectoral action, inclusive of social welfare, justice, education and the health sectors, among others.
- Engaging with communities, women's organizations, caregivers, children and adolescents on violence prevention. Effective government action needs to be underpinned by broad social mobilization that challenges the social acceptability of violence. Achieving this involves engagement by all levels of society in the promotion of positive social change and gender equality.
- Developing partnerships for coordinated regional and national action. SADC provides a platform to promote common standards and approaches and to exchange experiences in the subregion. Within countries, stakeholders in the UN System, community and faith-based organizations, and the private sector all have a role to play.



## Technical notes

The data presented in this publication are from the most recently available and comparable source identified for each country. Regional aggregates are only presented when the available country data cover at least 50 per cent of the relevant regional population. When this was not possible, weighted averages of the available country data are presented.

Collecting reliable data on violence against children and women is a complex undertaking that raises considerable methodological challenges and ethical issues. When interpreting these data, the recommended approach is to exercise caution and assume that figures underestimate the actual number of children and women affected.

Confidence intervals are not shown in this publication. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting the results since apparent differences among groups or countries may not be significant. However, key messages were developed taking confidence intervals into account; in cases where the title indicates a difference among population groups or countries, it has been confirmed as statistically significant. That said, the observed associations do not imply a causal relationship since the analyses do not control for other potential confounding factors (with the exception of the regression analyses).

### Analytical approach to regression analyses

To explore the relative influence of different risk factors on violent discipline among children, a series of four hierarchical logistic regression models (HLM) were run with children as the unit of analysis. Because prevalence levels of violent discipline are so high (above 60 per cent in all SADC countries with data), there was not enough variance to produce meaningful results for violent discipline overall. Therefore, the results presented in this publication reflect children's experiences of physical punishment as the outcome variable of interest.

Fathers' attitudes towards wife-beating were also initially included as an explanatory variable in Model 2, but created a quasi-separation in all available surveys due to small sample sizes; this variable was therefore excluded from the final analysis. The measure of attitudes towards physical punishment is only administered to mothers or primary caregivers (in the rare cases when the mother is deceased or not living in the household); it was therefore not possible to include a separate variable on fathers' attitudes to physical punishment in the models.

The analysis used the following datasets: MICS 2017-2018 for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MICS 2014 for Eswatini, MICS 2018 for Lesotho, MICS 2018 for Madagascar, MICS 2019-2020 for Malawi and MICS 2019 for Zimbabwe.

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