

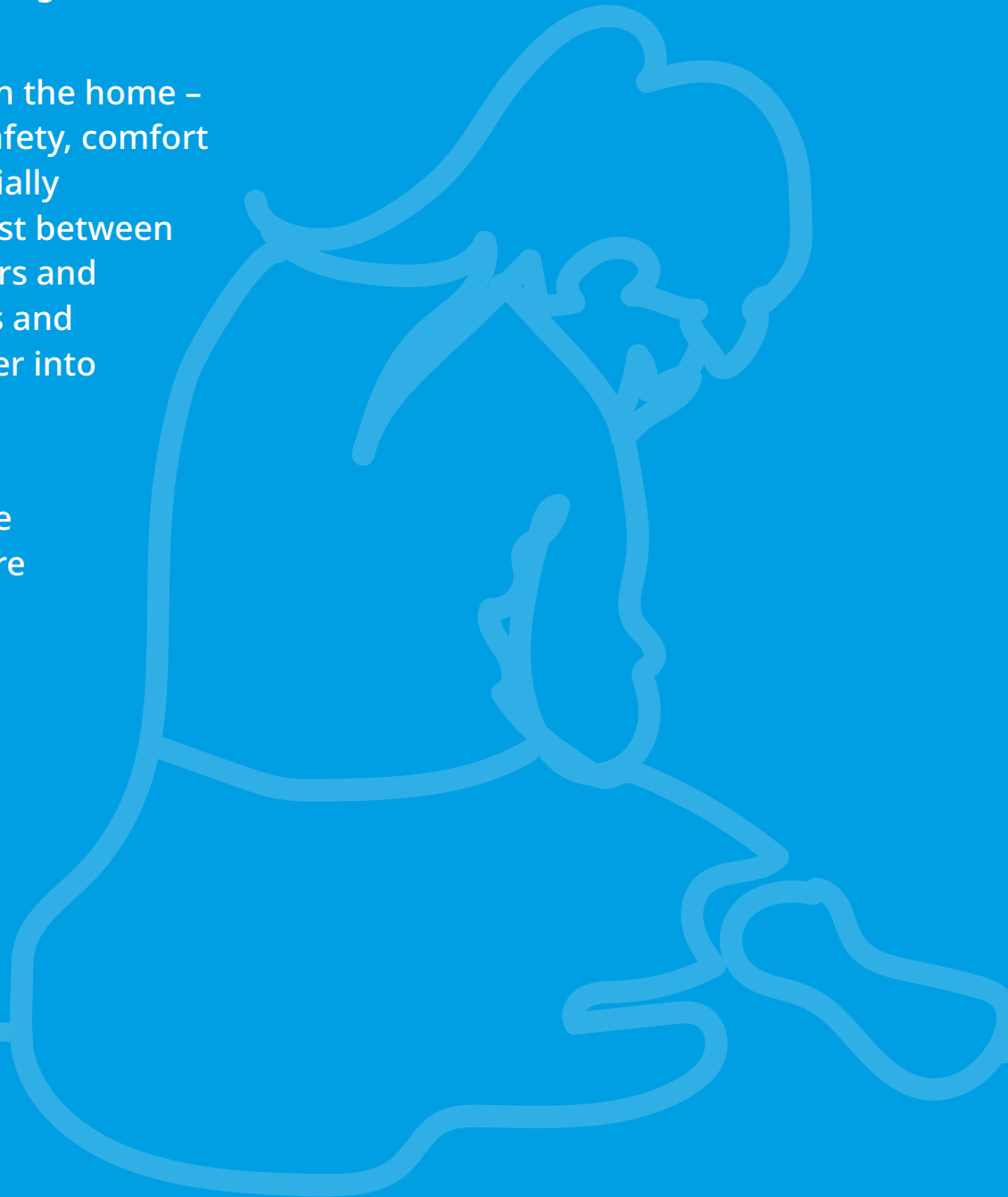
Data Brief on Violence against Children at Home



Violence against children can take many forms and occur in any setting where children spend time.

But when violence occurs in the home – a place that should offer safety, comfort and protection – it is especially damaging: It can erode trust between children and their caregivers and leave deep emotional scars and trauma that often carry over into adulthood.

Even when children do not directly experience violence themselves at home, but are exposed to it among their caregivers, the impact can be equally harmful.



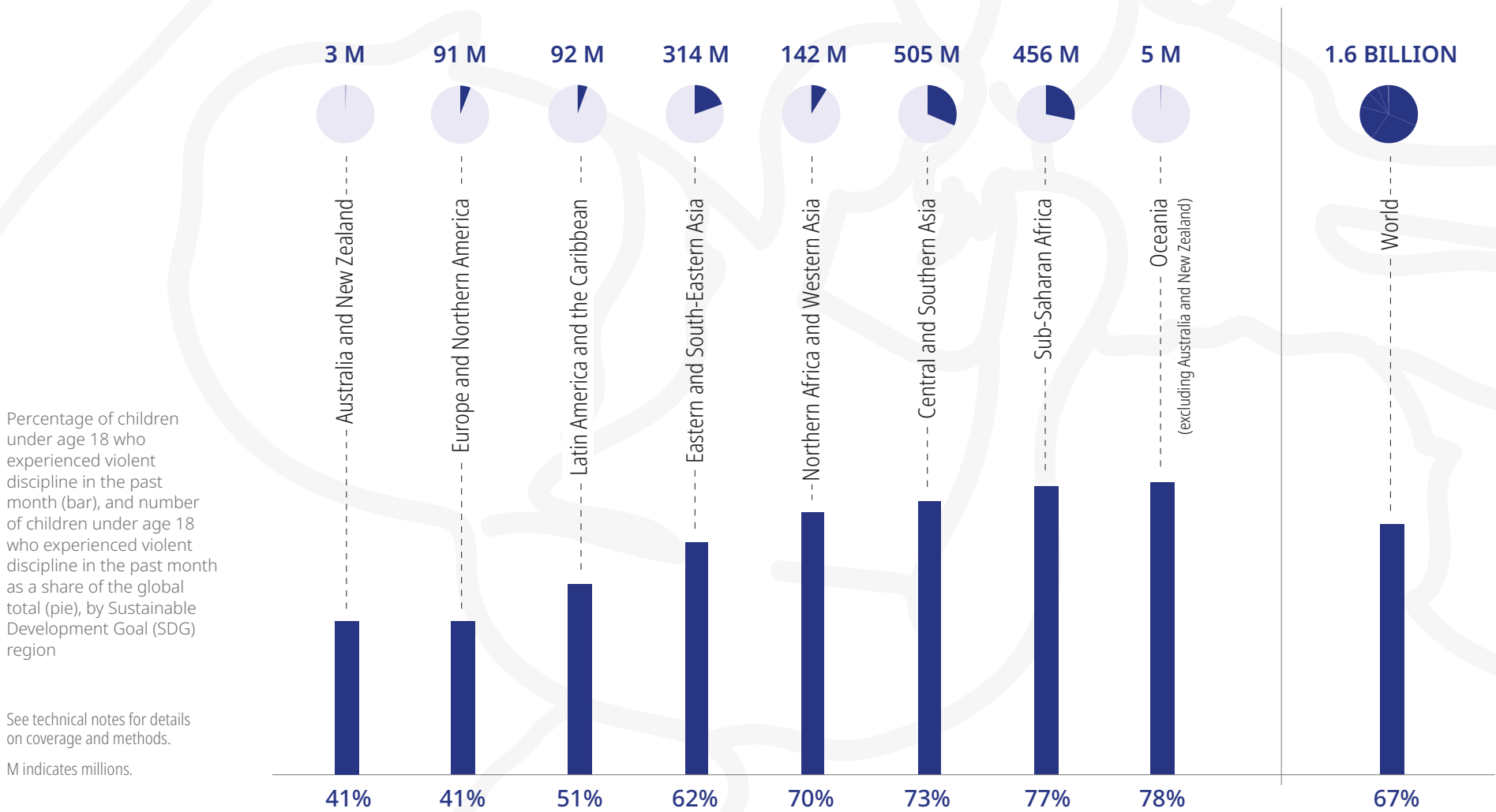
Violent discipline by parents and other caregivers

Supporting the development of self-regulation in children is an integral part of parenting in all countries and cultures. That said, many caregivers rely on violent methods when disciplining children. Caregivers rarely do so with the deliberate intention of causing harm. Rather, violent forms of discipline can oftentimes stem from anger and frustration, lack of understanding of the damage they can cause, or limited familiarity with effective non-violent disciplinary methods.

A large body of evidence confirms that violent discipline is both ineffective and can have negative consequences – ranging from immediate impacts to long-term harm. Yet, such discipline is not always perceived as violence due to prevailing societal and cultural norms and expectations and beliefs around parenting. It is therefore not surprising that violent discipline is the most common and widespread form of violence against children.



Around the world, 1.6 billion children (or 2 in 3) experience violent punishment by caregivers at home. While it is universal in nature, the largest numbers of children affected are found in Central and Southern Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa, which together account for more than half the global burden. In most regions, more than half of children regularly endure physical punishment or psychological aggression in the context of discipline at home



Percentage of children under age 18 who experienced violent discipline in the past month (bar), and number of children under age 18 who experienced violent discipline in the past month as a share of the global total (pie), by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) region

See technical notes for details on coverage and methods.

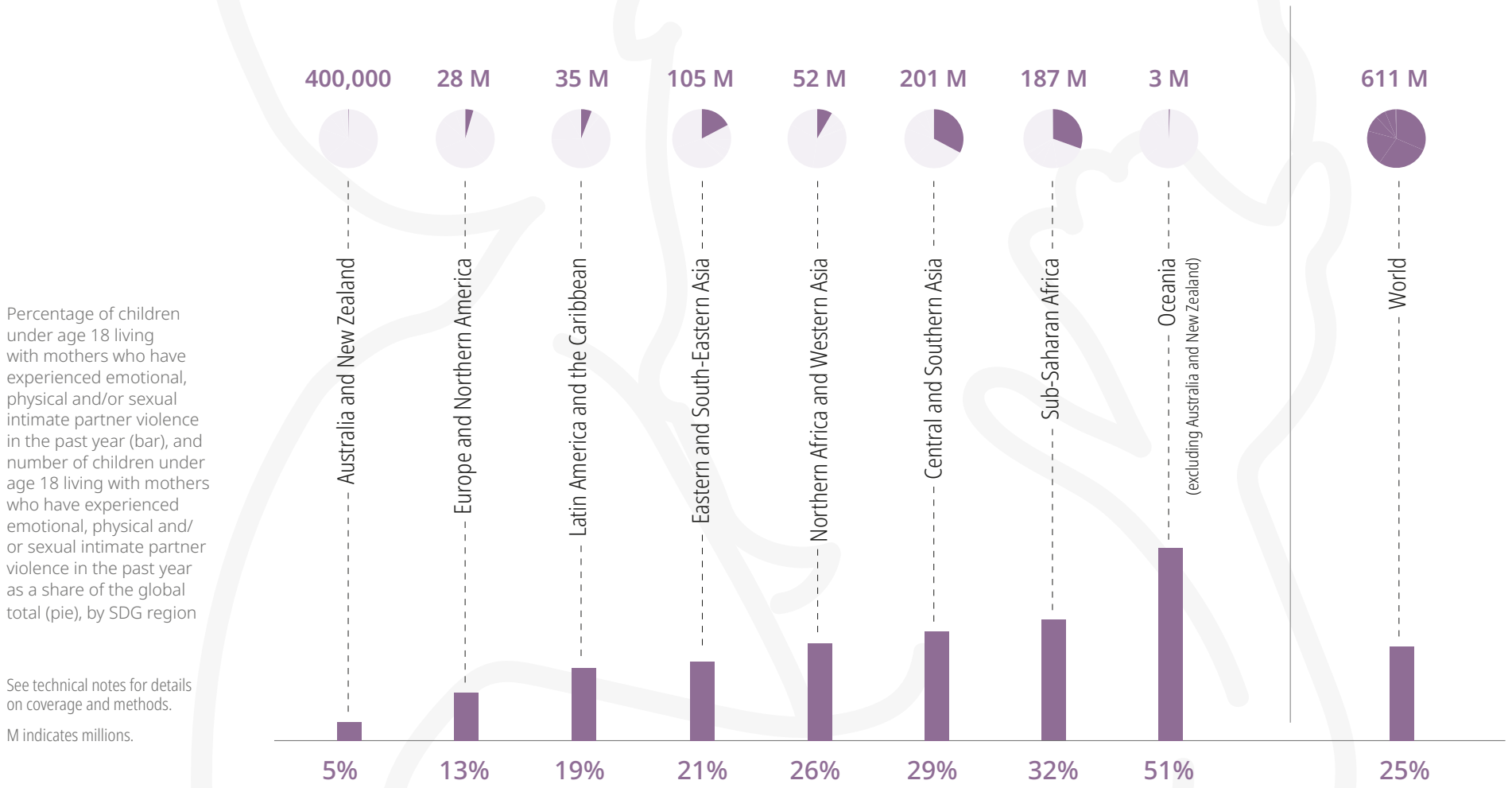
M indicates millions.

Children's exposure to intimate partner violence

Living in violent households is harmful to children even if they do not directly experience violence themselves. Indeed, it is well documented that children who witness intimate partner violence are at heightened risk of carrying violence into adulthood, either as victims or perpetrators.¹



Worldwide, 1 in 4 children (around 610 million) live with mothers who have experienced intimate partner violence within the past year. This figure would be even higher if children exposed to such violence at an earlier point in their lifetime were also counted. While prevalence is highest in Oceania, where just over half of children are living with a mother who has recently experienced intimate partner violence, the burden is greatest in Central and Southern Asia, which accounts for one third of the global burden. Sub-Saharan Africa has the second highest proportion and burden with around 1 in 3 children (about 187 million) living in households where intimate partner violence has recently occurred



Percentage of children under age 18 living with mothers who have experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the past year (bar), and number of children under age 18 living with mothers who have experienced emotional, physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the past year as a share of the global total (pie), by SDG region

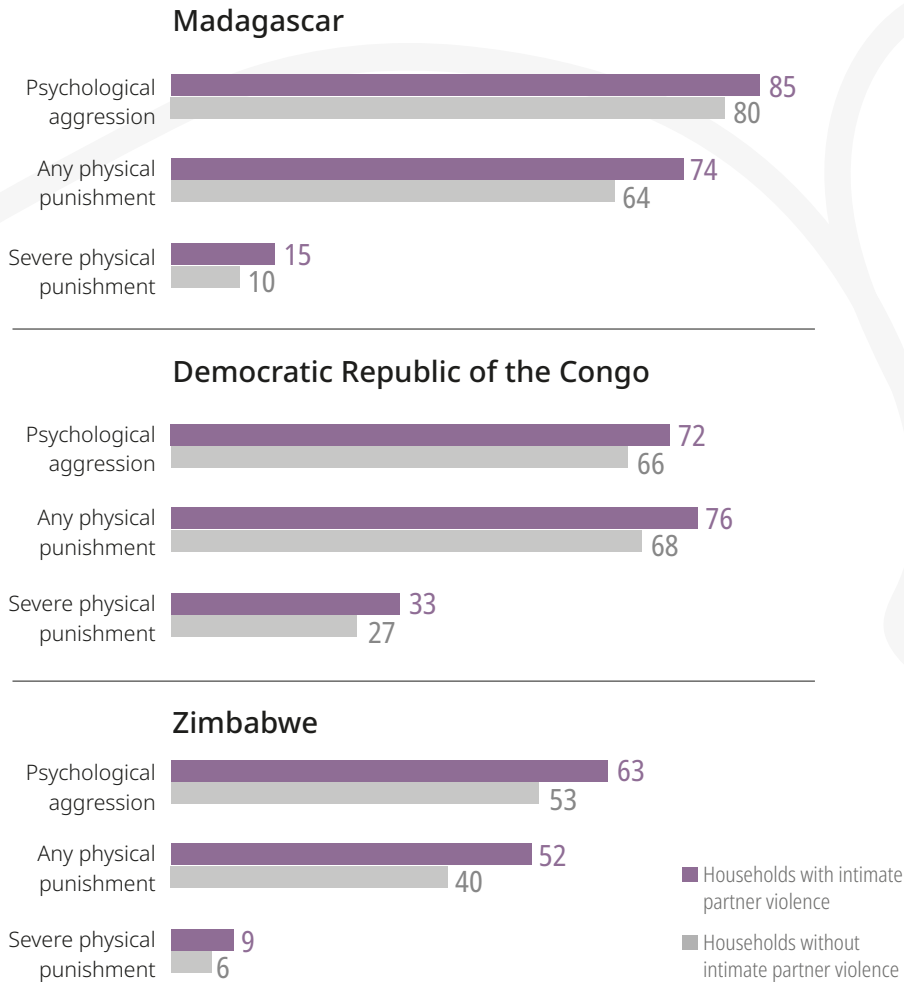
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How violent discipline at home and intimate partner violence intersect

of children under age 18 who experienced

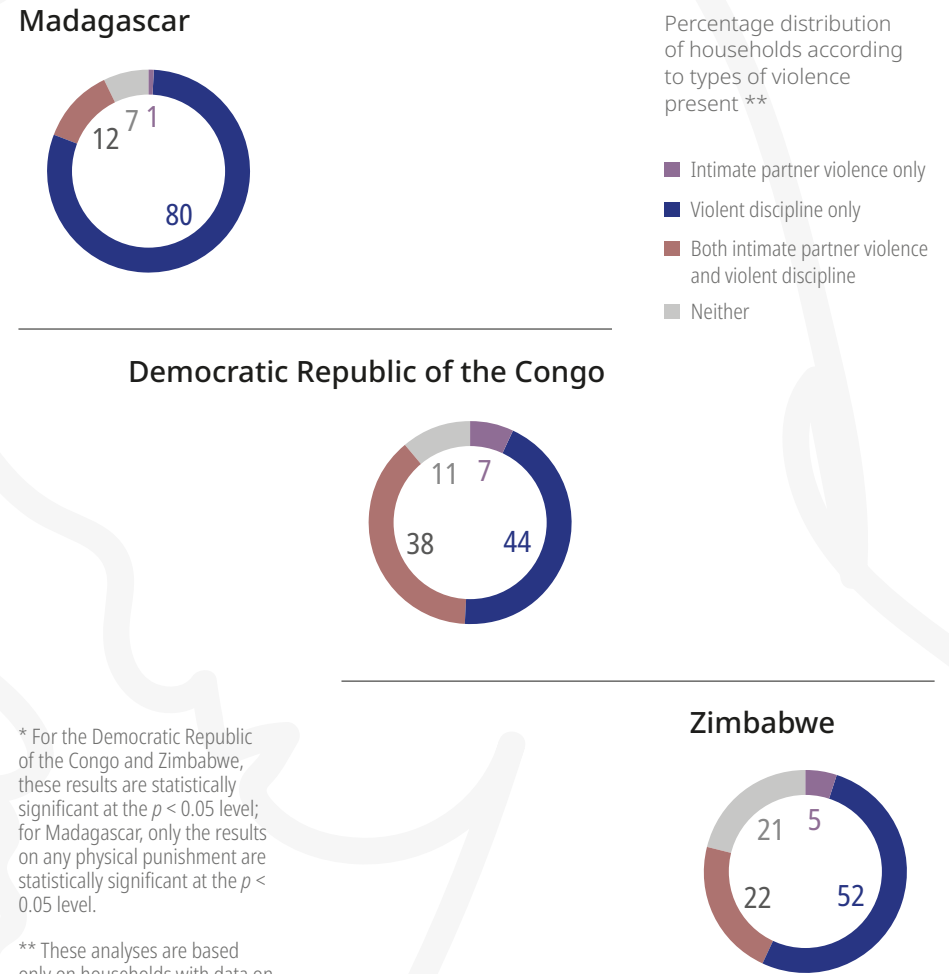
Violence against children and violence against women intersect in a number of ways. One manifestation is when both types of violence occur within the same household. A growing body of research from low- and middle-income countries provides evidence of the co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and violence against children, particularly corporal punishment.²

In some countries in Southern Africa, children living in households affected by intimate partner violence are significantly more likely to experience all types of violent discipline than children living in households where such violence is not present



Percentage of children aged 1 to 14 years who experienced psychological aggression, physical punishment or severe physical punishment in the past month, in households with and without intimate partner violence (defined as any emotional, physical and/or sexual violence by any partner in the past 12 months) *

As illustrative examples in three selected 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 types of violence present **

- Intimate partner violence only
- Violent discipline only
- Both intimate partner violence and violent discipline
- Neither

* 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.

** These analyses are based only on households with data on both child discipline and intimate partner violence.

SOURCE: United Nations Children's Fund, *Violence against Girls, Boys and Women in Southern Africa: A statistical profile*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

Technical notes

Violent discipline by parents and other caregivers

Definitions

The definition of violent discipline refers to any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression experienced in the month preceding the survey. Physical punishment includes 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. Psychological aggression includes shouting, yelling or screaming at a child as well as calling a child offensive names, such as 'dumb' or 'lazy'.

Data sources

Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) are the main data source for the majority of comparable national-level 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.³ The MICS module includes a standard set of questions covering non-violent forms of discipline, psychological aggression and physical means of punishing children between the ages of 1 and 14 years. The questions are administered to the mother or primary caregiver of the child and ask about disciplinary methods used by any adults living in the household within the past month. Some Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) as well as other national surveys have included the standard, or an adapted, version of the MICS module.

To complement this and improve coverage for some regions, data from other representative surveys were used for a handful of countries. These included surveys on child maltreatment and violence and other general health surveys that met some predefined criteria.

Coverage and methods

The prevalence of violent discipline at the global level represents a population-weighted average of the regional estimates. The burden figure reflects global prevalence applied to the global population.

The prevalence of violent discipline at the regional level represents population-weighted averages of the national estimates for countries with available data within each region. The burden figure reflects regional prevalence applied to the regional population.

All of the estimates are based on data collected between 2010 and 2024 for a subset of 102 countries covering 52 per cent of the global population of children under age 18. Population coverage was above 50 per cent for all SDG regions with the exception of Central and Southern Asia (18 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (41 per cent) and Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand (18 per cent). Population coverage is lower for these regions due to the lack of nationally representative and comparable data for the most populous country in each region. That said, there is no evidence to suggest that levels of violent discipline, and particularly physical punishment, are significantly lower (or higher) than levels seen in other countries in the same region. It was therefore deemed reasonable to ascribe the regional prevalence to such populous countries with missing data.

Some adjustments were applied to the data to improve comparability and to generate estimates reflecting the experiences of all children under age 18. A systematic adjustment was applied to all data sources to account for data collection on children of varying ages. The available country data from MICS and DHS only capture experiences of children between the ages of 1 and 14 years. However, some data sources include estimates of exposure to disciplinary methods among children of all ages, disaggregated by single years of age. This allowed for a comparison of levels among children aged 1 to 4 years to those under age 1 as well as a comparison of children aged 10 to 14 years to those aged 15 to 17 years, to establish a general pattern of expected levels among the missing age groups. These ratios were then

applied to the global and regional estimates calculated on the basis of the available data to derive estimates for children under age 1 and those aged 15 to 17 years.

Some data sources only captured information about physical punishment. It was therefore necessary in such cases to introduce some adjustment of how much more of the child population was likely to experience violent discipline overall, including forms of psychological aggression, taking into account the observed patterns of discipline by type.

Children's exposure to intimate partner violence

Definitions

These estimates refer to children living with mothers who have experienced any type of intimate partner violence (emotional, physical and/or sexual) in the past year.

Data sources

The main source of comparable country data on intimate partner violence are DHS that included a standard module on domestic violence administered to all girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have ever been married or cohabited (or have ever had a partner, in more recent surveys). Respondents are asked whether they have experienced various forms of emotional, physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former spouse or partner in the 12 months preceding the survey. Some recent MICS have included the standard DHS module.

To construct the indicator on children's exposure to intimate partner violence, data collected as part of the Women's Questionnaire are merged with the household member data using the women's line number in the household listing to link them to their biological children. The prevalence of children living with a mother who has experienced intimate partner violence is then calculated on the basis of their mother's responses to questions about such violence and by applying the household weight.

The denominator used to calculate the estimates is limited to only those children under age 18 whose mothers were selected to be interviewed with the domestic violence module.

Coverage and methods

The prevalence at the global level represents a population-weighted average of the regional estimates, and the burden figure reflects global prevalence applied to the global population. Global estimates are based on data collected between 2000 and 2023 for a subset of 115 countries covering 84 per cent of the global population of children under age 18.

For four regions, where the available country data represent at least 45 per cent of the regional population (Central and Southern Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand; and sub-Saharan Africa), the estimates were calculated as population-weighted averages of survey estimates for countries with available data within each region.

For two regions with low survey data coverage (Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Northern Africa and Western Asia) as well as for two regions for which there was no country with comparable survey data (Australia and New Zealand and Europe and Northern America), an alternate methodology was used. For these four regions, the estimates were based on the latest interagency modelled estimates⁴ of past-year intimate partner violence among ever-married/ever-partnered girls and women aged 15 to 49 years, with adjustments applied to account for two key differences (described below). These estimates of past-year intimate partner violence are based on data representing at least 50 per cent of the female population in each of the four regions.

The first adjustment was designed to align the definition of violence. While the interagency estimates reflect girls' and women's experiences of two types of intimate partner violence (physical or sexual), the estimates presented here also include a third type (emotional). An analysis of countries with complete data on all three types revealed that the inclusion of emotional violence increased total levels of intimate partner violence in all cases, with the largest proportional impact in countries with low levels of physical or sexual violence, and a smaller proportional impact in

countries with higher levels of physical or sexual violence. At the regional level, interagency estimates of intimate partner violence were adjusted to reflect the addition of emotional violence, with the size of the adjustment inversely proportional to the prevalence.

The second adjustment was designed to account for the difference in the distribution of children compared to women in households where intimate partner violence is present. An analysis of countries with complete data on children and women revealed that the distribution of children is slightly skewed towards households with intimate partner violence, so levels of such violence among women will translate to somewhat higher levels of exposure to such violence among children.

Endnotes

1. Holt, Stephanie, Helen Buckley and Sadhbh Whelan, 'The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children and Young People: A review of the literature', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 32, no. 8, August 2008, pp. 797–810; Whitfield, Charles L., et al., 'Violent Childhood Experiences and the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Adults: Assessment in a large health maintenance organization', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2003, pp. 166–185.
2. Abdel-Fatah, Noura Anwar, 'Determinants of Severe Physical Disciplinary Practices against Children in Egypt', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 111, 2001, article 104821; Bott, Sarah, et al., 'Co-Occurring Violent Discipline of Children and Intimate Partner Violence against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A systematic search and secondary analysis of national datasets', *BMJ Global Health*, vol. 6, no. 12, 2021, e007063; Pearson, Isabelle, et al., 'The Co-Occurrence of Intimate Partner Violence and Violence against Children: A systematic review on associated factors in low- and middle-income countries', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2023, pp. 2097–2114.
3. Straus, Murray A., et al., 'Identification of Child Maltreatment with the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales: Development and psychometric data for a national sample of American parents', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 22, no. 11, 1998, pp. 249–270.
4. Note that global and regional estimates of intimate partner violence in the past year tend to be lower than estimates of children's exposure to such violence since the former include girls' and women's experiences of physical and/or sexual (and not emotional) violence. See: World Health Organization, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2023: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and non-partner sexual violence against women*, WHO, Geneva, 2025. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

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