

# Policy Brief: Investment in nationally representative data on violence against children in low- and middle-income countries

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## Overview

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often have a high prevalence of violence and a high percentage of the population below the age of 18. As a result, violence poses a disproportionate burden on long-term health and development. Accurate data on which factors are associated with violence are key in tailoring prevention efforts to reduce violence against children and adolescents.

## Methodology

This policy brief is based upon a global systematic review and meta-analysis of factors associated with physical, emotional, and sexual violence against children in LMICs (1). This review was the first to identify the relative importance of factors associated with violence in LMICs worldwide. In total, 151 unique data sets from 75 countries formed the basis of the analysis.

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## Key findings

**FINDING 1:** Poverty, female gender, and low educational attainment of adult relatives and caregivers are key factors associated with violence.

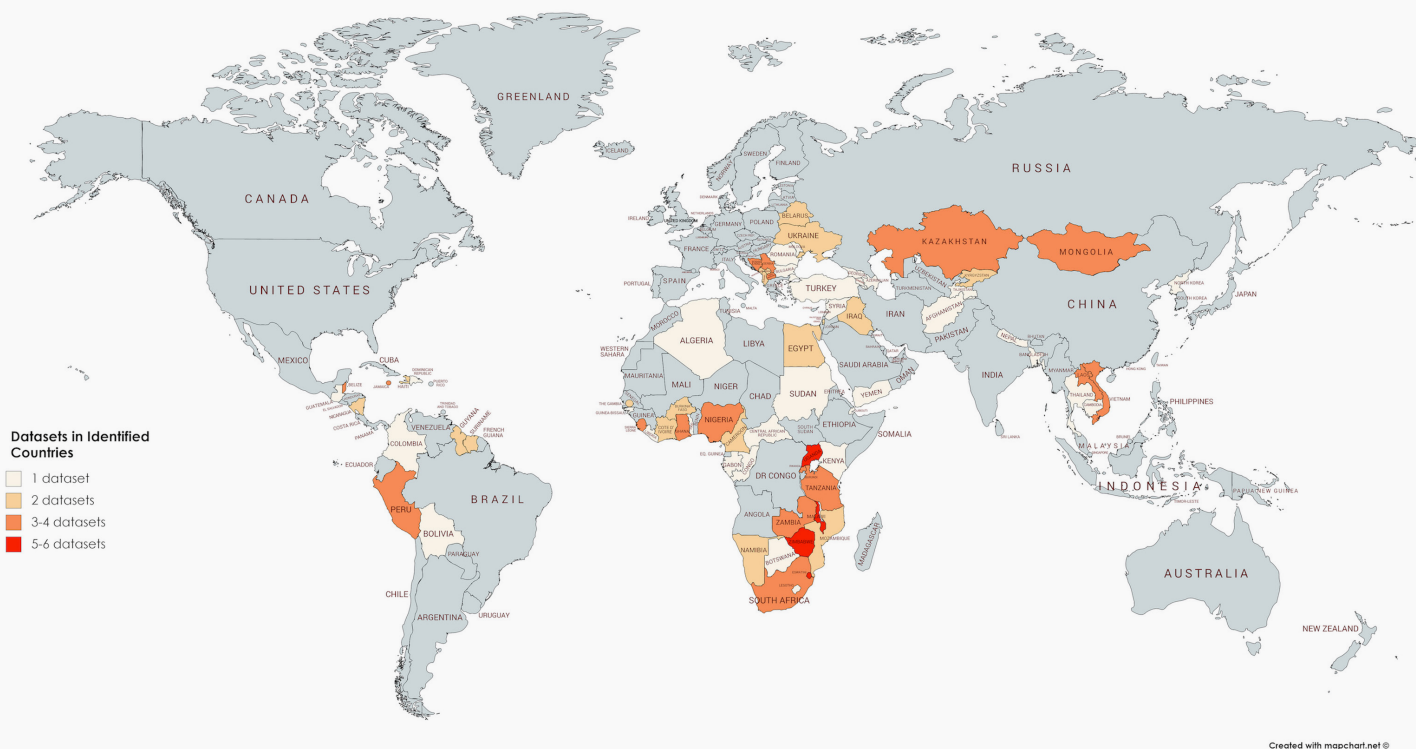
- Emotional violence: Low household wealth, being a girl, and low education attainment among adult members of the household and mothers are factors that co-occur and are significantly associated with a higher prevalence of emotional violence.
- Sexual violence: Being a girl was associated with a higher prevalence of sexual violence.
- Physical violence: No specific factors identified in this review were found to be associated with physical violence.

**FINDING 2:** Availability of nationally representative data is unequal across countries and populations.

- Only 2 of the top 10 most populous LMICs had nationally representative data available during the study's timeframe. Some additional countries, such as China, have conducted national studies but have not released the results.

- The greatest number of surveys—68 surveys in total—was conducted in the Africa region, and the Americas have conducted a relatively high number of surveys (23 in total). Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific each collected only four surveys (see Figure 1).
- Data availability was skewed towards upper and lower middle-income countries; only 18 low-income countries have conducted nationally representative surveys.
- Nearly all studies estimated violence for the general population of children in households or schools. Representative information on subpopulations of children (7 studies) or data disaggregated by gender (10 studies) were less common.
- Factors documented in each dataset varied considerably, leading to an inability to assess the associations between all identified factors and violence across countries.

FIGURE 1. Map of the number of included data sets per country



**FINDING 3:** Not all forms of violence have equal evidence.

- The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) was the most commonly implemented survey, followed by the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). These surveys solely documented physical and emotional violence in this review.

- Sexual violence was the least documented form of violence. Only 19 studies documented factors associated with sexual violence at the national level, despite the existence of comprehensive violence surveys, such as the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS), which captures information on all forms of violence.



## Policy recommendations

### Recommendation 1:

#### ALIGN NATIONAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PLANS TO EVIDENCE FROM NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SURVEYS:

A joint approach that prioritizes social protection and economic development, gender equality, and parental/caregiver support to change social norms around discipline should be considered for preventing emotional violence against children. Shifts in social norms and cultures of impunity and reforms of criminal justice systems are essential in reducing sexual violence against girls on the population level. A broad range of characteristics and experiences should be considered in building physical violence prevention strategies, with a specific eye towards local evidence specific to each location. INSPIRE (2) is a key technical package that can support planning of evidence-based strategies and interventions to target these factors.

### Recommendation 2:

#### ENSURE THAT DATA ARE CURRENT, ACCURATE, AND REPRESENTATIVE:

National governments and donors should consider investing in representative surveys on violence against children and using standardized data collection tools on child violence. The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (3) provides a comprehensive methods menu that is useful in planning and comparing costs across violence survey designs. Priority data collection should occur in countries that have not yet implemented nationally representative studies, but in general, data must be current to be accurate. We encourage regular

collection of nationally representative survey data to support surveillance, including in humanitarian contexts (4).

Data should include information disaggregated by gender and on important subpopulations of children that have vulnerability to violence, such as children with disabilities and sexual and gender minorities. In turn, policies must be multitiered to prevent violence among each segment of the population, and funding must be earmarked for programming and progress monitoring.

### Recommendation 3:

#### COLLECT INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

Information on physical, emotional, and sexual violence should be included as part of routine data collection. We suggest use of comprehensive violence surveys like the VACS to document factors associated with multiple forms of violence or the inclusion of additional questions to supplement other national surveys, such as the MICS and the DHS. Sexual violence is stigmatized in most societies, and a lack of equal documentation risks further invisibility and improper programmatic and policy responses.

# References

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