

Violence Against Children Brief

March 2025

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Background

The release of the 2022-23 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS 2022) provides an opportunity to review the situation of children in Mozambique. To this end, UNICEF has produced a series of thematic briefs that present key child-related information from this survey with a view to strengthening evidence-based policy making.



SDG Target 16.2

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

Violence against children is endemic in Mozambique. Around 1 in 3 boys experience physical violence, and around 1 in 7 girls experience physical violence before the age of 18 years¹. Unfortunately, this violence is typically experienced in the home, where children ought to feel most protected, and often at the hands of their primary caregivers, who ought to be providing children with a caring and nurturing environment to ensure their full development. Experiencing violence in childhood has severe consequences for the child's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, physical health, cognitive development, and educational performance. It can also have intergenerational



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effects, with children who experience violence being more likely to enact it as adults.

As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Government of Mozambique has committed to protecting children. This commitment is further enshrined in Articles 47 and 121 of the Constitution, as well as in several strategic documents, including the Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child 2008 (Child Rights Law hereafter) which protects children from abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. Government has also drafted the third National Action Plan for Children 2023-2033 (PNAC III), which outlines specific strategies for combatting violence against children.

¹ Mozambique Violence Against Children and Youth Survey, 2019

1 Violence against children in Mozambique

Key fact: According to the DHS 2022, 1 in 10 children in Mozambique experienced severe physically violent discipline in the month preceding the survey.



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The DHS 2022 shows that 55% of all children aged 1-14 years experienced some form of violent discipline in the month preceding the survey. This includes around 52% of children experiencing psychologically aggressive discipline – including being shouted at or called names; and around 32% of children experiencing physically violent discipline – including being shaken, spanked, hit on the arm or leg, hit with a belt or hard object, hit or slapped in the face, or

beaten. Particularly concerning is the fact that 1 in 10 children routinely experience severe physically violent discipline – being hit or slapped in the face, or beaten. Polyvictimization – the experience of multiple forms of violence – is also a significant issue. Among children experiencing severe physically violent discipline, 84% will also experience other forms of violent discipline, while 85% will experience psychological aggression.

Figure 1: Rates of violent discipline, disaggregated by type among children aged 1-14 years (2022)

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN THAT HAVE EXPERIENCED VARIOUS TYPES OF DISCIPLINE

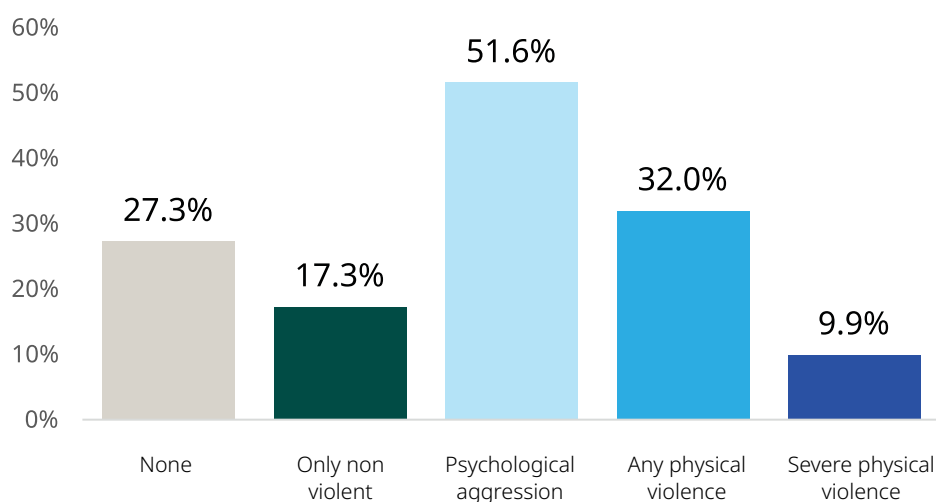


Figure 2: Rates of violent discipline among children aged 1-14 years (2022)

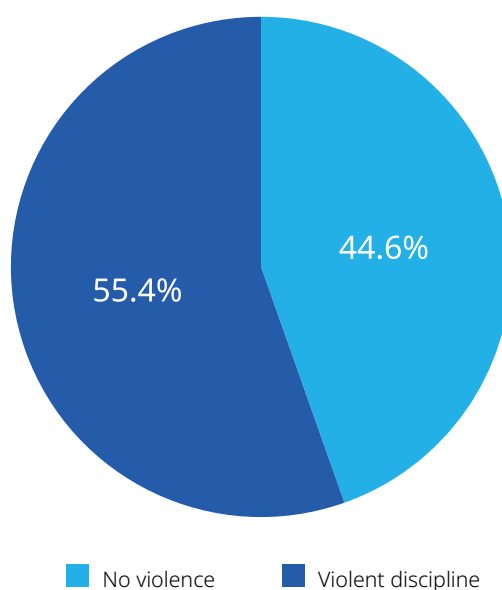


Figure 3: Rates of violent discipline, disaggregated by sub-type among children aged 1-14 years (2022)

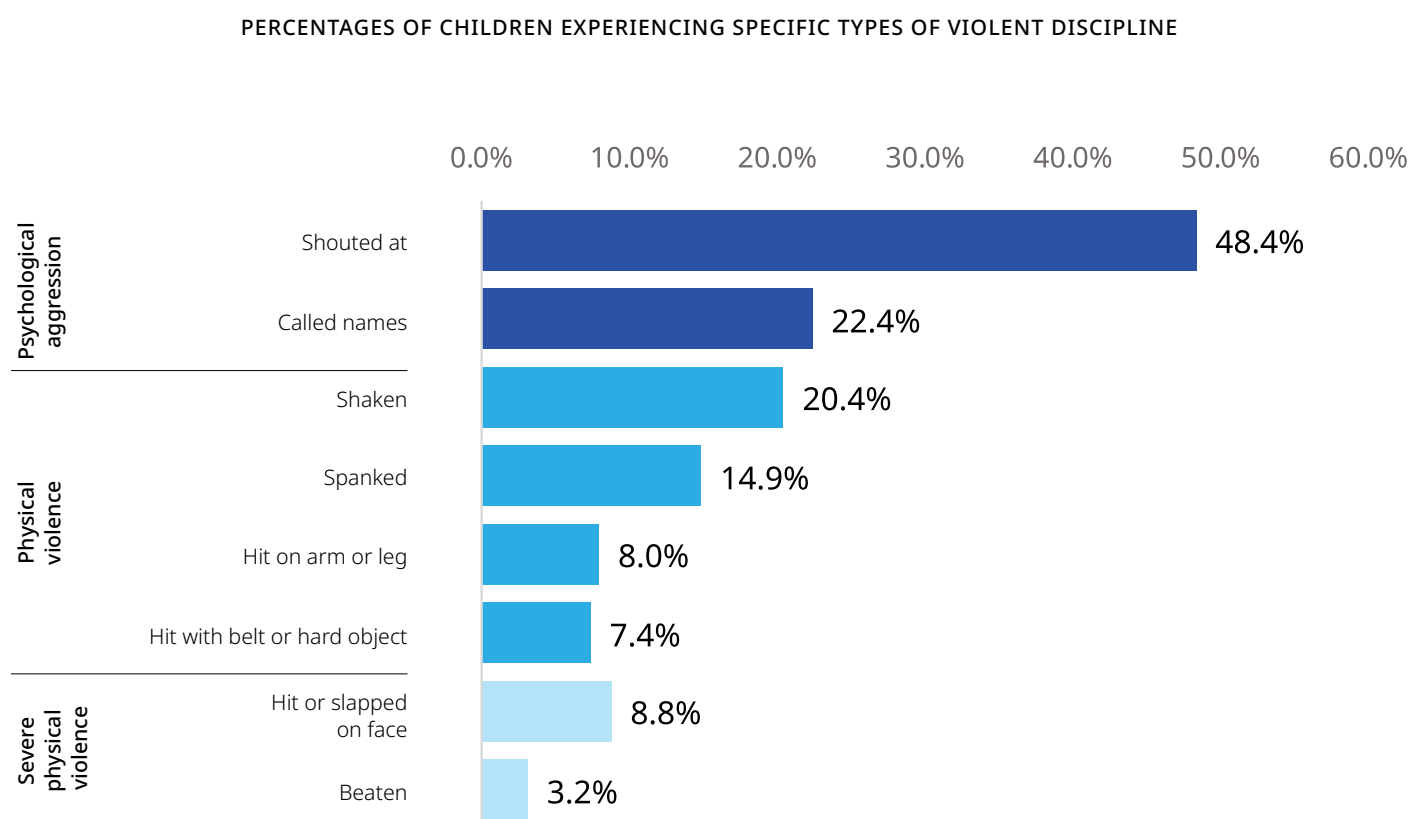


Figure 4: Co-tabulations of types of discipline experienced by children in Mozambique (2022)

		WERE ALSO DISCIPLINED THIS WAY			
		Non Violent discipline	Psychological violence	Less severe physical violence	Severe physical violence
CHILDREN DISCIPLINED IN THIS WAY	Non Violent discipline	100%	67%	43%	13%
	Psychological violence	79%	100%	53%	15%
	Less severe physical violence	87%	89%	100%	26%
	Severe physical violence	86%	85%	84%	100%



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2 Disaggregated trends in VAC

Key fact: According to the DHS 2022, 5 in 10 children under the age of 5 years in Mozambique experience routine violent discipline.

Rates and types of violence experienced by children differ according to socio-economic, geographic and demographic factors.

Socio-economic: More than half of children living in households across all five wealth quintiles experience routine violent discipline. This indicates that violent discipline of children is endemic across Mozambican society, regardless of socio-economic status. In fact, data from the DHS shows rates of violent discipline are lowest among households from the lowest wealth quintile (53%), increasing gradually through the income quintiles up until

the second-richest quintile, where rates of violent discipline are highest (58%), before dropping off marginally in the richest income quintile (56%).

Geographic: Overall rates of violent discipline vary significantly across provinces, from a high of 84% in Inhambane, to a low of 39% in Zambezia. Rates of psychological aggression in each province closely match overall incidence of violent discipline, ranging from a high of 79% in Inhambane to a low of 33% in Zambezia. Children in Inhambane also experience the highest rates of physically violent discipline (47%), while rates of physically violent discipline are lowest in Maputo City (17%). Maputo City also exhibits the lowest rate of severe physically violent discipline (3%), while rates in Manica are highest (21%).

Violent discipline of children, both overall and within the various sub-categories, is distributed evenly across the urban-rural divide, again illustrating the endemic nature of violent discipline across Mozambique..

Figure 5: Rates of violent discipline by wealth quintile (2022)

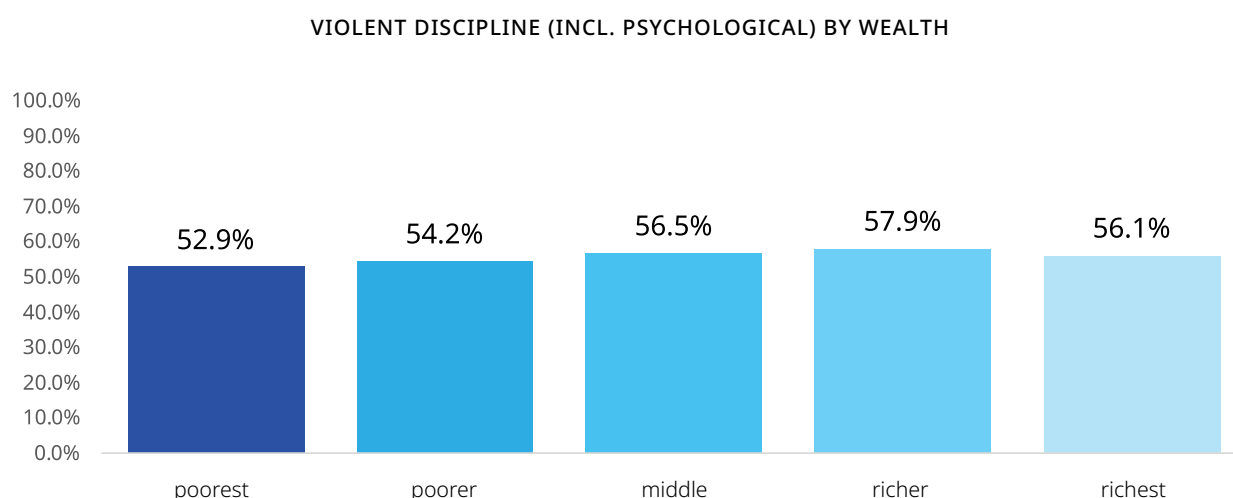


Figure 6: Rates of violent discipline, by type and location (2022)

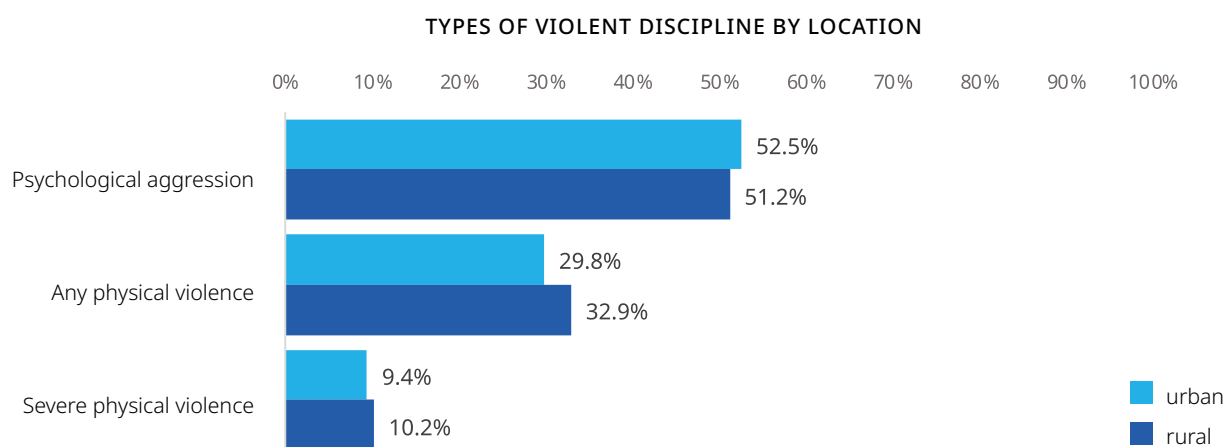


Figure 7: Rates of violent discipline, by type and province (2022)

PROVINCE	PSYCHOLOGICAL AGGRESSION	ANY PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	SEVERE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	ANY VIOLENT DISCIPLINE
Niassa	54%	26%	8%	57%
Cabo Delgado	51%	44%	18%	57%
Nampula	54%	32%	8%	57%
Zambezia	33%	26%	8%	39%
Tete	48%	37%	12%	51%
Manica	65%	40%	21%	66%
Sofala	46%	23%	7%	48%
Inhambane	79%	47%	9%	84%
Gaza	51%	27%	15%	56%
Maputo	78%	36%	6%	80%
Cidade de Maputo	43%	17%	3%	46%

Demographic: Rates of violent discipline are fairly uniform across genders, although boys are slightly more likely than girls to experience all three forms of violent discipline.

Rates of violent discipline increase with age between the ages of 1 and 4 years, before plateauing between 5 and 12 years, and then declining thereafter. The rates of physically violent discipline among children under the age of 5 years is of particular concern, given the severely detrimental impacts this can have on younger children. Moreover, such practice is in direct contravention of the Child Rights Law, which explicitly states that no discipline is justified if, by their tender age, the child is unable to understand its purpose².

² Law for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child No. 7/2008

Figure 8: Rates of violent discipline, by type and gender (2022)

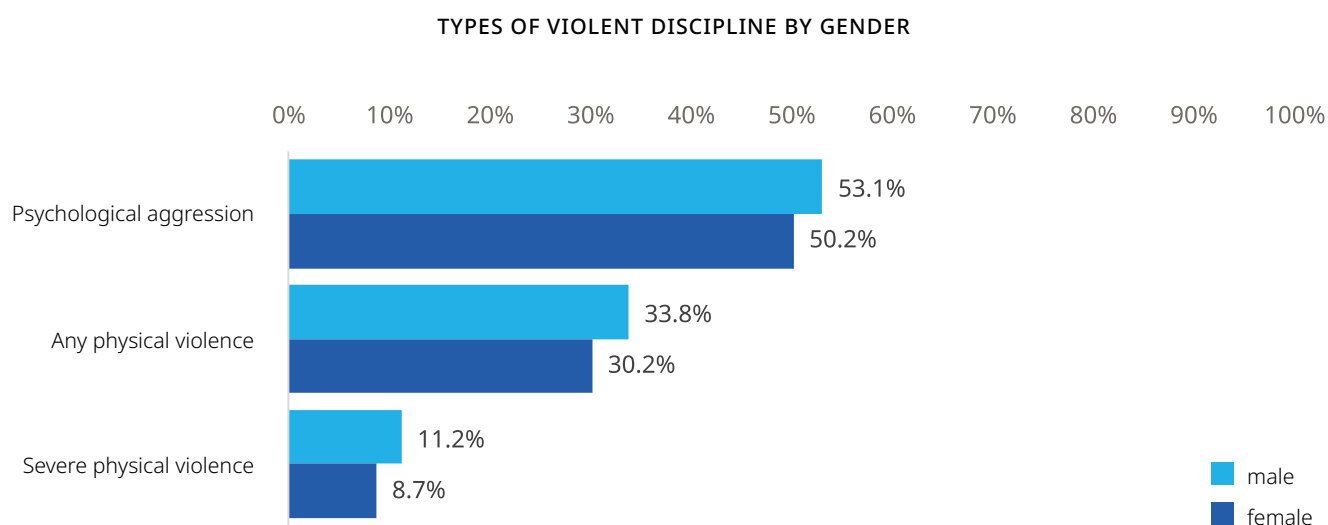
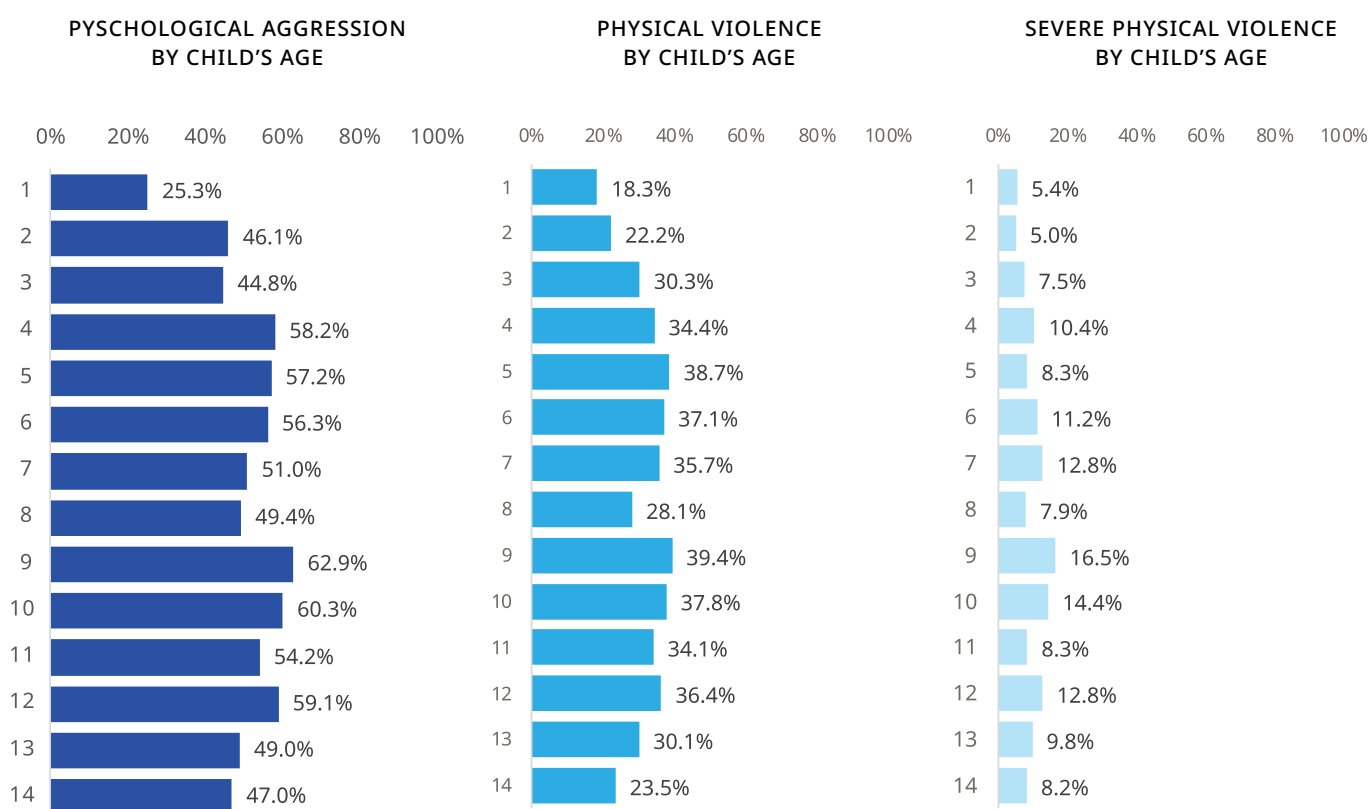


Figure 9: Rates of psychological (a), physical (b) and severe physical violence (c), by age (2022)



3 Key determinants of VAC in Mozambique

Key fact: According to the DHS 2022, mother's age at birth and beliefs around the use of violence are key determinants of violent discipline of children in Mozambique.

Mother's age at birth: Rates of all three categories of violent discipline are highest among children born to mothers that were aged 18 years or younger at the time of birth. These rates decrease with the mother's age at birth across all three categories. This suggests that teenage pregnancy is a key determinant of violence against children, and so policies to prevent child marriage³, delay sexual debut and pregnancy,

and provide psychosocial and parenting support to adolescent mothers, will have the added benefit of reducing violence against children among children in the next generation.

Beliefs around use of violence: Attitudes regarding the necessity of physical punishment for raising children⁴ is a key determinant of subsequent violent discipline. 50% of children whose parents believe that physical punishment is unnecessary to raise, educate and bring up a child properly experience routine violent discipline, compared to 61% of children whose parents are unsure, and 75% of children whose parents believe such punishment is necessary. This suggests that positive parenting programmes, and interventions which seek to amend knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding violent discipline are important for reducing rates of VAC in Mozambique.

Figure 10: Rates of violent discipline, by type and mother's age at birth (2022)

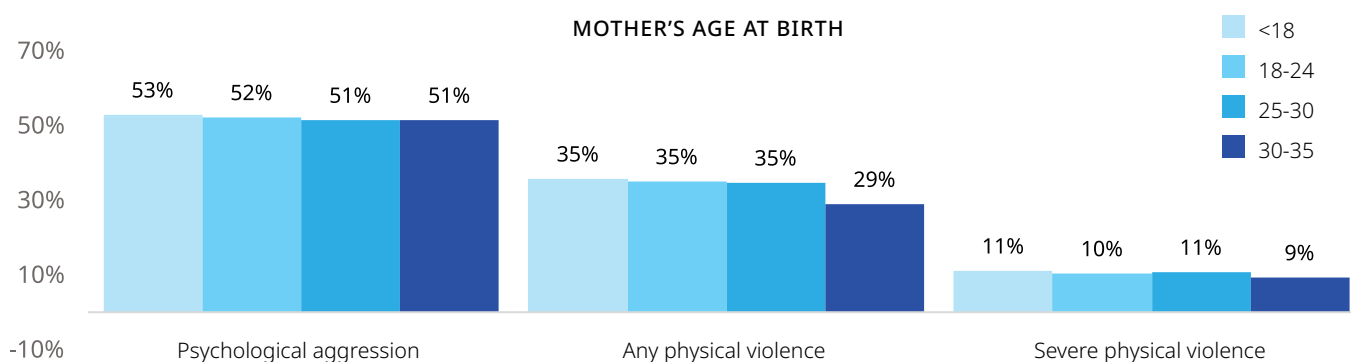
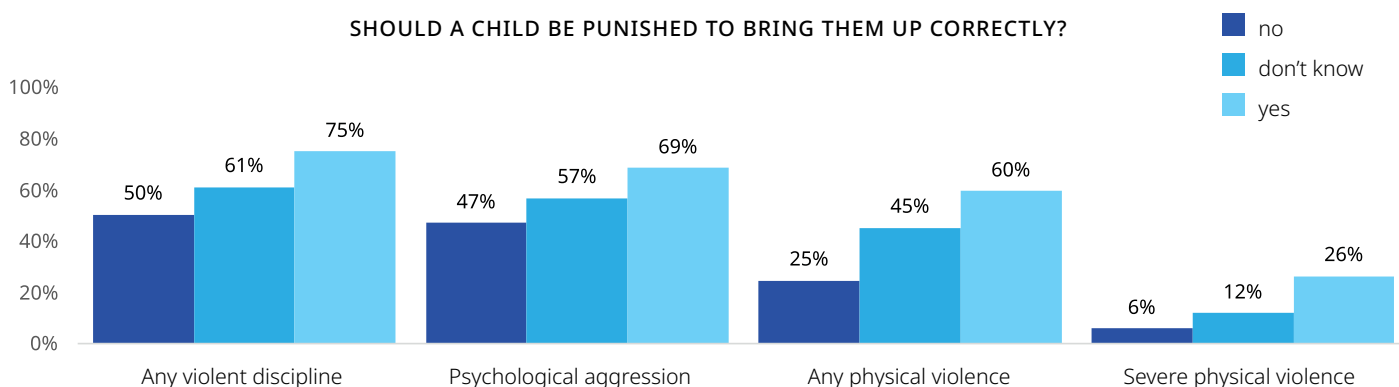


Figure 11: Rates of violent discipline, by type and parental attitudes to physical punishment (2022)



³ See Thematic Brief #1 in this series, on Ending Child Marriage

⁴ The DHS 2022 includes a Child Discipline module which asks "Do you believe that in order to bring up, raise, or educate a child properly, the child needs to be physically punished?"

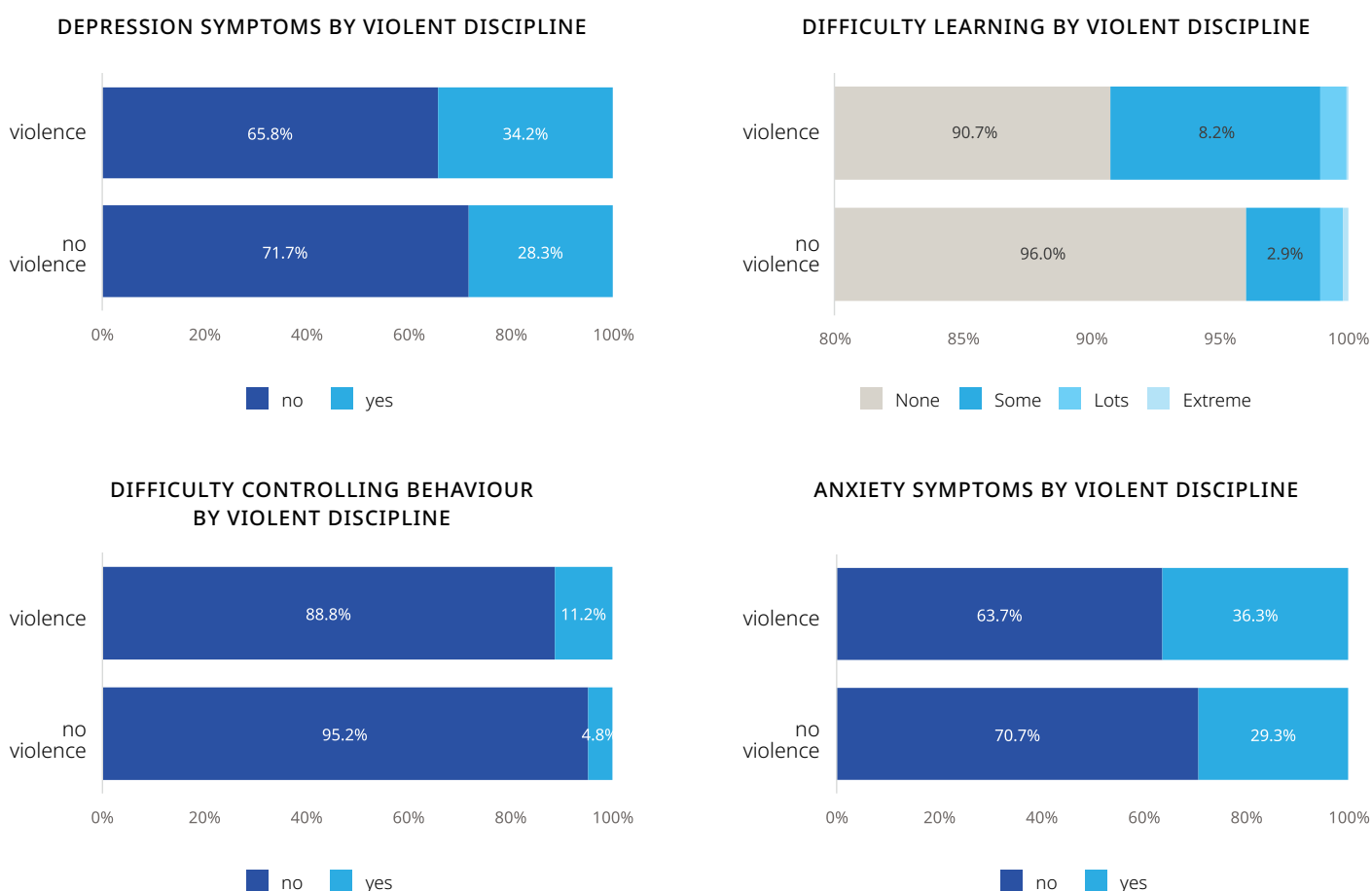
4 Impact of VAC in Mozambique

Key fact: According to the DHS 2022, exposure to violent discipline is associated with increased likelihood of behavioural and developmental problems, anxiety, and depression among children in Mozambique.

Exposure to violence has been shown to negatively affect children's mental health, cognitive and psychosocial development, and results in increased risks of anxiety, depression and behavioural problems. DHS 2022 shows that exposure to violent discipline among children has similar impacts. Rates of learning

difficulties are more than two times higher among children who are exposed to violent discipline (9%) compared to those who are not (4%). Impacts are also evident in terms of behavioural problems – rates of problems with behaviour control among children exposed to violent discipline are 11%, compared to rates of 5% among those not exposed to violent discipline. These negative impacts also manifest in children's mental health and wellbeing. Rates of anxiety symptoms among children exposed to violent discipline are 36%, compared to rates of 29% among their counterparts who do not experience violent discipline. Similarly, for depression, rates are higher among violently-disciplined children (34%) than among their counterparts who are not exposed to violence (28%).

Figure 12: Impact of violent discipline (2022)



Proposed Policy Priorities

1. Strengthen the policy framework to protect children from violence.

The Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child 2008 makes an allowance for justifiable discipline in accordance with the child's "age, physical and mental condition" (Article 24). This allowance, along with the allowances made in Article 51 of the Regulation on Basic Education and Article 179 of the Penal Code, serve as justifications for the use of excessive violent discipline of children. These Laws should be amended to more adequately protect children from violent forms of discipline. Government should also fast-track the adoption and implementation of PNAC III and its various measures to combat violence against children.

2. Parenting programmes and social behaviour change.

Parental and caregiver attitudes on the necessity of physically violent discipline in properly raising and educating children are closely aligned with actual use of physically violent discipline, and particularly severely physically violent discipline, which is particularly detrimental for children. Policy should therefore focus on interventions which seek to improve knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on the harms of violent discipline and the benefits of non-violent forms of discipline. Positive parenting programmes, which promote healthy relationships and the use of non-violent measures in managing children's behaviour, are a key intervention.

3. Preventing child marriage and delaying childbearing.

Early childbearing – having a mother younger than 18 years – is a key risk factor for exposure to childhood violence, as well as several other negative outcomes, including neonatal and child mortality⁵. Child marriage is, in turn, a key determinant of early childbearing. Policy should therefore focus on interventions to prevent child marriage and delay childbearing, including interventions to keep girls in school, expansion of access to adolescent-friendly health services, and strengthening the enforcement of laws to prevent child marriage.

⁵ See Thematic Brief #1 in this series, on Ending Child Marriage; and Thematic Brief #11, on Child Mortality

for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

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In more than 190 countries and territories.

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The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

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