

## VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD: KEY FACTS

Violence against children is ubiquitous. In 2015, at least three out of four of the world’s children – an estimated 1.7 billion – had experienced some form of inter-personal violence<sup>1</sup> in a previous year.<sup>2</sup> When the cumulative impact of violence is considered, almost no children – whether they live in rich countries or poor, in the global North or South – experience violence-free childhoods.<sup>3</sup>

The extent of data gaps makes it difficult to form an integrated view of childhood violence. Yet without such a view, it is difficult to stimulate a global conversation about ending violence. To improve on this, the *Ending Violence in Childhood* Report uses the econometric method of multiple imputation to arrive at national estimates of missing prevalence rates. It has done so for six indicators of violence against children: child homicide, corporal punishment at home, violence among peers (an indicator each on bullying and physical fights), and violence experienced by adolescent girls (physical violence since age 15 and forced sexual violence at any time in their lives). This has enabled Know Violence in Childhood to estimate the scale of childhood violence globally and across regions.<sup>4</sup>

### The scale of violence in childhood

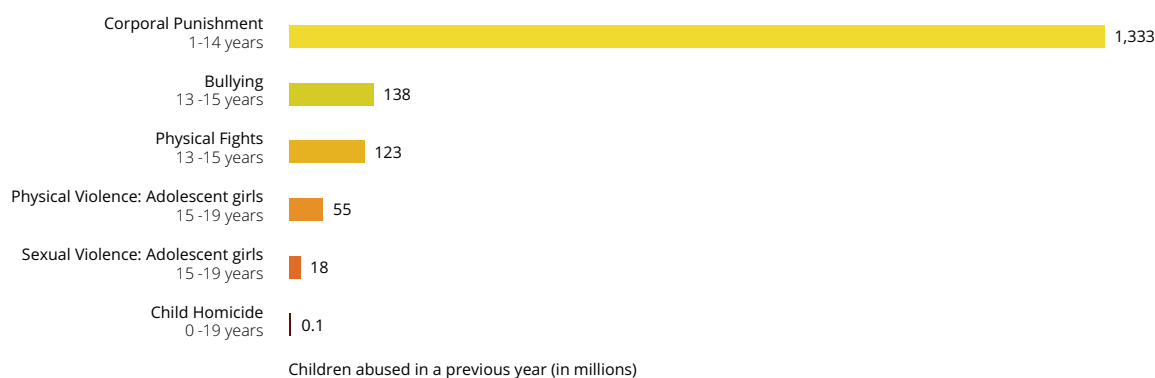
In 2015, 1.7 billion children are estimated to have experienced some form of inter-personal violence in a previous year (FIGURE 1). This figure includes:

- 1.3 billion boys and girls who experienced corporal punishment at home;

- 261 million schoolchildren who experienced peer violence; and
- 100,000 children who were victims of homicide.

It also includes 18 million adolescent girls aged 15–19 who had ever experienced sexual abuse; and 55 million adolescent girls in the same age-group, who had experienced physical violence since age 15.

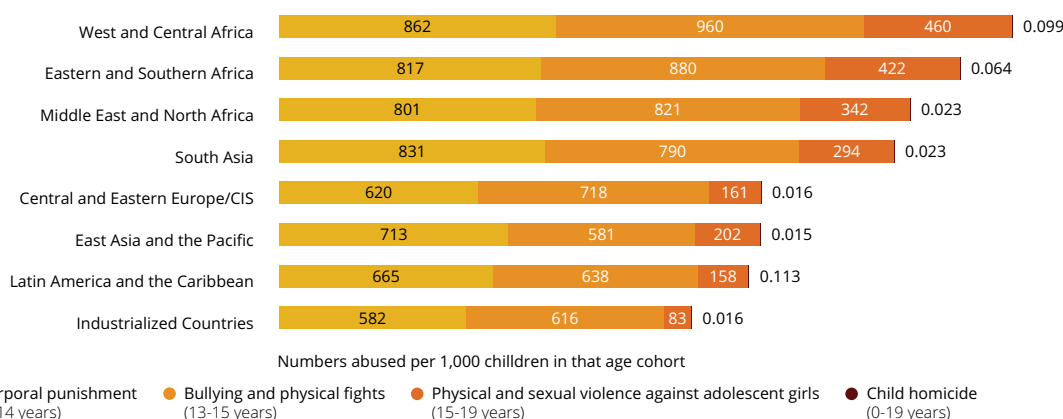
**FIGURE 1: Global burden of violence against children, 2015.**



Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

<sup>1</sup> This estimate includes child homicide, violent discipline (or corporal punishment) at the hands of caregivers, peer violence (including bullying and physical fights), and sexual and physical violence experienced by adolescent girls.  
<sup>2</sup> See Evidence Highlights 2 in this series. *Violence in Childhood: Key Facts*.  
<sup>3</sup> This summary draws on chapter 2 of the *Ending Violence in Childhood: Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood 2017. Ending Violence

in Childhood. Global Report 2017. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.  
<sup>4</sup> See Shiva Kumar, A.K., S.K. Mehta and A.K. Nandakumar. 2017. "Violence in Childhood (VIC) Index: Methodology and Measurement." Background paper. *Ending Violence in Childhood Global Report 2017*. Know Violence in Childhood. New Delhi, India.

**FIGURE 2: Regional burden of violence against children, 2015.**

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

The picture of childhood violence that emerges is disturbing. Millions of children experience inter-personal violence across all regions of the world. (FIGURE 2)

## Child homicide

Every year, homicide takes the lives of close to 100,000 children below the age of 19. Tragically, around one in every five homicide victims among children is below the age of four. Sometimes the perpetrator is unknown, particularly in low- and middle-income countries that do not have nationally representative data. Even in countries with well-established homicide monitoring systems such as the United States or Germany, a substantial number of child homicides have no reported perpetrator.

Nevertheless, the data suggest that most child murders are committed by caregivers. Around 78 per cent of homicides of children under the age of one year are committed by parents. For children under one year, the offender is likely to be the mother, as she is typically the main caregiver in the early years; for older children, the offender is more likely to be the father.

**TABLE 1: Child homicide rates (aged 0–19) by region, 2015.**

Per 100,000 population (2015)	Regional average*
East Asia and the Pacific	1.5
Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States	1.6
Industrialized Countries	1.6
Middle East and North Africa	2.3
South Asia	2.3
World	4.0
Eastern and Southern Africa	6.4
West and Central Africa	10.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	11.3

\*Population weighted.

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**TABLE 2: Countries with the highest rates of child homicide, 2015.**

Country	Child homicide rate (per 100,000) 2015
El Salvador	27
Guatemala	22
Venezuela	20
Lesotho	18
Brazil	17
Swaziland	16
Panama	15
Democratic Republic of the Congo	14
Nigeria	14
Colombia	13
Honduras	13
Jamaica	13
Rwanda	13

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

Child homicide rates (0–19 years) vary across global regions from an average of 1.5 per 100,000 population in the East Asia and Pacific and 1.6 per 100,000 population in industrialized countries and in Central and Eastern Europe–Commonwealth of Independent States to 10 per 100,000 population in West and Central Africa and 11.3 per 100,000 population in Latin America and the Caribbean. (TABLE 1)

Eight countries with the highest child homicide rates are in Latin America and the Caribbean. (TABLE 2)

The problem of child homicide is not, however, uniformly high within Latin America and the Caribbean. Even within this region, Chile, Cuba, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay, for example, reported a child homicide rate of 2 or lower per 100,000 population. Similarly, rates of child homicide vary widely across Africa. For instance, the child homicide rate varied from 1 per 100,000 population in Cabo Verde, Malawi, Mauritius and Senegal to 16 in Swaziland and 18 in Lesotho.

### Corporal punishment at home

In their early years, children can be subject to physical violence from their caregivers in the form of corporal punishment.

Sixty to seventy per cent of children, between the ages of 2 and 14, experience emotional violence at the hands of their caregivers or other household members. The experience of physical violence on the other hand declines with age. It is higher in younger age groups, with 55–60 per cent of girls and boys experiencing physical violence from a caregiver or household member at age 2. Levels decline by age 14 to about 35–40 per cent of boys and girls. (FIGURE 3)

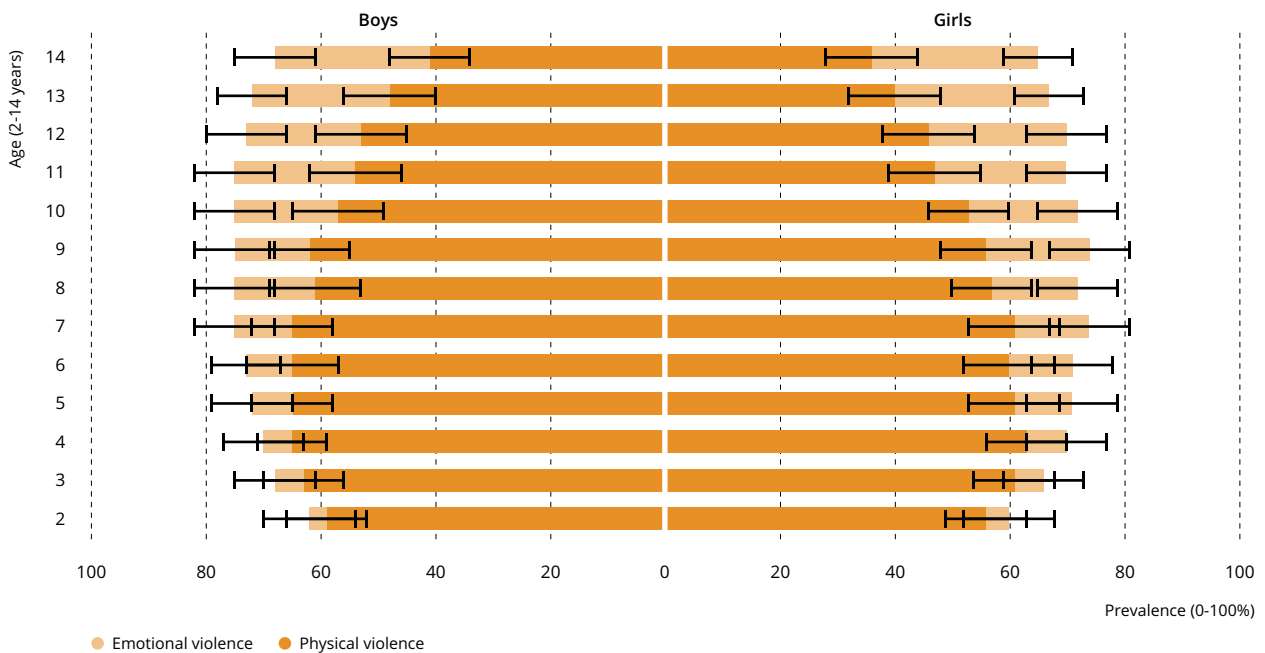
The use of violence to discipline children is widespread throughout the world. Most children –

three out of every four in the age-group 1-14 years – have experienced violent discipline (psychological aggression and/or physical punishment) in the previous month.

In the industrialized countries, nearly one child in two (58 per cent) experienced some form of violent disciplining at home. At the other extreme, in Eastern and Southern Africa, South Asia and Western and Central Africa, more than 8 out of 10 children faced corporal punishment at home. (FIGURE 4)

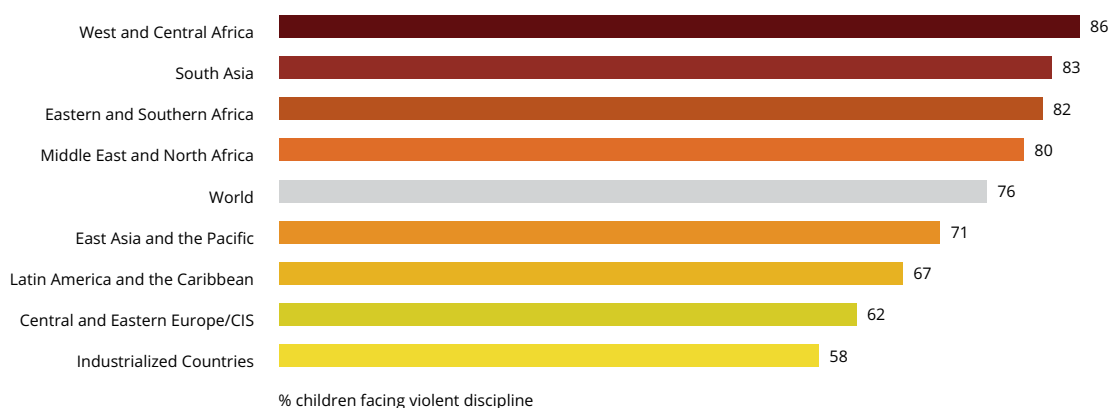
The use of violent disciplining at home was lowest (36–37 per cent) in Cuba and Turkmenistan. On the other hand, violent disciplining was almost universal in Burundi, Ghana and Mozambique, where more than nine out of ten children experienced some form of corporal punishment at home. (TABLE 3)

**FIGURE 3: Children suffer high levels of emotional and physical violence at the hands of their caregivers, 2-14 years.**



**Notes:** Data sources: Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). Model shows caregivers reports of physical aggression by household members. To read bar graph: age of the child is on the y-axis; prevalence of each form of violence is on the x axis. Prevalence corresponds to the distance of the bar along the x-axis for boys (to the left), and girls (to the right). Forms of violence are overlaid; and the black bars are a 95% confidence interval. For example, for girls aged 2 years, the prevalence of physical violence is 56% (95%CI 49-63%), and the prevalence of emotional violence is 60% (95%CI 52-68%).

**Source:** Devries and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**FIGURE 4: Corporal punishment at home (children aged 1-14) by region, 2015.**

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**TABLE 3: Countries with lowest and highest levels of violent discipline at home, 2015.**

Countries with lowest levels of punishment at home	Percentage of children	Countries with highest levels of punishment at home	Percentage of children
Cuba	36	Mozambique	98
Turkmenistan	37	Burundi	97
Serbia	43	Ghana	94
Panama	45	Tunisia	93
Costa Rica	46	Egypt	93
Czech Republic	46	Central African Republic	92
Mongolia	49	State of Palestine	92
Qatar	50	Benin	91
El Salvador	52	Côte d'Ivoire	91
Kazakhstan	53	Nigeria	91

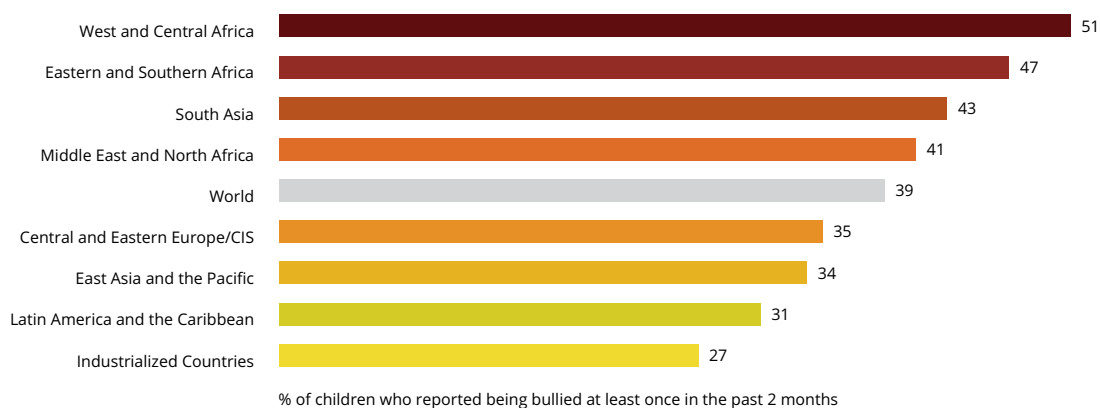
Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

## Bullying in schools

The extent of bullying varies considerably between global regions. Across the industrialized countries, Latin America and the Caribbean, East Asia and Pacific and in Central Eastern Europe-Commonwealth of Independent States, nearly one child in three reported being bullied at least once in the past two months at school. Across Africa, on the

other hand, almost every other child reported being bullied. (FIGURE 5)

There were wide variations within regions. The Middle East and North Africa region, for example, includes Morocco which had one of the lowest rates of bullying, but also Egypt, which had one of the highest (70 per cent). (TABLE 4)

**FIGURE 5: Bullying in schools (children aged 13-15) by region, 2015.**

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**TABLE 4: Countries with lowest and highest rates of bullying in schools, 2015.**

Countries with lowest rates of bullying	Percentage of children	Countries with highest rates of bullying	Percentage of children
Morocco	1	Samoa	74
Tajikistan	7	Burundi	70
Italy	9	Egypt	70
Armenia	10	Vanuatu	67
Sweden	11	Solomon Islands	67
Barbados	13	Zambia	65
Spain	14	Bangladesh	65
Trinidad and Tobago	15	Ghana	62
Chile	15	Zimbabwe	61
Czech Republic	16	Rwanda	58
Iceland	16	Kenya	57
Croatia	16	Papua New Guinea	57

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

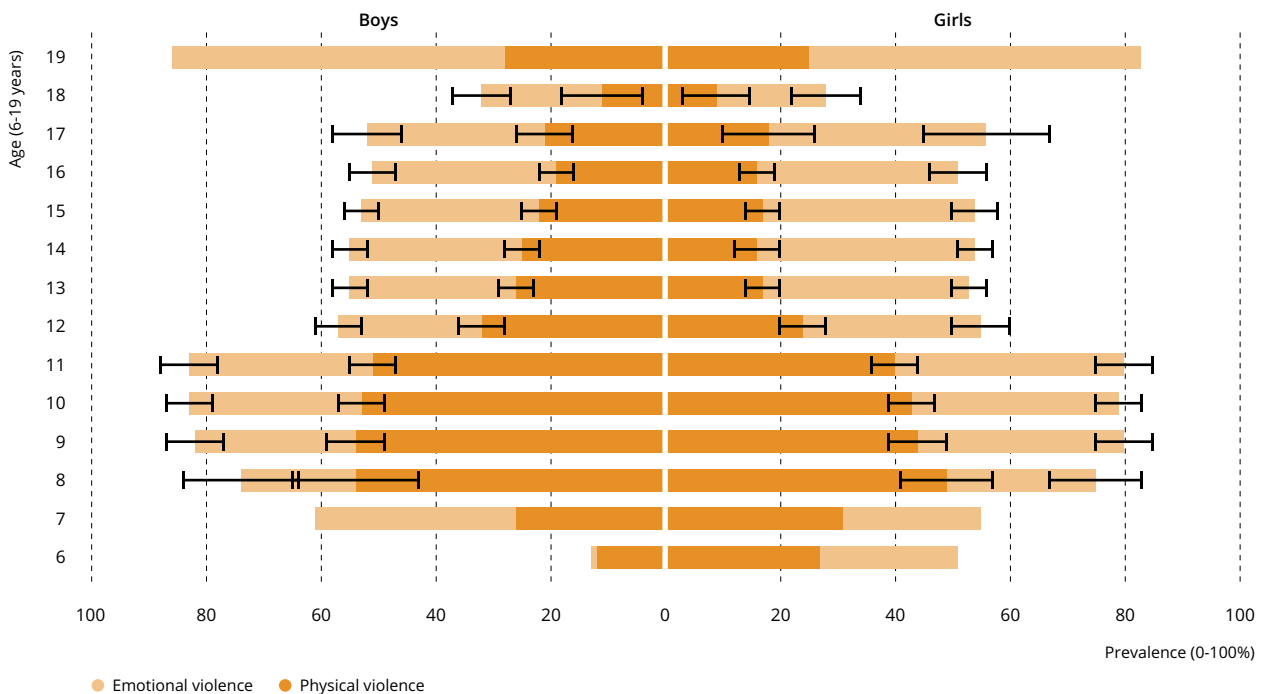
### Physical fights in schools

Children attending school are additionally vulnerable to physical and emotional violence at the hands of other students. The prevalence of emotional violence committed by peers reaches 80 per cent by the age of nine. The prevalence of physical violence for boys, peaks at the age of nine or ten at over 50 per cent. For girls, physical violence

from other students begins around age six, and remains at a prevalence of 20 to 30 per cent through the middle childhood years. (FIGURE 6)

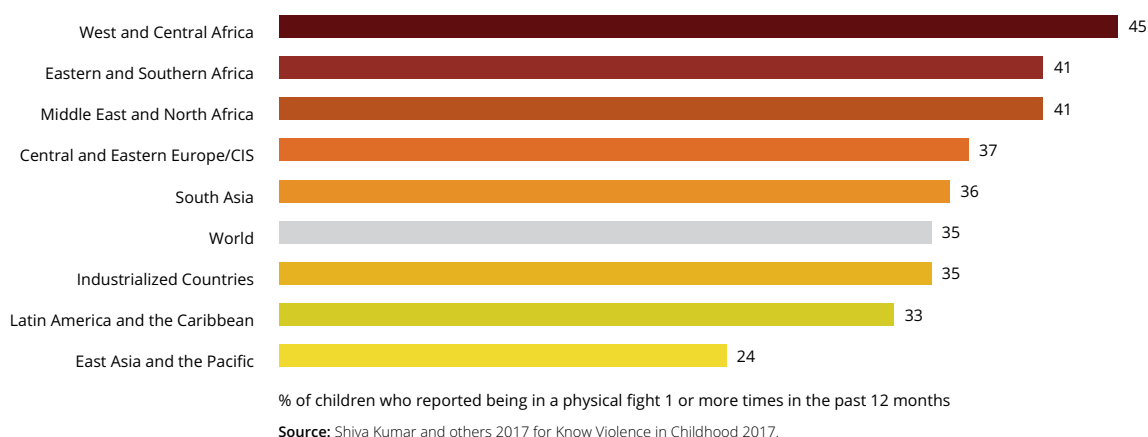
There is less variation when it comes to physical fights in schools. The proportion of children aged 13-15 who reported being involved in a physical fight in school, one or more times during the past 12 months, varied from 24 per cent in the East Asia and Pacific

**FIGURE 6: Emotional and physical violence is high amongst boys and girls in school, 6-19 years.**



**Notes:** Data sources: GSHS, HBSC, PIRLS, TIMSS and systematic review publications. Model shows children's self-reported exposure. Pooled prevalence estimates at ages 6, 7 and 19 years are from unadjusted meta-analyses, all others are adjusted meta-regression estimates. To read bar graph: age of the child is on the y-axis; prevalence of each form of violence is on the x axis. Prevalence corresponds to the distance of the bar along the x-axis for boys (to the left), and girls (to the right). Forms of violence are overlaid; and the black bars are a 95% confidence interval. For example, for boys aged 8 years, the prevalence of physical violence is 54% (95%CI: 43-65) and the prevalence of emotional violence is 74% (95%CI 63-84%).

**Source:** Devries and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**FIGURE 7: Physical fights in schools (13-15 years) by region, 2015.****TABLE 5: Countries with lowest and highest rates of physical fights in schools, 2015.**

Countries with lowest rates of school fights	Percentage of children	Countries with highest rates of school fights	Percentage of children
Morocco	9	Samoa	68
Cambodia	14	Mauritania	58
Myanmar	15	Bangladesh	54
Swaziland	19	Solomon Islands	53
China	19	Zambia	53
Germany	20	Ghana	53
Madagascar	21	Syrian Arab Republic	51
Suriname	21	Armenia	51
Viet Nam	22	Greece	51
Tajikistan	22	Qatar	51
Costa Rica	22	Sudan	51
Malawi	23	Vanuatu	51

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

region to 45 per cent in West and Central Africa. (FIGURE 7)

The lowest prevalence of physical fights between children was in Morocco, where fewer than one child in ten were involved in physical fights. The highest rates, however, were spread across the global regions: in Greece, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, and Vanuatu, in Ghana and Solomon Islands, and in Zambia, Bangladesh and Mauritania. (TABLE 5)

### Physical violence against adolescent girls

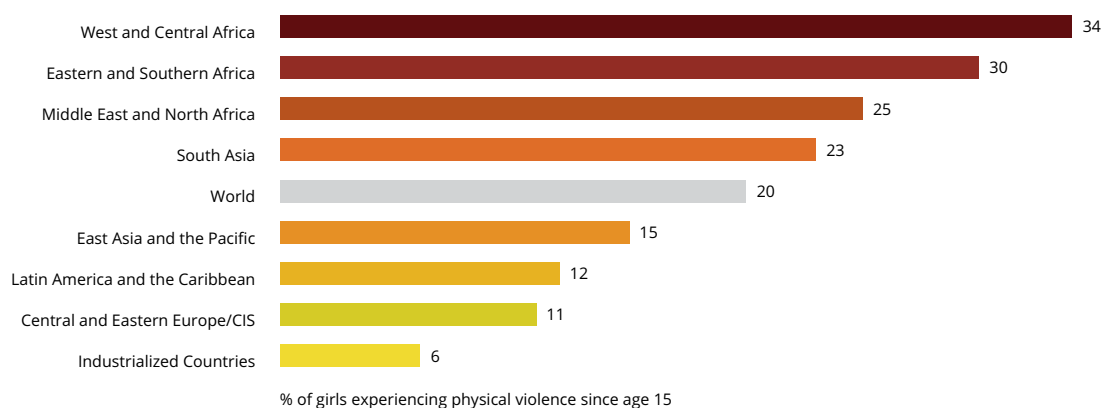
Of all forms of inter-personal violence, the maximum variations across regions is in physical and sexual violence against adolescent girls. The proportion of girls aged 15–19 who experienced any physical violence since age 15 was the lowest

in industrialized countries and in the Central and Eastern Europe Commonwealth of Independent States. It was highest in Western and Central Africa where more than one-third of girls aged 15–19 experienced some form of physical violence. (FIGURE 8)

Fewer than two out of 100 girls experienced physical violence in Costa Rica and Panama. On the other hand, more than half the girls aged 15–19 experienced physical violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. (TABLE 6)

### Sexual violence against adolescent girls

Sexual violence against girls begins as early as age 10, with the prevalence increasing by age 15. In most countries, the first episode of sexual violence for girls occurs before the age of 15. Violence Against Children (VAC) surveys from four countries – Tanzania,

**FIGURE 8: Physical violence against adolescent girls (aged 15-19) by region, 2015.**

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

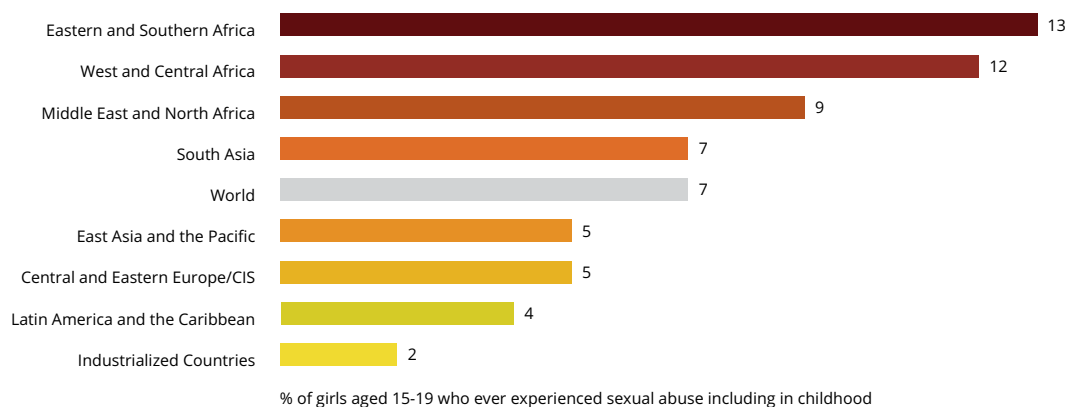
Cambodia, Kenya and Swaziland – found that sexual abuse is twice as likely for girls (20 per cent) than boys (11 per cent). While sexual violence against girls tends to be committed by an intimate male partner, the main offenders against boys are neighbours, schoolmates and friends.<sup>5</sup>

Sexual violence against girls is most prevalent in Africa, where more than one in ten adolescent girls aged 15–19 experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetimes. Adolescent girls were least abused sexually in the industrialized countries and in Latin America and the Caribbean. (FIGURE 9)

**TABLE 6: Countries with the lowest and highest rates of physical violence against adolescent girls, 2015.**

Countries with lowest prevalence of physical violence against adolescent girls	Percentage of adolescent girls	Countries with highest prevalence of physical violence against adolescent girls	Percentage of adolescent girls
Costa Rica	1	Democratic Republic of the Congo	56
Panama	2	Uganda	54
Cuba	2	Cameroon	45
Qatar	2	Swaziland	43
France	2	Central African Republic	43
Czech Republic	3	Yemen	42
Uruguay	3	Egypt	40
Cyprus	3	Chad	40
Slovakia	4	Liberia	39
Kazakhstan	4	Bolivia	37

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

**FIGURE 9: Sexual violence against adolescent girls (aged 15-19) by region, 2015.**

Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ravi, S. and R. Ahluwalia. 2017. "What explains childhood violence? Micro-correlates from VACS surveys." *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 22(S1): 17–30.

**TABLE 7: Countries with the lowest and highest rates of sexual violence against adolescent girls, 2015.**

Countries with lowest prevalence of sexual violence against adolescent girls	Percentage of adolescent girls	Countries with highest prevalence of sexual violence against adolescent girls	Percentage of adolescent girls
Germany	0.0	Cameroon	22
Kyrgyzstan	0.1	Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	21
France	0.2	Uganda	19
Cambodia	0.3	Malawi	18
Ukraine	0.3	Zimbabwe	18
Azerbaijan	0.4	Swaziland	18
Norway	0.5	Ghana	17
Portugal	0.6	Chad	17
Iceland	0.6	Central African Republic	16

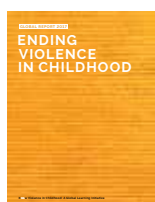
Source: Shiva Kumar and others 2017 for Know Violence in Childhood 2017.

Sexual abuse of adolescent girls is lowest in Germany, Kyrgyzstan and France. Levels of sexual violence were highest in Cameroon and the

Democratic Republic of Congo where one in every five adolescent girls had experienced some form of sexual violence. (TABLE 7)

Every day millions of boys and girls around the world experience fear and violence – physical, emotional or sexual. This need not happen. Violence in childhood is preventable – through concerted and collective action that addresses the root causes of violence and lays firm foundations for both sustainable development and more peaceful societies.

To fulfill the commitments to ending all forms of violence that are enshrined in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, states and societies must analyze the causes of childhood violence, and invest in preventing violence against women and children.



Know Violence in Childhood is a learning initiative dedicated to informing and supporting a global movement to end violence in childhood. Established in 2014 for a three-year period, the Initiative analyzed existing data, commissioned new research and synthesized knowledge on the causes and consequences of childhood violence worldwide. Its work highlights the impact of childhood violence on individuals, families, communities and societies, expands the research base on this global crisis and promotes evidence-based strategies to prevent violence.

The full report and related outputs are available at: [www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org](http://www.knowviolenceinchildhood.org)

