

Gender Inequalities in Madagascar



Policy Brief

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KEY MESSAGES

- Girls have an educational advantage over boys in early childhood. The advantage is particularly strong in poorer families and in rural areas where male children are more involved in child labour.
- During adolescence, the gender gap is reversed, and girls start dropping out of school more frequently, in both rich and poor families, in rural and urban areas.
- During early childhood, girls and boys receive the same level of health care from their families, regardless of socioeconomic characteristics or other specific factors.
- In adolescence, on the other hand, girls begin to experience more deprivation as they are more exposed to reproductive and sexual health risks. All girls are not equally exposed to risks: poor girls, living in rural areas, girls of very young mothers or those over 35 are particularly vulnerable.
- In case of economic hardship, food is not distributed equitably. Children working in the fields (especially boys) and biological children tend to be favoured over foster children.
- Girls living in female-headed households experience significantly fewer deprivations, especially with regard to early pregnancy and child marriage.
- The children of child-mothers (mothers who had their child before the age of 18) tend to have more deprivation, and to be more exposed to the risks of sexual violence, early pregnancy, etc. Breaking these vicious cycles requires empowering girls at all levels (education, economy, participation, etc.).
- In the analysis of multidimensional poverty, it is important to take into account the hidden dimensions of well-being, in particular, in the field of participation, leisure, discrimination and shame, love and care, psychological well-being.



INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the General Assembly of Member States of the United Nations. By adhering to the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 and Agenda 2063 for Africa, Madagascar has reaffirmed the essential place of gender equality in national policies.

The country has drawn up several strategic documents to achieve this objective, in particular the “National Policy for the Advancement of Women for a balanced development between men and women”, the National Policy for Gender Equality and the five-year action plans. However, the national report on the prioritization of the SDGs by Madagascar highlighted the need to review gender-related policies and strategies in order to effectively achieve the full participation and empowerment of women in society.

Gender inequalities are reflected in multiple dimensions of well-being and also in the realization of children’s rights; it is therefore crucial to analyze the gender-related dynamics that tend to fuel child deprivation to identify the factors that play a role at the individual, family and societal levels.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to examine gender-related inequalities in terms of children’s rights, based on MICS data (the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey carried out by the Malagasy Government through the National Institute of Statistics in partnership with UNICEF) and new qualitative data. The research adopted a mixed methods approach. The quantitative analysis was based on data from the MICS 2018 survey, while the qualitative analysis was based on a new collection of qualitative data carried out between September and December 2021 in the regions of Vakinankaratra, Atsimo Andrefana, Betsiboka and Atsinanana as well as interviews with key informants at the national level.

The results of this study will be used to better guide the consideration of gender issues in various programs, in particular during the UNICEF country program for 2021-2023 and to support advocacy with the Government of Madagascar in favor of the incorporation of gender aspects into the country’s development agenda.

EDUCATION

All education indicators used in the MODA index show an advantage for girls over boys. This advantage is strongest in the most disadvantaged contexts, such as in poor households, in rural areas and in the southern

regions of the country (Table 1). In case of financial needs, it is primarily male children who are sent to work.

Table 1 - Education deprivation prevalence rate

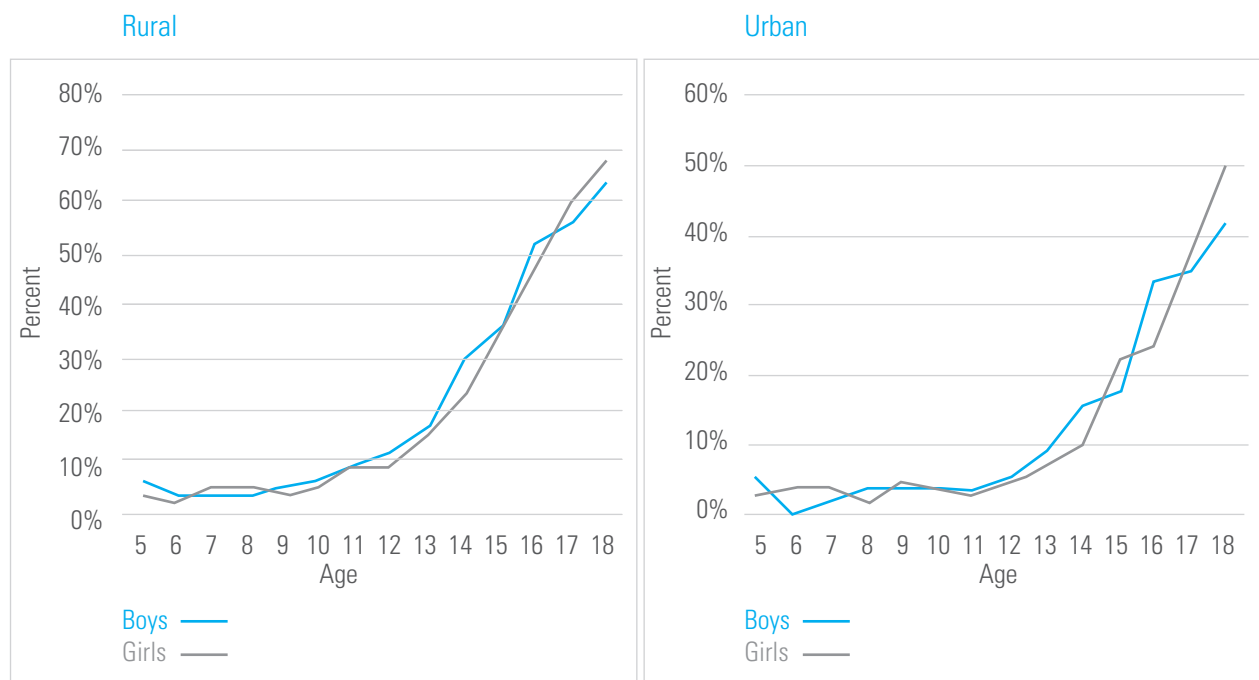
	Gender	Pre-school	Attendance	Reading	Calculus	School delay
All	Boys	48.4	15.5	39.7	25.5	42.3
	Girls	42.9***	11.8***	34.5***	21.9***	36.4***
Rural	Boys	53	17.9	43.6	29.1	46.6
	Girls	47.1***	13.5***	39.6***	25.2***	40.2***
Urban	Boys	27.8	6.6	28.8	13.2	26.6
	Girls	23.8***	5.5***	18.4***	10.4***	23.6***
Poor	Boys	61.7	24.7	54.9	40.3	56.6
	Girls	54.2***	20.4***	48.4***	35.6***	50.9***
Rich	Boys	36.9	9	31.8	15.5	32.7
	Girls	32.4***	5.6***	27.3***	12.8***	26.7***
North	Boys	41.4	8.2	34	14.7	34
	Girls	38.1***	6.6***	28.1***	13.4***	29.9***
South	Boys	57.1	26	52.6	42.5	54.5
	Girls	48.6***	19.1***	47.7***	35.7***	46.2***

Source: MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculation., Statistical significance (probability that the difference observed in the MICS sample does not reflect a real difference in the population) : *=10%, **=5%, ***=1%.

When moving from primary to secondary school, gender dynamics tend to disadvantage girls (Figure 2): dropout rates, in both urban and rural settings, become significantly higher for girls than for boys from the age of 16. This dynamic affects both rich and poor households, affecting the lives of girls in all population groups. The reasons for this are varied: the risks

of sexual violence linked to long journeys, the remoteness of secondary schools, which often requires relocation, the lack of sanitary facilities, social norms unfavourable to women and early pregnancies which lead to sudden interruption of studies. In addition, poverty can lead families to decide to marry off their daughters prematurely.

Graph 2 - Dropping out of school for girls and boys, by place of residence



Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculations.

Boys and girls in female-headed households are more likely to be in school and less likely to fall behind. In addition, the education of the

mother is also an important factor which tends to reduce deprivations in the field of education for both boys and girls, especially in rural areas.



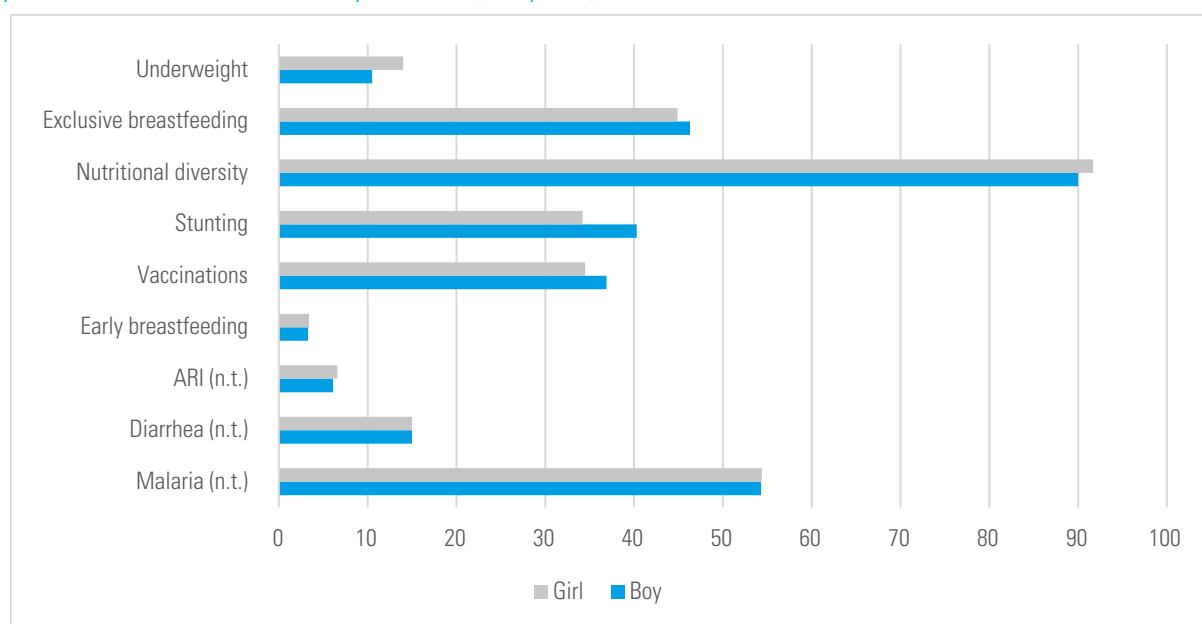
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SURVIVAL AND FLOURISHING

In general, the factors that have the greatest impact on health and nutrition are poverty, overreliance on traditional medicine, low level of education and remoteness from health centres. Added to this, are exogenous phenomena, such

as climatic events. According to the quantitative data, there are no particular inequalities in the field of health between boys and girls during early childhood (Graph 3).

Graph 3 – Prevalence of health deprivations (0-4 years)



Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculations.

During early childhood, girls and boys often receive the same level of care from their families, regardless of socioeconomic characteristics or other specific factors (Table 2).

Table 2 - Prevalence of selected health deprivations (0-4 years)

	Gender	Vaccinations	Malaria (untreated)	Diarrhea (untreated)	ARI (untr.)	Early breastfeeding
All	Boys	54.3	15.0	6.1	3.3	36.9
	Girls	54.4	15.0	6.6***	3.4	34.5***
Rural	Boys	57.0	15.1	6.3	3.6	37.3
	Girls	57.1	14.8	7.0***	3.4	34.8***
Urban	Boys	42.2	14.5	5.6	2.3	35.1
	Girls	43.9***	16.2***	4.9*	3.3**	33.3***
Poor	Boys	63.6	15.4	7.2	3.8	35.6
	Girls	63.1	14.5***	7.2	3.8	35.2
Rich	Boys	45.8	14.7	5.2	2.9	37.9
	Girls	46.4	15.6***	6.0***	2.9	33.8***
North	Boys	46.5	12.4	4.7	2.6	36.2
	Girls	47.2*	13.7***	5.6***	2.6	33.8***
South	Boys	64.3	18.3	7.9	4.3	37.8
	Girls	63.4**	16.8***	7.8	4.4	35.4***

Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculations., Statistical signif. : *=10%, **=5%, ***=1%.

Qualitative data confirm that gaps exist between children living with their parents and foster children. In many cases there is internal discrimination in the household, which is also reflected in nutrition.

« As for food, for example, we were not entitled to the same shares. And afterwards, when we ate pork for example, her children stole shares and she accused me of being rude. »

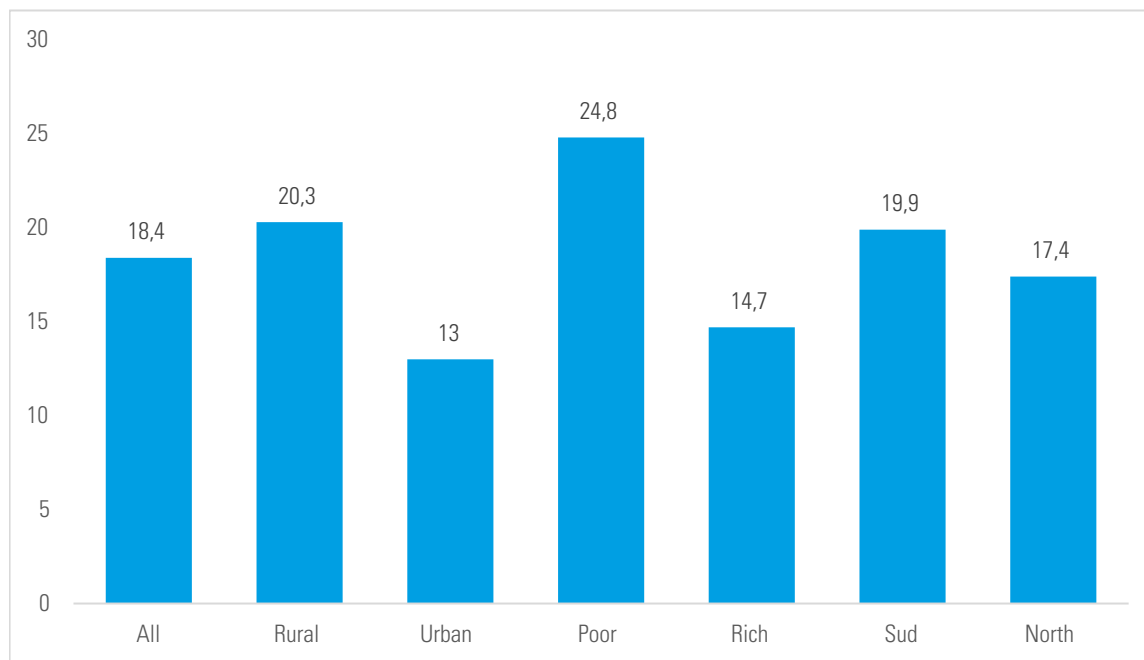
(Life Course Interview with a boy, 2021)

The mother’s level of education plays a role in the health and well-being of children: children of mothers with high school education tend to have a more varied diet than children of uneducated mothers with a similar income. The mother’s education is a more important factor in rural areas than in urban areas.

Another characteristic that has an impact on intra-family discrimination is birth order. The data clearly show the disadvantage of younger children, especially for girls.

As boys and girls get older, individual factors matter more than family factors and girls are at greater risk of sexual and reproductive health issues (Graph 4).

Graph 4 – Early pregnancy for girls aged 15-17, by type of households (%)



Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors’ calculations.

Early pregnancies risk reproducing the pattern of poverty and the intergenerational process of early pregnancy. In fact, the children of child-mothers (under the age of 18 at the birth of the child) have significantly more deprivations than other children: 52.2% suffer from 3 or more deprivations, compared to 44% for children of mothers aged 18 to 34 at birth; they are at increased risk of suffering from sexual violence, early pregnancy and child marriage.

The use of contraceptives is taboo for many boys and girls. The causes are mainly related to the fact that adolescent girls do not have

access to information, do not discuss this subject, therefore they do not receive advice on prevention either at school or in the family.

With regards to nutrition, although the quantitative data does not show any differences in early childhood, qualitative data show that there may be differences in adolescence. This is especially true in rural areas, where boys are often given priority in terms of quantity of food, on the grounds that they need more strength for the work of the fields:

« Our mother, when she shared the food – I watched – my share was like that of a 1 year old or 8-month-old child. She said to herself, this one doesn't work, it's better to give him less. Those who worked hard had a full plate. »

(Life Course Interview with a girl, 2021)

Difficulty accessing quality health services is a problem for many boys and girls (43.6% are deprived in this regard, MICS 2018). In the case of girls, this difficulty is amplified by the menstrual hygiene needs, which have significant consequences on their well-being, stigmatization and school attendance. In the case of girls with disabilities, these problems are even more serious.

PROTECTION

Quantitative and qualitative data show a high level of protection deprivation for girls and boys. Behavioural aspects seem to permeate the whole of society and regulate relations both in the private sphere (domestic violence within the family sphere and violence in close

relationships) and public (violence at school or in the street). MICS data allows the examination of separate deprivation indicators and the identification of the main inequalities that characterize them (**Table 2**¹).

Table 2 – Prevalence of protection deprivations

		Violent discipline (5-14 yrs)	Child labour (5-14 yrs)	Domestic violence (15-17 yrs)	Sexual violence (15-17 yrs)	Early pregnancy (15-17 yrs)	Child marriage (15-17 yrs)
All	Boys	31.7	41.6				
	Girls	26.3***	37.0***	10.8	8.7	15.5	18.4
Rural	Boys	31.7	45.9				
	Girls	26.4***	40.8***	9.1	7.7	16.9	20.3
Urban	Boys	31.9	26.5				
	Girls	25.9***	23.5***	19.8	11.6	11.5	13
Poor	Boys	29.9	47.3				
	Girls	25.4***	43.3***	10.8	6.7	20	24.8
Rich	Boys	33	37.5				
	Girls	26.9***	32.6***	10.7	10	13	14.7
North	Boys	25.6	52.2				
	Girls	22.8***	44.8***	6.6	6.1	18	19.9
South	Boys	35.6	34.9				
	Girls	28.5***	32.1***	13.4	10.3	14	17.4

Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculation., Statistical significance : *=10%, **=5%, ***=1%.

Child marriage and early pregnancies are significantly more common among poor households (lower quintiles). This inequality

indicates that child marriage is often a coping strategy for families to cope with poverty.

1 Voir l'annexe 1 pour la définition exacte des indicateurs utilisés.

Although child marriage is, in most cases, a coping strategy for the household, qualitative research conducted with girls has also highlighted cases where marriage is a voluntary choice made by girls for whom the marriage is the only way to improve their lives and leave difficult situations behind.

In urban areas, domestic violence and sexual violence are more prevalent, or girls are more likely to report cases. The fact that gender-based violence cuts across and affects all population groups is indicative of the fact that, according to prevailing social norms, there is a normalization of violence and discrimination against girls.

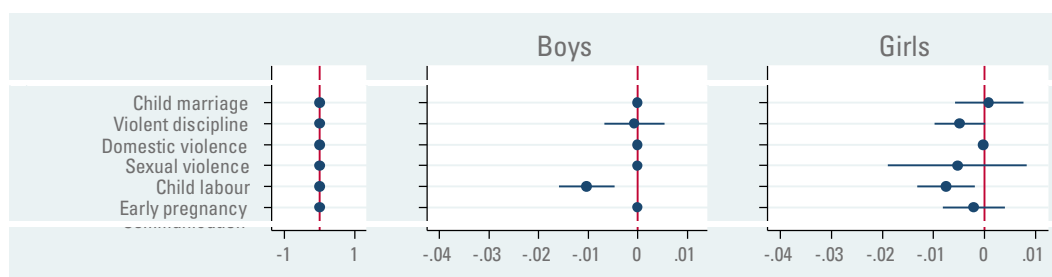
Regarding the risk of child labour, child labour practices are generally more prevalent among children living in the South. The data seems to indicate greater deprivation for boys than for girls.

As the quantitative and qualitative data show, the division of roles between boys and girls with regards to household chores tends to become more rigid as boys and girls get older. For example, fetching firewood is mainly done by boys while fetching water is increasingly the responsibility of girls and, at age 17, they are more than twice as likely as boys to do this.

When looking at inequalities between children living in female-headed households and other children, quantitative data show that, all other things being equal (controlling for wealth, etc.), girls have significantly less chances of being married and having early pregnancies if they live in a female-headed household. The data also show that a higher level of maternal education reduces child labour for both boys and girls, and can also have positive effects on the forms of violence experienced by girls.

Quantitative data (Graph 5) also show that maternal education reduces the risk of child labour, for both boys and girls, and can also have positive effects on the forms of violence experienced by girls.

Graph 5 - Effect of higher maternal education on protection deprivation (controlling for wealth, age, etc.) for boys and girls



Source : MICS 6 (2018) MADAGASCAR, Authors' calculations.

HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF WELLBEING

Measures of poverty can hide serious deprivations and inequalities in dimensions important to children's well-being. It is therefore important to broaden the field of information to other dimensions that can take into account the multidimensional nature of well-being and the specific context in which each person lives and develops. There are several ways to identify the "hidden dimensions" of wellbeing. In this study, they were, on the one hand, chosen by

the researchers on the basis of the analysis of the literature, and, on the other hand, proposed by the boys and girls, and deduced from the qualitative analysis of the interviews.

The dimension of participation was included by the participants because it is considered an important component of well-being. It has been defined as: being listened to in the household and in the community, having relationships, joining an association. Data shows that girls

often encounter both external and internal barriers to participation. Not being able to express oneself also diminishes self-esteem and the possibility of freely exercising one's choices. In general, the results show that girls and women are more empowered in urban areas because social norms are more permissive there.

After participation, leisure is a dimension that girls and boys considered very important and which also guarantees the well-being of children (going on vacation, reading, playing sports, etc.). While there are not many differences in early childhood, in adolescence young girls aged 14 to 16 suffer more deprivation in terms of leisure. In some cases, given the limitations of freedom to which they are subjected, being able to carry out work in the open air becomes one of the few moments when it is possible to have some free time.

« Only teenage girls without children can play football (the only leisure they can practice in the village) on Sundays. Otherwise, they take advantage of the time when we go to the fields (to pick vegetables) to rest a little, walk around and talk to each other.. »

(Focus group with girls, 2021)

One dimension that emerged very strongly is the desire for girls and boys to feel loved and to be supported by their parents. Interestingly, physical abuse is so normalized that it is not perceived by children as an absence of love. What weighs on them is the physical absence and the lack of communication and affection. This is also reflected in the National Child Marriage Strategy which lists lack of affection and lack of dialogue among the factors that can lead to significant child protection deprivations. In this respect, the research did not reveal significant differences between boys and girls, but rather with regards to foster children: in many cases, parents send their children away to give them a better education. And even if these choices were made to give them more

opportunities, they were experienced, in most cases, with suffering and longing. Most good memories are tied to times spent with their parents:

« Researcher: What are the best memories that you cherish?

Participant: When I was little, my grandfather took me on vacation to Majunga. At that moment I felt loved. »

(Life Course Interview with a girl, 2021)

Another dimension is not being discriminated against and not being ashamed. In most cases, shame is linked to poverty, not being able to afford clean clothes, not feeling like everyone else. In the case of girls, there is the added issue of menstrual hygiene that cause them much shame due to the lack of suitable places and products.

Finally, a dimension which was not mentioned explicitly but which emerges indirectly is the dimension of tranquillity, that is to say the fact of not being stressed, of not being worried. Children (especially girls) are found from an early age to have great worries about money, the choices they face (school, marriage), difficult family relationships, generalized violence at school and in the street.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is a need to support girls and their families during adolescence through community programs focused on enhancing the role of women, with awareness and information campaigns aimed at both families and girls and boys.
- With regards to access to health, priority must be given to women living in rural areas where the intersection of poverty, social norms and lack of services is more penalizing for girls.
- Ending violence against women through various actions, including: awareness campaigns, capacity building of key actors (including school staff) and establishment of reporting points at the community level.
- Promote the collection of data and the carrying out of additional surveys on the living conditions of boys and girls in foster care, so that extra-familial placement does not become a place of invisible discrimination.



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