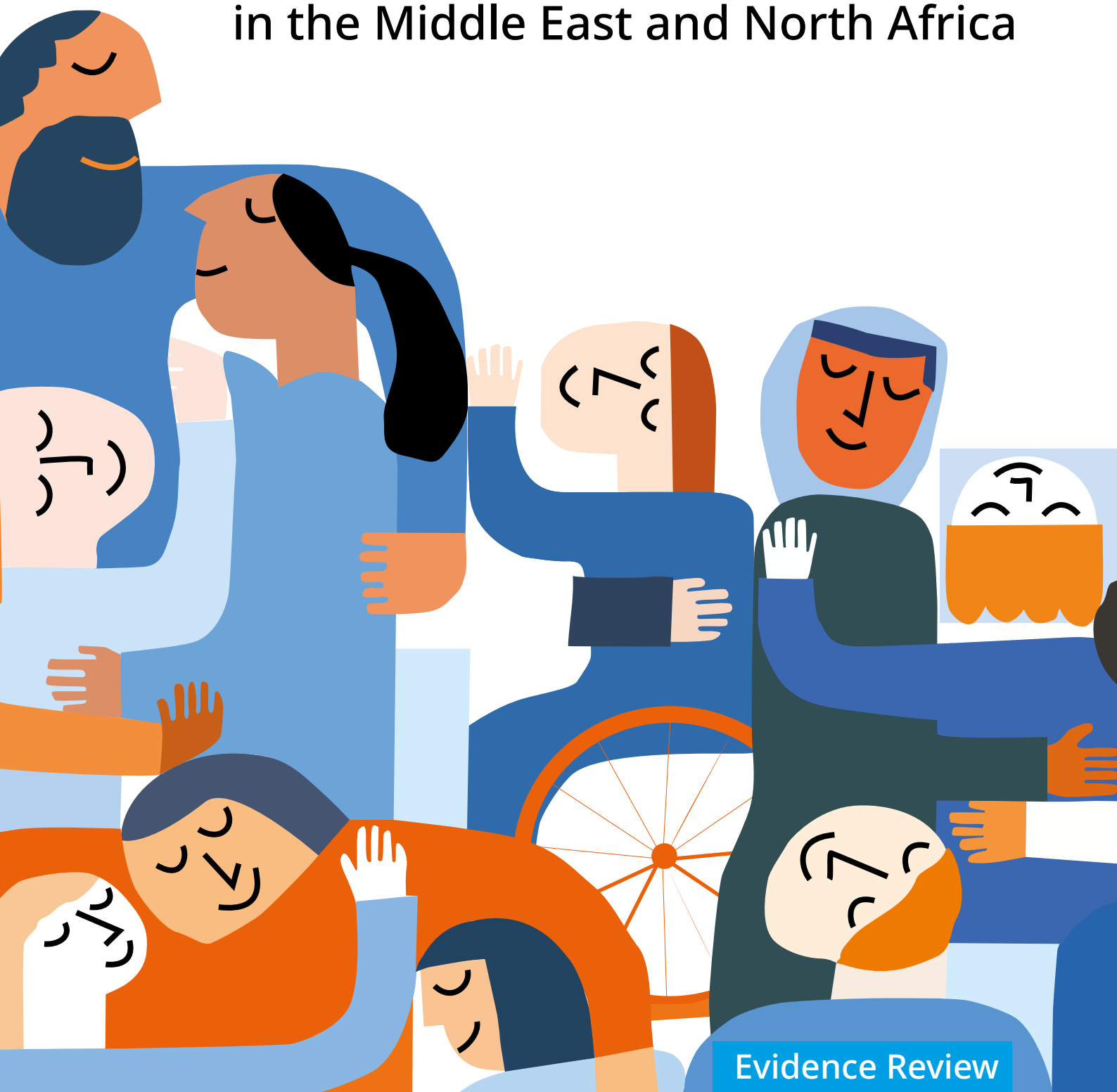


Changing Behaviours, Shifting Norms to End Violent Discipline in the Middle East and North Africa



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The review was initiated and shaped by Mohammed Abu Sulaiman, SBC Specialist; Stephanie Shanler, Child Protection Specialist (formerly); Carlos Javier Aguilar, Regional Advisor, Child Protection and Neha Kapil, Regional Advisor, SBC at the UNICEF MENARO.

The review was conducted by Suruchi Sood and Farren Rodrigues. The report was visually designed by Dima Darwazeh at Beyond Design House, Jordan. UNICEF and the authors of this report would like to thank Corinne Shefner-Rogers and Ami Sengupta, and to acknowledge Michael Hauer, Mobolawa Adio, Laxmisupriya Avadhanula, Meghan Gupta, Lem Phan, and Jesse Stover for their valuable contributions to this work.

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Rights Monitoring and Research, UNICEF MENARO (formerly); Robert Bain, Child Rights Monitoring and Research Specialist, UNICEF MENARO; Amaya Gillespie, Senior Behavioural Scientist, UNICEF MENARO (formerly); Ismahan Farhat, CP Specialist, UNICEF MENARO; Indrani Sarkar, CP Specialist, UNICEF MENARO (formerly); Andres Esteban Ochoa Toasa, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, SBC, UNICEF HQs; Line Baago-Rasmussen, SBC Specialist, UNICEF HQs Education (formerly); and Christine Kolbe-Stuart, SBC Specialist, UNICEF HQs Child Protection.

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Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
BDM	Behavioural Drivers Model
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
MENA	Middle East and North Africa Region
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers across Settings
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
SBC	Social and Behaviour Change
SEM	Social Ecological Model
VAC	Violence Against Children

Executive Summary

Social and behaviour change (SBC) interventions designed to address Violence against Children (VaC) are based on the understanding that VaC is driven by a complex interplay of socio-ecological factors that cannot be attributed to one culture or society. There are many different forms of VaC, with violent discipline in homes and in schools being the most prevalent form. While there is nothing inherently wrong with discipline, it constitutes abuse when it is violent. Forms of discipline that are considered abusive typically co-occur and fall into three categories, verbal punishment (psychological aggression), physical punishment, and severe physical punishment. This desk review draws on a range of national reports and surveys, peer reviewed journal articles, and reports and publications on violent discipline in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Despite paucity of available evidence, data highlights that countries in the MENA region have the highest prevalence of violent disciplinary practices globally. These data show high level of variability in violent discipline practices within and between many countries with multiple ethnicities and sub-national entities and emphasize several challenges to effective action to address violent discipline within the region.

Determinants of violent discipline when examined through the lens of the Social Ecological Model (SEM) with reference to the Behavioural Drivers Model (BDM)¹ highlights ways in which individual determinants like low knowledge, negative attitudes, lack of skills, and stigma perpetuate violent discipline in MENA. Demographic factors such as age and gender of parents and children, urban or rural residence also contribute to violent discipline. Parent and family specific dynamics that increase the chances of violent discipline practices include

style of parenting, lack of education, stress, parental history of being violently disciplined, and family size and composition. Patriarchal social and gender norms and low socioeconomic status are also primary elements contributing to violent discipline in MENA. The political and legal environment, for example the type of government, laws and their enforcement, social and child protection systems and structures play a role in facilitating or inhibiting violent discipline. Also, religion and cultural context emerge as both risk and protective factors. Perceived level of ability, minority ethnic and religious background, refugee or migrant status puts some children at higher risk. The role of protracted conflict and war in several MENA countries exacerbates violent discipline and has intergenerational ramifications. Additionally, the global COVID 19 pandemic has further exacerbated the incidence and prevalence of violent discipline. Finally, the role of intersectionality in contributing to higher levels of violent discipline is critical to consider in promoting social and behaviour change.

¹ [https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/5586/file/The Behavioural Drivers Model_0.pdf%20.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/5586/file/The_Behavioural_Drivers_Model_0.pdf%20.pdf)

Several global frameworks have been developed to address violence against children and women some of which focus on violent discipline. This review includes primary analysis of data from surveys specific to corporal punishment to draft a preliminary model emphasizing the causal behavioural and ecological pathways that contribute to violent discipline.

Two specific regional initiatives in the MENA region to address violent discipline that deserve mention include the prioritisation of violence against children as a key area of regional attention and a UNICEF 2021 Parenting Resource Pack², which contains tools and related guidance for specific nurturing caregiving behaviours among parents of children aged 0 - 8 years. Apart from regional initiatives there are also several country specific programmes. For example, a 2019 Regional Mapping and Scoping Report of Parenting Support Interventions from 11 MENA countries³, provides information on current and planned parent support interventions. One noted weakness in current programmes is that many initiatives emerge from early childhood development literature, resulting in a lack of programmes that emphasize support for parents of adolescents.

Since, most violent discipline occurs in two places, at home and in schools, this evidence review primarily focuses on strategies to reduce violent discipline in these two settings. However, a sociological approach to addressing violent discipline should involve both homes and schools as they are situated within broader cultural, social, and political systems and structures. This review focuses on the interventions that can be fit under specific levels of the social ecological model but with the caveat that addressing violent discipline will require actions from the bottom up (individual skills) and top down (policies) (Figure 1).

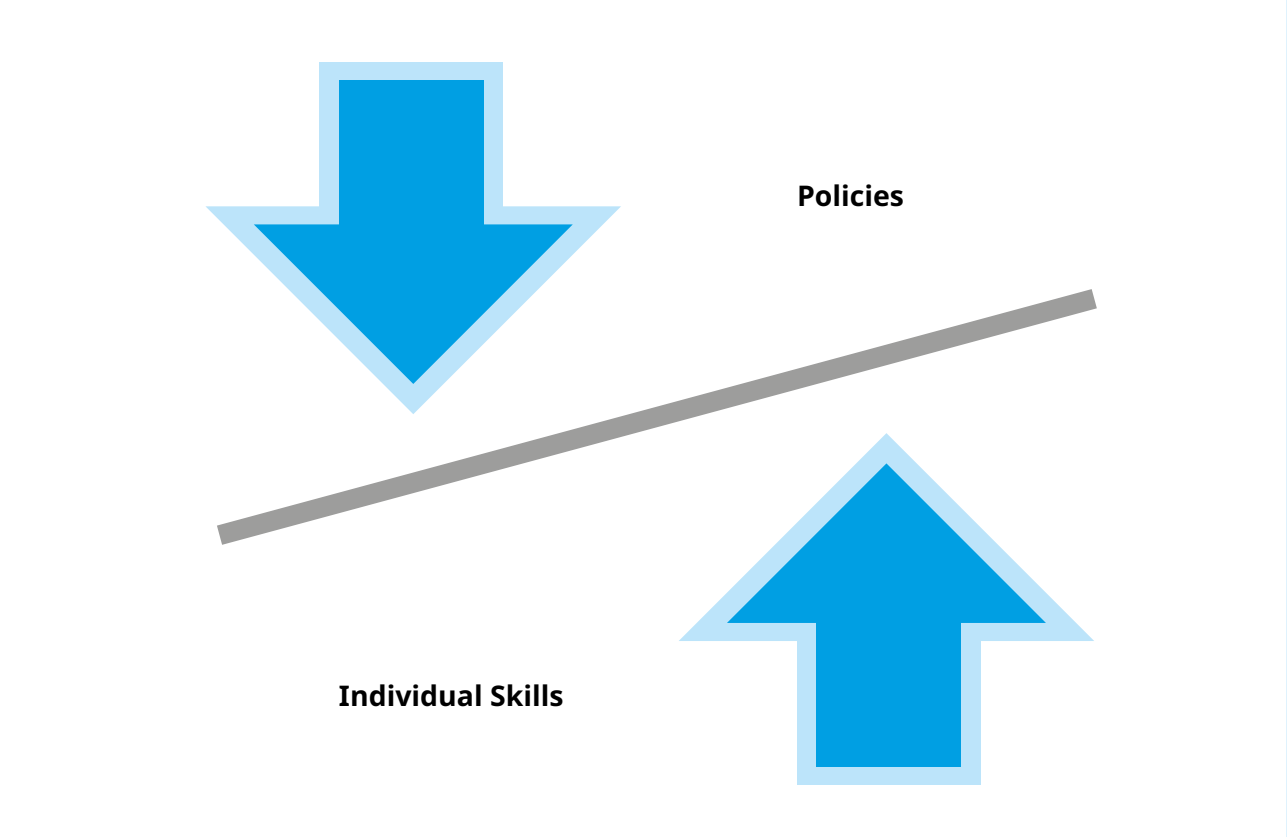


Figure 1: Bottom Up and Top Down Approach

² <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/media/8406/file/Our%20child%20are%20our%20lives.pdf>
³ Including Algeria, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, and Yemen

Parents alone do not discipline children, therefore family support interventions including for example other caregivers, relatives, and siblings need to be prioritized. Such family support interventions are particularly relevant for collectivist cultures that dominate the region (Basurrah, Al-Haj Baddar, & Di Blasi, 2022). The data shows high levels of school-based violence which highlights the importance of school-based interventions. However, instead of stand-alone interventions in homes and schools this review recommends interventions at the community level that link homes and schools.

Violent discipline flourishes within a broader social and cultural permissive environment. Therefore, interventions that promote enabling environments for positive discipline should be highlighted. At the response and referral level, social workforce interventions are required to both prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of violent discipline. Advocacy for legal reform is also of specific importance in the MENA region, especially given the fact that zero tolerance for violent discipline, specifically extreme violent discipline rather than a complete ban on all violence are likely to have population level support. Tackling violent discipline hence provides an entry point to address other forms of violence.

Planning and implementing robust evidence driven interventions requires careful attention to formative research and monitoring and evaluation of interventions. This will help sustain and scale-up programmes that promote positive behaviour and social change. While SBC strategies must be tailored to specific local, national, and regional contexts, these should be guided by some overarching guiding principles including extensive situation analysis and an attempt to streamline and adapt best practices in addressing violent discipline. Instead of starting from scratch planned strategies should to the extent possible be grounded within existing structures and systems by involving multidisciplinary experts, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and integrating violent discipline with programmes designed to address different forms of VaC.

A variety of communication approaches involving hotlines, digital media, and national campaigns are recommended. The value of interventions convincing people that violent discipline is not just a private matter but requires a shared responsibility will go a long way. Disaggregating inequities in violent discipline practices need to provide specialized services for at risk children. Finally, any concerted SBC interventions must monitor frequently with standardized accompanying measurement tools, to generate reliable and robust evidence and evaluate progress in changing behaviours and shifting norms associated with violent child discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Social and behaviour change (SBC) interventions designed to address Violence against Children (VaC) are based on the understanding that VaC is driven by a complex interplay of socio-ecological factors that cannot be attributed to one culture or society. These factors are found in the social structures that shape laws, policies, behaviours, and beliefs about gender, power, and authority. They are also found in institutional structures – the formal institutions and organizations that are governed by a set of rules, policies, and protocols. However, community opinions, beliefs and norms, interpersonal relationships and individual history also play a role as risks that can drive violence.

According to UNICEF, violence against girls, boys, and women refers to all types of violence and includes physical, sexual, and psychological forms of violence that affects boys, girls, and women across age groups in homes, schools, communities, and through the internet. Specifically, VaC is defined as “a deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act, threatened or actual, against a child or against a group of children that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in death, injury or other forms of physical and psychological suffering” (UNICEF, 2022a). This evidence review focuses on violent discipline, which comprises a large component of VaC. Discipline is typically defined as “the application of a negative stimulus to reduce or eliminate a behaviour” (Abolfotouh, 2008). Child discipline is a necessary part of child-rearing. It is intended to teach acceptable

and appropriate behaviours while eliminating undesirable behaviours to promote self-discipline so children can become responsible and social adults (Kamal et al., 2018). While there is nothing inherently wrong with discipline, sometimes it can lead to abuse. The difference is that discipline is meant to educate the child, whereas punishment is meant to instil fear. Forms of discipline that are considered abusive typically fall into three categories, verbal punishment (psychological aggression), physical punishment, and severe physical punishment. Violent discipline is defined as “any form of physical punishment and/or psychological aggression” (UNICEF MENA, 2019) (Figure 2). Corporal punishment, another term commonly found in the literature, is often used interchangeably with physical punishment.

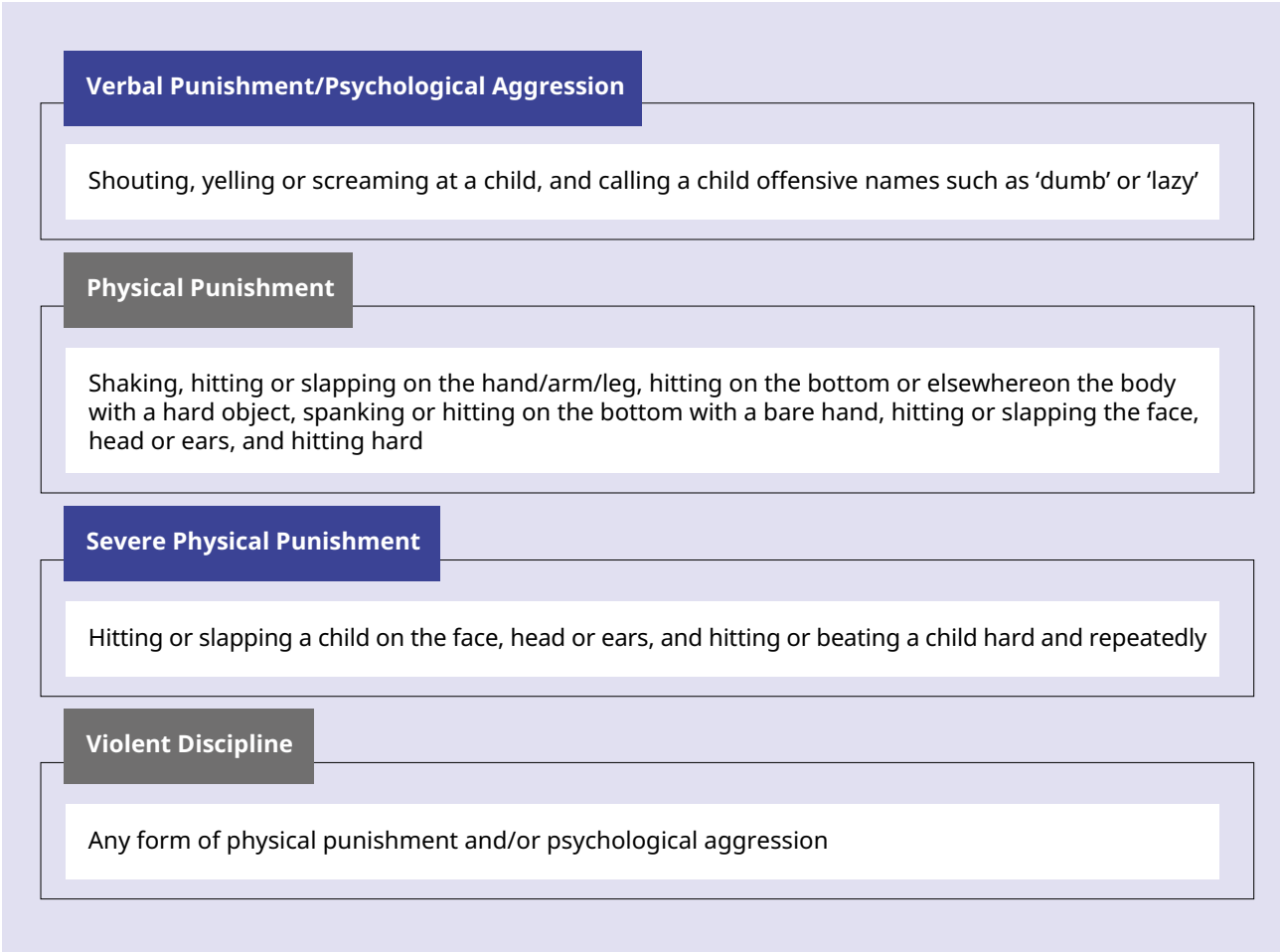


Figure 2: Forms of Punishment

The effects of violent discipline are particularly important in the earliest years of life when a child's brain architecture is still actively developing (Cuartas et al., 2019). Correlation analyses to understand the relationships between the types of violent discipline demonstrates moderate association between psychological aggression and physical punishment, and between physical punishment and severe physical punishment (UNICEF MENA, 2019). These connections suggest that programmes addressing violent disciplinary methods may want to include components that address both physical and psychological modes of disciplining.

This evidence review is part of a regional priority which focusses on interventions across several programmes, child protection specific interventions, and includes parenting programmes, Mental Health and Psychosocial (MHPSS) Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers across Settings (MHPSS) programmes in schools, research (access service), and VaC research. This report reviews the existing literature on violent discipline and highlights what is known about the norms, drivers, prevalence, barriers, and motivators for violent with focus on the MENA region and identifies gaps in the evidence. The information gathered will aid the design of SBC strategies that have clear results, frameworks that are social norms driven and participatory, and engage children, families, and local influentials to challenge normative beliefs and practices that condone violent discipline.

This SBC centred evidence review provides insights into the following domains (Figure 3):

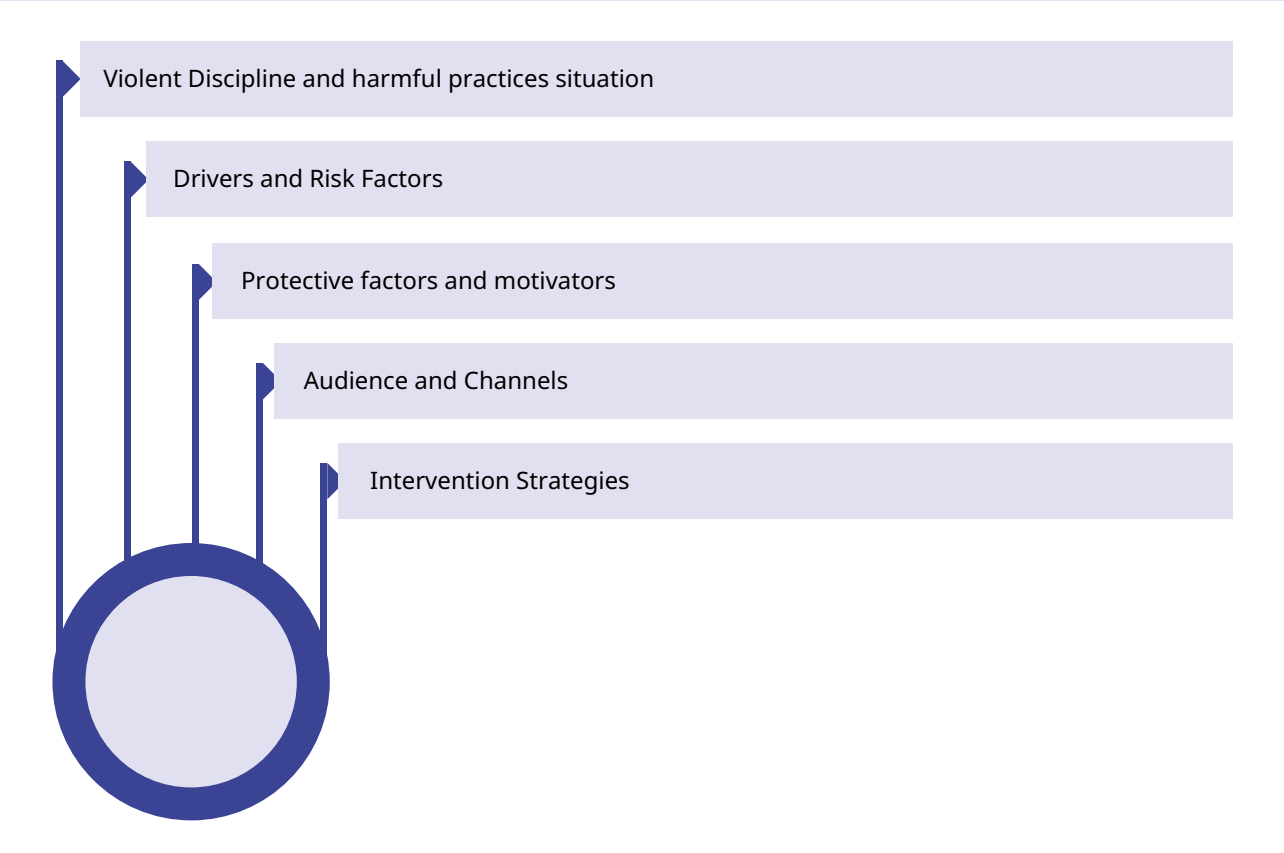


Figure 3: Evidence Review Domains

METHODOLOGY

This Evidence Review draws on a range of national reports and surveys, peer reviewed journal articles, and reports and publications from international organizations (Figure 4).

The Eevidence Review process involved three steps. First, was a search of peer reviewed literature, journal articles and other documents using five databases including Google Scholar, PubMed, Ovid Medline, Web of Science, and Sociological Abstracts. The second step involved the review of materials collated and shared by the UNICEF MENA regional office. These two steps yielded 74 resources (44 from UNICEF and 30 from the review of 5 databases). From the 44 documents provided by UNICEF MENA, 39 were deemed to be potentially relevant to this review. The third step involved analysis of data from population-based surveys on social and behavioural norms relating to child discipline conducted in three MENA countries (Sudan, Lebanon, and Jordan) by Ipsos. These surveys provide the most robust information on violent discipline.

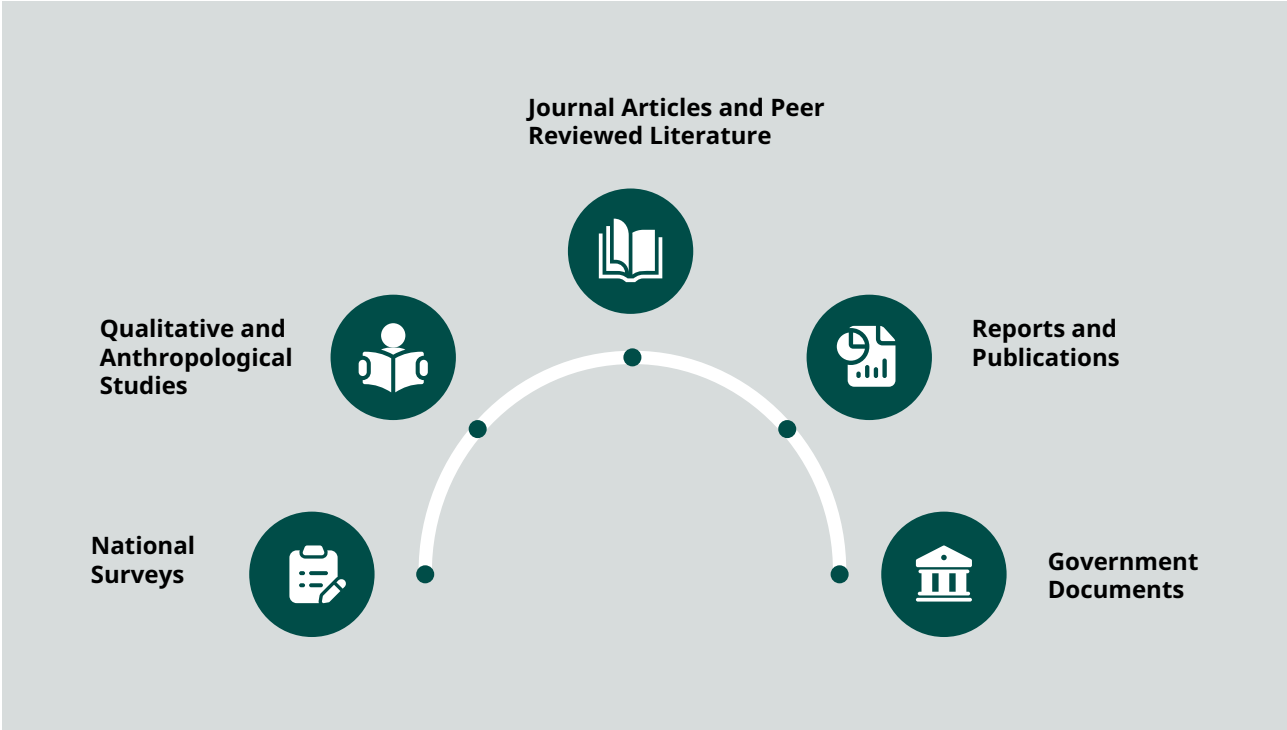


Figure 4: Evidence Review Sources and Materials

Both the peer-reviewed literature and documents provided by UNICEF were qualitatively coded to identify themes for this desk review. First, basic information such as the countries that were covered, background information, target audience(s), years of the study, programme objectives, and prevalence statistics were gathered. The kinds of violence that the study/programme focused on were identified, as were the determinants of various types of violence. The determinants of different forms of violence were stratified by levels of the social ecological model (SEM) with reference to the Behavioural Drivers Model (BDM) factors spread across the levels of the SEM (Petit, 2019). Frameworks and theories used were captured, as were the evaluation type, method, design, sampling frame and analytic methods. Best practices were identified, as were strengths and limitations noted in the documents. Finally, the recommendations for programming and research/evaluation in these documents was summarized (Figure 5).

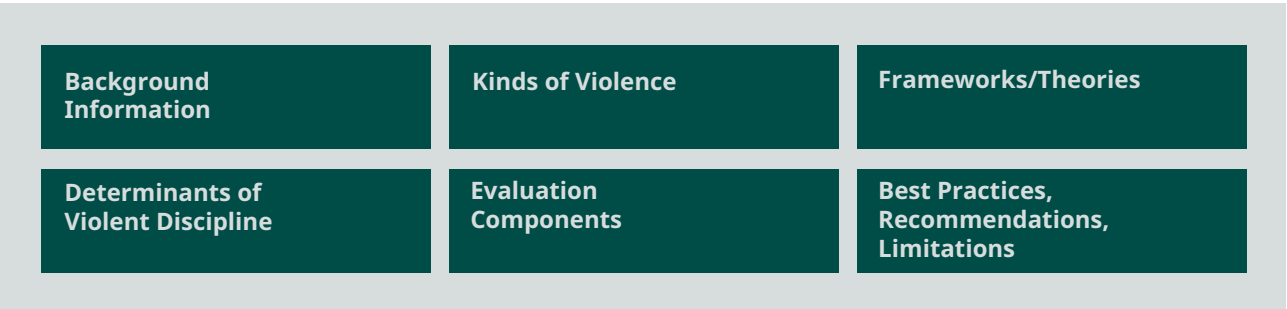


Figure 5: Coding Categories

KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the primary findings of the Evidence Review which are gleaned from an SBC lens.

Impact of violent discipline

Literature on the effects of violent discipline have emerged from several different fields, including but not exclusive to criminology, psychology and psychiatry, mental health, behavioural genetics, sociology, social work and family studies, public health, and paediatrics (Logan et al., 2022). A narrative review of outcomes of physical punishment on children from 69 prospective studies identified seven key themes (Heilmann et al, 2021) (See Appendix 1). The surveys included information about children’s developmental status and exposure to corporal punishment in the prior month. According to this analysis on average, children exposed to corporal punishment were about 24% less likely to be developmentally on track than children who were not exposed to corporal punishment. According to Cuartas (2022), not a single study using samples from low- and middle-income countries concluded that corporal punishment might be beneficial for children’s cognitive or social-emotional skills under any circumstances. One can hypothesize that these negative impacts apply to the MENA region.

the MENA region one of the most dangerous places in the world for adolescents and youth to live, with large numbers experiencing violence by those entrusted with taking care of them (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Around 127 million children and adolescents live in countries that have not fully prohibited corporal punishment at home, and 18 million school-age children and adolescents do not have full legal protection from this form of violence while at school (UNESCO, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Specifically, in the region, about 106 million children between the ages of 2-14 are regularly exposed to violent discipline at home, while 87 million children are punished in a physical manner (UNICEF, 2018). While issues relevant to children and adolescents have emerged as an important focus of discussions in the past few years (especially considering the 2030 SDG agenda) (UNICEF, 2019), several challenges remain in translating this awareness into scaled up and effective action within the MENA region. This includes translating statistics of the high levels of violence against children. A report on violent discipline in the MENA region focused on an estimated population of 85 million children aged 2-14 years across 12 surveyed countries (based on demographic data referring to 2017). Of these, approximately 84% (~71 million) reported experiencing violent disciplinary methods. Further, of these 71 million children, 80% (~68 million) reported that they experienced psychological aggression, 70% (~60 million) children experienced physical punishment, and 31% (~27 million) children experienced severe physical punishment (UNICEF MENA, 2019). It is important to note that since the publication of this report, new data have been collected and shared, however they have not been included into regional studies yet.

Prevalence of Violent Discipline in the MENA Region

The available statistical evidence on violence against children points out that countries in the MENA region have the highest prevalence of violent disciplinary practices globally, making

Every child has the right to go to school free from fear. But for many children worldwide, violence in school settings is prevalent, and this can prevent them from having access to quality, inclusive, and safe education. For many children and adolescents in MENA, the presence and/or threat of violence at school can prevent their access, and hinder their ability to learn, thrive, and benefit from educational opportunities (UNICEF, 2018). A study conducted in six public schools in one city among the students, staff, and the school community in Tunisia found that 37% of the participating children reported being physically or verbally abused (National Institute of Statistics & UNICEF, 2019). Another study from Morocco conducted with a large sample of teachers found that abuse persists in schools with 73% of teachers admitting that they abused their students and 87% of the participating children reported having been hit with a ruler or a stick (El Bcheraoui, Kouriye, & Adib, 2012).

While some smaller scale VaC surveys have been carried out in the MENA region (Jordan (2007, 2019); Libya (2017); Sudan (2022) and a three-governorate study in Egypt (2015), there are case management and child helpline data available for some countries, most disaggregated information about violence in the home and over the life course have been garnered largely from nationally representative Multiple Indicator Cluster (MICS) and Demographic Health (DHS) surveys and secondary analyses, such as the statistical analysis of household surveys used to produce the Violent Discipline in the Middle East and North Africa Region report released by UNICEF in January 2019.

The prevalence of violent discipline in the MENA region across 13 countries can be seen in **Table 1**. According to this comparison prevalence rates of violent discipline range from 50% (Qatar) to 90% (State of Palestine and Morocco) with most countries being somewhere around 80%.

Table 1: Prevalence (%) of Violent Discipline in the MENA Region	
Country	Prevalence
Egypt	≈ 81%
Tunisia	≈ 88%
State of Palestine	≈ 90%
Morocco	≈ 90%
Jordan	≈ 81%
Syrian Arab Republic	≈ 89%
Algeria	≈ 84%
Lebanon	≈ 82%
Iraq	≈ 81%
Yemen	≈ 79%
Djibouti	≈ 72%
Sudan	≈ 64%
Qatar	≈ 50%

Moreover, **Table 2** summarizes the prevalence data where available from this report for each country disaggregated by type of discipline.

Table 2: Prevalence of Types of Violent Discipline Across MENA Countries				
	Any Violent Discipline	Psychological Aggression	Physical Punishment	Severe Physical Punishment
All Surveys	84%	80%	70%	31%
Country				
Algeria (2012-13)	86%	81%	71%	23%
Djibouti (2006)	72%	57%	67%	22%
Egypt (2014)	94%	92%	79%	45%
Iraq (2018)	81%	79%	63%	31%
Jordan (2012)	98%	88%	60%	21%
Lebanon (2015-16)	60%	50%	45%	9%
Qatar (2012)	50%	43%	34%	6%
State of Palestine (2014)	93%	90%	74%	24%
Sudan (2014)	65%	54%	49%	14%
Syria (2006)	89%	84%	78%	24%
Tunisia (2018)	88%	84%	72%	23%
Yemen (2013)	80%	0%	80%	42%
Subnational Samples				
Lebanon residents population survey (2015-16)	58%	47%	44%	8%
Palestine refugees in Lebanon Survey (2015-16)	83%	78%	60%	14%
Palestine refugees from Syria in Lebanon Survey (2015-16)	79%	74%	57%	8%
Syrian refugees in Lebanon (2015-16)	66%	57%	48%	10%

These data show high level of variability in violent discipline practices within and between many countries with multiple ethnicities and sub-national entities. These disparities are evident from a study by Beatriz and Salhi (2021), which compared survey data from 18 – 24-year-olds from Qatar and the State of Palestine to find that Qatari young adults who were more educated and had more full-time employment than Palestinian young adults, reported lower physical and emotional abuse compared to their counterparts in Palestine. Qatari participants also mentioned that any harsh discipline they received in childhood was not reasonable and not justified compared to Palestinian participants.

Extreme Forms of Violent Discipline in the MENA Region

Another source of data that allows for estimation of violent discipline comes from hospital records and autopsy data. For example, to provide an overview of the problem and patterns of child abuse and neglect in the seven countries of the Arab Peninsula, one study reviewed medical literature, published between January 1987 and May 2005 (Al Mahroos, 2007). In addition, reports were obtained from regional meetings and professional organizations. The results from this study reported the following information seen in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Extreme Forms of Violent Discipline in Five MENA Countries	
Kuwait	Three studies identified 27 children: 22 with physical abuse, 3 with sexual abuse, and 2 with Munchausen’s syndrome by proxy (MSP), and 3 deaths.
Saudi Arabia	Eleven case reports identified 40 abused children: 24 with physical abuse, 6 with sexual abuse, 4 with MSP, and 6 with neglect. Fatal outcome was documented in 5 children.
Oman	Five cases of MSP were reported.
Bahrain	A total of 150 hospital-based cases were reported: 50 with physical abuse, 87 with sexual abuse, and 10 with both forms of abuse.
Yemen	Population-based surveys revealed a widespread use of corporal punishments and cruelty to children at homes, schools, and juvenile centres, which ranged from 51-81%.
Qatar and UAE	No publications regarding child abuse and neglect were found in their search.

Legal Protections in MENA

Becker (2018) argues that legal reform, when accompanied by public education, can be an effective strategy to end the corporal punishment of children. Evidence from multiple countries has found that when corporal punishment is prohibited by law, changes in attitudes and practices follow. Nearly all the countries that have prohibited corporal punishment have done so ahead of public opinion (Global Initiative, 2017). Within the MENA region, the various countries have implemented different measures and laws that prevent corporal punishment among children. **Table 4** provides information on laws around corporal punishment across the MENA region.

Table 4: Level of Policy Ban on Corporal Punishment Mainly in Schools and Homes (Shin, 2020)	
Algeria	Even though the Education Act prohibited violent discipline, the UN found incidence data of routine punishments in school-settings.
Bahrain	Regulations ban corporal punishment at schools but there is no law in effect. The government is unable to eliminate corporal punishment.
Egypt	No laws for children have been passed in relation to violence in schools despite data showing belts, sticks, and canes are used to discipline children.
Iran	Educational policies are adopted that don’t allow teachers to resort to violence. However, parents are undermined within the policies.

Iraq	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment.
Israel	Prohibits violent discipline of children at schools.
Jordan	Ban of violent discipline at schools and outreach on positive discipline.
Kuwait	Educational policies ban corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure.
Lebanon	Prohibits corporal punishment in school settings but not in home environments.
Libya	Corporal punishment has been prohibited since 2011.
Morocco	Still working to prohibit corporal punishment among children in schools.
Oman	Limited implementation of corporal punishment bans due to disagreements on the definition of “disciplining”.
Palestine	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment.
Qatar	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment despite 50% of the country experiencing it.
Saudi Arabia	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment.
Syria	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment.
Tunisia	Prohibits corporal punishment in school settings.
UAE	Prohibits corporal punishment in school settings however with home settings it is unknown.
Yemen	There are no bans against corporal punishment against children in any environment.

DETERMINANTS OF VIOLENT DISCIPLINE

In this section determinants of violent discipline are examined through the lens of the SEM with reference to the BDM factors (Figure 6). Planning and implementation of interventions using SBC to address violent discipline, need to keep the SEM levels as well as the interaction between them in mind.

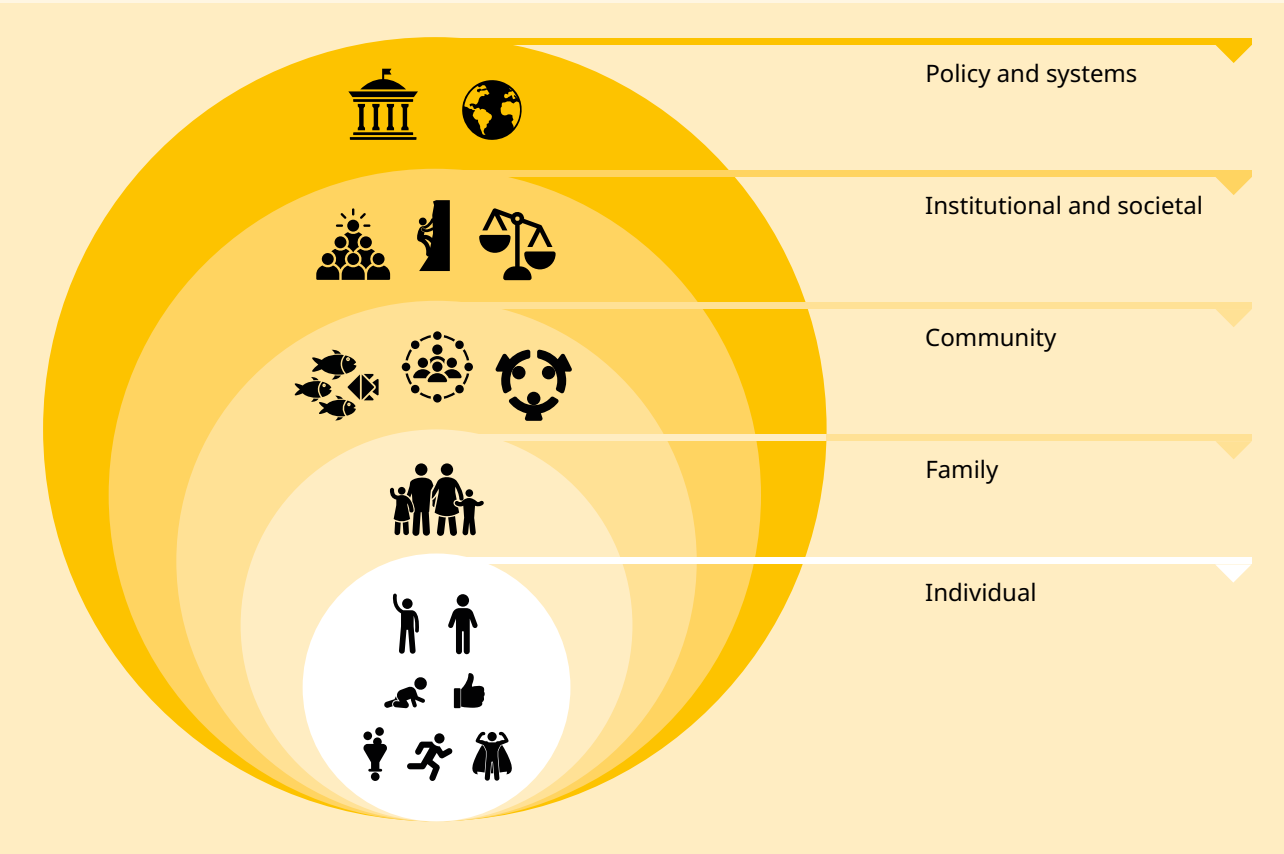


Figure 6: The Behavioural Drivers Model Factors Spread Across the Levels of The Social Ecological Model

Individual Level

Knowledge and Skills

Misconceptions, such as the idea that violent discipline is used for educational purposes and to modify the behaviour of a child, perpetuate violent discipline in MENA (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Abolfotouh et al., 2009). Additionally, parents may not understand the harmful effects of violence or may have a limited understanding of alternative non-violent discipline methods (UNICEF, 2023). Parents often think that both verbal and physical disciplinary practices are part of a child's education process and that its use is essential for child-rearing (Swailam et al., 2022). Research in Egypt found that parents were generally not aware of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) indicating a lack of knowledge on their part. When introduced to the content included in the CRC, most parents found it to be acceptable. What they objected to was the idea that children should be allowed to choose their religion. To them, faith and religion are questions too significant for children to decide upon by themselves (Tveten, 2016), however all the other content is acceptable to them.

Attitudes Towards Violent Discipline

Attitudes refer to “inclinations to react in a certain way to certain situations; to see and interpret events according to certain predispositions; or to organize into coherent and interrelated structures” (Badran, 1995). While attitudes are often a predictor of behaviours, positive attitudes do not always translate into action, as is the case with violent discipline. Data on attitudes towards physical discipline is available from a few countries in the region (Table 5).

Table 5: Attitudes Towards Violent Discipline

A study of **Kuwaiti parent's** attitudes towards physical punishment found that 86% of parents agreed with physical punishment as a means of child disciplining. Agreement with punishment was higher in cases of serious misbehaviours such as stealing, sniffing glue, and using drugs (Qasem et al., 1998).

Data from **Saudi Arabia** shows positive attitudes towards physical punishment of children with two-thirds of mothers agreeing that parents have the right to discipline their children the way they see fit and more than half of the mothers supported physical punishment.

Al Jadani et al (2018) further revealed the following information on attitudes associated with child physical punishment:

- 30.7% agreed that use of physical punishment is a useful and effective educational means if the child is naughty or annoying.
- 11.2% agreed that it is necessary sometimes to discipline the child by slapping him or her on the face.
- 15.6% agreed that physical punishment is not harmful to children.
- 26.8% disagreed that there should be a law or a system prohibiting the use of physical punishment with children.

82% of **Yemeni parents**, believed that physical punishment is the appropriate means for child discipline (Alyahri, 2008).

Results from **Egypt** show that children whose parents believe that physical punishment is necessary to discipline children are more likely to experience severe violence (Abdel-Fatah, 2021).

Attitudes are a noteworthy determinant for violent discipline in the MENA region because prevalence rates are generally higher than the acceptance rates (UNICEF MENA, 2019; Cuartres et al, 2019) (Table 6).

Table 6: Themes From (Cuartas et al., 2019)

1.	In most countries in MENA, the prevalence rates of violent discipline were higher than the rates of acceptance of disciplinary practices involving physical punishment
	While the study did not dive into what the drivers of this relationship might be, it suggested that social drivers may be one reason for this discordance between what people think and what they do. This presents an opportunity to explore the sociocultural drivers and determinants of violence, and how they can be addressed to improve intervention strategies.
2.	In most countries in MENA, women's attitudes towards domestic violence (i.e., their belief that a husband is justified in beating his wife) and the prevalence of violent discipline were positively associated with each other.
	That is, in cases where women's attitudes towards domestic violence are more favourable (meaning beating is considered justifiable), the prevalence of any violent discipline may be high as well.
3.	Children whose caregivers (responding to the survey) have a positive attitude towards physical punishment have 2.9 times higher likelihood of being subjected to physical punishment than those whose respondents do not have such positive attitudes.

The attitudes questions reflect individual beliefs, the practice question is asked with reference to anyone in the household. These two questions highlight possible discrepancies between attitudes and practices, an important measure for SBC programming as it underscores the differences between intent and action. Nevertheless, these discrepancies are important to consider in SBC-related programming.

Another significant dimension to the discrepancies between attitudes and practices also includes the idea that practices could be driven by social norms, which are the “perceived informal, mostly unwritten, rules that define acceptable and appropriate actions within a given group or community, thus guiding human behaviour” (UNICEF, 2020). Research by Eisner and Ghuneim (2013) with Jordanian adolescents highlights the intersections between attitudes and norms. These authors found that adolescents who more strongly display patriarchal ideology and believe in the importance of female chastity, were more likely to justify aggressive behaviour towards others. According to their findings these norms are already internalized among 14- to 16-year-old Jordanian adolescents (Schuster et al., 2021).

Age

Both the age of the parent(s) and the age of the child are determinants of violent discipline in MENA, with younger age being a risk factor. Lack of alternative care and considering teen parents as grown-ups place children and adolescents at additional risk.

- Younger parents are more likely to violently discipline their children and younger children are more likely to be violently disciplined.
- The age of childbearing is also correlated with violent discipline, with younger mothers being more likely to impose violent discipline (Kamal et al., 2018).
- Children between the ages of 5 and 9 are 1.4 times more likely to experience violent discipline than those aged 10-14 years (UNICEF MENA, 2019).

At that age, it is believed that a child must be able to understand right from wrong, and mistakes should be addressed with violent discipline. Key informants in Palestine have noted that the myriad NGO-run child protection services tend to be focused on younger children, not adolescents.

Another relevant driver identified as a risk factor in the MENA region is the age difference between spouses.

- Younger women who are married to men who are much older than them in age are more likely to practice violent discipline (Mohammed & Samak, 2017).

Overall, it is difficult to differentiate between age being a risk or protective factor. Age can be associated with risk factors such as substance use and impulse control. Age can also be associated with protective factors such as problem solving and critical thinking which may increase or counter violent discipline (UNICEF, 2010).

Gender

Gender of the child and parent influence corporal punishment (Lansford, Alampay, & Al-Hassan, 2010). In general, prevalence of physical violence is higher among boys while girls experience higher levels of psychological and sexual violence (Abdel-Fatah, 2021; Mohammed & Samak, 2017). Girls and boys are both often victims of severe violent discipline though boys generally face more physical violence than girls inside their homes, neighbourhoods, and in schools (UNICEF, 2021).

According to the 2019 UNICEF Violent Discipline in MENA report, boys are 1.3 times more likely than girls to be exposed to violent disciplinary methods (such as psychological aggression or severe physical punishment). Boys in the MENA region are also far more at risk of the most extreme forms of violence, with some boys reporting that their fathers had drawn guns on them. Around the world the advancement of women and girls in economic and political life is the most visible component of state efforts to achieve gender equality. This perpetuates the notion that boys are wild and require strict, firm, and –physical forms of discipline to learn how to be respectful and ‘become men’. Ethnographic research in Jordan shows that this notion of ‘wild boys’ is used to legitimize corporal punishment. Shirazi (2016) conducted observations during school hours at Mustaqbalna and Al-Shabab, observing many teachers carrying implements such as belts, rods, sticks, and lengths of white plastic pipe in the classrooms, hallways, the courtyard, and by the school gate. While most teachers carried these as props, signalling a

symbolic (often half-hearted) commitment to a disciplinary regime aimed at controlling the ‘wild boys’, some faculty actively utilised these tools to punish students for infractions.

Although boys see themselves as their sisters’ protectors, girls’ narratives about extreme violence in the household almost always include brothers – not fathers – as perpetrators. This is because older brothers are often tasked, including by mothers, with monitoring and controlling girls’ behaviours, to prevent girls from besmirching family honour. Girls report that their mobility and use of technology is strictly limited, and that even perceived transgressions can result in violence (Presler-Marshall et al., 2021).

The gender of the parent is also a factor as research suggests that mothers more commonly use violent disciplinary methods with their daughters than their sons, and fathers more commonly with their sons (Kamal et al., 2018). Research with a representative sample of Qatari youth aged between 18- and 24-years (N=697) using a cross sectional random household survey investigated the influence of gender on the experiences of discipline and maltreatment in childhood among young people in Qatar.

Results found that at least one form of physical abuse was reported by 22.1% of participants and was significantly higher among males (28.2%) than females (16.7%). The rates for psychological abuse were 16.2% for girls and 15.0% for boys. This study demonstrates the importance of identifying the role of gender and age when exploring the extent and nature of violent discipline in any given context (Salem et al., 2020). Overall, it is imperative to acknowledge the data that show the gender differences in the levels, forms, and protective and risk factors depending on the individual and the social and environmental context of either practicing or experiencing violent discipline.

Low Parental Education

Low levels of education among parents is one of the more frequently mentioned determinants of violent discipline in MENA (Abdel-Fatah, 2021). According to UNICEF, parents with an education below lower secondary school as compared to parents with a higher level of education, have 1.15 times higher odds of using violent discipline (UNICEF MENA, 2019). Low education may be associated with lower social economic status and higher parental stress. Parents with less educational attainment are more likely to use violent discipline to discipline their children (Al Mahroos et al., 2007; Swailam et al., 2022). One of the reasons being that parents with little education are more likely to believe in the authoritarian child-rearing style which increases the chances that they use violent discipline (Mohammed & Samak, 2017). Higher parental education reduces the risk of abuse and can increase knowledge surrounding positive/non-violent methods (Eldeeb et al., 2016).

Disability

One study from the Nile delta that explored the spectrum of violent versus non-violent parenting discipline styles practiced by a sample of Egyptian families who came for psychiatric advice in Tanta Psychiatry and Neurology Centre, found a significant association between all forms of psychological and physical violence against children (Saleem & Amer, 2020). Another study examined the relationship between parental self-confidence, warmth, and involvement, and corporal punishment in families of children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in Iran. Parents of children with ADHD were found to have lower self-confidence and less warmth and involvement with their children and used corporal punishment significantly more than the parents of children in the control group (Alizedeh, Applequist, & Coolidge, 2007). Another study in Alexandria, Egypt found that a family history of mental illness was a significant predictor of corporal punishment. The same is true in schools with counsellors largely focused on academic underperformers, or on misbehaving pupils, not on those with mental health needs (Smetana, Ahmad, & Wray-Lake, 2015).

Ethnic Background

Some literature exists on the importance of ethnic background or belonging to a minority community as a determinant of violent discipline (Qasem et al., 1998). This is a factor in several MENA countries like Kuwait with groups such as the Bedouin’s. Shechory-Bitton, David, and Sommerfeld (2015), examined the effect of ethnicity on parenting styles and violence and found differential levels of support for violence among immigrant women who came from other countries and the Western culture in Israel.

Interpersonal

Family Composition

Family size is another strong predictor of violent discipline (Aboltoufoh et al., 2009). There are two main reasons why family size matters; the first is that parents who have more children often have less time for children and the second is that overcrowdedness often occurs (Swailam et al., 2022). Overcrowding is exacerbated when children do not have a supportive and stable family environment, for example, children living with host families who are already strapped for resources or in displaced female-headed households, when caregivers are unemployed with no income, children who have lost their families due to the war, internally displaced persons, and refugees (Carter, 2018). One study by Dwairy et al. (2006) found that in Arab societies, sibling order strongly influenced disciplinary methods.

Parental stress

Exposure to violence and psychological stress can increase depression, harsh discipline, and punitive parenting styles, all of which are known to have deleterious effects on children. For instance, psychological stressors and depressive symptoms may prevent parents from attending to, and positively engaging with, their children. Prenatal and infant exposure to extreme maternal stress resulting from terror and war may also influence the long-term stress regulation and health of children (Yehuda & LeDoux, 2007).

Parent’s History of Being Violently Disciplined

Parents who were violently disciplined when they were children are more likely to use similar methods to discipline their children (Aboltoufoh et al., 2009). Research from Egypt for example shows that children whose mothers have experienced domestic physical violence are more likely to be subject to severe physical violence. One of the main reasons for this is that being physically punished as a child is associated with more acceptance of physical and emotional forms of punishment, and parents with higher levels of acceptance are more likely to use it (Qasem et al., 1998). It is possible that girls and boys who experienced harsh discipline by the parent of the same sex may have learned from them a unique model of how to deal with conflicts. That means that girls who experienced harsh disciplinary measures by their mothers and boys who experienced harsh disciplinary measures by their fathers (i.e., their primary role models in childhood) may have internalized that violence is an adequate and appropriate way to deal with potential conflict situations.

Parenting Style

Data from around the globe has found an association between violent discipline and parenting styles (Rodriguez, 2010). Research shows that positive parenting is linked with a wide range of potential outcomes for children across the life course (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Potential Outcomes of Positive Parenting

Literature on parenting styles conceptualizes four types of parenting styles across the globe, whereas in the MENA region seven styles of parenting have been identified (Aref, 2020), highlighting that a thorough understanding of parental style is necessary to address violent discipline (See Appendix 2). Additionally, data generation and utilization is critical to map the success of demand, supply, and enabling environment interventions (Appendix 3).

| Community

Residence

Most research shows urban residence to be a positive determinant, with children in in rural areas being more likely to face violent discipline. When families migrate from rural to urban areas in Arab countries, their harsh conventions soften. In Kuwait, almost 80% of mothers in rural areas use violent discipline to discipline children while 59% of urban mothers do (Al Mahroos, 2007). In a study in Egypt, male respondents reported harsher discipline from their parents compared with females in rural areas of Egypt, while in urban areas females reported more authoritarian parenting than males (Mohammed & Samak, 2017). However, there is some contradictory information regarding residence, for example one study by Elemi and Moustafa (2013) reviewed 89 cases of suspected child deaths from 2000 to 2007 in the Suez Canal area retrospectively and reported that 73% lived in urban areas. Secondary analysis of DHS data from Egypt has also reported high levels of child abuse or maltreatment in urban areas (Anatai, Braithwaite, & Clerk, 2016).

Religion

Religious misconceptions are often the cause of violent discipline of children. Swailam et al., (2022) points out that parents often misapprehend religious testimonies that describe forms of nonviolent discipline and use religion as a justification for corporal punishment. A study examining proverbs usually cited in Egypt as a justification for violent discipline can be seen in Table 7 below (Swailam, Fahiem, Hesham, & Magdy, 2022).

Table 7: Egyptian Proverbs Dictating Necessity		
Explanation in the Context of Child Discipline	Meaning	Proverb
The fastest way to stop a child's inappropriate behaviour is through violent disciplinary practices.	Violent expression of 'get it over with'.	اقطع عرق وسيح دمه
Violently disciplining your daughter will result in her being more developed.	Break one of the girl's ribs, and she'll form 24 new ones.	اكسر للبننت ضلع يطلق لها 24
Let your child feel pain now (by you), instead of feeling future pain (inflicted by someone else).	Feeling pain for one hour is better than feeling pain every hour.	وجع ساعة وال كل ساعة
Those who hurt me with words to teach me a lesson are better than those who do not.	Those who make me cry and cry for me are better than those who make me laugh and make other people laugh at me.	يا بخت من بكاني وبكك عليا، وال ضحكني وضحك الناس عليا
If you beat one of your children for making a mistake, your other children will fear making it as well.	Beat the person who is tied up and the person who is free will become afraid.	إضرب المربوط يخاف السايب
If a child cries, he is not a man.	Men don't cry.	الراجل مبيعيطش
If a child is afraid, he is not a man.	Men don't feel afraid.	الراجل مبيخفش
If a child gets embarrassed, he is not a man.	Men don't feel embarrassed.	الراجل مبيتكسفش

Religion can also be a positive factor, given that most religions emphasize prosocial norms. Parents largely desire to teach their children respect for parents, God, and religion and to not be extreme. Islam considers that spending time with and supporting family is the best of all expenses and support. Accordingly, Islam presented the fundamental human rights of children for good upbringing, to explore the intelligent protection from all sorts of exploitation and abuse over 1,400 years before conventional experience (Islam, 2015). Another fundamental protective factor is the Islamic belief that reliance on the family is the best place for a child. No place is better or safer for the child to be than with their parents where they can feel the love and comfort of the family. According to Islamic doctrine, a child is to cause no harm to their parents. By implication, parents should reciprocate and do no harm to their children. It is also the parent's duty to look after their child. A meta-analysis examining the link between maternal religiosity and parenting revealed that maternal religiosity was related to positive parenting and child outcomes (Mahoney et al., 2008).

Stigma

Research with adolescents from Palestine emphasised that stigma is a key barrier. Some spoke of being too embarrassed to ask for help; others reported that their parents would not let them seek help, for fear that the entire family would be shamed and ostracised. While boys are more likely to experience violence than girls, they are less likely to seek support, with only 4% of boys compared with 11% of girls having ever spoken to anyone about violence at home (Smetana, Ahmad, & Wray-Lake, 2015).

| Societal

Social and Gender norms

Powerful social norms at the household level, with traditional power relations and roles reinforce the vulnerability of women and children to violence. Patriarchal patterns of kinship, legalised discrimination, social subordination, and ingrained male dominance leave women and girls economically and socially vulnerable. At the social level, religious beliefs also impact gender norms. For example, research from Egypt shows

that with respect to gender, people seemed convinced that men and women are of a rather different nature, and for this reason need to be raised in different ways. Girls require protection, while boys need to learn to take on the role of the protector of the family and must grow up to provide. Girls only need an education in case they want to contribute to the income of the household (Mughal & Ahmed, 2018).

Cultural Context

Physical abuse of children has been defined in many ways. Price-Robertson and Bromfield (2009) point to the involvement of both intentional and unintentional factors. A diversity of definitions as to what constitutes physical child abuse poses a challenge especially so when the definitions need to be weighed in the context of a particular culture or society.

For example, there is recognition that certain behaviour, such as corporal punishment, may be considered acceptable in one culture but abusive in another (Al-Shail et al., 2012). In some societies, strong physical punishment of children, for example using hard strokes of a cane or flexible stick on the hand, as a means of behaviour correction is endorsed by parents, and sanctioned by schools and other institutions (Lansford, 2010). If it is acceptable to hit, slap, or smack a child there is an inherent risk that the physical punishment of children and discipline may be related to physical abuse and overlap with it (Haugaard, 2000).

Culture also plays a role in the perceptions of children. Different studies have indicated that Arab children and youngsters are often accepting of both abusive-aggressive behaviours from teachers and authoritarian styles from parents who use harsh discipline (Mohammed, & Samak, 2017). Brink (2014) observed that punishment, which includes spanking and beating and bringing shame upon the child in front of others, is aimed at instilling reason in children. But as most households use harsh disciplining, Arab children are less likely to be emotionally stressed about it compared with children in nations where such violence at home is not well accepted or perhaps even illegal (Gershoff et al., 2010).

Poverty

One of the primary determinants of violent discipline in MENA is socioeconomic status (Abdel-Fatah, 2021). Beatriz & Salhi (2019) estimated the association of country-level stressors and household-level economic stressors with disciplinary behaviours and beliefs using MICS data between 2010 and 2013 and reported that country-level stressors predicted psychological and physical discipline use and belief in the utility of physical discipline. Lower household wealth was associated with increased violent disciplinary practices even when the caregiver did not believe in its utility. In general, financial well-being is related to a more permissive style of parenting, whereas poverty is more likely to be related to a harsh means of discipline (Mohammed & Samak, 2017). Children are typically overrepresented among the poor in the region and the persistence of poverty is considered a root cause of many child rights problems (Arts, 2014). Data from Egypt show that Egyptian children living in the poorest households are the most likely to experience severe physical violence.

Political/Legal

Type of Government

Findings reveal that more repressive and failing regimes are more likely to use corporal punishment, compared to freer and more sustainable nations (Gould & Pate, 2011). A systematic review on the arguments for corporal punishment bans by Zolotor and Puzia (2010) found that corporal punishment bans have occurred in representative governments. At the same time, in an elected representative government, there must be sufficient popular support for such a ban, for lawmakers to act.

Laws and Enforcement of Laws

Legal bans on corporal punishment are closely associated with decreases in support of and use of corporal punishment as a child discipline technique. Although the directionality of this relationship is not clear, data comparing countries with corporal punishment bans to those without corporal punishment bans

demonstrate that general support of corporal punishment declines after the enactment of anti-corporal punishment legislation.

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children monitors the legal status of corporal punishment globally as part of the End Corporal Punishment initiative (End Violence Against Children, 2021). As of November 2022, 64 countries, only one in the MENA region, Tunisia, have enacted a full ban of corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment legislation does not work in a vacuum but is part of a dynamic national cultural landscape. As demonstrated by the case of Yemen, corporal punishment of children remains a widespread phenomenon despite the prohibition by law, therefore addressing root causes are as important as reforming laws. Laws banning corporal punishment vary greatly in their language and the range of punishments. The problem is further compounded by shaky legal structures in conflict or post-conflict zones where there are competing priorities for laws and security (Mahroos, 2007; Malcolm, Diwakar & Naufal, 2020).

Systems/Structures

Several MENA countries need to identify a child protection authority responsible for investigating, managing, and providing safe alternative care options for all victims of violence including violent discipline.

Conflict and War

One metric to calculate the challenges of governance is through examining the global peace index, the positive peace report and other data relating to the peacefulness of states. In 2017, for the fifth successive year MENA was named as the least peaceful region in the world (Schippa & Morgan, 2016).

At the societal/political level, political stressors, and war/violent conflict can result in violent discipline (Eldeeb et al., 2016; Malcolm, Diwakar, & Naufal, 2020). Research shows that the impact of war-related violence on households can be devastating. War leads to long-term reductions in income and economic growth, in addition to permanent increases in risk for both physical and mental health-related disorders. Levy and

Sidel (2008) observed that exposure to external war violence creates social conditions that foster violence within the household—being acclimatized to war makes violence “easier to accept” and leads people “to believe in resolving conflict by violent means.” Data from Lebanon, in a survey conducted by UNICEF in 2016 found that among children between the ages of 2 and 14, 57% of Lebanese, 65% of Syrians, 82% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and 77% of Palestinian refugees from Syria were subject to violent discipline (UNICEF, 2020).

Data from Palestine shows that adolescents have limited access to support after experiencing or witnessing violence because specialised, professional services are largely unavailable in Palestine. Also, refugee adolescents from Palestine are far less likely than their Jordanian and Syrian peers to seek support for violence at home. Of the latter, 21% of girls and 9% of boys had spoken to someone about violence at home (Smetana, Ahmad, & Wray-Lake, 2015).

War also has a severe and prolonged impact on the psychological health of parents and children. Nickerson et al. (2010), for the specific case of Iraqi refugees, find permanent increases in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and mental disability resulting from exposure to violent conflict. De Jong, Komproe, and Van Ommeren (2003) uncover similar findings with respect to several others post conflict settings including in Algeria and in Palestine. War can devastate labour markets and drain family income and assets, leading to impoverishment, disrupting caregiving and familial relationships (Barber, 2008), and potentially increasing the risk of violent discipline.

COVID-19

Finally, the impact of COVID-19 as a predictor of violent discipline cannot be ignored. The pandemic unveiled a specific set of challenges facing the Arab region, namely health, social, and economic disparities, political instability, armed conflicts, and resource scarcity that all created pressure on the public health system (UN Women, n.d.) creating environments conducive to violent discipline against women and children (Peterman et al., 2020). For example, phone surveys with Palestinian adolescents

and caregivers living in Lebanon noted that the pandemic exacerbated household stress and violence (Jones et al., 2022).

Intersectionality

While the determinants mentioned above are the ones most discussed in the literature, there are many others that drive violent discipline as well. Some can typically be considered as sub determinants that can be folded into other cross-cutting categories. Parental disciplinary beliefs and practices reflect a complex interplay with broader social, political, and economic contexts. Violent discipline is rarely the result of one specific factor but stems from a multiplicity of factors.

Children who experience multiple risk factors – within and across the individual, interpersonal, and community levels of the socio-ecological framework – are at an increased risk of experiencing violence. These risk factors are similar across countries and for all types of violence. Most at-risk children include, for example: children with disabilities, orphans, out-of-school children, and ethnic minorities. For violence within schools, the vulnerabilities that are visible (such as physical indications of poverty, sexual identity, and ethnicity) put children at increased risk of both peer violence and corporal punishment within schools.

Frameworks/Theories

Several frameworks have been developed to address violence against children and women. These frameworks summarized in Appendix 4 include INSPIRE, Response to Multiple Childhood Adverse Events, and a Comprehensive Model to address VaC, and could be combined or adapted to address violent discipline.

We analysed data from population-based surveys on child discipline conducted in Sudan, Lebanon, and Jordan. These findings can be extrapolated to other countries in the region. Based on our analysis we developed a macro framework by categorizing determinants of violent discipline into psychological determinants and personal characteristics of the child and adult, family dynamics and sociological-meta norms, community and sociological determinants, and structural and environmental determinants (Figure 8).

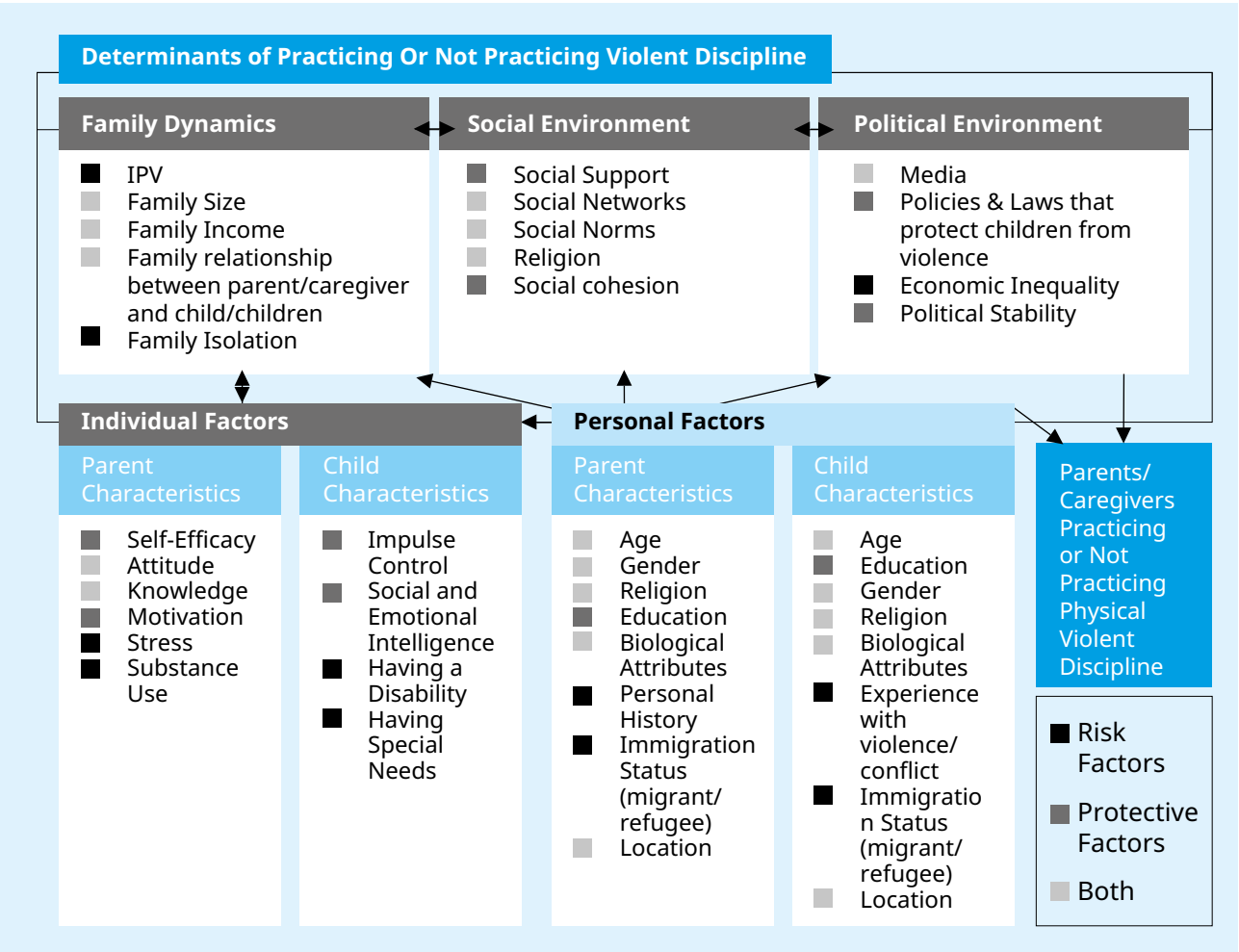


Figure 8: Determinants of Practicing or Not Practicing Violent Discipline Conceptual Model

Interventions

This section summarizes literature from various SBC programmes designed to address violent discipline. Two specific regional initiatives to address violent discipline that deserve mention include the prioritisation of violence against children as a key area of regional attention and a UNICEF 2021 Parenting Resource Pack, which provides national stakeholders across the 20 MENA countries with a set of tools and related guidance to promote specific nurturing caregiving behaviours among parents of children aged 0 - 8 years to support and foster young children’s development across the region.

Apart from regional initiatives there are also several country specific programmes. A 2019 Regional Mapping and Scoping Report of Parenting Support Interventions from 11 countries in the MENA Region, provides a detailed table with current and planned parent support interventions in the MENA region. Instead of cataloguing individual interventions, the following section aims to provide best practices for different types of interventions to address violent discipline (see Appendix 5 for specific examples from the MENA region and global best practices). Since, most violent discipline occurs in two places, at home and in schools, this desk review focuses on strategies to reduce violent discipline in these two settings. However, a sociological approach to addressing violent discipline should involve both homes and schools as they are situated within broader communities. The different types of interventions that can be adapted for and tailored across countries in the MENA region are summarized in Figure 9.

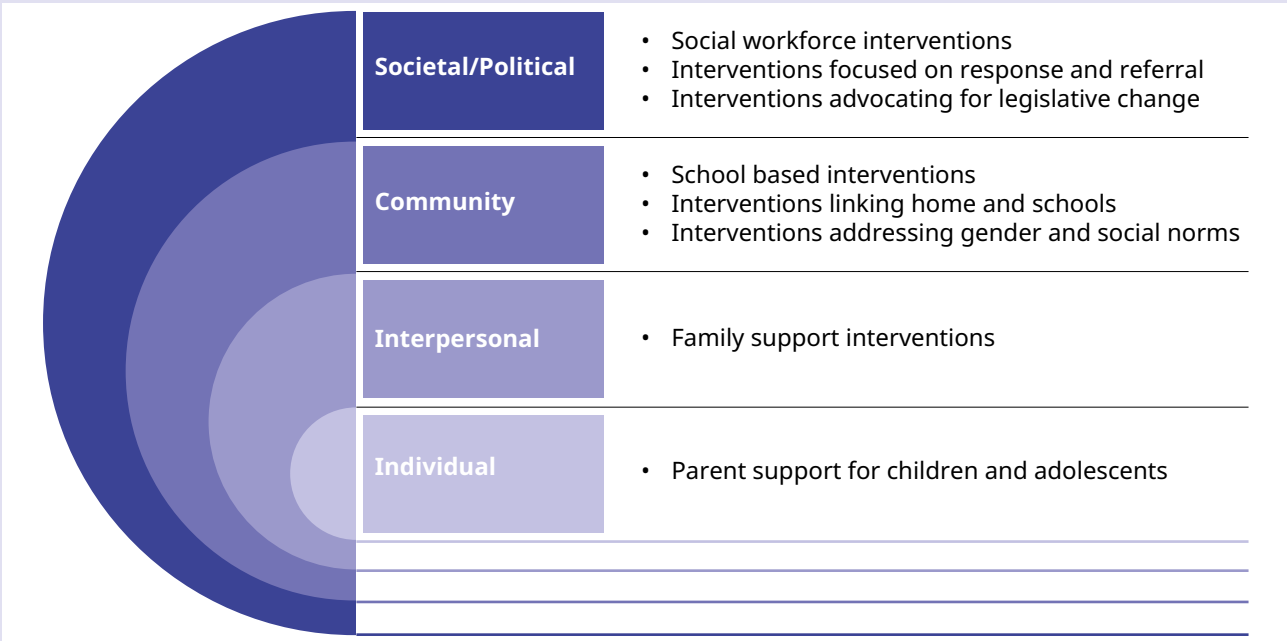


Figure 9: Types of Interventions at the SEM Levels

Parenting Support Interventions for Adolescents and Children

Parenting interventions or more appropriately caregiving interventions are described by various names – positive parenting, alternate parenting, parenting intervention, parental skill development, and parent support programmes. These interventions are founded on the belief that parents and other caregivers are responsible for a child and have the child’s best interests at heart. They may practice both harsh discipline based on specific beliefs, for example, repeating what they saw or experienced as children or that they were expected to discipline their children by others. It is important to clarify that positive parenting does not advocate against disciplining a child. Instead, it focusses on seeking non-violent ways toward child rearing and interacting with adolescents. Positive parenting is defined as parents who nurture, guide, protect, and provide for their children at different stages of their life and to prepare them for independence in their adult lives. The WHO guidance on Parenting for Lifelong Health can be used as a foundation to identify and implement positive parenting strategies. Other strategies that have been successful elsewhere are summarized in [Appendix 6](#).

Much of the literature on parenting support programmes comes from the early childhood development literature. One of the critiques of these interventions is that they do not focus on adolescents. However, the extent to which parenting programmes increase awareness and provide skills to avoid violent discipline, they are effective in addressing and reducing problems and behaviours in both children and adolescents (Aref, 2020). A UNICEF guidance (2021) specifically focussed on parenting adolescents summarizes the best available evidence, including key considerations and core content areas for programmes ([See Appendix 7](#)).

Family Support Interventions

Despite some overlap, while parenting support is primarily focused on imparting information, education, skills, and support to parents, family support is concerned with the family as a social unit and its ecological balance – how the relationships and resources flow between members as well as how well the family is embedded within supportive networks. Hence, family support is oriented to family stability and general family functioning and involves providing services or economic support for families (Daly et al., 2015).

School Based Interventions

Since children of school-going age through adolescence spend considerable time at schools, it is important also to focus on violent discipline in and around schools. School-based interventions are learning programmes that promote skills and enhance concepts through development using self-efficacy, physiological, and psychological well-being, and satisfaction. The criteria of school-based programmes include approaches that create a safe and responsive school climate, identify issues early enough to present an intervention, and/or respond to a crisis (UNESCO, 2019). Global best practices in addressing violence in schools, some of which have been successful in MENA countries and can be adapted to local contexts can be seen in Appendix 8.

Linking Home and School Based Interventions

One crucial link between the home and school environments can be accomplished through supporting community-based organizations, involving both parents and teachers. This can range from parent teacher associations in schools or safe community spaces where children can learn, play, and share their concerns.

Social Service Work Force Interventions

Modern social work has evolved towards the concept of accessing resources as a citizens’ rights issue (Crabtree & Baba, 2001). Practical applications of a strong school social worker model has the following prerequisites: (1) social workers need to do more research about their roles and how they could make positive changes; (2) teachers and parents should be educated so they understand the role of social work, and how students’ life environment affects their academic performance; and (3) future research should continue in social work interventions and outcomes.

Embedding SBC competencies within social worker training will help meet the needs of the students as well as the social and emotional needs of individual pupils (Alhajjaj, 2017). For example, social workers assigned to schools can play a role in influencing administrative decisions around violent discipline within schools, and identify and provide response and referral services in case of suspected violent discipline at home.

Gender and Social Norms Interventions

Given the social and cultural aspects of violent discipline, it is important for programmes interested in addressing violent discipline to reflect on gender and social norms. Long term interventions focussing on gender socialization which refers to the processes by which individuals (especially children and adolescents) internalize, or take on, those informal rules or shared beliefs shaped by gender norms, are crucial to address the paternalism that exists in much of the MENA region. Gender socialization interventions are not specific to violent discipline, instead they provide ways to address broader social and cultural norms that impact violent discipline. Application of a social norms lens to specifically address violent discipline are summarized in [Figure 10](#) below.



Figure 10: Best Practices for Addressing Social Norms

Response and Referral Interventions

Response and referral interventions need to be established to address all forms of violence against children. For example, Helms (2015) has developed a four-component counselling tool for professionals to target issues of honour and shame specifically focused on communities practicing Islam (Figure 11).

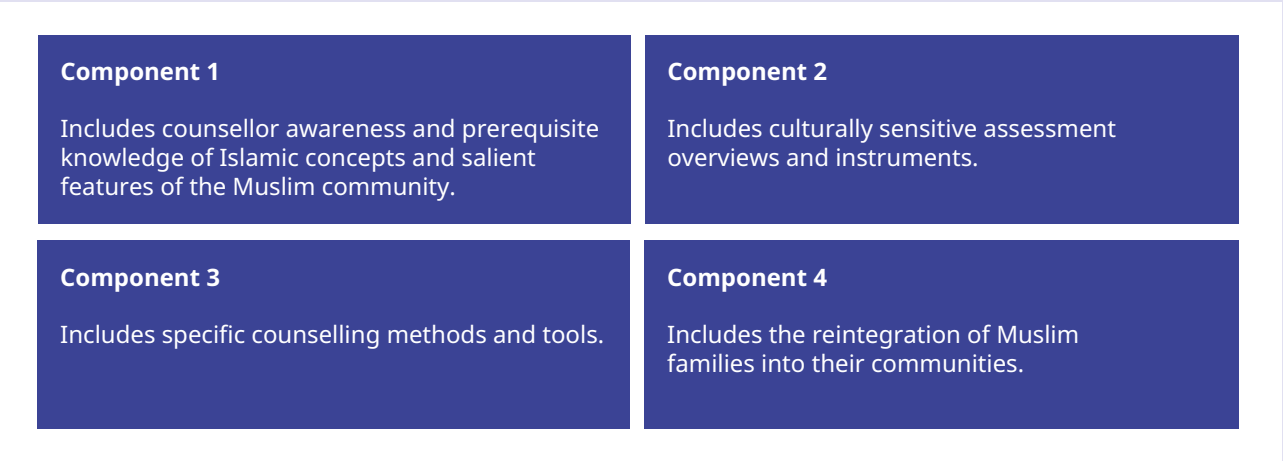


Figure 11: Four-Component Counselling Tool

While these counselling tools are relevant to address all forms of violence against children, these can be used to frame interventions to address violent discipline.

Advocacy Interventions

Current reports indicate that the communication and coordination of efforts between different professionals range from inadequate in some countries to non-existent in others. This calls for clear mechanisms for coordinating professionals’ efforts as part of multidisciplinary teams, which include physicians, psychologists, social workers, and justice and law enforcement workers. Opportunities throughout the region include the free access to medical services in all countries (except for Yemen) and the ratification of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which can be used to make a case for banning corporal punishment in home and schools.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Drawing from the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-25, programme monitoring can utilise a menu based standardized approach that can be used by multiple stakeholders to strengthen programme design and monitoring and improve the quality of measurement of SBC results, specifically by capturing the “missing middle” of intermediate results between activity monitoring and prevalence monitoring. Violence against girls, boys, and women, which includes violent discipline is a part of goal area 3. Addressing violent discipline is a big part of positive behavioural and social change outcomes for child protection (Figure 12).



Figure 12: SBC Outcomes

SBC efforts can transform normative drivers of violent discipline that exist on different intersecting levels of the SEM. While each country programme will devise its own theory of change including specific outputs and outcomes associated with their programmes, there is value in providing some overarching outcomes and outputs from UNICEF’s mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) of children, adolescents, and caregivers across settings theory of change (UNICEF, 2022b) (Table 8). The preliminary framework developed through the analysis of country specific data from MENA can be used as a starting point to design more rigorous strategies. It is important to note that outcomes and outputs exist but there is a need to adapt these and/or design more specific ones for addressing violent discipline.

Table 8: UNICEF’s MHPSS Theory of Change Outcomes and Outputs	
Outcome 1: Children and Adolescents Improved child and adolescent physical and mental health as well as psychosocial wellbeing	Output 1.1 is focused on strategies that contribute to children and adolescents having safe, nurturing and violence free environments at home, at school and in the community. Output 1.2 is focused on children’s interpersonal wellbeing, including the positive relationships that promote inclusion, equality, belonging and agency. Output 1.3 includes strategies that support the skills and knowledge necessary for positive practices.
Outcome 2: Caregivers (Including for parents, caregivers, mothers, family, and teachers) Increase caregivers practicing alternative discipline strategies	Output 2.1 Parents, caregivers, mothers, families, and teachers have access to support for developing and maintaining improved mental, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing. Output 2.3 Parents, caregivers, mothers, families, and teachers develop skills for parenting, teaching, and supporting children and adolescents in distress.
Outcome 3: Community Improved community, accessible, available, and quality services for mental and physical health across the primary health care, social welfare and protection, and education systems and structures	Output 3.1 Stigma- and judgement-free environments for social and community awareness, acceptance and positive behaviour change for children, adolescents and their parents, caregivers, families, and teachers. Output 3.2 Community mental, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing support systems are strengthened across sectors, including community capacities to support children, adolescents, parents, caregivers, families, and teachers. Output 3.3 Multisectoral care systems (primary health care, social welfare and protection, education) for children, adolescents, parents, caregivers, families, and teachers, including family-friendly policies, are developed, and strengthened.

Outcome 4: Systems

An improved enabling environment is created across policy, legislation, and financing systems, across the health, social welfare and protection and education workforce, multisectoral supports and referral pathways, with research and data on violent discipline (both physical and psychosocial)

Output 4.1 Policy, legislation, and financing: An effective policy, legislative and financing environment is available and accessible.

Output 4.2 Strengthened multisectoral systems and referral pathways: Multi-layered support systems and processes within existing structures include functional referral systems across primary health care, social welfare and protection, and education.

Output 4.3 Workforce development and capacity: Strengthened capacity among the health, social welfare and protection and education workforce supports the provision of quality age- and gender-responsive care across all sectors.

Output 4.4 Research, evidence, and data: An evidence and data ecosystem informs and drives programmes and policies for violence-free, positive mental, physical, and psychosocial wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Recommendations

Because of intersections across the different levels of interventions, there is no one way to categorize the recommendations. In this section we focus on the interventions that can be fit under specific levels of the SEM, with the caveat that addressing violent discipline will require actions from the bottom up (individual skills) and top down (policies). Additionally, acknowledging the role of the education sector and schools is also critical, in terms of both identifying and providing social services to children in need and the role it can play in addressing normative behaviours that either ignore or promote violent discipline in the surrounding community. Implementing and leveraging interventions at schools can strengthen systems on addressing and preventing violence across all levels of the SEM.

The literature shows that children who experience violence in one context are vulnerable to experiencing violence in other contexts as well. Multi-component interventions that address the lived experiences of all types of violence faced by children require considerable technical, human, and financial resources. Tackling violent discipline provides one entry point to address other forms of violence. Some recommendations that are directly associated with addressing violent discipline are summarized in **Figure 13** below.

Individual Level

- Address the underlying and specific drivers of violent discipling practices.
- Increase individual (children/adolescent/caregiver) and public knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and values associated with violent discipline, including corporal punishment.
- Identify and publicly acknowledge myth-busters i.e., individuals who are practicing positive discipline. Using them as role models is likely to be more effective in teaching parents and caregivers than didactic education from experts.

Family Level

- Scale up evidence-based parenting and caregiver programmes such as couples classes, life skills training, alternate forms of discipline which allows parents to practice and model the skills they need for positive and non-violent child discipline.
- Promote intergenerational dialogue between children and parents to address conflict.

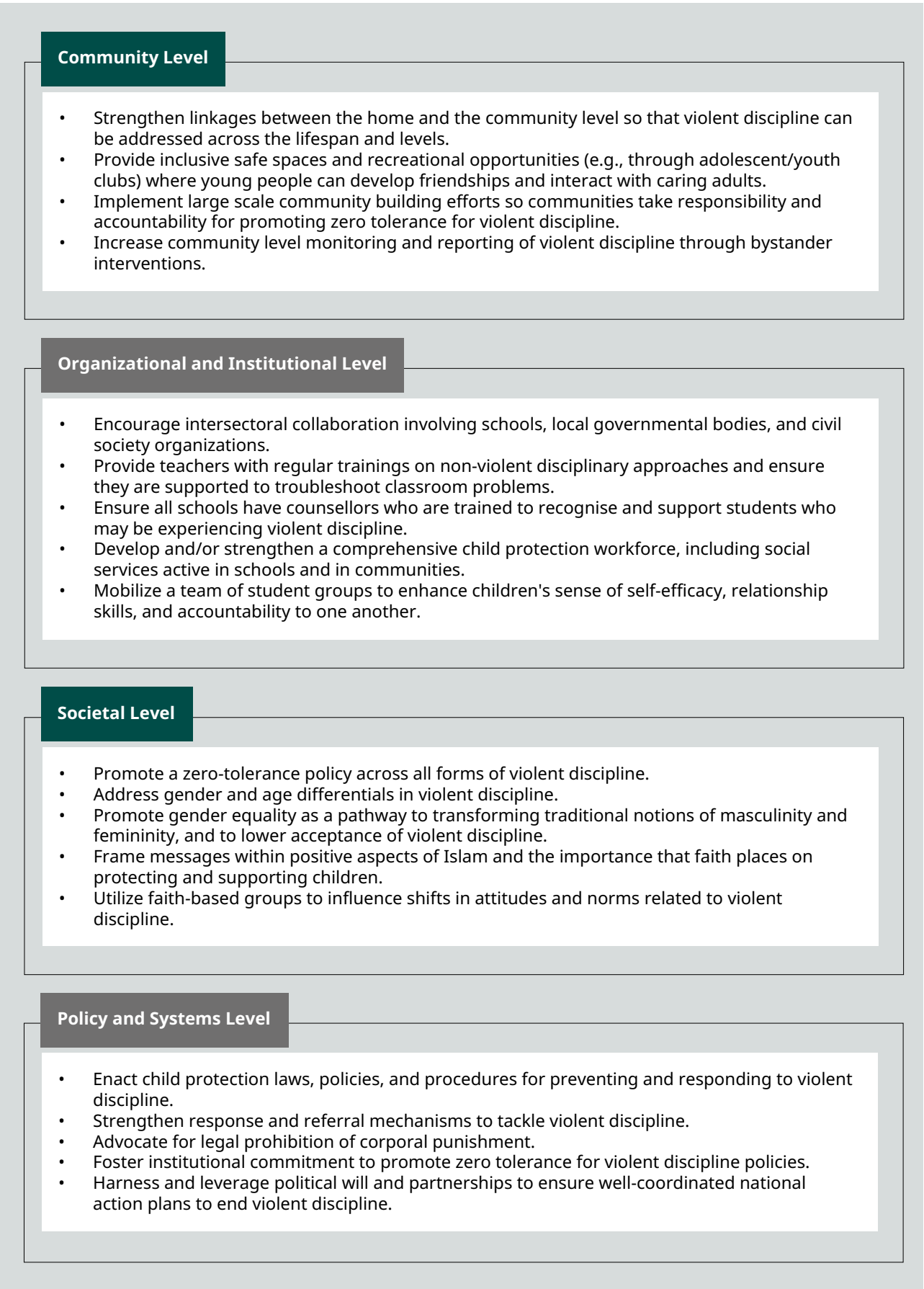


Figure 13: Recommendations

Programming Steps

This last section of the review provides a dozen overarching guiding principles to help with the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of theory-driven and evidence-based SBC interventions to address violent discipline in the MENA region.

1. Conduct situation and audience analyses. While adaptation of evidence-based practice is to be encouraged, it cannot be done at the cost of interventions that do not resonate with MENA societies and cultures. Formative research to identify and segment audiences, understanding and involving trusted sources of information will help tailor interventions based on audience needs and preferences.
2. Transcreate interventions. Despite some commonalities the linguistic, social, and political context makes it difficult to formulate interventions from the bottom up. However, there is much to be learned from the examples of good practices from within the region as well as from around the globe.
3. Foster dialogue with an assembled pool of experts from relevant disciplines, at both the regional and country level, with a view to ensure contextualization, prioritization, and agreement on concrete follow-up actions.
4. Scope current behaviour change interventions in homes, schools, and communities and integrate violent discipline, as part of the ongoing regional and country level efforts around the larger VaC agenda.
5. Identify hot spots to disaggregate inequities in violent discipline practices to provide specialized services for at-risk children.
6. Take stock, re-imagine, and re-engage a wider variety of actors on human rights, by working with institutions that have contact with children, for example dentists and non-state armed groups.
7. Implement hotlines (both phone and online) that allow young people to report and get support if they are survivors of violence at home or in the community.
8. Implement nationwide communication campaigns focusing on the detrimental immediate and long-term effects of violent discipline on the health, well-being, and development of children, as well as promote positive non-violent disciplinary approaches and actions.
9. Include social and emotional learning and bystander responsibility as part of interventions to address violent discipline.
10. Leverage digital media to increase awareness of different aspects of violent discipline to engage individuals to prevent and respond to it. Be cautious to ensure digital safety for all and to prevent shaming, silencing, and harassment.
11. Study how the cumulative impact of protracted conflicts, the COVID pandemic and other emergencies may have impacted children and women, specifically in the context of violent discipline.
12. Monitor frequently with standardized accompanying measurement tools to generate reliable and robust evidence and assess progress against changing behaviours associated with violent child discipline.



APPENDICES



Appendix 1: Seven key themes of outcomes of physical punishment on children from 69 prospective studies (Heilmann et al., 2021).

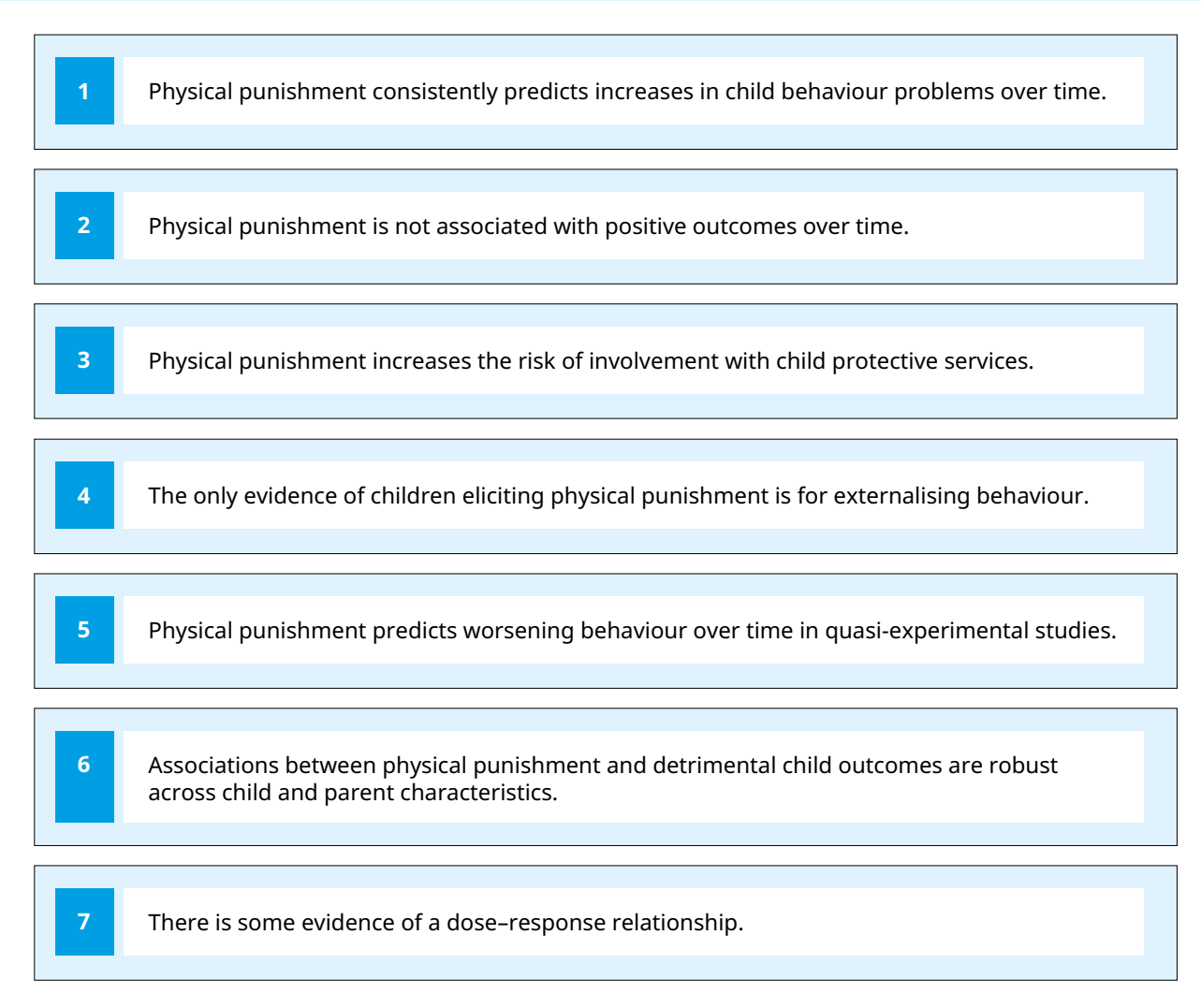


Figure 14: Seven Themes from (Heilmann et al, 2021)

Appendix 2: Parenting Styles (Aref, 2020)

Authoritarian	Authoritative	Permissive	Rejecting-Neglecting style
• Strict parental authority • Firm in control practices • Focus on obedience with little communication • Directive orders and punishments	• Parents encourage children to be self-governing by giving orders and leaving spaces for independence which encourages autonomy	• Express warmth frequently • Avoids confrontation with a low enforcement of rules and high acceptance with almost no punishment	• Parents are neglecting the needs of their children • Communicate and interact minimally with their children

Figure 15: Types of Parenting Styles

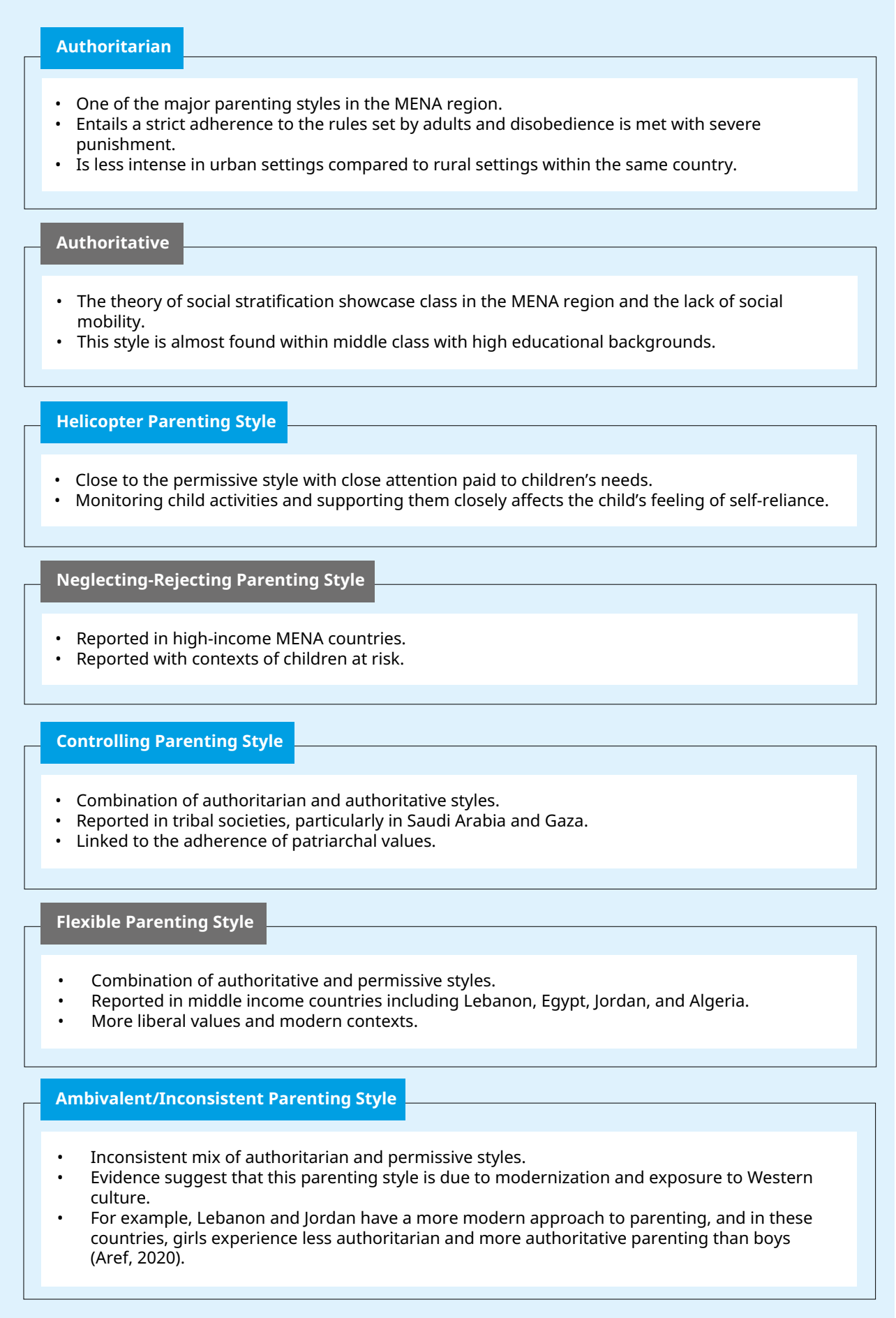


Figure 16: MENA Specific Parenting Styles

Appendix 3: Caregiver support interventions function at various domains

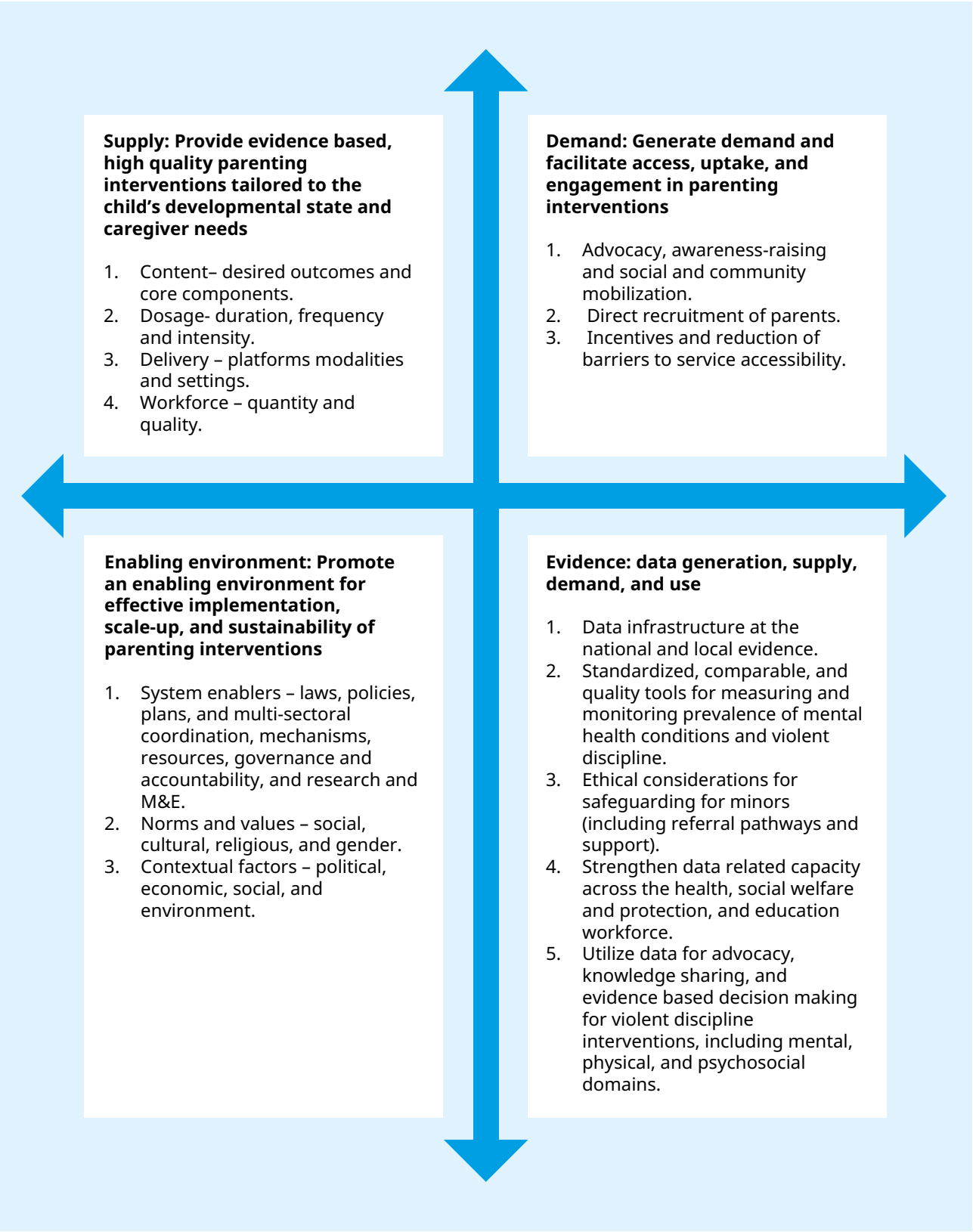


Figure 17: Domains of Caregiver Support Interventions

Appendix 4: Frameworks

INSPIRE Framework

The most holistic framework designed to examine VaC broadly, but also violent discipline more specifically is the INSPIRE Framework, which consists of a set of seven evidence-based strategies to end VaC around and across communities and in countries (WHO, 2016 & 2019).

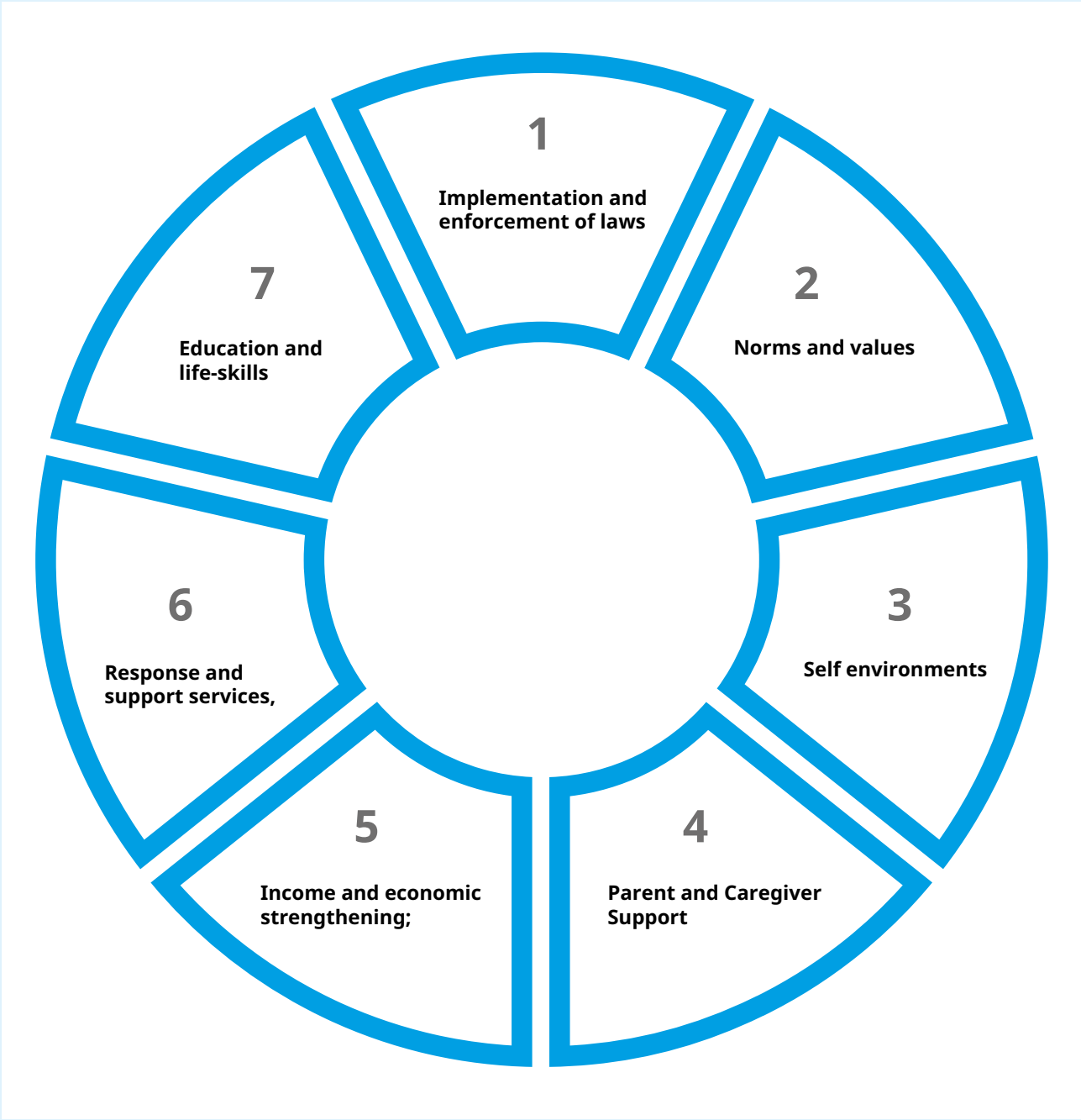


Figure 18: Seven Inspire Strategies to Address VaC

Multiple Adverse Childhood Events

Theory based and evidence driven conceptual model to guide multiple short- and long-term responses to childhood trauma (Maioli et al., 2021).

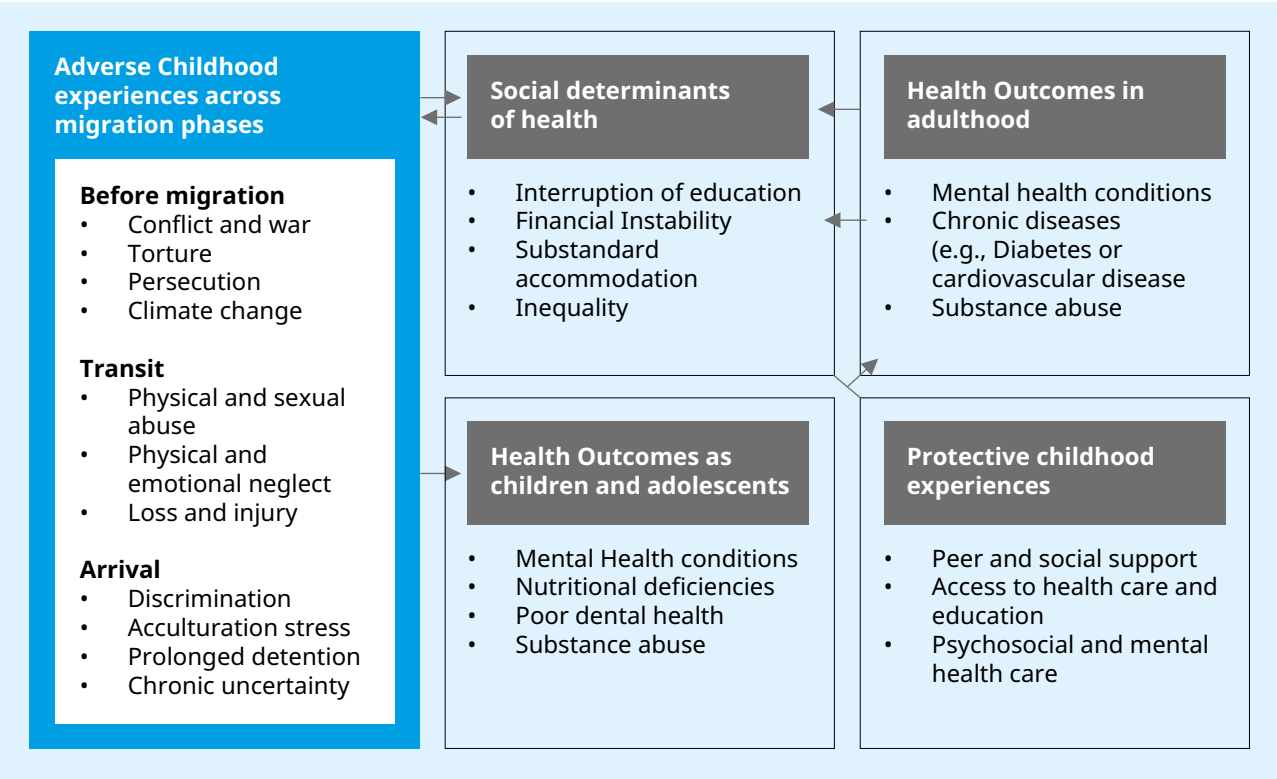


Figure 19: Response to Multiple Adverse Childhood Events

Comprehensive Model to Address VaC

A cross cutting approach to preventing and responding to VaC also entails investing in individual capacities of both caregivers and children, strengthening systems and policies to respond to violence while also addressing the root causes and drivers of violence. As recommended in the model proposed by Raman and colleagues (2017), these investments and actions need to work together as part of a comprehensive response.

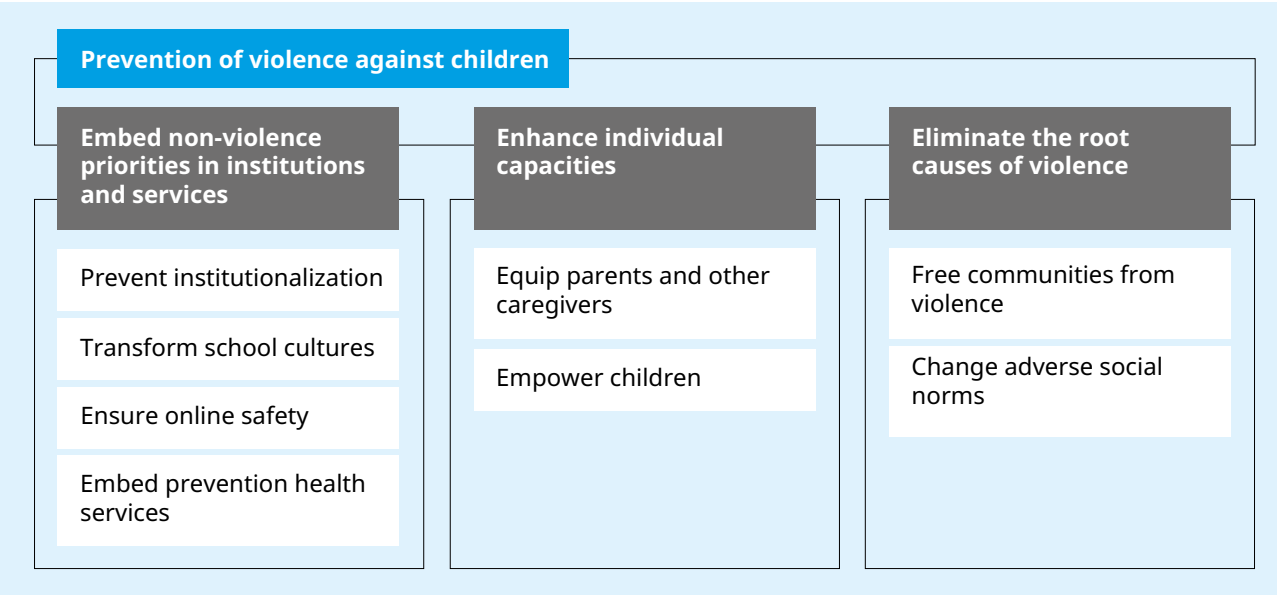


Figure 20: Comprehensive Model to address VaC

Appendix 5: Evidence of Determinants (Risk Factors) of Violent Discipline by SEM Level

	Individual												
	Knowledge	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Gender	Attitudes	Sone preference	Parental age	Parental education	Gender of parent	Munchausen's by Proxy	Parental substance abuse	Parents history of being violently disciplined
Hendy 2022		X			X				X	X			X
Antai et al 2016					X			X	X				X
Mohammed & Samak, 2017								X	X				
Salem et al 2020		X			X								
ElHak et al 2009		X							X	X			
Elemi and Moustafa, 2013		X						X					
Malcolm et a; 2020													
Beatriz and Salhi (2019)													
Eldeeb et al., (2016)									X				
Qasem et al., (1998)		X	X						X	X			X
Swailam et al., (2022)					X							X	
Kamal et al., (2018)		X			X								X
Shirazi (2016)					X								
Malcolm et al., (2020)				X	X								
Al-Jadani et al., (2018)						X			X				
Mohammed & Samak (2017)		X			X				X				
Alshari et al., (2019)					X								
Alyahri et al., (2008)						X			X				X
Al-Mahroos et al., (2007)						X	X	X	X		X		
Abolfotouh et al., (2009)					X				X				X
Becker (2018)						X							
Abdel-Fatah (2021)		X			X				X				X
Share et al 2013	X	X							X				
Schuster eta l 2021					X	X			X	X			

	Individual												
	Internalization	Interpersonal	Interpersonal support	Socioeconomic status	Stress level in parents	Family size	Traditional Family Structure	Marital status of parents	Community	Exposure to violence	Geography (urban vs. rural)	Religion	Societal/Political
Hendy 2022				X		X	X				X	X	
Antai et al 2016										X	X		
Mohammed & Samak, 2017				X				X					
Salem et al 2020													
EIHak et al 2009								X			X		
Elemi and Moustafa, 2013											X		
Malcolm et a; 2020				X			X						
Beatriz and Salhi (2019)				X						X			
Eldeeb et al., (2016)				X									X
Qasem et al., (1998)						X							X
Swailam et al., (2022)				X		X					X		X
Kamal et al., (2018)						X							
Shirazi (2016)													
Malcolm et al., (2020)			X	X	X						X		
Al-Jadani et al., (2018)				X	X		X				X		
Mohammed & Samak (2017)				X	X			X			X		
Alshari et al., (2019)												X	
Alyahri et al., (2008)				X		X	X				X		
Al-Mahroos et al., (2007)				X		X	X	X					X
Abolfotouh et al., (2009)			X	X		X	X	X			X		
Becker (2018)												X	
Abdel-Fatah (2021)						X	X	X					
Share et al 2013			X			X				X			X
Schuster eta l 2021	X									X		X	

	Individual		
	Lack of laws (or lack of enforcement)	Coordination Mechanisms	War/Violent conflict
Hendy 2022	X		
Antai et al 2016			
Mohammed & Samak, 2017			
Salem et al 2020			
EIHak et al 2009			
Elemi and Moustafa, 2013			
Malcolm et a; 2020			X
Beatriz and Salhi (2019)			X
Eldeeb et al., (2016)			
Qasem et al., (1998)	X		
Swailam et al., (2022)			
Kamal et al., (2018)			
Shirazi (2016)			
Malcolm et al., (2020)			X
Al-Jadani et al., (2018)			
Mohammed & Samak (2017)			
Alshari et al., (2019)			
Alyahri et al., (2008)	X		
Al-Mahroos et al., (2007)	X	X	X
Abolfotouh et al., (2009)	X		
Becker (2018)	X		
Abdel-Fatah (2021)			
Share et al 2013			
Schuster eta l 2021			

Appendix 6: Rules for Implementing Interventions

Parent support programmes have a common goal – to improve the lives of children – and a shared strategy – to affect children by creating changes in parents’ attitudes, knowledge and/or behaviour. However, there is no core set of guiding principles that can be uniformly applied. Some of the common rules that have been developed to implement these interventions include:

1. The 3 F’s of positive parenting are firm, fair and friendly. These F’s emphasise the importance of being consistent with your children, setting clear boundaries and expectations, and maintaining a positive relationship with them.

2. The 7-7-7 rule, following Hadith of the Prophet gives us the guidance to divide the upbringing of a child into three stages. “Play with them for the first seven years (of their life); then teach them for the next seven years; then advise them for the next seven years (and after that).”

3. 1-2-3 Magic divides the parenting responsibilities into three straightforward tasks: controlling negative behaviour, encouraging good behaviour, and strengthening the child-parent relationship. A key element of 1-2-3 Magic is the “no talking, no emotion” rule. This means that when you are using counting as discipline, you do not talk, explain, or rationalize with your child, and you do not get angry or otherwise emotional during or after.

4. 5:1 practice is based on the notion that stable relationships require a ratio of at least five positive interactions to each negative interaction during a conflict .

5. The 3 C’s of discipline are clarity, consistency, and consequences.

6. The Four C’s of Parenting are: choices, consequences, consistency, and compassion.
7. The 10 ft rule for parents is when you are very frustrated or angry, make sure the child is in a safe place and then stay 10 feet away until you have calmed down.

8. The Five positive parenting principles: attachment, respect, proactive parenting, empathetic leadership, and positive discipline.

9. The 3 R’s of child protection — recognize, respond, and report. Both adults and children learn what constitute child abuse. “Trusted” adults should be trained to respond to abuse when they identify it (or suspect it). Children should be encouraged to report abuse.

10. The 4 Rs of consequences: reveal, related, respectful, and reasonable.

11. The Five pillars of parenting are: character, knowledge, action, steadfast and positive relationships.

Appendix 7: Key considerations and core content areas for programmes specifically focussed on parenting adolescents (UNICEF, 2021).

Strengths Based	Key message: Using a strengths-based approach in parenting programmes of adolescents builds on parents’ skills and experience and supports them to nurture the strengths of their adolescents.
Gender Responsive	Key message: As gender socialisation becomes more entrenched, promoting equitable norms and reducing exposure to gender-specific risks through parenting programmes of adolescents is critical.
Adolescent Participation	Key message: Parenting programmes for adolescents should support the safe and meaningful participation of adolescents within their families and communities, according to their evolving capacities
Inclusive	Key message: Programmes should be inclusive of all parents, including the most marginalised, to meet the needs of their adolescent children.
Evidence Based	Key message: There is a good evidence base supporting parenting programmes of adolescents. Programmes should make use of knowledge and experience available.

Appendix 8: Global Best Practices in Addressing Violence in Schools

Whole School Approach.

This approach involves the whole school and community in the process of prevention since violent discipline behaviours are part of the values and norms of the society. This practice can be very useful when it is focused on four areas: 1) Applying a zero-tolerance policy through the whole school, 2) Targeting the environments where most violent discipline happens mostly, in the classroom and playground, 3) Encouraging a culture that reports violent discipline, and 4) Involving caregivers in addressing corporal punishment in schools.

Professional Development for School Staff.

Supporting teachers and creating development programmes for staff to be able to respond effectively to maintain discipline is an essential component to address violent discipline in schools. Teachers and staff need developmental programmes that can improve their intervention skills and understanding of the problem.

Systematic Implementation and Evaluation.

Most programmes in schools are incomplete or do not match the schools’ culture, resources, or priorities, which is extremely challenging. The monitoring and evaluation of programmes is supported by a meta-analysis that showed that the most effective programmes are the ones which are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis (Smith, 2004).

Embedding positive discipline content in the Curriculum and Classroom.

Apart from training teachers and staff, ending violent discipline also entails implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) and promoting bystander behaviour through activities that are age appropriate. SEL focuses on improving self-awareness, relationship skills, decision making, social awareness, and self-management. These activities would help students recognize and respond to violence.

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