

# EXPLORING DETERMINANTS OF VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD: METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH ON SOCIAL NORMS AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN ZIMBABWE

A DATA BRIEF IN THE UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN ZIMBABWE SERIES

## INTRODUCTION

This data brief is one in a series using evidence to better understand violence against children in Zimbabwe. This brief will describe the novel methodology developed by the University of Edinburgh and the Women's University in Africa to collect the data on social norms that exist which allow violence against children to occur or to perpetuate. This innovative approach – used for the first time in Zimbabwe – has added to knowledge about why violence against children occurs, and how prevention and response services can be improved.

## BACKGROUND

The Zimbabwe Social Norms study was commissioned by UNICEF Zimbabwe under the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Young Women project funded by DANIDA. The research was led by the Inter-Ministerial Committee headed by the Ministry of Public Services, Labour and Social Welfare. Members include representatives from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Zimstat. As part of the study, the University of Edinburgh (UoE) and Women's University in Africa (WUA) developed unique methodologies and tools for analysing social norms and drivers pathways to explore the social norms underpinning violence among children and adolescents in Zimbabwe.

The aim of the study was to develop a comprehensive Social Norms strategy for more effective and focused preventive interventions that are based on evidence. The work will also contribute to programming guidance and policy briefs on different types of violence against children, focusing on interventions to prevent such violence. This also feeds into the global Social Determinants Study, where Zimbabwe is one of the four countries in this study exploring the drivers of violence against children facilitated by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The study aimed to better understand why violence is happening in Zimbabwe, specifically to determine the normative components and contexts around the drivers of violence against children. The research asked:

- What are the social norms and behaviours that allow violence against children to happen/continue?
  - Which social norms are harmful and which are beneficial for the prevention of violence against children?
  - Are the social norms the same for different age groups?
  - How do they differ for boys and girls?
- Which reference group of people are important for changing social norms?
- Which social norms need to change and how can social norms be used for violence prevention?



From the literature it was found that in most countries corporal punishment, child marriage and some forms of gender-based violence are driven by social norms.<sup>1</sup> This existing evidence determined the four topic areas of focus for this study:

1. Child marriage;
2. The intersection of gender-based violence with sexual and reproductive health, including teenage pregnancy and early sexual debut;
3. Adolescent relationship violence; and
4. Violence in education settings, namely corporal punishment and 'bush boarding'.

To explore these topics, the study employed a mixed methods approach consisting of two main components:

1. **Qualitative participatory focus groups** (called Round Robin sessions) and **in-depth interviews** with young adults aged 18-24 in six sites (with a total of 136 participants) across Zimbabwe on the social norms that allow violence against children to occur or perpetuate.
2. Complementary **quantitative 'polls'** using an SMS-based software platform developed by UNICEF called U-Report. Ten U-Report polls of five to six questions were sent to pre-registered respondents (approximately 15,000) who opted into the study to ask about empirical and normative expectations related to six key social norms areas.

## METHODS

### Round Robin sessions

The Round Robin sessions consisted of a three-day event held with young people aged 18-24 with a number of participatory qualitative activities to explore conceptualization of childhood, pathways to violence, social norms and recommendations for responses. The Round Robin methodology was developed by UoE and WUA to explore the drivers of violence affecting children, and was based on rigorously tested participatory activities, using a focus group discussion approach with elements that have been proven to be effective in measuring social norms.<sup>2</sup>

The Round Robin format relies on an iterative process, soliciting consecutive contributions from each participant. It also has the distinct advantage of encouraging contributions from all participants in the group, allowing each participant an equal opportunity to voice their thoughts, and a space to present their ideas without undue influence by potentially overly assertive individuals. Participants moved through a series of 'table topics' facilitated by a WUA-trained facilitator. These topics included violence in bush boarding, child marriage, adolescent relationship violence and corporal punishment.

The round robin events consisted of five inter-related qualitative participatory research activities:

- I. **Age and gender timelines** – Participants started by creating a timeline to explore their perceptions about the changes in a boy's and girl's life as they transition from childhood into adolescence, especially the physical, emotional and social changes that occur for children between 0-18 years old, with a focus on the ages of 5-18 years.

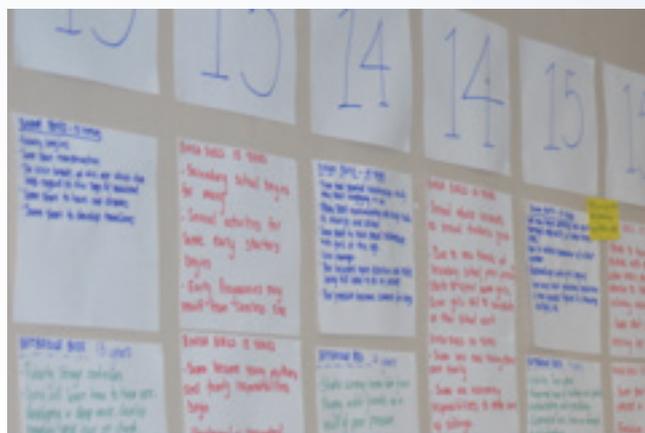


Photo 1: Growing up in Zimbabwe: Young people from the Round Robin sessions reflect on what happens for boys and girls from their community at each age from 0 to 18 years old.

- II. **Listing and ranking activity** – This activity involved brainstorming and listing the causes of different types of violence and responding to questions as a group. After responding to questions, participants grouped similar answers together before each person in the group voted on his or her personal top three responses. Listing and ranking activities were conducted to identify the causes of early sexual debut, intimate relationships between adolescents and older men/women (10+ years older), transactional sex and corporal punishment against children in schools ranked according to the perceptions of young people in the study.

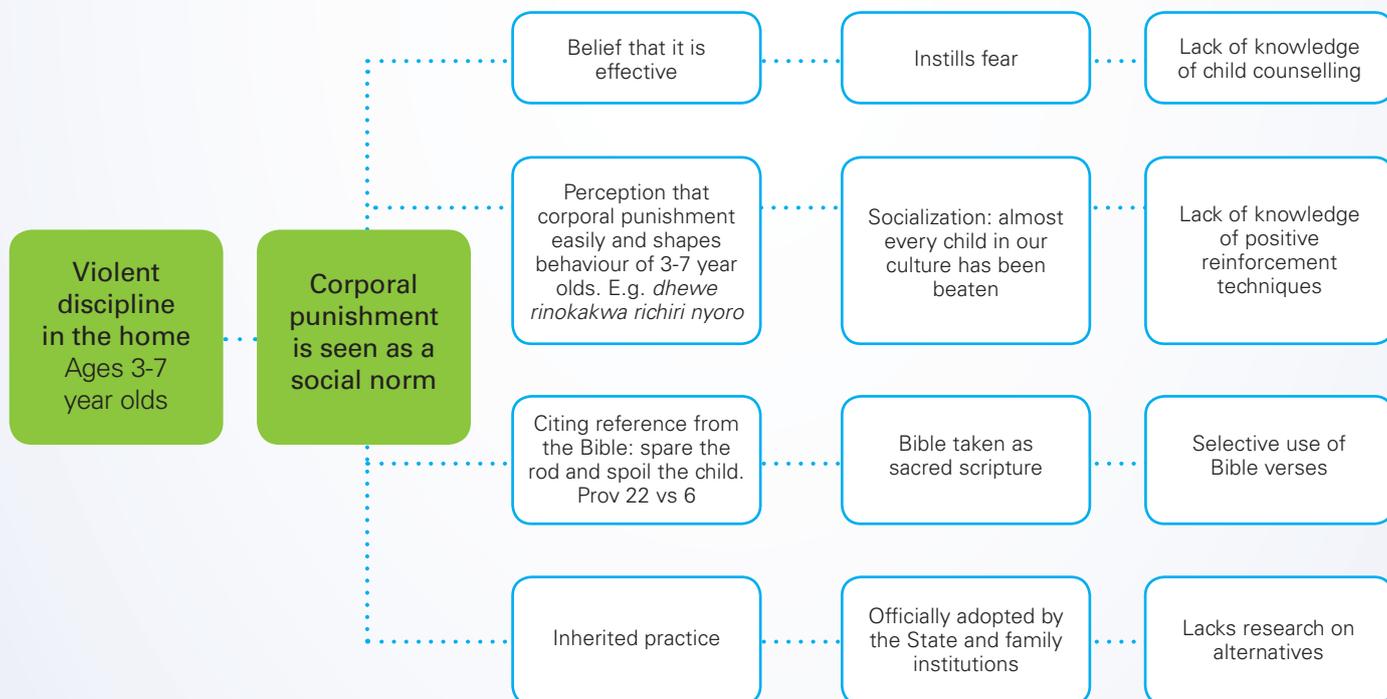
Table 1: Example listing and ranking activity on the causes of corporal punishment in schools

Top ranked reasons for corporal punishment	
♂ Boys	♀ Girls
Misbehaving/not following rules	Refusal to be in a love relationship with the teacher
Substance abuse of drugs or alcohol at school	Misbehaving/not following rules
Teacher frustration (primarily economic frustration)	Having a boyfriend if it is not allowed by the school rules

**III. Drivers Pathways** – The ‘Drivers Pathway’ was a tool developed specifically for this study. It shifts the emphasis from proximal causes to more distal ones, such as the social and structural determinants (‘the causes of the causes’) in order to more effectively think about violence prevention. Drivers Pathway exercises were conducted on the following topics: child marriage, adolescent relationship violence, violence in bush boarding and teenage pregnancy.

The Drivers Pathway exercise looks at one outcome and discusses in the group why that outcome happens. Each of these ‘causes’ is written in a box leading to the outcome. Then each of those causes are explored in turn – why do they happen? These causes of the causes are written in the pathway and participants are encouraged to go back as far as possible to explore the linkages and more distant causes of a particular outcome.

Figure 1: Example Drivers Pathway developed by stakeholders using the same methodology to explore the causes of violent discipline in the home against children aged 3 to 7 years old



**IV. Social Norms Vignettes** – Participants were also given vignettes to consider. For each vignette, participants were asked a series of questions about the possible pre-story scenarios. After participants discussed the possible pre-

stories, they engaged in discussions about different actors and their expectations. Participants in the pre-test explored potential alternative endings to the story and engaged in discussions about these alternative endings.

### Box 1: Details on Activity IV: Social norms vignettes

This activity began with the facilitator reading one of the following vignettes, according to the topic of the table:

#### Vignette 1: Child Marriage

[Girl name] lives in [community name]. She is 15 years old and has just gotten married to [boy name] with the blessing of both of their parents. Now we are going to talk through some hypothetical situations for [girl name] and [boy name].

#### Vignette 2: Adolescent Relationship Violence

[Girl name] lives in [community name] and she is 17 years old and is in a relationship with [boy name]. [Boy name] is very jealous about who [girl name] sees and tries to control what she does and whom she sees. In the last couple of months [boy name] has been getting really angry and hitting [girl name]. Now we are going to talk through some hypothetical situations for [girl name] and [boy name].

#### Vignette 3: Bush Boarding

[Girl name] and [boy name] are brother and sister and live in [community name] and [girl name] is 13 years old and [boy name] is 11 years old. The only school is in another community further away. [Girl and boy name] have started living in a residence with other students on their own in the bush [called Bush Boarding] in order to attend school. Now we are going to talk through some hypothetical situations for [girl name] and [boy name].

#### Vignette 4: Teenage Pregnancy

[Girl name] is 14 years old and lives in [community name]. She just found out that she is pregnant by [boy name] who is 17 years old and also lives in the community. Now we are going to talk through some hypothetical situations for [girl name] and [boy name].

For each vignette, participants were asked what they thought led the girl and boy to the situation they were in, and how frequently they thought these situations occurred in their communities. Participants then engaged in discussions about different actors – including the girl and boy, their parents, relatives, teachers, friends and community members – and their expectations. They were then asked what might happen if the girl and boy did not follow these expectations, and discussed potential alternative endings to the story.

**V. Response and Prevention Mapping** – This activity used the same Round Robin table topics that were explored during the ‘Drivers Pathway’ and vignette activities, and gathered participants’ thoughts and beliefs about violence prevention.

Table 2: Example from Binga Round Robin for Activity V: Prevention and response mapping

WHAT	LINKS TO BEHAVIOURS	RANKING of WHAT	WHO	RANKING of WHO	BY WHOM	HOW
What expectations need to change?	How do these expectations link to specific behaviours?	What is the most important expectation to change first? Second?	Whose expectations should change?	Whose expectations need to change first? Second?	Looking at the ranking of key actors whose expectations need to change, who would be MOST EFFECTIVE at working with them to change these? Who would they listen to?	What specific activities or programmes might change these expectations?
Sex is a must in every adolescent relationship, particularly for boys	<p>Sending nude pictures and pornographic material to make the message clear that sex is required (particularly in urban areas)</p> <p>Inviting a partner to a secluded place with the expectation of having sex. Boys are seen as the initiators</p> <p>Girls ‘giggle’ and heavily pet their boyfriends to show them that they want to have sex</p>	Sex is a must in every adolescent relationship, particularly for boys	Boys	Boys Peers	<p>Boys, those who go to church should be counselled by advisors and uncles</p> <p>Peers, peer educators</p>	<p>Behaviour change workshops</p> <p>Parents to monitor what their children watch on TV, restrictions should be put in place</p> <p>Sex education should be reinforced in schools and should focus on discussions around expectations of sex</p>

Participants in the three-day Round Robin sessions participated in all of these activities. The Round Robin included four facilitated tables each with a different topic by activity as mentioned above.

Table 3: Agenda for the three-day Round Robin session

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
 <b>Morning</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of study</li> <li>• Informed consent and demographic survey</li> <li>• Discussion of ground rules, expectations and definitions</li> <li>• Round Robin Activity: Age and Gender Timelines (1 per table)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recap of previous day</li> <li>• Drivers Pathway Activity (2 times, participants switch tables once for a new topic after 1 hour 20 minutes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recap of previous day</li> <li>• Prevention and Response Table Activity (3 topics before lunch, and 1 topic after lunch, participants switch tables after 45 minutes)</li> </ul>

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
 <b>Afternoon</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listing and Ranking Activity (4 table topics – participants switch tables after 40 minutes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Norms Vignette Activity (2 times, participants switch tables once for a new topic after 1 hour and 25 minutes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of Prevention and Response Table Activity</li> <li>• In-depth interviews</li> </ul>

## Round Robin sample of participants

The Round Robin sessions were conducted with a total of 136 young people who were identified through UNICEF’s partners. Forms with demographic-oriented questions – including age, sex, religion, ethnicity and education level – were distributed to identify participants.

In order to ensure geographic coverage, depth and breadth of interviews, a sampling frame was developed. The sampling frame ensures a gender and ethnic balance. Just over half of participants were female (51.5 per cent) while 49.5 per cent were male. Of the participants, 15 per cent were living with disabilities and 12 per cent of the participants were HIV positive and freely disclosed their status. Single orphans consisted of 30 per cent of the sample and 10 per cent were double orphans. The most common religion’s participants identified as Charismatic Pentecostal (47.5 per cent) and traditional churches (37.4 per cent). About 6 per cent of the sample had dropped out of school while two thirds had either attained their O-level (45 per cent) or A-level (20 per cent). The most common ethnicities of participants were: Zezuru (27 per cent), Tonga (24 per cent) and Manyika (14 per cent).

Marital status was important to note to discover the age they got married and the age of marriage for their partners; this could be a determinant of some of the issues that were coming from the discussions. Of the total number of participants 70 per cent had never been married and 30 per cent had been married and were now divorced/separated or co-habiting. Table 4 also shows the parenthood status of the participants.

Table 4: Parenthood status of sample respondents

	Never a mother or father	Mother or father before 16	Mother or father between 16 and 18	Mother or father after 18
 <b>Girls</b>	30%	7%	25%	28%
 <b>Boys</b>	70%	0%	7%	23%

## Round Robin sites

The study took place in four districts: Harare, Binga, Chipinge and Beitbridge. The selected districts ensured diversity of ethnicity, rural, urban, peri-urban, farming communities and town populations, which provided a number of perspectives from across Zimbabwe.

- **Binga** is located in Matebeleland North Province where the BaTonga people live. Due to Binga’s remoteness, many BaTonga people have not been included in development processes and strategies. Additionally, anecdotal reports suggest that ‘bush boarding’ in Binga led to different forms of violence against children. Moreover, according to the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 70.7 per cent of the Matebeleland North population believed that children need physical discipline – the highest in the country.<sup>3</sup> There is also a high prevalence of teenage pregnancies and low levels of child marriage. These factors make Binga a unique area to explore the drivers of violence against children.<sup>4</sup>
- **Chipinge** is in Manicaland Province. According to the Descriptive Child and Youth Equity Atlas at least 5 per cent of children who have never been in school.<sup>5</sup> Other research also reports that the marriage and reproduction of women, including female children, is central to Chipinge’s social norms.<sup>6</sup>
- **Beitbridge** is a border town, the rural part of which falls in the worst quartile of poverty.<sup>7</sup>
- **Harare** is the capital of Zimbabwe. Urban and peri-urban areas of Harare were selected to pre-test the methodology.

One Round Robin workshop specifically for young people living with disabilities was held in Harare as the idea of mainstreaming them at each site had failed to gain traction. Further details on this workshop are described in another data brief.

The study was approved by the ethics review committee of the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe. A full study protocol is available from the authors.

## In-depth interviews

At the end of the Round Robin event, potential participants were invited through purposive sampling to engage in an in-depth interview. Participants who shared specific examples during the event or who could provide new or more in-depth examples were invited to participate. Each facilitator invited one to two participants for interviews.

The in-depth interviews used an approach called Critical Incident Technique<sup>8</sup> to explore two specific examples among the topics discussed during the Round Robin event. A critical incident can be described as one that makes a contribution – either positively or negatively – to an activity or phenomenon. Critical incidents can be gathered in various ways, but typically respondents are asked to tell a story about an experience they have had. More general questions were then asked to gather the participant's thoughts on violence prevention.

## Quantitative 'polls' – U-Report

The research also used complementary quantitative 'polls' called the U-Report, which were conducted through an SMS-based platform. A real-time feedback platform, the U-Report is social messaging tool developed by UNICEF which allows anyone from any community, anywhere in the world to respond to polls, report issues, support child rights and work as positive agents of change on behalf of people in their country. It is designed to strengthen community-led development and has been used extensively in research and to inform policy and programming. UNICEF has also used U-Report polls on a number of topics including HIV/AIDS, the constitutional amendment around child marriage, water and sanitation and other issues. U-Reporters sign up for the service and are sent a series of questions as well as health and well-being information regularly. For this study, U-Report was used to ask participants questions on social norms – specifically the beliefs and expectations of others (empirical expectations) and what the respondent thinks others' beliefs and expectations are towards their own behaviours (normative expectations). These two concepts (empirical and normative beliefs and expectations) are central to social norms research and are combined with questions about the 'reference group' (e.g. the people who the respondent refers to for different behaviours).

No names were collected and current U-Reporters had the opportunity to provide opt-in informed consent to participate in the research study without affecting their normal U-Report use. Participants were also able to opt-out of the study at any point.

As is standard, UNICEF paid the costs of any cell phone charges through reverse billing. The study data is stored securely on UNICEF servers and is available to researchers on a secure password-protected platform. Questions for U-Report are sent in batches of five questions at any given time known as 'question trees'. As they were sent through an SMS platform, they need to be 160 characters in length or fewer. Longer questions can be spread across multiple messages – this is a common practice in U-Report polling.

Ten U-Report polls of five to six questions each were sent to 15,000 pre-registered respondents of the ages between 18 and 24 years. The U-Report respondents were drawn from all the Round Robin sites as well as the rest of the country.

Respondents were asked about empirical and normative expectations from six key social norms areas related to violence against children. Specifically, each poll asked the following types of questions for understanding social norms:

### Empirical expectations

- The number of others who use the behaviour (according to the beliefs of the respondent).
- How frequently they think others do/use the behaviour.
- Whether others approve/disapprove of behaviour (e.g. is it socially approved/socially appropriate).

### Normative expectations

- Number of others that expect the respondent to comply.
- The importance of each of these people to the respondent.
- Individual expectations of the strength of others' expectations.

### Reference group

- Who the respondent talks to about important issues.
- Whose opinion the young person respects or admires and what they think those people think about the topic.

### Ease of change

- Respondents' thoughts on how easy is it to change people's expectations.

### Short vignette

- Very short story about a hypothetical character asking a series of questions about what the character should do and why. This is based on research that shows asking about 3rd party/ hypothetical situations is a better way at getting at social norms than asking direct questions to participants.



None of the U-Report questions asked about respondents' actual behaviours, rather they asked about their beliefs about other people's behaviours and what other people expect them to do. Thus, all the

data collected was about perceptions that are relevant to social norms. Table 5 shows the question trees that were sent to the sample, as well as the number of responses.

Table 5: U-Report question trees

Question trees	Number of questions asked	U-Reporters contacted	Response rate	Sample size
Child marriage, empirical expectations	5	10,535	26%	2,739
Child marriage, normative expectations	9	2,174	34%	739
Pressured sex, empirical expectations	6	1,128	46%	519
Pressured sex, Normative expectations	3	3,632	31%	1,126
Bush boarding, empirical expectations	7	2,579	48%	1,238
Bush boarding, normative expectations	6	3,244	39%	1,265
Corporal punishment, empirical expectations	4	930	54%	502
Corporal punishment, normative expectations	5	2,689	19%	511
Teenage pregnancy, empirical expectations	13	847	70%	593
Teenage pregnancy, normative expectations	4	1,814	44%	798

## Using the methodology: Practical issues and lesson learned

Using the Round Robin methodology successfully depends on adequate planning. The following section reflects on some of the practical issues involved and lessons learned from developing and using the Round Robin methodology in Zimbabwe.

To get the most out of this fruitful methodology, the pre-test is a very important tool for testing logistical challenges and the timing of sessions. The pre-test must go beyond the testing of the instrument and should replicate the entire programme for the research. This was a crucial part of the successful

use of the Round Robin methodology in Zimbabwe. It allowed researchers to assess the feasibility of the research programme and make logistical and activity changes where necessary, such as the number of activities that fit within a specified length of time. Another important lesson learned from Zimbabwe is that the timing of the programme sessions is vital to its success. For example, delays with one session can result in the loss of a whole session. If Round Robin sessions are planned to run over several days, the first day should not be packed with too many sessions and activities, as the first day often has a slow start due to logistical delays. From our experience, the

second day usually starts earlier and has fewer ice-breaking activities as participants and researchers will have become acquainted by then.

The following are additional practical issues and lessons learned from the teams' own experiences which will assist in getting the most out of this methodology:

- Language translations of tools and activities should be pre-tested. From experience, translation tends to be time-consuming and if the pre-test does not include the translated materials, this could disrupt the timing of activities after the pre-test. Additional consideration should be made to note important cultural formalities so that they are also timed.
- Always note the gender dynamics that exist in the groups. For example, depending on the cultural context, girls and women might not participate as much when mixed with male participants. This then makes the Round Robin activities difficult to manoeuvre. One way to identify if this might affect the Round Robin sessions, especially where the participants are pre-selected, is to ask participants questions about what type of group they feel most comfortable participating in.
- When conducting the sessions with people living with disabilities, the facilitators are the ones who should switch tables. Additionally, depending on the types of impairments that the participants have, it might be difficult to have more than one table change due to the additional time needed. Best practice includes working with a local disability organization to ensure tools and activities are accessible. It is also important to pre-test these activities with people living with disabilities to understand how best to adapt the research programme and handle any logistical issues that may arise.

## Conclusion

The data collected through this mixed methods study was triangulated with existing evidence from the secondary analysis of the National Baseline Survey on Life Experiences of Adolescents,<sup>9</sup> MICS data<sup>10</sup> and a systematic literature review to develop a series of data briefings to help inform a Social Norms Strategy.<sup>11</sup> This evidence-based strategic toolkit was developed to assist programmers in the Government of Zimbabwe to improve the effectiveness of preventive interventions. The methodology developed for this study and described in this brief is an innovative approach to enhance understanding of why violence occurs through exploring social norms, and what can be done to prevent it.

## Acknowledgements

This data brief was written by Dr. Deborah Fry and Ms. Tabitha Casey from the University of Edinburgh and Ms. Charity Hodzi and Dr. Tendai Nhenga from the Women's University of Africa as part of the Social Norms Study commissioned by UNICEF Zimbabwe.

The work undertaken to prepare this data brief would not have been possible without the support and input from several key UNICEF Zimbabwe staff: Noriko Izumi and Line Baago Rasmussen.

## Suggested Citation

Fry, D., Casey, T., Hodzi, C. and Nhenga, T. Exploring Determinants of Violence in Childhood: Methodology of research on Social Norms and Violence Prevention in Zimbabwe. Understanding Violence Against Children in Zimbabwe Series, No. 4. Harare: UNICEF, 2016.

This publication is part of the Understanding Violence Against Children in Zimbabwe Series. Children from all parts of society may be exposed to physical, sexual and psychological violence, abuse and exploitation. This is a growing concern due to the negative health and developmental consequences for children and society, both at present and in the future.

While evidence is relatively limited on the extent of violence and abuse, studies are beginning to suggest that it is a significant problem in Zimbabwe. The Understanding Violence Against Children in Zimbabwe Series aim to contribute to this growing body of evidence to understand better why violence against children is happening and what is driving it. The Series draws data largely from the UNICEF-supported interventions where diverse information is being collected as part of programme monitoring. The Series attempt to give it a closer look at the data and information at hand and dig deeper the issue of violence against children in Zimbabwe. We hope to generate evidence, create deeper understanding of the issue and stimulate discussions – all to better inform programming to address violence against children in Zimbabwe.

This data brief was produced by the University of Edinburgh and Women's University of Africa for UNICEF Zimbabwe in 2016. The opinions and statements presented here do not necessarily represent those of UNICEF, University of Edinburgh or Women's University of Africa.

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