

FAMILY VIOLENCES AGAINST GIRLS AND BOYS IN BURKINA FASO: differences across normative contexts

Communication

Alis BAMBARA

PhD student in demography

Institute of Demography and Socioeconomics/ University of Geneva

Abstract

In different contexts, social norms can expose or prevent children from family violence. Sub-Saharan Africa boasts diverse and multicultural settings, yet there's a dearth of studies comparing how variations in social norms influence the practices of violence against girls and boys in these societies. This research uses an intersectional approach, with Burkina Faso as a case study, to examine how specific normative contexts contribute more significantly to girls' and boys' protection from various forms of family violence. Multilevel analyses were conducted using data from children under 12 years old in Burkina Faso in 2018. The findings reveal disparities in the practice of family violence against children across municipalities. These variations are not related to social norms. Interestingly, communities with strong support for violent discipline can also be protective of children. However, further detailed studies on how social norms are interpreted, integrated, and reproduced across societies would clarify these findings.

Issues of family violences against children: considering the individual and their context

In Sub-Saharan African societies, as in most societies around the world, children remain victims of violences and more often by their caregiver (Delanoë, 2015; Durant and Ensom, 2012; Dassa et al, 2005). One of the explanations given for this result is that these practices are encouraged by social norms supporting violent discipline.

(Lilleston et al., 2017; Mackie et al. 2015; Markus and Harper, 2014). However, beliefs and perceptions relating to girls' and boys' education vary greatly in families and communities, particularly in multicultural contexts such as those of Africa (Gelles, 1985; Danhoundo, 2017; Niang, 2002). And they do not all systematically involve acts of violence (Niang, 2002). Indeed, in sub-Saharan Africa, empirical studies from sociology, psychology and public health have examined, through interviews or cross-sectional survey data (EDS, data on communities) the relationships between beliefs and perceptions at the individual level or social norms at the meso-level and corporal and/or emotional punishment. They show positive relationships between beliefs or attitudes or even perceptions valuing disciplinary violences and the use of acts of violence against children in families (Kouwounou and Locoh, 2006; Fourn, Hountondji and Ayatode, 2014; Mayisela, 2017; Mansor and Talib, 2012; Benebo, Schumann and Vaezghasemi, 2018; Murphy et al, 2020). In some contexts, such as in Togo, Dassa, Bakonde, and Djassoa (2009) reveal that social beliefs, while sometimes favorable to acts of punishment, prohibit severe types such as touching genitals, drawing blood, using sharp objects, or starving children. Thus, social beliefs and norms, including gender ones, can, depending on the context, encourage family violence against children by encouraging practices with an educational aim or, on the contrary, protect them from it by limiting or prohibiting practices of violence against them against (Lilleston et al., 2017). Therefore, guarantee the children's protection and achieve the sustainable development goals ((UN, 1989, 2016)) require thinking children's vulnerabilities in a more global ecosystem considering in addition to the child, his or her life context (Lacharité, 2021, Bonnet, 2020) which also implies the use of multiple methodological and conceptual approaches (Rossier et al, 2023; Bonnet, 2020).

However, few studies compare practices of violence against children in different normative contexts.

This contribution is part of a doctoral research project which mobilizes knowledge in demography and gender studies to provide information on social norms and/or contextual factors which protect children from violences.

The aim of this paper is to understand how some specific cultural contexts (norms relating to the education of children, gender) in Burkina Faso protect girls and/or boys from family violences? More specifically, it asks the following questions: i. Are practices of violence different from one cultural community to another in Burkina Faso? ii. What are the normative contexts where children are protected from family violences?

Data

This study uses data from the national survey on violence against children in Burkina Faso. This survey was carried out in 2018 to provide information on the extent and determining factors of violence against children. It covered 10,900 households and provides information on various forms of violence suffered by children during the last twelve months preceding the survey, as well as on the social norms, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in relation to these violences. The analyses in this paper are mainly based on data from children under 12 collected through one of their biological parents, or a guardian. In total, information from 4,709 parents (guardians) is available for 10,915 children. Data on the violences of 5051 female children and 5765 male children were effectively considered in the analyses.

Main variables

- ***Social norms***: Social norms are understood through data from three questions using the 5-degree Likert scale “1. strongly agree, 2. agree, 3. neither agree nor disagree, 4. not agree 'agree, or 5. strongly disagree with the following sentence'. “The majority of people in my community hit their child when he or she does not obey,” “The majority of people in my community would agree that parents hit their son or daughter if the child has disobeyed,” “The Most people in my community would think badly of parents if they didn't hit their child when he disobeyed. This information was synthesized into its essential component through factor analysis.
- Violence against children under the age of twelve was detected by questioning one of their parents/guardians about events they had suffered during the last twelve months preceding the investigation.

Emotional violence: being shouted at, yelled at or called by offensive names, humiliated, insulted, cursed, ignored for a period of time.

Mild physical violence: having been spanked, hit on the hand, arm, leg, pulled on the ears with a bare hand.

Severe physical violence: being slapped, kicked on the buttocks, hit, beaten, with a hard object or kicked.

Deprivation: having privileges taken away, forbidden from leisure by sermons and warnings.

Other variables

In addition to violent practices, other factors linked to the individual, family and contextual characteristics of the child were considered:

At individual level: Child's *sex, age, biological status and schooling*; Parent(guardian)'s, *sex, age, and marital status*; *Household living's standard*,

At Contextual level: *place of residence, regional gender inequality index (SIGI -discriminations within family), regional number of conflicts in 2018 (from ACLED) and then proportion of parent's religion, ethnicity, and education level.*

Multilevel analysis

To examine variations in practices of violence against children based on normative contexts, we conduct a multilevel analysis using quantitative data from the 2018 national study on violence against children in Burkina Faso. This analysis encompasses multiple levels: the individual level, which includes characteristics of the children and their parents, and the community level, approximated by the municipalities. Three models are performed for each type of violence and both categories of children. Model0 includes the outcome variable and municipalities at level two. Model1 adds to Model0 variables on social norms (centered individual score and mean score). Model2 adds to Model1 other individual and contextual variables.

Extract of first results

This section presents an extract from the study's findings.

1. Variations of family violence practices between municipalities in Burkina Faso

Multilevel analyses have revealed significant variability in family violence practices against children across various municipalities in Burkina Faso. Some communities are more protective of children than others.

Model0

Rho (Violences)	Girls	Boys
Emotional	27%	21%
Mild physical	18%	17%
Severe physical	21%	21%
Deprivation	27%	29%

Source: VAC, Burkina Faso, 2018

2. Absence of social norms effects related to municipalities 'variation of violence practices

Moving from Model 0 to Model 1, the results of the Intraclass correlation coefficient show no variation. Social norms are not linked to variations in practices between municipalities, even though at the individual level there is a positive relationship between community norms and violence practices.

Model1

Rho (Violences)	Girls	Boys
Emotional	27%	21%
Mild physical	18%	18%[-1]
Severe physical	20% [1]	21%
Deprivation	27%	30%[-1]

[] : variation model0-model1

Source: VAC, Burkina Faso, 2018

3. Some municipalities with strong support for violence can also be protective.

When comparing the variation between risks of practices of violence against girls and boys (extract from Model 2) and the average of social norms at the municipal level, we see that children are more protected in some municipalities that are less supportive of violence, but also in some that are. These results vary according to the types of violence and the children's sex.

Conclusion:

The study examined the influence of social norms on variations in practices of violence across societies (municipalities) in Burkina Faso. Practices of various forms of violence vary across municipalities, but this is not linked to differences in social norms. Some municipalities protect children even when the normative context supports corporal punishment against them. Our findings underscore that conclusions regarding the relationship between social norms and family violence practices at the societal level should be interpreted with caution, as they may not necessarily be related. It is also important to consider multiple contextual factors beyond social norms when understanding variations in violence practices across different communities. This requires conducting more detailed studies on how social norms are interpreted, integrated, and reproduced in different societies to provide clarification for these findings.

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