

Angolans see child abuse and neglect as common, say government is not doing enough

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 613 | Edmundo da Costa Francisco and Carlos Pacatolo

Summary

In 2007, the government of Angola adopted “11 Commitments to Children,” a country-level framework for the values expressed in the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child (Conselho Nacional da Crianca, 2011).

These commitments, which guide government action on child welfare, establish a legal basis for the protection of children’s rights to education, health, and freedom from neglect, abuse, physical and psychological violence, discrimination, child labour, sexual exploitation, and other threats to well-being.

But progress in ensuring these rights is slow. According to the World Bank (2021), half of Angolan children below age 5 are anaemic, while more than one-third are stunted and nearly one-fifth are underweight. As the country battles its most severe drought in decades, Angola’s children face extremely high exposure to the effects of climate change (UNICEF, 2023; Phillips, 2021).

The 2015-16 Multiple Indicator and Health Survey revealed that almost one-quarter (23%) of Angolan children aged 5-17 engaged in child labour, including 12% who had worked in dangerous conditions (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2017). Drought forces many children to exit the education system to herd cattle, dig wells, and collect water; more than 2 million school-age children do not attend school (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

According to the National Children’s Institute, more than 4,000 children below age 14 suffered sexual abuse during the 12-month period between June 2020 and June 2021 – a number that does not include the many cases of sexual violence that are never reported (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans’ attitudes and perceptions related to child welfare.

While a majority of Angolans reject the use of physical force to discipline children, most say this is a frequent phenomenon in their communities. Many also describe child abuse, neglect, and out-of-school children as common. Only half say abused or neglected children can find help in the community, and even fewer report that support is available for children with disability or mental-health problems. Most citizens believe the government is doing a poor job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life.

Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, based at Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed 1,200 adult Angolans in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Angola in 2019.

Key findings

Disciplining children:

- A slim majority (54%) of Angolans say it is “never justified” for parents to use physical force to discipline their children, although more than four in 10 (44%) don't object to the practice.
- More than six in 10 respondents (63%) say the use of physical force to discipline children is a frequent phenomenon in their communities.

Abused, neglected, and out-of-school children:

- More than half (54%) of citizens say child abuse, mistreatment, and neglect occur “somewhat frequently” (32%) or “very frequently” (22%) in their community.
- Seven in 10 citizens (70%) say school-age children are often not in school.

Availability of support services for vulnerable children:

- About half (49%) of Angolans say resources are generally available in their community to help abused and neglected children.
 - But majorities report that support services are not available for children living with disability (51%) and for children and adults affected by mental or emotional problems (53%).

Government performance on child welfare:

- Overall, almost two-thirds (64%) of Angolans think the government is doing a poor job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.

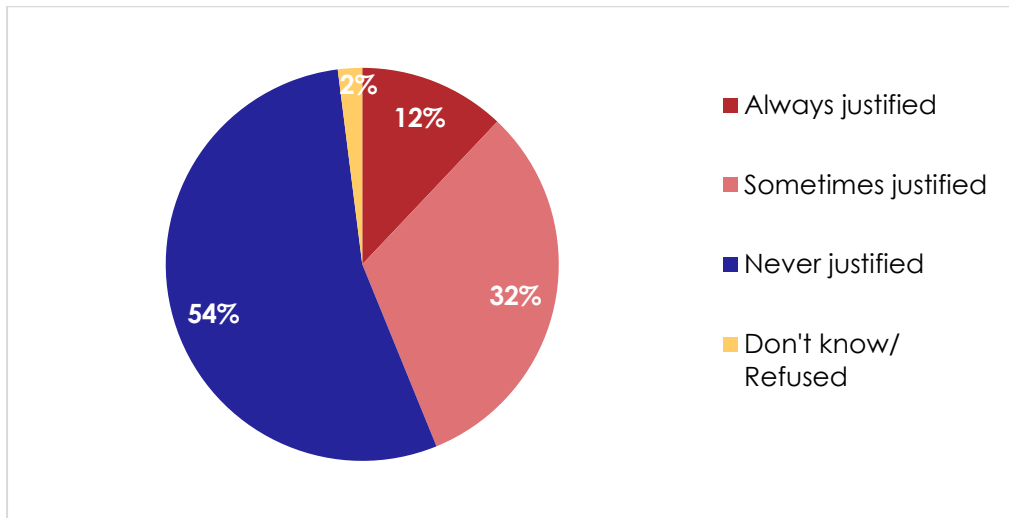
Disciplining a child

Discipline is an integral part of raising children. But should the use of physical force to discipline children be considered appropriate or abusive?

More than half (54%) of Angolans believe it is “never justified” for parents to use physical force to discipline their children, while more than four in 10 (44%) say this practice is “sometimes justified” (32%) or “always justified” (12%) (Figure 1).

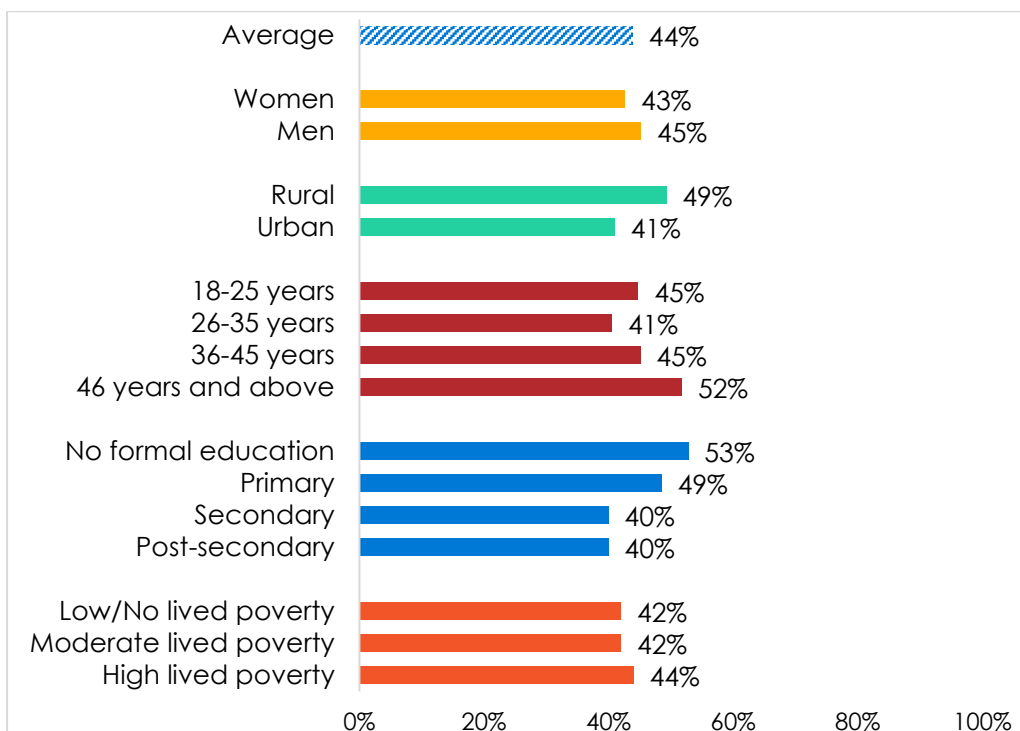
Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to endorse the use of physical force to discipline children (49% vs. 41% who say it is at least sometimes justified) (Figure 2). The practice is also more widely accepted among older citizens (52% of those over age 45) and among those with no formal education (53%) than among their younger and more educated counterparts.

Figure 1: Should parents physically discipline children? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children?

Figure 2: Justified for parents to physically discipline children | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children? (% who say "sometimes justified" or "always justified")

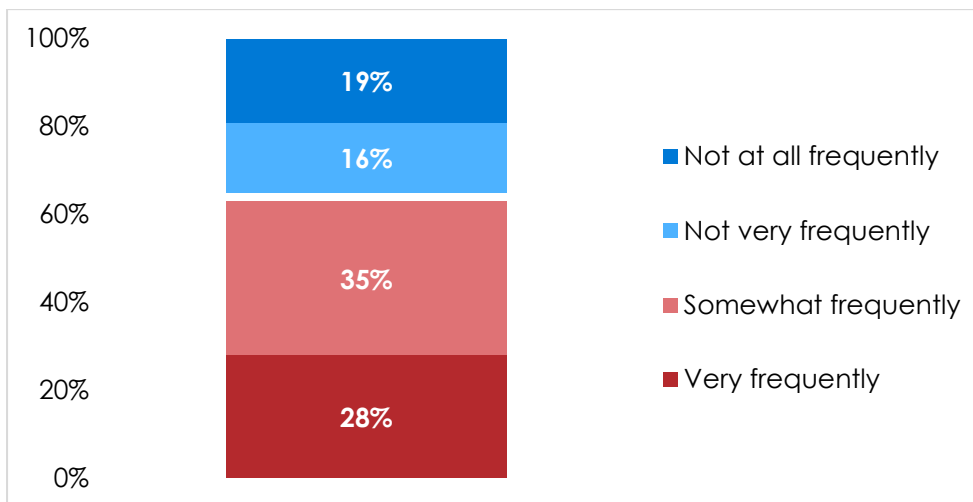
In practice, more than six in 10 Angolans (63%) say that adults in their community "very frequently" (28%) or "somewhat frequently" (35%) use physical force to discipline children

(Figure 3). About one-third see this as a “not very frequent” (16%) or “not at all frequent” (19%) occurrence.

The perception that people in their community frequently use physical force to discipline children is more widespread among citizens with high levels of education (63%-69% of those with post-secondary or secondary education) and among urbanites (67%, vs. 56% of rural residents) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: How frequently do adults use physical force to discipline children?

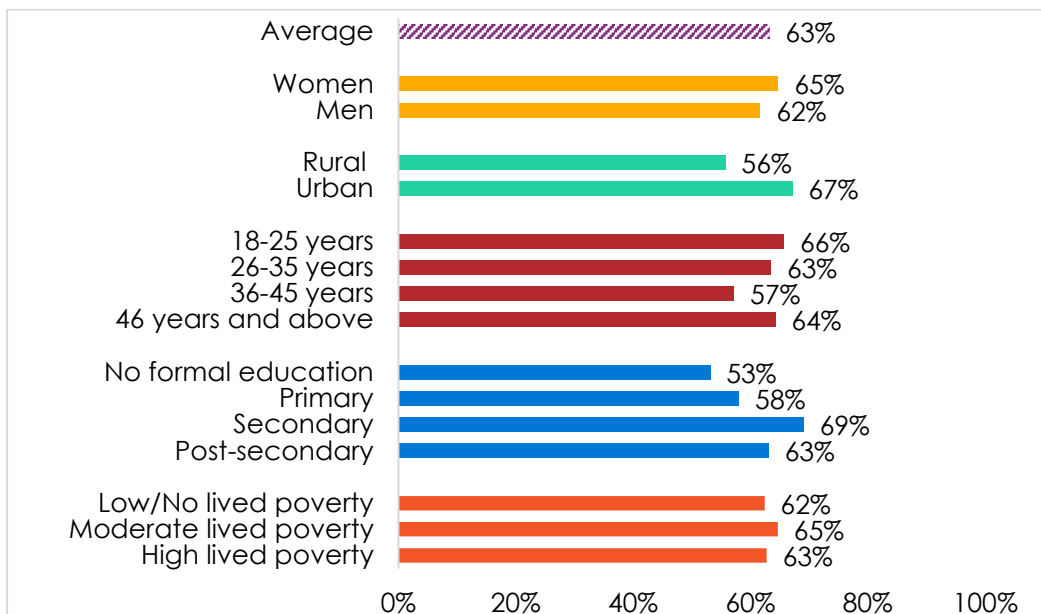
| Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Adults use physical force to discipline children?

Figure 4: Perception that adults frequently use physical force to discipline children

| by demographic group | Angola | 2022



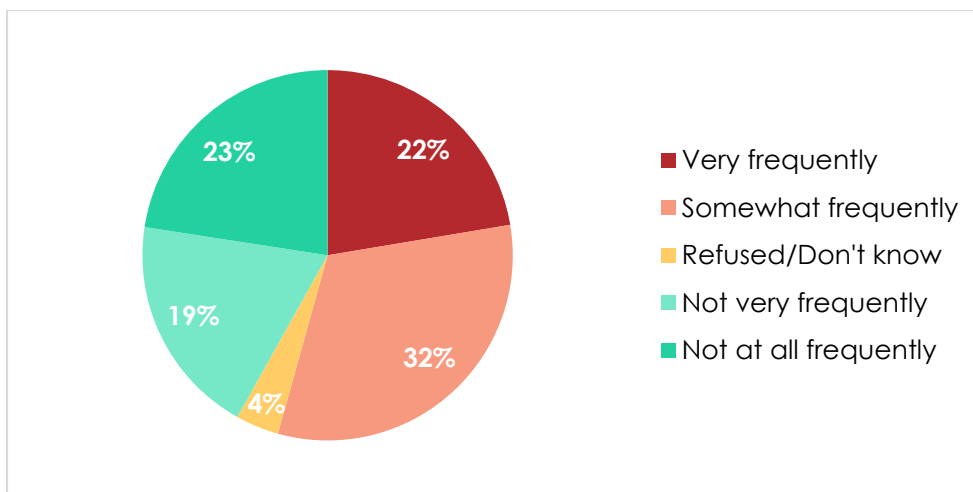
Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Adults use physical force to discipline children? (% who say “somewhat frequently” or “very frequently”)

Abuse and neglect

Asked how often they think children in their community are abused, mistreated, or neglected, more than half (54%) of Angolans say this is “very frequent” (22%) or “somewhat frequent” (32%), while 42% report that abuse and neglect are “not very frequent” (19%) or “not at all” (23%) frequent (Figure 5).

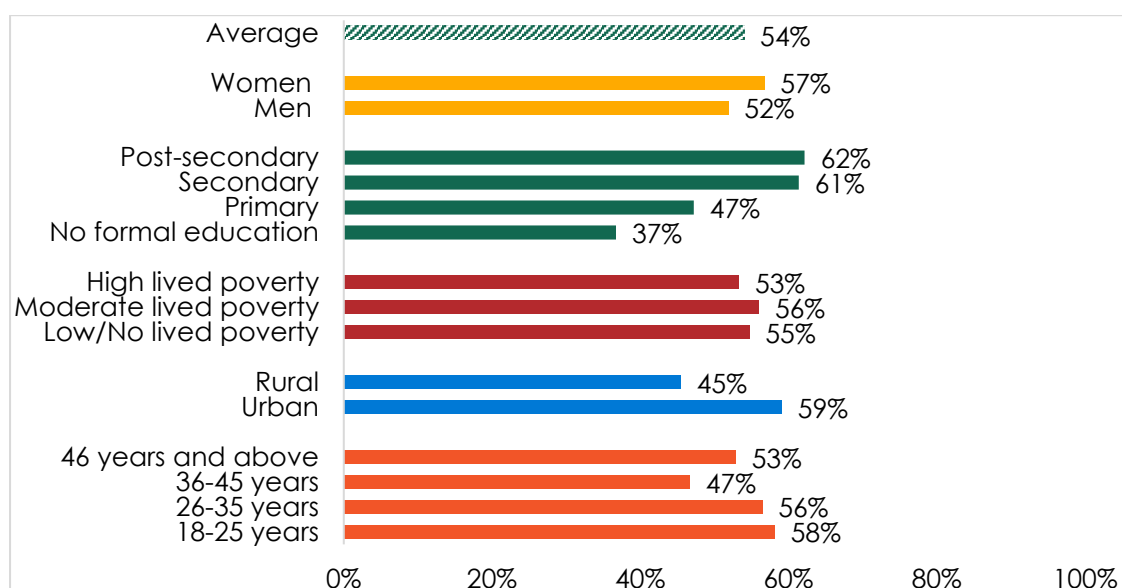
Women (57%), more educated citizens (61%-62%), and urban residents (59%) are more likely to see child abuse and neglect as frequent problems in their community than are men (52%), less educated respondents (37%-47%), and rural residents (45%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: How often are children abused, mistreated, or neglected? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected?

Figure 6: Perception that children are frequently abused or neglected | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



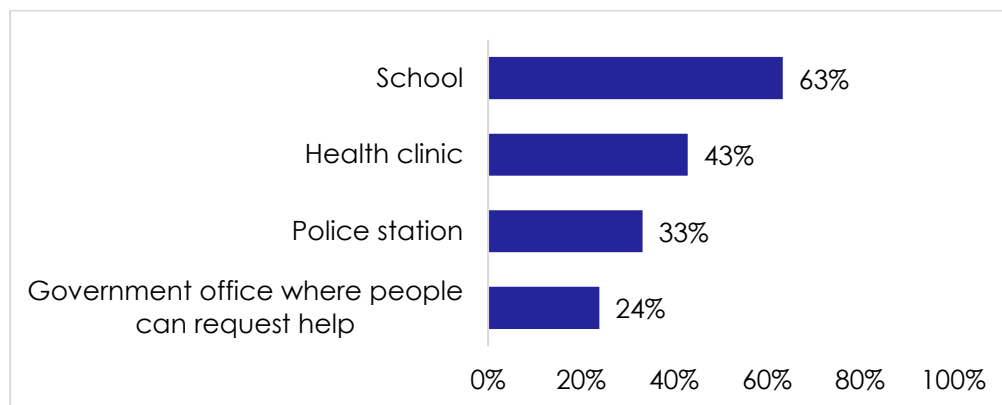
Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected? (% who say “somewhat frequently” or “very frequently”)

Support for vulnerable children

For children facing major challenges, support services can be crucial in preparing them for full, successful lives. To what extent are such services available at the community level?

Based on Afrobarometer field teams' observations in all enumeration areas they visited, fewer than two-thirds (63%) of Angolans live within walking distance of a school. Fewer than half have a nearby health clinic (43%) or police station (33%). About one-quarter (24%) have access to a nearby government office where people can request help (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Availability of public services at the community level | Angola | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked to record: Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area or within easy walking distance: School (private or public or both)? Police station? Health clinic (private or public or both)? A social centre, government help centre, or other government office where people can request help with problems? (% "yes")

Regarding more specialised support services, about half (49%) of Angolans say that people in the community can generally get help for children who are abused, mistreated, or neglected, while 40% disagree (Figure 8).

Fewer than four in 10 respondents report that help is generally available for children living with disability (39%) and for children and adults affected by mental or emotional problems (34%).

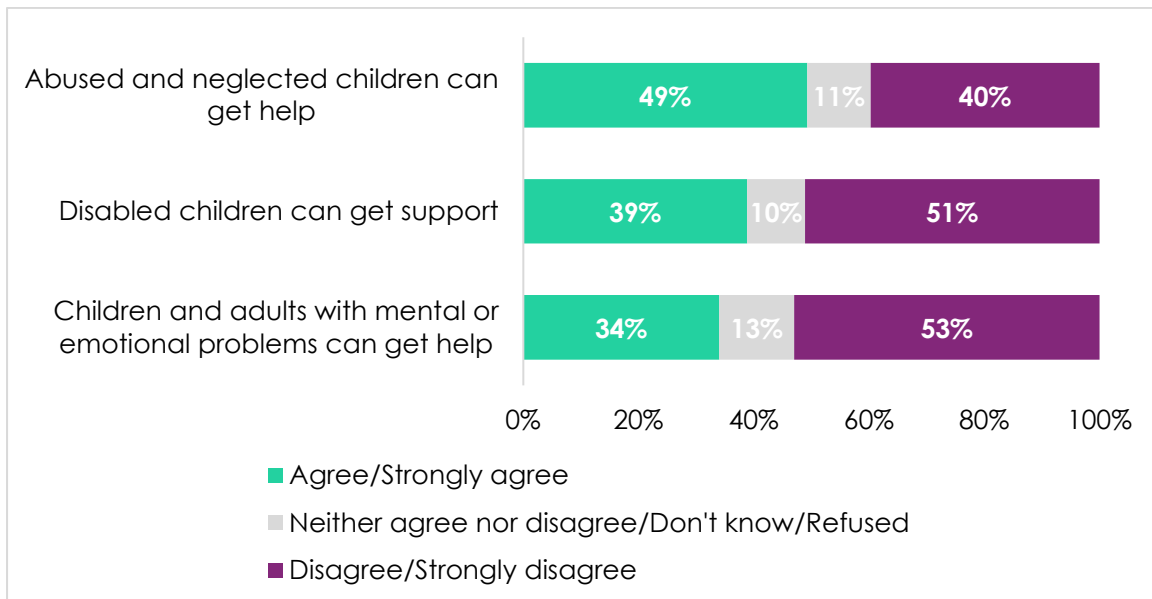
Assessments of the availability of support services differ significantly by respondents' education and economic levels.

More educated respondents are somewhat less likely to report that support services are available for children living with disability (36% of those with post-secondary qualifications, vs. 42% of those with no formal schooling) (Figure 9). And assessments diverge sharply when it comes to help for children and adults with mental or emotional problems, ranging from just 24% of the most educated respondents to 49% of those with no formal education.

The pattern is different for views by lived poverty¹: The poorest citizens are significantly less likely to report that support is available for abused and neglected children, children living with disability, and people with mental or emotional problems (Figure 10).

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2022).

Figure 8: Is help available for vulnerable children? | Angola | 2022



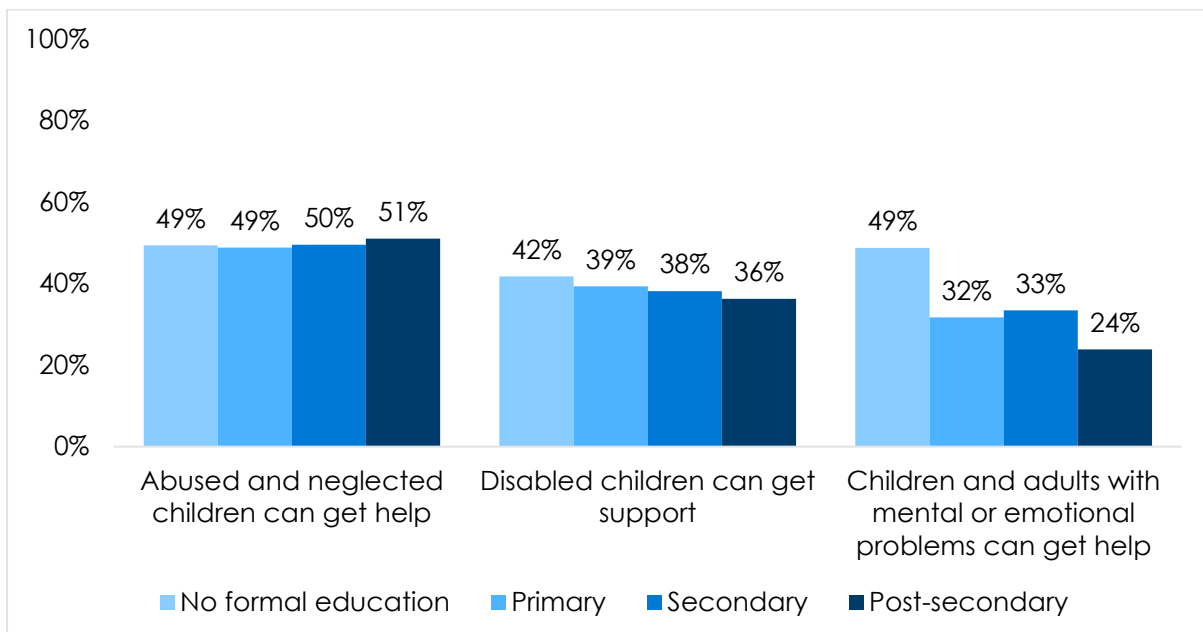
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree.

In general, people in this community are able to get help for children who are abused, mistreated, or neglected.

In my community, children who have a physical disability are generally able to get the support they need to succeed in life.

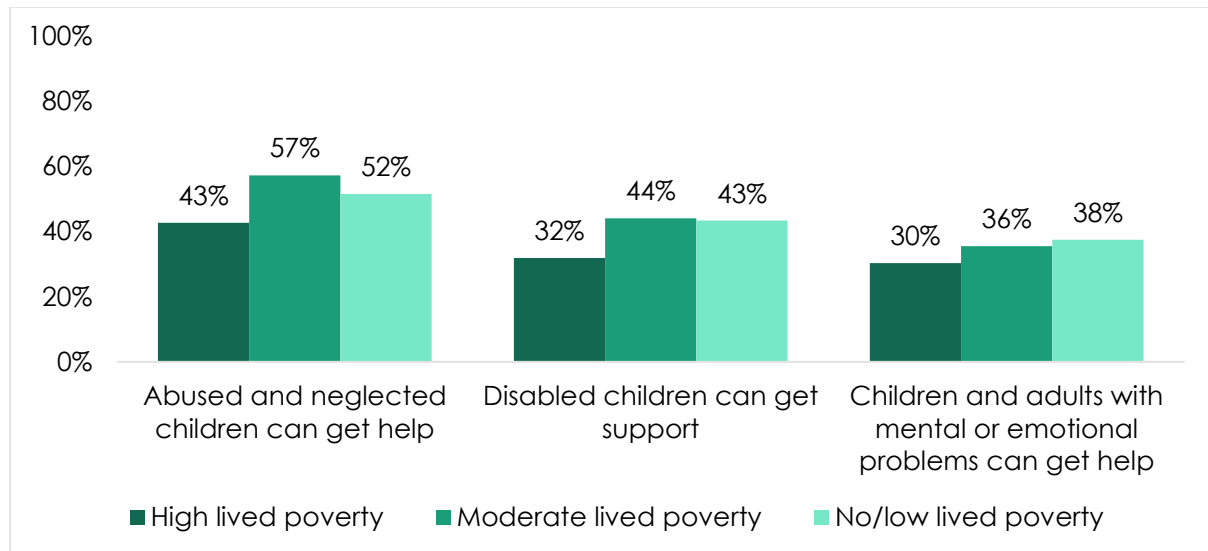
In my community, children and adults who have mental or emotional problems are generally able to get the help they need to have a good life.

Figure 9: Help is available for vulnerable children | by education level | Angola | 2022



% who "agree" or "strongly agree" that help is generally available in their community for children who are abused, mistreated, or neglected; for children who have a physical disability; and for children and adults who have mental or emotional problems

Figure 10: Help is available for vulnerable children | by lived poverty | Angola | 2022



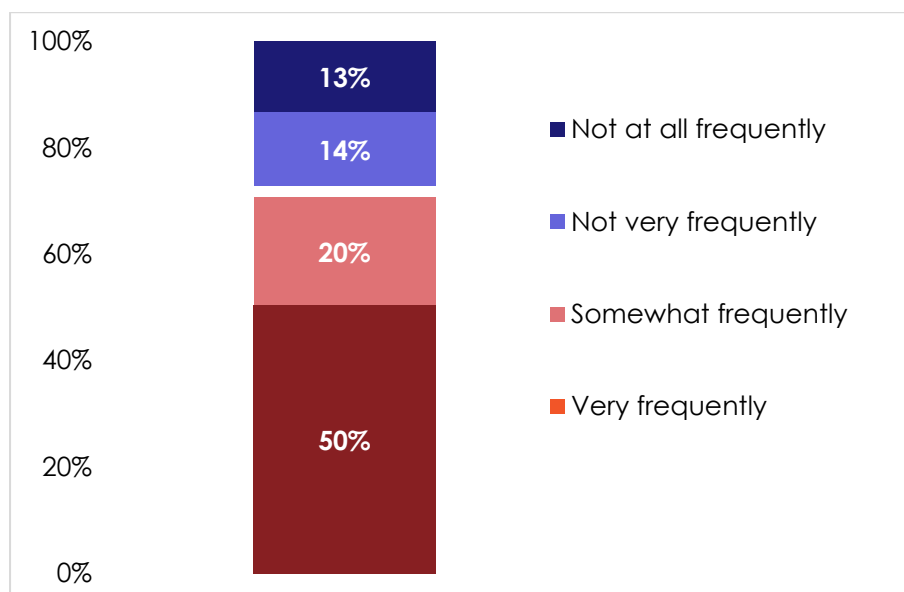
% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that help is generally available in their community for children who are abused, mistreated, or neglected; for children who have a physical disability; and for children and adults who have mental or emotional problems

Government performance in addressing educational needs of children

Seven in 10 Angolans (70%) say it’s common to see school-age children who are not in school, including 50% who say this is a “very frequent” occurrence (Figure 11).

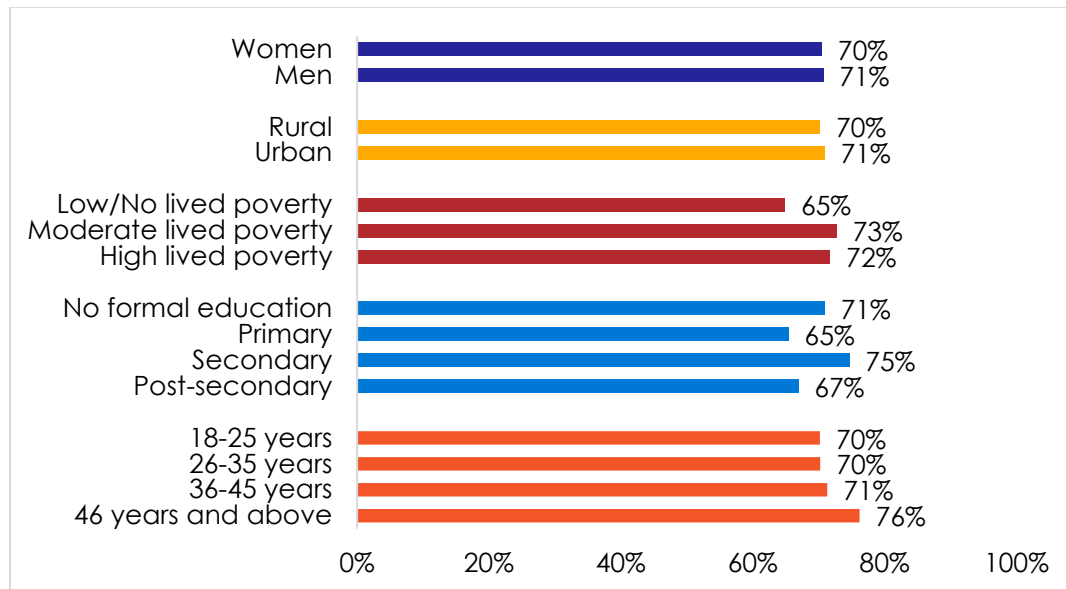
Better-off citizens (65%) are less likely than their poorer counterparts (72%-73% of those experiencing high or moderate lived poverty) to report that children of school age are out of school (Figure 12).

Figure 11: How often are school-age children not in school? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children who should be in school are not in school?

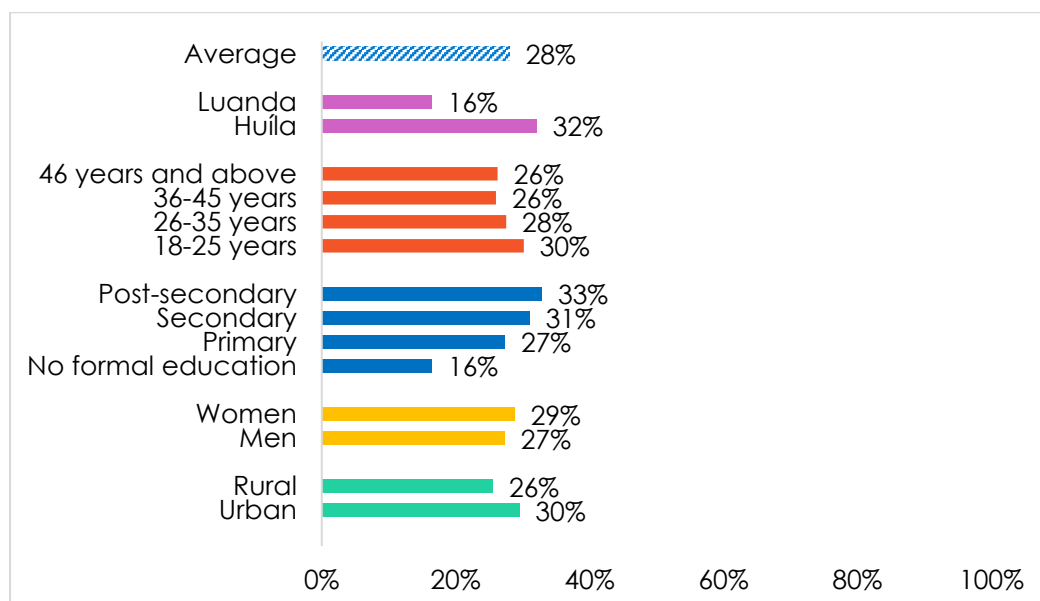
Figure 12: Children who should be in school are frequently not in school | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children who should be in school are not in school? (% who say “somewhat frequently” or “very frequently”)

Asked how well the government is addressing educational needs, only 28% of Angolans say it is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job (Figure 13). Assessments are particularly negative in Luanda (16% approval) and among respondents with no formal schooling (16%).

Figure 13: Government performance in addressing educational needs | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)

Government performance on child welfare

Overall, a majority of Angolans believe the government is doing a poor job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children: 65% say it is performing badly, including 49% who say it is doing “very badly.” Only 25% of citizens give the government a passing grade on child welfare (Figure 14).

Negative assessments of the government’s performance are more widespread among urban residents (68%) and better-off citizens (70%) than among rural residents (59%) and poorer respondents (62%-66%) (Figure 15).

Older citizens (61%) are less likely than their younger counterparts (65%-66%) to say the government is doing a poor job of protecting and promoting vulnerable children.

Figure 14: Government performance on child welfare | Angola | 2022

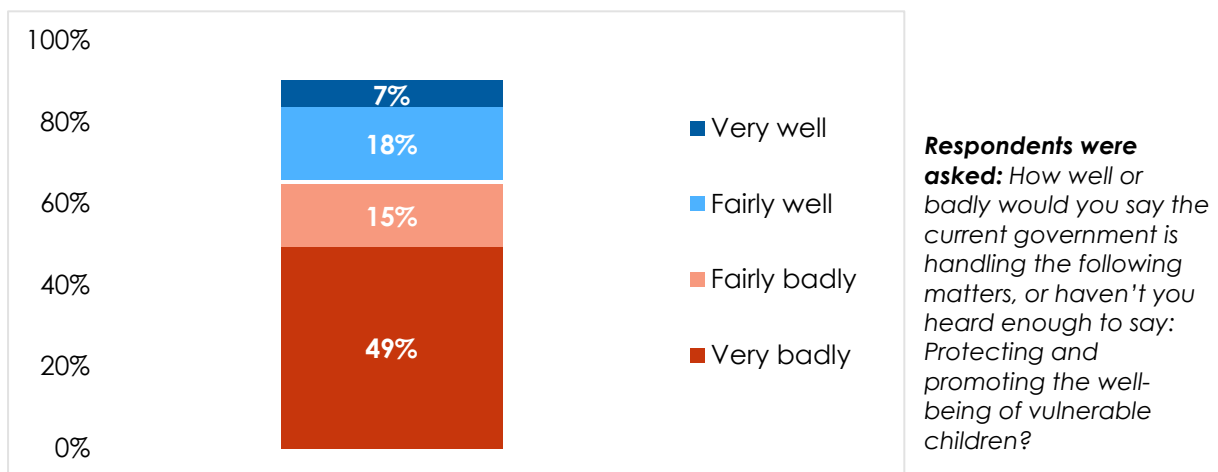
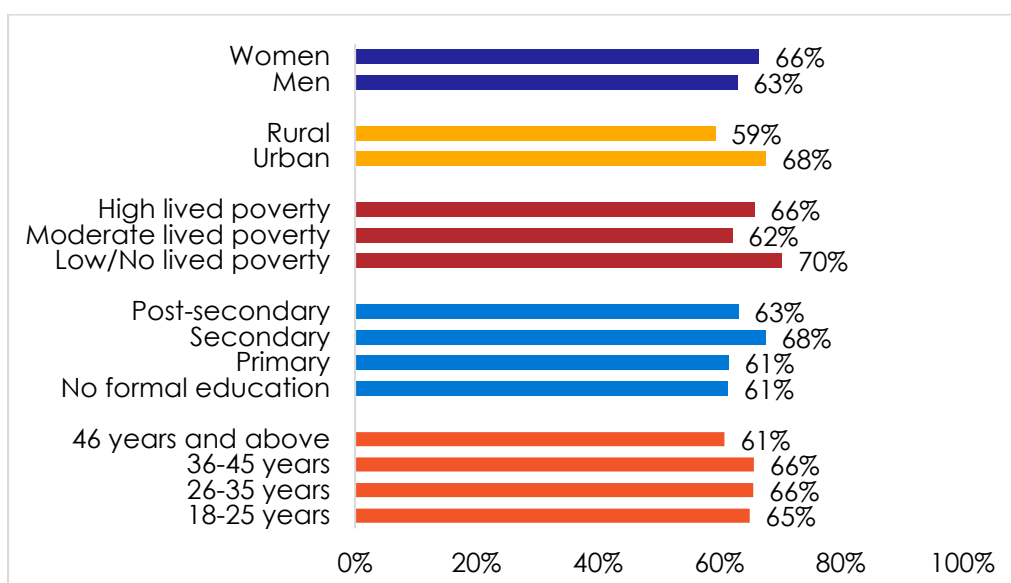


Figure 15: Disapproval of government performance on child welfare | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children? (% who say “fairly badly” or “very badly”)

Conclusion

Survey findings suggest that Angola's "11 commitments to children" are far from being fulfilled. A majority of citizens describe child abuse, mistreatment, and neglect as common in their community, and only half think that affected children can get the support they need in their community. Even fewer say resources are available to help children living with disability or children with mental or emotional problems.

Most citizens believe the government is doing a poor job of protecting and promoting the well-being of children, suggesting that a serious review of the country's child-protection strategies is needed.

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