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Tanzanians praise government efforts on child welfare, oppose corporal punishment

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 716 | Derick Msafiri

Summary

Tanzania's legal and policy arsenal to safeguard children's rights includes the Law of the Child Act, Child Development Policy, and National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children, all grounded in the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016).

But ensuring the well-being of its children remains a challenge. About half of the population lives below the international poverty line, and Tanzania ranks low on the Human Development Index (160th out of 191 countries), with attendant implications for health, education, and other aspects of well-being (World Bank, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

Among major successes, under-5 mortality has dropped by about two-thirds since 2000. Moderate and severe stunting due to malnutrition has also declined, but still affects almost one-third of young children. Attendance in lower secondary school is just 28%, and one in four children (aged 5-17) are engaged in child labour. Almost one in three girls and one in seven boys experience sexual violence, while more than seven in 10 young people suffer some form of physical violence (UNICEF, 2017, 2022, 2023; United Republic of Tanzania, 2016; U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Corporal punishment of children, which is legal in schools as well as in the home, has been a topic of heated debate, especially in the wake of high-profile reports of a fifth-grader who died after being beaten at school and a viral video clip of an official beating more than a dozen pupils with sticks (Africanews, 2018; Ng'wanakilala, 2019; Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, 2021).

About three in 10 Tanzanian women were married as children, and court-ordered amendments raising the minimum marriage age for girls from 14 to 18 have so far not been implemented (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016; UNICEF, 2022; Citizen, 2022). In 2021, the government ended a policy that had required girls in public schools to undergo pregnancy testing and expelled them if they were pregnant (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2021).

To strengthen protection of vulnerable children, including more than 800,000 street children, the government has established 30 children's centres in major cities and is considering updates to the 2009 Law of the Child Act (Tairo, 2022).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Africans' attitudes and perceptions related to child welfare.

Survey findings show that opposition to the use of physical force to discipline children has risen dramatically in Tanzania and is now the majority view. Most citizens say child abuse and neglect and out-of-school children are infrequent problems in their community. A majority of citizens say that the government is doing a good job of promoting child well-being and that

resources are available in their community to help vulnerable children, but poor people are significantly less likely to agree on both counts.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 Tanzanian adults in September-October 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

Disciplining children:

- Almost three-fourths (72%) of Tanzanians say it is “never justified” for parents to use physical force to discipline their children. Opposition to physical discipline increased by 31 percentage points between 2017 and 2022.
- Eight in 10 respondents (81%) say the use of physical force to discipline children is not common in their community.

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

- Most Tanzanians say child abuse and neglect (83%) and out-of-school children (74%) are infrequent problems in their community.
 - Economically disadvantaged citizens are more likely than their better-off counterparts to see child abuse and neglect and out-of-school children as widespread problems.

Availability of support services for vulnerable children:

- About two-thirds of Tanzanians say resources are available in their community to help abused and neglected children (65%) and children with disability (67%). A slimmer majority (61%) say children and adults with mental or emotional problems can get help.
 - Poor and less educated citizens are considerably less likely than better-off and more educated respondents to report that support services for vulnerable children are available in their community.

Government performance on child welfare:

- Seven in 10 Tanzanians (70%) say the government is doing a good job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.
 - Fewer than half (48%) of citizens experiencing high lived poverty approve of the government's performance on child welfare.

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?

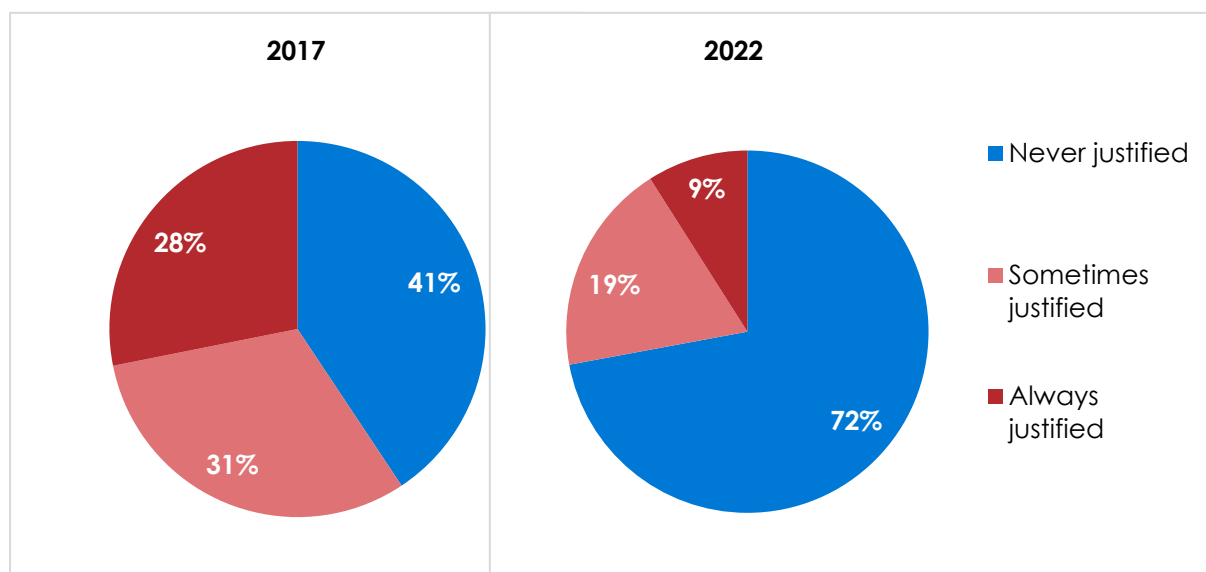
More than seven in 10 Tanzanians (72%) say it is “never justified” for parents to use physical force to discipline their children, a 31-percentage-point increase compared to 2017. Fewer than three in 10 consider this practice “sometimes justified” (19%) or “always justified” (9%) (Figure 1).

Views on physically disciplining children differ little by gender, urban vs. rural residency, and age (Figure 2). Economically better-off citizens (24%) are somewhat less likely to endorse the practice than those experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty¹ (30%-31%).

In practice, eight in 10 Tanzanians (81%) say that adults in their community do “not very frequently” (29%) or “not at all frequently” (52%) use physical force to discipline children. Fewer than one-fifth (18%) see it as a “somewhat frequent” or “very frequent” occurrence (Figure 3).

The perception that children are frequently disciplined using physical force is more common among the most educated citizens (25%) than among those with less schooling (15%-22%) (Figure 4). It is also more widespread among the poorest respondents (25%) than among their better-off counterparts (14%-19%), and among 18- to 45-year-olds (20%-21%) compared to their elders (13%-14%).

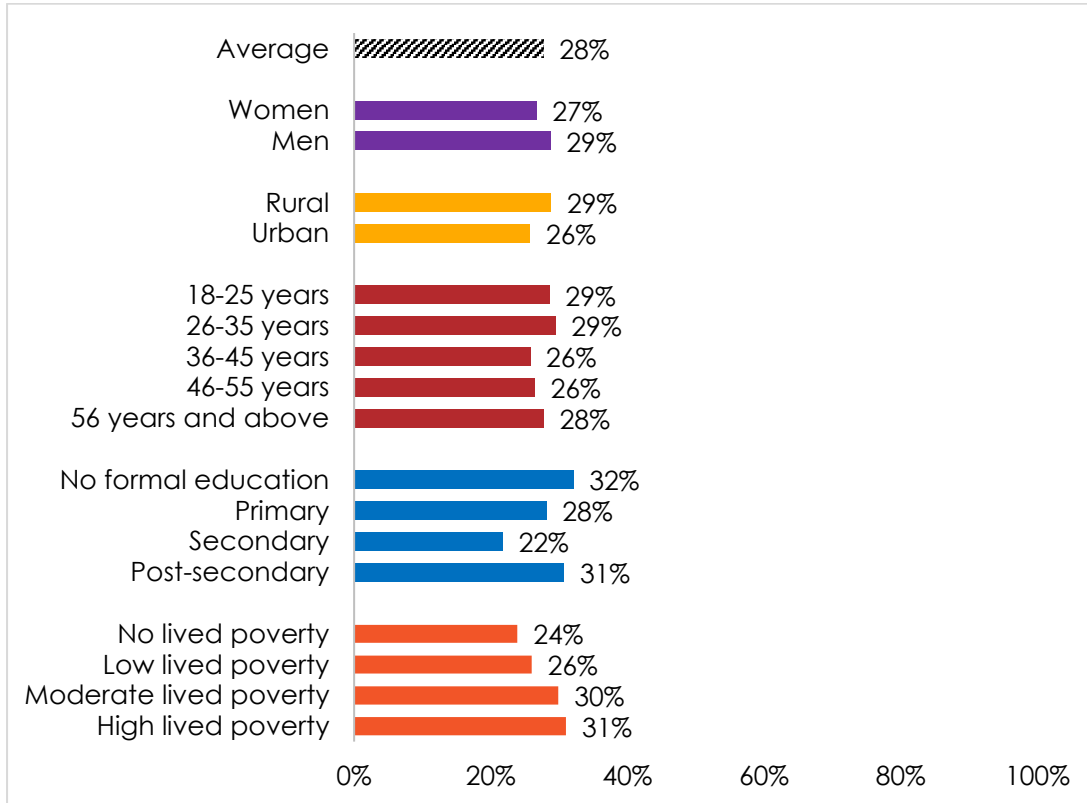
Figure 1: Should parents physically discipline children? | Tanzania | 2017-2022



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?

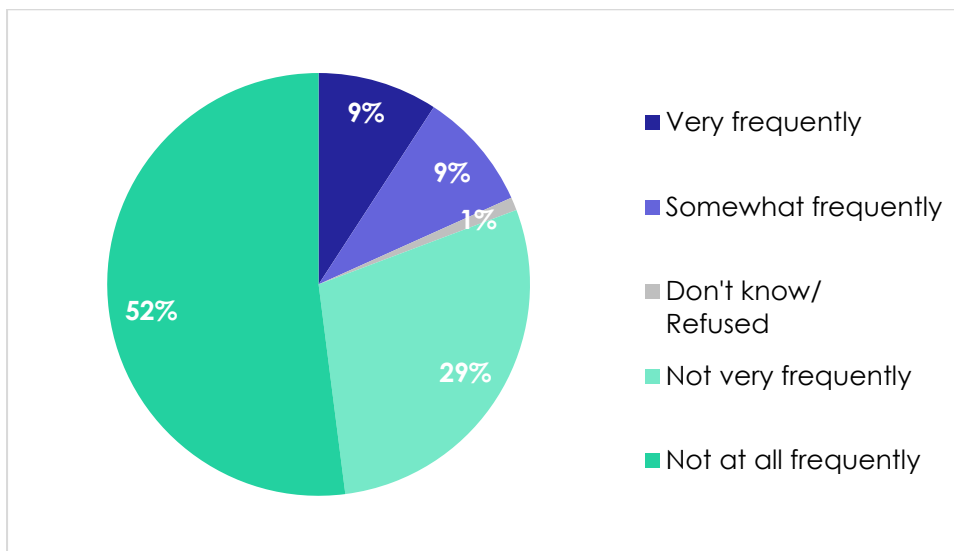
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

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



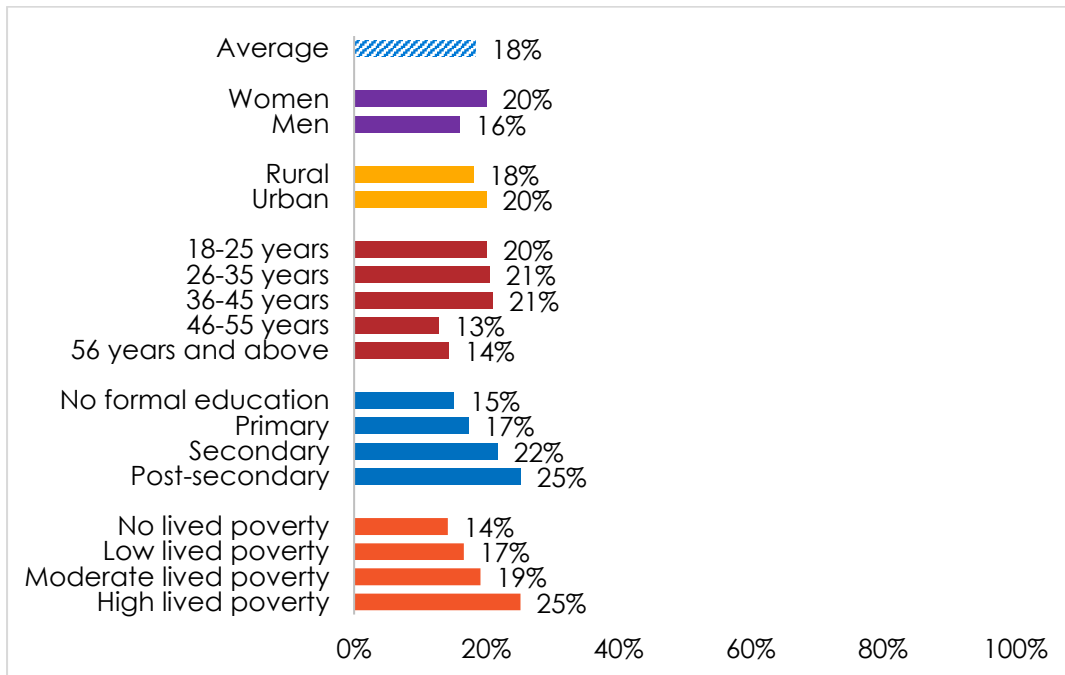
Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children? (% who say "sometimes justified" or "always justified")

Figure 3: How frequently do adults use physical force to discipline children? | Tanzania | 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 | Tanzania | 2022

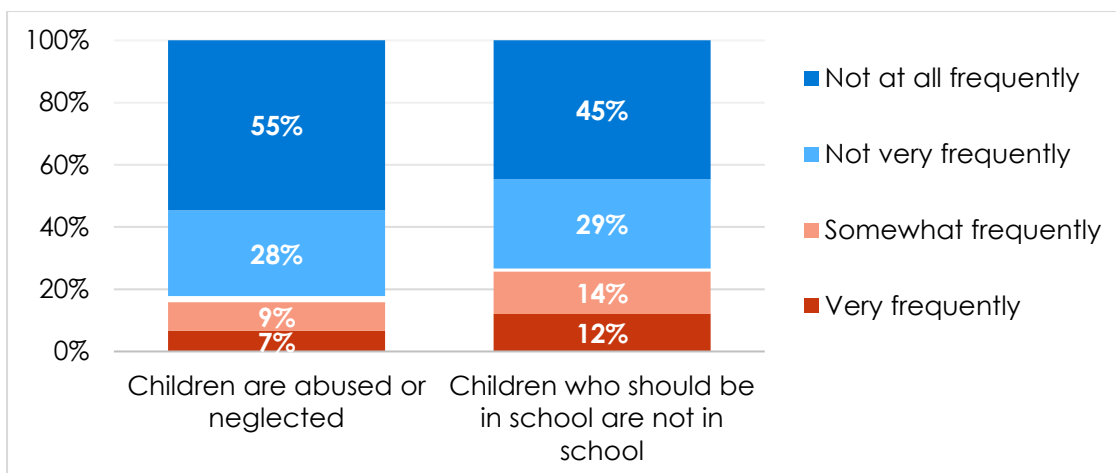


Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Adults use physical force to discipline children? (% who say "somewhat frequently" or "very frequently")

Abuse and neglect

Asked how often they think children in their community are abused, mistreated, or neglected, more than eight in 10 Tanzanians (83%) say this is "not at all frequent" (55%) or "not very frequent" (28%), while only 16% report that abuse and neglect are "somewhat" or "very" common (Figure 5). Three-quarters (74%) also say it's not common to see school-age children who are not in school, although about a quarter (26%) of respondents disagree.

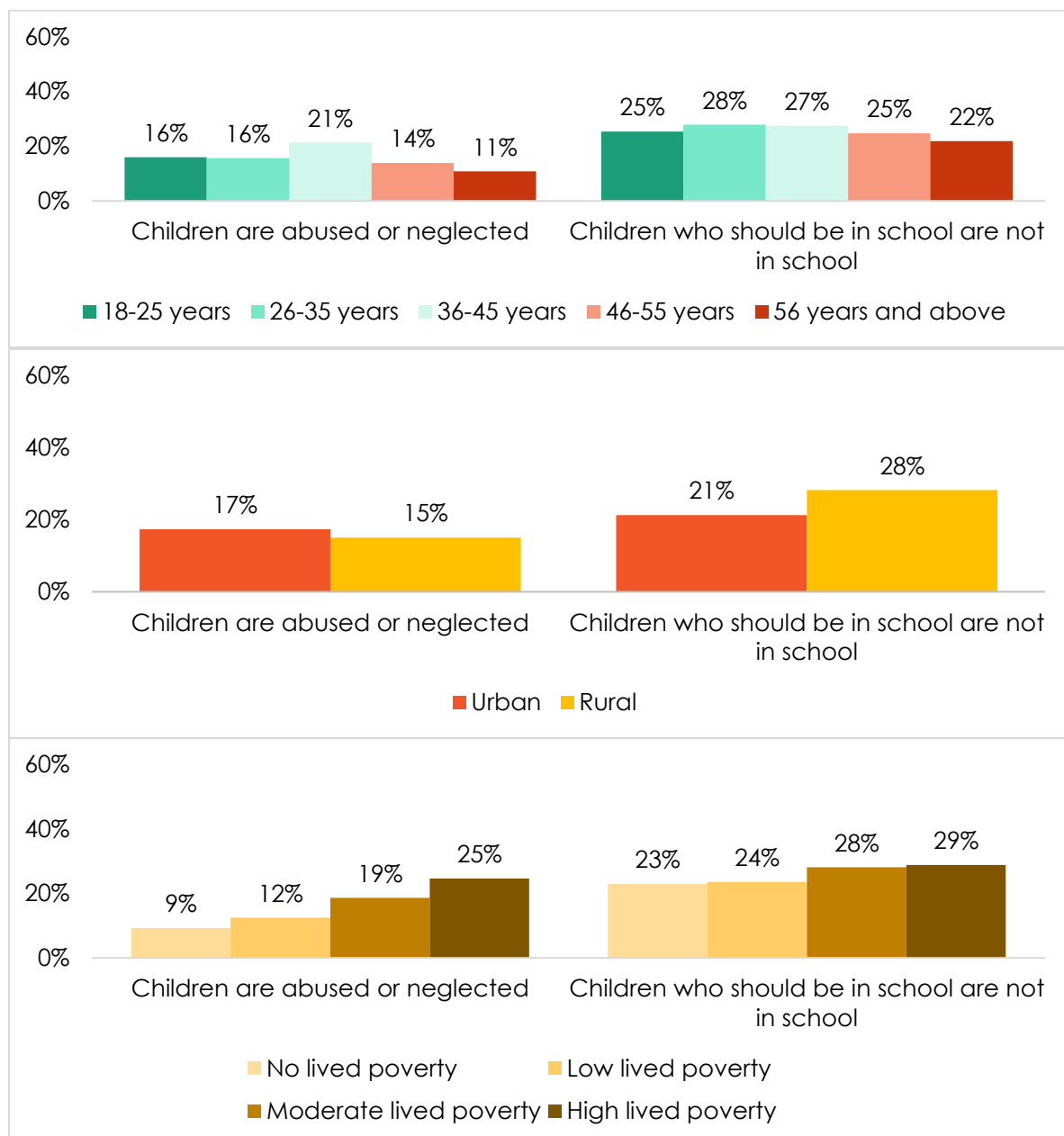
Figure 5: How often are children abused or neglected? | Tanzania | 2022



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

Older citizens are somewhat less likely to see child abuse/neglect (11%) and out-of-school children (22%) as frequent problems in their community (Figure 6). Out-of-school children are more widely considered a common problem in rural areas (28%) than in cities (21%). But a clearer pattern emerges based on respondents' economic status: The poorest citizens are almost three times as likely as the best-off to report that child abuse and neglect are a frequent problem in their community (25% vs. 9%), and somewhat more likely to say the same about out-of-school children (29% vs. 23%).

Figure 6: Perception that children are frequently abused or neglected | by age, urban-rural location, and lived poverty | Tanzania | 2022



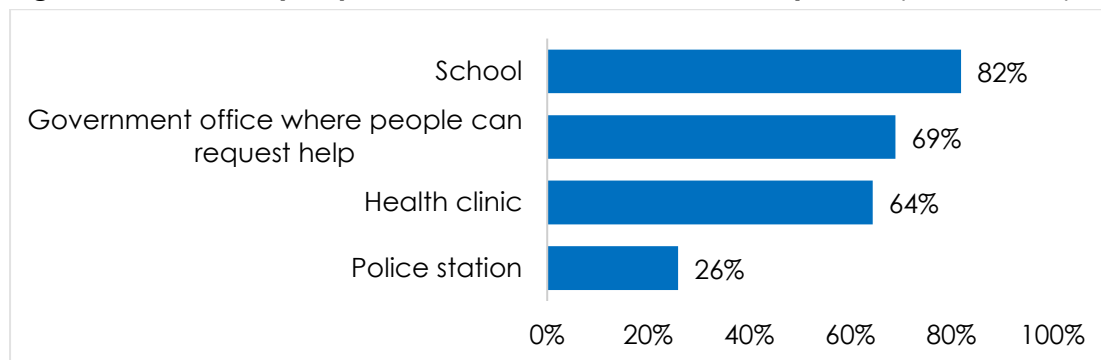
Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected? Children who should be in school are not in school? (% who say "somewhat frequently" or "very frequently")

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, most Tanzanians live within walking distance of a school (82%), a social centre or other government office where people can request help with problems (69%), and a health clinic (64%) (Figure 7). A quarter (26%) have a police station nearby.

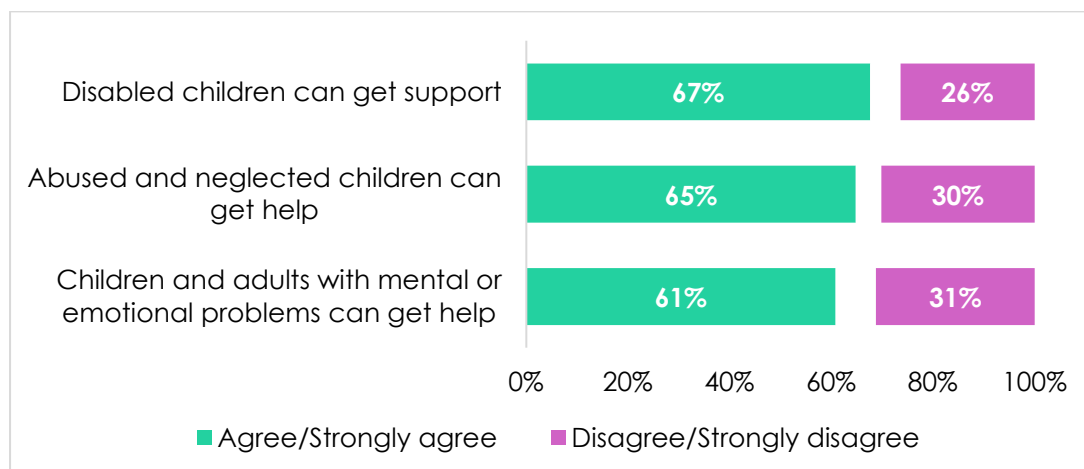
Figure 7: Availability of public services at the community level | Tanzania | 2022



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")

A majority of respondents also report that more specialised support services for vulnerable children are available in their community (Figure 8). About two-thirds say people are generally able to get help for children who have a disability (67%) and for children who have been abused, mistreated, or neglected (65%). Similarly, 61% say support is available for children and adults with mental or emotional problems.

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

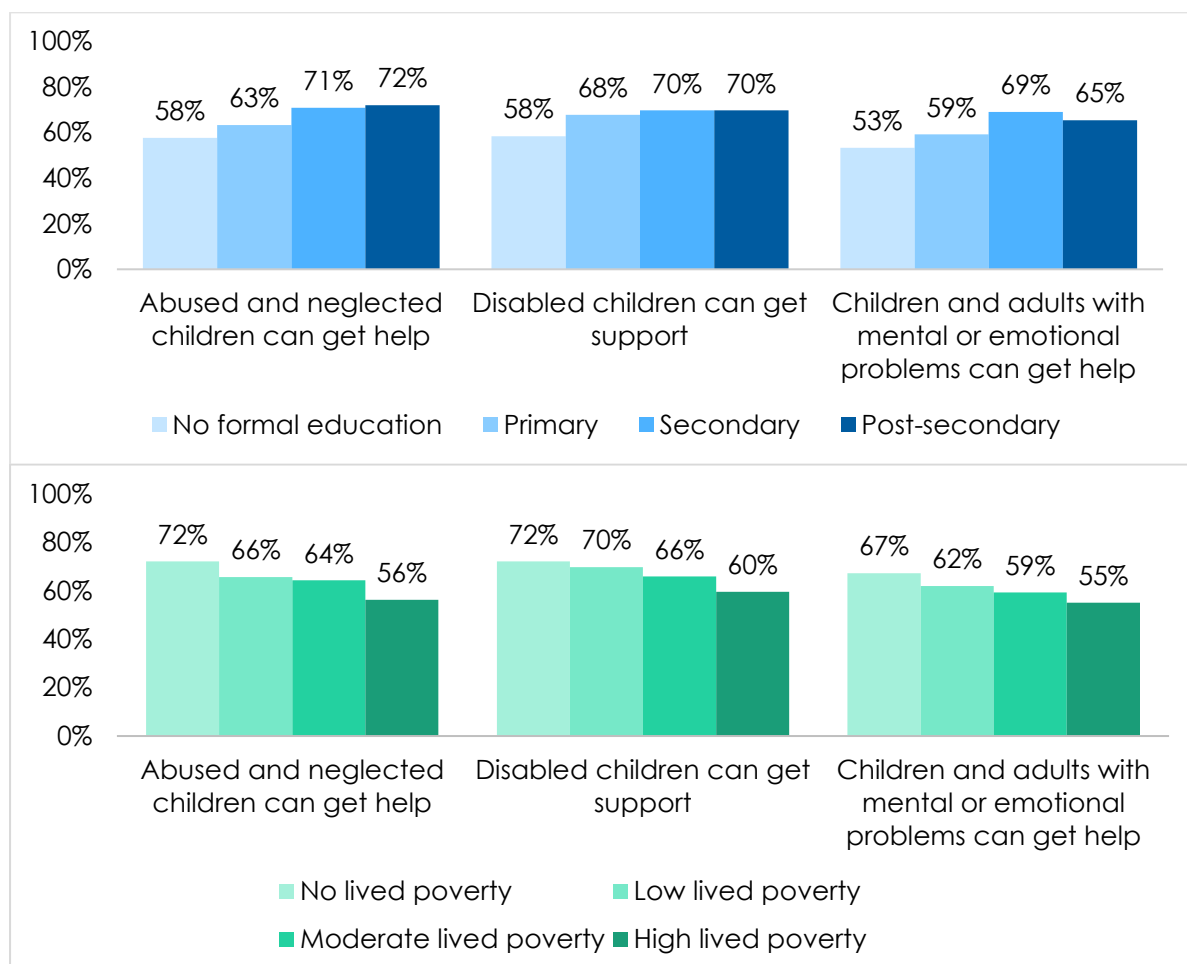


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: In general, people in this community are able to get help for children who are abused, mistreated, or neglected. In my community, children who have a physical disability are generally able to get 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.

Across the board, less educated and poorer citizens are less likely than their more educated and better-off counterparts to report that support services for vulnerable children are available in their community (Figure 9).

For example, while 72% of respondents with post-secondary education say services are available for abused and neglected children, only 58% of respondents with no formal schooling agree. Similar gaps of 12-16 percentage points separate the most and least educated, as well as the best-off and poorest, in their perceptions of available support for disabled children and for children and adults with mental or emotional problems.

Figure 9: Help is available for vulnerable children | by education and lived poverty levels | Tanzania | 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.

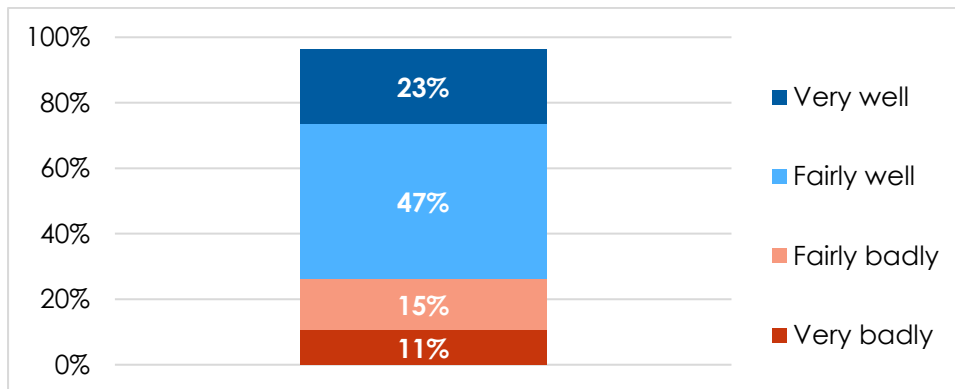
(% who say "agree" or "strongly agree")

Government performance on child welfare

Overall, seven in 10 Tanzanians (70%) say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” on protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children, while 26% believe it is doing a poor job (Figure 10).

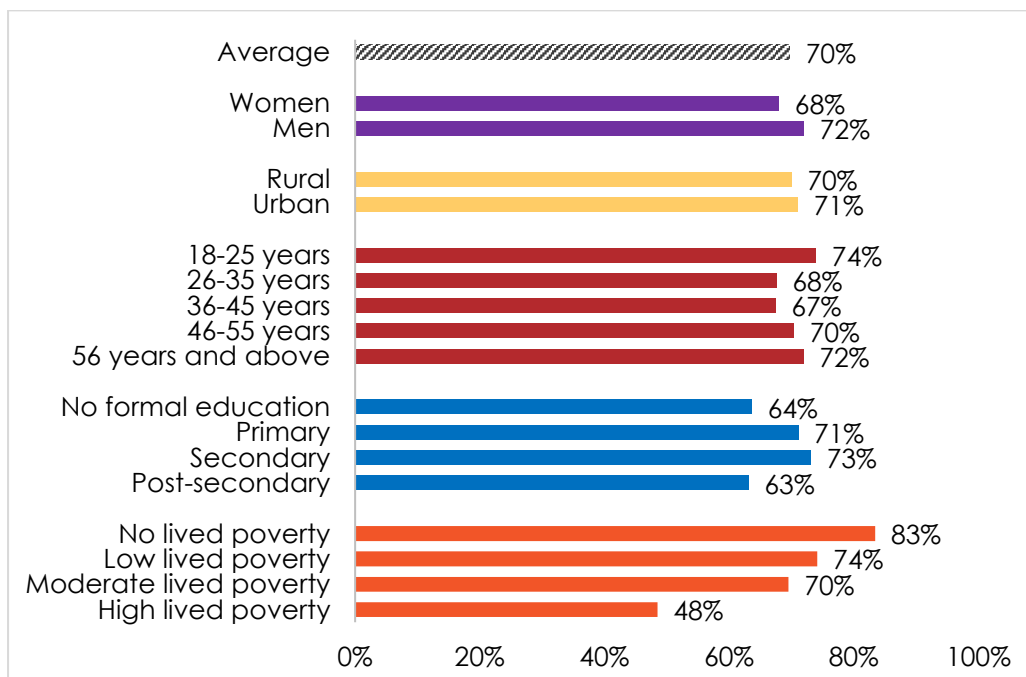
Slightly fewer women than men approve of the government's performance on child welfare (68% vs. 72%) (Figure 11). But assessments differ far more strongly by respondents' economic level: Fewer than half (48%) of the poorest citizens say the government is doing a good job on child welfare, compared to 83% of those experiencing no lived poverty.

Figure 10: Government performance on child welfare | Tanzania | 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?

Figure 11: Approval of government performance on child welfare | by demographic group | Tanzania | 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 well” or “very well”)

Conclusion

Survey findings show a dramatic increase since 2017 in opposition to the use of physical force to discipline children: Most Tanzanians say this practice is “never justified” and is not common in their community.

Most citizens also report that child abuse and neglect and out-of-school children are infrequent problems in their community, although this view is less widely shared among economically disadvantaged respondents.

Majorities say that resources are available at the community level to help abused and neglected children, children with disability, and children and adults with mental or emotional problems. And most approve of the government's performance on protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children. But assessments of whether help is available, and of how well the government is doing on child welfare, are significantly less positive among poor respondents, suggesting that interventions targeting lower-income communities may be needed.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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