



Dispatch No. 732 | 13 November 2023

## Mozambicans see government support for vulnerable children as inadequate

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 732 | Walleign S. Hassen

### Summary

Mozambique stands at No. 185 out of 191 countries in the 2021 Human Development Index, trailing most of the world in health, education, income, and other aspects of well-being (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Despite strong economic growth between 2000 and 2015, 60% of the population lives in extreme poverty, and more than 3.5 million people face severe food insecurity (World Bank, 2023; ECHO, 2023). Vulnerabilities due to poverty are exacerbated by protracted conflicts in the North of the country, recurrent droughts and cyclones, and disease outbreaks.

These conditions have dire implications for the country's children. According to UNICEF (2022, 2023), almost half (46%) of Mozambican children experience multidimensional poverty, and half are stunted due to malnutrition. Conflict in Cabo Delgado Province has displaced more than 1 million people, 80% of them women and children, and nearly 1.4 million children in the country require humanitarian assistance.

Mozambique's 2007 Social Protection Law aims to support and protect vulnerable citizens, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with chronic diseases, but is of limited use in protecting children (UNICEF, 2022). While its 2016 National Basic Social Security Strategy II improved social protection for children (Falange & Pellerano, 2016), studies show that Mozambique continues to have some of the world's lowest scores on indicators specifically relevant to children (Pomati & Nandy, 2019; Mahrt, Rossi, Salvucci, & Tarp, 2020).

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.

Survey findings show that a majority of Mozambicans oppose the use of physical force to discipline children, but acceptance of the practice has increased compared to 2018.

Most citizens describe child abuse and neglect as infrequent in their community, though poor respondents are significantly more likely to see them as common problems. Almost half of citizens say out-of-school children are a frequent occurrence.

Assessments are mixed regarding the availability of support services in the community for abused or neglected children, children with disability, and children and adults with mental or emotional problems.

Overall, only about one-third of Mozambicans think their government is doing a good 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. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos Mozambique, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,120 adult Mozambicans in October-November 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 Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

## Key findings

### **Disciplining children:**

- A majority (56%) of Mozambicans say it is "never justified" for parents to use physical force to discipline their children. However, the share of citizens who think this practice is "sometimes" or "always" justified increased from 33% in 2018 to 43%.
  - The use of physical force is more widely accepted in rural areas (49%) and among citizens who are poor (55%) and those with no formal education (47%).
- More than half (54%) of respondents say the use of physical force to discipline children is not common in their community.

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

- A two-thirds majority (68%) of Mozambicans say that child abuse and neglect are not common in their community. Half (51%) say the same about out-of-school children, though 47% disagree.
  - Poor citizens are almost twice as likely as well-off respondents to see child abuse and neglect as a common problem in their community (37% vs. 20%), and far more likely to say that children are frequently out of school (55% vs. 36%).

### **Availability of support services for vulnerable children:**

- A slim majority (54%) say resources to help abused or neglected children are generally available in their community. About half (49%) offer the same assessment regarding children with disability. Only 44% say resources to support children and adults with mental or emotional problems are available in their community, while 41% disagree.

### **Government performance on child welfare:**

- Six in 10 Mozambicans (60%) say the government is doing a "fairly bad" or "very bad" job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.

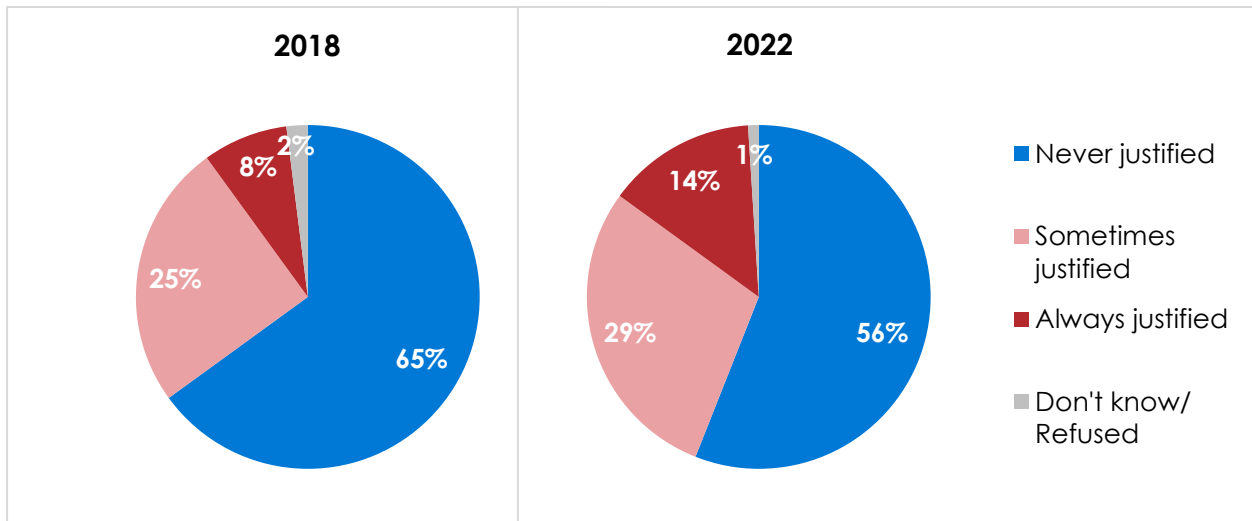
## Disciplining a child

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

A majority (56%) of Mozambicans say it is "never justified" for parents to use physical force to discipline their children. That reflects a 9-percentage-point decline compared to 2016 (65%).

More than four in 10 (43%) say the use of physical force is “sometimes justified” (29%) or “always justified” (14%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Should parents physically discipline children? | Mozambique | 2018-2022**



**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?

The use of force is less accepted by urbanites than rural residents (33% vs. 49%) and among older citizens (35% of those over age 45) compared to their younger counterparts (40%-50%) (Figure 2).

Economically better-off respondents (35%) are less likely to say that physical discipline is sometimes/always justified than those experiencing moderate (42%) or high (55%) levels of lived poverty.<sup>1</sup> Acceptance decreases as respondents' educational status rises, ranging from 47% among those with no formal schooling to 38% among those with secondary or post-secondary education.

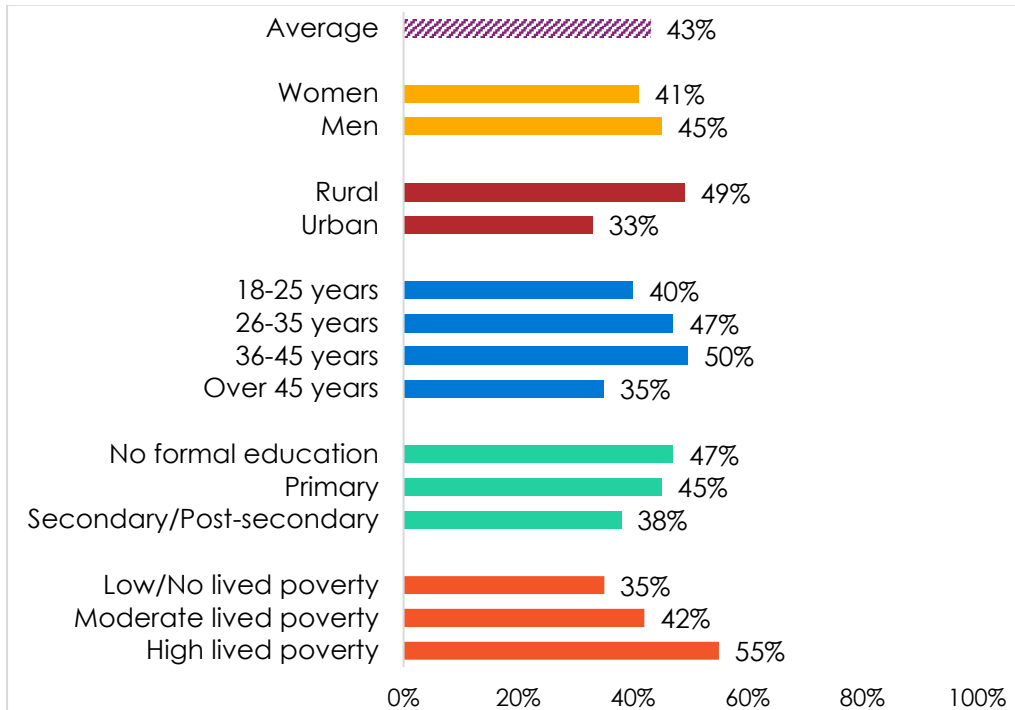
More than half (54%) of Mozambicans say the use of physical force to discipline children “not at all frequent” (30%) or “not very frequent” (25%) in their community (Figure 3).<sup>2</sup> Three in 10 (29%) say the practice is “somewhat frequent,” and 16% describe it as “very frequent.”

Women (47%) and rural residents (48%) are more likely to report that the use of physical force to discipline children is “somewhat” or “very” frequent in their community than are men (42%) and urban residents (39%) (Figure 4). This assessment is also more common among respondents experiencing high (54%) or moderate (49%) lived poverty than among better-off citizens (32%).

<sup>1</sup> 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).

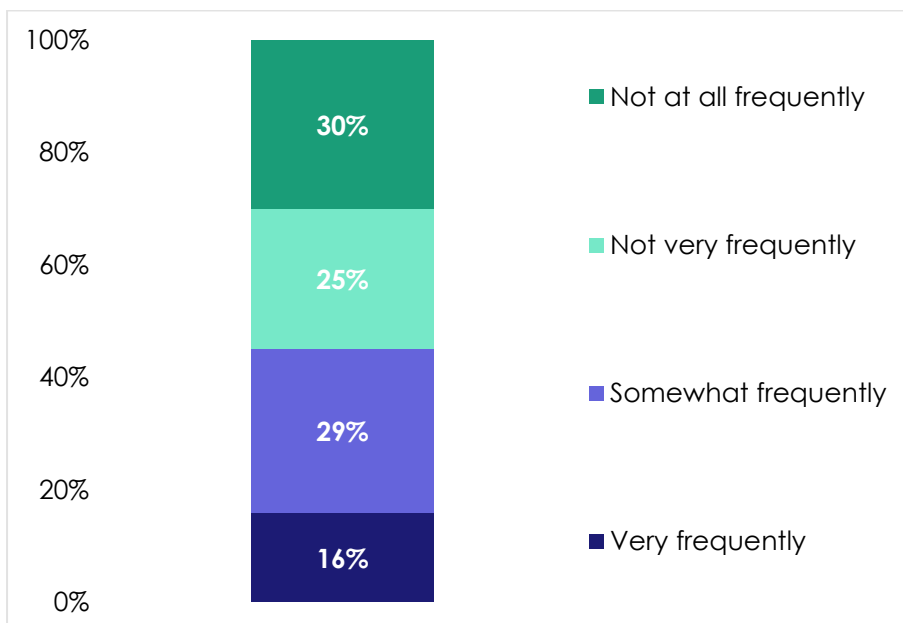
<sup>2</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 30% “not at all frequently” and 25% “not very frequently” sum to 54%).

**Figure 2: Justified for parents to physically discipline children** | by demographic group | Mozambique | 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")

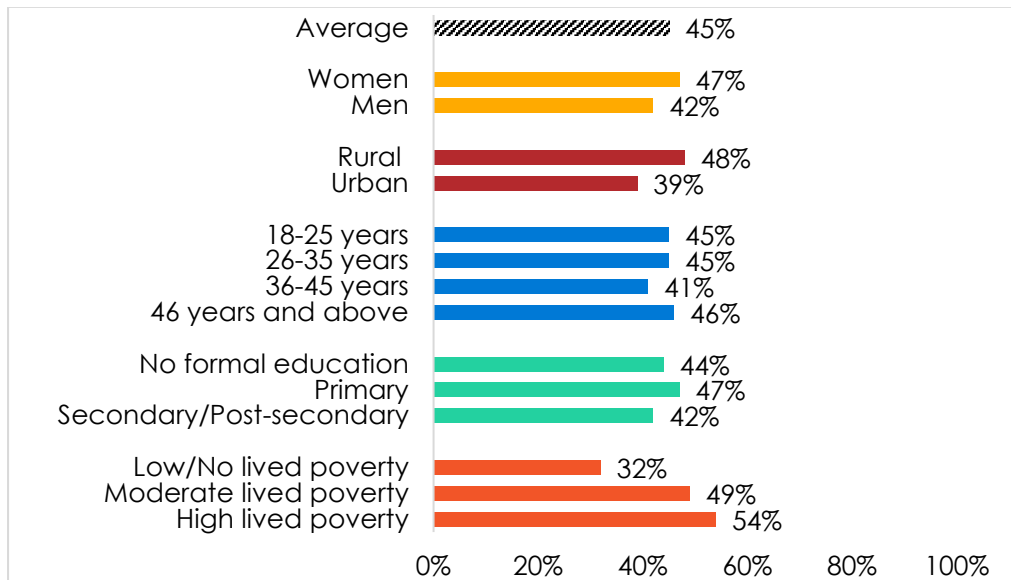
**Figure 3: How frequently do adults use physical force to discipline children?** | Mozambique | 2022



**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: Adults frequently use physical force to discipline children**

| by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



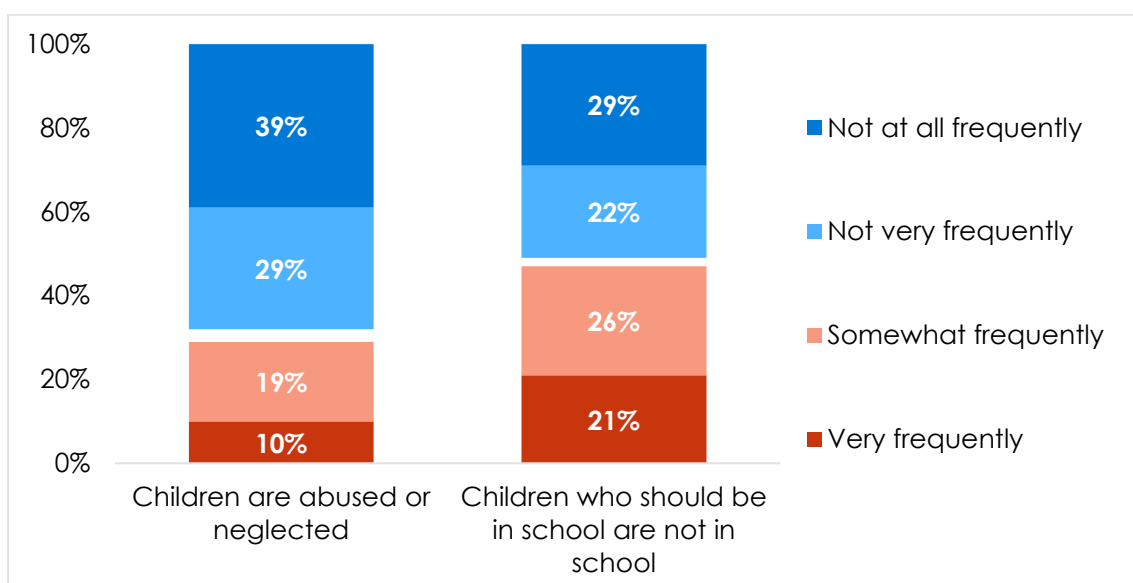
**Respondents were asked:** How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Adults use physical force to discipline children? (% who say “somewhat frequently” or “very frequently”)

### Abuse and neglect

About two-thirds (68%) of Mozambicans say that child abuse, mistreatment, and neglect are “not at all frequent” (39%) or “not very frequent” (29%) in their community, while 29% think these are common occurrences (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: How often are children abused, mistreated, or neglected?** | Mozambique

| 2022

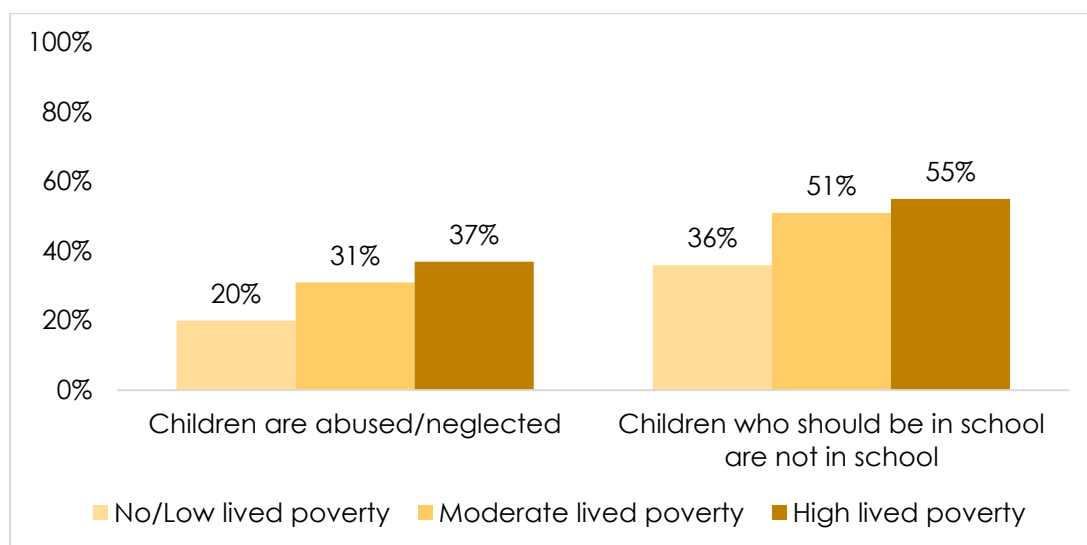


**Respondents were asked:** How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected? Children who should be in school are not in school?

Assessments are more closely divided on whether it is common to see school-age children who are not in school. Half (51%) of respondents say out-of-school children are “not very” or “not at all” common, but almost as many (47%) disagree.

Perceptions of child abuse/neglect and out-of-school children as frequent problems do not show clear patterns of variation by respondents' gender, urban-rural location, age, or education level. But they do vary considerably by respondents' economic status (Figure 6). The poorest citizens are almost twice as likely as well-off respondents to see child abuse and neglect as a common problem in their community (37% vs. 20%), and far more likely to say that children are frequently out of school (55% vs. 36%)

**Figure 6: Perception that children are frequently abused or neglected** | by lived poverty | Mozambique | 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 that are accessible can be crucial in preparing them for full, successful lives. To what extent are such services available at the community level?

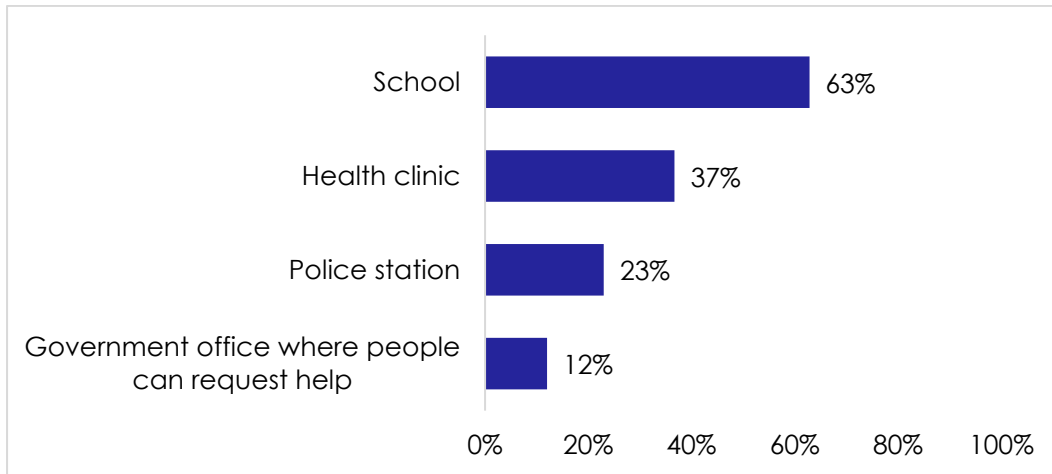
Based on Afrobarometer field teams' observations in all enumeration areas they visited, more than six in 10 Mozambicans (63%) live within walking distance of a school, and 37% have a health clinic within easy reach (Figure 7). Fewer than one in four (23%) have a police station in the area, and only 12% live within walking distance of a social centre or other government office where people can request help.

As for more specialised support services, a slim majority (54%) of Mozambicans say help for abused or neglected children is available in their community, while 29% disagree and 17% don't offer an opinion (Figure 8).

About half (49%) think support for children with disability is available, though 36% say no such assistance is found in their community.

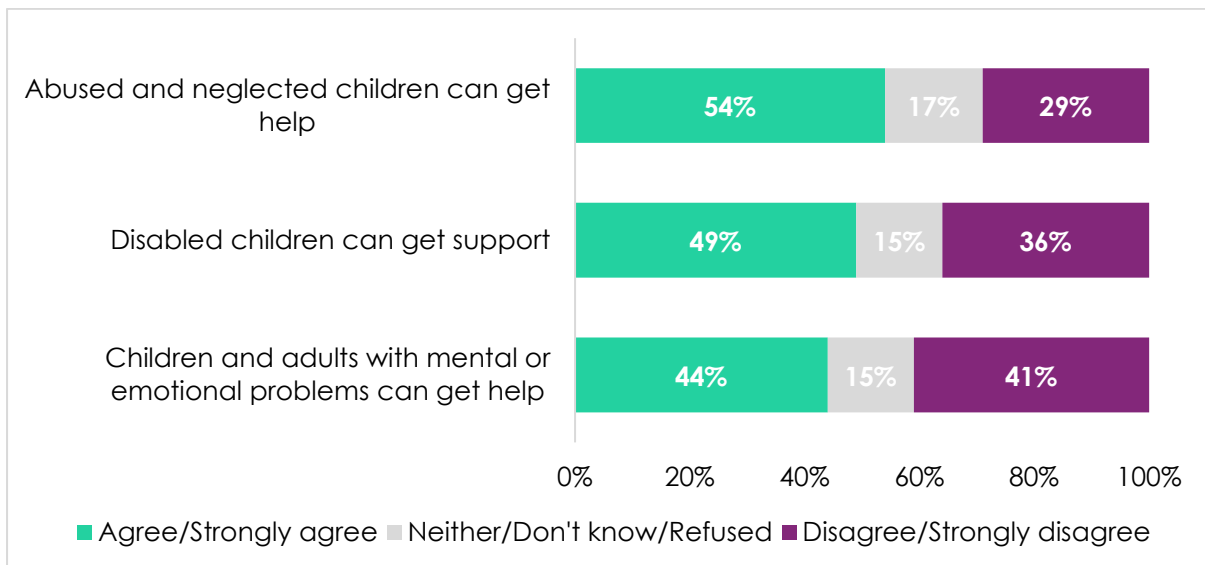
And views are almost evenly divided regarding the availability of support for children and adults with mental or emotional problems: 44% say such resources exist in their community, but 41% say they do not.

**Figure 7: Availability of public services at the community level | Mozambique | 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")

**Figure 8: Is help available for vulnerable children? | Mozambique | 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.*

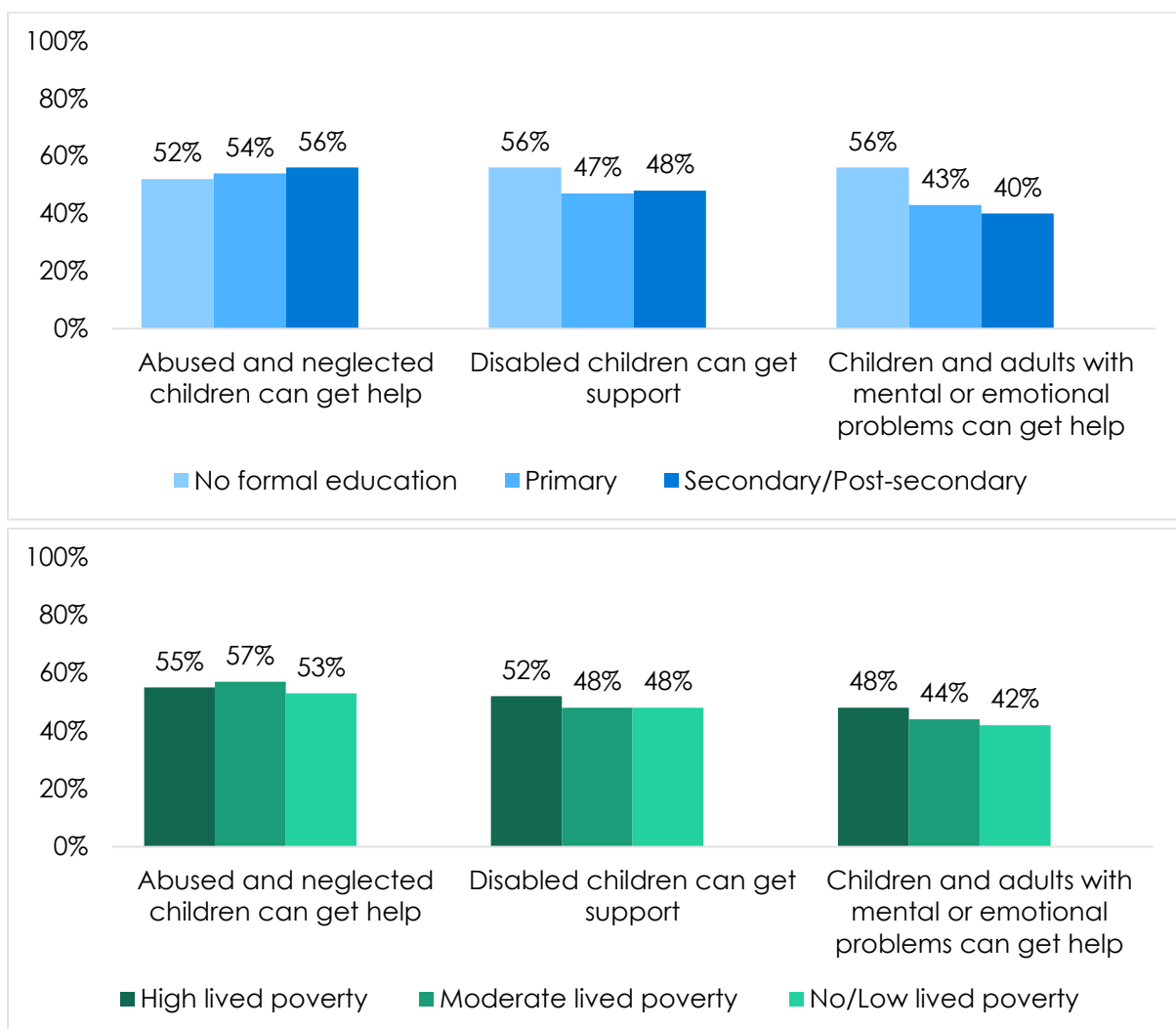
Breakdowns by demographic groups do not reveal clear patterns but do show some significant differences. Respondents with secondary or post-secondary education are slightly more likely than those with no formal schooling to say support is available in their community for abused or neglected children (56% vs. 52%). But they are less likely to indicate that help is

available for children with disability (48% vs. 56%) or for children/adults with mental or emotional problems (40% vs. 56%) (Figure 9).

Similarly, well-off respondents are somewhat less likely to see community-level help as available for children with disability and people with mental or emotional problems.

Urban residents are more likely than rural residents to report that help for abused or neglected children is available (61% vs. 51%), as are men compared to women (58% vs. 51%). But on the questions about support for other vulnerabilities, views differ only marginally by location and gender.

**Figure 9: Help is available for vulnerable children** | by education and lived poverty levels | Mozambique | 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 "agree strongly")

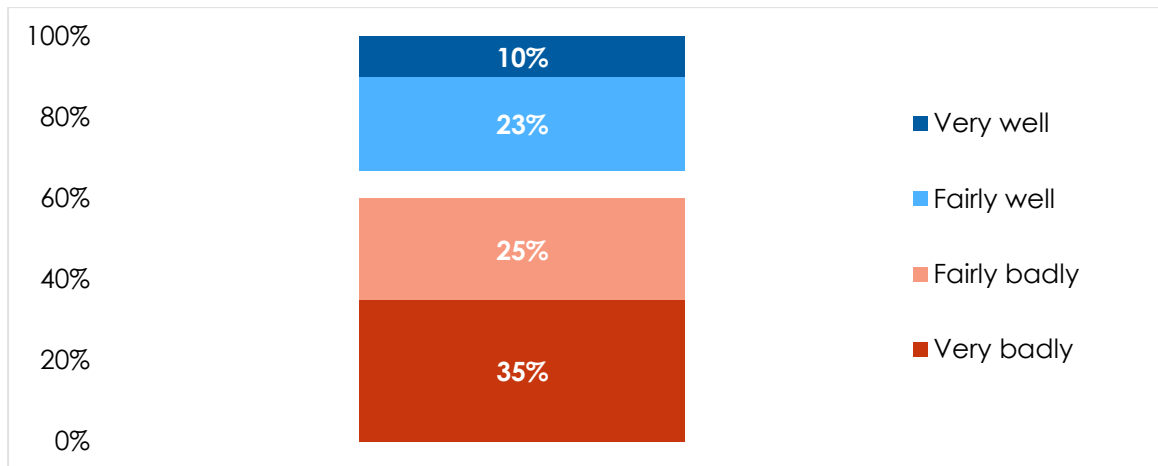


### Government performance on child welfare

Overall, only one-third (33%) of Mozambicans believe that their government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” on protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children, while 60% say it is doing a poor job (Figure 10).

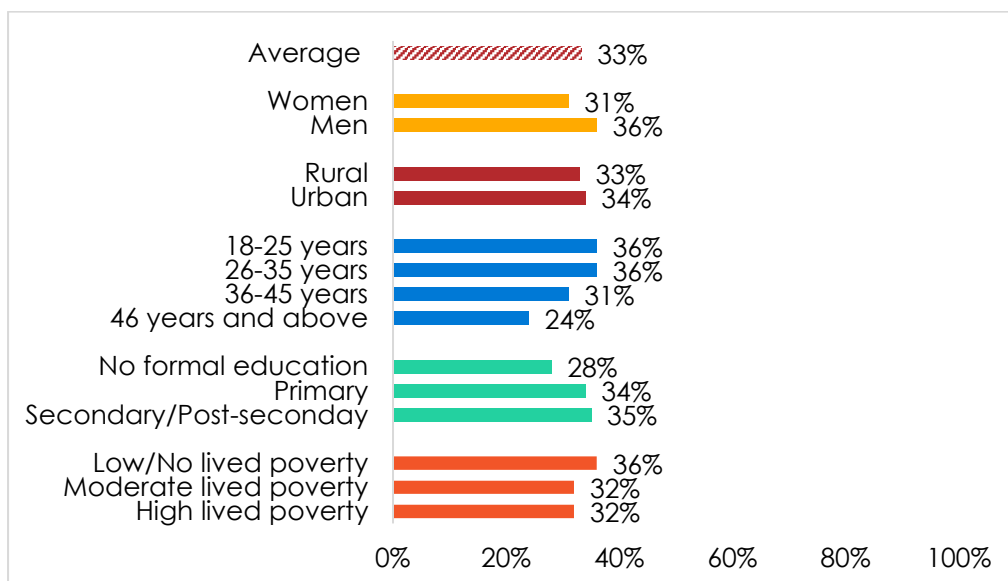
Approval of the government's performance declines with age, dropping from 36% among 18- to 35-year-olds to just 24% among those over age 45 (Figure 11). Citizens without formal schooling (28%) and women (31%) are less likely to praise the government's efforts than those with more education (34%-35%) and men (36%).

**Figure 10: Government performance on child welfare | Mozambique | 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 | Mozambique | 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

Mozambique's multifaceted security and humanitarian situation multiplies children's vulnerabilities and the challenges of promoting their well-being. While a majority of survey respondents say that child abuse and neglect are not common in their community, insecurity and poverty heighten such risks for children, especially for girls.

Survey findings highlight the need for more support services for abused or neglected children, children with disability, and children and adults with mental or emotional problems. Few Mozambicans think their government is doing an adequate job of promoting child well-being, though other stakeholders may interpret these findings as a call to action as well.

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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 Mozambique. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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