



In Seychelles, ensuring children's welfare remains a challenge for the poor

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 764 | Anne Okello

Summary

Seychelles' policy and legal framework to protect and promote child well-being has included free and compulsory education for children aged 5-16 since 1978. The National Plan of Action for Children (2005-2009) formalised a commitment to enhancing children's well-being. Most recently, the Children (Amendment) Act 2020 outlawed corporal punishment of children in all settings, including schools, homes, and alternative care settings (Government of Seychelles, 2005, 2020; Purvis, 2020).

Despite this legal arsenal, issues pertaining to the protection and well-being of children remain, including child labour and sexual exploitation (Humanium, 2020). A recent case shocked the nation and highlighted the new dangers of social media: In 2020, three men, including a police officer, were convicted of sexual offences against 75 girls aged 12-18 whom they had recruited and groomed via social media (Africa Legal Information, 2020; Seychelles News Agency, 2020). In response, the government established the Seychelles Child Law Reform Committee to review the country's legal framework for children in line with international law obligations and best practices (Judiciary of Seychelles, 2020).

What is the perspective of Seychelles citizens regarding their country's efforts in safeguarding children's welfare?

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 well-being.

Survey findings show that Seychellois are evenly divided on whether the use of physical force to discipline children is justified, though a majority say neither corporal punishment nor child abuse and neglect are common in their community.

Most also say that support services are available in their community for abused or neglected children, for children with disability, and for children and adults with mental or emotional problems. And a majority of Seychellois are satisfied with the government's performance on child welfare. But compared to economically well-off citizens, poor respondents are significantly more likely to see child abuse and neglect as common problems and less likely to say that support services are available and that the government is doing a good job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.

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 completed 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.

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Seychelles, a team led by the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Seychellois in December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

Disciplining children:

- While half (50%) of Seychellois say parents are "never" justified in using physical force to discipline their children, about the same proportion (49%) endorse the practice.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of citizens say the use of physical force to discipline children is not very common in their community.

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

- Three in 10 respondents (31%) say child abuse and neglect are frequent problems in their community, while 58% disagree. Out-of-school children are seen as a common occurrence by 44% of citizens.
 - Poor citizens are significantly more likely to perceive child abuse/neglect (55%) and out-of-school children (56%) as common problems than well-off respondents (26% and 39%, respectively).

Availability of support services for vulnerable children:

- About three-fourths of Seychellois say resources are available in their community to help abused and neglected children (75%), children with disability (77%), and children and adults with mental or emotional problems (74%).
 - The poor are considerably less likely than better-off citizens to report that support services for vulnerable children are available in their community.

Government performance on child welfare:

- Most Seychellois (71%) say the government is doing a good job of protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children.
 - Poor and less educated citizens are least satisfied with the government's performance on child welfare.

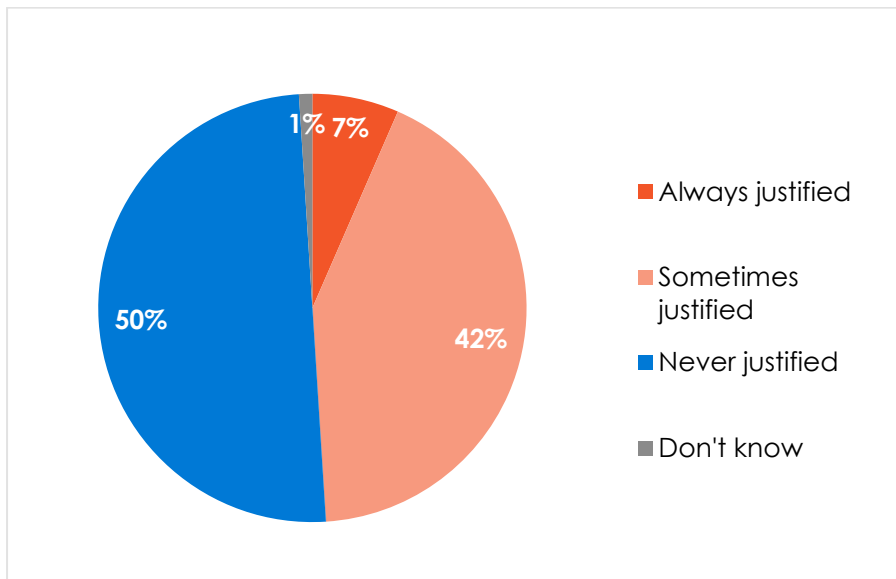
Disciplining a child

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

Half of Seychellois (50%) believe it is "never justified" for parents to use physical force to discipline their children (Figure 1). But about the same proportion (49%) say the practice is "sometimes justified" (42%) or "always justified" (7%).

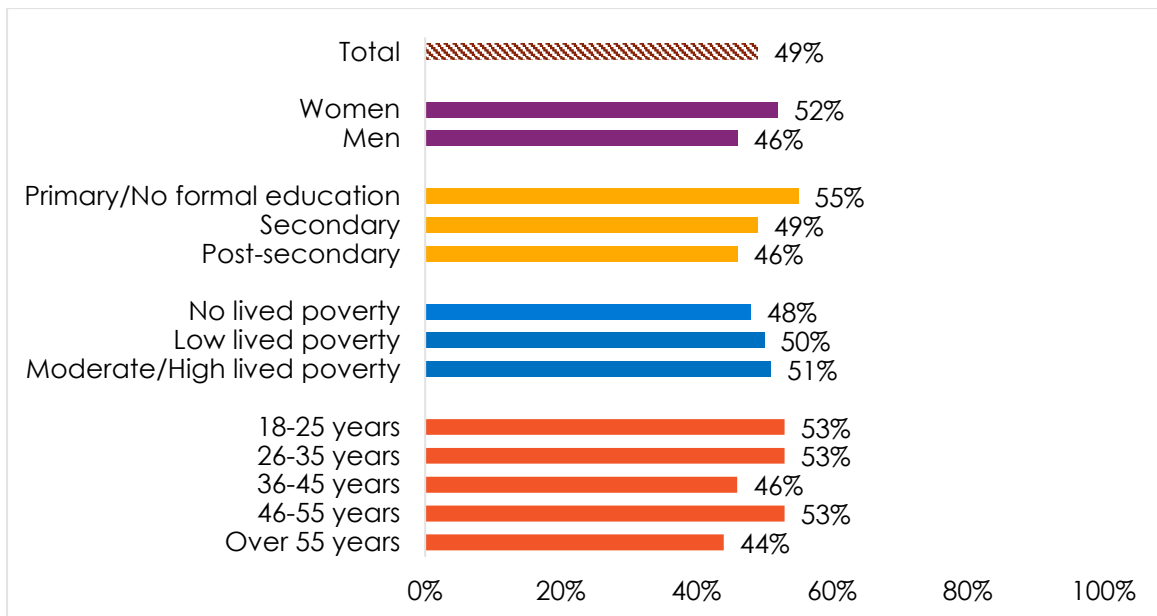
Women are more likely than men to endorse the use of physical force to discipline children (52% vs. 46%) (Figure 2). The practice is more widely accepted among respondents with primary or no formal schooling (55%) than among those with secondary (49%) or post-secondary education (46%).

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

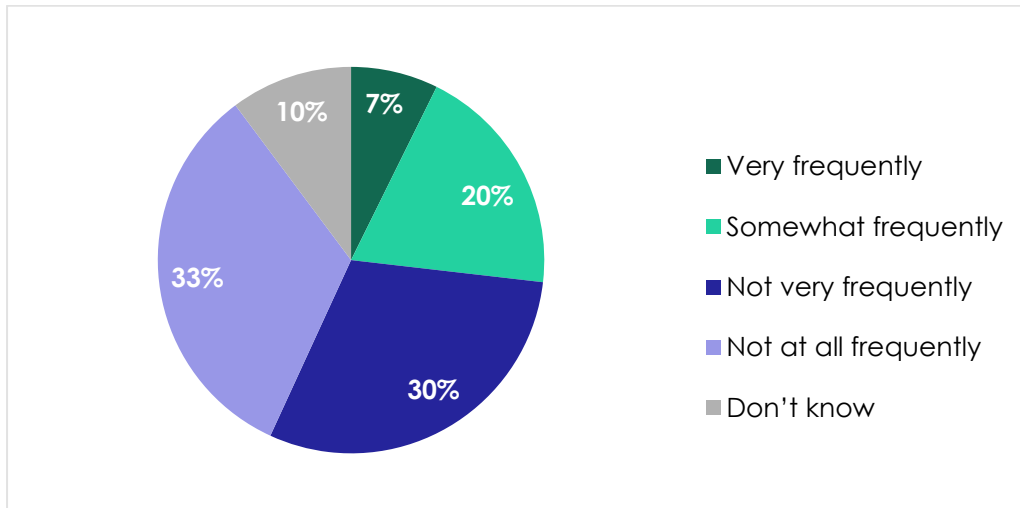


Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children? (% who say "sometimes justified" or "always justified")

In practice, almost two-thirds of Seychellois say that adults in their community do "not very frequently" (30%) or "not at all frequently" (33%) use physical force to discipline children (Figure 3). About one in four citizens see this as a "somewhat frequent" (20%) or "very frequent" (7%) occurrence.

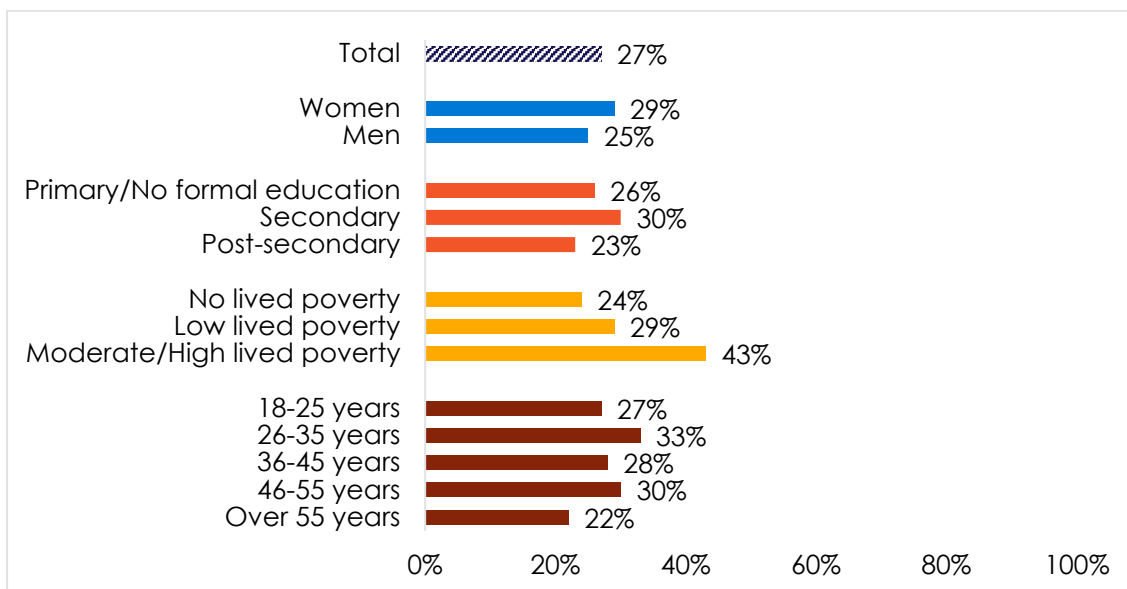
Poor respondents are significantly more likely than their better-off counterparts to report that adults in their communities use physical force to discipline children (43% vs. 24%)¹ (Figure 4). This perception is slightly more prevalent among women than men (29% vs. 25%).

Figure 3: How frequently do adults use physical force to discipline children?
 | Seychelles | 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 | Seychelles | 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")

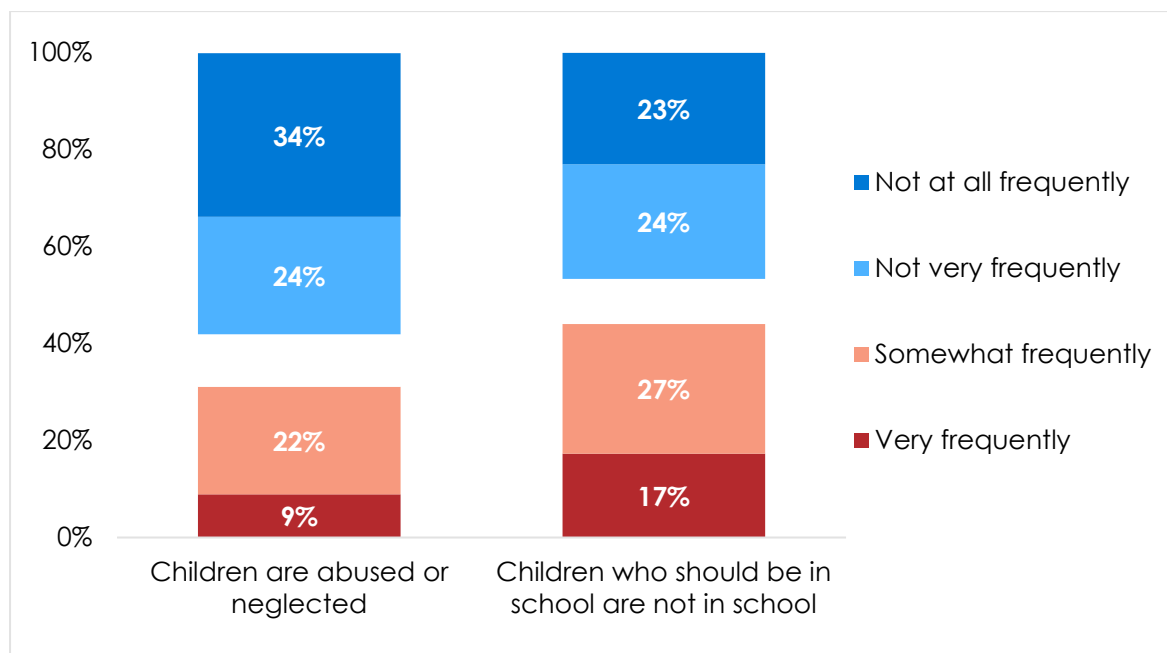
¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Abuse and neglect

Asked how often they think children in their community are abused, mistreated, or neglected, more than half of Seychellois (58%) say this is “not at all frequent” (34%) or “not very frequent” (24%) (Figure 5). One in three (31%) report that abuse and neglect are “somewhat” (22%) or “very” (9%) common.

More than four in 10 (44%) say it is “somewhat” or “very” common in their community to see school-age children who are not in school, while 47% disagree.

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

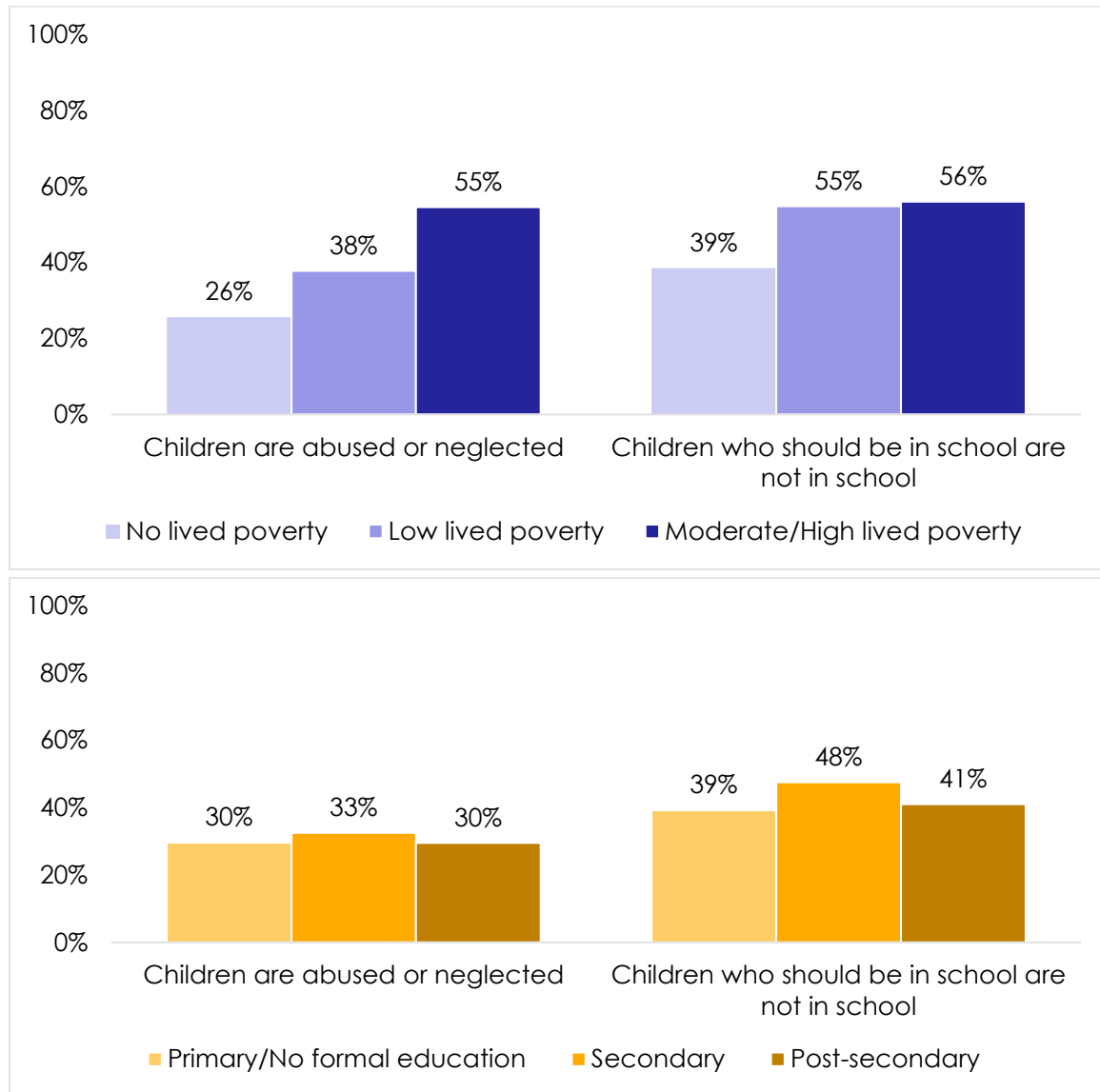


Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected? Children who should be in school are not in school?

Perceptions that child abuse/neglect and out-of-school children are frequent problems in their community are more widespread among poor respondents (Figure 6). A 29-point gap separates the rich from the poor when it comes to perceptions of frequent child abuse and neglect (26% vs. 55%). Out-of-school children are also more commonly seen as a common problem by poor citizens, ranging from 39% of the best-off to 56% of those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty.

Citizens with secondary education are more likely to see child abuse/neglect and out-of-school children as common problems than their counterparts with less or more education, while no clear pattern of significant differences is apparent across genders or age groups.

Figure 6: Perception that children are frequently abused or neglected | by lived poverty and education | Seychelles | 2022



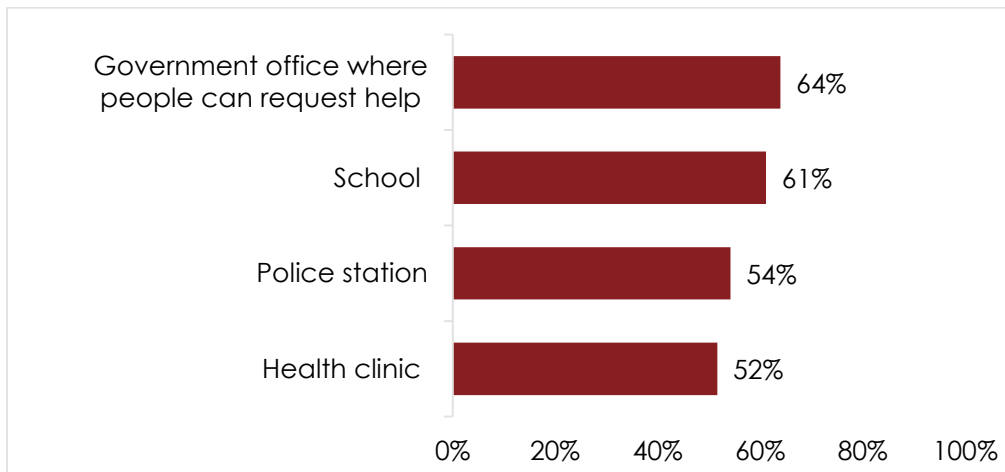
Respondents were asked: How frequently do you think the following things occur in your community or neighbourhood: Children are abused, mistreated, or neglected? Children who should be in school are not in school? (% who say "somewhat frequently" or "very frequently")

Support for vulnerable children

Support services can be crucial for children facing significant challenges, helping to prepare them for whole, 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 Seychellois live within walking distance of a government office where people can request help (64%) and a school (61%) (Figure 7). Slimmer majorities have a nearby police station (54%) and health clinic (52%).

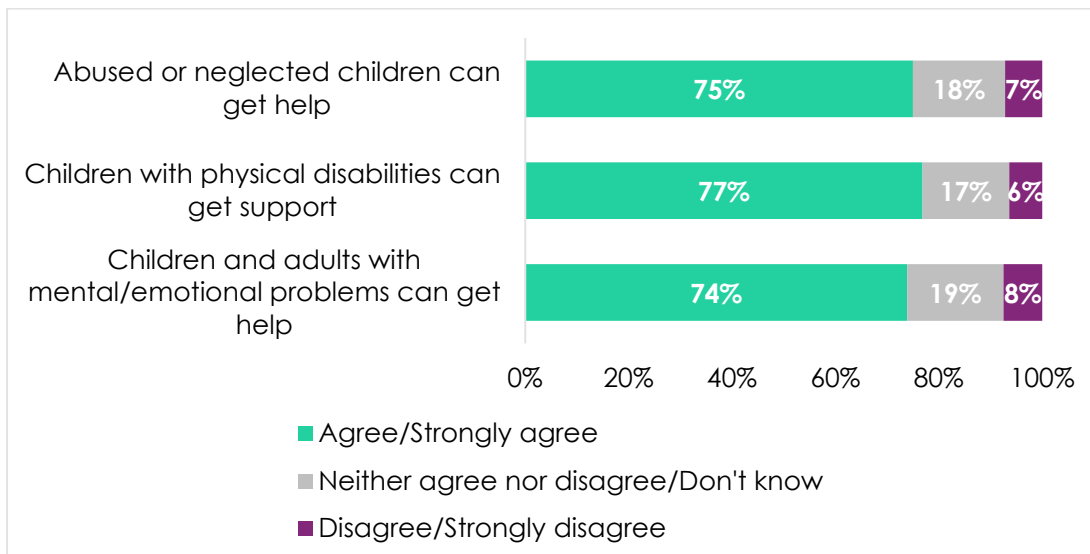
Figure 7: Availability of public services at the community level | Seychelles | 2022



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")

Most respondents report that more specialised support services are also available in the community (Figure 8). Three-fourths (75%) say people in their community are generally able to get help for children who have been abused, mistreated, or neglected. About the same proportion say support is available for children with physical disabilities (77%) and for children and adults with mental or emotional problems (74%).

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

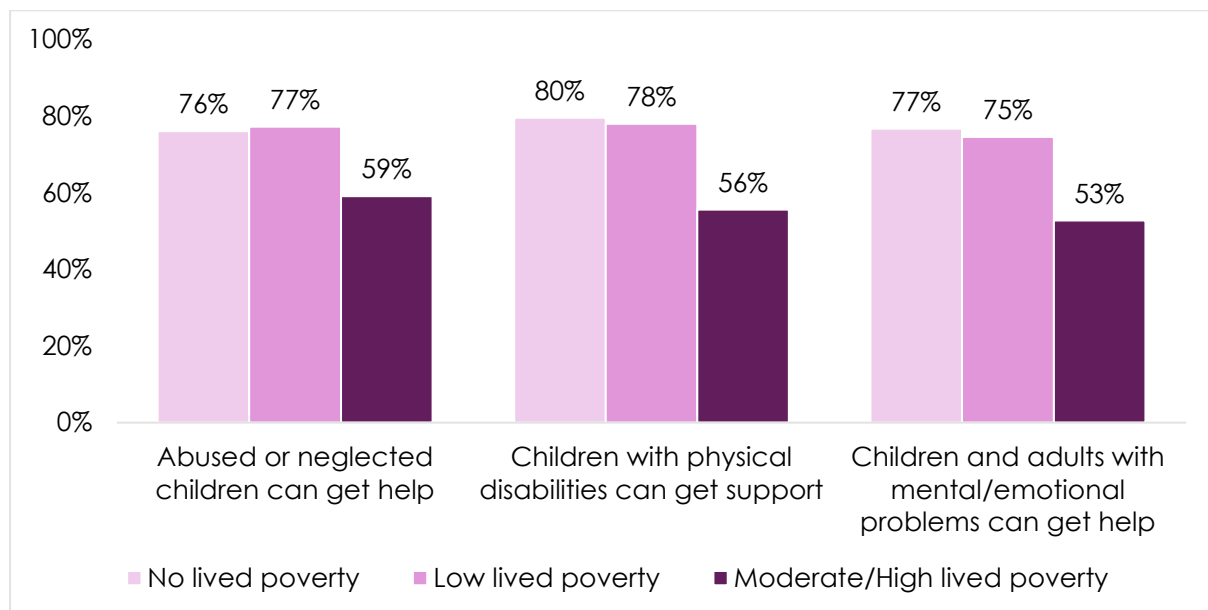
In my community, children who have a physical disability are generally able to get the support they need to succeed in life.

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.

Men and women hold similar views on these questions. But across the board, citizens experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty are less likely than their better-off counterparts to report that support services for vulnerable children are available in their community (Figure 9).

Gaps of 17-24 percentage points separate poor and well-off respondents when it comes to perceptions that help is available in their community for abused and neglected children (59% vs. 76%), children with disability (56% vs. 80%), and children and adults with mental or emotional problems (53% vs. 77%).

Figure 9: Help is available for vulnerable children | by lived poverty | Seychelles | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree. (% who say “agree” or “strongly 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.

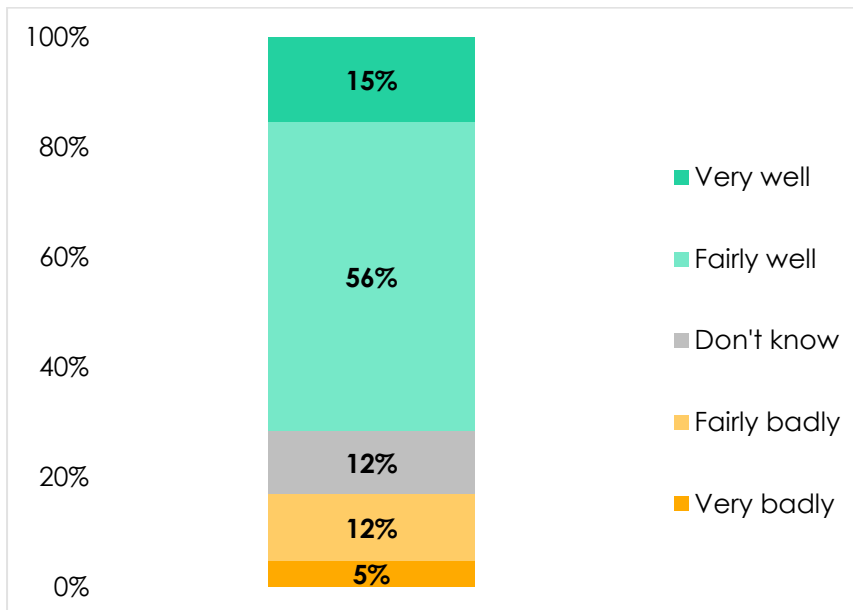
Government performance on child welfare

Most Seychellois are positive in their assessments of how well the government is protecting and promoting the well-being of vulnerable children: 71% say it is doing “fairly well” (56%) or “very well” (15%). Only 17% believe it is doing a poor job (Figure 10).

In line with their less rosy perceptions regarding child abuse/neglect and the availability of support services, poor citizens are considerably less approving of the government’s performance than well-off respondents (58% vs. 75%) (Figure 11).

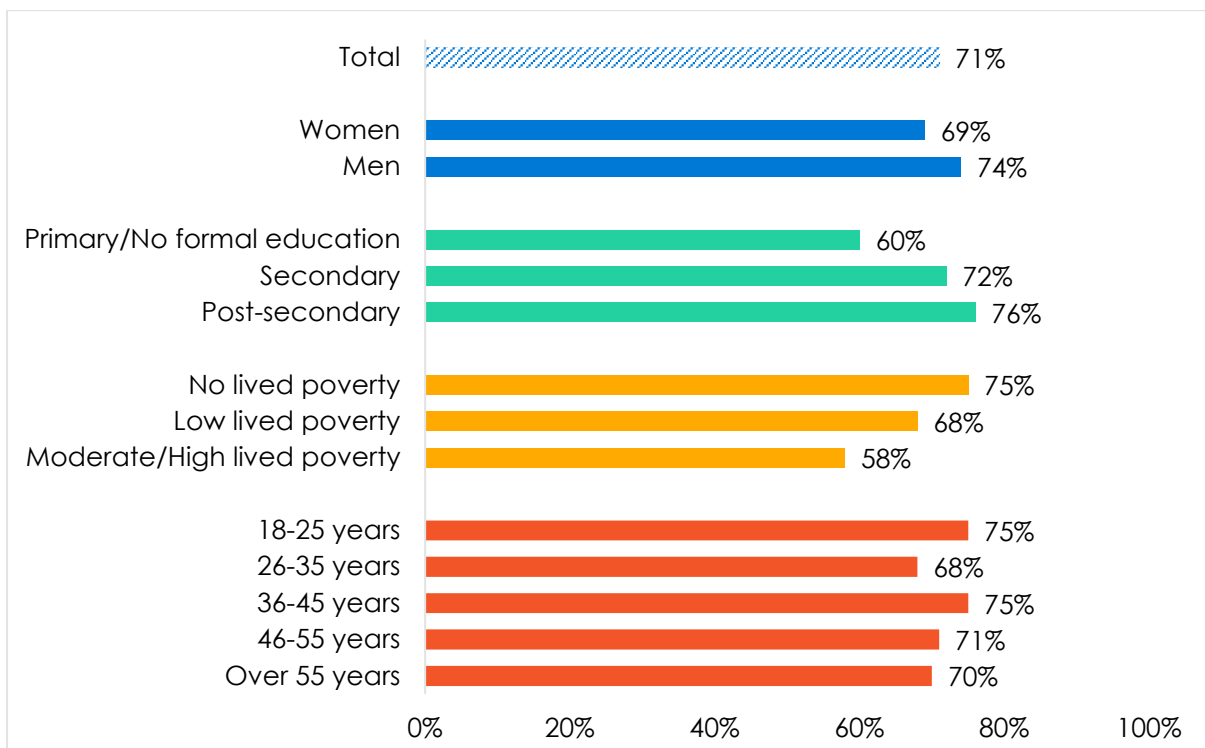
Similarly, the least educated (60%) are significantly less likely to praise the government’s efforts than those with post-secondary education (76%). Approval ratings are also somewhat lower among women than among men (69% vs. 74%).

Figure 10: Government performance on child welfare | Seychelles | 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 | Seychelles | 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

Seychelles continues to make legislative and policy strides to protect and promote the well-being of children, and a majority of citizens are satisfied with the government's efforts. But survey findings point to at least two issues for consideration by children's advocates.

Despite the Child (Amendment) Act 2020 against corporal punishment, about half of adults say parents are justified in the use of physical force to discipline their children. For activists seeking to end the practice, this may suggest a greater need for sensitisation on this issue.

And economically disadvantaged citizens are notably more likely to report that child abuse/neglect and out-of-school children are frequent problems, that support services for vulnerable children are not available in their community, and that the government is doing a poor job on child well-being, suggesting a need for interventions that target these populations.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan 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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