

# Violence against children: a review of evidence relevant to Africa

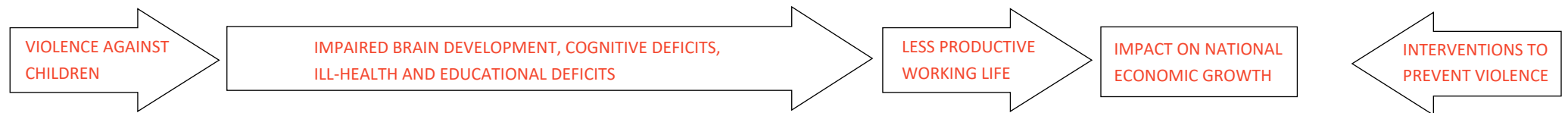


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**Violence in childhood is associated with long-term mental, physical and economic deficits, but can be prevented.**

Interpersonal violence against children at home, at school and in the community is an economic issue for Africa as well as a moral one. The evidence points to a chain of permanent impacts, with violence being associated with brain impairments, lower cognitive ability, increased mental and physical illness, lower educational attainment, a less productive working life and lower national economic growth. A range of interventions can prevent violence and so are important human capital investments.



**Prevalence.** In sub-Saharan Africa around **two thirds of children suffer physical violence, a third of girls suffer sexual violence, a quarter of children suffer emotional violence and half of children witness domestic violence.** One in five instances of physical violence causes injury. Most violence is from parents, partners, teachers and neighbours.

**Impact on the brain.** Violence against children is associated with the **impaired development of brain areas for learning, memory, language, motivation, vision, awareness, problem-solving, abstract thinking, emotional control and empathy.** Such damage across multiple brain systems is likely to have a profound impact on a person's cognitive, emotional and social capacities.

**Impact on mind and body.** Violence is associated with mental impacts both in childhood and later life such as **a fall in intelligence of 8-10 IQ points, impaired learning, aggression in social situations, anxiety, depression and psychosis.** It is also associated with **risky behaviors such as substance misuse,** leading to physical health impacts such as cancer, heart disease and abortion.

**Impact on education.** Research in high-income countries finds that child maltreatment is associated with **lower school grades, worse behavior, more absences and drop-outs and more need for special education.** Maltreated children **complete one less year of school** on average, are twice as likely to repeat a year and have impaired intellectual and language abilities.

**Impact on productivity.** Research in high-income countries finds that childhood maltreatment is associated with **income in adulthood being reduced by a third and the risk of unemployment and poverty being doubled.** Research in low and middle-income countries on the related issue of violence between partners finds similar impacts on income.

**Impact on the economy.** Violence against children is calculated in middle-income countries to **reduce GDP by 3-4%.** The calculations omit many areas of cost such as health and education, and use lower figures for violence than seen in most of Africa. Violence between parents imposes further costs due to poorer parenting and the effects of children witnessing violence.

**Prevention.** Programs have achieved big falls in violence in four key contexts: home, school, the community and children's own empowerment. **Sexual violence was reduced by 62% by a local program in Kenya, physical violence by parents was reduced by over 50% by local programs in South Africa and Liberia, and violence by teachers was reduced by 42% by a local program in Uganda. Child maltreatment was reduced by 80% by a local program in the US.** Leadership is coming from the African Union, multilateral bodies and governments.