No Evidence That Anti-Domestic Violence Laws Reduce Violent Child Discipline in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Hanbo Wu and Luca Maria Pesando

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Hanbo Wu
Division of Social Science, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
hanbo.wu@nyu.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5135-1298

Luca Maria Pesando
Division of Social Science, New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
lucamaria.pesando@nyu.edu
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1690-7163

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Abstract

Albeit rarely recognized as such in existing legislation, violent child discipline is a clear form of domestic violence (DV), with long-lasting implications for children's health and wellbeing. This study investigates whether anti-DV laws introduced gradually in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) since the mid-2000s had any effect in curbing violent caregiving practices. We do so by merging household survey data from 27 SSA countries with time-series information on anti-DV law implementation from World Bank's reports. Leveraging a quasi-experimental approach, we compare African caregivers' childrearing practices and attitudes toward harsh parenting in countries with and without anti-DV laws, before and after law implementation. We test the effectiveness of the laws and conduct heterogeneity analyses by caregiver, household, and child characteristics, alongside country-level indicators of development and inequality. We document a robust increase in violent child discipline following law implementation—mainly driven by emotional punishment—as well as a significantly higher endorsement of harsh parenting practices. Results are weaker, i.e., the consequences of the laws are less negative, in countries characterized by higher income and gender inequalities, where laws have more of a "protective" effect. Findings underscore the unintended consequences of legislation implemented without a clear aim of protecting children.

1. Introduction

Violent child discipline—including physical and emotional punishment of children by parents and caregivers—continues to present a global public health and human rights crisis (World Health Organization 2020) and is particularly widespread in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).[1] Data from eight SSA countries collected in 2005–2006 suggest that 83% and 64% of children experienced some form of emotional and physical violence from their parents, respectively (Akmatov 2011). Violence against children did not alleviate in the following decade, as more than 70% of children in SSA were physically or emotionally punished by their parents between 2010 and 2016 (Cuartas et al. 2019). Exposure to multiple concurrent forms of violence during childhood is also common in SSA (Leoschut and Kafaar 2017; Meinck et al. 2015; Pesando et al. 2024).

Experiencing any form of maltreatment during childhood has long-term adverse consequences that may persist into adulthood (Currie and Tekin 2012; Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor 2016; Herbert et al. 2023; Norman et al. 2012). In the context of SSA, childhood experiences of violent or even abusive parenting practices have been linked to low academic performance and increased probability of dropout (Pieterse 2015), worse mental health and wellbeing (Adjorlolo et al. 2017; Fakunmoju and Bammeke 2015), and engagement in risky behaviors (Brown et al. 2009; Culbreth et al. 2021). Moreover, parents who themselves used to experience parental abuse and neglect have been shown to be more likely to become perpetrators of violence against children when entering parenthood (Crombach and Bambonyé 2015; Smarrelli et al. 2024) and, in extreme cases, commit child homicide (Dekel et al. 2018). The consequences of violent child discipline are detrimental to human and societal development in SSA and have drawn significant public attention, calling for urgent interventions and legislation

protecting children from abusive parenting practices (African Child Policy Forum 2014; 2021; Dinarte Diaz et al. 2023).

Despite high prevalence of violent child discipline, public spending on child protection in SSA is among the lowest in the world (Edwards et al. 2024), with reasons for underfunding attributable to complex political economy dynamics in the region (Muchabaiwa 2024). A series of small-scale interventions have been implemented in SSA to prevent violence against children, yet substantial limitations remain.[2] First, the scope and coverage of these programs is narrow, as they are typically targeted to small shares of the population. Samples drawn for program evaluations are often non-representative and relatively limited. Second, the majority of interventions target primarily individual- or household-level dynamics, aiming to change aspects related to individual socioeconomic status, communication skills, and normative beliefs around harsh parenting. As Edwards et al. (2024) indicated, "no research in SSA has examined the impact of policy interventions on childhood victimization or community-level interventions to change norms and values that support violence against children" (p. 605). Finally, previous research and policy efforts have focused mostly on single-country cases, limiting broader understanding of interventions that may effectively target violent child discipline across contexts.

This article contributes to the relevant literature by exploring the following question: Can legal provisions criminalizing domestic violence affect violent child discipline in SSA? Domestic violence (DV) refers to physical, psychological, and sexual violence occurring within the family sphere. Starting in mid-2000s, several African countries enacted legislative reforms including specific wordings to criminalize DV with clearly stipulated penalties, while in other countries no explicit mention of DV in the national legal code was made (Beninger 2014). Scholars have examined the impact of these anti-DV laws on intimate partner violence (IPV),

i.e., violence perpetrated by a person in an intimate relationship and most commonly seen as a paramount component of DV (Beninger 2014; Govender 2015; Medie 2020; Umubyeyi et al. 2016; Usdin et al. 2000; Xu 2024).

Although violent child discipline is another key element of DV—albeit rarely recognized as such—this domain has received less attention among scholars and policymakers. In this article, we make use of large-scale comparative data from nationally representative surveys conducted in 27 SSA countries to assess whether anti-DV laws reduce violent child discipline and/or alter African parents' attitudes toward harsh parenting. Our identification exploits two sources of variation in the implementation of these laws across SSA: (1) anti-DV laws were enacted in some countries, but not in others; (2) the timing of the implementation varied, i.e., in a country the law was put into effect before or after a survey was conducted. Following previous research on IPV (Xu 2024), we seek to understand the potential impacts of the laws by comparing parental behaviors and attitudes toward childrearing practices between countries with and without anti-DV laws, before and after the implementation of the laws.

On one hand, there is reason to believe DV-related legislation may affect childrearing practices and attitudes towards harsh parenting. By analyzing progressive anti-DV laws in Ghana, Namibia, and South Africa, Beninger (2014) argued that legislative reforms combating DV are not only "effective" but also "necessary" for "developing normative and legal standards, driving state accountability for protection from violence, and ultimately promoting social change" (p. 75). Drawing on cross-national survey data for 22 African countries, Xu (2024) showed that countries enacting anti-DV laws saw substantial declines in the likelihood of justifying IPV among women after the laws were enforced. As attitudes towards violence are arguably related to (or even conducive to) violent behavior, Xu's finding that anti-DV laws

pushed African women to increasingly reject DV is promising, providing empirical and quantitative support to Beninger's argument. Similarly, anti-DV laws might create normative and legal standards making people endorse the idea that harsh parenting is illicit, unnecessary, and bad for child development, which can help reduce child maltreatment.

On the other hand, anti-DV laws may fail to lower violent child discipline for a range of reasons. First, there has been criticism about the inadequate and inefficient implementation of anti-DV laws and bans on corporal punishment in SSA (Lansford et al. 2017; Medie 2020; Smarrelli et al. 2024). For example, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in South Africa in November 1998 and came into force in December 1999, placing legal duties on South African Police to handle DV cases. Through interviews with DV victims and police officials, Govender (2015) examined complaints filed by the former against the latter. The author found that even though relevant legislation had been made, DV was not being investigated and policed properly in South Africa. Second, the effectiveness of anti-DV laws may be hampered by peculiarities of the local context. For instance, through focus groups in Rwanda with health professionals regularly taking care of DV victims, Umubyeyi et al. (2016) found that, despite the anti-DV law constituted in 2008, gender norms and poverty reduced the potential for abused victims to seek help, thus hindering the legislation's effort to reduce DV.

Third, violent child discipline is rarely framed as a manifestation of DV, neither in scholarship nor in policy discourse, hence individuals themselves may be conceptualizing IPV as the primary and only form of DV. Relatedly, the majority of anti-DV laws in SSA focus on IPV or feature the generic term "domestic violence," without specifying whether violent child discipline is accounted for by the laws. As a result, the police and the court may fail to treat child maltreatment as a violation of the laws, and harsh parenting may be perpetrated due to caregivers

not perceiving it as illegal. Fourth, the success of any law might depend on the availability of effective alternatives to use in disciplinary situations in which violent practices, such as spanking and beating, had been an option traditionally, as well as on caregivers' knowledge of these alternatives. In the absence of such alternatives or knowledge, caregivers may continue or even increase the use of violent disciplinary methods (Larzelere et al. 2013). Lastly, in households that are intrinsically violent and where IPV occurs regularly, we may observe a "substitution mechanism" whereby DV legislation may reduce violence between partners, but parents may turn increasingly violent towards their children given the frequent coexistence—and similar root causes—of the two practices (Bacchus et al. 2024; Pearson et al. 2023).

2. Data and methods

To conduct this analysis, we pooled multiple waves of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for 27 SSA countries. Specifically, we relied on MICS waves 3–6 and DHS conducted after 2005 to ensure that all surveys have a complete child discipline (CD) module that inquired about the primary caregiver's childrearing practices. We also limited the sample to caregivers currently in couples, to be able to include couple-level characteristics in the model, as recent literature suggests that measures of status consistency between partners (such as similar levels of education) negatively predict harsh parenting practices (Pesando et al. 2024). The countries and surveys used in this study are listed in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

The CD module in MICS and DHS follows the Conflict Tactics Scale, widely adopted in studies of family violence, including child maltreatment (Straus et al. 1998). In the CD module, a

child aged 2–14 was randomly selected from a surveyed household, and the respondent was asked if they or anyone else in the household used a method to discipline the selected child if the child misbehaved during the month preceding the survey time. The CD module consists of 11 child disciplinary methods, and we categorized them into three groups:

a) Physical punishment, including a1) shook child; a2) spanked, hit or slapped child on bottom with bare hand; a3) hit child on the bottom or elsewhere with belt, brush, stick, etc.; a4) hit or slapped child on the face, head or ears; a5) hit or slapped child on the hand, arm or leg; a6) beat child up as hard as one could.
b) Emotional punishment, including b1) shouted, yelled or screamed at child; b2) called child dumb, lazy or another name.
c) Non-violent disciplinary methods, including c1) took away privileges; c2) explained why behavior was wrong; c3) gave child something else to do.

Based on these questions, we created five outcome variables indicating if the respondent used the following methods to punish their misbehaved children: (1) any violent methods (any of a1–a6 or b1–b2); (2) any physical punishment (any of a1–a6); (3) any severe physical punishment (any of a4–a6); (4) any emotional punishment (any of b1–b2); and (5) any non-violent methods (any of c1–c3). In addition to behaviors, the CD module also asked respondents if they thought the child needs to be physically punished to be raised properly, and we used this as an additional outcome variable characterizing attitudes toward harsh parenting.

We examined if outcomes for individual i from country j surveyed in year t were affected by anti-DV laws using the following specification:

$$CD_{i,j,t} = \alpha + \beta Post\_law_{i,j,t} + \gamma \mathrm{X}_i' + \varepsilon_i,$$

where one's exposure to anti-DV laws is determined by the country they lived in and the time they were surveyed. Specifically, we considered country j a "treated" country if an anti-DV law was put into effect before the latest MICS/DHS conducted in this country. For an individual i living in a treated country, if they were surveyed after the implementation of anti-DV laws, they were considered exposed to the laws (i.e., $Post\_law_{i,j,t} = 1$). This flexible difference-in-differences (DID) specification allows us to compare individuals in treated countries (having anti-DV laws enforced) with individuals in untreated countries (having no anti-DV laws enforced), before and after the laws were enacted. Accordingly, β is the coefficient of interest, measuring the impact of anti-DV laws on the outcomes. All estimates are from linear probability models (with corresponding analyses with logistic regression in the Appendix).

The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* report tracks legal and regulatory changes for several indicators relating to women's empowerment (World Bank 2024), and we gathered information from this report on laws addressing DV in SSA. The report records which country enacted a specific law that criminalizes DV and stipulates the punishment. For countries with these anti-DV laws enacted, the report further documents the names of the laws, as well as the dates of enactment and entry into force. The accuracy of information provided in the World Bank's report is validated with the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices submitted by the United States Department of State to the United States Congress (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, United States Department of State 2023). We made use of such information to assign the 27 SSA countries into treatment and control groups (see Table 1), and allocate individuals living in treated countries into pre-law and post-law groups.

In all regression models, we controlled for a number of child-, parent-, and household-level characteristics extracted from MICS/DHS, including child's age and sex, mother's and

father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, mother's marital status and age, respondent's religion (Christianity vs. Islam vs. other/no religion), household wealth, household size, location of residence (urban vs. rural), and the number of children under age five in the household. We also added country and survey fixed effects to account for unobservable heterogeneity between countries. The fixed effects do not capture some country characteristics—such as socioeconomic development and levels of inequality—that change over time and may affect both law implementation and the occurrence of child maltreatment. To account for them, we included three time-varying country-level variables in our models: (1) (logged) gross domestic product (GDP) per capita from the World Bank, measuring a country's economic condition; (2) Gini coefficient also from the World Bank, measuring a country's level of economic inequality (a higher Gini coefficient indicates greater income inequality); and (3) Gender Inequality Index (GII) from the UNDP, measuring a country's level of gender inequality (a higher GII indicates higher gender inequality). In all regression models, standard errors are clustered at the country level, and survey weights are applied. Heterogeneity analyses were conducted by interacting the post-law dummy with the above individual-, parent-, household-, and country-level variables.

3. Descriptive statistics

According to Table 1, 12 out of the 27 SSA countries had anti-DV laws entered into force prior to the latest MICS/DHS surveys and are hence in the treatment group. The remaining 15 countries are in the control group, including six countries that never implemented anti-DV laws, eight countries that enacted anti-DV laws only after the latest MICS/DHS surveys were conducted, and Guinea-Bissau, where an anti-DV law was passed in 2014 but never came into

force (World Bank 2024). Table 2 presents the sample characteristics of outcome variables for all countries combined, as well as for the 12 countries in the treatment group and the 15 countries in the control group, respectively. Depending on which outcome is considered, the total sample size ranges from 117,223 to 124,705. The sample size of individuals in the treatment group is 1.7 times that in the control group.

[Table 2 here]

85% of caregivers reported using some violent disciplinary methods, and the same proportion of caregivers also reported using some non-violent methods. Violent child discipline is highly prevalent in SSA—72% and 80% of children were physically or emotionally punished in the month prior to the survey date, with almost a quarter being subject to severe physical punishment. Moreover, 40% of caregivers agreed that a child needs to be physically punished to be raised properly. There is no considerable discrepancy in the sample means of outcome variables between treatment and control countries, although sample means are slightly higher in the treatment group across all outcomes.

4. Results

4.1 Main results

Table 3 presents estimated effects of exposure to anti-DV laws on CD practices and attitudes. According to Model 1—our preferred specification with full set of controls—anti-DV laws in SSA fail to exert a protective effect on children. Although we found some evidence that exposure to anti-DV laws made caregivers more likely to use non-violent methods to discipline their children (panel e), such effect lacks statistical significance. Conversely, the laws increased any harsh parenting practice by 7.2 percentage points, corresponding to 8% of the sample mean

(panel a). This estimate is mostly driven by emotional punishment, as the laws raised the likelihood of children experiencing emotional punishment by 12.7 percentage points, or 16% of the sample mean (panel d). Impacts on physical punishment and severe physical punishment are both positive—about a third in size relative to emotional punishment—but not significantly different from zero (panels b and c). These results suggest that, instead of protecting children, anti-DV laws implemented in SSA made children more likely to experience violent parenting, thereby contradicting the purpose of the legislation to lower violence in the family and domestic sphere.

[Table 3 here]

In addition to actual disciplinary practices, we also investigated anti-DV legislation's influence on individual attitudes toward harsh parenting (Table 3, panel f). We show that caregivers exposed to anti-DV laws were significantly more likely to justify harsh parenting by believing physical punishment to be necessary for children to be raised properly.

4.2 Robustness checks

We ran several robustness checks. In Models 2–5 in Table 3, we excluded certain controls from the baseline model (Model 1). For any violent punishment, physical punishment, emotional punishment, and non-violent discipline, we found that the signs of the coefficients remain positive. For severe physical punishment and attitudes to harsh parenting, coefficients turn from positive to negative in Models 2–5 with partial controls, yet they are not significantly different from zero.

Next, we explored whether the effects on child discipline are mediated by IPV—a series of more proximate outcomes the laws were intended to affect. We started by controlling for caregiver's attitudes toward IPV in the models. In doing so, we intend to control for individual

propensity to use violence in the domestic sphere, presumably correlated with violent child discipline but uncontrolled in the main specification. In MICS/DHS, respondents were asked whether they justified husbands beating wives in five hypothetical situations, e.g., if the wife neglects children or argues with her husband. We created two variables using information on justification of IPV from MICS/DHS: the first one is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if wife-beating was justified in any of the five situations (dichotomous); the other is the number of situations in which a respondent justified wife-beating (continuous). Table 4 reports results from regression models controlling for attitudes toward IPV. We found that justification of IPV is significantly correlated with higher prevalence of child maltreatment and higher justification of harsh parenting practices. Comparing with the main results on the effects of the laws (Model 1, Table 3), adding IPV attitudes does not alter the magnitude of the coefficients. The most apparent inconsistency is observed for the non-violent discipline outcome, as adding a control for IPV attitudes doubles the size of the coefficient and makes it statistically significant. Note that anti-DV laws have been shown to alter individual attitudes toward IPV in Africa (Xu 2024), hence IPV attitudes could possibly be the outcome of our treatment, thus being a "bad control." As a result, we left IPV attitudes out in the main specification.

[Table 4 here]

In the main analyses, we followed previous research on violent child discipline using linear probability models for estimation (e.g., Pesando et al. 2024; Xu 2024). We re-estimated all models with logistic regression and reported corresponding results in the Appendix (Table A1 replicates Table 3, and Table A2 replicates Table 4). Estimates are numerically the same.

4.3 Heterogeneity

To explore anti-DV laws' potential heterogenous effects, we started by considering heterogeneity by child's gender (female child as the reference group), child's age, household location (rural as the reference group), household wealth (five quintiles, the middle quintile as the reference group), maternal and paternal education, and caregiver's religion (Islam and other/no religion, Christianity as the reference group). Coefficients on the interactions between post-law indicator and each of these child-, parent-, and household-level variables are reported in Table 5. The majority of the interaction terms are not statistically significant. We do observe that parental education significantly moderates the impact of anti-DV laws on attitudes to harsh parenting. However, the effect size is small, as a one-year increase in either mother's or father's years of schooling is associated with a 0.6 percentage-point increase in the probability of justifying harsh parenting among respondents exposed to an anti-DV law (panels e and f). Besides, relative to Christians, Muslims exposed to anti-DV laws were 6.5 percentage points less likely to believe that harsh parenting is necessary (panel g), thus halving the overall positive effect of the law.

[Table 5 here]

We then examined heterogeneity by country-level characteristics. Table A3 in the Appendix presents estimates of heterogenous impacts by income group (low income vs. lower middle income), GDP per capita, GII, and Gini coefficient. Once again, interaction terms lack statistical significance, with some exceptions. In countries characterized by lower GDP per capita, anti-DV laws had a protective effect in reducing severe physical punishment; as GDP per capita increases, prevalence of severe physical punishment also increased, and the protective effect of anti-DV laws also diminished significantly in wealthier countries (Table A3, panel b—also see Figure A1 visualizing the continuous interaction between law and GDP per capita). Furthermore, anti-DV laws were more effective in lowering severe physical punishment in more

gender-unequal countries, i.e., those with higher GII (Table A3, panel c—also see Figure A2 visualizing the continuous interaction between law and GII).

The most significant country-level variable moderating the impacts of anti-DV laws on multiple CD outcomes is the Gini coefficient (Table A3, panel d). To better visualize the results, we plotted predicted probabilities of each outcome against the Gini coefficient in Figure 1. In countries without anti-DV laws, or during the time when anti-DV laws were not enacted, the probabilities of all violent CD outcomes and the probability of justifying harsh parenting increase as the Gini coefficient increases (Figures 1a–d and 1f), while the probability of using non-violent disciplinary methods decreases (Figure 1e). In other words, countries with larger socioeconomic inequality saw higher prevalence and justification of child maltreatment yet lower prevalence of non-violent parenting behaviors in the absence of anti-DV legislation. The positive association between Gini coefficient and child maltreatment is reversed by the introduction of anti-DV laws, as exposure to anti-DV laws made caregivers less likely to physically and emotionally punish their children in more unequal countries (Figures 1a–d). This finding is consistent with the above one on gender inequalities: the implementation of the laws had negative implications for child discipline (i.e., making it more violent), yet this was particularly the case in societies characterized by higher income and gender equality.

[Figure 1 here]

4.4 Concurrent child discipline outcomes

So far, we have analyzed non-violent and violent childrearing practices separately, yet modelling them as distinct outcomes overlooks the fact that caregivers can use, and often do use, several disciplinary methods concurrently (Meinck et al. 2015; Pesando et al. 2024). We thus complemented the main analyses by applying multinominal logistic regression to model

childrearing practices. The outcome variable has four categories: those who used (1) neither non-violent nor violent methods; (2) only non-violent methods; (3) only violent-methods; and (4) both non-violent and violent methods. The four categories account for 6%, 9%, 9%, and 76% of the total sample (N = 124,702), respectively.

We plotted predicted probabilities for each category of the concurrent CD outcomes in Figure 2. After the implementation of the laws, we observe moderate declines in the likelihood of a caregiver using neither non-violent nor violent (0.08 to 0.04) or only non-violent (0.11 to 0.07) methods. Conversely, the probability of a caregiver using only violent methods increased slightly (0.08 to 0.09). Relative to those unexposed, those affected by the laws witnessed a substantial increase in the probability of using a combination of non-violent and violent disciplinary methods (0.73 to 0.80), corroborating evidence pointing at increases in violent parenting following law implementation.

[Figure 2 here]

4.5. Corporal punishment bans

Three countries in our sample banned corporal punishment against children: Togo in 2007, Congo in 2010, and Benin in 2015 (Pace 2022). Among the three countries, only Benin is a treated country because its anti-DV law was entered into force in 2012, two years before the first MICS/DHS survey was conducted. Both Congo and Togo enforced anti-DV laws in 2022, which means at the time of the surveys there was no anti-DV law in either country. Relative to anti-DV laws that are ambiguous on violence against children, corporal punishment bans directly target child protection through legal prohibitions of violent discipline and, in particular, physical punishment. In this subsection, we reran analyses controlling for presence of a corporal punishment ban (Table 6, panel a), and excluding the three countries with bans (Table 6, panel

b). The extra dummy variable $Post\_CPB_{i,j,t}$ takes the value of 1 if an individual was exposed to corporal punishment bans at the time of the survey. Results (panel a) do not alter the main finding: corporal punishment bans worked in the expected direction by reducing harsh parenting, in line with the literature (Smarrelli et al. 2024), yet violent child discipline significantly increased following anti-DV law implementation, even after controlling for the presence of corporal punishment bans targeting violence against children. Furthermore, removing the three countries from the sample (panel b) delivers analogous results to those presented in Table 3, suggesting that countries with corporal bans are not driving the estimates.

[Table 6 here]

4.6 Law enforcement and quality of government

The effectiveness of legislative reforms hinges upon efficient enforcement of relevant laws, which SSA largely lacks (Batyra and Pesando 2024; Collin and Talbot 2023; Wilson 2022). In this subsection, we take into account cross-national variation in the effectiveness of law implementation in SSA by controlling for a proximate indicator from the Quality of Government (QoG) data set (Teorell et al. 2024). The QoG synthesizes time-series data on more than 1,900 indicators of governance efficiency from over a hundred sources. The data set covers a large number of African countries, but for a relatively shorter period of time, hence controlling for some QoG indicators substantially reduces sample size. For this reason, we did not control for QoG indicators in the main specifications.

We use an index of judicial independence from the QoG data set as a proxy for the effectiveness of law implementation. The index ranges from 0 to 100, with a higher score indicating that independence of the judiciary is more likely to be guaranteed. Data on this index

are available for all 27 SSA countries in our sample, but only for the 2013–2022 sub-period. As a result, MICS/DHS surveys conducted in earlier years were excluded from the analyses.

Table A4 reports the results. A higher judicial independence index is significantly associated with less emotional punishment and more non-violent discipline (panel a). For the overall violence outcome (i.e., any violent), there is no significant variation in the effect of the law by quality of judiciary index (panel b), yet effects of the law on emotional punishment and attitudes are more negative in contexts characterized by higher judicial independence (which, echoing Table A3, are likely those contexts characterized by higher GDP per capita).

5. Conclusions

Comprehensive legislative reforms aimed at changing norms and values justifying violent child discipline and developing normative and legal standards against child maltreatment have not been widely enforced throughout SSA. No research has examined the effectiveness of legislative reforms against violent child discipline in the region (Edwards et al. 2024). This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating whether anti-DV laws introduced gradually in SSA since the mid-2000 had any effect in curbing harsh parenting practices. We did so by merging household survey data from 27 SSA countries with information on anti-DV legislation from the World Bank. Leveraging a quasi-experimental approach, we compared African caregivers' childrearing practices and attitudes toward harsh parenting in countries with and without anti-DV laws, before and after the laws were implemented. We found that the laws had no protective effect on children. Rather, we found evidence for the opposite: we documented a sizeable and robust increase in violent child discipline following law implementation—primarily driven by an increase in emotional punishment—and a higher endorsement of harsh parenting practices. Our

results are robust to controlling for IPV attitudes, presence of corporal punishment bans, and quality of law enforcement.

An increase in violent child discipline is consistent with our finding on the higher likelihood of justifying harsh parenting following law enforcement, suggesting alignment between attitudes and actual behaviors. Caregivers exposed to anti-DV laws were 7.2 percentage points more likely to report any violent disciplinary practice and 8.7 percentage points more likely to believe in physical punishment as an appropriate tool to raise children. Findings are completely opposite to the purpose of the anti-DV legislation and inconsistent with recent work by Xu (2024) who, focusing on IPV in a smaller set of countries, found a reduction in justification of IPV among African women exposed to anti-DV laws.[3]

Nonetheless, our results are consistent with three hypotheses and/or potential mechanisms. The first, supported by the finding that the increase is primarily driven by emotional punishment, may suggest a slow shift from *very* violent to *less* violent (but still violent) disciplinary practices. In other words, harsh parenting practices do not decline because of the law, quite the opposite, but they increasingly shift from spanking and beating to yelling and belittling, in line with arguments made by Lansford et al. (2017). The second aligns with work by Larzelere et al. (2013) in the context of Sweden, who found increases in violence following bans on spanking to be consistent with the idea that parents may not be aware—or lack the knowledge altogether—of any other alternative disciplinary method. In their words, the "success [of the laws] may depend upon parents learning effective alternatives to use in disciplinary situations in which spanking had been an option traditionally" (p. 134). If no other alternative is given, caregivers may preserve the status quo or even increase the use of violent disciplinary methods, consistently with our findings. The third mechanism—which we cannot

test with the current data, as actual IPV is absent in the MICS and we have no way of knowing which parent disciplines the child in a violent way—would be compatible with a "substitution" mechanism whereby DV legislation could reduce violence between partners, but parents may turn increasingly violent towards their children if they are "innately" violent.

We did not find variation in the impact of the laws by individual characteristics, but we did uncover that societal inequality matters for explaining cross-country variation, as the increase in violent child discipline methods following law implementation is driven by wealthier SSA societies characterized by higher income and gender equality. In other words, anti-DV laws had some "protective" effect on children in more economically unequal countries, i.e., those characterized by higher Gini coefficients, and more gender-unequal ones, i.e., those characterized by higher GII. This finding is relevant from a policy perspective, as child maltreatment is more common in more unequal societies (Akmatov 2011). As such, legislation could be one (minor) factor contributing to reduce violence against children. A qualitative study in Rwanda showed that social inequality hampered legislation's efforts to lower family violence (Umubyeyi et al. 2016). Our study suggests the opposite: anti-DV legislation's protective effect on children is more pronounced in more unequal societies. Nevertheless, the magnitude of the protective estimate is limited and, at least for income inequality, the overall effect size remains positive, hence the term "protective" entails that the estimate is "less positive," but even in unequal contexts laws did increase the likelihood of violent disciplinary practices.

Violent child discipline remains widespread in SSA, with long-lasting implications for children and adolescents within and across generations (Cuartas et al. 2019). This study has shown that anti-DV laws are not an effective tool to curb the practice. To address this social plague from a localized perspective, a small number of programs have been designed to provide

education sessions for caregivers and children with regard to parent-child communication and non-violent discipline, such as the Sinovuyo program in South Africa (Cluver et al. 2016, 2020; Lachman et al. 2017; Shenderovich et al. 2020), the REAL Fathers Initiative (Ashburn et al. 2016), the Parenting for Respectability education sessions in Uganda (Wight et al. 2022), and the Parenting for Lifelong Health for Young Children program in Kenya (Murphy et al. 2021). Our recommendation is that some of these parenting interventions could incorporate elements boosting participants' knowledge of the legal frameworks surrounding child discipline—as well as the manifold alternatives caregivers can adopt to discipline their children—so to complement and enhance the global reach of existing programs.

On a broader level, findings from the study underscore the unintended consequences of legislation implemented without clear aims of protecting children and raise two broader fundamental questions: (1) which efforts are needed to ensure that definitions of domestic violence shift away from purely *horizontal* dynamics of violence between household members, typically spouses? (2) how should governments redefine existing DV legal provisions in such a way that all vulnerable populations are included as potential beneficiaries of the laws?

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Figure 1: Predicted probabilities and 95% confidence intervals against Gini coefficient

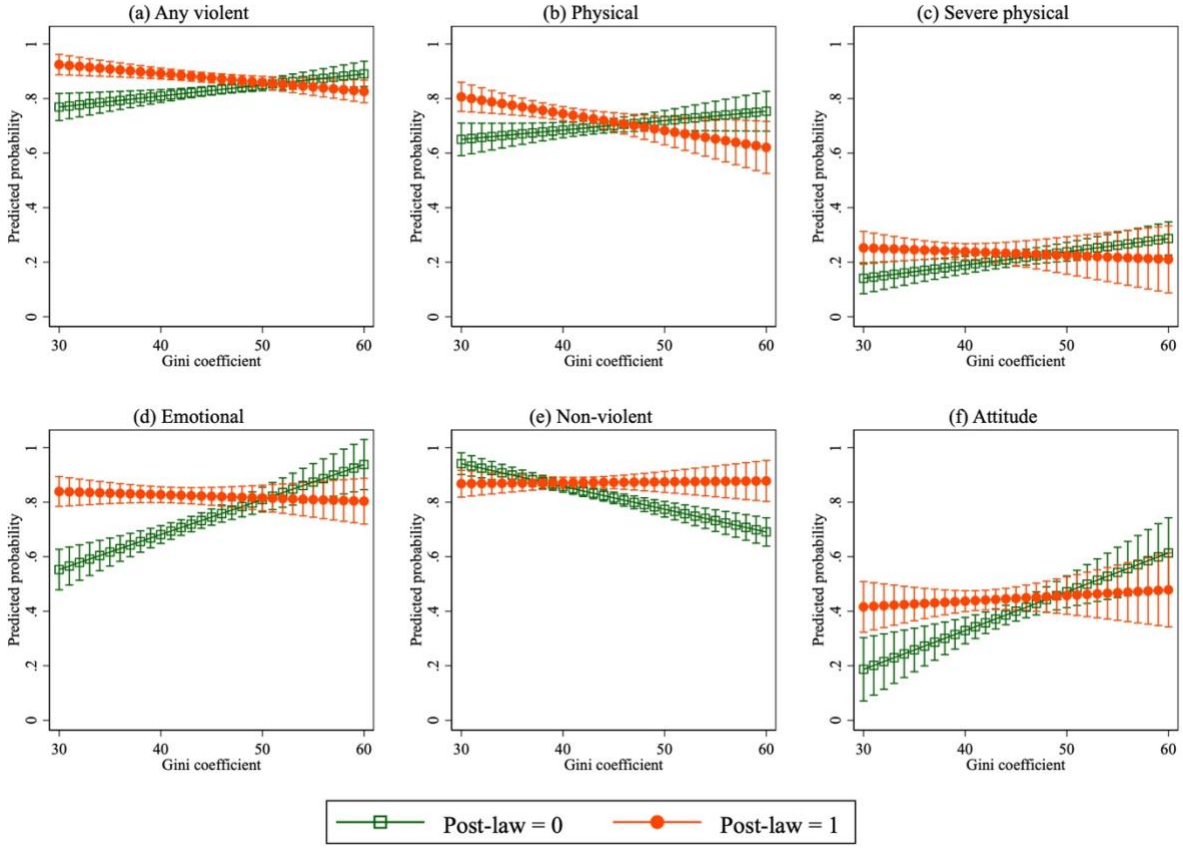

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities and 95% confidence intervals from multinominal logistic regression modelling concurrent child discipline outcomes

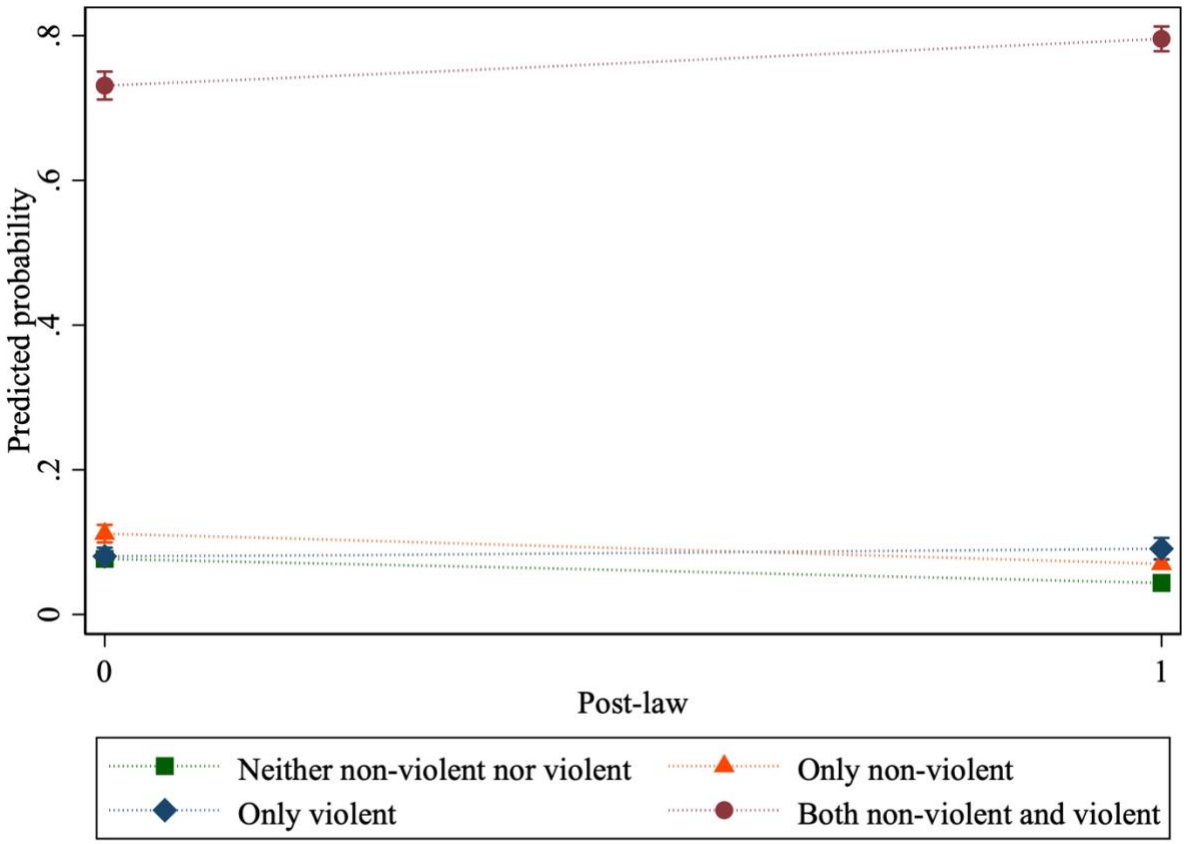

Table 1: Countries (by treatment and control groups) and surveys used in the study

	Anti-domestic violence law		Survey	
	Date of enactment	Date of entry into Force	Survey rounds	Survey years
Treatment				
Benin	27/09/2011	09/01/2012	MICS5; DHS7	2014; 2017–18
Burundi	22/04/2009	22/04/2009	DHS7	2016–17
Central African Republic	27/12/2006	01/09/2007	MICS3; MICS4; MICS6	2006; 2010; 2018–19
Chad	08/05/2017	08/05/2017	MICS4; DHS7; MICS6	2010; 2014–15; 2019
Gambia	17/12/2013	30/12/2017	MICS3; MICS4; MICS6	2006; 2010; 2018
Ghana	03/05/2007	04/05/2007	MICS3; MICS4; MICS6	2006; 2011; 2017–18
Liberia	19/01/2018	19/01/2018	DHS5; DHS7	2006–07; 2019–20
Malawi	29/12/2006	29/12/2006	MICS5; MICS6	2013–14; 2019–20
Nigeria	18/05/2007	18/05/2007	MICS4; MICS5	2011; 2016–17
São Tomé and Príncipe	15/08/2008	29/10/2008	MICS5; MICS6	2014; 2019
Sierra Leone	26/07/2007	26/07/2007	MICS3; MICS4; MICS6	2005; 2010; 2017
Uganda	17/03/2010	09/04/2010	DHS7	2016
Control				
Burkina Faso	31/05/2018	31/05/2018	MICS3	2006
Cameroon	N/A		MICS3; MICS5	2006; 2014
Congo	04/05/2022	19/05/2022	DHS6; MICS5	2011–12; 2014–15
Congo, DR	N/A		MICS4; DHS; MICS6	2010; 2013–14; 2017–18
Côte d'Ivoire	21/12/2021	21/12/2021	MICS5	2016
Eswatini	28/06/2018	16/07/2018	MICS4; MICS5	2010; 2014
Guinea	N/A		MICS5	2016
Guinea-Bissau	04/02/2014	N/A	MICS3; MICS5; MICS6	2006; 2014; 2018–19
Lesotho	N/A	12/12/2022	MICS6	2018
Madagascar	13/12/2019	21/01/2020	MICS6	2018
Mali	N/A		MICS5	2015
Mauritania	N/A		MICS4; MICS5	2011; 2015
Niger	N/A		DHS6	2012
Togo	15/11/2022	15/11/2022	MICS3; MICS4; DHS6; MICS6	2006; 2010; 2013–14; 2017
Zimbabwe	26/02/2007	25/09/2007	MICS5; MICS6	2014; 2019

Notes: DHS = Demographic and Health Surveys; MICS = Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.

Table 2: Sample means and standard deviations (in parentheses) of outcome variables

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
All						
Sample mean	0.85	0.72	0.22	0.77	0.85	0.40
	(0.35)	(0.45)	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.35)	(0.49)
N	124,702	124,702	124,691	124,700	124,705	117,223
Treatment						
Sample mean	0.86	0.73	0.22	0.78	0.86	0.42
	(0.35)	(0.45)	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.34)	(0.49)
N	78,022	78,022	78,015	78,021	78,023	74,668
Control						
Sample mean	0.84	0.70	0.21	0.75	0.84	0.38
	(0.36)	(0.46)	(0.41)	(0.43)	(0.37)	(0.49)
N	46,680	46,680	46,676	46,679	46,682	42,555

Notes: See Table 1 for countries in the treatment and control groups.

Table 3: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws on child discipline practices and attitudes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(a) Outcome: Any violent					
Post-law	0.072**	0.072***	0.051**	0.053**	0.053**
	(0.021)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
N	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702
(b) Outcome: Physical					
Post-law	0.047	0.053**	0.025	0.026	0.027
	(0.027)	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
N	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702
(c) Outcome: Severe physical					
Post-law	0.041	–0.003	–0.020	–0.019	–0.019
	(0.030)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
N	124,691	124,691	124,691	124,691	124,691
(d) Outcome: Emotional					
Post-law	0.127**	0.104**	0.080*	0.082*	0.084*
	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)
N	124,700	124,700	124,700	124,700	124,700
(e) Outcome: Non-violent					
Post-law	0.025	0.048*	0.039*	0.042*	0.042*
	(0.018)	(0.021)	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.020)
N	124,705	124,705	124,705	124,705	124,705
(f) Outcome: Attitudes					
Post-law	0.087*	–0.015	–0.029	–0.025	–0.027
	(0.039)	(0.062)	(0.068)	(0.069)	(0.067)
N	117,223	117,223	117,223	117,223	117,223
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓		✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓			✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓				✓
Country-level controls	✓				

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Table 4: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws on child discipline practices and attitudes, controlling for attitudes toward intimate partner violence (IPV)

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Controlling for IPV attitudes (justified in any situation)						
Post-law	0.074*	0.042	0.050	0.122**	0.051**	0.076
	(0.027)	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.032)	(0.018)	(0.043)
IPV justified (any situation)	0.029***	0.040***	0.032***	0.028***	0.006	0.023
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.012)
N	118,160	118,160	118,151	118,158	118,163	111,327
(b) Controlling for IPV attitudes (number of situations justified)						
Post-law	0.074*	0.041	0.049	0.121**	0.051**	0.073
	(0.027)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.018)	(0.043)
IPV justified (number)	0.006***	0.010***	0.010***	0.007***	0.002	0.008*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)
N	118,900	118,900	118,890	118,898	118,903	112,012
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Table 5: Heterogenous effects by child-, parent-, and household-level variables

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Interacted with child's gender						
Post-law	0.074**	0.048	0.043	0.128**	0.025	
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.037)	(0.019)	
Post-law × male child	–0.003	–0.001	–0.004	–0.001	–0.000	
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	
(b) Interacted with child's age						
Post-law	0.066*	0.038	0.023	0.120**	0.014	
	(0.027)	(0.037)	(0.031)	(0.043)	(0.025)	
Post-law × child age	0.001	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.002	
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	
(c) Interacted with urban residence						
Post-law	0.077**	0.050	0.043	0.131**	0.027	0.089*
	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.037)	(0.018)	(0.039)
Post-law × urban	–0.015	–0.010	–0.008	–0.012	–0.006	–0.006
	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.020)
(d) Interacted with household wealth						
Post-law	0.082**	0.061	0.048	0.134**	0.029	0.097*
	(0.027)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.042)	(0.021)	(0.040)
Post-law × poorest	–0.020	–0.023	–0.025	–0.021	0.001	–0.020
	(0.013)	(0.017)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.022)
Post-law × poorer	–0.014	–0.016	0.002	–0.022	–0.016	–0.013
	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.014)
Post-law × richer	–0.005	–0.014	0.005	0.008	0.006	–0.011
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.013)
Post-law × richest	–0.004	–0.013	–0.015	0.009	–0.008	–0.007
	(0.016)	(0.019)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.024)
(e) Interacted with mother's years of schooling						
Post-law	0.072**	0.046	0.037	0.127**	0.026	0.080
	(0.022)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.037)	(0.018)	(0.040)
Post-law × mother's edu	0.000	0.001	0.003	0.000	–0.001	0.006**
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
(f) Interacted with father's years of schooling						
Post-law	0.070**	0.042	0.034	0.127**	0.028	0.072
	(0.023)	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.038)	(0.018)	(0.040)
Post-law × father's edu	0.001	0.002	0.003	0.000	–0.001	0.006**

	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
(g) Interacted with caregiver's religion						
Post-law	0.068**	0.049	0.035	0.114**	0.017	0.107**
	(0.018)	(0.024)	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.037)
Post-law × Islam	–0.000	–0.027	–0.035	0.004	0.030	–0.065*
	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.014)	(0.026)
Post-law × other/no religion	0.010	0.013	0.033	0.024	–0.001	0.001
	(0.011)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.024)
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	124,702	124,702	124,691	124,700	124,705	117,223

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Table 6: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws and corporal punishment bans on child discipline practices and attitudes

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Adding corporal punishment bans as an additional control						
Post-law	0.064*	0.036	0.028	0.124**	0.025	0.064
	(0.024)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.040)	(0.021)	(0.043)
Post-corporal punishment bans	–0.031**	–0.041	–0.047**	–0.010	–0.000	–0.073*
	(0.010)	(0.021)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.034)
N	124,702	124,702	124,691	124,700	124,705	117,223
(b) Removing the three countries with corporal punishment bans						
Post-law	0.068*	0.043	0.016	0.135**	0.028	0.081*
	(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.040)	(0.022)	(0.036)
N	113,227	113,227	113,216	113,226	113,230	106,381
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01.

Appendix

Figure A1: Predicted probability of severe physical punishment and 95% confidence intervals against (logged) gross domestic product (GDP) per capita

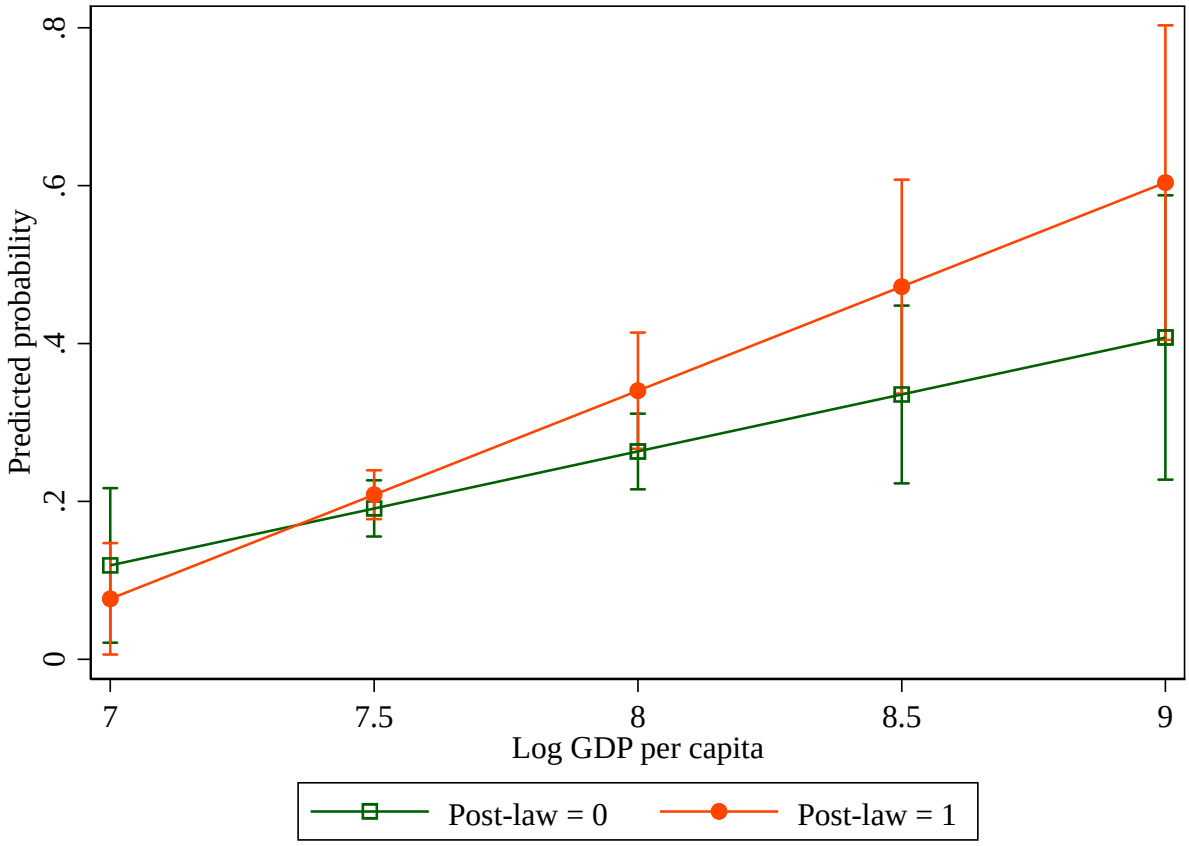

Figure A2: Predicted probability of severe physical punishment and 95% confidence intervals against Gender Inequality Index

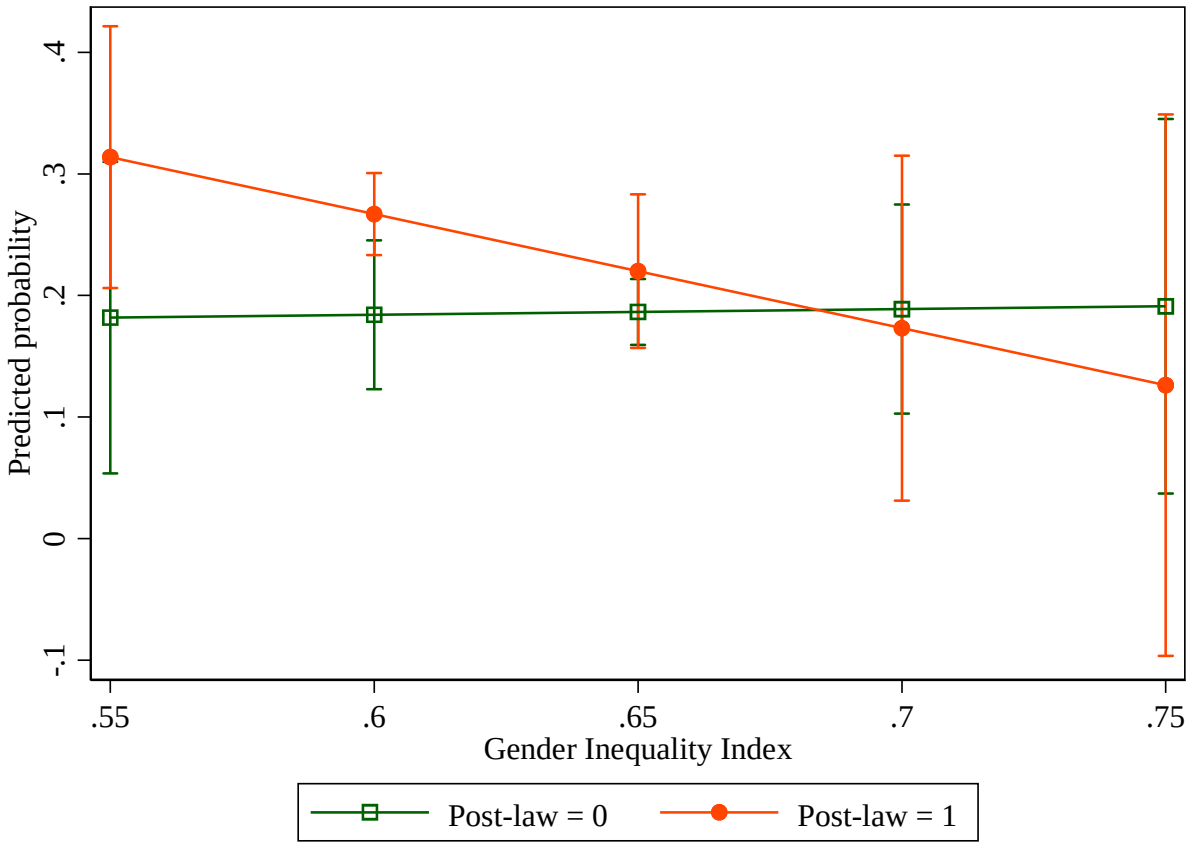

Table A1: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws on child discipline practices and attitudes, robustness checks with logistic regression

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
(a) Outcome: Any violent					
Post-law	0.582***	0.680***	0.499***	0.512***	0.525***
	(0.104)	(0.097)	(0.123)	(0.123)	(0.121)
N	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702
(b) Outcome: Physical					
Post-law	0.250*	0.310**	0.163	0.167	0.175
	(0.123)	(0.094)	(0.106)	(0.106)	(0.109)
N	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702	124,702
(c) Outcome: Severe physical					
Post-law	0.136	–0.076	–0.174	–0.165	–0.158
	(0.238)	(0.136)	(0.152)	(0.155)	(0.154)
N	124,691	124,691	124,691	124,691	124,691
(d) Outcome: Emotional					
Post-law	0.693***	0.603***	0.470*	0.484*	0.493*
	(0.147)	(0.159)	(0.191)	(0.192)	(0.191)
N	124,700	124,700	124,700	124,700	124,700
(e) Outcome: Non-violent					
Post-law	0.175	0.328	0.230	0.264	0.275
	(0.154)	(0.186)	(0.154)	(0.161)	(0.172)
N	124,705	124,705	124,705	124,705	124,705
(f) Outcome: Attitudes					
Post-law	0.331	–0.127	–0.184	–0.168	–0.179
	(0.236)	(0.276)	(0.303)	(0.306)	(0.299)
N	117,223	117,223	117,223	117,223	117,223
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓		✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓			✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓				✓
Country-level controls	✓				

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Table A2: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws on child discipline practices and attitudes, controlling for attitudes toward intimate partner violence (IPV), robustness checks with logistic regression

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Controlling for IPV attitudes (justified in any situation)						
Post-law	0.559***	0.189	0.204	0.646***	0.457**	0.239
	(0.137)	(0.161)	(0.264)	(0.131)	(0.173)	(0.256)
IPV justified (any situation)	0.243***	0.207***	0.199***	0.165***	0.056	0.105
	(0.039)	(0.030)	(0.027)	(0.030)	(0.043)	(0.058)
N	118,160	118,160	118,151	118,158	118,163	111,327
(b) Controlling for IPV attitudes (number of situations justified)						
Post-law	0.548***	0.180	0.200	0.641***	0.457**	0.223
	(0.134)	(0.156)	(0.269)	(0.130)	(0.173)	(0.258)
IPV justified (number)	0.055***	0.054***	0.056***	0.045***	0.018	0.036*
	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.014)
N	118,900	118,900	118,890	118,898	118,903	112,012
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Table A3: Heterogenous effects by country-level variables

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Interacted with country income level (ref = low-income country)						
Post-law	0.078*	0.034	0.020	0.158**	0.031	0.065
	(0.032)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.026)	(0.049)
Post-law × lower middle income	–0.018	0.042	0.066	–0.100	–0.020	0.064
	(0.042)	(0.051)	(0.049)	(0.055)	(0.034)	(0.068)
(b) Interacted with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita						
Post-law	0.055	–0.432	–0.877*	0.458	0.375	–0.239
	(0.361)	(0.398)	(0.329)	(0.546)	(0.249)	(0.583)
Post-law × GDP per capita	0.002	0.062	0.119**	–0.043	–0.046	0.042
	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.042)	(0.069)	(0.031)	(0.074)
(c) Interacted with Gender Inequality Index (GII)						
Post-law	–0.063	0.164	0.674***	–0.268	–0.142	–0.157
	(0.143)	(0.205)	(0.168)	(0.210)	(0.135)	(0.376)
Post-law × GII	0.211	–0.182	–0.985**	0.614	0.260	0.382
	(0.242)	(0.340)	(0.262)	(0.350)	(0.214)	(0.582)
(d) Interacted with Gini coefficient						
Post-law	0.375***	0.444***	0.300*	0.707***	–0.334***	0.593*
	(0.091)	(0.110)	(0.132)	(0.131)	(0.098)	(0.227)
Post-law × Gini coefficient	–0.007**	–0.010**	–0.006	–0.014***	0.009**	–0.012*
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.005)
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	124,702	124,702	124,691	124,700	124,705	117,223

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age, and respondent's religion. Child characteristics include child's age and sex. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P<0.001.

Table A4: Effects of exposure to anti-domestic violence laws on child discipline practices and attitudes, controlling for judicial independence index

	Outcome variable					
	Any violent	Physical	Severe physical	Emotional	Non-violent	Attitudes
(a) Controlling for judicial independence index						
Post-law	0.111***	0.072**	0.089***	0.215***	0.051***	0.135**
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.011)	(0.037)
Judicial independence index	–0.000	–0.001	–0.000	–0.001**	0.001***	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
(b) Interacted with judicial independence index						
Post-law	0.064	0.066	0.054	0.140**	0.088***	–0.028
	(0.034)	(0.051)	(0.029)	(0.037)	(0.018)	(0.053)
Post-law × judicial independence index	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.002*	–0.001*	0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)
Country and survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caregiver characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Child characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Household characteristics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-level controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	82,843	82,843	82,841	82,843	82,843	76,238

Notes: Caregiver characteristics include mother's and father's years of schooling, as well as the similarity between them, and mother's marital status and age. Child characteristics include child's age and sex, and respondent's religion. Household characteristics include household wealth, size, and location of residence, and the number of children under age five in the household. Country-level controls include (logged) gross domestic product per capita, Gini coefficient, and Gender Inequality Index.
*P < 0.05; **P<0.01; ***P < 0.001.

Endnotes

[1] According to the World Health Organization (WHO), child maltreatment is any form of abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Thus, child maltreatment includes violent caregiving practices, as well as sexual abuse and child neglect. The focus of this study is on the former—child discipline practices—yet the broader literature often does not disentangle them all. For the sake of this study, the terms violent child discipline, child maltreatment, and harsh parenting are used interchangeably.

[2] For a comprehensive review of evaluations of these programs, see Edwards et al. (2024).

[3] If we redo Xu's analysis with our data, we fail to find a statistically significant impact of anti-DV laws on IPV attitudes (P = 0.807 for IPV justified in any situation, and P = 0.496 for number of situations in which IPV was justified, detailed results upon request). The inconsistency may be due to the fact that we used data from both MICS and DHS, while Xu only used DHS. Besides, the countries under investigation are different: Xu's sample covered 22 countries, while ours had 27 countries, and only 13 countries appeared in both samples.