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# The Effects of Relatedness, Age, and Orphan Status on Discipline

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## Research Questions

### How does a child's relationship to the head of the household affect the severity of discipline received by the child?

A child who is the direct offspring of the head of the household, may be disciplined differently than a child who has a different relatedness to the head of the household.

### How does a child's age affect the severity of discipline he or she receives in the home?

Most parents believe that children should receive physical discipline compensatory to the age of the child.

### How does a child's orphan status affect the severity of discipline he or she receives in the home?

Orphans, particularly those in kin-care, may be disciplined differently than non-orphans who reside in the home.

### What are the effects of parental education level, parental beliefs in the necessity of physical punishment and parental attitudes regarding domestic violence on these outcomes?

The more educated the parent is, the less likely they are to abuse their children. Conversely, the more the parent justifies domestic violence and corporal punishment, the more likely the child is to experience harsher forms of discipline in the home.

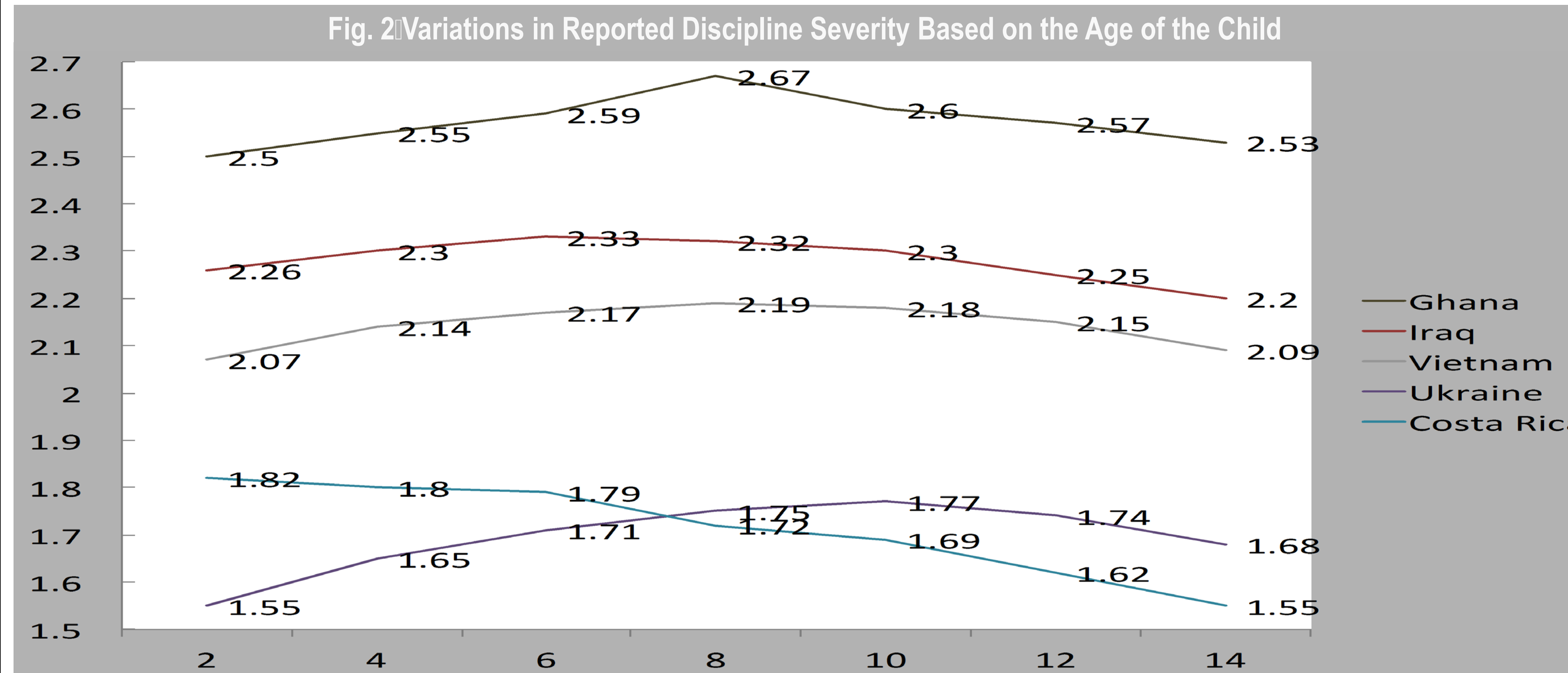
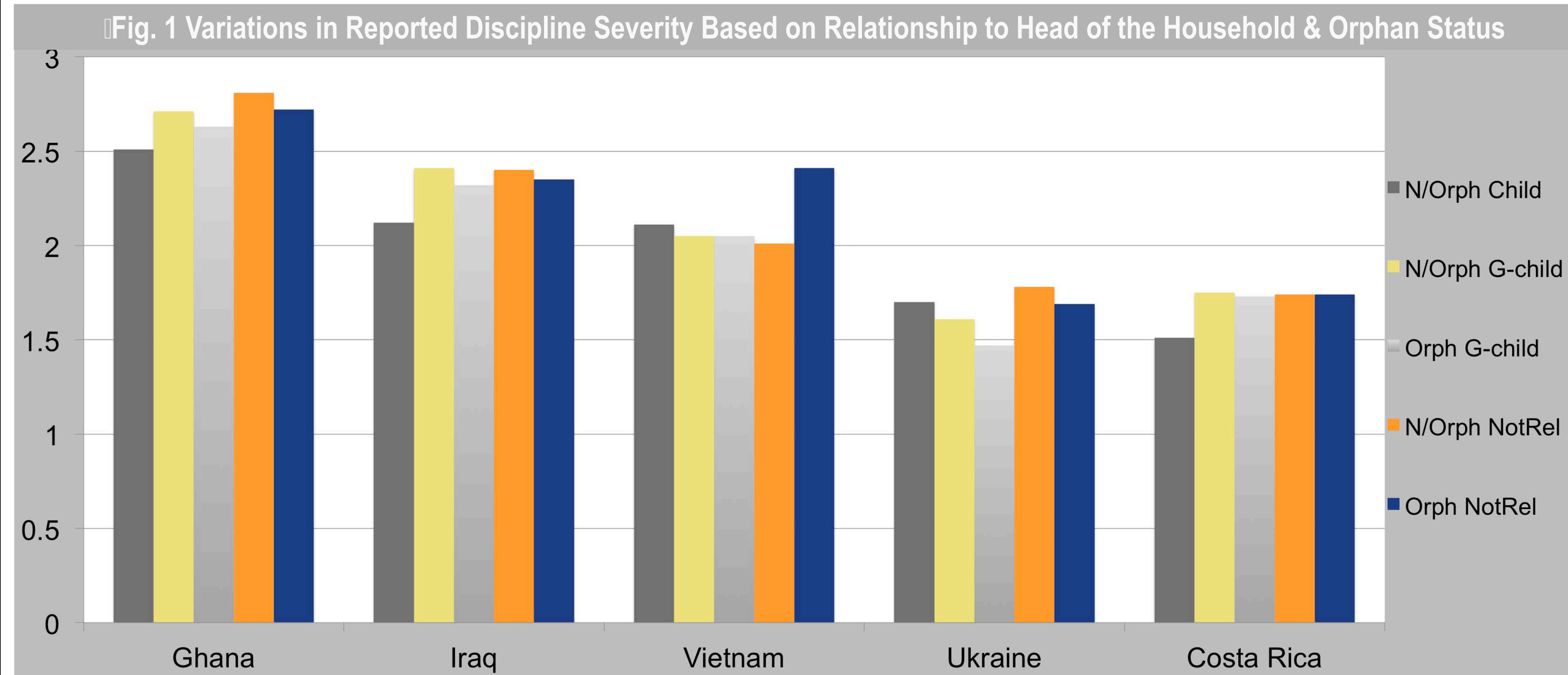
## Data & Methods

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MISC4), UNICEF, 2010, for Ghana (n=54,453), Iraq (n=239,218), Vietnam (n=45,091), Costa Rica (n=22,558) and Ukraine (n=34,889).

Three latent variables were created to determine discipline severity: mild, medium, and severe. Discipline was considered mild if the adult a) took privileges or a well-liked object from the child, b) explained why the child's behavior was wrong, or c) distracted the child by giving her something else to do. Discipline was considered medium if the adult a) shook the child, b) shouted at the child, or c) spanked the child on the bottom. Finally, discipline was considered severe if the child was a) struck with an object, b) called a degrading name, c) hit or slapped on the face, head or ears, d) hit or slapped on the limbs, or e) beat up or hit repeatedly as hard as possible. Discipline was scored as 0=no discipline, 1=mild discipline, 2=moderate discipline, and 3=severe discipline.

Relatedness was measured by whether the child was the offspring of the head of the household, a relative of the head of household (such as a grandchild, or niece/nephew), or a non-relative. Orphan status was measured as being either a non-orphan or an orphan. UNICEF defines an orphan as a child who has one or both parents deceased. Children in the study ranged in age from 2-14 years old. The authors controlled for caregivers' attitudes towards corporal punishment for children, domestic violence towards women and the education level of both men and women.

## Results



## Review of the Literature

Many factors appear to correlate with the severity of discipline a child receives in the home. Hamilton's rule (Roby, Shaw & High George, 2014) states that we are more altruistic and less aggressive towards our closest kin, making relatedness to the head of the household and a child's orphan status possible predictors of discipline. Though some orphans in Africa reported harsh physical discipline, neglect, exploitation of labor and withholding of educational opportunities when living with grandparents and other distant relatives (Foster & Makufa, 1997), others report being satisfied with their care, even in extreme circumstances (Foster et al., 1995).

It is important to understand the differences in discipline attitudes in various cultures. The authors looked at the self-reported discipline practices of caregivers from five regions of the world. Along with relatedness to the head of household and orphan status, age was looked at as a predictor of discipline severity. Fig. 2 shows that in most countries, the severity of discipline a child receives decreases by the age of 8 years old. This pattern is consistent with patterns in the United States by the National Study of the Incidence and Severity of Child Abuse and Neglect (USDHHS, 1981) who found that child maltreatment is under-reported in children over 6 years old. Though this is relatively old data, our findings support that perhaps under-reporting is still a current worldwide problem.

Foster, G., Shakespeare, R., Chinemana, F., Jackson, H., Gregson, S., Marange, C., et al. (1995). Orphan prevalence and extended family care in a peri-urban community in Zimbabwe. *AIDS Care: Psychological and Socio-Medical Aspects of AIDS/HIV*, 7(1), 3-18.  
Foster, G. M., & Makufa, C. (1997). Perceptions of children and community members concerning the circumstances of orphans in rural. *AIDS Care*, 9(4), 391-406.  
Roby, J.L., Shaw, S.A., & High George, L. (2014). Perceived food and labor equity and school attendance among Ugandan children living in kin care. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 23(2), 205-214.  
Straus, M. A., & Stewart, J. H. (1999). Corporal punishment by American parents: National data on prevalence, chronicity, severity, and duration, in relation to child and family characteristics. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology*, 2(99), 55-70.  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1981). *Study findings: National study of the incidence and severity of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, D.C.: DHHS Publication No. 81-30325.

## Discussion

In Ukraine ( $p < .01$ ) and Vietnam ( $p < .05$ ), grandchildren were punished more harshly than children of the head of the household. We also found that in Iraq and Vietnam ( $p < .05$ ), orphans are punished more harshly than non-orphans.

However, our study found that the most significant predictors of child discipline are: parent's beliefs that children require physical punishment to be brought up correctly ( $p < .001$ ), the child's age ( $p < .01$  and  $< .001$ ) and women's attitudes regarding domestic violence ( $p < .01$  and  $< .001$ ). Mother's level of education was also a significant predictor of child discipline in Vietnam ( $p < .001$ ), whereas father's education level was significant in Costa Rica ( $p < .05$ ), Vietnam ( $p < .05$ ) and Iraq ( $< .001$ ).

VARIABLES	UKRAINE	GHANA	COSTA RICA	VIETNAM	IRAQ
<b>Relationship to Head of Household</b>					
Child (ref)	--	--	--	--	--
Grandchild/ Other Related	-0.108** (0.034)	0.084 (0.056)	-0.004 (0.044)	-0.018 (0.025)	0.015 (0.010)
Not Related	-0.013 (0.072)	0.066 (0.056)	-0.028 (0.057)	-0.136 (0.073)	-0.008 (0.024)
<b>Age of Child</b>					
Children's ages (2-14)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.042** (0.015)	0.001 (0.018)	0.050*** (0.012)	0.032*** (0.004)
Interaction of discipline received by age	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.002*** (0.000)
<b>Orphan Status</b>					
Non-Orphan (ref)	--	--	--	--	--
Orphans	0.033 (0.167)	-0.003 (0.083)	0.051 (0.123)	0.105 (0.069)	-0.050* (0.020)
Interaction of Grandchild/Other Related and Orphan	-0.004 (0.376)	0.006 (0.173)	0.040 (0.244)	-0.316* (0.125)	0.020 (0.045)
Interaction of Not Related and Orphan	-0.423 (0.259)	-0.142 (0.121)	-0.075 (0.246)	0.175 (0.246)	0.045 (0.055)
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Belief that Child Needs Physical Punishment	0.618*** (0.046)	0.437*** (0.022)	0.562*** (0.040)	0.459*** (0.024)	0.567*** (0.007)
Mothers Education Level	0.027 (0.031)	0.006 (0.015)	0.035 (0.025)	-0.076*** (0.010)	-0.003 (0.004)
Fathers Education Level	0.041 (0.024)	-0.003 (0.011)	0.025* (0.012)	-0.021* (0.008)	-0.041*** (0.004)
Women's attitudes about domestic violence	-0.024 (0.032)	0.051*** (0.015)	0.049** (0.018)	0.108*** (0.013)	0.071*** (0.004)
Men's attitudes about domestic violence	0.034 (0.018)	0.007 (0.015)	--	--	--
Constant	1.123*** (0.136)	2.208*** (0.058)	1.590*** (0.091)	2.106*** (0.049)	2.169*** (0.017)
Observations	2,256	4,195	4,464	8,827	81,891
R-squared	0.099	0.090	0.055	0.079	0.091
r <sup>2</sup> <sub>a</sub>	0.094	0.088	0.052	0.078	0.091

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## Implications

- Children in kin-care living arrangements, and some orphans can be at higher risk for severe discipline. This is important information for those involved in child social welfare worldwide.
- Maltreatment of older children is under-reported and most research in this area is more than 20 years old.
- Child welfare is significantly improved when parents are educated. This also includes education about corporal punishment for children and domestic violence towards women.

## Contact information

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