



Contrary to court ruling, Zimbabweans endorse parental right to physically discipline children

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 156 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Corporal punishment of children has been a topic of contentious public debate in Zimbabwe since High Court Judge Justice David Mangota's ruling in March 2017 that the use of physical force to discipline children in school or at home is unconstitutional (Laiton, 2017).

While the case concerning a Harare schoolboy is to be sent to the Constitutional Court for confirmation, debate has raged as to whether corporal punishment is an effective way of disciplining a child and which alternative methods, in the absence of the cane, might be employed by parents and teachers (Charamba, 2017).

Recent Afrobarometer survey data from Zimbabwe show that a strong majority of citizens regard physical discipline by parents as "sometimes" or "always" justified. While the court ruling addressed corporal punishment of children both at home and at school, the survey did not ask about physical discipline by teachers.

In contrast, Zimbabweans overwhelmingly reject wife-beating as "never justified."

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2017/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 1,200 adult Zimbabweans between 28 January and 10 February 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

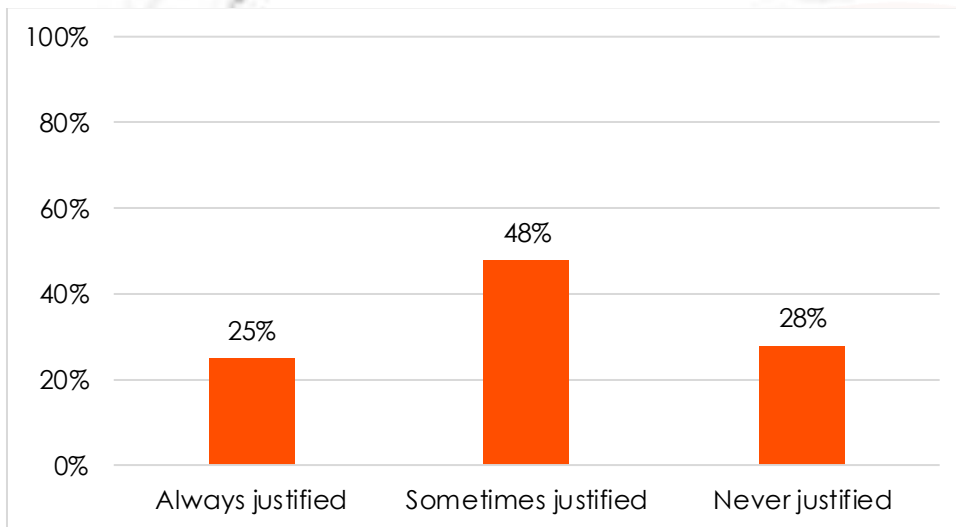
- Almost three-fourths (72%) of adult Zimbabweans say that it is "sometimes" or "always" justified for parents to physically discipline their children. Only 28% say it is "never justified."
- Opposition to corporal punishment of children is somewhat stronger among poor respondents than among their better-off counterparts.

- Eight of 10 Zimbabweans (80%) say it is “never justified” for men to beat their wives.

Support for physical disciplining of children by parents

Almost three-fourths (72%) of Zimbabweans support parents' right to physically discipline their children, asserting that corporal punishment is “sometimes justified” (48%) or “always justified” (25%), while 28% argue that corporal punishment is “never justified” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Views on physical disciplining of children by parents | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions 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? (Note: Due to rounding, the sum of categories may not always equal 100%.)

Men and women hold similar views on this issue, as do urban and rural residents (Figure 2). Older Zimbabweans are somewhat more likely to endorse corporal punishment (78% among those aged 56 and older), although even among those aged 18-35, 70% of respondents support the practice.

Respondents' education levels show no clear pattern, as those with a primary education (77%) are more likely to endorse corporal punishment than respondents with less or more education.

Of note, poorer respondents (i.e. those experiencing moderate or high “lived poverty”¹) are less likely to support physical disciplining of children than their wealthier counterparts.

Support for parents' right to physically discipline their children is the majority view across all 10 administrative provinces in Zimbabwe but ranges from lows of 58% in Mashonaland Central and 59% in Manicaland to highs of 90% in Matabeleland South and 87% in Midlands (Figure 3).

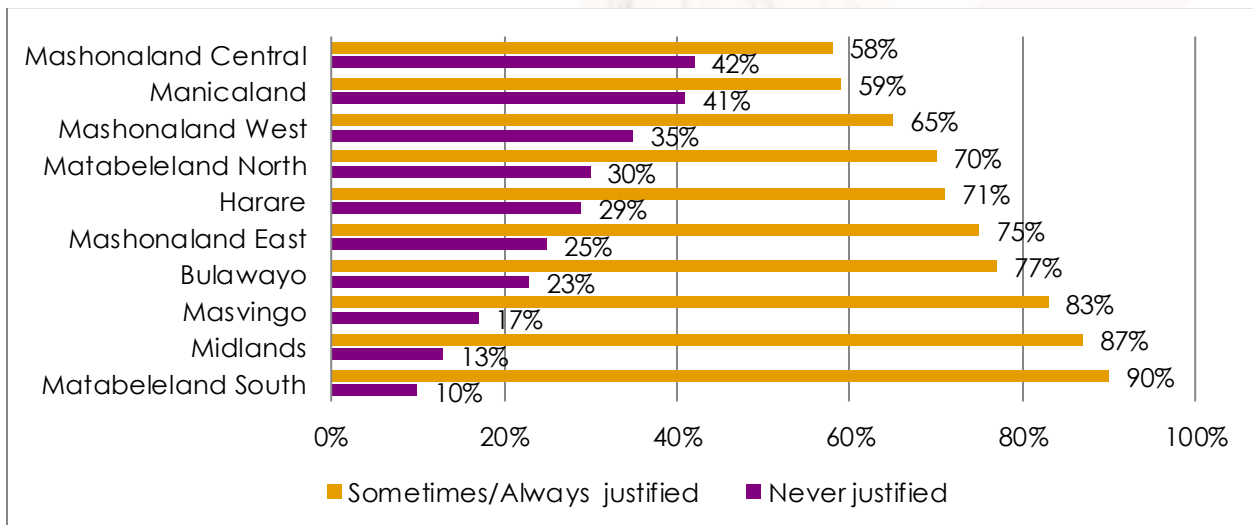
¹ Afrobarometer measures “lived poverty” by the frequency with which respondents or their families went without enough food, enough clean water, medicine or medical care, enough fuel for cooking, and a cash income during the previous year.

Figure 2: Views on physical disciplining of children by parents | by gender, urban-rural residence, age, education, and lived poverty level | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children?

Figure 3: Views on physical disciplining of children | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017

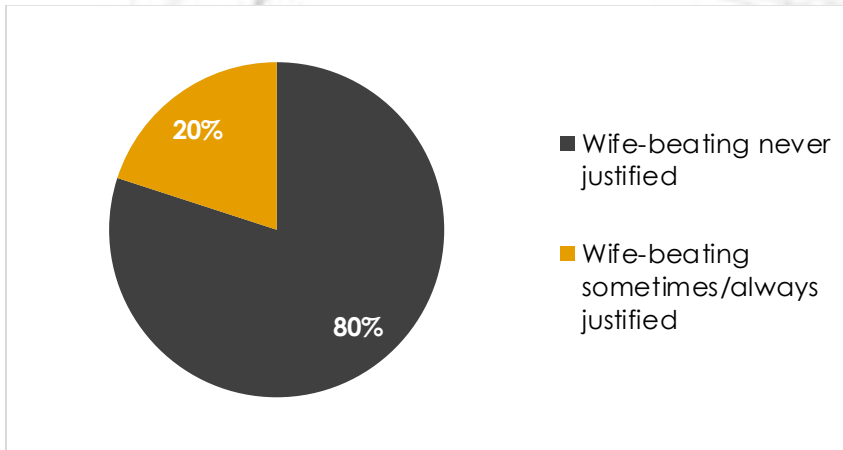


Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For parents to use physical force to discipline their children?

Justified for men to beat wives?

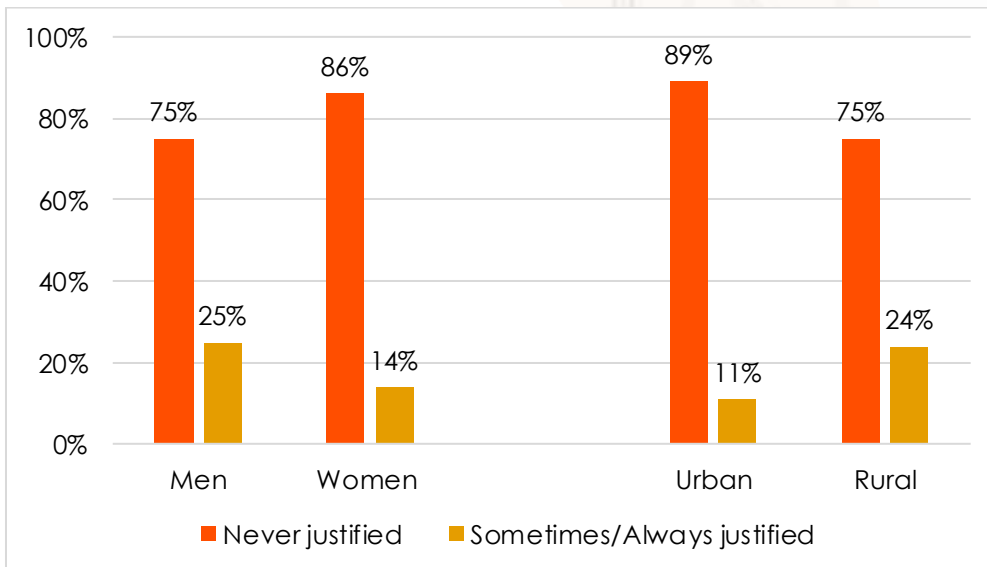
While corporal punishment of children still has strong support in Zimbabwe, an overwhelming majority of citizens (80%) say it is “never justified” for men to beat their wives (Figure 4). This view is stronger among women (86%) than men (75%) (Figure 5). Similarly, urban residents (89%) are more nearly unanimous in their rejection of wife-beating than are rural dwellers (75%), reflecting the common dynamic of rural traditionalism vs. cosmopolitanism.

Figure 4: Justified for men to beat their wives? | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Figure 5: Justified for men to beat their wives? | by gender and urban-rural residence | Zimbabwe | 2017

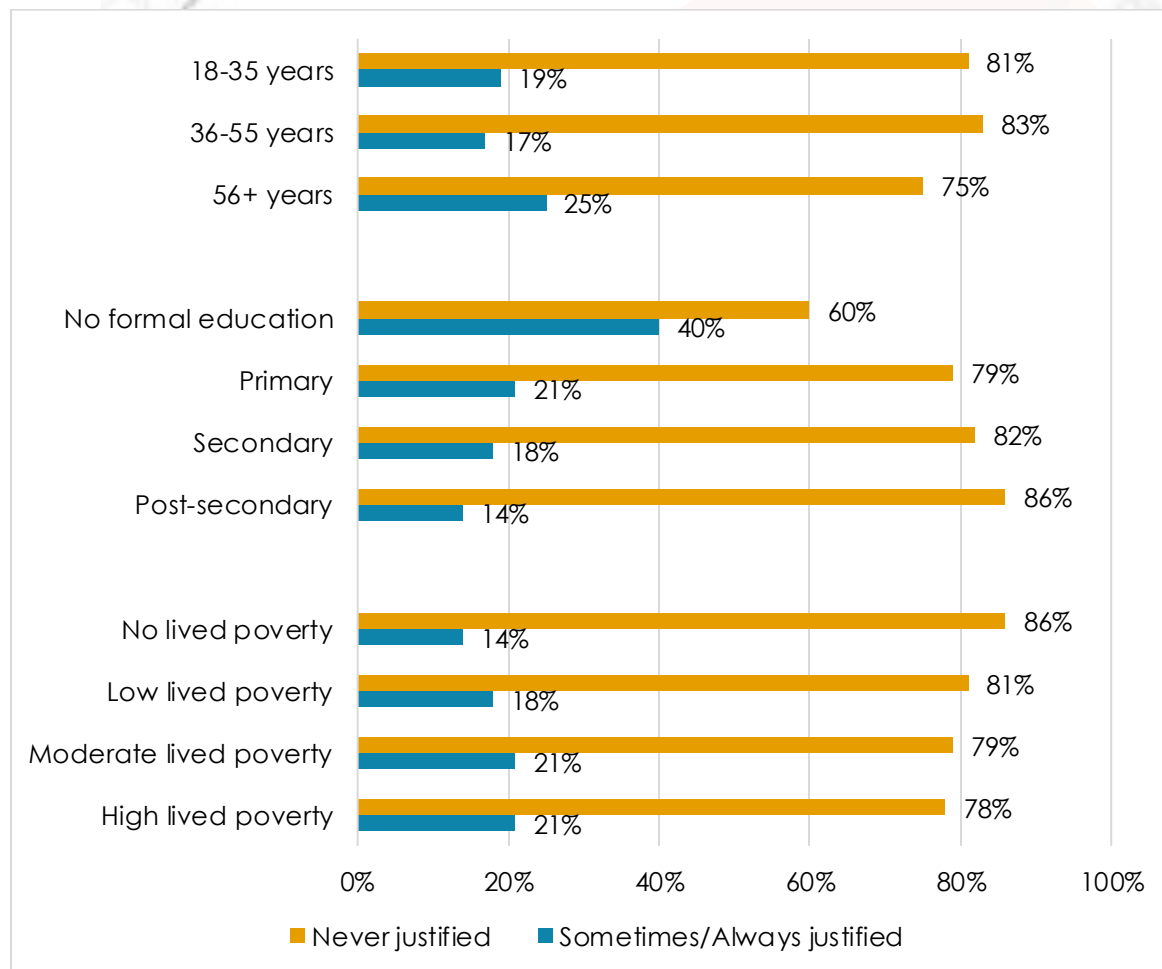


Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife?

While the sentiment that there is never a justification for men beating their wives is the majority view among all age groups, it is most widely shared by middle-aged (83%) and young (81%) respondents and least common among the elderly population (75%) (Figure 6).

Respondents' levels of education and material security show the clearest association with opposition to wife-beating. Only 60% of respondents with no formal education say that wife-beating is "never justified," compared to 86% of those with post-secondary qualifications. And those experiencing "no lived poverty" are more likely to reject wife-beating (86%) than those who are less well off.

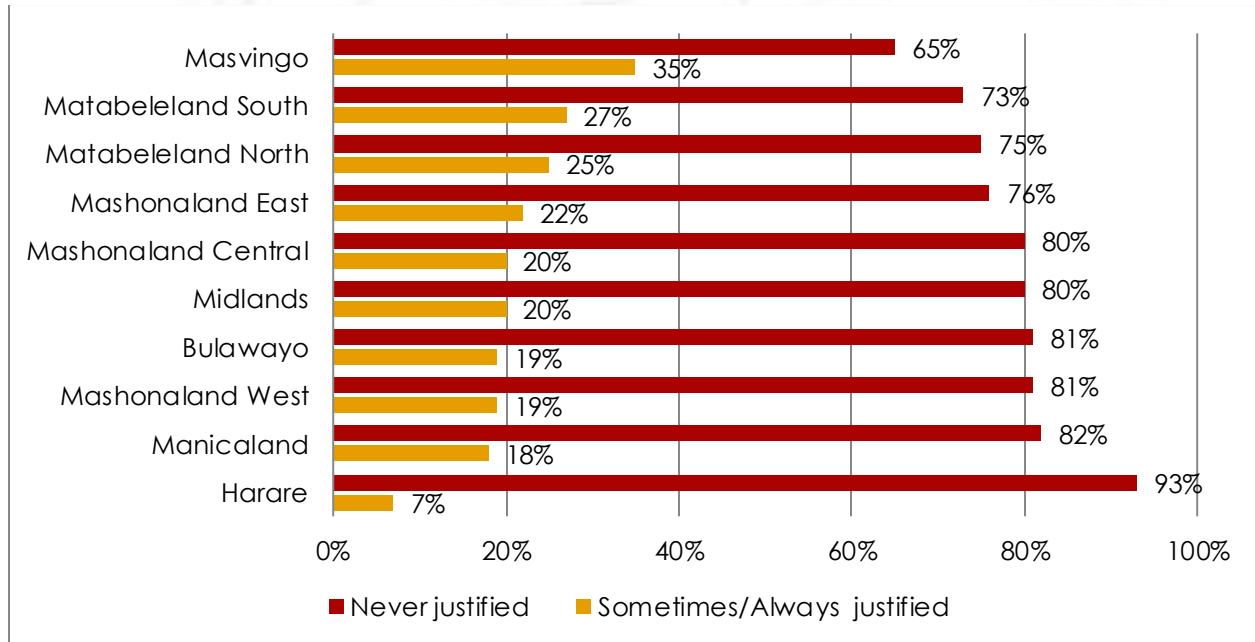
Figure 6: Justified for men to beat their wives? | by age, education, and lived poverty level | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Rejection of wife-beating is nearly unanimous in Harare (93%) but far less strong in Masvingo (65%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Justified for men to beat their wives? | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Conclusion

In a mismatch between a recent High Court ruling and public opinion, a strong majority of Zimbabweans say parents should have the right to use physical force to discipline their children. In contrast, most Zimbabweans say that wife-beating is “never justified,” perhaps reflecting weakening patriarchal attitudes and successful government efforts to promote gender equality.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

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