

**INTRA-FAMILIAL VIOLENCE PRACTICES AGAINST CHILDREN IN BURKINA FASO:  
THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER INEQUALITIES AND VIOLENT DISCIPLINE NORMS**

Oral communication

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**Abstract**

Social norms are often identified as factors contributing to violence against children, particularly within families, in hierarchical societies characterized by gender and generational inequalities. In these contexts, the rearing of both girls and boys is shaped by patriarchal norms that assign women and girls to subordinate roles. Feminist theories show how individuals can be affected by multiple dimensions of their identity or social position, which in turn shapes their experiences and vulnerabilities.

Understanding the individual and local dynamics that underpin patterns of violence within families is crucial for developing more effective child protection policies.

This study uses intersectional and decolonial frameworks, with Burkina Faso as a case study, to investigate how gender-related social expectations interact with norms that support violent discipline, thereby heightening children's vulnerabilities—particularly those of girls—to intra-familial violence.

Using quantitative data on children under 12 years of age from Burkina Faso, the study reveals that contexts of gender inequality amplify the effects of social norms that support violent discipline and increase severe physical and emotional violence against children, while providing some degree of protection against deprivation. However, the research finds that girls are not disproportionately affected by these forms of violence compared to boys.

**Keywords:** Social norms, gender inequality, intersectionality, children, intra-familial violence, Burkina Faso

**Background**

In Sub-Saharan African societies, as in most societies worldwide, children remain victims of violence, frequently perpetrated by their caregivers (Delanoë, 2015; Durant & Ensom, 2012; Dassa et al., 2005). This occurrence is partly explained by social norms that endorse violent discipline, particularly in hierarchical societies shaped by gender and generational inequalities (Lilleston et al., 2017; Mackie et al., 2015; Markus & Harper, 2014; Bouju & De Bruijn, 2008; Nyamu & Wamahiu, 2022; Labé, 2000; Clément & Chamberland, 2014).

In these contexts, the rearing of both girls and boys is governed by societal expectations regarding gender roles (Bambara et al., 2023). In traditional settings, these expectations, as well as the value and status attributed to children of both sexes, are influenced by patriarchal norms. Such norms grant privileged positions to men and boys, while relegating women and girls to subordinate roles (Connell, 1987).

Feminist intersectionality theories illustrate how individuals can simultaneously experience multiple facets of their identity or social positioning, thereby shaping their experiences and

vulnerabilities (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). Nevertheless, beliefs and perceptions regarding the girls' and boys' rearing can vary within societies (Gelles, 1985; Danhouno, 2017; Niang, 2002).

Understanding the specific factors and local conditions that contribute to violence within families is essential for developing more effective child protection policies.

This paper aims to investigate how gender-related social expectations, together with norms that support violent discipline, interact to exacerbate children's vulnerabilities—particularly those of girls—to intra-familial violence. Adopting a decolonial perspective, the study will analyse the specific vulnerabilities, compounded vulnerabilities, and contradictions in the vulnerabilities of girls and boys to various forms of violence within the context of Burkina Faso (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2012).

### **Aims**

Using the case of Burkina Faso, this paper aims to examine, through an intersectional and decolonial approach, how social norms reinforced by gender inequalities contribute to increasing the vulnerabilities of female children to certain forms of violence accepted within families.

Specifically, the paper will: i. provides a description of the profiles of female and male children; ii. conduct a descriptive analysis of the links between social norms supporting violent discipline and differences in violence practices against girls and boys within families; iii. perform a multivariate analysis integrating the interaction between social norms and the way in which gender-inequality differently structure the effect of these norms on violence practices against girls and boys.

### **Data**

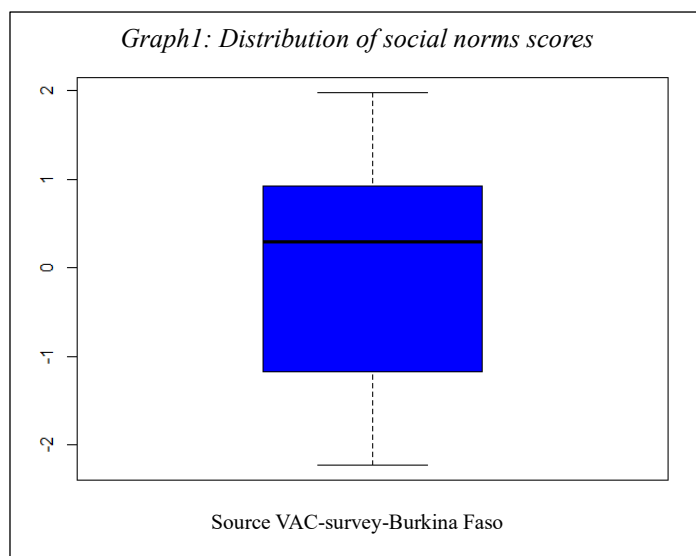
This study uses data from the national survey on violence against children in Burkina Faso. This survey was carried out in 2018 to provide information on the extent and determining factors of violence against children. It covered 10,900 households and provides information on various forms of violence suffered by children during the last twelve months preceding the survey, as well as on the social norms, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals in relation to these violences. The analyses in this paper are mainly based on data from children under 12 collected through one of their biological parents, or a guardian. In total, information from 4,709 parents (guardians) is available for 10,915 children. Data on the violences of 5051 female children and 5765 male children were effectively considered in the analyses.

To inform the context of gender inequality, the paper uses data from the survey “Social Institutions and Gender Equality in Burkina Faso” (SIGI-Burkina Faso, 2018).

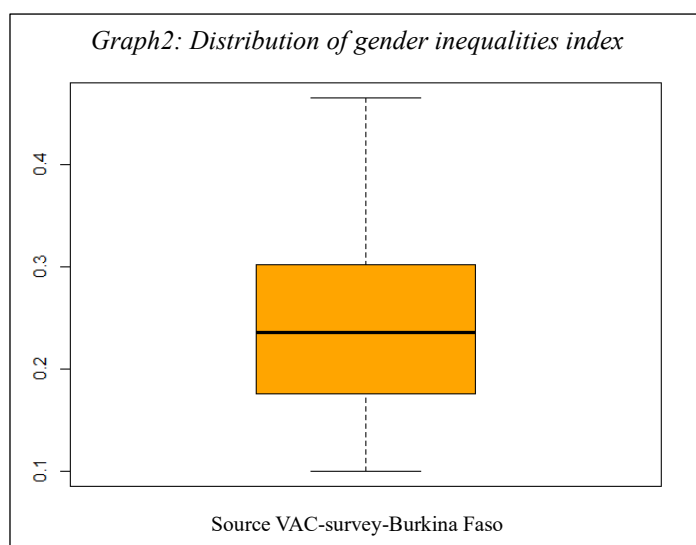
### **Main variables**

- ***Social norms***: Social norms are understood through data from three questions using the 5-degree Likert scale “1. strongly agree, 2. agree, 3. neither agree nor disagree, 4. not agree 'agree, or 5. strongly disagree with the following sentence'. “The majority of people in my community hit their child when he or she does not obey,” “The majority of people in my community would

agree that parents hit their son or daughter if the child has disobeyed,” “The Most people in my community would think badly of parents if they didn't hit their child when he disobeyed. This information was synthesized into its essential component through factor analysis.



- **Gender Inequalities:** This variable is represented by the values of the SIGI index, particularly regarding “preference for boys within social institutions” for the 45 provinces of Burkina Faso in 2018. It encompasses attitudes and practices related to the preference for male children, discrimination in the education of children, and the distribution of unpaid caregiving tasks between girls and boys.



- Violence against children under the age of twelve was detected by questioning one of their parents/guardians about events they had suffered during the last twelve months preceding the investigation.  
**Emotional violence:** being shouted at, yelled at or called by offensive names, humiliated, insulted, cursed, ignored for a period.

***Mild physical violence:*** having been spanked, hit on the hand, arm, leg, pulled on the ears with a bare hand.

***Severe physical violence:*** being slapped, kicked on the buttocks, hit, beaten, with a hard object or kicked.

***Deprivation:*** having privileges taken away, forbidden from leisure by sermons and warnings.

#### **Other variables**

In addition to violent practices, other factors linked to the individual, family and contextual characteristics of the child were considered:

Child: *Sex - Age - Biological child status - Schooling*

Parent(guardian): *Sex - Age - Religion – Ethnic group - Level of education - Marital status*

*Household living's standard, Place of residence*

#### **Multivariate analysis**

To examine variations in practices of violence against girls and boys, we conduct the following analyses: First, a descriptive analysis is performed to present the characteristics of both categories of the population: girls and boys. Then, a bivariate analysis investigates the relationship between social norms and various forms of intra-familial violence practices. Finally, a multivariate analysis, specifically a logistic regression, including an interaction between social norms and the gender inequalities index, allows us to assess the extent of the effects related to multiple vulnerabilities.

#### **Some results' table.**

Odds ratios physical violence practices FEMALE CHILDREN									
Variables	log (OR) <sup>1</sup>	95% CI <sup>1</sup>	p-value	log (OR) <sup>1</sup>	95% CI <sup>1</sup>	p-value	log (OR) <sup>1</sup>	95% CI <sup>1</sup>	p-value
(Intercept)	-1.3	-1.4, -1.2	<0.001	-0.77	-0.99, -0.55	<0.001	-2	-2.5, -1.5	<0.001
Social norms	<b>0.26</b>	0.18, 0.33	<0.001	<b>-0.23</b>	-0.45, 0.00	0.049	<b>-0.51</b>	-0.76, - 0.26	<0.001
Child-Age									
0-5							—	—	
6-11							0.98	0.77, 1.2	<0.001
Child family status									
Fostered							—	—	
Non fostered							0.23	-0.06, 0.53	0.13
Child schooling									
No							—	—	
Yes							0.47	0.26, 0.68	<0.001
Caregiver's sex									
Masculine							—	—	
Feminine							0.43	0.24, 0.62	<0.001
Caregiver-age									
18-35							—	—	
36-49							0.06	-0.14, 0.25	0.5
50+							0.2	-0.06, 0.46	0.14
Caregivers. Marital status									
Monogamous							—	—	
Single. Parent							-0.3	-0.63, 0.03	0.078
Polygamous							0.02	-0.17, 0.21	0.8
Caregiver. Attitude for childcare							-0.5	-0.59, - 0.42	<0.001
Caregiver. Attitude for physical violence							0.32	0.22, 0.42	<0.001
Household living standard							0.16	0.07, 0.25	<0.001

Residence. Area									
Urban							—	—	
Rural							-0.01	-0.20, 0.18	>0.9
Caregiver. Ethnicity									
Mossi							—	—	
Peul/Tuareg							-0.93	-1.3, -0.58	<0.001
Lobi/Djan/Dagara							-1.6	-2.2, -1.0	<0.001
Bobo/Dioula/Samo							0.59	0.34, 0.85	<0.001
Gourounsi							0.52	0.14, 0.89	0.007
Senufo/Gouin							0.28	-0.10, 0.66	0.15
Gourmantche							0.26	-0.07, 0.58	0.12
Bissa							-0.71	-1.2, -0.22	0.006
Caregiver. Religion									
Catholic							—	—	
Muslim							-0.14	-0.34, 0.06	0.2
Protestant							-0.26	-0.65, 0.11	0.2
Traditional							-0.29	-0.70, 0.11	0.2
Gender inequalities				-2.3	-3.1, -1.4	<0.001	-2.2	-3.2, -1.2	<0.001
Social norms * Gender inequalities				<b>2</b>	1.1, 2.9	<0.001	<b>2.4</b>	1.5, 3.3	<0.001



Peul/Tuareg							-0.84	-1.2, -0.53	<0.001
Lobi/Djan/Dagara							-0.79	-1.2, -0.42	<0.001
Bobo/Dioula/Samo							0.3	0.06, 0.53	0.012
Gourounsi							0.53	0.17, 0.87	0.003
Senufo/Gouin							0.19	-0.19, 0.57	0.3
Gourmantche							0.18	-0.15, 0.51	0.3
Bissa							-0.33	-0.76, 0.08	0.12
Caregiver. Religion									
Catholic							—	—	
Muslim							-0.17	-0.36, 0.02	0.072
Protestant							-0.53	-0.89, -0.17	0.004
Traditional							-0.57	-0.91, -0.25	<0.001
Gender inequalities				-2.9	-3.6, -2.1	<0.001	-2.1	-3.0, -1.2	<0.001
Social norms * Gender inequalities				<b>1.8</b>	0.95, 2.6	<0.001	<b>2.2</b>	1.4, 3.1	<0.001



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