



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Exploring Factors Associated with Child Violent Discipline in Sudan: Evidence from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

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**ARTICLE INFO**

Received: Jun 30, 2024

Accepted: Sep 15, 2024

**Keywords**

Child protection, child violence; violent discipline; multiple indicator cluster survey; survey logistic regression; Sudan.

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**ABSTRACT**

Violent child discipline is regarded as a form of child maltreatment and is closely related to socialization or the process of child upbringing. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors associated with child violent discipline in Sudan and examine how these factors relate to its prevalence. The study adopts a retrospective cross-sectional design utilizing secondary data from the nationwide Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF and the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2014. The sample included 40,814 children aged 1 to 14 years. Survey logistic regression was employed to identify factors associated with violent discipline. The results showed that 63.9% of children aged 1 to 14 years were subjected to violent discipline, with the highest prevalence in Sinner State (78.3%), followed by South Darfur (75.1%), and the lowest in Central Darfur (18.2%). The prevalence was higher in urban areas (68.2% in urban areas vs. 62.3% in rural areas) and among the richest households (71.6% compared to 54.1% in the poorest households). Violent discipline was also more common among children aged 2-3 years (68.5%), those with a birth order of 2-3 (66.9%), in households where the head had primary (67.5%) or secondary (67.1%) education, in mothers with primary education (69%), and in mothers aged 35-39 years (67.1%). Survey logistic regression results further showed that, after adjusting for other factors, mother's education level, household head's education level, child's age, and wealth index quintile were significantly associated with violent child discipline. The practical value of this study lies in informing the creation of programs, policies, and initiatives by the Ministry of Social Welfare, educational institutions, and civil society organization to positively contribute to the protection of children and the preservation of their rights against all forms of abuse, including violent discipline. Moreover, there is an urgent need for effective implementation of the Sudan Child Act 2010 to ensure a child's right to grow up free from any violence or abuse.

**INTRODUCTION**

Child violence is a public concern that transcends race, religion, social background, and culture. It encompasses various forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence. Addressing child violence is a critical component of prevention and protection efforts (World Health Organization, 2014). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Sudan signed in July 1991 and ratified in September 1991, defines a child

as a person under 18 years of age, unless national laws recognize an earlier age of majority (UN, 1989). This definition aligns with the Sudanese Child Act of 2010 (Child Act, 2010).

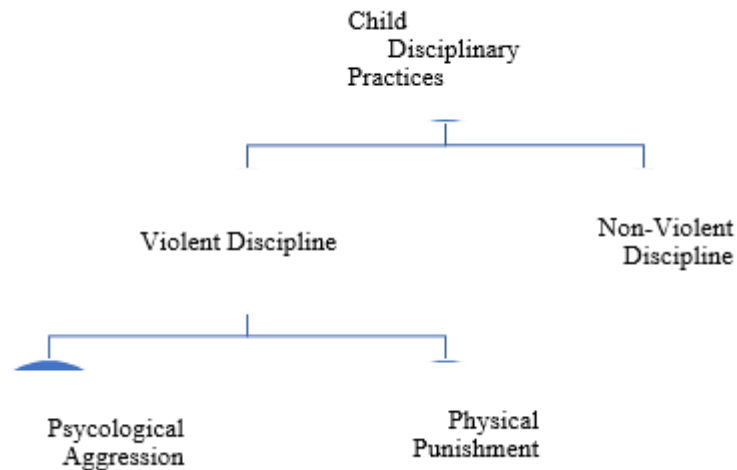
Child protection involves measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence affecting children (Atim, 2015). While violent discipline is a form of child violence, it also plays a significant role in socialization, shaping a child's self-esteem, and influencing behavior—factors essential for child development and upbringing (Mad et al., 2024). The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) asserts that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel treatment or punishment. The convention also obligates all state parties to protect children from all forms of exploitation that could harm any aspect of their welfare. Similarly, the Sudanese Child Act of 2010 mandates the state to care for and protect children, ensuring their proper upbringing in an environment of freedom, human dignity, spiritual and social values, and overall well-being.

Despite these legal frameworks, violent discipline remains a widespread issue across Sudan, driven by various factors and leading to numerous negative consequences. Child discipline practices, defined as “methods used by parents or caregivers to prevent future unwanted behavior in children,” aim to promote cognitive, moral, and mental development (Madi et al., 2024). These practices range from nonviolent to violent and can be categorized into three major types: verbal aggression, physical violence, and severe physical violence (Straus and Emily, 2024).

O'Donnell and Seymour (2004) note that the term 'child protection' is used differently by various organizations in different contexts. In this study, it refers specifically to protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation. The Sudanese Fifth Population Census in 2008 indicated that the total number of children in Sudan is 15.5 million, representing 50% of the population (Ahmed, 2018). According to UNESCO, Sudan faces significant challenges in child protection. Globally, eight out of ten children experience violent discipline by their caregivers. Abdouqadoud (2020) emphasizes that reducing the prevalence of violent discipline requires an understanding of the socio-economic factors influencing disciplinary choices. Although violent discipline is prevalent in the Arab world, few studies have focused on this issue, particularly in Sudan. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors associated with child violent discipline in Sudan. Therefore, the objectives of the study are concentrated on the prevalence of violent discipline practices across Sudan's eighteen states and assessing their relationship with factors such as household head's education level, economic status, mother's education, mother's age, and child's age. Moreover, the novelty of this study is that it seeks to bridge the knowledge gap by addressing the issue of violent discipline in Sudan as there is scarcity in the studies of violent child discipline.

## **THEORETICAL CONTEXT**

Several theories have been discussed to clarify the emergence of violence within society. Among these theories is the theory of the social situational model. Gelles and Straus (1979) introduced the social situational model as the structural stress model, which claims that the use of violence is unevenly distributed within society and that it is linked to differences in stress occurrences and differences in socialization. Accordingly, the theory suggests that violence is unevenly distributed throughout society. It is assumed that violence within the family arises from two main causes. The first cause or factor is structural stress. Therefore, it is proposed that individuals in specific positions, like lower socioeconomic status, always suffer from more frustration and stress. The second cause or factor is a cultural norm that motivates the use of coercion and violence as a common reaction to this frustration and stress (Coser, 1967). Moreover, Coser (1967) states that individuals in these environments use violence frequently; hence, children are socialized to use the same techniques of violence to deal with stress and frustration. Consequently, the uneven distribution of the factors of violence among specific individuals in society, associated with the socialization of these individuals to use violence, must theoretically increase the possibility that persons who belong to certain groups will be involved in violence. This comprises a strong possibility of spanking and other forms of physical punishment in child upbringing. Additionally, the theory proposes that individuals who are subjected to stressful and violent environments are more likely to be socialized in a way that makes them accept violent discipline because it becomes a part of their culture.



**Figure 1: Child discipline classification**

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence against children is a common practice across the globe (Cuartas et al., 2019; United Nations Children's Fund, 2014). Ma, et al., (2021) showed that 43% of children who were on average more than 3 years old were subjected to physical punishment, mainly spanking by their parents or caregivers, whereas 20% and 17 % of the same population of the children were subjected to other forms of physical punishment, such as hit with an object and being slapped with hand. Psychological aggression against children includes different forms such as shouting, yelling, and screaming at children (Kim et al., 2014). In the same line Akmatov, (2011) stated that psychological aggression is more commonly used by caregivers worldwide. The non-aggressive discipline practices include several practices, such as: taking privileges away from the child; explaining why the behavior is wrong to the child; and giving the child something else to do (Ward et al., 2022). There are several studies associated with the use of corporal punishment based on the child's gender. However, the effect of the child's gender might vary depending on the type of society. For instance, in China; male children are more vulnerable to violent discipline compared to female children; yet, in India, it is the opposite wherein female children are being more prone to violent discipline (Wang, 2014). The variations in the violent discipline based on the child's gender are due to the caregivers' anticipations of the child's behaviors. Several societies, assign certain responsibilities to male children at an early age, which makes them more vulnerable to punishment if they do not perform the tasks according to expectations (Gers off., 2010). Similarly, Alyahri, (2008) found that male child discipline was associated with corporal punishment compared to females as in the case in Yemen. On the other hand, Wolfe (1999), states that the method of child discipline is varied by the child's age, however, infancy is associated with neglect in most child discipline practices. Some studies have shown that children aged 9 months to 3 years are closely linked to yelling and spanking (Barkin et al.,2007). whereas children aged 12 to 17 are closely associated with physical punishment (Wolfe, 1999). According to Kang (2023), the use of violent discipline among parents is more prevalent among females over/35 years old, living in rural areas with large size families. Additionally, the households with low income witness more violent discipline than the poorest families.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

This research adopts a retrospective cross-sectional design utilizing secondary data gathered from the Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in 2014. MICS provides nationwide, internationally comparable, robust, and reliable data on women and children using a household-based, two-stage sampling method. The first stage involves the selection of census enumeration areas within each designated stratum, followed by the selection of households within each enumeration area. The MICS Sudan 2014 was the most recent comprehensive nationwide survey

conducted by UNICEF and the Central Bureau of Statistics, covering all 18 states of Sudan. A full description of the survey, along with its general report, can be found in (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016) UNICEF (2014) has made the data freely accessible for research purposes upon request through (Hosmer et al., 2013).

### Data and Variables

The total number of children aged 1 to 14 years sampled was 40,814. The outcome variable of interest is violent discipline, categorized as "yes" or "no." "Yes" indicates that the child experienced psychological aggression or physical punishment in the past month, while "no" indicates that the child did not experience any psychological aggression or physical punishment during that period. Potential variables that could influence violent discipline include the mother's age and educational level, household head's educational level, area of residence, state, child's age, child's sex, birth order, and household wealth index.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample characteristics and estimate the magnitude of violent discipline across the categories of the explanatory variables. The Chi-square test was employed to examine the possible association between the outcome variable and the explanatory variables. Survey logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with violent discipline. Initially, explanatory variables were entered into the model one by one, and the unadjusted odds ratios were calculated to identify which variables should be included in the multivariable logistic regression model. Explanatory variables with p-values less than 0.25 were considered potential factors and included in the multivariable logistic regression, where the adjusted odds ratios were calculated [3]. Unlike standard logistic regression, survey logistic regression accounts for the complex survey design by incorporating sample weights, clustering, and strata.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

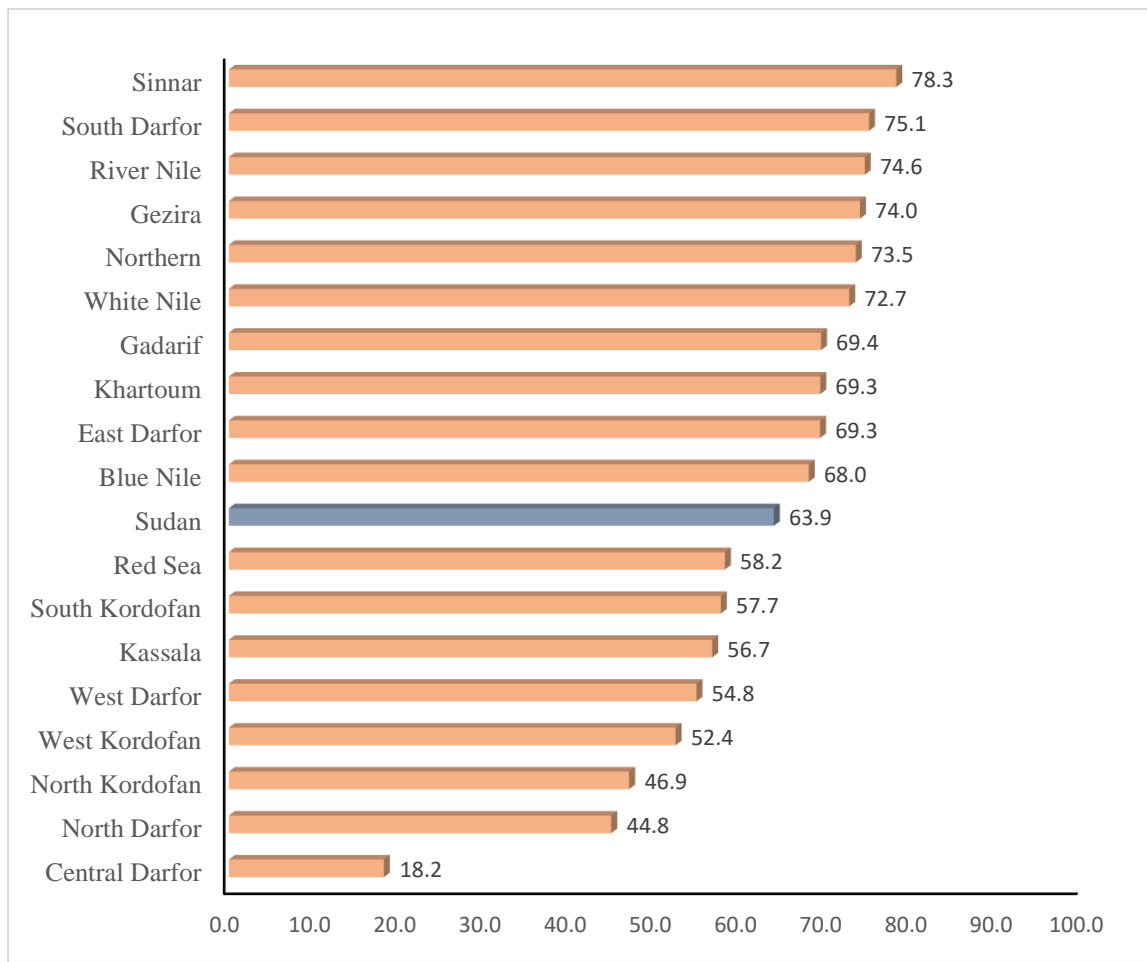
The study included 40,814 children aged 1- 14 years of whom 50.2% are males, 38% are 5-9 years old, 71.9% of the children lived in rural areas, 34.3% of them were 2-3 birth order, 46% of them had none educated household head. Regarding mothers'/caregivers' characteristics 50.3% of mother or caregivers had no formal education, 25.8% of them were 35-39 years old. Wealth status ranged from 15.7% in the richest category to 23% in the poorest.

**Table 1: Table 1: Sample characteristics:**

Variables	Count	Percent
Child Age		
1-2 years	5611	13.7
3-4 years	6452	15.8
5-9 years	15522	38.0
10-14 years	13229	32.4
Area		
Urban	11487	28.1
Rural	29327	71.9
State		
Northern	699	1.7
River Nile	1215	3.0
Red Sea	840	2.1
Kassala	1653	4.0
Gadarif	2114	5.2
Khartoum	4927	12.1
Gezira	6472	15.9
White Nile	2027	5.0
Sinnar	1498	3.7
Blue Nile	1831	4.5
North Kordofan	2649	6.5

South Kordofan	1408	3.4
West Kordofan	2555	6.3
North Darfur	3535	8.7
West Darfur	1449	3.6
South Darfur	3617	8.9
Central Darfur	799	2.0
East Darfur	1523	3.7
Wealth index quintile		
Poorest	9383	23.0
Poor	8797	21.6
Middle	8438	20.7
Rich	7773	19.0
Richest	6423	15.7
Education of household head		
None	18764	46.0
Primary	12061	29.6
Secondary	7625	18.7
Higher	2035	5.0
Missing/DK	330	0.8
Mother's education		
None	20541	50.3
Primary	12560	30.8
Secondary	5792	14.2
Higher	1842	4.5
Cannot be determined	13	0.0
Missing/DK	66	0.2
Sex		
Male	20494	50.2
Female	20318	49.8
Missing	2	0.0
Birth order		
1	6824	20.1
2-3	11629	34.3
4-6	10554	31.1
7+	4928	14.5
Mother Age		
15-19	447	1.3
20-24	2534	7.3
25-29	7134	20.6
30-34	7945	22.9
35-39	8934	25.8
40-44	4808	13.9
45-49	2852	8.2

Overall, 63.9% of children aged 1 to 14 years were subject to violent discipline with the highest prevalence of violent discipline in Sinner State (78.3%) followed by South Darfur (75.1%) and the lowest prevalence in Central Darfur (18.2%) followed by North Darfur (44.8%) (Figure 1). Table 2 shows that there was statistically significant variation in violent discipline prevalence according to exploratory variables. The prevalence was higher in urban areas (68.2% in urban areas vs. 62.3% in rural areas), richest households (71.6%) for richest households compared to 54.1% in poorest households). Also, the child violent discipline was higher in children aged 2-3 years (68.5%), in birth order 2-3 (66.9%), in household with head of primary (67.5%) and secondary (67.1%) level of education, in mother of primary level of education (69%) and in mothers aged 35-39 years old (67.1%).



**Figure (2): Prevalence of violent discipline at the national level and per state.**

**Table 2: Prevalence of violent discipline across exploratory variables.**

Variables	Prevalence of violent discipline		P-value
	Count	Percent	
Area			<0.005
Urban	7833	68.2	
Rural	18266	62.3	
Wealth index quintile			<0.005
Poorest	5079	54.1	
Poor	5178	58.9	
Middle	5802	68.8	
Rich	5444	70.0	
Richest	4596	71.6	
Education of household head			<0.005
None	11366	60.6	
Primary	8140	67.5	
Secondary	5114	67.1	
Higher	1309	64.3	
Mother's education			<0.005
None	12213	59.5	
Primary	8663	69.0	
Secondary	3973	68.6	
Higher	1220	66.3	

Sex			0.026
Male	13213	64.5	
Female	12885	63.4	
Birth order			0.115
1	4498	65.9	
2-3	7784	66.9	
4-6	6922	65.6	
7+	3225	65.4	
Mother Age			<0.005
15-19	279	62.4	
20-24	1607	63.4	
25-29	4695	65.8	
30-34	5250	66.1	
35-39	5991	67.1	
40-44	3167	65.9	
45-49	1797	63.0	
Child Age			<0.005
1-2 years	3034	54.1	
3-4 years	4420	68.5	
5-9 years	10434	67.2	
10-14 years	8213	62.1	

Table 3 shows the results of the logistic regression analysis, which contains both unadjusted prevalence odds ratios obtained from a univariate logistic regression with one predictor and adjusted prevalence odds ratios obtained from multivariable logistic regression, Sex, birth order, mother age variables are omitted from the final model. The unadjusted logistic regression results show that the likelihood of violent discipline are significantly higher in urban (UOR: 1.30; 95% CI: 1.14, 1.47) compared to rural, in all levels of wealth index compared to the poorest and it is the highest in the richest (UOR: 2.13; 95% CI: 1.70, 2.67), in children in aged 3-4 years (UOR: 1.33, 95% CI: 1.12,1.57) and 5-9 years (UOR: 1.25, 95% CI: 1.11,1.41) compared to 10-14 years old, but its significantly lower in children in aged 1 to 2 years (UOR: 0.72, 95% CI: 0.61,0.84) compared to 10-14 years.

After adjusting for socio-demographic and household characteristics, the results show that the odd of violent discipline are significantly higher in all levels of wealth compared to the poorest and it is the highest in the poor quintile (AOR: 2.35; 95% CI: 1.74,3.17). Also, it is higher in primary educated household heads (AOR: 1.40, 95% CI: 1.01,1.93) compared to higher educated household heads, in children aged 3-4 years (AOR: 1.30, 95% CI: 1.10,1.53) and 5-9 years (AOR: 1.27, 95% CI: 1.12,1.43) compared to 10-14 years, but its significantly lower in children aged 1-2 years old (AOR: 0.69, 95% CI: 0.58,0.81) compared to 10-14 years.

**Table 3: Survey logistic regression analysis results for investigating the association between child violent discipline and exploratory variables.**

Variables	Unadjusted Prevalence Odds Ratio (UPOR)	P-value	Adjusted Prevalence Odds Ratio (APOR)	P-value
Area				
Urban	1.30* (1.14,1.47)	<0.005	0.95(0.81,1.12)	0.568
Rural	1.00		1.00	
Wealth index quintile				
Poorest	1.00		1.00	
Poor	1.21* (1.00,1.47)	0.048	2.35* (1.74,3.17)	<0.005
Middle	1.87* (1.52,2.30)	<0.005	1.94* (1.53,2.47)	<0.005

Rich	1.98* (1.62,2.42)	<0.005	1.88* (1.50,2.36)	<0.005
Richest	2.13* (1.70,2.67)	<0.005	1.23* (1.01,1.49)	0.037
Mother's education level				
None	0.75(0.55,1.01)	0.056	1.03(0.71,1.49)	0.872
Primary	1.13(0.83,1.54)	0.435	1.31(0.91,1.89)	0.144
Secondary	1.11(0.79,1.57)	0.550	1.13(0.78,1.63)	0.527
Higher	1.00		1.00	
Education level of household head				
None	0.85(0.66,1.10)	0.212	1.29(0.92,1.80)	0.134
Primary	1.15(0.89,1.49)	0.276	1.40* (1.01,1.93)	0.040
Secondary	1.13(0.84,1.52)	0.410	1.19(0.87,1.64)	0.272
Higher	1.00		1.00	
Child age				
1-2 years	0.72* (0.61,0.84)	<0.005	0.69* (0.58,0.81)	<0.005
3-4 years	1.33* (1.12,1.57)	0.001	1.30* (1.10,1.53)	0.002
5-9 years	1.25* (1.11,1.41)	<0.005	1.27* (1.12,1.43)	<0.005
10_14 years	1.00		1.00	

The results showed a high prevalence of child violent discipline in the Sudan with prevalence varying across children, women, and household characteristics. This result is consistent with the study of Ssenyonga et al. (2019), which indicated that 91.5% of students in Uganda experienced violent discipline from their teachers. Furthermore, 88.3% of instructors in Uganda supported constructive views regarding physical punishment. Additionally, Diaz et al. (2023) revealed that 75% of children aged 2 - 4 years are frequently experiencing violent discipline worldwide. Parents use a variety of methods to discipline their children. According to UNICEF (2019), the prevalence rates of violent discipline in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) range between 50% to 93% in Egypt in 2014 and Tunisia in 2012 with the majority of countries in (MENA) being the range of 75% to 92%. As shown in Table 2, the prevalence of violent discipline was higher in urban areas of Sudan compared to rural areas whereas in urban areas the rate of violent discipline was 68.2% while in rural areas was at 62.3%. According to Kang et al. (2023), 41% of households in Asia-Pacific countries were witnessing violent discipline against children in rural areas. In rural areas of western China, the prevalence rate of psychological aggression was 76.4%, while the severe physical punishment rate was 57.5%. Moreover, any physical punishment rate was 68.3% and any violent discipline rate was 14.1% (Huang et al., 2021). The wealth index is a significant variable that addresses the household's status in terms of possession of material and nonmaterial assets, and information. It is closely linked to how a child's caregiver acts in terms of child discipline. Wealthy caregivers or parents are likely to be more familiar with parenting methods due to quick and easy access to child needs such as books and healthcare resources. Impoverished parents, on the other hand, may contribute to the creation of stress in the in home, which can lead to increases in the use of violent discipline. Oppositely wealthy households may not tend to use violent disciplinary practices as often (McLloyd et al. 1994). The present study indicated that the prevalence rate in the richest households was (71.6%) compared to (54.1%) in the poorest households. Similarly, the MICS of Nepal, (2019) showed that the prevalence of violence against children in urban households of Nepal is higher at (81%) compared to rural households at (78%). Also, the study confirmed that the violent discipline in children aged 2-3 years was at (68.5%), and in birth order 2-3 at (66.9%). In the same line, the violence against children is more common in the ages between 1 to 9 years old, but it gradually declines as children get older (Nepal MICS, 2019). The prevalence rates were higher in households with heads of primary education at (67.5%) and secondary education at (67.1%). The primary level of education in mothers was at (69%) and in mothers aged 35-39 years old at (67.1%). In this point Wolf (2020) stated that higher parent education levels and ages are associated with less physical punishment. Moreover, some studies have shown that older parents are less encouraged to use corporal punishment compared to younger parents (Dietz 2000). Straus and Mathur (1996) found that younger parents aged 18-29 hit their children more than older parents, suggesting an association between youthfulness and violence. Although it is expected that less-educated parents are more likely to use physical



punishment (Durant et al., 1994); however, this view is not a concluding one, as some studies associate violent disciplinary methods with higher levels of education (Ghana Statistical Service 2011), whereas other studies still perceive that educational level does not have any impact on violent disciplinary methods at all (Wolfner and Gelles 1993). The variation in the rates of violent discipline prevalence among different states of Sudan based on the variables of the study such as rural versus urban areas, household head educational level, economic status of the household, mother's education, mother's age, and child's age, is due to two factors, according to the authors points of view. The first factor is associated with structural stress where individuals living in different areas of Sudan with certain low socioeconomic positions in a society suffer from more frustration and stress. The second factor is a cultural norm that encourages the use of coercion and violence as a common reaction to this frustration and stress (Coser, 1967). In addition, most of the Sudanese communities believe that violent discipline is associated with corporal punishment because it is considered an effective strategy for the right discipline for children, and this belief has strong justification in the culture, religion, and social traditions in Sudan. On the other hand, this study requires further investigation, to improve the understanding of the factors that lead to violent child discipline and to develop effective strategies to reduce its frequency and impact.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to investigate the factors associated with child violent discipline in Sudan. Data on children's violent discipline gathered from the nationwide Sudan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF and the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2014 were analyzed. Survey logistic regression was employed to identify factors associated with violent discipline. The results showed that 63.9% of children aged 1 to 14 years were subjected to violent discipline with varying prevalence across children, women, and household characteristics. Survey logistic regression results showed that, after adjusting for other factors, the mother's education level, household head's education level, child's age, and wealth index quintile were significantly associated with violent child discipline.

The results suggest an urgent need for intervention from the Ministry of Social Welfare, educational institutions, and civil society organizations to contribute positively to the protection of children and the preservation of their rights against any form of violent discipline. Furthermore, the effective implementation of the Sudan Child Act 2010 guarantees a child's right to natural growth free from any violations.

## **Conflict of Interest**

None

## **Authors' Contributions**

The authors who contributed to the publishing of the manuscript are assigned tasks as follows:

MEKA conceptualized the idea, participated in study design, drafted the manuscript, and edited and reviewed the final manuscript. EHMS conceptualized the idea, participated in the study design, participated in writing the manuscript draft, and edited and reviewed the final manuscript. ZMSM designed the study methodology, conducted the data analysis, contributed to drafting the manuscript, and reviewed the final manuscript. Finally, all authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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