

Policy Brief 34 On Positive Parenting: Preventing Disciplinary Violence Against Children Within Egyptian Households

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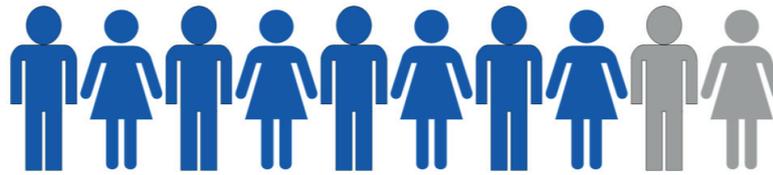


Children under the age of 18 in Egypt constitute 40% of the whole Egyptian community (Egypt Today, 2018), with more than 90% of children (ages 1-14) being subjected to violence (Al Masry Al Youm, 2019). The Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) defines violence against children as any form of physical, psychological, and sexual violence inflicted both directly and indirectly. Guided by this and the ministry's recommendation, we will focus on forms of violent disciplinary practices against children inflicted by parents in Egyptian households.

What is the problem?

Children look up to their parents as protectors from harm and danger. Nevertheless, **93% of children aged 1 to 14 were violently disciplined in Egypt in 2014 (EDHS, 2014) and Egyptian parents ranked the highest** in the Middle East and North African region to adopt violent disciplinary practices with their children (UNICEF, 2018). They discipline their children through physical violent means such as shaking and hitting, verbal violent means such as calling a child names and shouting, and sexual violent means like performing female genital mutilation [FGM] to regulate girls' sexual behavior.

What is the problem?



More than 8 out of 10 children were subjected to physical and verbal violent disciplinary practices.



9 out of 10 girls were subjected to FGM.

Figure 1: Violently Disciplined Children
Source: Authors, based on EDHS, 2014.

Contrary to common misconceptions, children that lie under any wealth quintile, and who have educated or uneducated parents, are all to some extent equal when it comes to violent discipline (EDHS, 2014). However, it is important to note that the mothers' lack of education contributes to subjecting their daughters to FGM (EDHS, 2014). A close examination of vulnerable families shows that more than 65% of mothers and 50% of fathers use violent methods to raise their children, according to Dr. Fatma El Zanaty, Owner, El Zanaty & Associates. Those mothers tend to verbally abuse their children more than physically abuse them.

Children view their families as a safe haven where they are raised to become healthy and productive individuals (National Council of Childhood & Motherhood (NCCM) & UNICEF, 2015). However, research has shown that multiple causes wreck this haven and in turn have both short-term and long-term effects on the child, parents, and the Government of Egypt [GOE] as shown in figure 2 below.

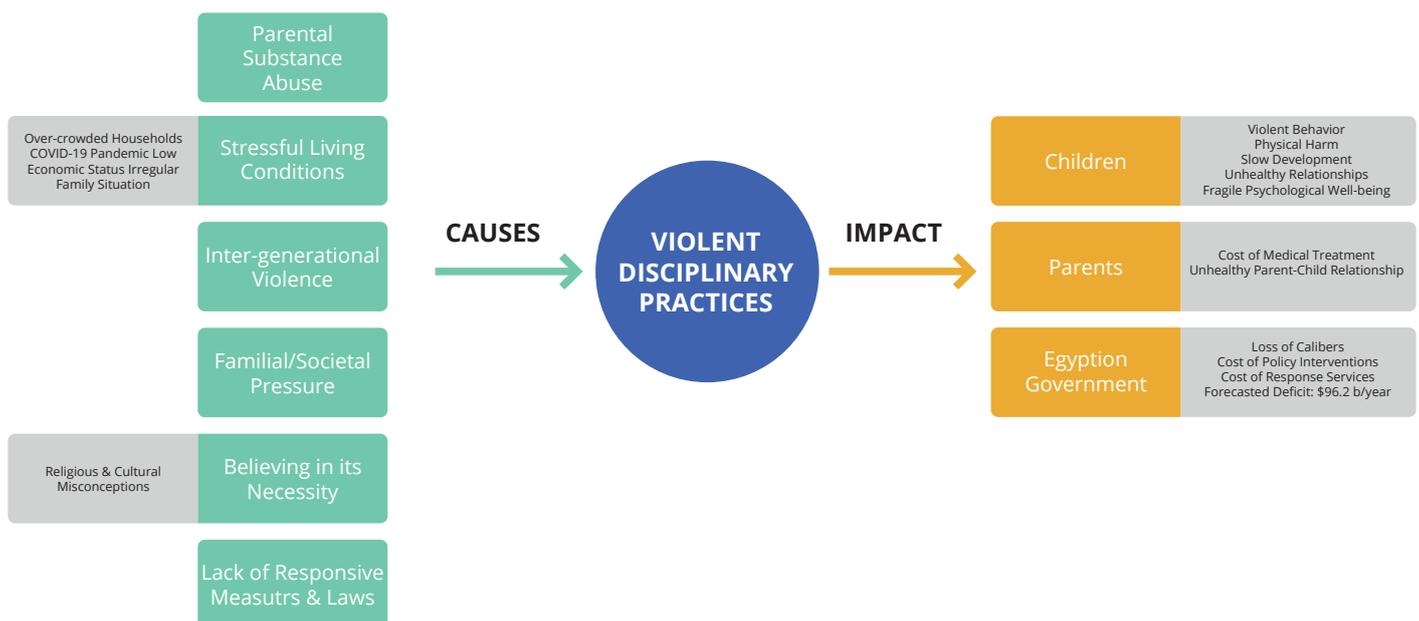


Figure 2: Problem Tree
Source: Authors, based on literature review and meetings with diverse stakeholders.

How is it being tackled and what are the gaps in that?

For the past 10 years, the phenomenon of violent parenting methods has been an issue of concern for the GOE and many other stakeholders who both affect its prevalence and/or are affected by it according to their power and interest, as shown in figure 3 below.

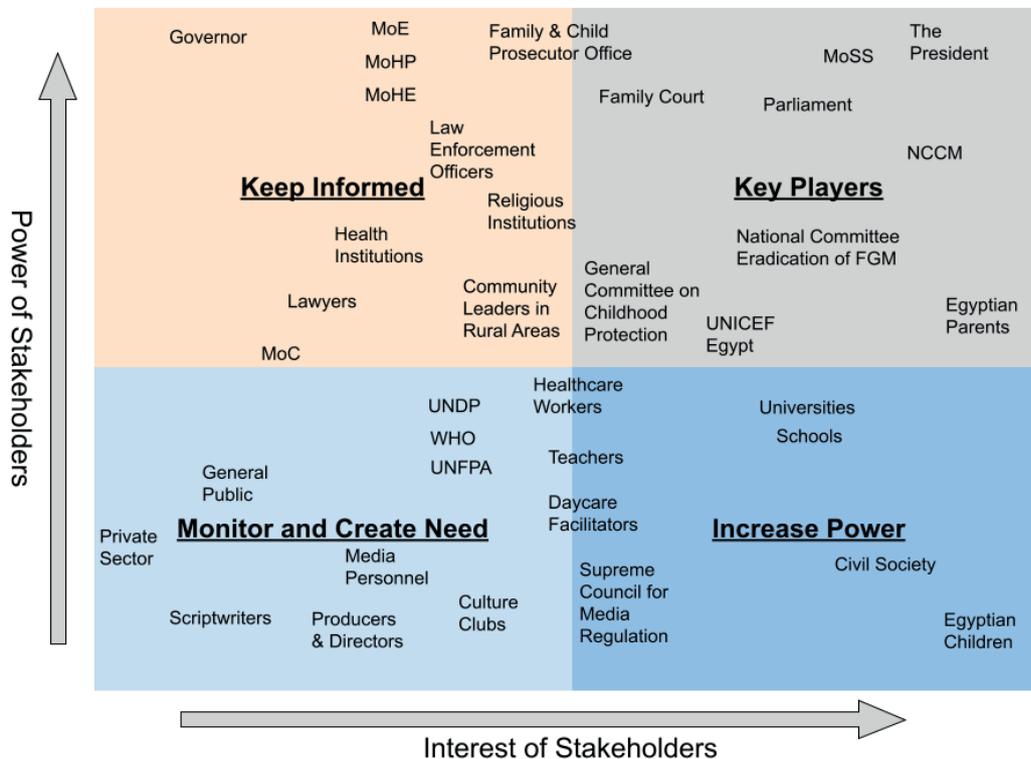


Figure 3: Power-Interest Matrix
 Source: Authors, based on literature review and meetings with diverse stakeholders.

A particular examination of the GOE has shown that the government made considerable strides in addressing the problem through adopting diverse national policies which we categorized into four pillars: the legal framework, non-digital awareness tools, digital awareness tools, and responsive mechanisms. However, as indicated below, we identified some gaps in each pillar.

The legal framework

includes the Egyptian FGM Law No. 78/2016 and Child Law No. 126/2008.

- Escorts to FGM practices are not harshly penalized.
- “التأديب المباح شرعا” (discipline allowed by sharia) is not defined clearly and the use of “عمدا” (intentionally) poses controversies in court. Children are not granted all information necessary for their protection and empowerment.
- The penalty of imprisonment for parent perpetrators could negatively impact the child.
- The period and the process of reporting an incident of a child at-risk is not clearly stated.



Non-digital awareness tools

include utilizing religious figures and community leaders in rural areas to raise awareness of the problem.

- Probable communication of false religious claims that promote such practices.
- Ineffective message delivery due to Ra'edats' high case-load and the dependence on community gatherings as the main awareness channel.
- Lack of awareness messages delivered to fathers/paternal grandmothers.

Digital awareness tools

comprise outreach through RapidPro and media channels such as radio, TV, social media, and print.

- RapidPro is used to target only one sector of the Egyptian population.
- Radio stations do not cater to all audiences.
- The utilization of TV as a channel of communication for this issue is not maximized to its full potential.

Responsive mechanisms

- include the Child Helpline, psycho-social support interventions and 'Nabtet Masr' mobile application.
- Most children are unaware of the child helpline.
- Most children are hesitant to report any wrongful practices inflicted by their parents.
- The insufficient number of social workers who can provide psycho-social support to children.
- Lack of awareness of the existence of 'Nabtet Masr' mobile application.

Policy Alternatives and Criteria

1. Capitalizing on 'Waa'y' program:

mainly through integrating male participants as 'Rowad' and children as 'Al Ra'ed/Ra'eda Al Sagheer', and increasing the number of Ra'edat to conduct one-on-one meetings with vulnerable family members.

2. Building more integrated awareness outreach methods:

mainly through disseminating awareness messages on positive parenting through SMS, WhatsApp, radio stations, TV channels, and religious institutions to reach the entire population and ensure children are equipped with the necessary information pertaining to protection. These messages can integrate Egyptian proverbs to ease their recall and to be relatable.

3. Improving existing responsive tools:

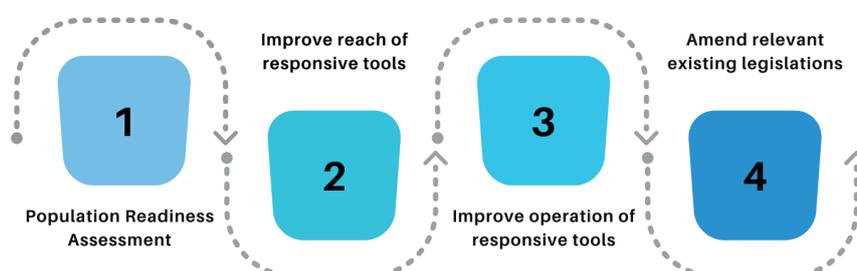
mainly through focusing on improving the operation and awareness of 'Nabtet Masr' mobile application and the child helpline, and amending the existing legislations as needed.



Guided by the policy analytical framework of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], policy options are ranked according to the following criteria: 'Effectiveness', 'Feasibility' and 'Economic Impact'. Based on this, our decision rule is the third policy option **improving existing responsive tools** as it scored the highest across the effectiveness and feasibility criteria and will effectively protect children from hazards and ensure intergenerational equity. This option has a moderate feasibility likelihood and its costs are moderate relative to its benefits.

The Way Forward

Guided by UNICEF's INSPIRE-Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children, we focused on two particular strategies: [I] the implementation and enforcement of laws and [R] response and support services. Our implementation plan is illustrated in figure 4 below, which includes the steps, main action points and the respective main stakeholders.



Step 1

Develop a population-wide survey to understand the different attitudes and factors that might contribute to the prevalence of the problem.

CAPMAS

Step 2

2.1. Raise the public's awareness of NCCM's 'Nabtet Masr' mobile application through cost-effective means.

2.2. Increase the parents' awareness of current legislations through legal awareness gatherings, titled "اعرف اللي ليك واللي عليك", implemented across governorates

2.3. Increase children's awareness of the child helpline through cost-effective mediums within their reach.

MOSS social media team, Ra'edat, UNICEF ambassadors and religious figures

Civil society organizations [CSO] and lawyers directed by the Ministry of Justice

CSOs, publishing houses, book authors and playwrights

Step 3

3.1. Introduce new features to NCCM's 'Nabtet Masr' mobile application.

3.2. Integrate a national psychological support service within the child helpline.

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NCCM and app developers

NCCM, psychologists and IT personnel

NCCM, psychologists and IT personnel

Step 4

4.1. Amend the imprisonment penalty in the FGM law no.78 of 2016 for FGM escorts to be 10 years similar to the penalty for FGM perpetrators.

4.2. Include a clear definition of "التأديب" and remove the term "عمدا" from the clause in article -7BIS[A] of the Child law.

4.3. Amend the imprisonment penalty and add a rehabilitative activity in article 96 in the Child law.

4.4. Introduce legislation that clearly explains the process of reporting an incident.

Lawyers and parliamentarians

Lawyers and parliamentarians

Lawyers, parliamentarians, psychologists and social workers

Lawyers, parliamentarians and police officers

Figure 4: Implementation Plan and Main Action Points

Stakeholders

«All the academic references used in this brief are mentioned in the policy paper.»

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