

Violence against children in Angola: The institutional response from the perspective of police intervention in Luanda province

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Abstract

This article analyses the institutional response to violence against children in Luanda Province, Angola, from the perspective of police intervention, with a particular focus on the municipalities of Cacuaco and Viana. The study adopted a qualitative approach, drawing on a review of the literature and documentary sources, complemented by semi-structured interviews conducted with five police officers experienced in handling and referring cases involving child victims of violence. The collected data were subjected to content analysis. The findings reveal that child abandonment, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse are the most frequently reported forms of violence against children. The main contributing factors include alcoholism, poverty, family disintegration, unemployment, and harmful cultural beliefs, such as accusations of witchcraft against children. The study further demonstrates that the economic and emotional dependence of victims on their perpetrators contributes to the perpetuation of silence and hinders the reporting of cases. The results also indicate a lack of coordination between police action and local social assistance services. It is concluded that strengthening the institutional response requires the standardization of police procedures, enhanced interinstitutional coordination, and the consolidation of child protection networks at the community level.

Keywords:

Violence against children; Police intervention; Child protection.

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Como citar: Boma, M. (2026). Violência contra a criança em Angola: Resposta institucional sob óptica da intervenção policial na província de Luanda. *Sapientiae*, 12(1), e120106. <https://doi.org/10.37293/sapientiae121.06>



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SAPIENTIAE: Ciências Sociais, Humanas e Engenharias
Universidade Óscar Ribas, Luanda, Angola
ISSN Versão Impressa 2183-5063 ISSN Versão Digital 2184-061X
Vol. 12 (1). Julho - Dezembro 2026
<http://publicacoes.uor.ed.ao/index.php/sapientiae/>

sapientiae

Recebido: 16/05/2026
Aceito: 22/06/2026
Publicado: 15/07/2026

e120106

Violência contra a criança em Angola: Resposta institucional sob óptica da intervenção policial na província de Luanda

Resumo

Este artigo analisou a resposta institucional à violência contra a criança na província de Luanda, sob a perspectiva da intervenção policial, com enfoque nos municípios de Cacuaco e Viana. A investigação adoptou uma abordagem qualitativa. Recorreu à revisão bibliográfica e documental, complementada por entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas a cinco oficiais da Polícia com experiência no atendimento e encaminhamento de casos envolvendo crianças vítimas de violência. Os dados recolhidos foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo. Os resultados evidenciam que o abandono, os maus-tratos físicos, as agressões psicológicas e os abusos sexuais constituem as formas de violência mais frequentemente registadas. Entre os principais factores associados destacam-se o alcoolismo, a pobreza, a desestruturação familiar, o desemprego e determinadas crenças culturais nocivas, como as acusações de feitiçaria contra crianças. O estudo demonstra ainda que a dependência económica e emocional das vítimas em relação aos agressores favorece a perpetuação do silêncio e dificulta a denúncia dos casos. Os resultados apontam que há um défice de coordenação entre a acção policial e os serviços locais de assistência social. Conclui-se que o fortalecimento da resposta institucional requer a padronização dos procedimentos policiais, reforço da coordenação interinstitucional e consolidação da rede de protecção à criança ao nível das comunidades.

Palavras-chave: Violência contra a criança; intervenção policial; protecção da criança.

Violencia contra la niñez en Angola: La respuesta institucional desde la perspectiva de la intervención policial en la provincia de Luanda

Resumen

Este artículo analizó la respuesta institucional frente a la violencia contra la niñez en la provincia de Luanda, desde la perspectiva de la intervención policial, con especial atención a los municipios de Cacuaco y Viana. La investigación adoptó un enfoque cualitativo y recurrió a la revisión bibliográfica y documental, complementada con entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas a cinco oficiales de policía con experiencia en la atención y derivación de casos que involucran a niños víctimas de violencia. Los datos recopilados fueron sometidos a análisis de contenido. Los resultados evidencian que el abandono infantil, los malos tratos físicos, las agresiones psicológicas y los abusos sexuales constituyen las formas de violencia más frecuentemente registradas. Entre los principales factores asociados destacan el alcoholismo, la pobreza, la desestructuración familiar, el desempleo y determinadas creencias culturales perjudiciales, como las acusaciones de brujería contra los niños. El estudio demuestra además que la dependencia económica y emocional de las víctimas respecto de sus agresores favorece la perpetuación del silencio y dificulta la denuncia de los casos. Los resultados indican también la existencia de un déficit de coordinación entre la actuación policial y los servicios locales de asistencia social. Se concluye que el fortalecimiento de la respuesta institucional requiere la estandarización de los procedimientos policiales, el refuerzo de la coordinación interinstitucional y la consolidación de la red de protección de la niñez a nivel comunitario.

Palabras clave: Violencia contra la niñez; Intervención policial; Protección infantil.

Introduction

Every year, thousands of children worldwide fall victim to various forms of non-fatal interpersonal violence, including sexual violence. Violence contributes to numerous lifelong health problems, particularly affecting children, who are especially vulnerable to harm (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014).

The prevalence of violence varies according to the environment where a child spends most of their time—ranging from schools, homes, and kindergartens to foster care settings and even churches. In many regions of the African continent, violence affects a large number of children, resulting in thousands of deaths annually (Itigi & Njuguna, 2013). Beyond legal measures, there is a need for protective interventions and structural changes that emphasize the role of various local actors and communities in preventing violent behavior and its consequences.

Child protection is a global imperative, and in Angola, violence against children has reached alarming levels. Luanda province records the highest incidence of this phenomenon, particularly in the municipalities of Cacuaco and Viana. This situation is exacerbated by a rise in cases of fathers evading parental responsibility, adults failing to fulfill their duty of protection, and neglect regarding the proper care of children. Data indicate that, following the COVID-19 pandemic, an upward trend in domestic violence and violence against children was observed in Angola between 2024 and 2025 (Angolan National Police [PNA], 2026).

Institutional approaches are grounded in children's rights—reaffirmed in the Millennium Development Goals and highlighted by the United Nations (UN, 2015). Interventions in this area must take place at multiple levels. It is essential that institutions, such as the police and other competent bodies, align their legislation, actions, and outcomes in a coordinated manner. In this context, the following question arises: How does police intervention in Luanda Province contribute to the prevention of, response to, and combat against violence against children in Angola?

The study aimed to analyze institutional responses to violence against children in Angola, based on accounts of police intervention in Luanda Province, while identifying the challenges, measures, and child protection strategies adopted. The text characterizes the main forms of violence against children as perceived by police officers in Luanda. The research focuses on evaluating the procedures and practices adopted by the National Police of Angola regarding the prevention and referral of cases of violence against children, as well as identifying the key operational challenges faced when intervening in situations involving violence against minors.

Phenomenological profile of violence against children in Africa

Violence against children is considered a highly prevalent problem, particularly in developing countries (Boma, 2026). The term “violence against children” is commonly used to refer to acts of violence directed at minors.

According to Pinheiro (2006), violence against children refers to any act or form of mistreatment directed at a child that may cause harm. Lowenthal (2001) explains that violence against children involves behaviors that cause physical or mental harm, sexual abuse, neglect, or mistreatment of individuals under the age of 18.

UNICEF (2023) describes violence against children as forms of physical or mental violence, injury, abuse, neglect, or inadequate treatment where the victim is a minor. WHO (2014, p. 24) defines violence against children as all forms of physical and/or emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or exploitation that result in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity, in contexts of relationship, responsibility, trust, or power.

Based on these definitions, it can be summarized that violence against children involves physical and psychological manifestations that jeopardize children's well-being. This violence occurs in different cultures and socioeconomic contexts and is widely documented by international authors and organizations, considering its impacts and consequences. In Angola, it is a complex and widespread problem, with physical and psychological manifestations that seriously compromise their development.

Physical manifestations of violence against children include a range of aggressions that leave visible marks and sometimes internal damage (Sani, 2002). Bruises, burns, and fractures are common examples of physical injuries resulting from abuse. In Angola, corporal punishment is still a socially accepted practice in some families, schools, and care centers, contributing to the perpetuation of physical violence.

The psychological and emotional manifestations of violence against children extend beyond physical injuries, profoundly affecting children's mental and emotional health. Psychological abuse can result in invisible but lasting damage, such as lifelong social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive problems. A particularly worrying phenomenon in Angola is the accusation of witchcraft, which leads to serious assaults, torture, and often the abandonment of children (Cimpric, 2011).

These accusations, often driven by harmful cultural beliefs and superstitions, have a devastating impact on the identity and psychological well-being of the victims. Fear of reprisals and the social stigma associated with these accusations contribute to their invisibility and lack of reporting (Mirembe & Davis, 2001).

Factors such as poverty, harmful cultural beliefs, and fragile family structures contribute to the perpetuation of abuse and neglect. Although laws and institutions dedicated to child protection exist, challenges such as the culture of silence, scarcity of resources, and lack of institutional coordination hinder effective intervention. It is imperative to strengthen reporting mechanisms, raise community awareness, and reinforce the capacity of institutions to ensure that all Angolan children can grow up in a safe and violence-free environment.

Oduor et al. (2012) explain that violent behavior directed at children can be grouped into two categories: explicit and implicit. Explicit violence manifests itself in acts such as sexual harassment, corporal punishment, rape, and desecration (Itegi & Njuguna, 2013). Implicit violence is evidenced in acts of intimidation, bullying, and other forms of psychological violence (Mirembe & Davis, 2001). Recent studies provide evidence suggesting that children are more susceptible to certain forms of violence at different ages and when exposed to multiple violent environments. However, data disaggregated by age and gender are not always complete. For example, UNICEF indicates that violent disciplinary practices, physical punishment, and psychological aggression affect six out of ten children aged 2 to 14 years (National Institute for Children [INAC], 2022).

Although representative information on certain forms of violence, such as physical and verbal abuse and bullying, is available in some countries, data on sexual abuse remain limited. Mirembe and Davis (2001) explain that there are difficulties in the authenticity and disaggregation of data on the number of child victims of violence in Africa, with great dispersion in the records in terms of variations and measurement methodologies. It is estimated that about 1 in 10 girls, approximately 120 million worldwide, have been victims of forced sexual relations by adults (UNICEF, 2023).

Global concern for child protection is transnational. Crises, social conflicts, wars, and natural disasters increase children's vulnerability. Many African countries still face challenges related to parental abandonment, violence stemming from armed conflict, the use of children in war contexts, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and other forms of violence (Marques et al., 1994). Despite the magnitude of the problem, there are significant gaps in data production, hindering prevention and control efforts.

Nevertheless, violence against children has been extensively studied, allowing for a better understanding of its prevalence and associated factors. Studies indicate that the most common forms of violence include physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological or emotional abuse, both attempted and completed, and in many cases, the perpetrators maintain a close relationship with the victim (UNICEF, 2023). Child protection and the prevention of violence, exploitation, and abuse are central responsibilities of States. Some African countries, such as Angola, have made commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, covering all spheres of protection and guarantee of children's rights (Straus et al., 1998).

This protection should create barriers against vulnerabilities that expose children to sexual abuse, exploitation, human trafficking, child labor, and violence. The work of organizations like UNICEF seeks to ensure a safe environment and reduce disparities in access to information, guidance, and services for children. UNICEF's activities are guided by an international normative framework for children's rights, as well as decisions and policies agreed upon in intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations. In all actions concerning children, whether carried out by public or private social assistance institutions, courts, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child will be a primary consideration.

States undertake to ensure that children receive the protection and care necessary for their well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of their parents, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for them, and to this end shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures. Institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall comply with the standards established by the competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, number and adequacy of their staff, as well as competent supervision. These actions involve a set of strategies integrated into the different national child protection systems.

Countries like Angola are urged to focus on defining minimum packages of child protection services – laws, policies, and capacities to support them, ensuring care and protection for children across various sectors (INAC, 2006). National child protection systems have responsibilities in government action, including creating service structures, monitoring, and strengthening human capacity for child protection. Generally, these systems are structured with a set of necessary laws, policies, regulations, and services across all social sectors – especially in the areas of social welfare, education, health, security, and justice. They function to support prevention, response to violence, and risk reduction, strengthening the role of families and other institutions and law enforcement authorities (Straus et al., 1998).

Child protection policies and police programs for violence prevention

Angola has a relevant legal framework regarding the protection of children's rights and access to justice. In the 1990s, the country ratified several international conventions, even during the period of armed conflict. Since its democratic opening, Angola has sought to commit to the protection and promotion of children's rights in all areas. To fulfill these obligations, Angola, as a State Party, is required to regularly submit periodic reports on measures adopted and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (National Assembly Resolution No. 20/90, of November 10, 1990) and the progress.

Children are best served by justice systems that ensure the effectiveness of actions and adequate guarantees for victims, witnesses, and offenders alike. The identification of vulnerabilities should be carried out in conjunction with communities and local government services, aiming to reduce marginalization and expand child protection (Martins, 2004). This alignment, which follows international norms, constitutes an essential basis for the advancement of human rights. Following the civil war in 2002, significant steps have been taken over the years in the adoption of laws.

The right of the child is a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Angola. The Angolan State places the child as an absolute priority. Other legal instruments include the Law against Domestic Violence (Law No. 25/11, of July 14) and the Law on the Protection and Integral Development of the Child (Law No. 25/12, of August 22). The Law against Domestic Violence establishes systems for preventing acts of domestic violence against defenseless and physically, psychologically, and emotionally vulnerable individuals, requiring greater care from those obligated to protect them, especially women, men, children, the elderly, and adolescents, as they are vulnerable to aggression.

The Law on the Protection and Integral Development of Children is more specific. It establishes obligations for the State and society within the framework of promoting and protecting children, and establishes the link between the various legal instruments that contribute to the promotion and defense of children's rights, while also giving binding character to the recommendations made by society within the framework of the "11 Commitments". These legal instruments result from the need to promote and defend children's rights, while also giving binding character to the recommendations made to the State in this matter (Ministry of Justice and Human Rights [MINJUSDH], 2018).

In 2019, the Flowcharts and Parameters for the Care of Children and Adolescents Victims of Violence were published. The government established procedures for humane care, preventing further harm and suffering. The flowcharts detail six main areas: care for victims of sexual violence and abuse, shelter, adoption and guardianship, adolescents who commit acts classified as crimes, use of psychoactive substances, child labor, and children on the move (trafficking or unaccompanied). The document defines the intersectorial referral system among protection actors, guiding professionals in Education, Health, Social Services, Justice, and the Interior on the identification, registration, referral, and management of cases (Ministry of Social Assistance and Reintegration [MINARS], 2016).

Furthermore, the Angolan Penal Code (Law No. 38/20, of November 11) and the Angolan Code of Criminal Procedure (Law No. 39/20, of November 11) contain provisions on children's rights in judicial proceedings, including the right to be heard, to choose a lawyer, and to establish age limits for criminal responsibility. The Angolan penal system has five main components in the area of protection: 1) child participation; 2) prohibition of all types of violence; 3) age of criminal responsibility; 4) legal age for sexual consent; and 5) minimum age for marriage (MINJUSDH, 2018).

However, many experts believe that the legal framework regarding sexual consent still constitutes an obstacle to the protection of children against sexual violence. There are still shortcomings that must be addressed to make the laws consistent with each other and coherent with the Constitution of the Republic and international treaties (INAC, 2006). The operationalization of tasks from the central government has been transferred to provincial, municipal, or community levels.

The municipal secretariats of Social Action, Family and Women's Promotion, as well as municipal and provincial delegations from the Ministries of the Interior and Justice, assume local responsibilities. In the sphere of police authorities, these play a relevant role, especially in municipalities, working closely with governmental entities. Actions to prevent and combat violence are adaptable to police demand, adopting different intervention strategies (PNA, 2018).

Driven by the need to consolidate trust and mutual cooperation with the population, crime prevention and protection programs for vulnerable individuals, especially children, were implemented. These programs include: Door-to-Door Encounters/Contact, Safe School, and Victim Support.

- **Door-to-Door Contact:** Developed through policing actions that seek to listen to and observe citizens' general security concerns on-site, promoting civic values of harmonious coexistence.

- **Victim Support:** A program focused on providing humane care to victims of crimes, including domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, and other criminal acts.
- **Safe School:** A crime prevention program in school environments, involving educational actors and territorial police units.

These programs increase knowledge of crimes due to greater interaction between the population and police patrols (PNA, 2018). Strictly police-led prevention programs include street patrols, community intervention, and crime reduction mechanisms. Another relevant factor is the structuring of community surveillance or security councils. According to Gohn (2002), these councils represent mediating bodies between the community and the State, promoting co-management of public interests.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, using bibliographic and documentary research. The technique for collecting empirical data was the semi-structured interview (Garret, 1981). This is an instrument of social interaction and informational interpenetration, capable of breaking down group, individual, and social isolation. According to Lüdke and André (1994), interviews allow for clarifications and adaptations that make the search for desired information more effective. Five interviews were conducted with police officers working in the Luanda Provincial Command (2017), specifically in the municipal commands of Cacuaco and Viana. These interviews took place at different times, using a 20-minute format for each one.

The study included squadron commanders and operations chiefs with 14 to 28 years of service, mostly from the Luanda Provincial Command. Interviews were scheduled between August 14th and 30th, 2025, according to participant availability, and conducted individually. The researcher focused on the participants' experiences as a starting point to reconstruct details of the context in which cases of violence against children occurred. The goal of the individual sessions was to maximize expression, allowing participants to fully express their opinions.

The themes addressed in the interview script constituted pre-established categories for content analysis, guiding the interpretation of the obtained accounts. The interview script was given to the participating officers beforehand, serving as a basis for the conversation. The script was structured in thematic sets, addressing: the types of violence against children most frequently recorded, the possible perceived causes, and police action strategies in the prevention and control of these cases. The interviews were recorded using electronic equipment and subsequently transcribed, guaranteeing the anonymity of the participants. The data provided by each participant generated extensive material for transcription and research.

For data processing, descriptive content analysis was used. Formally, content analysis is a research technique for obtaining valid and replicable inferences from data in their context (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The focus of this type of content analysis is to verify the semantics of the data. It allowed the identification of meanings of implicit messages and underlying themes for a complete understanding of the data. The processing procedure sought to account for what was narrated, attributing an interpretative dimension that resulted from the question.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

This section presents the results of the study, detailing the participants, methodological procedures, and content analysis of perceptions and experiences related to police action in the face of violence against children in the province of Luanda.

Main forms of violence against children recorded

Some forms of violence against children reached worrying levels, with the victims being mostly children in vulnerable situations. However, there is differentiation between the communities that recorded these cases, making the perceived causes diverse. The purpose of this analysis is to provide an overview of the trends and prevalence of different types of violence perpetrated against children. Regarding this first topic, the responses were as follows:

“The most common situations of violence are classified as domestic violence or child abuse, perpetrated by an adult or adolescent with advanced physical and mental maturity, who acts as a caregiver or guardian over the victim” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, August 15, 2025)

“The level of violence against children in this territory is based on abandonment of paternity, physical violence, and sexual abuse, these being the most prominent. Data from our records indicate daily cases of violence against minors. There are occurrences in communities, while others do not have a culture of reporting” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, August 30, 2025).

“Violence against children is among the most worrying issues in terms of child protection in Luanda. Sexual rapes and certain types of punishments happen weekly” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, August 23, 2025).

“Sexual violation and domestic violence against children and women are worrying, but there are still few cases reported to the police. This is also evident in the phenomenon of accusations of witchcraft, which increases the number of assaults and frequently leads to the abandonment of children” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, August 20, 2025).

“Physical abuse tends to occupy the first place among the forms of violence in Luanda. Police units attend to these cases weekly, probably because they are more serious and require medical attention, a fact that, depending on the circumstances, cannot be ignored” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, August 17, 2025).

Reports indicate that domestic violence and mistreatment are the most recurrent types of incidents, frequently associated with parental neglect, especially paternal abandonment (Interviewee 2). Interviewees 2, 3, and 4 agree that many incidents do not reach police stations or posts due to the absence of a reporting culture, fear of reprisals, the social normalization of certain violent practices, and the fragility of protection and support mechanisms for victims.

Sexual violence is identified as one of the most concerning forms, occurring on a weekly basis (Interviewee 3). The seriousness of this type of crime is aggravated by the silence of victims and their families, hindering the work of justice, health, and social services. Interviewees draw attention to harmful sociocultural practices, such as accusations of witchcraft, which trigger physical aggression, stigmatization, and abandonment, amplifying the framework of structural and symbolic violence.

According to Interviewee 5, physical abuse is the most frequently dealt with by police units, largely due to its visibility and the need for immediate medical attention.

Main factors associated with violence against children

Violence against children has multiple and complex causes. Understanding the associated factors is crucial for developing effective interventions. Among the officers interviewed, the following points stood out:

“The problems that cause children to suffer violence due to conflicts within homes are visible, associated with negative traditional practices such as early marriages, child sexual abuse, street vending, and other factors that harm the child’s overall development” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, August 15, 2025)

“Usually, violence occurs within the homes themselves—the most frequent aggressors are parents or those who take their place, followed by others in the child’s social circle. Low-income areas are worrying, as sexual abuse and beatings increase significantly in these zones” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, August 30, 2025).

“The level of physical violence includes acts of hitting or beating, motivated by social difficulties in daily life, in family relationships and with the child, emotional instability, and alcoholism, which is at a worrying level” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, August 23, 2025).

“We are concerned that parents and family, who should be the main space for the child’s protection, often become the place where cases of sexual violence occur” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, August 20, 2025).

“The causes of violence are complex and, in many cases, originate from internal family problems, where the aggressor perceives himself as the ultimate authority. Domestic conflicts and other criminal acts that affect children are, in most cases, motivated by the excessive use of alcoholic beverages” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, August 17, 2025).

The testimonies indicate that family conflicts, coupled with the breakdown of households, create an environment conducive to the occurrence of various forms of violence against children, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence. The information obtained highlights that these situations are aggravated by negative traditional practices, such as child sexual abuse and child exploitation through street vending, factors that seriously compromise the child's integral development.

Violence manifests itself predominantly in the domestic space, with parents or direct caregivers being the main aggressors, reinforcing the seriousness of the phenomenon, since the child is in a relationship of dependence on the aggressor, making it difficult to report and break the cycle of violence. The data obtained associate physical violence with socioeconomic difficulties, family tensions, emotional dysregulation, and alcoholism, considered recurrent and worrying (Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 3).

The interviewees also emphasize the contradiction between the socially expected role of the family and the reality experienced by many children, highlighting that the increase in cases of intrafamilial sexual violence indicates the fragility of child protection mechanisms. This perception is reinforced when testimonies emphasize the excessive use of alcoholic beverages as a catalyst for violent behavior within the family, potentially escalating conflicts and actions that directly affect children.

The role of police action in preventing violence against children

The Angolan National Police, as an institution defending the rights, freedoms, and guarantees of citizens, plays a fundamental role in protecting children at risk. It seeks to identify and eliminate sources of violence, preventing it from developing in both public and private spaces. This part of the interview explored the responsibilities of the Police in protecting children and the challenges faced by law enforcement officers in this sensitive area. The objective was to present how police intervention focuses on preventing violence, considering that the sense of responsibility of the authorities is awakened by the levels of harm caused by these situations. Regarding this second topic, the officers' responses were as follows:

“The prevention and combat work conceived by the Police in the Province of Luanda, with regard to violence against children, has been directed at families, aiming to find ways to change the current worrying situation” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, August 15, 2025)

“The police strategy aims to prevent more children from becoming victims, maintaining greater vigilance and proximity to the communities. Above all, we ensure that partners are not afraid to report, because there are cases in which the children themselves report, but some mothers, although aware, do not want to report their partners” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, August 30, 2025).

“There are still families and abused individuals who are afraid to report it, either anonymously or due to cultural taboos and fear of reprisals. Therefore, the Police's strategies are aligned with community policing and constant communication with people in the most affected neighborhoods” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, August 23, 2025).

“The organization of police activity in the prevention of crime and violence against children is based on the community. Policing activities seek to mobilize the population to participate in the prevention of these cases. However, there are limitations resulting from the reduced presence of resources and police personnel” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, August 20, 2025).

“Regarding the adoption of strategies, community policing is the main approach, as we seek local experiences to reduce violence. We need to increase the number of officers and continue to interact with families, traditional authorities, and schools” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, August 17, 2025).

The analysis of the interviews reveals a discursive convergence among the participants regarding the central role of the police in preventing violence against children. Interviewees emphasize that police work aims to “change the current worrying situation,” demonstrating a preventive and educational approach, rather than a merely repressive one. This perspective is reinforced by interviewees 4 and 5, who highlight the organization of police activity based on the community, mobilizing families, traditional authorities, and schools, revealing a logic of co-production of security.

The testimonies also emphasize the need for a continuous police presence in the most affected neighborhoods, promoting dialogue and trust between the police and citizens. Some interviewees highlight that constant communication allows overcoming cultural and social resistance. A recurring element in the statements is the fear of reporting, a fact motivated by cultural taboos, economic dependence, fear of reprisals, and proximity between victim and aggressor (Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 4).

The police observe situations where mothers, although aware of the violence, choose not to report their partners who perpetrate it, even against their minor children. Interviewee 3 reinforces that fear persists even when anonymous reporting channels exist, highlighting the need to strengthen awareness and protection actions for victims and those reporting.

Interviewees point to structural limitations, such as the scarcity of material resources and police personnel. This insufficiency compromises territorial coverage and the capacity for preventive response. The data obtained reinforce the idea that there is a need to increase the number of officers to consolidate continuous interaction with the community and ensure greater effectiveness of the strategies adopted. In general, the interviews reveal that the police in Luanda Province adopt a preventive, community-based, and participatory approach in combating violence against children

Effectiveness of police actions in controlling violence against children

The question of the effectiveness of police actions in combating child violence was raised, reflecting the impact of intervention on prevention, investigation, and response to cases of violence. The responses on this topic were:

“Violence against children is perpetrated by family members [...] this group is difficult for the police to approach, as the purposes of the Police in revealing and discussing the difficulties of the family unit are opposed to the immediate interest of the family. Frequently, the Police need to make explicit a problem that the family does not wish to discuss at that moment, either because they do not want to expose their difficulties, or because they are not prepared to perceive them. Social communication bodies, churches, schools and shelters should collaborate more with the police authorities” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, August 15, 2025).

“The proximity of the aggressor makes disclosure difficult, increasing the risk of recidivism. Lack of collaboration can reduce the effectiveness of police action. To improve efficiency, it is necessary for the educational area, social protection institutions and the Police to act directly on the causes; only in this way can we reduce the rates of violence against children” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, August 30, 2025).

“Sensitive work is needed to establish bonds with the person accompanying the child to the police station, building a space of trust where abuse can be revealed, recidivism avoided, and the effects on the child’s health reduced. Only in this way can we improve the effectiveness of the police” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, August 23, 2025).

“Several prevention strategies require community collaboration to improve police work. Cases of physical and sexual violence have a great social impact, gaining intense visibility” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, August 20, 2025).

“It is essential to understand the ramifications of violence not only for parents, but for society as a whole. Child abuse can cause serious developmental damage, with long-term repercussions” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, August 17, 2025).

Interviewees agree that violence against children is frequently perpetrated by family members, making police intervention sensitive and complex. This is a type of crime that is “difficult for police to address,” because when attempting to reveal and discuss family conflicts, police action clashes with the family’s interest in concealing vulnerabilities. The close relationship between victim and perpetrator emerges as a critical factor that hinders the disclosure of abuse and increases the risk of recidivism (I2). The emotional, economic, or affective dependence of the child and caregivers on the perpetrator contributes to silence and the continuation of violence.

The accounts demonstrate that effective police action requires a high degree of professional sensitivity, especially during the initial contact with the child and the accompanying adult. This approach reveals police intervention not only as a repressive act, but as a relative process, centered on the protection of the victim and the humanization of care.

Another central point is the need for inter-institutional collaboration. The officers interviewed point out that media outlets, churches, schools, shelters, and other social institutions should actively collaborate with the police. They also advocate for greater coordination between the educational sector, social protection institutions, and the police, acting directly on the structural causes of violence, increasing the effectiveness of actions.

The data obtained highlight that types of violence, such as physical and sexual violence, generate a strong social impact and public visibility, exposing weaknesses in the prevention and response system. The results reveal that violence against children, especially in the family context, constitutes a complex phenomenon that challenges police action. The effectiveness of police intervention depends on a combination of professional sensitivity, trust, family collaboration, and inter-institutional coordination. The absence of these elements contributes to underreporting, recidivism, and the perpetuation of physical, psychological, and social harm caused to the child.

Discussion of Results

The analysis of the severity level and types of violence indicates that the most recurrent cases involve abandonment, physical violence, and sexual rape, generally severe. Most physical and verbal aggression is perpetrated by mothers and/or stepmothers, while fathers, uncles, neighbors, and other citizens close to the children appear more frequently as perpetrators of sexual violence (Pedro, 2023). Violence against children is a complex social phenomenon that transcends the individual dimension of the aggressor and is embedded in a broader context of structural, familial, and cultural vulnerabilities (Martins, 2004).

Families deal with abuse or violence suffered by children in different ways. Certain forms of corporal punishment are still accepted by some families, schools, and service centers. When perpetrated by a family member, the violence generates complaints that expose the aggressor, triggering discussions of problems previously restricted to the family sphere. The resulting conflicts involve the entire family, even impacting the person who filed the complaint (Cimpric, 2011). Police action should therefore strengthen the person who filed the complaint and protect the child, considering the highly tense situation. Disparities between urban and peri-urban areas are significant, particularly regarding physical violence, child labor, and early marriage (Itigi & Njuguna, 2013).

It is observed that the interviewees did not report significant emotional violence, nor did they emphasize abandonment or social isolation of children. Psychological aggression, although prevalent, is frequently ignored by families, who have no interest in reporting it to the police. Abandonment and neglect in care constitute forms of violence that are difficult to define, involving cultural, social, and economic aspects, and are frequently configured as mistreatment of children and adolescents (Marques et al., 1994).

Regarding the causes of violence against children, the study identifies family vulnerabilities stemming from poverty, excessive alcohol and drug use, and behavioral disorders. These elements, unevenly distributed, are closely correlated with social and family structure (Iborra & Sanmartín, 2011). This understanding reinforces the criminological perspective that crime and violence are not merely individual deviations, but responses to social contexts marked by marginalization.

Anomie and Tension Theory contributes to the analysis by explaining that socioeconomic difficulties, unemployment, and frustrations generated by the inability to achieve socially valued goals can trigger feelings of powerlessness and aggression (Hunter et al., 2004). These factors, present in the interviewees' statements, favor the externalization of violence against the most vulnerable family members, particularly children. The results indicate that police activity attempts to strengthen social bonds, informal surveillance, and collective accountability.

The weakening of family and community ties contributes to the perpetuation of violence, and therefore, strengthening proximity to citizens constitutes an essential prevention mechanism. Prevention involves the situational and social dimensions of crime, prioritizing a continuous police presence in the most vulnerable neighborhoods and building relationships of trust (Pinheiro, 2006). This approach aims to reduce the fear of reporting, breaking the silence imposed by cultural taboos, emotional dependence, and fear of reprisals—factors that hinder the disclosure of domestic violence crimes.

Strategies to encourage anonymous reporting can create accessible channels of communication. The results point to important structural limitations, such as the scarcity of police personnel and resources, which condition the effectiveness of the implemented strategies. In light of criminology, these limitations reflect institutional and structural constraints of the police system, highlighting the need for sustained public investment to ensure a continuous and effective response to violence against children.

In summary, police intervention adopts strategies that prioritize prevention, community policing, and social mobilization. However, the effectiveness of these strategies depends on strengthening human and material resources, the continuity of educational actions, and the consolidation of inter-institutional partnerships. Police interventions are based on community policing, instructing and raising awareness among citizens and families.

However, the need for guiding principles for conditional interventions—considering the victim’s position regarding the complaint—was identified, as well as supervision and programs that promote uniformity in police action. The degree of difficulty of police intervention depends on the dynamic attitude of families, which can change depending on the police action itself. Communities should constitute the main source of protection and solidarity for children. Working at the community level is effective in promoting social change, using non-coercive and non-judgmental approaches that emphasize the fulfillment of human rights (Hunter et al., 2004).

The technical-police programs designed for violence prevention—such as door-to-door contact, safe schools, victim support, and safe communities—were designed in a generic way. Police influence is more effective when there are permanent community policing teams, avoiding revictimization. Local initiatives, such as meetings with residents and door-to-door visits, allow the perceived severity of the situation to be linked to the authorities’ sense of responsibility.

The programs should include police work to raise awareness about non-violent relationships and alternative ways of disciplining children (Silva, 2012). In these cases, police action is limited to awareness-raising. Although operational procedures exist, it is essential to strengthen coordination between education, health, social services, and justice to increase the efficiency of the intervention.

The perception of the seriousness of the situation and the sense of personal responsibility directly influence police action in situations of explicit violence that disrupt public order. Compliance with legal guidelines, especially the definition of domestic violence as a public crime, is not always considered in its full legal scope, leaving police action conditioned by the individual interpretation of each officer. Strategies aim to curb domestic and family violence against children through coordinated actions, some specifically aimed at security forces (Burger, 2007).

- Prevention uses normative means to contain violence. Police stations need to strengthen ties with the community, creating structures that improve service and case clarification, protecting children within their own families. Despite limitations, community efforts have increased the effect of police presence, encouraging the reporting of cases of violence and rape of minors. The main restrictions are the lack of personnel trained in human rights and child

Conclusion

protection. This text analyzed institutional responses to violence against children in Angola, based on testimonies about police intervention in the Province of Luanda, identifying the challenges, measures, and strategies adopted to protect children. The study highlights three main conclusive axes of responses to the research objectives:

- First, there is a weekly occurrence of different forms of violence against children, including physical violence, sexual violence, and parental abandonment. The analysis of the testimonies shows that violence against children in Luanda takes multiple forms, with domestic violence, physical abuse, and sexual abuse predominating. A less reported form of violence, compared to the previous ones, is neglect and emotional abuse. The accounts demonstrate that many cases remain hidden or omitted, without being shared with the police.
- Secondly, the results reveal that violence against children cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as a result of the interaction between structural factors (poverty, social exclusion), cultural factors (harmful traditional practices), behavioral factors (alcoholism, authoritarianism), and emotional factors (family conflicts and lack of control). It is also observed that when the aggressor is not part of the family unit, the reporting of violence to the police tends to be faster and more direct, demonstrating that the proximity of the aggressor to the victim influences the complexity of the intervention. Convergingly, the interviewees identify the family and community space as the main locus of these practices, with the aggressors, in most cases, being adults or adolescents with more advanced physical and psychological maturity, who exercise caregiving, authority, or responsibility roles over the victims.
- Thirdly, although various measures are implemented in police intervention, these show generic actions in addressing violence. It is observed that the orientation towards community or proximity policing has received greater attention, but the interventions still lack clarity, standardization, and systematization among territorial units. In addition, the availability of operational capabilities compromises the technical approach to this criminal phenomenon and the effectiveness of actions aimed at protecting children’s rights and promoting non-violent practices directed at this vulnerable group.

- The results also point to a deficit in coordination between police action and local social assistance services, especially in communities with children in vulnerable situations. Therefore, there is a need to align police interventions with local social assistance structures in order to ensure a more efficient and comprehensive intervention.
- Despite the contributions of this study, it is important to point out two limitations that should be considered in conducting this study. The first is the limited number of participants. Furthermore, it focuses strictly on the perspective of police officers. The absence of other actors implies that the data reflect only a sectoral view and may be subject to response biases or the phenomenon of institutional desirability.
- The second limitation of the study is the fact that it prioritizes only police intervention to the detriment of an in-depth analysis of other fundamental institutions of the child protection system. Therefore, the actions of the courts, social services, health, education, and civil society organizations—crucial elements for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon—are outside the detailed scope of this study.
- In short, the study shows that a sustainable response to violence against children in Luanda depends on the integration of community policing, family awareness campaigns, and strengthening the child protection system networks in Angola. The solution to forms of violence against children does not lie solely in strengthening police actions.

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