



Regional Synthesis Report

Towards Safer Schools for Children

Preventing Violence Against Children in
Schools in South and Southeast Asia



Coalition for
Good Schools





VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS IN ASIA

Violence against children (VAC) in school settings is often unrecognized and unreported. Schools often lack knowledge and financial resources to play an effective role and an overall commitment to tackle VAC. Nonetheless, VAC in schools (VACiS) harms children, limits their learning and educational attainment, and extends harm to families and the broader community.

Asia is home to the largest school-going population globally, with over 800 million children¹ and adolescents enrolled in educational institutions across the continent. Despite this, there is a significant gap in comprehensive and comparable data on VACiS. This data gap limits a nuanced understanding of how violence manifests in different social and cultural contexts, as well as its impact on children's well-being and educational outcomes. Without robust evidence, designing effective and contextually relevant strategies to address the issue becomes challenging. Increasingly, there is recognition of the need for high-quality data and evidence on VACiS throughout the region to support long-term solutions that make schools safe, inclusive, and enabling spaces for all children.

In this context, the Coalition for Good Schools undertook a scoping study in ten Asian countries - Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos (Lao PDR), Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, The Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam - to understand the broad contours of the problem and formulate priorities for action. This document has been developed for practitioners to understand the landscape in which they work, for policymakers and regional alliances to understand commonalities across diverse contexts, and for donors to guide investment. It includes synthesized information from across the region on prevalence of VAC in schools, shares some key resources useful for practitioners and policymakers, challenges any prevailing notions about VACiS, and shares key recommendations to guide in developing programmes and in policy making.

This study is a qualitative and scene-setting review, which aims to paint a broad picture drawing from existing data of variable levels of rigour. Due to lack of comparable cross-country data, the authors have not attempted a comparative analysis, but identify common themes across the vast and diverse region. In the absence of systematic data collection on VACiS in Asia, this report highlights data that are indicative of trends and point attention to existing gaps. The study confirmed that VACiS is a significant problem across the ten countries, with country-level differences in how violence manifests. Common overarching themes that emerged include:

- Asia has the world's largest school-going population. There are 436² million children in the countries covered by this study, and one in every three of these children³ are estimated to experience violence in schools.

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/future-800-million-children-across-asia-risk-their-education-has-been-severely-affected-covid-19>

² Estimated based on 10 country specific reports in this study (see individual reports for full details).

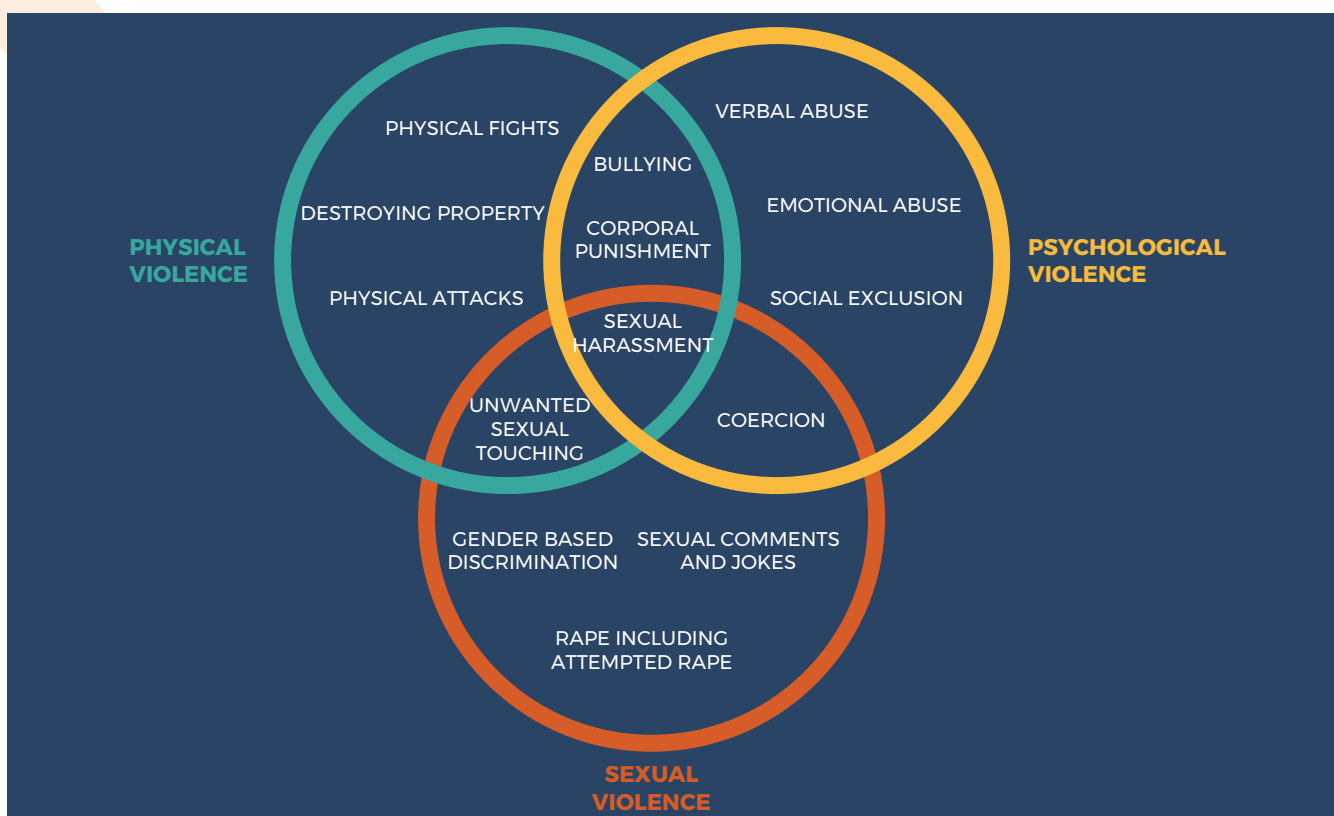
³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ending-bullying-and-violence-school-should-be-top-priority-asia-pacific>

- All children are vulnerable to VACiS but some children carry heightened risk. Children's socio-economic status, gender, disability and sexual identity among others exacerbate the violence perpetrated against them.
- Corporal punishment, peer violence (bullying) and cyberbullying (including online abuse and exploitation) are among the most prevalent forms of violence in schools.
- Given the high prevalence of VACiS and the limited country-specific, contextual evidence on vulnerabilities and underlying factors, there is a pressing need for sustained investment in generating robust, locally relevant data and in developing and implementing responsive strategies for prevention. Such investments are essential to inform and strengthen programmes and policies that ensure safe and inclusive learning environments.

NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF VIOLENCE

Children's experience of violence is complex and multifaceted. Violence can occur in various forms across multiple settings and is shaped by a range of intersecting factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status, disability, and broader social and cultural norms.

The Conceptual Framework of School Violence and Bullying is a useful tool to understand the different forms of school violence, which includes physical, psychological and sexual violence, and can take several forms including corporal punishment, sexual abuse and assault. There are multiple national and regional surveys and global reports that have established the worldwide prevalence of VACiS, which includes violence perpetrated by adults in schools including teachers and staff as well as peer violence. It is common for children to experience more than one form of violence simultaneously. Those who experience one form of violence are often more vulnerable to further risk of violence.



Source: UNESCO 2019. *Behind the Numbers: ending school violence and bullying*.

In the countries covered in this scoping study, there are over 436 million school-going children enrolled in primary and secondary levels in both government and private schools. Considering UNESCO's estimates⁴ that 30% of children in Asia experience violence in school settings, at least 130 million children in the region may have experienced some form of school-related violence. Given the sheer scale of the issue and its profound social and economic consequences, addressing VACiS must be treated as an urgent priority in these countries.

Much of what is known about preventing violence during childhood has emerged from research published in the Global North except for data emerging from conflict settings or high-risk communities. This review presents a Global South perspective where findings prove that physical violence from adults to children in the form of corporal punishment or structural violence are the biggest concerns. In the ten Asian countries included in the scoping study, the diversity in social and cultural practices, economic conditions and gender norms implicitly affect how violence manifests in schools. This section further discusses the nature and extent of school violence across these countries.

Violence Perpetrated by Adults in Schools

Evidence from both South Asian and South-East Asian countries included in the study show that children face significant violence from adults in positions of power in the form of discrimination, exclusion and other forms of psychological maltreatment and physical and sexual violence. However, there is currently an overall lack of standardized, cross-country data on violence perpetrated by adults in schools.

Socio-culturally, age-based structural violence in the region is a result of cultural definitions of what it means to be a child and of what it means to be a parent or an adult. Often, justification for child maltreatment (i.e. physical and emotional abuse) stems from the perceived role of an adult as a form of discipline and the need to make children learn the culturally defined 'correct' ways to behave.⁵ This notion of adult power over children is at the core of violence perpetrated by adults.

Children from marginalized sections of society including the economically poor and socially disadvantaged, neurodivergent and differently-abled are likely to face more violence from teachers than other children.⁶ This violence is a manifestation of existing inequalities in power, social disparities, exclusion, discrimination and aggression that exist in families, communities and the society at large.

Emotional or psychological violence in schools includes restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.⁷ Emotional violence is the most prevalent form of violence in schools followed by physical violence.⁸ For example, the prevalence of psychological aggression in schools is reported to be at 77.6% in Nepal and 74% in the Punjab province of Pakistan - some of the highest rates in the region.⁹

⁴ UNESCO 2019. Behind the Numbers: ending school violence and bullying.

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/sites/unicef.org/rosa/files/2018->

⁶ UNESCO, 2016: School violence and bullying: Global status report, 2016

⁷ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children#:~:text=Emotional%20or%20psychological%20violence%20includes,physical%20forms%20of%20hostile%20treatment.>

⁸ ICRW and PLAN. February 2015. 'Are Schools Safe and Equal Places for Girls and Boys in Asia. Research Findings on School-Related Gender- Based Violence as quoted in UNICEF, 2016

⁹ Preventing violence in Schools - Lessons from South Asian Countries. Know Violence in Childhood and SAIEVAC

In India, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR 2011) reported that the practice of abusing children verbally is widespread. The conclusion was based on interviews with a total of 6,632 children aged 03 to 17 years across seven states. More than 81 % of children in the study had been told that they were not capable of learning.¹⁰

As part of the initiative to identify identity-based discrimination in schools, National Dalit Movement for Justice (NDMJ) – National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) conducted a National Public Hearing on ‘Identity-based discrimination and violence in school education’ in 2015. In many cases that were deposed at the hearing, children from a particular community were made to do menial jobs, which included cleaning toilets, classrooms and even the principal’s office. In residential hostels, young students are made to run errands including personal chores of the management and faculty. The case of midday meals being served from a height to the children of a particular community and being made to sit next to the toilets are blatant incidents of untouchability being practiced in schools. In another case, children were brutally beaten by the school authority for drinking water from the teacher’s earthen pot.¹¹

A study in Asia, which covered sites in Nepal and Pakistan and involved over 9,000 students (girls and boys aged 12–17 years, Grades 6–8), revealed that 61% had experienced emotional violence during the past six months in Pakistan.¹²

Corporal punishment is the most common form of violence in schools across the 10 countries

The focus of research on VAC in the region has long been on bullying. However, corporal punishment was found to be the most common form of violence, and reflects children’s lack of power and their low social status within society and the family, as well as in the classroom. Children are often made to feel invisible and the assumption is that adults know best and thus must make decisions about children’s lives. The teacher is considered a figure of authority who must be obeyed while the students should adjust and comply.¹³ In Asian schools, corporal punishment is an acceptable form of disciplining the child. As a result, aggressive behaviour by teachers is often downplayed and condoned as a necessity. It is viewed simply as a means of keeping children in line and making them obedient.

Corporal punishment includes “any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light, as well as non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading.”¹⁴ Corporal punishment is high in all countries of South Asia. Child Fund International’s research in Indonesia found that 100% of parents believe that children are the teachers’ responsibility and therefore (parents) do not question corporal punishment in school.¹⁵ In Nepal the estimated prevalence according to different studies is 81.7%, in India it is 99% and in the Punjab province of Pakistan it is 81%.¹⁶ It is equally common in South-East Asian countries with high prevalence in Indonesia and Vietnam.

¹⁰ NCPCR. 2011. ‘Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools.’ New Delhi: Author.

¹¹ NDMJ (NCDHR), 2017. Exclusion in Schools: A Study on Practice of Discrimination and Violence

¹² ICRW and PLAN. February 2015. ‘Are Schools Safe and Equal Places for Girls and Boys in Asia. Research Findings on School-Related Gender- Based Violence as quoted in UNICEF, 2016

¹³ <https://archive.crin.org/en/docs/resources/treaties/crc.28/UNICEF-SAsia-Subm.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/introduction/>

¹⁵ <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/are-we-legitimizing-violence-in-asian-schools/>

¹⁶ Know violence in childhood, 2016, Preventing Violence in Schools, Lessons from South Asian Countries.

'The Young Lives' longitudinal study found that in Vietnam 59% of 8-year-olds had been physically punished by a teacher in the past week. All forms of corporal punishment were more prevalent in boys than girls and in private schools than in public schools.¹⁶ Among 8-year-olds in India, corporal punishment was more common for boys (83%) than girls (73%), in rural areas (79%) than in urban areas (75%), and in public schools (80%) than in private schools (77%).¹⁷

Despite corporal punishment being prohibited in school in Thailand, a survey in 2020 revealed a high prevalence of corporal punishment (60%).¹⁸

A survey of students aged 12-17 years, conducted between October 2013 and March 2014 in Pakistan, found that 44% had experienced physical violence by teachers in school in the last six months, and 30% had been locked in the toilet by teachers.¹⁹ Parents and teachers who participated in the survey said corporal punishment is on the decline in Pakistan, but students said it is still prevalent and is justified as a corrective measure for students who commit mistakes. Teachers expressed a belief that corporal punishment is necessary for ensuring good academic achievement and making students focus more on their studies.²⁰ These common beliefs reflect a sense of impunity among teachers and school authorities, even as such justifications are increasingly discredited.²¹

Sexual Violence in School

Specific data on sexual violence in school settings is limited. Data on sexual violence perpetrated by adults in schools in different countries is available through media reports and crime data in terms of an absolute number of cases reported but that does not show prevalence. Obtaining reliable data on the prevalence of sexual violence in or around the school is difficult partly due to confidentiality concerns, fears of retaliation and stigma that affect children's decision to speak up about sexual violence incidents.

While prevalence data on sexual violence across the region is not strictly comparable, Cambodia's 2013 VACS survey found that of the children aged between 13-17, 6.4% of girls and 5.2% of boys said that they had experienced at least one incident of sexual abuse, and in Lao PDR, VACS data found that among those who experienced sexual abuse as a child, 8.7% of females and 12.2% of males missed school because of their experience.²² And in a UNICEF report, 10.5% of children reported being victims of sexual assault while at school.

A study by the University of Indonesia found that sexual assault in schools is common and frequent problems include teachers forcibly hugging or inappropriately touching students (Elimination of Violence Against Children, Ministry for Women's Empowerment and Child Rights 2015). According to a National Baseline Study on VAC in The Philippines in 2016, sexual harassment is also common in schools, which affects both primary and secondary school students in The Philippines, with females being particularly at risk.

¹⁷ As cited <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Vietnam.pdf> (Ogando Portela, M. J. & Pells, K. (2015), Corporal Punishment in Schools: Longitudinal Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Viet Nam, Innocenti Discussion Paper No. 2015- 02, Florence, Italy: UNICEF Office of Research)

¹⁸ <https://tdri.or.th/en/2020/12/teachers-need-to-learn-child-rights/>

¹⁹ <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Pakistan.pdf>

²⁰ <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/regions/vac-full-report-lao-pdr-final-may-2018.pdf>

²¹ In this document the prevalence of peer-to-peer violence has been drawn primarily from UNESCO (2019) which uses data from the Global School-Based Health Survey (GSHS) of the World Health Organization. GSHS data for peer-to-peer bullying, physical fights and physical attacks is available for nine out of ten countries included in this study (excluding India).

²² UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

Peer Violence

According to UNESCO (2019), peer violence includes bullying, physical fights and cyberbullying.²³ Bullying is defined as aggressive behaviour that involves unwanted, negative actions, is repeated over time, and occurring when there is an imbalance of power or strength between the perpetrator or perpetrators and the victim. Bullying is the most prominent form of violence by peers.

The overall prevalence of bullying in the Asian region is 30.3% which is slightly lower than the global median of 32%. Bullying across the ten countries covered by the scoping study varies between 13.25% to 51.2%, with the highest prevalence of bullying reported from The Philippines and the lowest from Lao PDR. It is more prevalent in Nepal, India and Pakistan compared to the South-East Asian countries included in the study with the exception of The Philippines. While the prevalence of bullying in The Philippines and South Asian countries is over 40%, it ranges between 20% to 35% in Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia. As data sources, years of studies, and measurement methods vary, prevalence data are not strictly comparable; however from these small studies, the trend points to bullying being a significant problem. For instance, this study highlights that:

- More boys than girls face bullying in six out of the ten countries included in the study. In Cambodia and Vietnam both boys and girls face a similar magnitude of bullying.
- More boys compared to girls face physical bullying in particular in nine out of the ten countries covered by the study and this aligns with the global trend. However, more girls than boys experience psychological bullying in Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. In South Asian countries, the prevalence of psychological bullying is of a similar magnitude for boys and girls.
- Peer sexual bullying victimization is greater in boys compared to girls, except in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand where the prevalence is marginally higher in girls. Globally too, there are no major differences in the extent to which boys and girls experience sexual bullying.²⁴
- Over 37% of children in Nepal and Pakistan engage in physical fights. From the South-East Asian countries included in the scoping study, the prevalence of physical fights is highest in The Philippines and Malaysia and lowest in Lao PDR and Cambodia.²⁵
- Evidence presented by UNESCO (2019) shows that Indonesia and Thailand have witnessed a decrease in bullying between 2003-2015 and 2002-2014 respectively. Indonesia has also witnessed a decrease in physical fights in the same period. However, The Philippines has reported an increase in bullying and a decrease in physical fights among peers.

Cyberbullying is a Growing Trend

“Connected classrooms mean school no longer ends once a student leaves class and, unfortunately, neither does schoolyard bullying.”²⁶ Globally, one in three Internet users are estimated to be children.²⁷ In Asia, the proportion of children with Internet access varied widely

²³ UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

²⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/unicef-poll-more-third-young-people-30-countries-report-being-victim-online-bullying>

²⁵ <https://childfundalliance.org/2023/05/30/asias-families-must-be-empowered-to-combat-online-abuse/>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Livingstone, S., Carr, J., and Byrne, J. (2015) One in three: The task for global Internet governance in addressing children's rights. Global Commission on Internet Governance: Paper Series. London: CIGI and Chatham House, <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/one-three-Internet-governance-and-childrens-rights>

by country – ranging between 100% in Hong Kong to 22% in Indonesia²⁸ – as per one estimate. Children use cyberspace for education, reading books, playing games, peer engagement and sourcing information, all of which contribute to increased usage and time spent online. The Covid-19 pandemic increased online activities manifold with the Internet being used for formal learning, entertainment and for social interaction. Increased access to the Internet and digital devices from an early age increases their risk of experiencing cyberbullying across the region.

There is no uniform evidence or data source which provides the status of cyberbullying in schools in different countries in Asia. According to the scoping study, cyberbullying is increasing in all the ten countries with India, Indonesia and Malaysia having significantly high prevalence rates. Cyberbullying increases with age and hence children in secondary and higher secondary school face more cyberbullying. Children in private schools face more cyberbullying than those in government schools. Both boys and girls face a similar magnitude of cyberbullying, though girls usually face more sexual bullying online.

Anonymity, the possibility of multiple aggressors teaming up to victimize and the rapid dissemination of information or misinformation online all contribute to the potential for great harm to victims.²⁹ Cyberbullying often involves a sexual component such as “sexting” or circulating sexually explicit photos or messages which gravely shames and silences the victim. The psychological toll of cyberbullying can be immense due to the relentless, inescapable assault on victims and its damaging effects are compounded by its limitless reach leaving a footprint in cyberspace forever.³⁰

What does the data say about online peer violence?

According to a study by Child Fund International, 50% of Indonesia’s high school and college students bully others online and 60% have faced bullying in the last three months, suggesting that peer violence may be moving online even as physical bullying decreases. This has included non-consensual sharing of private information, stalking, defamation, harassment, sexual abuse, threats, and extortion.³¹ A poll released by UNICEF and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) revealed that one in every three young people in 30 countries said they have been a victim of online bullying, with one in five reporting having skipped school due to cyberbullying and violence.³²

Some Children are more Vulnerable to Bullying and Other Forms of Violence Than Others

Children of different ages experience violence differently: Age is one of the determinants of how children experience violence and how they respond to it. As children grow older, they are less likely to be bullied, to be involved in a physical fight or to be physically attacked. In contrast, older students appear to be more at risk of cyberbullying than younger students.³³

Boys and girls experience violence differently: There are differences in violence and bullying experienced by boys and girls. However, the pattern is not consistent across the ten Asian countries covered by the study. The socio-cultural and gender norms in countries have a significant bearing on this trend. As per the data from the Global School-based Student Health

³¹ <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/cyberbullying-in-asia/#>

³² Ibid.

³³ UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

Survey (GSHS) boys are more likely to experience physical bullying than girls.³⁴ The Young Lives data from India also reiterated that boys were at significantly greater risk of physical and verbal bullying, while girls experienced more indirect and relational bullying.³⁵

Boys are more likely to be victims of corporal punishment from teachers who are influenced by gender stereotypes and expectations about masculinity. Girls are systematically disadvantaged due to their gender and are particularly more vulnerable to the most severe forms of sexual violence, and as a result, may suffer detrimental consequences, including unwanted pregnancies, rejection and loss of social support networks.³⁶ According to a UNESCO³⁷ report from the Asia Pacific region, girls and gender-diverse people are more likely to experience sexualized hate and online threats and this is likely to bear out in school settings as well.

Many children do not feel comfortable reporting their experiences of violence and evidence suggests that boys are less likely to speak up as they are conditioned by the norms of masculinity and are not comfortable sharing their vulnerability publicly. Many girls do not report gender-based violence like sexual harassment, sexualized comments and inappropriate behavior from teachers and male peers because of shame, stigma and fear of restriction on their movements.

Children who are perceived to be 'different' in any way are more likely to face violence in school. In the 2016 UNICEF U-Report/SRSG-VAC opinion poll on the experience of bullying to which 100,000 young people in 18 countries responded, among those who had experienced bullying, 25% reported that they had been bullied because of their physical appearance, 25% because of their gender or sexual orientation and 25% because of their ethnicity or national origin.³⁸

Children's perceived differences increase their vulnerability to violence. Often there is more than one factor present that compounds this vulnerability. Some key ways in which children are labelled as 'different' include:

- **Physical Appearance:** In Asia, predominantly girls experience bullying based on physical appearance, while boys on race, color or ethnicity.³⁹ Girls report bullying because of looks more frequently than boys which aligns with the gender expectations and norms of beauty associated with girls.
- **Disability:** As the United Nations report 'Tackling Violence in Schools' (2011) states, 'Powerlessness, social isolation and stigma faced by children with disabilities make them highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation in a range of settings, including in schools.'⁴⁰ This stands true for children with learning difficulties too. The fact that a large proportion of children with disabilities choose to drop out of school has a relation to the exclusion from and within the traditional classroom. The global systematic review and meta-analysis (2022) shows that overall, around one-third of children with disabilities survived violence and that these children were more than two times as likely to have experienced violence than their non-disabled peers. They also experienced higher rates of both traditional bullying and

³⁴ UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

³⁵ <https://www.younglives.org.uk/news/poverty-inequity-and-childrens-experiences-bullying>

³⁶ Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (2016). Ending the torment: Tackling bullying from the schoolyard to cyberspace

³⁷ UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

³⁸ Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. June 2011. 'Tackling Violence in Schools: A Global Perspective.' Prepared for the expert meeting held in Oslo, Norway. For information on increased vulnerability of children with disabilities to corporal punishment

³⁹ UNESCO 2019: Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

⁴⁰ <https://www.younglives.org.uk/news/poverty-inequity-and-childrens-experiences-bullying>

cyberbullying.⁴¹

- **Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression:** Violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in educational settings targets students who are, or who are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT); and others whose gender expression does not fit into binary gender norms.

Apart from explicit acts of violence, there is 'implicit' homophobic and transphobic violence in the education sector, due to policies, systems and curricula that reinforce or embed negative stereotypes related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Some simple examples could be denying LGBTQI students the right to express their gender identity or adhering to gender-specific uniforms and hair regulations.⁴²

- **Poverty and social status:** Children and adolescents who are socially and economically disadvantaged often face increased exclusion, stress, discrimination and denigration in school both by peers and teachers. The evident hierarchies in the social structure are mirrored in the school environment leading to violence and bullying.

In the Young Lives study, children from poor families were consistently found to have experienced higher rates of bullying.⁴³ Teachers are more likely to target children and adolescents from stigmatized and marginalized populations, for example, refugee and migrant children may be punished for not being able to speak the language of instruction⁴⁴ or not able to cope with the pace of education.

WHY DOES VIOLENCE IN ASIA'S SCHOOLS PREVAIL?

Violence is often a hidden and invisible dimension of children's time in school

55% of LGBT students in Thailand experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence in the month before the study. 24% of heterosexual students experienced homophobic or transphobic violence because of their gender expressions.⁴⁵

16% of LGBT students experienced verbal harassment in schools in Nepal.⁴⁶

LGBTQI students both in urban and rural areas in Laos have reported discrimination while at school. As a result, students tend to drop out as there are no policies and practices which support LGBTQI students, and they are forced to hide their identity.⁴⁷

⁴¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(22\)00033-5/abstract#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20risk%20of%20violence,meta%2Danalysis%20of%20observational%20studies.&text=found%20that%2026.7%25%20of,for%20their%20non%2Ddisabled%20peers](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(22)00033-5/abstract#:~:text=Prevalence%20and%20risk%20of%20violence,meta%2Danalysis%20of%20observational%20studies.&text=found%20that%2026.7%25%20of,for%20their%20non%2Ddisabled%20peers)

⁴² UNESCO 2016: Out in the Open, Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression

⁴³ Experiences of Peer Bullying among Adolescents and Associated Effects on Young Adult Outcome: Longitudinal Evidence from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, *Innocenti Discussion Paper* 2016-03, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

⁴⁴ Cited in UNICEF (2014). Hidden in plain sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children

⁴⁵ UNESCO, 'Bullying targeting secondary school students who are or are perceived to be transgender or same-sex attracted: Types, prevalence, impact, motivation and preventive measures in 5 provinces of Thailand', Mahidol University, Plan International Thailand, UNESCO Bangkok Office, Bangkok, 2014

⁴⁶ UNDP and the Williams Institute, 'Surveying Nepal's Sexual and Gender Minorities: An Inclusive Approach - Executive Summary', UNDP, Bangkok, 2014

⁴⁷ https://www.apcom.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-1126_Report_APCOM_FinanceInc_LaoPDR_Rev_2-withLogos.pdf

It's evident that violence in schools cannot be seen in isolation from the existing social disparities, exclusion, discrimination and aggression that exist in families, communities and society at large. Violence in the form of scolding, slapping, punishing etc. is an accepted form of disciplining used by adults at home and in communities in Asia. Such disciplining is not considered violence unless it leads to extreme physical or emotional hurt or repercussions. It is because of this normalization that violence in schools remains invisible and not considered an urgent problem impacting generations of children.

Hierarchical structure justifies adult authority over children

Hierarchical structures and practices are key characteristics of social life in Asia and extend to schools as well. The teacher's authority is central to the teaching-learning process and is

Most marginalized school students experience daily corporal punishment in Gurugram city in India, according to a survey carried out by NGO Agrasar in November 2018. Interviews were carried out with 522 children of migrant workers and their parents. The survey found that 80% of children were beaten several times a week, compared to a national average of 50%. Children said they experienced both mild and severe forms of physical punishment, as well as verbal harassment referring to their "poor upbringing". The research also found that most parents approved of corporal punishment (91%) and used it themselves (74%).⁴⁸

used to reinforce rules or expected behavior in classrooms. Violence in the form of corporal punishment, scolding, discrimination or exclusion from class activities is justified as a way of controlling and disciplining 'disruptive' students. Existing power dynamics in society play out in schools as well and children continue to face discrimination and abuse because of their marginalized backgrounds based on caste, class and religion.

Children are not perceived as rights holders

Social approval of various forms of punishment for children is evident in Asia. This points towards a relatively low status of children. They are perceived as possessions rather than individual rights-holders who have no voice and agency. Children's opinions, experiences and choices are not given due importance and they must accept and obey decisions taken by adults on their behalf.

Lived experience of violence normalizes violence

Many children witness domestic violence in families in their growing years. As a result of this lived experience of constant aggression, they not only accept violence inflicted on themselves but also justify the use of violence over others. Hence children use peer violence as a means of resolving conflict, exercising power over others and reinforcing their position in the social hierarchy.

Apart from exposure to violence in family and society, children have prolonged exposure to social media, streaming platforms, video games, movies, influencers and advertisements that further reinforce the use of violence. Moreover, children are consuming media for longer duration, however, most of this content is not age-appropriate and children are not able to process it in a manner so as to be able to make proper decisions for themselves. Neither the schools nor the homes are imparting children with the required skills to manage their emotions.

⁴⁸ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/80-of-government-school-children-face-corporal-punishment-saysstudy/articleshow/68087661.cm>

The constant and increasing competition created by social media also generates an environment that breeds violence between peers.

Institutional set-up of schools and capacity of teachers

Teachers are the key actors in developing a safe environment conducive to learning. They are often not trained enough to understand and address the varied emotional, social and pedagogical needs of their students. Their training prepares them to teach a subject well, however, it does not equip them to understand critical aspects of childhood and positive discipline methodologies.

Also, there are institutional limitations like large class size, high teacher-to-pupil ratio and lack of adequate resources like space, learning material and time to use engaging teaching methodologies which result in teachers using fear and corporal punishment as a means of delivering their duties. Finally, teachers are an integral part of society and hence follow the same societal norms and practices of exclusion and discrimination in schools as well.

It is not surprising that among different types of school violence prevention interventions, those focusing on providing teachers with skills to improve their relationships with students and manage students' behaviors had the strongest and most reliable results in terms of lessening disruptive and aggressive behaviors in the classroom, improving learning outcomes and enhancing pro-social behavior's later in life.⁴⁹

STATUS OF STATE ACTION AGAINST CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

| Countries where corporal punishment is banned in all settings | |
|---|---|
| Lao PDR | Lao PDR has banned all forms of corporal punishment against children in all settings including school, home, institutions and public spaces. |
| Nepal | Nepal has banned all forms of corporal punishment against children in all settings including school, home, institutions and public spaces. |
| Countries where corporal punishment is banned in schools | |
| Thailand | Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools. |
| Cambodia | Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools in Cambodia. Cambodia has publicly committed to enacting legislation to explicitly prohibit all forms of corporal punishment in all settings including the home, without delay. |
| The Philippines | Corporal punishment is prohibited in schools. The Philippines have publicly committed to enacting legislation to explicitly prohibit all forms of corporal punishment in all settings including the home, without delay. |
| Vietnam | Corporal punishment is not prohibited in the home, alternative care settings and day care. Corporal punishment is unlawful in schools under Article 75 of the Education Law 2005. |

⁴⁹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/unacceptable-and-intolerable-reality-corporal-punishment-children-and-youth>

Countries with regional bans but not national prohibition

| | |
|----------|---|
| Pakistan | Corporal punishment is prohibited in some but not all schools. Except where it is explicitly prohibited, such as in the Islamabad Capital Territory, Sindh and Punjab Provinces, corporal punishment remains lawful in schools under Article 89 of the Penal Code 1860. |
| India | Corporal punishment is not banned across settings. The legislation on the Right to Free and Compulsory Education bans corporal punishment in schools but all schools are not covered under the legislation. |

Countries that have made public statements but yet to enact bans

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Malaysia | Corporal punishment is not prohibited in schools or in the home. |
| Indonesia | Corporal punishment is yet to be prohibited in Indonesia. Indonesia has publicly committed to enacting legislation to explicitly prohibit all forms of corporal punishment in all settings including the home, without delay. |

Source: The country's status on the prohibition of corporal punishment is drawn from <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory>

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Violence in schools can be prevented, and there is growing acknowledgement that VACiS is a priority in the global commitment to end violence. Unfortunately, across the world children are denied their right to education in settings that could be effectively made free of violence. With the largest number of school-going children in the world, Asian countries must prioritize and allocate sufficient investment to address VACiS, and national-level action must be situated within broader regional-level efforts.

Based on this review, the following recommendations can help us build dialogue and create actionable change for our schools and our children:

- Government action at the national level - in close collaboration with education and child protection stakeholders - is required to address and prevent VACiS across Asia. Each country should design multi-sectoral strategies based on available evidence and proven interventions for addressing violence at school. Dedicated indicators should be developed for tracking progress in this strategy, accompanied by iterative learning from interventions themselves.
- Multi-level working groups of key stakeholders from government, education sector, research and advocacy institutions and those working with children and young people with a strong focus on intersectionality and norm change should be mobilized to collaborate and amplify the call to prevent VAC in schools, and to ensure accountability for action.
- Violence prevention efforts must be situated within the education sector, and national policy and legislative frameworks should be comprehensively reviewed and revised to address school violence. Though legislation prohibiting corporal punishment is an essential first step, many Asian countries still lack explicit legislation against corporal punishment in schools; in countries where legislation exists, lack of proper implementation and monitoring is evident in the high prevalence violence reported by children.

- Education policies should focus on improving children's experience of school and developing children's agency. This includes promoting enabling environments, considerations for child well-being, prevention of harm and abuse, and learning without fear, rooted within a child rights based approach while aiming to promote retention and improved learning outcomes.
- These commitments should remain central in governance regulatory frameworks and relevant budget allocations. National teacher training, curriculum and pedagogy should include necessary inputs on child physical and emotional well-being, as well as positive discipline such that teachers can understand children better and establish a learner-centric environment that facilitates learning without pressure and fear.
- Evidence-based initiatives informed by robust, up-to-date data are essential to drive policy advocacy, programme interventions and financial investments. At present, there is a deficiency in the availability and quality of recent research on the prevalence of school violence in Asia. Lack of regular and systematically gathered empirical data at local, country and regional levels prevents comparable cross country and regional analysis of the problem. Multiple stakeholders such as the government, education sector actors and research institutions must invest in regular data collection on the experience of violence in schools.
- In the Asian context, it is imperative to adopt an intersectional lens in that considers the range of sociocultural, economic, and political factors like race, class, gender, sexuality, and other individual characteristics that overlap and reinforce each other to create unique experiences of violence for children. Prevention programmes must acknowledge that some children are more likely to experience violence than others and that the severity and frequency of violence can vary. Policies should address multiple forms and levels of oppression and any intervention should be carefully designed and adapted for each context. Response services for children who suffer violence should be inclusive and accessible to all children.
- A whole-school approach should be adopted that recognizes VACiS as a systemic problem by addressing the entire school culture that condones violence. Violence is often steeped in the school culture and is connected to prevailing gender and social norms; schools should co-create and be mandated to embed safeguarding through actionable policies and practices. The entire school ecosystem should be addressed with meaningful engagement of teachers and staff, responsive codes of conduct, student participation in school management and regular monitoring for accountability of everyone associated with this system.
- Knowledge generation on school violence and disseminating research, guidance and good practice based evidence will boost collaboration and amplify learning across countries. There are many examples of successful programmes aimed at changing school culture, promoting positive discipline and addressing multiple forms of violence. These local solutions need to be better assessed, and any adaptations need to be contextualized to each context, rather than mere translations for adoption.
- A multi-country regional taskforce should be formed to generate knowledge, support adaptation and implementation, and steer advocacy for state and private sector action to ensure schools are safe spaces for children. Collaborations at the regional level that leverage existing platforms such as ASEAN and the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) to ensure commitment and action at the highest levels should be pursued. Regional private philanthropic platforms such as Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (AVPN) may also be engaged as allies to bring attention and investment to VACiS. Despite their extreme diversity, Asian countries would benefit from regional coordination to ensure shared messages are amplified.

The Coalition for Good Schools encourages consideration of these recommendations as part of a growing collective agenda on preventing violence in and through schools. We hope these recommendations will guide practitioners from the region to inform local and national advocacy with diverse stakeholders. We also hope this document will guide policymakers throughout the region and help inform the growing network of civil society groups, researchers, funders, academics and thought-leaders who recognize the imperative to prevent all forms of violence in and through Asia's schools.

Solutions to end violence do exist, and violence can be prevented in our lifetime. Core components of effective, foundational interventions should be considered in all our collective efforts going forward. Such interventions should emphasize:

1. **Purpose:** recognition that schools exist to cultivate and develop children's potential rather than to act as an assembly line that processes them.
2. **Values:** that schools can and should promote justice, equality and empathy with a clear emphasis on social citizenship;
3. **Affirmation of children's rights and agency:** that children truly are independent beings with rights and therefore their agency should be nurtured through modelling and opportunities to participate;
4. **Shifting norms:** embracing a process of change that honours every child's inherent dignity, regardless of gender, caste, creed or other arbitrary category; and
5. **Promoting progressive pedagogy:** in emerging economies we are going to need a multitalented citizenry, not just those who can memorize facts. Creative, problem-solving, empathetic learners emerge from schools that do not use fear to control them.

Schools can act as the epicenter of VAC, and therefore can also serve as the best learning and implementation ground to prevent VAC. Hence, the effect of school-based initiatives to prevent VAC can generate manifold results. We hope these recommendations will prove useful to grow the field of violence prevention in and through schools, and provide helpful insights for the regional practitioners on the very frontlines of this critical work.



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