



Country Report

Towards Safer Schools for Children: India

Preventing Violence Against Children in
Schools in South and Southeast Asia



Coalition for
Good Schools





About Coalition for Good Schools

The Coalition for Good Schools is a collection of leading Global South practitioners committed to preventing violence against children (VAC) in and through schools across Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Coalition elevates insights and evidence-based interventions in order to provide critical tools, data and best practices for sustainable, local solutions. This ten-country document review series has been initiated by the Asia Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools, coordinated by Samya Development Resources Private Limited (SAMYA).

The Asia Hub commissioned 10 country reports on the state of VAC in and around schools in the broader region, in collaboration with core partners in each context. Each report provides an overview of how violence manifests in educational settings, explores contributing social, cultural and economic factors for VAC in each context, and provides a brief review of the policy landscape, national leadership and strategy for ending violence. While school violence is the primary focus, violence in other physical and online settings is explored. These reports are thus developed for all those working on the issue of VAC, particularly for those who see schools as an ideal entry point for its prevention.

In the absence of systematic data collection on VAC in Asia's schools, these reports highlight data that are indicative of trends and point attention to existing gaps. These 10 reports are developed to stand alone, and are summarized in a scene-setting "Synthesis Report" which can be found on our website at www.coalitionforgoodschools.org.

Acknowledgements

This series of reports, produced by the Asia Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools presents background information, infographics and key resources that aim to foster change and development in both schools' settings and communities in the field of prevention of Violence Against Children across Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. This would not be possible without the diverse inputs of practitioners and researchers throughout each context. The Asia Hub is grateful to the following people for their contributions:

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Graphics and Design

Macro Graphic Pvt. Ltd.

Coordination

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Country Profile

INDIA

Population (2020): 1.37 billion

**27%**

Urban population

73%

Rural population

Main ethnic groups

**72%**

Indo-Aryan

25%

Dravidian

3%

Other ethnic groups

Languages



Hindi

English

20 other official
languages

Over 19,500 dialects

Age Structure

**26.31%**

0-14 years

17.51%

15-24 years

41.56%

25-54 years

7.91%

55-64 years

6.72% (2020 ¹
est.)

65 years and over

GDP per capita

**\$6,100**

(2020 est.)

Poverty Rate

**11.28%** ²

Literacy rate

**65%**

Key Findings

- ❖ Corporal punishment remains widespread in India's schools despite legal bans, with 42% of students facing physical punishment in schools.
- ❖ Peer violence is a significant problem: 34% of students (Grades 6-12) report being bullied, and 20% of adolescents experience physical fights in schools.
- ❖ A rise in internet usage has increased online violence risks, with 37% of children (10-17 years) having experienced cyberbullying and 14% exposed to online sexual exploitation.
- ❖ Girls face a higher risk of sexual violence, with some estimates as high as 42%, but boys are also vulnerable. India has one of the highest rates of child trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Overall status of violence against children (VAC) in India

India is home to 20% of the world's children and yet limited evidence is available on the magnitude and trends of VAC nationwide. About 37% of India's population is comprised of children under 18, with a large proportion lacking basic needs such as nutrition, education and health care. In India, nearly 5.4 per 100,000 children reported experiencing some form of crime in 2009, which increased to 28.9 per 100,000 children in 2017 (NCRB Report 'Crime in India-2017').

In 2022, India witnessed a staggering 8.7% increase in child abuse cases, reaching a total of 162,000 incidents, as reported by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB Report 'Crime in India', 2022). According to a survey conducted by the Government of India Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD, 2007), it was observed that the prevalence of all forms of child abuse is extremely high, particularly physical abuse (66%) and emotional abuse (50%) and 53.22% children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse.

Furthermore, rates of VAC in India's educational institutions remains high both regionally and globally. According to a study, 2/3 of 12–14-year-old boys from low-income schools reported experiencing at least one form of violence in school over the past three months. Another study found that 65% of school-going children faced corporal punishment Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD, 2007). There is no recent national data available on corporal punishment. Similar prevalence was documented in a recently conducted study by UNICEF in 2020.

Bullying² is one of the most prevalent forms of psychological and emotional violence that schoolchildren encounter. Although there is no national prevalence data available on bullying in India, a study in 2019 by The Teacher Foundation³, in association with Wipro Applying Thought In Schools (WATIS) in 15 cities found that 42% of students of Class 4 to 8 and 36% of Class 9 to 12 said they are subjected to bullying and harassment in school campuses with far reaching consequences. This includes children and youth being unable to concentrate, missing classes, avoiding school activities, playing truant or dropping out altogether.

In recent times, cyberbullying⁴ is becoming more widespread as more children, especially young teens, access the internet and mobile devices. According to a 2019 UNICEF U-Report survey,⁵ one in three Indian youngsters said they have been the victim of cyberbullying. According to this global poll data, almost half of the respondents were unaware of options for reporting online abuse.

Prevalence of different forms of VAC

1. Corporal punishment

Despite India having laws against corporal punishment in all educational institutions, these laws only apply to children between the ages of 6 and 14 years old. Research conducted by National

¹ Country profile information from https://www.indexmundi.com/india/age_structure.html and NITI Aayog (2022-2023)

² Bullying is "intentional and aggressive behaviour occurring repeatedly against a victim where there is a real or perceived power imbalance and where the victim feels vulnerable and powerless to defend himself or herself. The unwanted behaviour is hurtful: it can be physical, including hitting, kicking and destroying property; verbal, such as teasing, insulting and threatening; or relational, through the spreading of rumours and exclusion from a group". Source: Olweus, Dan, bullying at school: What we know and can do (Understanding Children's Worlds). Wiley-Blackwell, 1993.

³ Re-imagining School Leadership to Foster Social and Emotional Development of Students (Vol.13 No.3) Authors. Maya Menon, The Teacher Foundation (India) Publication Date. 2019.

⁴ Cyberbullying is not limited to a specific platform or technology. It can occur through text messages, apps, social media, gaming, edtech/online learning platforms and more, where people can view, participate in, or share content. The forms of cyberbullying are diverse, including sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content. It is crucial to understand that cyberbullying can happen in any online space where people interact and new platforms may emerge over time as technology evolves (NCPCR, 2023).

⁵ 3IU-Report Global Poll on Digital Violence and Cyber-bullying. June 2019

Commission for Protection of Child Rights NCPCR found that in 2011⁶, of 6,632 children ranging in age group from 3 to 17 years, almost all of them had experienced corporal punishment. 75% of participants reported having their ears boxed, 69.9% having their cheeks smacked, 57.5% having their backs struck and 69.9% having their ears twisted. The teacher usually causes pain as a wilful punishment (NCPCR, 2011). The widespread nature of corporal punishment also emerged in the 2007 national survey and a large-scale study in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh⁷. Severe forms of corporal punishment were also reported, including being kicked very painfully, enforced starvation and being tied to a chair/pole before being beaten.

Analysis of the data collected between 2016 and 2017 of roughly 4,130 childcare facilities and homes revealed that the majority acknowledged employing legality-violating methods of child discipline that frequently equate to physical punishment and humiliation. Meghalaya (19%), Haryana (17.7%), Arunachal Pradesh (12.5%) and Delhi (10%) had the most significant percentage of care homes that physically abused and spanked children; however, the real numbers were significantly higher in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.⁸

Following two cohorts of children, the Young Lives longitudinal study (2018) found that 93% of 8-year-olds and 68% of 15-year-olds said they had seen other children being physically punished. Among 8-year-olds, corporal punishment was more common for boys (83%) than girls (73%), in rural areas (79%) than urban areas (75%) and in public schools (80%) than private schools (77%). Almost 16% of 8-year-olds cited “teacher’s beating” as the most crucial reason for disliking school.

In 2018, a formative parenting study was carried out by UNICEF and partners, which identified 33 different forms of violence and abuse against children reported by parents of children aged 0-6 years. The majority of parents acknowledged employing physical punishment and humiliation that frequently equate to legality-violating methods of child discipline. According to UNICEF, NINEISMINE and Mumbai Smiles’ “Play It Safe” opinion poll (2017)⁹, which involved interviewing almost 5,000 children throughout Maharashtra, children in rural regions receive greater physical punishment at home than children in cities and towns. Compared to 43% of urban children, 66% of the interviewed rural children reported having their ears pulled by elders, 55% of them had been imprisoned in a room and 57% of them had been smacked. According to the survey, children living in mixed homes also reported higher levels of violence than children in nuclear or single-parent households.

2. Peer violence and bullying

In India, it is estimated that 42% of students have experienced violence in schools from one of their classmates¹⁰. UNICEF found that 66% of school children have experienced physical violence from a peer at school¹¹. In March 2019, a survey by UNESCO found that 42% of students in grades 4 to 8 cohort and 36% of students in grades 9 to 12 were bullied. Religion and caste are key determinants, and children from minority and marginalised sections were likelier to become bullying victims than most of their upper-caste peers (Mishra et al., 2018; Thakkar et al., 2019). Students from the lowest SES groups were shown to have the lowest likelihood of being bullies in a parallel study conducted among Indian schoolchildren (Sethi et al., 2019). Bullying behaviours were less prevalent in public schools than in private schools and special schools for kids with modest intellectual disabilities (Nambiar et al., 2020).

⁶ NCPCR. 2011. ‘Eliminating Corporal Punishment in Schools.’ New Delhi: Author.

⁷ Kacker, L., Varadan, S. and Kumar, P. 2007. ‘Study on Child Abuse: India.’ New Delhi: Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

⁸ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/80-of-government-school-children-face-corporal-punishment-says-study/articleshow/68087661.cms>

⁹ Reported in “Study: Rural kids face more physical abuse”, Hindustan Times, 29 March 2017

¹⁰ <https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/india-commits-end-school-violence>

¹¹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/66581/file/Violence-against-children-in-education-settings-in-SouthAsia.pdf>

Many studies have examined the proportion of students in different bullying roles (Kshirsagar et al., 2007; Malhi et al., 2014; Malik & Mehta, 2016; Patel et al., 2017) but did not provide a detail of their profiles. An individual may assume different roles in a bullying scenario and there are chances that they may overlap, i.e., those who are bullied in a situation may act as perpetrators in other situations and vice versa, thus acknowledging the chain of violence that children often find themselves navigating. The frequency of bullying also differs depending on the type of school, such as all-boys, all-girls and co-ed schools. In a study conducted by Kshirsagar, Agarwal and Bavdekar (2007), it was discovered that bullying occurs at a rate of 18.5% in girls' schools and 38.2% in co-ed schools.

Ramya & Kulkarni (2010) conducted a study that revealed that the most prevalent type of bullying is verbal, such as name-calling (57.9%), followed by mocking one's physical appearance (15.5%) and belittling (15.2%), while physical bullying accounts for only 12.5%. They also noted that bullying rates increase with age, peaking at 13 years old and declining at 14 years old. Patel, Verma, Shah, Phatak and Nimbalkar (2017) discovered that 29.7% of students are bullied, with girls being victims of emotional and sensitive forms of bullying, while boys are victims of physical and verbal bullying.

In their survey, Rai, Binil V. and Savitha (2018) found a substantial correlation between bullying and family income, gender and place of residence. Most studies conducted in India (Thakkar et al., 2021) have focused on examining the prevalence, forms and risk factors of bullying rather than the phenomenon itself, i.e. the bullying profile, experiences and attitudes towards bullying in those in various bullying roles. This is why bullying research is essential. However, bullying cannot be prevented unless we learn about the experiences of those involved. India's vast geographical territory and the cultural differences between regions hinder the interpretation of the studies conducted. Scholars highlight the need for cross-regional and cross-cultural comparative studies to obtain reliable results¹².

3. Sexual violence and harassment

A vital Government of India Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) study in 2007, which interviewed 125,000 children in 13 Indian states, revealed that the prevalence of all forms of child abuse is exceptionally high (physical abuse (66%), sexual abuse (50%) and emotional abuse (50%). This major state-sponsored survey in India reported the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) as 53%. A UNICEF study during 2005–2013 reported that CSA in Indian girls was as high as 42%. According to the NCRB data from 2020, approximately 28.9% of the entire child population experienced some form of sexual crime, yet only 65.6% of these crimes were reported.

India has seen a marked rise in reported occurrences of child abuse, especially sexual assault. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) disclosed that there was a 4.5% increase in crimes against children in 2019 compared to 2018. According to the report, a total of 148,185 crimes against children were reported in the country in 2019. Of these, 31.2% of cases were registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences POCSO Act, 2012. The NCRB report also revealed that there were 64,469 reported cases of children being sexually abused and 38,444 cases of children being raped in India in 2022. This translates to an average of seven children reporting a sexual crime against them every hour and four children reporting rape. Due to societal stigma, fear and lack of information, particularly in rural regions, experts believe that many cases remain unreported.

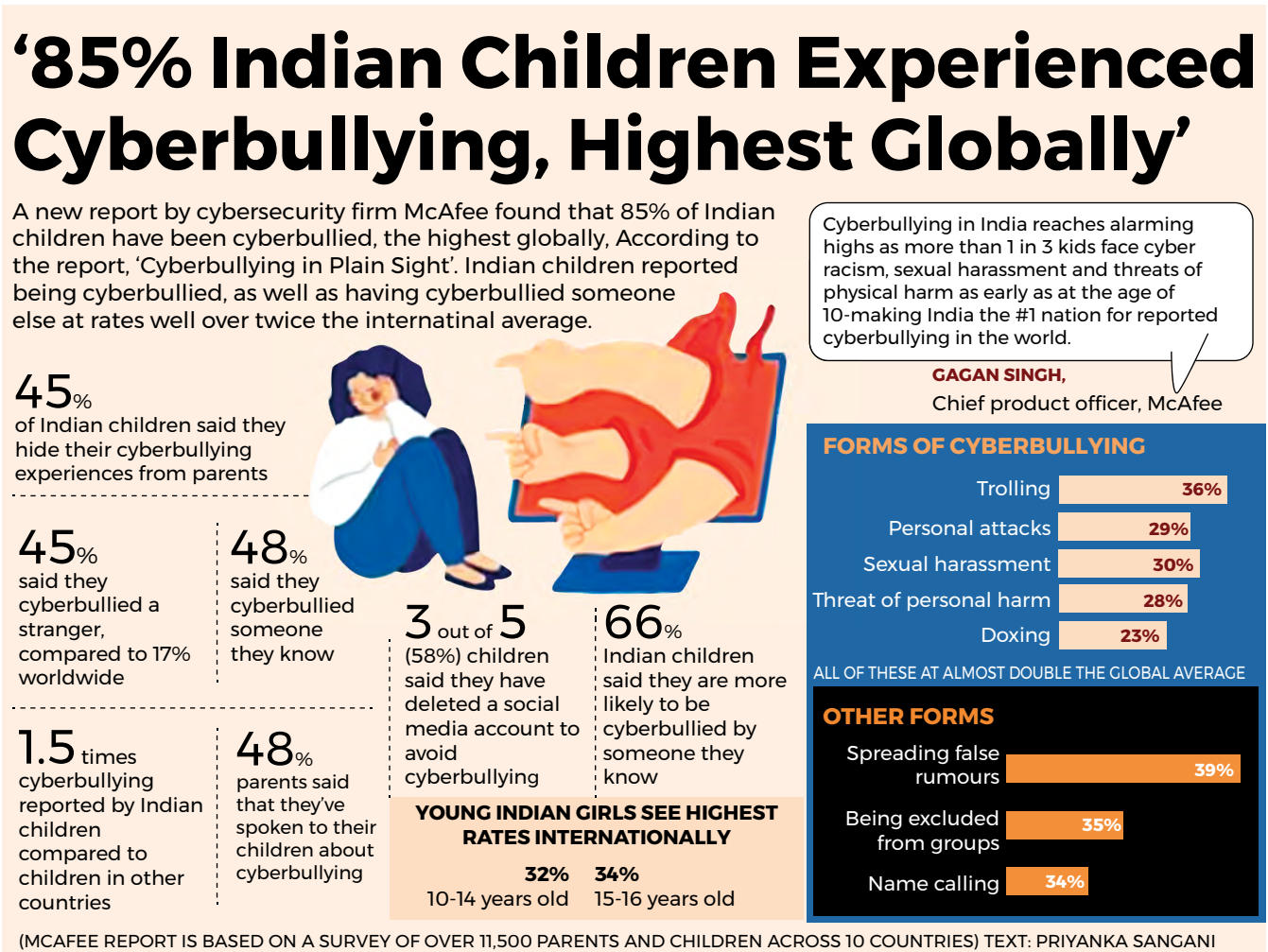
4. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying and online violence is becoming more widespread among children, especially young teens, with internet and mobile devices increasingly becoming more accessible in

¹² <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42380-020-00081-4>

India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, NCRB, India witnessed 50,035 reported cybercrime cases in 2020. Among these, 1614 cases of cyberstalking, 762 cases of cyber blackmailing, 84 cases of defamation, 247 cases of fake profiles and 838 cases of fake news were investigated. The NCRB data revealed a 63.48% increase in cyber-crimes in India from 2018 to 2019 (27,248 cases to 44,548 cases) and a 12.32% surge in 2020 (44,548 cases to 50,035 cases). There is a paucity of prevalence and impact studies on cyberbullying among children in India.

A recent survey by McAfee Corp. (2022) found that 85% of Indian children have reported experiencing cyberbullying, which is the highest percentage worldwide. The survey, conducted in ten countries in 2022, revealed that twice as many Indian children reported cyberbullying



someone compared to the global average. Additionally, 45% of children in India reported cyberbullying a stranger, compared to 17% globally and 48% reported cyberbullying a friend, compared to 21% in other nations. The survey also found that girls aged 10 to 16 years were the most vulnerable online, with rates of sexual harassment and threats of personal harm ranging between 32-34%, higher than the global average. Another study (Sharma et al., 2017) found that 7.5% of the students engaged in cyberbullying while 17.2% reported experiencing it.

Drivers of VAC

The violence perpetrated in schools and its causes, incidence, impact and resulting interventions cannot be viewed in isolation. Ideological normalisation of violence towards children (Debarbieux, 2003), custom and practice (Abrahams et al., 2006), legislative measures, conflict (Smith & Vaux,

2003) and social and economic disadvantage (Hsieh & Pugh, 1993) are macro-level causal factors. While research suggests that certain causal factors are associated with absolute poverty and deprivation, Smith et al. (2002) study shows that this association is not ubiquitous. Schools will also be impacted by the violence young people encounter in society, as schools are integral to it (Hargreaves, 2003).

1. Normative influence

The roots of acceptance and normalisation of cultural punishment lie within cultural norms and personal experiences. Since our cultural norms of child rearing do not forbid disciplining a child whose behaviour they believe to need correction, physical abuse appears to be widespread in Indian society. Some of these individuals who are responsible for the youngsters use a considerable amount of physical force. Instead, such use is typically encouraged in subtle—and occasionally not-so-subtle ways.

2. Sexuality

Due to social stigmatisation, prejudice and biases originating from socio-cultural, religious and familial contexts, LGBTQIA+ youth are more vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CSEA). This is primarily driven by the desire to ‘punish’ those challenging the heteronormative ideals in the society. Bullying is one of the issues which affects students’ lives physically, psychologically and socially. These consequences increase the level of stress, anxiety, lack of confidence and suicidal attempts tendency among LGBTQIA+ students. Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ have increased anxiety due to bullying in school (Payne & Smith, 2013). LGBTQIA+ students are disproportionately affected by the societal issue of bullying. There is no specific law against bullying in India¹³. Negative impressions of bullies are created among LGBTQIA+ students who are already at a disadvantage because of their behaviour (Payne & Smith, 2012). A recent study by UNESCO and NGO Sahodaran in Tamil Nadu 2019 with the 18-22 age group from the transgender and MSM (men having sex with men) communities showed that 43% faced sexual harassment in primary schools and 60% to 50% faced physical bullying in middle and higher secondary schools. Only 18% of participants reported being bullied by authorities. Unfortunately, these studies are a rarity and more so in the cohort of lesbians and other sexual identities¹⁴.

3. Poverty

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in India report experiencing violence or discrimination in school from school teachers. Structural barriers such as poverty and resultant oppression and marginalisation and the existence of power inequity in society leading to discrimination based on caste and gender are the significant causes of violence. Discrimination against children based on their caste often leads to them being exposed to situations of both verbal and physical abuse. The 2007 MWCD reports showed that 62% of corporal punishment was in government and municipal schools. Research indicates that rising levels of deprivation, inequality and social exclusion play a large part in school-based violence (Plan Report, 2008). Children in socioeconomically advantaged households are four times more vulnerable to physical violence compared with disadvantaged households. This is associated with academic achievements and expectations (Fernandes et al., 2021)¹⁵. According to a November 2018 survey

¹³ Payne, E. C. (2007). Heterosexism, Perfection and Popularity: Young Lesbians'. *Educational Studies* 41, 60-79.

¹⁴ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being_LGBT_in_Asia_Nepal_Country_Report.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/policybristol/briefings-and-reports-pdfs/2021/PolicyBristol_Report66_Fernandes_India_child_abuse-IT070377.pdf

conducted by NGO Agrasar,¹⁶ Most underprivileged school kids in Gurugram City get physical punishment daily. Interviews were conducted with 100 parents and 522 children of migrant labourers. In contrast to the 50% national average, the study revealed that 80% of youth reported being beaten multiple times each week. Children claimed to have been subjected to verbal abuse that said they had a “bad upbringing,” in addition to mild and severe physical punishment.

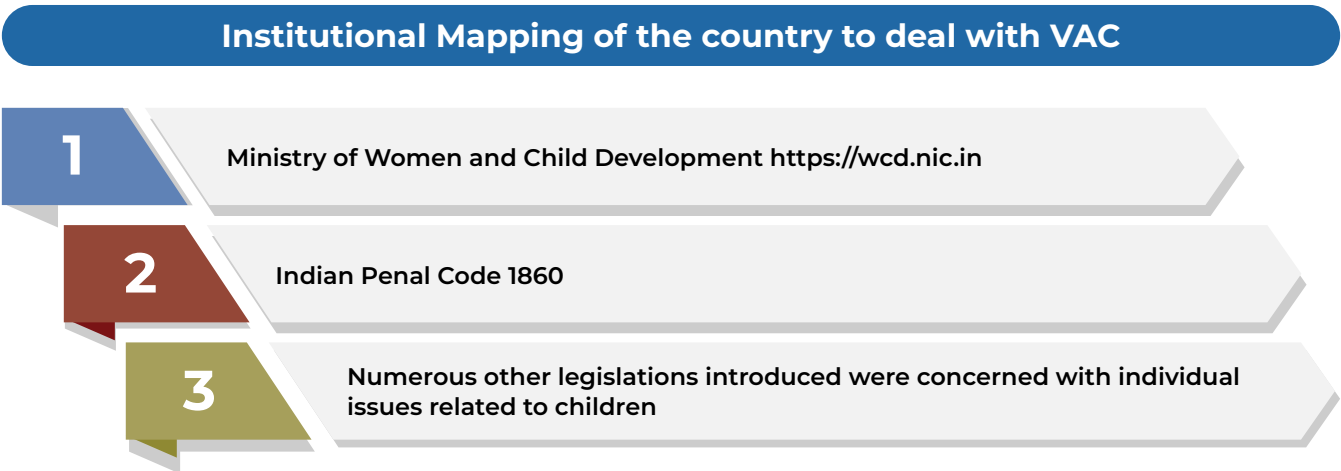
4. Conflict

The scale of VAC in conflict-affected school settings in South Asia remains little known (UNICEF, 2016). This is a similar scenario in India, where there is negligible documentation or evidence of the impact of conflict on the prevalence of VAC. In 2010, 129 schools were used as part of battlefield operations, which led to an increased risk of children becoming involved in military activities. Among the various types of violations, the highest numbers were reported for the killing of 2,985 children and the maiming (a wound or injury) of 5,655 children, totalling 8,631 affected children. This was followed by the recruitment and use of 7,622 children and the abduction of 3,985 children. Additionally, children were detained either for their actual or alleged association with armed groups (2,496), including those recognised as terrorist groups by the UN or for reasons related to national security. Nevertheless, for the first time since 2010, the United Nations Secretary-General removed India from the 2023 Report on Children and Armed Conflict, given measures taken by the Indian government to protect children.

Prevention and Response to VAC

India has a comprehensive policy and legal framework addressing rights and protection for children, providing opportunities to ensure that all children have equal access to quality protection services. In addition, many statutory bodies are constituted to address and oversee concerns about child rights and their violations (further explored in the box¹⁷ below).

The Indian government and UNICEF are working as partners to end VAC through the national strategy called “End VAC (EVAC)”. The approach combines the country’s civil societies, private sectors and development partners. Government and stakeholders have increased commitment to fund and implement comprehensive, evidence-based, multi-sectoral, coordinated interventions, policies and laws for EVAC.¹⁸



¹⁶ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/80-of-government-school-children-face-corporal-punishment-says-study/articleshow/68087661.cms>
¹⁷ <https://www.lawinsider.in/columns/child-protection-policies-and-laws-in-india>
¹⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/india/>

Budget and policy

In 2022-23, child protection received 0.04% of the total Union Budget. The share of children in the Union Budget 2023-24 continued to decline, with a total share of 2.30%. The budget for children increased by 11.92% compared to the previous year (BE) of 2022-24, despite the Union Budget growing by a staggering 1415%. According to Statement 12, the 2023-24 Union Budget's entire allotment for the Budget for Children is INR 103790.70 crore. It is important to note that over the past 11 years, there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of children in the Union Budget. It is important to emphasise that, even with growing concerns about child safety, as seen by the NCRB's Crime in India Report, child protection still receives the most minor portion of funding overall.

The Child Protection Policies in India are firmly rooted in the legal framework. The Constitution of India, under Article 15(3) and Article 39(e) and (f), guarantees special protection and care for children. Additionally, legislations like the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012, the Right to Education Act of 2009 and The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986, amended in 2016), collectively reinforce the legal safeguards for children¹⁹.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), which was established by the Government of India in March 2007 by an Act of Parliament, with a broad mandate and considerable powers. The Delhi Commission for the Protection of Child Rights was started in July 2008. Similar bodies at the State level have pursued various matters concerning child rights and protection. Telephonic helplines (CHILDLINE 1098) and Child Welfare Committees (CWC) have been established, where reports of child abuse or a child likely to be threatened to be harmed can be made and help sought.

The government of India adopted a new National Policy for Children in 2013, which replaced the 1974 child policy. The new policy lays down the guiding principles that must be respected by national, state and local governments in their actions and initiatives affecting children. The National Policy states that the “safety and security of all children is integral to their well-being and children are to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect, violence, maltreatment and exploitation in all settings including care institutions, schools, hospitals, crèches, families and communities.”

In terms of protecting children from violence at school, India has several laws in place. Section 17 of the Right to Education Act, 2009, for example, prohibits corporal punishment or any physical punishment and mental harassment to children of any age below 18 years. Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act also prescribes punishment for cruelty to children. In addition, whenever a child is assaulted, abused, exposed or neglected in a manner that causes physical or mental suffering by any person employed by or managing an organisation which is entrusted with the care and protection of the child, the punishment would be rigorous imprisonment up to five years and fine up to INR 5 lakh/ 5500 USD²⁰.

¹⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/66581/file/Violence-against-children-in-education-settings-in-SouthAsia.pdf>

²⁰ <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained->



Priority and strategy for the way forward

While India has made notable progress in establishing a legal and policy framework for protecting children from violence in schools, significant challenges remain. Lack of clear laws addressing issues like corporal punishment and bullying, inconsistent implementation, insufficient training and awareness, cultural and social barriers, weak monitoring and accountability, resource constraints and limited legal recourse and support are critical areas that need urgent attention.

Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving more vigorous enforcement, increased resources, enhanced training and awareness programs and cultural shifts towards zero tolerance for violence in schools.

As per the Central Board of Secondary Education CBSE guidelines, schools must take proactive measures to prevent bullying. The responsibility of preventing any undesirable aspect of bullying rests jointly and individually on all stakeholders, including the head of the institution, teachers, non-teaching staff, students, parents and the local community. Despite these efforts at the school level, in India, no laws could handle bullying in schools. In other words, bullying is not technically illegal. However, in case of suicide by the bullying victim, the accused bully will be liable for abetment of suicide under Section 306 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860. The Indian legal framework covers within its ambit options to prosecute aspects of physical and cyberbullying largely under the Indian Penal Code, the Information Technology (IT) Act 2000, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

To address the concerns regarding cyberbullying, the Information Technology (IT) Act of 2000 is the primary legal instrument for prosecuting cyber-crimes. This Act, when read with the Indian Penal Code, addresses elements of cybercrimes, while the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, addresses cyber-sexual offences concerning minors. Child perpetrators are treated as 'Children in conflict with the Law' under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Suggestions on the Way Forward

As the understanding of safety in educational environments continues to evolve, there is increasing recognition of schools as spaces where non-violent and just societies can be co-created. The findings presented here aim to inform a growing network of national and regional practitioners, policymakers, civil society groups, researchers and funders committed to preventing all forms of violence within India's schools. While the Coalition for Good Schools encourages stakeholders to review the full recommendations outlined in the regional synthesis report, insights from the Asia Hub highlight key areas for action:

- **Education delivery system as an entry-point:** *The education system offers a strategic avenue for the prevention of violence against children. Effective multi-sectoral government action at the national level is crucial for catalysing these interventions.*
- **Children's experience and agency:** *Prioritising children's lived experiences within schools and fostering their agency should be central in education policies and interventions.*
- **Whole-school approach:** *Implementing a comprehensive, whole-school strategy that nurtures a positive school culture and upholds the inherent dignity of every child can produce long-term outcomes. Meaningful engagement with teachers, school staff, and the local community is essential for the success of such initiatives.*
- **Knowledge generation and dissemination:** *Ongoing documentation, sharing, and expansion of knowledge and evidence is vital for deepening understanding of effective interventions, strengthening local efforts and supporting scale through the education sector.*

There are proven solutions to end violence, and with collective effort, violence can be prevented within our lifetime. Breakthrough's whole school approach to violence prevention and gender equality, *Taaron ki Toli*, is backed by rigorous evidence and has reached over 29,000 schools. ICRW Asia leads the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) programme which has led to increased intention to report violence, increased bystander intervention, and reduced gender discrimination, teasing, and abusive language. Enfold Proactive Health Trust's *On Track* teaches life-skills, personal safety and adolescent sexuality, and Kidpower India offers comprehensive safety education to empower children with the knowledge and skills to recognise, avoid, and respond to potential threats, fostering confidence and resilience. These and many other civil society efforts reflect a robust and expanding movement dedicated to VAC prevention in India.

Effective foundational interventions should incorporate several core elements:

- **Recognising schools' role in nurturing and developing children's potential.**
- **Promoting justice, equality, and empathy as foundational school values.**
- **Affirming children's rights and agency within the educational context.**
- **Supporting progressive pedagogies that encourage positive change.**
- **Honouring the dignity of every child, irrespective of gender, sexuality, race, caste, creed, or other categorisations.**

Prevention programmes must also adopt an intersectional perspective that acknowledges the overlapping and reinforcing characteristics that shape children's unique experiences of violence. This approach recognises that certain groups of children may face increased risks and that the severity and frequency of violence can vary considerably.

While sometimes sites of violence, schools also hold significant potential as primary sites for learning about and implementing strategies to prevent it. When prioritised, school-based initiatives can yield multiple positive outcomes, serving as catalysts for broader change.

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