



Country Report

Towards Safer Schools for Children: The Philippines

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 summarised 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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Country Profile

THE PHILIPPINES

Population



119
Million (2023)¹

Languages



Filipino (Tagalog)

English

Main ethnic group (2024)



26%

Tagalog

14.3%

Bisaya/Binisaya

8%

Cebuano

8%

Ilocano

7.9%

Hiligaynon/Ilonggo

6.5%

Bikol/Bicol

2.6%

Waray

26.1%

Other local ethnicities

0.1%

(2010
est.)²

Other foreign ethnicities

Age Structure



30.2%

0-14 years

18.4%

15-24 years

37.4%

25-54 years

11.8%

55+ Years ³

GDP per capita



\$4,130

(2023 est.)

Poverty Rate



13.7% ⁴

Literacy rate



97.94%

Key Findings

- ❖ Corporal punishment is widely accepted at school with an estimated 3 out of 5 children facing physical or psychological violence at the hands of teachers and school staff.
- ❖ Peer violence and bullying are common, with a strong link to mental health issues, and rates have been reported at as high as 63%.
- ❖ Cyberviolence is on the rise, affecting nearly half (42.8%) of students.
- ❖ The Philippines is a global center for online child sexual exploitation, requiring urgent intervention. It is estimated that 1 in 5 children have experienced sexual violence.

¹ <https://www.findeasy.in/population-of-philippines/#:~:text=Philippines%20Population%202022%20Philippines%20has%20a%20population%20growth,equivalent%20to%201.41%25%20of%20the%20total%20world%20population>

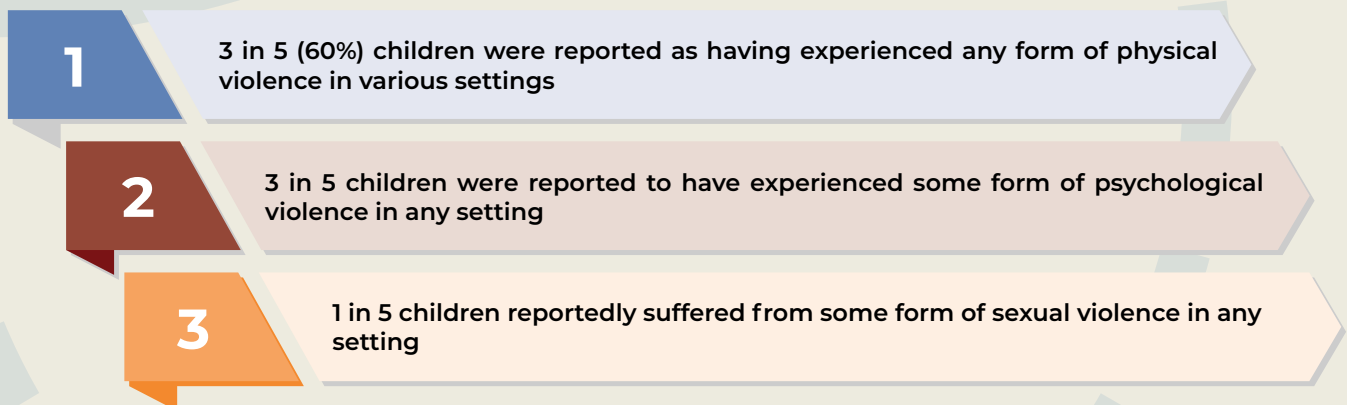
² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/philippines/summaries>

³ <https://www.indexmundi.com/philippines/>

⁴ <https://borgenproject.org/poverty-in-the-philippines-2/>

Overall snapshot of Violence Against Children (VAC) in the Philippines

The Philippines faces significant challenges in addressing Violence Against Children (VAC), with high prevalence rates across homes, schools, and online platforms. While legal frameworks exist, enforcement gaps and societal norms contribute to continued violence against children. According to the 2015 National Baseline Survey on VAC in the Philippines, there is a high prevalence of physical, psychological, sexual and online violence committed on Filipino children. Preliminary results of a 2015 National Baseline Study on VAC (NBS-VAC), which UNICEF supported, showed:



There are many forms of violence inflicted on children at home, school, in communities and when dating. Further adversity at home puts children at greater risk of severe physical violence. Bullying has been reported at rates as high as 63.15%, with 29% of the population surveyed identified as perpetrators of bullying (National Baseline Study, 2015)⁵. With many children in the country living in non-family households due to drug use or alcoholism at home, risk of violence in various settings is further increased.

Online violence is also a growing major area of concern in the Philippines, according to the National Baseline Study, which stated that 48.5% of children have experienced violence online. In a UNICEF press release in September 2019, it was mentioned that online bullying remains widespread in the Philippines, that at least 33% are affected by cyberviolence in the form of verbal abuse, while one-fourth experience sexual messages or sexual activities shown through the internet and cell phones⁶.

Prevalence of forms of VAC

1. Corporal punishment

Three out of every five children aged one to fourteen years, or 58.8%, reported having received at least one violent type of discipline in 2022, while 36%, reported receiving exclusively non-violent forms of discipline.⁷ Boys are generally more likely to experience violent discipline than their female counterparts and children in urban areas were found to be more prone to receive violent discipline than those living in rural areas.

⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/online-bullying-remains-prevalent-philippines-other-countries>

⁷ Situation of Children Reports (2023) provides in-depth analyses of child rights issues in the Philippines to help facilitate informed decision-making in child welfare and rights, covering areas like health, education and protection. To view interactive dashboards and access the latest data, please visit www.situationofchildren.org

According to a national baseline study, on average, 27.36% of students had faced some form of physical violence from teachers, such as pinching, being struck with an eraser or piece of chalk, twisting or being hit with a stick⁸. In 2022, 11.9% of adults held that physically punishing a child is necessary to properly raise, discipline, or educate them. It was discovered that 12.2% of adult females used physical punishment, which is somewhat more than adult males (Situation of Children Reports, 2023). Similarly, adults in cities are slightly more likely to accept corporal punishment, albeit with slight variance.

In the Philippines, it is estimated that 63.15% of children experience violence at home, particularly those who live in households with alcoholic or drug-using family members. A UNICEF study found that 66% of respondents have experienced some form of violence by their parents or siblings, such as being hit or having their hair pulled, pinching or twisting of ears and, in some cases, being burned or kicked during their childhood⁹. The prevalence of children experiencing violent discipline is highest among those whose mothers have had no education or post-secondary education (Situation of Children Report, 2023). According to research conducted by Save the Children Philippines¹⁰ on the mental health and welfare of kids and teens during the COVID-19 pandemic, 91.5% of parents and carers who were questioned (65/71) in a few Metro Manila cities reported having trouble disciplining their kids; 31% admitted to using physical discipline.

2. Peer violence and bullying

In the Philippines, bullying within schools appears to be widespread, though research remains limited. In 2022, three out of ten children reported¹¹ being bullied frequently at school, which is a decrease from four out of ten students in 2018, but it is still the highest rate among 80 countries and economies. Although somewhat less than 40.1% of students stated the same in 2018, over 35% of pupils in the PISA 2022 research reported being bullied frequently. The most recent study also revealed that, compared to the average for participating OECD countries of 20% of girls and 21% of boys, 43% of girls and 53% of boys reported being the victim of bullying acts at least a few times a month. According to UNESCO (2023), over 40% of learners aged 13–17 report experiencing bullying. The Situation of Children Reports (2023) places this figure closer to 3 in 10 students.

Another study (National Baseline Study 2015 (NBS-VAC) reported concerns regarding Filipino youngsters being bullied by their peers are becoming more prevalent. Bullying is more common in girls than in boys, with 66.8% and 59.5% of cases, respectively. At 41%, bullying is just as common among younger and older teenagers. Children who live with other people other than family, or who come from homes with alcoholism or drug addiction are at higher risk of bullying. Consequently, some researchers have emphasised the need to develop training support for teachers and parents so that they are better equipped to identify bullying when it is taking place in classrooms. Further localised research is required to fill the knowledge gaps on the distinct socio-cultural elements impacting bullying (Orozco et al., 2023)¹².

3. Sexual violence and harassment

According to a baseline study on VAC in the Philippines, sexual harassment is common in schools in the Philippines, which affects both primary and secondary school students, with females being

⁸ <http://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/national-baseline-study-violence-against-children-philippines>

⁹ <http://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/national-baseline-study-violence-against-children-philippines>

¹⁰ Save the Children Philippines (2020). "Children worry because of COVID-19." <https://www.savethechildren.org.ph/our-work/our-stories/story/children-worry-because-of-covid-19/>

¹¹ Situation of Children Reports (2023) provides in-depth analyses of child rights issues in the Philippines to help facilitate informed decision-making in child welfare and rights, covering areas like health, education and protection. To view interactive dashboards and access the latest data, please visit www.situationofchildren.org

¹² <https://multijournals.org/index.php/excellencia-imje/article/download/121/186/495>

particularly at risk¹³. Both Baco National High School (BNHS) and the Philippine High School for the Arts (PHSA) recorded numerous cases of sexual harassment towards students from teachers (Inquirer.net). According to statistics from the NBS_VAC 2015, one in four youngsters (24.9%) reported having experienced sexual violence of any kind in any situation. There have been reports of child sexual abuse in all contexts, including the community, the school and the household. According to data, older adolescents are more likely than younger adolescents to experience sexual abuse (28% vs 22%). Additionally, the prevalence is higher in male adolescents (28.7%) than in female adolescents (20.1%). All these findings point to a higher prevalence of sexual abuse among older teenagers and men in the Philippines.

4. Cyberbullying and online violence

Cyberbullying is a growing concern in the Philippines, the latest national data (NBS VAC, 2015) show that online violence affects almost half of the children aged 13-17¹. The prevalence of online violence for males (44%) is nearly the same for females (43%). About 33.7% were verbally abused over the internet or cell phone. In comparison, about 25.4% have been shown sex videos and photos of sex organs or the sexual activities of other people, about 29.4% were sent sexual messages and 3% have had their nude body or own sexual activities shown on the Internet or a cell phone. Males are more likely to be subjected to online violence than females, at 50.4% and 46.7% prevalence, respectively. Older adolescents (57.1% prevalence) are more likely to experience cyber violence than younger adolescents (42.7% prevalence). However, there is a gap in the evidence on cyberbullying in the country that needs to be filled to address the problem.

Drivers of Violence

1. Normative Factors

A review¹⁴ of 64 studies with findings on prevalence, risk and protective factors related to VAC in the home found violent discipline to be the most frequent form of violence against both boys and girls in the house, driven by factors including social norms around the use of and effectiveness of discipline, authoritarian parenting and parent's levels of education. A study conducted in urban schools in the Philippines found that young students who were more violently disciplined by their parents and those who came from homes with "an authoritarian style of child-rearing" were more likely to be violent at school. This is important because parenting styles and family issues are generally not widely considered risk factors that lead to violence.

2. Sexuality

According to the National Baseline Report (2015), when compared to heterosexual males (65.9%) and females (61.8%), the percentage of child violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQIA+) was highest (75%). "Grey literature has also indicated that LGBTQIA+ children may be disproportionately at risk of sexual violence at school – typically from peers," according to the systematic literature review on VAC (2016). This review also noted that little research has been done on LGBTQIA+ children's experiences and that they are more likely to be the target of physical and psychological bullying at school (University of the Philippines Manila, The University of Edinburgh, Child Protection Network Foundation & UNICEF Philippines, 2016). While the majority of the data, although very limited, that is currently available focuses on bullying, LGBTQIA+ students may also be the victims of other types of violence, such as sexual assault.

¹³ <http://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/national-baseline-study-violence-against-children-philippines>

¹⁴ University of the Philippines Manila, The University of Edinburgh, Child Protection Network Foundation & UNICEF Philippines (2016), A Systematic Review of the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children in the Philippines, Manila: UNICEF Philippines

3. Poverty

Poverty in the Philippines continues to have a significant impact on children's education. It is estimated that as much as 15% of the population live below the poverty line and cannot afford the costs of sending their children to school, including school supplies and uniforms. As a result, children from poverty-stricken families are often forced to find sources of income instead of going to school, which could include begging or scavenging¹⁵.

4. Conflict

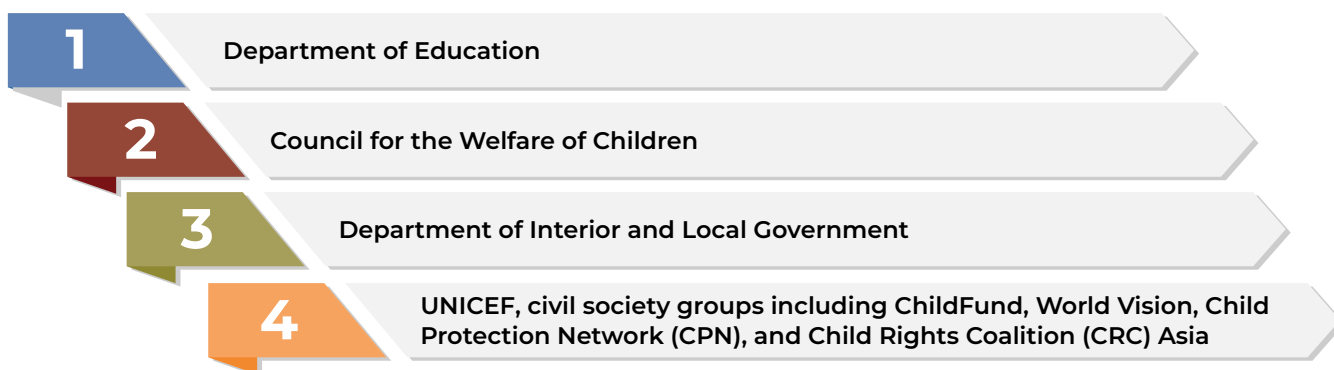
The Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines states that in 2020 and 2021, there were 115 confirmed cases of severe breaches committed against 104 children, made up of 42 girls and 62 boys. The three most frequently confirmed violations were attacks on hospitals and schools, recruiting, killing and maiming. More than half of all infractions were related to killing and maiming, which continued to be the most common. The principal offenders were the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Armed Forces and the New People's Army. Mindanao was the most afflicted region, with 83% of all verified violations occurring during the reporting period. But there are likely far more infractions than are officially reported. As a result of the conflict in Mindanao province, many children have been forced to relocate due to the long-running conflict and, in some cases, lost their parents and family members, which has had a significant impact on their education¹⁶.

Prevention and response to VAC

The Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) and UNICEF designed a multi-sectoral roadmap for the reduction of VAC, called the "Philippine Plan of Action to End VAC" (PPAEVAC). The Department of Education created a policy and guideline called "Protecting Children in School from Abuse, Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Bullying and Other Forms of Abuse," known as the Depend Child Protection Policy.

The Department of Education's Safe Schools project used findings from the national baseline study. Through this project, teachers are trained on the "4 Rs" of child abuse. These include instructions on how to spot probable abuse indications (recognition), record abusive acts, report them to others, and contact the appropriate authorities for prompt action (referral). The seventh and eighth-grade curricula has also addressed the prevention of sexual abuse, victimisation and deviant conduct.

Institutional Mapping of the country to deal with VAC



¹⁵ <http://www.filipino-orphans.org/why-so-many-orphans-part-3/>

¹⁶ <http://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/national-baseline-study-violence-against-children-philippines>

Budget and policy

Following all current government policies, including the National Strategic Framework for Action to End VAC, as well as the vision, goal and strategies of Child 21 and the National Plan of Action for Children, and the Comprehensive Programme for the Protection of Children, UNICEF and CWC developed the Philippine Plan of Action to End VAC (PPAEVAC). The ASEAN Guidelines for a Non-Violent Approach to Nurture, Care and Development of Children in All Settings and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of VAC also serve as a guide for the PPAEVAC.

The PPAEVAC acknowledges the significance of reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Target 5.2 under Goal 5 on attaining gender equality and empowering women and girls, and Targets 16.1 and 16.2 on building just, peaceful and inclusive societies, specifically addressing violence.

Since passing the Republic Act (RA) 10627 in 2015, schools have been required to develop bullying prevention programs and include child protection systems from peer and adult abuse at schools. However, there is some concern over whether this is being carried out. The Philippines formally embraced the 2012 Universal Periodic Review of the recommendation to reaffirm its commitment to outlawing physical punishment in the home and other contexts. However, full prohibition is still to be achieved in the home.

Priority and strategy for the way forward

The Philippines has made some notable progress towards protecting children from violence. The government has committed to establishing an environment that respects, protects and fulfils the rights of all children and has stated that it recognises children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation and their right to attain their full potential, as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)¹⁷.

The Council for the Welfare of Children and UNICEF have also demonstrated good collaboration through the Philippine Plan of Action to End VAC. However, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed concern that many of its previous recommendations were either ignored or only partially addressed. They further stressed that legislation on the prohibition of corporal punishment, the ban on torture and the status of children born out of wedlock, has still not been put into place. The government had still not generated sufficient funds to support children's welfare, which could prevent such mechanisms from functioning effectively. The Committee also remains concerned about the level of discrimination that many children face in accessing social and health services and education in the Philippines¹⁸.

Nonetheless, a growing movement has emerged around the issue of VAC. In the Global Ministerial Conference on Ending VAC in 2024, the Government committed to developing and implementing protection systems in learning institutions and pledged to roll out a plan to address online sexual abuse and exploitation of children through learning institutions by 2025.

¹⁷ <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-PHL-CO4.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC-C-PHL-CO4.pdf>

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 schools in the Philippines.

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. For instance, Child Protection Network's (CPN) Safe Schools for Teens works to reduce dating violence through a mindfulness focused approach for 13-15 year olds, and is working with the government to pilot the interventions while scaling Women and Child Protection Units (WCPUs) across the country. Child Rights Coalition (CRC) Asia develops child rights policies in schools and provides life-skills education and trainings on consent and sexual safety. Several local and international NGOs are working to address online safety for students. These efforts reflect a robust and expanding civil society dedicated to violence prevention in The Philippines.

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 and implementing strategies to prevent it. School-based initiatives can yield multiple positive outcomes, serving as catalysts for broader change.

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