



# 10 things

you need to know about  
**violence against children in Asia Pacific**

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## Acronyms

<b>APAC-FCACP</b>	Asia-Pacific Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CCWC</b>	Commune Committee for Women and Children (Cambodia)
<b>CPC</b>	child protection committee
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>HuRENDEC</b>	Human Rights and Environment Development Centre
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>SAIEVAC</b>	South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>VACS</b>	'Violence Against Children Survey'
<b>VCPPC</b>	Village Child Protection and Promotion Committee

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# Violence against children in Asia Pacific

All children have the right to a safe and fulfilling childhood. But every year more than 1 billion children around the world experience violence.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Asia Pacific<sup>2</sup> has one of the highest rates of violence against children. Around 64 per cent of children aged between 2 and 17 years experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in Asia Pacific over the past year.<sup>3</sup> While Asia Pacific is a complex and diverse region with many different cultures and traditions, the devastating impact of violence against children is common across all countries. With the renewed focus on ending violence against children in the Agenda 2030 and the 2017 launch of World Vision's *It takes a world to end violence against children* campaign, it is time for the region to act and break the cycle of violence.

1 Susan Hillis et al., 'Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates', *Pediatrics* 137, no.3 (2016): 1, 6.

2 For the purposes of this publication Asia Pacific includes the following countries: Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand, Mongolia, Myanmar, Vietnam, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Singapore.

3 Hillis et al., 1, 6.

For more than two decades, governments across Asia Pacific have committed to end violence against children at the national, regional and global levels. Since 1990, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – ratified by all governments in Asia Pacific – has prohibited all violence against children under Article 19. In 2010, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), an intergovernmental regional committee of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation, adopted a five-year regional action plan to end violence against children in the region.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, more than 150 world leaders committed to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include a commitment to end 'abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children' (SDG 16.2). In 2016, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the ASEAN Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children, which resolves to eliminate violence throughout the region. These steps are significant, as no single government, group or organisation can solve this issue in isolation. However, after two decades of commitment, violence still prevails. Ending violence against children in Asia Pacific requires partnership and collaboration across all sectors – government, civil society, children and youth, parents and caregivers, communities, media, academia, faith leaders and businesses. It also requires a mind shift of social values and norms, better and more informed data, and the willingness to recognise violence even where we may not be expecting it. In short, it is going to take a world. All of us.

4 See 'The South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) Workplan', [http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/political\\_declarations\\_SAIEVAC5YEAR0WORKPLAN2010.pdf](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/political_declarations_SAIEVAC5YEAR0WORKPLAN2010.pdf).

## What is violence against children?

The CRC defines violence against children as 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, violence also includes practices such as sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour, cyber abuse and child marriage. A child is any person under the age of 18 years.<sup>6</sup>

**Physical abuse** is that which results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust.<sup>7</sup> It can span the spectrum from extreme abuse or torture to inappropriate disciplinary punishment. The CRC defines corporal punishment as 'any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light'.

**Sexual abuse** is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent to, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.<sup>8</sup>

5 CRC, art 19(1).

6 CRC, art 1.

7 See 'CRC Committee GC 13', [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.GC.13\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/CRC.C.GC.13_en.pdf).

8 Ibid.

**Mental and emotional abuse** is the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate and supportive environment. This includes acts towards the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.<sup>9</sup>

**Neglect** can be defined as the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres – health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions – in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and that causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm.<sup>10</sup>

**Exploitation** of a child refers to use of the child in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes, but is not limited to, child labour and child prostitution. These activities are to the detriment of the child's physical or mental health, education, or spiritual, moral or social-emotional development. Child exploitation also includes the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, child trafficking and the sale of children.<sup>11</sup>

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

## It takes a world to end violence against children

In early 2017, World Vision launched the *It takes a world to end violence against children* campaign, which will be the organisation's central campaign for the next five years. The aim is to improve significantly the lives of hundreds of millions of girls and boys vulnerable to violence by 2021, contributing to the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.<sup>12</sup> With offices in more than 100 countries and grounded in its faith, World Vision is well placed to inspire a movement to end violence against children worldwide.

The overall objective of the campaign is to have a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of the most vulnerable boys and girls by 2021 by making a significant contribution towards ending violence against children in alignment with the SDGs. Specifically, World Vision aims to:

-  ignite movements for, with, and by children to catalyse global changes in attitudes, raise awareness and drive courageous and effective action to end violence against boys and girls
-  strengthen prevention, response, and restoration measures to address violence against boys and girls
-  increase long-term targeted funding to end violence against boys and girls
-  strengthen accountability for the implementation of commitments to end violence against boys and girls.

12 'End Violence Against Children: The Global Partnership', <http://www.end-violence.org/>.

The campaign reflects World Vision's longstanding commitment and approach to child protection, which involves a process of engaging with key community stakeholders while building capacity, partnering and collaborating with formal and informal child protection actors to address the root causes of violence against children. Working together with partners, World Vision seeks to create and strengthen the protective environment that cares and supports all children, especially the most vulnerable. World Vision has harmonised its approach with that of the World Health Organization's INSPIRE package, which includes seven evidence-based best practices to end violence against children.<sup>13</sup> It includes improving implementation and enforcement of laws; strengthening norms and values that respect nonviolent relationships; creating and sustaining safe environments for children; creating positive parent/caregiver-child relationships; improving families' economic security and stability; increasing and improving social services and support; and strengthening children's education, resilience, life skills and voice.<sup>14</sup>

## 10 themes

The purpose of this document is to inform the strategic approach of policymakers and persuade and inform concerned members of the public to end violence against children in Asia Pacific. It outlines the '10 things you need to know about

<sup>13</sup> See World Health Organization, *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*, (2016), [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/inspire/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/inspire/en/).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

violence against children in Asia Pacific' devised by World Vision to assist policymakers in developing actionable solutions to ending violence in the region. The 10 themes are:

- 1 Too much violence is not yet banned by law.
- 2 Ending violence requires changing hearts and minds.
- 3 Child marriage is a form of violence.
- 4 Breaking down myths – boys suffer from violence, too.
- 5 Violence may be virtual – dealing with online abuse and exploitation.
- 6 Vulnerable children are at a higher risk of violence.
- 7 Harming children is bad for the economy.
- 8 A coordinated child protection system is needed to end violence.
- 9 What we know about violence is only the tip of the iceberg.
- 10 Businesses can end violence against children.

The 10 themes have been drawn from an extensive desk review on relevant literature as well as decades of World Vision's programming experience on violence against children in Asia Pacific. Actionable solutions in relation to each of the 10 themes are included at the end of each chapter. In addition to information on prevalence, cause and impact, the publication highlights the voice of children with the inclusion of stories from survivors of violence drawn from World Vision's extensive experience in programme and advocacy implementation.





# Too much violence against children is not yet banned by law



## The issue at a glance:

- + **The definitions of child and violence in national laws are inconsistent across the region, compared to the CRC definition.**
- + **Corporal punishment of children is still permitted by law in many countries.**
- + **Mongolia is the only country in the region to prohibit in legislation all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment in the home.**

Protection from violence is a basic human right. Adults are afforded legal protection from violence, but children, despite their vulnerabilities, are not provided with the same protection and rights. Even where violence against children is banned, many children are found exempt from protection because of insufficient definitions of the terms *child* and *violence*. Indeed, violence against children is still permitted by law in some form in all countries in Asia Pacific except Mongolia.

## Inconsistent definitions of child

The CRC defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years.<sup>15</sup> However, there are gaps and discrepancies in the definitions of *child* or *young person* across the region. The definition of *child* or *young person* determines who is afforded protection from violence in national child rights legislation. Singapore<sup>16</sup> defines a child to be below 14 years and a young person to be between 14 and 16 years. In Vietnam a child is anyone below 16 years.<sup>17</sup> In both countries those who are 16 years and below are afforded protection from violence. However, there is a gap for children above 16 years. Furthermore, some minimum age requirements make children susceptible to particular forms of violence like child labour:

<sup>15</sup> CRC, art 1.

<sup>16</sup> Children and Young Persons Act (Singapore, 2001), art 2, available here: <http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/aol/search/display/view.w3p?page=0;query=DocId%3A911aba78-1d05-4341-96b7-ee334d4a06f0%20%20Status%3Ainforce%20Depth%3A0;rec=0>.

<sup>17</sup> Law on Child Protection, Care and Education (Vietnam, 1991), art 1, available here: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/84243/1/1/1/4/F-1723419329/VNM84243%20Eng2.pdf>.

In 2016, India introduced amendments to the nation's labour law. While the law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 unless working for family after school hours or during vacation, it permits 14–18 year olds to work except in hazardous occupations.<sup>18</sup> This ultimately leaves 14–18 year olds in India more vulnerable to some forms of violence.

## Inconsistent definitions of violence

The definition of violence against children is not regionally conclusive. In the Thai language the word *violence* translates into physical aggression. In the international community there is little agreement on the measurement of neglect.<sup>19</sup> And throughout the Asia Pacific region many students, teachers and parents view corporal punishment as an acceptable response to children's behaviour.<sup>20</sup> So, who decides what is and what is not violence against children?

The CRC defines violence against children as 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.<sup>21</sup>

Since every country in Asia Pacific has ratified the CRC, this definition serves as each one's benchmark. Policy advances are being made across the region to further define the nuances of violence in order to better protect the children. For example, the legal age for marriage in Nepal is now 20, despite socially accepted norms of child marriage, and corporal punishment has been outlawed in Mongolia. These policies are not fully implemented yet, but the foundation is being laid and the example set for the elimination of *all* forms of violence against children, beyond those which are clearly unacceptable, like severe physical abuse.

## Corporal punishment must be banned by law

The CRC defines corporal punishment as 'any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light'.<sup>22</sup> Evidence shows that those closest to children, including parents and teachers, are most likely to perpetrate violence.<sup>23</sup> Corporal punishment is prevalent; in Asia Pacific there are consistent findings that nearly three out of every four children experience a form of physical violence as punishment.<sup>24</sup> However, in many countries across Asia Pacific the law allows corporal punishment to continue

18 The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act 2016, available here: [http://www.labour.nic.in/sites/default/files/THI%20CHILD%20LABOUR%20%28PROHIBITION%20AND%20REGULATION%29%20AMENDMENT%20ACT%2C%202016\\_0.pdf](http://www.labour.nic.in/sites/default/files/THI%20CHILD%20LABOUR%20%28PROHIBITION%20AND%20REGULATION%29%20AMENDMENT%20ACT%2C%202016_0.pdf).

19 See UNICEF, *Child Maltreatment: Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences in the East Asia and Pacific Region* (2012), 67, [https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Child\\_Maltreatment.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Child_Maltreatment.pdf).

20 See UNICEF, *Violence Against Children in East Asia and the Pacific*, Strengthening Child Protection Systems no. 4 (Bangkok: UNICEF EAPRO, 2014), 11.

21 CRC, art 19(1).

22 See Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 8, 42nd session, arts 19, 28(2), 37, <http://hrilibrary.umn.edu/crc/comment8.html>.

23 Shamika Ravi and Rahul Ahluwalia, 'What Explains Childhood Violence? Micro Correlates from VACS Surveys', *Psychology, Health and Medicine* 22, sup 1 (2017): 17, 26.

24 UNICEF, *Violence Against Children in East Asia and the Pacific*, 11.

in the home and school settings. As children are at most risk of experiencing violence in these settings, it is imperative that corporal punishment is banned across the region.

Mongolia is the only country in Asia to have legally prohibited all forms of violence against children in all settings, including corporal punishment in the home.<sup>25</sup> Corporal punishment in the home is still permitted in many Asia Pacific countries<sup>26</sup> either directly – by allowing for corporal punishment in the home through national legislation<sup>27</sup> – or indirectly – by not explicitly outlawing corporal punishment. Corporal punishment may also be permitted in schools or as a form of criminal punishment.

Prohibiting corporal punishment is a requirement of the CRC, and the need to ban it has been recognised by both SAEVAC<sup>28</sup> and ASEAN.<sup>29</sup> While corporal punishment is known to have negative effects on children,<sup>30</sup> banning it has proven to have positive implications, including:

- + reducing the use of corporal punishment
- + raising awareness of the negative effects of corporal punishment
- + changing attitudes of parents, caregivers and the community towards positive discipline.<sup>31</sup>

Policy makers are in a unique position to change attitudes and social norms in relation to violence. Reforming the law is a powerful message from the leaders of a nation that all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment in the home, will not be tolerated.

## Recommendations

- 1 Ensure national legislation across the region is aligned with the CRC:
  - a) clarify that a child is anyone under the age of 18
  - b) ban violence against children in all forms and settings: physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse
  - c) ban corporal punishment as a form of violence against children.
- 2 Ensure all Asian Pacific countries ratify every international child rights instrument.

- 25 See *The Law on the Rights of the Children 2016* (Mongolia), art 7.1, art 2.6 (unofficial translation).
- 26 Children may still experience violence at home in many countries, including but not limited to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pacific Islands, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, DPR Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Vietnam.
- 27 Parents can be authorised to impose 'reasonable defence', which typically constitute a 'legal defence'. See Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *Progress towards Prohibiting All Corporal Punishment of Children in ASEAN Member States* (2015).
- 28 South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children, 'Corporal Punishment', <http://www.saevac.org/corporal-punishment/>
- 29 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (ASEAN RPA on EVAC) (2016), 16, <https://acwc.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Final-ASEAN-RPA-on-EVAC-IJP-16.03.2016-2nd-Print-updated-ISBN-24.03....pdf>.
- 30 Elizabeth Gershoff and Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, 'Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analyses', *Journal of Family Psychology* 20, no. 4 (2016): 453–69.
- 31 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*.

# The negative consequences of corporal punishment: A story from Chulkiri District, Cambodia

When 11-year-old Ratha\* came home one day with a small snack, she didn't even have time to enjoy it before she was intercepted by her aunt and uncle. They accused her of stealing the money for the snack and lying. Ratha immediately denied the allegation, explaining that she had received the money from her mother. In retaliation, they resorted to the only form of discipline they knew. They beat her and hit her head against a brick wall until she had serious head injuries.

After they had finished disciplining her, they sent her to the police station and filed a complaint against her for stealing. But because of Ratha's physical condition and her young age, the local authorities knew that the problem was not that Ratha stole the money. The problem was the use of physical violence as a form of discipline.

When Ratha's mother found out, she informed World Vision and the local authorities in the area to ask for support. Ratha was immediately sent to the local health centre for treatment and then referred to a local hospital. After three months the girl had still not completely recovered, so she was moved to Phnom Penh for better treatment where she stayed for over a month. After a long period of treatment, Ratha started to recover and returned to school.

Besides supporting Ratha's immediate physical treatment, her family wanted to ensure that this would never happen again. This wasn't the first time they had heard of an abuse case, but they had never reported one before, knowing that the law rarely protects the victims. This time, World Vision staff assisted Ratha and her mother to file a case against the aunt and uncle with the help of the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC). World Vision staff also supported the family through all of the complicated legal and court proceedings. The court decision has now been issued charging the aunt and uncle of 'intentional acts of violence with aggravating circumstance' (based on article 219 of the Criminal Code of Cambodia). This is punishable by two to five years of imprisonment and a fine of 4 million to 10 million riels (US\$1,000 to US\$2,500).

In addition to helping individual families, World Vision is working with the CCWC, the local church and local authorities to conduct awareness-raising on child rights, domestic violence and child participation in the community so that other families know when and how to report cases.

\*Name changed to protect confidentiality





# 2 Ending violence against children requires changing hearts and minds



## The issue at a glance:

- + **Harmful social norms and values perpetuate violence against children.**
- + **By utilising the influence of community and faith leaders and the reach of the media, it is possible to change hearts and minds.**
- + **Empowering children and encouraging their participation has a powerful impact on harmful norms and values.**

While it is imperative that formal laws and policies are in place to protect children, it is equally important to change harmful social norms and values. Social norms are 'shared perceptions about others that exist within social groups';<sup>32</sup> examples include accepting corporal punishment as a form of discipline; accepting child marriage as normal; and believing that coercion of young boys into gang violence is a 'rite of passage'.<sup>33</sup> Raising awareness with individuals and communities and empowering children are tools to combat harmful social norms and values.

## Harmful social norms and values

In a region as diverse and complex as Asia Pacific, it is difficult to identify common social norms and values. However, one common norm across not only Asia Pacific, but the world, is the idea that some forms of violence against children are justified. For example, there can be a perception amongst parents that 'physical punishment' is an acceptable means of 'educating their children'.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, strong, hierarchical family structures evident in some Asian cultures<sup>35</sup> are a norm which can result

32 P.S. Lilleston et al., 'Understanding Social Norms and Violence in Childhood: Theoretical Underpinnings and Strategies for Intervention', *Psychology, Health and Medicine* 11, sup 1 (2017): 122, 124.

33 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 37.

34 Thi Thanh Huong Vu, 'Understanding Children's Experiences of Violence in Vietnam: Evidence from Young Lives' *Innocent Working Paper* (Florence: UNICEF Office of Research, 2016), 12.

35 Save the Children Sweden, 'Child Rights Situational Analysis within the ASEAN Region', Mahidol University (2016), 26.

in children occupying the lowest position in the family,<sup>36</sup> this may lead to a disregard for their rights and agency. In some cases strong community ties may impede reports of incidents of violence against children because of fears that such reports would disrupt social cohesion.<sup>37</sup> Failure to report and prosecute violence results in a culture of impunity and allows the cycle of violence to continue. Ending violence requires changing hearts and minds by shifting these social norms and values towards creating a safe environment where children do not suffer from violence.

## Influencing hearts and minds

There are many tools that can be used to influence the hearts and minds of individuals and communities to stop harmful social norms and practices. Because violence against children is often perpetuated by parents and caregivers, it is important that they are a primary target of interventions. Transforming their attitudes and behaviours by making them aware of alternative, positive disciplinary techniques is fundamental.

In terms of reach and influence, faith and community leaders and the media are key stakeholders in shaping social norms and practices. Who is considered a community leader will vary depending on the local context, but community leaders may include police officers, local politicians, health-care providers,

cultural leaders and faith leaders.<sup>38</sup> In a study of the Asia Pacific region it was found that faith leaders have an important role in providing a 'moral compass for the communities' and church leaders were 'highly influential in mediating people's behaviour and actions'. In some circumstances, the church had more coverage than government child protection services. For example, in the Solomon Islands, the Church Association could reach almost 88 per cent of the population, which was higher than any other welfare agency.<sup>39</sup>

Any attempt to shift social norms and values must be supported by a sustained and influential media and communications campaign. Campaigns can be designed using insights from behavioural science.<sup>40</sup> Some governments across the globe utilise dedicated behavioural science units to inform policies and campaigns that seek to promote behaviour change with success.<sup>41</sup> Often, governments recruit high-profile sporting heroes or entertainers as champions to speak out and deliver key messages. An influential media campaign will be necessary to support any change in laws and policies that address violence against children.

38 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 41.

39 ECPAT International, *National Child Protection Systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region*, 39.

40 For example, see the Ring the Bell campaign from India, which then went global. Seeking to create behaviour change, the ad campaign urged bystanders to 'ring the bell' when they suspected domestic violence. See <http://us.breakthrough.tv/campaigns/ring-the-bell/>.

41 See, for example, the Behavioural Insights Team in the UK, <http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/>, or the Dedicated Unit of Behavioural Economics in the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/domestic-policy/behavioural-economics>.

36 Ibid.

37 ECPAT International, *National Child Protection Systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region* (2014), 42.

## Empowering children

Another measure to challenge harmful social norms and values is empowering children and supporting child participation. Many countries throughout Asia Pacific have recognised this right and are implementing measures to encourage child empowerment and a framework more focused on child rights.<sup>42</sup> Some examples include the following:

- + **The Philippines** has created many councils in government that are child focused. To establish a system of collaboration, a Convergence of Councils and Committees for Child Protection was created. This includes, but is not limited to, the Council for the Welfare of Children, the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography, the Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking, the Committee for Special Protection Against Children and the Department of Justice Office of Cybercrime. At the local level every *barangay* has a youth council which 'serves as the voice of the youth in the local government'.<sup>43</sup>
- + **Cambodia** has established the Cambodian National Council for Children and the National Committee for Counter Trafficking. At the local level commune councils and community-based child protection networks have been established to promote children's rights.<sup>44</sup>

42 Save the Children Sweden, *Child Rights Situational Analysis within the ASEAN Region*, 27.

43 Ibid., 26.

44 Ibid.

- + **Vietnam and Singapore** both have laws in place that recognise the right for children to have access to information and to express opinions.
- + **Bangladesh** has laws in place to address child labour, child marriage and child trafficking, including its Children's Act 2013.

Children's participation in decisions and issues that affect them is a right that is afforded under Article 12 of the CRC. World Vision supports child participation, working throughout many countries in Asia Pacific strengthening children's life skills, hope and resilience in order to protect themselves and others. Through World Vision's support, children and youth are empowered to inform decision-making of duty-bearers and to develop their own initiatives, individually and collectively, to end violence against children.

## Recommendations

- 1 Support policy advances that aim to end violence against children with campaigns informed by behavioural research, targeting in particular those closest to children.
- 2 Utilise the reach of media and of community and faith leaders to promote behaviour change.
- 3 Empower children by creating and funding formal and informal participation mechanisms and by equipping them with life skills through education.

# From exploitation to a secure, happy childhood: Children's clubs in India

For 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, Ajith,\* a boy of just 9 years, would work rolling *beedis* (traditional Indian cigarettes) with only a one small lunch break. The owner of the factory took laziness very seriously and would often resort to abuse if he found his staff 'slacking off'. Ajith found the work so difficult that he tried to run away to his sister's house at one point. But the owner of the factory dragged him back, and as punishment he tied Ajith's hands and feet and branded him with a hot iron on his thigh. 'It hurt a lot. The pain was unbearable, especially on my thighs,' recalls Ajith.

For weeks after Ajith was in pain. He could not walk or go to the toilet easily. Even though Ajith worked for days and months on end, he was never paid. After Ajith's father passed away when he was very young, he and his mother started working in the factory to pay off a family debt. If they refused, the owner threatened to kill both of them. They had no choice.

After Ajith had been burned, his grandmother came and saw what had happened. By that time his wounds were infected with worms. 'How could you do this to him?' his grandmother screamed. The owner said that 'he came here for work but he keeps running away. So we did this. This is for his good.'

From there, Ajith's grandmother told World Vision's self-help group leader who informed the local authorities. And after a combined

effort by World Vision India, Tamil Nadu Police, District Administration, community-based organisations, teachers and other members of the community, Ajith was rescued from the factory and returned to school.

Ajith has now completed his final year of high school. 'I am happy now. I am enjoying myself during these holidays. I am playing. I have also made a lot of friends. I am spending time with them,' says Ajith.

Children's clubs and the community groups form an important part of the informal child protection system in the villages and around Gudiyattam, where Ajith is from. An enthusiastic girl in her late teens explains, 'The children's clubs in our villages have helped us understand that education is important, and also to help each other out.' Held for about an hour weekly, the children's clubs also teach basic general knowledge, English and social awareness.

The children's club programme is successful in this region because of the collaborative process in the community. World Vision's model is based on the tenets of active community participation, child-friendly platforms and collaboration among different stakeholders. 'We could achieve such progress on this front largely due to the support from the district collector and the police,' says Raj Kumar from World Vision India.

\*Name changed to protect confidentiality





# 3 Child marriage is violence against children



## The issue at a glance:

- + **Child marriage is a form of violence against children and a violation of a child's human rights. It affects girls disproportionately.**
- + **The impact of child marriage is devastating for girls, communities and the economy.**
- + **Child marriage can be prevented by a combination of interventions that address its root causes.**

While boys and girls both suffer from violence in their childhood, the way in which they experience violence may differ. Gender norms leave girls susceptible to particular types of violence, including child marriage. The elimination of child marriage is part of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and is included in the agenda of both ASEAN and SAIEVAC.

## Prevalence and consequences

Child marriage is the formal marriage or informal union when one or both parties are under 18 years of age.<sup>45</sup> There are a range of situations which constitute child marriage, but often such marriages are forced, with girls below the age of legal consent being given in marriage to much older men or to men in other regions or countries. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in South Asia; UNICEF figures suggest 18 per cent of women aged 20–24 reported being married before the age of 15, and 52 per cent of women aged 20–24 reported being married before the age of 18.<sup>46</sup> The practice is also common across other parts of Asia Pacific; 15 per cent of girls across East Asia and the Pacific (excluding China) are married before the age of 18.<sup>47</sup> There is no data available on women married before the age of 15 at the regional level. Rates of child marriage before the age of 18 vary across East Asia and

45 Allison M. Glinski, Magnolia Sexton and Lis Meyers. *The Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide* (Washington, DC: Banyan Global, 2015).

46 UNICEF, 'UNICEF Data: Monitoring the Situation of Children and Women', <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>.

47 Ibid.

the Pacific but are as high as 35 per cent in Laos and 21 per cent in Vanuatu.<sup>48</sup> Some girls are more vulnerable to child marriage. For example, trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of forced marriage has become a particular issue for East Asia. Forced marriage of women from Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia into China has received increasing recognition.<sup>49</sup> In Vietnam, girls from ethnic minorities are more likely to marry early.<sup>50</sup> In World Vision Vietnam's 2017 baseline assessment, conducted in two provinces that have a large ethnic minority population, the percentage of female youth (18–24 years) who reported being married before 18 years of age was 25 per cent – with 12 per cent in Luc Yen and 31 per cent in Muong Cha.

Child marriage has severe consequences for girls, the economy and society. Child brides face higher risk of maternal death; early pregnancy is the leading cause of death for 15–19 year old girls in developing countries.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, child marriage is directly linked to an increased risk of intimate partner violence for girls.<sup>52</sup>

More broadly, the global economic costs of child marriage have a large impact on population and growth, children's health and

education and earnings.<sup>53</sup> Key findings from the World Bank 2017 report 'Economic Impacts of Child Marriage' include the following:

- + By 2030, through lower population growth, ending child marriage could generate more than US\$500 billion in benefits annually each year.<sup>54</sup>
- + By 2030, benefits from reduced deaths and severe malnutrition amongst young children could reach close to US\$100 billion globally per year.<sup>55</sup>
- + Ending child marriage would also increase labour market earnings and production for women and for nations as a whole.<sup>56</sup>

## Root causes of child marriage

The root causes of child marriage are complex and varied, so the strategies to end the practice require a comprehensive, multisectoral plan. Key causes in Asia Pacific include:

- + **Gender inequality:** Child marriage is a cause and consequence of gender inequality. In many Asian Pacific contexts women and girls are assigned lower status than men and boys, and their value is only viewed by reference to their role as wife, mother and caregiver.<sup>57</sup>

48 Ibid.

49 UN-ACT, *Human Trafficking Vulnerabilities in Asia: A Study on Forced Marriage between Cambodia and China* (Bangkok: UNDP, 2016).

50 Nguyen Thi Thu Hang, *Addressing the Risk Factors for Early Marriage in Vietnam*, Young Lives, Vietnam Policy Brief 3 (2016), <https://www.younglives.org.uk/content/addressing-risk-factors-early-marriage-vietnam>.

51 World Bank, *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity* (2014), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/19036>.

52 L McCleary-Sills et al., 'Child Marriage: A Critical Barrier to Girl's Schooling and Gender Equality in Education', *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13, no. 3 (2015): 69, 71.

53 Quentin Wodon et al, *Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report* (2017), 8.

54 Ibid., 71.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 5–6.

57 World Health Organization and Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Child, Early and Forced Marriage Legislation in 37 Asia Pacific Countries' (2016), 8.

- + **Poverty:** Girls may be viewed as a financial burden in low-income families. Dowries may be used to secure economic security.<sup>58</sup>
- + **Lack of education:** Lack of education operates both as a key risk factor and a result of child marriage.<sup>59</sup> Girls who marry early are less likely to be literate and less likely to obtain secondary education.<sup>60</sup> Girls with less education are also more likely to marry early.
- + **Security:** Parents may see marriage as ensuring girls financial and physical security.<sup>61</sup>
- + **Honour:** In some circumstances child marriage is permitted to legitimise sex with a girl where it would otherwise be rape.<sup>62</sup>
- + **Disasters, conflict and political instability:** Child marriage persists in unstable, disaster-affected or conflict-affected settings. In these circumstances girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to rape, sexual violence, unwanted premarital pregnancies, homelessness and hunger or starvation, which force families to continue the practice with the impression that it provides protection or prevents shame.<sup>63</sup>

- + **Legal inconsistencies and religious exemptions:** Some religious communities are legally exempted from the general prohibition of child marriage.<sup>64</sup>
- + **Social pressures and social networks:** In some circumstances, witnessing girls dropping out of school and getting married creates pressure on other girls to marry. Fear and social stigma of being a 'spinster' can be common in both girls and parents.<sup>65</sup>

## A multisectoral approach to end child marriage

There is no single solution or intervention that will end child marriage. Only a multisectoral approach, relevant to the local context, can succeed in tangible results to end child marriage. Some interventions and strategies could include the following:

- + Work with communities, including faith communities, to influence behaviour change towards gender and social norms.
- + Identify and provide care for adolescents at risk of marriage.
- + Remove barriers to accessing education for girls.
- + Educate girls, boys, parents and their wider communities about the consequences of early marriage and child rights.
- + Educate and engage media.

58 Ibid.

59 McCleary-Sills et al., 'Child Marriage', 69, 71.

60 E. Field and A. Ambrus, 'Early Marriage, Age of Menarche, and Female Schooling Attainment in Bangladesh', *Journal of Political Economy* 116, no. 5 (2008): 881–930.

61 Centre for Reproductive Rights, *Child Marriage in South Asia: International and Constitutional Legal Standards and Jurisprudence for Promoting Accountability and Change* (2013), 17.

62 Ibid., 15.

63 USAID, *Child Early and Forced Marriage Resource Guide* (2015), 12–13.

64 Centre for Reproductive Rights, 'Child Marriage in South Asia: International and Constitutional Legal Standards and Jurisprudence for Promoting Accountability and Change' (2013).

65 Child Fund, 'See Institute, PLAN International and World Vision, 'Child Marriage in Some Ethnic Minority Communities in Vietnam: An Analysis from Anthropological Perspective', 6 (2017).

- + Provide economic and income-generating opportunities to empower families.
- + Enable a strong legal and policy framework, removing any exemptions.
- + Strengthen formal and informal child protection mechanisms, ensuring they are equipped to prevent and respond to child marriage cases.

Efforts to end child marriage will require strengthening the health-care and the formal and informal child protection systems, ensuring they are equipped to prevent and respond to cases. This includes reducing income disparity, increasing access to quality education and maternal health services and ensuring gender equality and human rights for all. Intervention strategies should focus on (1) understanding the root causes of child marriage in the local context and (2) using a combination of the best multisectoral interventions to respond.

## Recommendations

- 1 Promote behaviour change around gendered social norms.
- 2 Design, implement and scale national awareness-raising campaigns to end child marriage.
- 3 Prohibit faith leaders from performing child marriage ceremonies.
- 4 Strengthen the legal frameworks prohibiting child marriage by removing all exemptions.
- 5 Develop, fund and implement a national strategic plan to end child marriage, adopting a multisectoral approach that engages the education, health, civil registration, justice and protection sectors.
- 6 Remove barriers for girls to access compulsory primary and secondary education.
- 7 Create supportive services for girls and boys at risk, such as girls' or boys' clubs, vocational training and livelihood activities that empower them and improve their quality of life.
- 8 Support girls who are already married by providing them with options for schooling; sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV prevention; livelihoods skills; and recourse from violence in the home.

# It takes one brave girl to prevent children marriage: The story of Parvati from Nepal

Parvati\* no longer believes that one's fate cannot be changed.

Born in a remote village called Udayapur, Parvati is the youngest of nine children. Child marriage was prevalent in Udayapur, and Parvati's eldest sister was married at the age of 15.

Parvati barely escaped child marriage herself. At the age of 17, a marriage proposal was made to Parvati's older sister. However, when her sister refused, Parvati was offered the marriage proposal instead. Parvati refused despite pressure from the *iami* (matchmaker) and the boy's family.

Parvati had been a member of World Vision's children's club and had learned that child marriage is illegal. It was not easy to convince her parents and the family of the boy, but she was determined and sought the support of the local Village Child Protection and Promotion Committee (VCPCC), a committee supported by World Vision. Eventually, her parents and the family of the boy conceded.

Since this experience Parvati has become an advocate to end child marriage. She helped in stopping the marriage of Asha, a junior at her school who was 14 years old when her marriage was fixed to a man who was 23. Parvati was compelled to do something, given her own experience. The local VCPCC also assisted to end this forced marriage.

Her efforts aside, things are tough at home. Her parents are already in their sixties and dependent on the cattle they raise at home, which hardly suffices for everyday expenses, let alone anything extra. However, Parvati, working odd jobs, managed to complete her high school education. Following this, she secured a job with the Human Rights and Environment Development Centre (HuRENDEC), an NGO working in Udayapur. Now, HuRENDEC partners with World Vision in helping to implement stronger child protection systems in Udayapur, and Parvati is an active social mobiliser in her community. Her sister Kamala says, 'Although I got married at a young age, I am happy that Parvati was able to do something with her life. When I talk to other women here, they appreciate her efforts in trying to bring change. I am proud of her.'

Parvati may be young, but that doesn't stop her from envisioning a community that is free from child marriage. 'Child marriage, initiated by parents and relatives, has reduced substantially here, due to the increased awareness following activities such as orientations, street plays, dialogues, etc. The major challenge now is elopement,' she shares.

Looking at her now, Parvati stands as an example that it is possible to prevent child marriage with the right interventions and when stakeholders – such as communities, local authorities and NGOs like World Vision – work together.

\*Name changed to protect confidentiality



# 4 Breaking down myths: Boys experience violence, too



## The issue at a glance:

- + Boys suffer from sexual violence too, but are less likely to report it.
- + Boys are more likely to be victims of homicide.
- + Boys are more likely to suffer from corporal punishment, bullying and gang violence.

While much attention is directed towards sexual violence perpetrated against girls, less is known or spoken about this issue in relation to boys. In fact, boys experience sexual violence, too,<sup>66</sup> and are less likely to report it.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, boys are more likely to be victims of homicide<sup>68</sup> and may experience more physical punishment.<sup>69</sup>

## Sexual violence against boys

The World Health Organization has recognised that sexual violence against men and boys is a significant problem that is neglected in research and policy.<sup>70</sup> World Vision has a longstanding commitment to addressing child sexual violence, especially in countries like the Philippines, the focus of the latest global campaign. Determining the prevalence of sexual violence against boys is difficult; boys are underrepresented in data on sexual violence.<sup>71</sup> While more research in this area is needed, it is known that, globally, approximately 73 million boys have been victims of sexual violence.<sup>72</sup> Evidence from Asia Pacific indicate that boys are more likely to suffer from sexual violence than girls. In Cambodia, it was found that a higher percentage of boys

66 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 12.

67 UNICEF Cambodia, *Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey* (2014), 88.

68 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 12.

69 UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence Against Children* (2014), 31.

70 World Health Organization, *World Health Report on Violence and Health: Sexual Violence* (2002), 154.

71 A. K. Shiva Kumar et al., 'Ending Violence in Childhood: A Global Imperative', *Psychology, Health and Medicine* 22, no. 51 (2017): 1, 5.

72 The International NGO Council on Violence Against Children, *10 Years On: Global Progress and Delay in Ending Violence Against Children – The Rhetoric and the Reality* (2016), 22.



suffered sexual abuse before the age of 18. In fact, the average age of the first incidence of sexual violence was 10 years old for boys.<sup>73</sup> In a survey conducted by UNICEF, 5.6 per cent of males (compared to 4.4 per cent of females) aged 18–24 experienced one incidence of sexual abuse before the age of 18.<sup>74</sup> Perpetrators of sexual violence were also more likely than strangers to be those close to children.<sup>75</sup> The study also found that boys are less likely to disclose sexual abuse.<sup>76</sup> A similar survey in Laos was conducted which found that boys were also more likely to experience sexual violence.<sup>77</sup> Twelve per cent of boys, compared to 7.3 per cent of girls, experienced a form of sexual violence during childhood.<sup>78</sup>

The magnitude and prevalence of sexual violence is not well understood, and it is largely ignored. Indeed, in Sri Lanka the rape of boys is not recognised in the Penal Code,<sup>79</sup> and therefore not prohibited by law.<sup>80</sup> More attention and focus on this issue is needed to understand the cause and impact of sexual violence against boys in Asia and beyond. It is imperative to break down the myths and recognise that boys are victims of sexual abuse too.

73 UNICEF Cambodia, *Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey*, 21.

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.* Neighbours were the most common perpetrator of the first incident of child sexual abuse for both girls and boys.

76 *Ibid.*, 88.

77 UNICEF, *Violence Against Children Survey in Laos: Preliminary Report* (2016), 35.

78 *Ibid.*

79 Prohibition of rape under s363(3) of the Penal Code (Sri Lanka) only applies to girls.

80 All Survivors Project and UCLA School of Law, *Lessons and Legacies: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Sri Lanka and Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2017), 3.

## Homicide, corporal punishment and gang violence – A reality for many young boys

Homicide is one of the top killers of adolescent boys,<sup>81</sup> and boys are more likely than girls to suffer from physical violence.<sup>82</sup> Boys are at greater risk of physical punishment from caregivers.<sup>83</sup> Boys are also at higher risk of suffering corporal punishment at school.<sup>84</sup> This gender discrimination regarding corporal punishment is even codified by law in Singapore.<sup>85</sup> More research is needed to understand the cause and impact of different forms of violence against boys in the region.

81 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 13.

82 Kumar et al., 'Ending Violence in Childhood', 1, 5.

83 UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 31.

84 Kumar et al., 'Ending Violence in Childhood', 1, 5.

85 Elizabeth Gershoff, 'School Corporal Punishment in a Global Perspective: Prevalence, Outcomes, and Efforts at Intervention', *Psychology, Health and Medicine* (January 2017): 1, 10. See also Education (Schools) Regulations 2013 (Singapore), 88.

## Recommendations

- 1 Review national legislation to criminalise sexual violence against boys and girls.
- 2 Modify legislation that bans violence against children to ensure it is gender sensitive, explicitly using the terminology 'boys and girls'.
- 3 Recognise in national strategic plans to end violence against children that boys suffer from violence differently than girls and require specialised care and services.
- 4 Allocate more research funding to understanding violence against boys, particularly for studies about sexual violence against boys and the reasons for underreporting.

# One of triggering factors of trafficking: **Poverty**

About 510 kilometres from Bangkok, as the main gateway between Thailand and Myanmar; Mae Sot, the westernmost town of Tak province in Thailand, has a substantial population of migrant workers and refugees from Myanmar. Many of these migrant workers from Myanmar live in the community's so-called Islam community. One family in this community – a single mother with several children – was approached by a broker and tricked into sending one of her boys to sell flowers in Bangkok when he was only 8 years old. The boy had to work from 19:00 to 22:00 every evening; in the afternoon his duty was to prepare the flowers and clean the house of his employer.

'It was the most difficult time for me', he said, as he recalled his pain. He was allowed to have only one meal each day, and it was just instant noodles. It was not uncommon for him to be hit by his employer with a hanger or a belt as punishment if he could not sell all the flowers. After two weeks his mother sent his 6-year-old brother to join him working as a flower seller.

After working for six months the elder boy had the opportunity to escape together with his peer. He returned back to Mae Sot and told his mother what had happened to him. The mother informed the child protection volunteer in the community, who then contacted World Vision local staff.

World Vision worked with the Multi-Disciplinary Team and the authorities to rescue the younger boy, who was still working in Bangkok. After the rescue the boy received intensive care in a children's shelter in Bangkok before he was reintegrated to his family in Mae Sot.

Back in the community, World Vision staff took care of the boys' well-being by supplying their basic needs and encouraged them to attend school. The mother was also counselled and made aware of her underage children's rights to an education and therefore could not force them to work. The boys are now engaging in the youth club in the community, while the mother receives the health care that she needs.





# 5 Violence may be virtual: Dealing with online abuse and exploitation



## The issue at a glance:

- + **Increased use and access to the Internet means forms of violence in the real world coexist with violence online, including bullying and exposure to violent material.**
- + **Online sexual exploitation is a risk for children in Asia, particularly East Asia.**

The Internet removes physical boundaries and allows people to connect to one another across the globe. While Internet and communication technologies bring many benefits for children growing up today, they also provide new avenues in which violence may be perpetrated.<sup>86</sup> Today, children are not merely bystanders to the Internet; they are active participants,<sup>87</sup> often beginning to use the Internet at an early age. Over 40 per cent of young people recently polled globally stated that they had begun to use the Internet before they were 13 years old.<sup>88</sup> The increased use and access to the Internet may mean that children are exposed to the following forms of online violence:

- + **Cyber-bullying:** Internet, smart phones and mobiles, and social media sites expose children to new channels of bullying. Often such bullying is 'hidden' from the view of other people around the child, and parents and teachers are not aware it is occurring.

86 Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, United Nations Secretary-General (2006), 123.

87 Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Releasing Children's Potential and Minimizing Risks: ICTs, the Internet and Violence Against Children* (2014).

88 UNICEF, *Perils and Possibilities: Growing Up Online* (2016).

- + **Online exploitation:** The Internet facilitates acts of violence and sexual exploitation and allows them to flourish locally, nationally and across borders. Children can be targeted for child sexual abuse or trafficking anytime, anywhere, domestically or internationally.
- + **Access to violent, explicit or harmful material:** The Internet allows easy access to violent, harmful and explicit materials. These may include extremist materials that promote racist or hateful ideologies or websites that discuss suicide, eating disorders and self-harm. Exposure to this material has the potential to have a negative impact on children's development and behaviour.<sup>89</sup>

While these interactions may begin online, they can and will manifest into 'threatened or actual violence [for children] in physical places.'<sup>90</sup> Children from diverse backgrounds and various ages will experience the Internet in different ways and be more susceptible to different types of online harm. Younger children are more vulnerable to online exploitation, given that they generally lack 'technical expertise and the capacity to identify possible risks.'<sup>91</sup> Sex offenders may use the Internet to 'groom' young victims. Older adolescents may be more susceptible to accessing harmful material and encounter cyber-bullying.

89 Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Releasing Children's Potential and Minimizing Risks*, 24.

90 ECPAT International, *Violence Against Children in Cyberspace* (2005), 17.

91 Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Releasing Children's Potential and Minimizing Risks*, 37.

## Key risks in Asia Pacific – Online exploitation and trafficking

A key concern for the safety of children in Asia Pacific, particularly South East Asia, is protecting children from travelling sex offenders, online sexual exploitation and trafficking. The Internet has greatly expanded access to child-abuse images online. There has been a rising trend of commercial exploitation of children in South East Asia,<sup>92</sup> and the Internet enables this growth. Mobile phones and the Internet allow travelling child sex offenders to target children directly. Some perpetrators act individually, but often perpetrators form online groups. This provides both access and affirmation of their actions for perpetrators.<sup>93</sup> Perpetrators can easily groom young, vulnerable children online. The scale of offending and its cross-national nature is creating unprecedented challenges for enforcement agencies.<sup>94</sup>

There have been positive steps made by policymakers in the region, like Brunei Darussalam, which has strengthened the national laws to criminalise many acts of online sexual exploitation. However, tackling online sexual exploitation of children will require strong national and regional action and partnership with law-enforcement agencies, civil society

92 EPCAT International, *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in East and South-East Asia: Developments, Progress, Challenges and Strategies for Civil Society* (2014), iv.

93 Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, *Releasing Children's Potential and Minimizing Risks*, 24.

94 Sonia Livingstone, John Carr and Jasmina Byrne, *One in Three: Internet Governance and Children's Rights* (2015), 12.

and industry. Some examples of effective interventions and campaigns include:

- + **APAC-FCACP:** The Asia-Pacific Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography was launched in 2009 and brings together banks, credit card companies, technology companies, social networking platforms, online third-party payment companies and law-enforcement agencies to combat child sexual exploitation material online.<sup>95</sup>
- + A partnership between the United States' FBI and Thailand to form the **Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce**. This allows Thailand to gain access to the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports on child exploitation.<sup>96</sup>
- + **World Vision Philippines** has partnered with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, International Justice Mission, Compassion International, the Inter-Agency Against Trafficking, and other likeminded groups to raise awareness and resources to address sexual exploitation of children online.

95 See International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, 'Asia-Pacific Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography', <https://www.icmec.org/apac-fcacp/>.

96 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 'Press Release: Thailand and the US Strengthen Partnership to End Child Sexual Exploitation' (29 March 2017), <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news/3/6886/76451-Thailand-and-the-U.S.-Strengthen-Partnership-to-En.html>.

## Recommendations

- 1 Review national laws to criminalise acts of online sexual exploitation.
- 2 Invest in programmes that educate children about cyber-bullying, risks from domestic and international predators and online exploitation.
- 3 Ensure that adequate funding and resources are available to empower local law-enforcement agencies to monitor and prosecute online sexual predators.

# From online boyfriend to physical abuser: A story from Thailand

In June 2017, World Vision in Chiang Rai, Thailand, was contacted by a father who reported his 14-year-old daughter, Nuch,\* had gone missing.

Unbeknown to the family, the teenager had built up an online relationship with a man on Facebook. The two had been communicating for two months but had never met. The man even transferred money, which she collected from an ATM, for her to spend as a gift. One day the man offered to transfer even more money, and she returned to the ATM with her older sister but was unable to withdraw any cash. Instead of waiting, the sister had to leave to return to her son.

That same evening, the father received a phone call from his daughter's phone, but the voice was that of an adult male. The caller threatened to harm the girl if the father contacted the police. The phone number could not be reached after that call.

The next morning the father received another phone call, but this time he could hear his missing daughter's voice on the other end. Her voice was trembling as if she was under the influence of

alcohol or drugs. She apologised and indicated she was in another village in a neighbouring province, some five hours away by road. The father tried many times to contact the number again, but the phone had been turned off.

Later that day, Nuch's older brother reported what had happened to his teacher. Together, they helped the father contact the local police to report the disappearance of his daughter. The next day the teacher was able to locate Nuch, and she was then brought back to her family.

Within three days the police had located the suspect, a man in his fifties, and arrested him. He is now serving a sentence for crimes which included sexual assault against a minor. World Vision staff referred the case to the district social worker and local hospital psychologists, and Nuch is undergoing treatment. She is now staying at the government-run family and children's shelter, where her physical and mental conditions are closely monitored. World Vision staff are working with government service providers to help reunite the family and reintegrate Nuch, who is the victim of online grooming and sexual exploitation.

\*Name changed to protect confidentiality





# 6 Vulnerable children are at a higher risk of violence



Ending violence against children in Asia Pacific will only succeed if *all* children are reached – especially the most vulnerable. The commitment to Agenda 2030 recognises that ‘people who are most vulnerable must be empowered’.<sup>97</sup> This includes all children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, ethnic minorities, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants. ASEAN has recognised the need to reach the most vulnerable children in the Regional Action Plan to End Violence Against Children.<sup>98</sup>

## Closing the data gap on vulnerable children

Understanding more about vulnerable children is the first step towards ending violence against those children. As section 9 of this document elaborates, the disaggregated data on vulnerable children required to meet the commitments made in Agenda 2030, the SDGs and regional action plans are sparse.<sup>99</sup> Precise data is needed to design and implement policies that will reach the most vulnerable children. Children may be invisible to data gatherers for several reasons – they may be separated from families, living in poverty or on the streets, trafficked or living in a conflict zone.<sup>100</sup> There is a need to ensure that all children are accounted for and represented in data collection efforts through improved methodologies.

97 United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015), 23.

98 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children* (ASEAN RPA on EVAC), 8–10.

99 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016* (2016), <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/leaving-no-one-behind>.

100 We Are Lumos, ‘Open Letter to UN and Its Member States’ (2016), <https://wearelumos.org/sites/default/files/All%20children%20count%20but%20not%20all%20are%20counted%20EN%2015.11.16%20%281%29.pdf>.



## Vulnerable children in Asia Pacific

Children's exposure to violence may increase due to one or a combination of factors. ASEAN identified vulnerable children to include:

- + children living in out-of-home care
- + homeless children or children not registered at birth
- + children involved with the justice system or in detention
- + children with chronic illness
- + children with disabilities
- + children from ethnic minorities
- + children in early forced marriage
- + child involved in forced labour; trafficking
- + migrant children, refugee children
- + children who have witnessed or experienced violence in the community
- + children in low socioeconomic urban environments where guns, alcohol and drugs are easily accessible
- + children living in accident prone and natural disaster areas
- + children who are unwanted, born prematurely or part of a multiple birth
- + children exposed to information and communication technologies (ICTs) without adequate safeguards, supervision or empowerment.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (ASEAN RPA on EVAC)*, 8–10.

These factors can be understood on a sliding scale, meaning the combination of two or more of these factors and the amount of time experiencing them increases the child's vulnerability to violence. Children are at an increased risk of violence, for example, if they are living out of home with a disability. A child without a birth certificate may not be able to access education and health services, which increases that child's risk and vulnerability. Children that World Vision defines as the 'most vulnerable' are those who are living with three or more of the following risk factors that threaten their well-being: (1) abusive and exploitative relationships, (2) extreme deprivation, (3) serious discrimination, and (4) vulnerability to negative impacts of a catastrophe or disaster. Understanding the effect of the combination of vulnerability factors is crucial to addressing violence against children.

## Recommendations

- 1 Identify in national strategic plans to end violence against children the factors that make children more vulnerable to violence and address the root causes of that vulnerability.
- 2 Design interventions with the participation of vulnerable children and their families, and provide them access to inclusive social services.
- 3 Invest in identifying and measuring the prevalence of violence and the impact of interventions for the most vulnerable children in order to design, finance and implement effective interventions.

Children in Asia Pacific also may be at a higher risk of violence where they suffer from discrimination based on social markers. For example, in South Asia there is evidence that a child's caste status significantly increases his or her risk of experiencing violence, including corporal punishment in school.<sup>102</sup> In India, children from lower castes and ethnic minorities face caste-based violence in both private and government schools.<sup>103</sup> In Nepal, schools provide separate water taps for Dalit and non-Dalit children. If Dalit children are found drinking from non-Dalit children's water taps, they are punished.<sup>104</sup> These examples illustrate how discrimination and social markers increase a child's risk of experiencing violence. Baseline evaluations conducted in 2017 in Cambodia<sup>105</sup> and Vietnam<sup>106</sup> reported that vulnerable children were more likely to experience violence than nonvulnerable children. In Cambodia, 33.2 per cent of vulnerable children reported physical violence compared to 8.3 per cent of nonvulnerable children. Moreover, poor vulnerable children and boys in Vietnam reported experiencing more violent discipline (corporal and emotional).

<sup>102</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, *Violence Against Children in Education Settings in South Asia: A Desk Review* (2016), 22, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/VACineducation.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> Kathleen Kostelny and Colleen McGinn (Columbia Group for Children in Adversity), 'Ending Violence Against Children – Cambodia Baseline Report', unpublished report.

<sup>106</sup> Kathleen Kostelny and Mathilde Guntzberger (Columbia Group for Children in Adversity), 'Ending Violence Against Children – Vietnam Baseline Report', unpublished report.

# Sharmin wins over hardship

Sharmin,\* a 15-year-old girl, lives in an area of Chittagong, Bangladesh, and is no stranger to the challenges and pain of exploitation. In her early life, Sharmin endured severe hardship due to poverty and vulnerability. She became a victim of child labour in a cotton factory near her house at the age of 12, where she had to work for eight hours per day and earned only US\$7 per month. Sharmin recalls that the owner used to punish her if she made any mistakes at all. 'Though I used to do a lot of work there, I was not given my salary regularly.' She adds, 'It was too tough for our family to manage all the expenses with the little income of my father.'

In 2014, Sharmin joined a programme facilitated by World Vision called the Reducing Child Labour project (RCL project). This was a turning point in Sharmin's life. She received three months' training on general sewing provided by the RCL project. After the successful completion of the training, she was given a sewing machine to utilise her practical knowledge, create self-employment and be self-reliant.

The story could have stopped there, but, Sharmin was motivated to do more. She was selected by an RCL partner organisation to

complete a beauty therapy course through the UCEP Bangladesh Technical School. She successfully completed the course, obtaining an A+ and ranking first in her class. Then, in September 2016, she started working in a local beauty parlour. Sharmin also works three days a week in a Polytechnic Institute as an assistant of tailoring instructor, where she earns from personal sewing orders.

With these opportunities Sharmin has become self-reliant and independent. She is already assisting others to transform their lives as well by teaching four other girls beauty therapy and another girl skills in tailoring free of charge. She hopes that the training will allow the five girls to be independent, granting them an opportunity to build a better future.

Her parents are so proud of her and her valuable contribution to the well-being of her family. Sharmin's dream of becoming an entrepreneur to help other vulnerable people get the chance to change their lives is coming true.

\*Name changed to protect confidentiality





# 7 Harming children is bad for the economy



## The issue at a glance:

- + It is estimated that violence against children costs US\$7 trillion a year globally.
- + The consequences of childhood violence last a lifetime and influence a child's ability to prosper.
- + There is an economic imperative to act now.

Experiencing violence in childhood has long-term consequences for the well-being and prospects of both the individual child and wider society. It is estimated that the economic costs and impact of violence against children costs up to US\$7 trillion a year globally.<sup>107</sup> This is exponentially higher than the investment needed to fund prevention measures and probably much higher than what is currently spent on child protection measures. Therefore, aside from the obvious human rights and good governance considerations, investing in preventing violence against children is good for the economy.<sup>108</sup>

## The consequences of childhood violence last a lifetime

Experiencing violence can have a severe impact on the long-term health of an individual and can be costly to treat. Violence against children may result in:

- + injury
- + death
- + infectious disease
- + mental health problems
- + reproductive health problems
- + noncommunicable diseases.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Paola Perezniето et al., *The Costs and Economic Impact of Violence Against Children*, Overseas Development Institute and Child Fund Alliance (2014).

<sup>108</sup> SRSG on Violence Against Children, *Toward a World Free From Violence: Global Survey on Violence Against Children* (2013), xiv.

<sup>109</sup> Susan Hillis et al., 'The Enduring Impact of Violence Against Children', *Psychology, Health and Medicine* 22, no. 4 (2017): 393.

Studies on early brain development illustrate the devastating impact of violence on a child's development. The toxic stress associated with violence can negatively affect the structure, activity and emotional function of a child's brain. This can have a negative effect on a child's 'behavioural, social and emotional functioning',<sup>110</sup> the effects of which can last into adolescence and adulthood.<sup>111</sup> A study of the Asia Pacific region found that experiences of childhood emotional violence were linked to 25 per cent of all common mental disorders (such as, depression and post-traumatic stress) later in life.<sup>112</sup>

Aside from the health costs, there are many studies demonstrating that violence has a negative impact on children's education. There is evidence indicating higher rates of grade repetition and lower attainment of grades amongst children who have experienced violence.<sup>113</sup> In a study based in Vietnam, children who experienced corporal punishment in schools had poorer cognitive function and lower maths scores.<sup>114</sup>

## Economic costs

In addition to the impact on the individual level, there are also large economic consequences of violence against children incurred by governments and businesses due to the health and social costs that arise. Unfortunately, there are only a few country-specific estimates.

In a 2012 study it was estimated that the costs of child maltreatment in the East Asia and Pacific region came to a total of US\$209 billion per year, equivalent to 2 per cent of the region's GDP.<sup>115</sup> In a 2013 study that focused on Cambodia, the economic burden of health consequences for children totalled US\$168 million, and productivity losses due to violence totalled US\$83.3 million for that year alone.<sup>116</sup>

Violence against children also 'erode[s] the productive capacity of future generations'.<sup>117</sup> The long-term public health impact on children, including impaired brain development, can lead to lifelong mental physical and mental health issues for generations to come.

110 Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development* (2015), 8.

111 *Ibid.*, 9.

112 D. Fry and S. Blight, 'How Prevention of Violence in Childhood Builds Healthier Economies and Smarter Children in the Asia and Pacific Region', *BMJ Global Health* 1, sup 3 (2016): 3, 5.

113 D. Fry and S. Blight, 'How Prevention of Violence in Childhood Builds Healthier Economies and Smarter Children in the Asia and Pacific Region', *BMJ Global Health* 1, sup 2 (October 2016): 3, 8.

114 *Ibid.*

115 X. Fang et al., 'The Burden of Child Maltreatment in the East Asia and Pacific Region', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 42 (April 2015): 146.

116 UNICEF, *Economic Burden of the Health Consequences of Violence Against Children in Cambodia* (2015), 26.

117 World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 15.

While there are no clear estimates on the economic impact at the regional level, it is apparent that preventing and addressing violence against children is imperative not just from the viewpoint of protecting children but also for the economic health of nations within the region.<sup>118</sup> The economic cost of inaction is too great.

118 Hillis et al., 'The Enduring Impact of Violence Against Children', 393, 398.

## Recommendations

- 1 Ensure that enough resources are allocated to systems, programmes and interventions that prevent and respond to violence against children.
- 2 Research public and private resources that are spent to prevent and respond to violence against children to demonstrate the potential savings and increases in productivity.



# Heartbreak grass

*Gelsemium elegans*, nicknamed 'heartbreak grass', is a small flower which is well-known amongst the hill tribes of northern Vietnam as an effective means for suicide if eaten. The beautiful façade is quickly tainted once eaten, causing symptoms of thirst, dizziness, muscular fatigue, stomachache and finally a quick death due to apnea.

Cases of young people using 'heartbreak grass' and other poisons to take their lives early are becoming more apparent in northern Vietnam. Reasons for child suicide are often because young people experience emotional violence and shame in the home or they are rejected by a loved one. The cost of one single life lost is not quantifiable, but the cost of rehabilitating someone who self-harms can put a poor family into desperate financial circumstances.

A 15-year-old girl tried to take her own life by drinking toxic liquid. When the family discovered the child, they immediately rushed her to a commune health station. She received emergency first aid, but that wouldn't be enough to save her life. The family knew that they did not have enough money to take her to the provincial hospital, which was 50 kilometres away. But when the commune secondary-school headmaster reported it to the child protection committee (CPC), the committee notified the village leader, who provided support to the family to hire a car and take her to the hospital where she could access better services. This financial contribution was enough to save this girl's life.

In this case the girl was able to make it to the hospital on time after the village banded together to help. But the assistance didn't end

there. When the girl returned home, the family worked with the CPC and the social welfare officer to help reintegrate her. She had missed weeks of school and was very afraid of facing her family and friends. Not only that, but the medical bills had set the family back, considering they were only making US\$130 a month on average.

The CPC, who were trained by the World Vision staff, worked with the family and community prior to her return, discussing positive ways to reach and behave with children. This included ways to avoid emotional violence and saying shameful things, which would instigate and promote this type of reaction. The CPC also met with the school headmaster to orient her classmates about discrimination and the negative effects it may have on the girl when she came back.

World Vision is working with families specifically on how to avoid incidences like this one by training communities on how to positively discipline children and avoid emotional violence. World Vision staff are also equipping youth to recognise emotional violence and how to report it.

The young girl is now happily living back at home with her family. This may not have been the case had she experienced discrimination upon return. World Vision will continue to invest in prevention education to ensure that an individual's potential is maximised. When communities lose young lives to self-harm, it doesn't just have an impact on the family; it affects everyone.





# 8 A coordinated child protection system is needed to end violence



## The issue at a glance:

- + **Ending violence against children requires working with multiple aspects, interventions and actors at the same time – laws, services, resources, coordination and monitoring – and involving institutions, people who surround the child, and children themselves.**
- + **Most child protection services across Asia are reactive and issue focused. Strengthening child protection requires a systems approach.**
- + **Strengthening child protection systems to end violence against children requires targeted funding from national governments.**
- + **Strengthening child protection systems can be achieved through strong and empowered ‘informal structures’ such as families, caregivers and communities.**

Violence against children is a complex issue that requires a multisectoral, systematic approach across the region. While it is recognised that policymakers deal with many competing demands, it is evident that prioritising the prevention of violence against children makes sense not only for the well-being of children and overall economic health, but also for good governance. Strengthening child protection in Asia Pacific requires:

- + a systems approach to child protection and ending violence against children (as further explained later in the section)
- + targeted funding and resourcing from national governments
- + strong and empowered informal structures like families, caregivers and communities.

Strengthening child protection systems through these measures is key to addressing violence against children in the region.

## A systems approach to child protection in Asia Pacific

The report *National Child Protection Systems in East Asia and Pacific Region*<sup>119</sup> assessed the nature, quality and coverage of services provided to children and their families. No similar report is available for South Asia. Most child protection services across East Asia and the Pacific are reactive and issued focused, lacking the required systems approach in practice.<sup>120</sup> This results in low coverage and limited delivery of services to children. WorldVision uses the systems approach to child protection so that its work strengthens the protective environment around children (including both informal and formal elements). The focus is always on strengthening one or more elements<sup>121</sup> of a child protection system in a country, according to the context. WorldVision's systems framework states that strengthening the child protection system, requires:

- + addressing child protection issues in a comprehensive and sustainable manner; including cultural, political, social, spiritual and financial factors
- + affirming the role of parents (both mothers and fathers) and caregivers as primarily responsible for care and protection of children

<sup>119</sup> ECPAT International, *National Child Protection Systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region*, 33.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> 1. Laws and policies; 2. Services; 3. Capacities (human and financial resources); 4. Coordination and collaboration; 5. Accountability mechanisms; 6. Circle of care; 7. Children's resilience, life skills and participation.

- + affirming the responsibility of governments to guarantee the care and protection of children by respecting, protecting and fulfilling their protection rights as outlined in the CRC
- + affirming the role of children in protecting themselves and their peers
- + providing targeted resourcing – both from national budgets and Official Development Assistance (ODA).

Adopting this approach allows policymakers to address child protection holistically rather than dealing with matters on a case-by-case basis.

## Targeted resourcing and funding

Funding and resourcing for child protection is the responsibility of national governments everywhere. For countries with lower national incomes, additional resources coming from international development assistance, philanthropy, or the private sector can provide a useful, though small, complement. Indeed, in line with the trends in total ODA disbursed to the region, ODA allocated to ending violence against children in Asia Pacific is smaller when compared to other regions. A recent study found that South and Central Asia as well as East Asia receive a smaller share of spending compared to other regions. Only one

country in the Asia Pacific region, Papua New Guinea, made the top 10 global recipients for total spending for ending violence against children.<sup>122</sup>

Obtaining up-to-date information on investments in ending violence against children from national government budgets is difficult due to several reasons:

- + Infrastructure and services for child protection are typically spread across a range of agencies or allocated between different levels of government (local and national).<sup>123</sup>
- + There is no single source that provides information about child protection budgets or the budgetary process.<sup>124</sup>
- + Where policies and programmes deal with overlapping issues, it may be unclear whether services are classified as child protection services or some other service. For example, one-stop crises centres operating in Thailand, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea address violence against both women and children.<sup>125</sup>

Policymakers should thus work towards more transparent budgetary processes on resources dedicated to child protection systems. This is the first step in determining whether there are sufficient funding and resources allocated to child protection systems in countries across Asia Pacific.

<sup>122</sup> Development Initiatives, *Counting Pennies: A Review of Official Development Assistance to End Violence Against Children* (2017), 19.

<sup>123</sup> ECPAT International, *National Child Protection Systems in the East Asia and Pacific Region*, 55.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*



## Utilising informal structures to strengthen child protection systems

Strong family ties and community structures are particularly valuable assets for improving the child protection systems in countries and communities that lack resources and have limited coverage of child protection services. World Vision seeks to empower families and communities by assisting with capacity-building programmes, including:

- + **Home Visitor Programme:** Through this model, community members, groups and organisations become involved at different levels to help vulnerable families. Home Visitors are trained to develop a relationship with vulnerable boys and girls and their families to improve the child's well-being. The benefits often include increased child protection, improved care and well-being for children, and spiritual nurture for families.<sup>126</sup>
- + **Channels of Hope:** This programme trains and equips faith and community leaders to respond to issues in their community – such as widespread violence against children.
- + **Celebrating Families:** This is a three-day workshop designed for parents and caregivers. The programme invites parents and caregivers to engage in activities that prompt deep self-reflection and growth to help them become aware of their role in creating a space to support the spiritual nurture of children.

Empowering informal structures like families, caregivers and communities can go far in strengthening child protection systems.

## Recommendations

- 1 Ensure that national strategies and action plans to protect children and to end violence include all the critical violence issues; create bridges and synergies amongst different types of interventions and actors; and address both formal and informal aspects of, and solutions to, violence against children.
- 2 Improve transparency of national budgets and demonstrate the financial commitments made to child protection and ending violence against children.
- 3 Working with civil society organisations like World Vision, policymakers should seek to improve informal systems of child protection by allocating resources to programmes which inform and empower children, caregivers and community leaders.

<sup>126</sup> World Vision International, *Home Visitors* (2012), [http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Home\\_Visitors\\_PM.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Home_Visitors_PM.pdf).

# Community action to protect children

Prior to World Vision's child protection work in the area of Banteay Meanchey province in Cambodia, there was very little awareness of violence against children and of child protection specifically. In February 2015, three cases of child sexual assault against girls were reported by members of the community. The incidents occurred along the road by the forest, where perpetrators could hide themselves and capture the girls easily.

After the incidents were reported by the parents to the local police, the village chief informed World Vision. World Vision then worked with the CCWC to develop an increased awareness of child protection practices after the incidents occurred. Following the incidents the CCWC worked together with World Vision, the local police, the CPC and the village safety group to make a plan to stop the sexual assaults happening to girls in their community.

They started by consulting with children and local youth groups, who reportedly felt unsafe walking along the busy road to the community. Together, the community leaders and children agreed to clear the bushes along the road. Children today feel much safer while walking and are aware that people in their community will continue to work to make their village safe for them.

The CCWC is now supporting the youth group to launch an awareness campaign to eliminate violence against children and continue to prioritise child protection. 'We commit to eliminate the abuse against children in our community, today and in the future,' Chao Mey, a community leader, declared.





# 9 What we know about violence against children is only the tip of the iceberg



## The issue at a glance:

- + **Statistics on violence against children – including its prevalence, causes and impacts – are still very limited in numbers and quality.**
- + **In Asia Pacific there is a lack of information on violence against children, including a lack of national surveys, inadequate monitoring, and underreporting of actual instances of violence against children.**
- + **Evidence-based policymaking and programme design are essential to delivering programmes with high impact.**

The renewed focus on ending violence against children in the Agenda 2030, the SDGs and the regional plans to end violence presents an opportunity for policymakers, civil society, academics and a wide range of other stakeholders to work together to improve monitoring and evaluation of the issue. While it is a complex and multisectoral problem, there are solutions that any country in the region can implement. A critical challenge to effective response has been the lack of information and evidence as well as the resources to gather that information.

While it is clear that violence against children in Asia Pacific is widespread and has devastating consequences, the precise scale and magnitude of the issue are not known. There is a need to collect appropriate disaggregated data on violence against children that is focused on the Asia Pacific region. Accordingly, there is a need to improve monitoring systems across the region. It is also imperative to invest in monitoring, evaluation and research efforts to build the evidence for effective, scalable interventions.

## Improving monitoring systems

It can be difficult to measure the extent of violence against children; shame, stigmatisation and social norms all result in underreporting of violence, resulting in a less than accurate knowledge of the prevalence of violence against children.<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, there is a need for a more systematic and periodic surveillance of the issue in Asia Pacific. By implementing stronger monitoring mechanisms policymakers will better understand the:

- + prevalence of violence against children
- + location and source of violence against children
- + forms of violence children are experiencing
- + consequences of violence
- + measures needed to address the issue effectively.

As noted earlier, there is also a need to disaggregate the data to ensure that the impacts on the most vulnerable children are captured and reported.

Monitoring can be improved by strengthening the information obtained from care facilities like hospitals and schools from children who come in having been maltreated. In circumstances where quality administrative data is difficult to obtain, it is recommended that the monitoring indicators are obtained from national survey data, such as the 'Violence Against Children

Survey' (VACS) often conducted by UNICEF. Implementing a monitoring system will allow countries to track their progress against international and regional commitments like Sustainable Development Goal 16.2<sup>128</sup> and commitments made under the ASEAN plan to end violence against children.

There are some countries in the region that should be commended for having made the effort to compile a national baseline survey on violence against children; these include Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. It is imperative that all surveys use standardised measurements and are collected routinely and periodically to enable meaningful analysis and insights at the regional level.

## Evaluation of previous interventions

Evidence-based policymaking and programme design is essential to delivering programmes with high impact. Most evidence on addressing violence against children to date has been derived from high-income countries and may not, therefore, provide the best evidence for policy design for middle-income to low-income countries. It is essential that interventions are drawn

<sup>127</sup> UNICEF, *Violence Against Children in East Asia and the Pacific: A Regional Review and Synthesis of Findings*, Strengthening Child Protection Series, No. 4 (Bangkok: UNICEF EAPRO, 2014), 3, [https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Violence\\_against\\_Children\\_East\\_Asia\\_and\\_Pacific.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Violence_against_Children_East_Asia_and_Pacific.pdf)

<sup>128</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

from quality evidence-based studies, that is, studies with findings on effective interventions for addressing violence against children that are either:

- + statistically significant, based on high-quality experimental design such as a randomised control trial
- + recommended based on high-quality meta-analysis or systematic reviews of evaluations of multiple interventions.<sup>129</sup>

Accordingly, there is an imperative to invest in producing evidence of the impact of child protection programmes and policies in Asia. This will provide insight into:

- + what programmes and policies are effective in preventing violence in all settings (the home, school, institutions)
- + how to respond to and treat children who have experienced violence
- + how to allocate resources targeting violence against children.

World Vision is investing in the capacity to monitor and evaluate its own programmes targeted at violence against children and encourages its partners and policymakers to do the same.

<sup>129</sup> World Health Organization, *INSPIRE*, 23.

## Recommendations

- 1 Include strengthening of surveillance, monitoring and evaluation systems in the design of regional and national plans to end violence against children.
- 2 Prioritise conducting national and regional violence-against-children surveys to regularly collect prevalence data.
- 3 Ensure measurements are standardised across the region.
- 4 Increase investment in research to understand the impact and effectiveness of programme interventions that target violence against children.
- 5 Implement policy interventions based on high-quality evidence and research.

# A mother's courage for justice in the Philippines

My name is Anna,\* and I'm a mother of five children. I only have one daughter, Anita,\* who is 10 years old. She is our princess. She was an answer to prayer because it was my wish to have a daughter:

My husband was a taxi driver and the main provider for our family. Over a period of five years we had lived in 12 different apartments. It seemed as though we were always running away because we couldn't pay the rent. I heard rumours that he was indulging in drugs, but instead of fighting with him, I continued to focus on taking care of my children.

There were many nights when my children went to bed hungry. I thought about working in order to provide an additional income, but my husband didn't like the idea.

When Anita turned 3, I insisted on working in a restaurant. Financially, our situation started to improve, but I didn't realise that this was the start of a nightmare.

As time went by I noticed blood on my daughter's clothing, so I asked her what it was from. In tears, Anita confided to me that her father has been sexually abusing her.

My daughter told me that my husband threatened to kill her if she said anything, and she was afraid that if she tried to stop him, he would lash out in anger. She thought there was no other option. My heart continued to sink. I did not want to believe that this was true.

Unfortunately, I still don't know all of the answers, but I do know that I will do my best to fight for her.

*Update: The mother reported the crime to the city welfare and development office, and the father is now in prison at the city jail after being sentenced.*

*Anita is now in the fifth grade at one of the public schools in the city. World Vision has assisted her to participate in the psychosocial activities of the THRIVE project, such as Healing Through Arts. Anna also actively participates in the livelihood seminars which has helped her to start a small business to support her family. It can be a long road to full recovery, but World Vision is committed to assisting Anita and her family after this traumatic experience.*

\*Name has been changed to protect confidentiality





# 10 Businesses can end violence against children



## The issue at a glance:

- + **To end violence against children in Asia Pacific, policymakers must engage a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses in the private sector.**
- + **Businesses must eliminate all violence-against-children practices in their own operations and services.**
- + **Businesses can offer unique solutions and services to end violence.**

Violence against children is a complex and challenging problem to address. It has many root causes, cuts across many cultures and traditions and can arise from many risk factors – often meaning the most vulnerable children are most at risk of violence. It will require a multisector response. Therefore, World Vision's *It takes a world* campaign aims to inspire a movement that can bring together families, communities, governments, faith leaders, business and civil society to bring an end to violence. Amongst these many stakeholders, worth special mention is the imperative for policymakers to work with businesses in the private sector to end violence against children.

## Business needs to be on board

Inspiring the business community to join and make its contribution is key to ending violence against children. Businesses must invest in ending violence against children because it is a human right imperative and it is in their economic interest. Policymakers and civil society can engage the business sector in many capacities. First, businesses must ensure they eliminate all violence-against-children practices in their own operations and services (indeed, the law should require that they do so). This may include:

- + prohibiting child labour
- + cleaning up their supply chain
- + prohibiting employee use of company technology for any exploitative or violent behaviour
- + ensuring business policies prohibit any form of violent behaviour with a view towards shifting social norms.

## Businesses' special contribution

Businesses may also be well placed to create and develop new solutions to help tackle violence against children and strengthen child protection systems. Utilising businesses' capacity, resources and technical expertise will be key in developing new solutions to improving child protection systems. World Vision has a

proven track record in working with businesses to achieve real change in child protection – most recently in Mongolia (see the case study on the following page). Finally, it is vital to engage with businesses from across industries, ranging from large multinational businesses to small-sized and medium-sized business enterprises. Partnerships with businesses should adopt a 'shared value' strategy towards strengthening child protection and ending violence against children, which means that both business and child protection systems will benefit from this partnership.

## Recommendations

- 1 Partner with businesses to raise awareness about ending violence against children.
- 2 Collaborate with businesses to develop the technology needed to end violence against children – resources for keeping children safe online and child protection reporting mechanisms.
- 3 Ensure legal and policy frameworks require businesses to eliminate all violence-against-children practices in their operations and services.

# Mobicom Corporation and the child helpline in Mongolia

In 2014, World Vision Mongolia, Mobicom Corporation (a mobile phone business) and the Government of Mongolia partnered to establish the country's first toll-free 24/7 nationwide child helpline. Mobicom made critical contributions to the partnership, leveraging its core skills and assets in providing hardware and software to log, track and store all calls; providing free usage of its servers; and providing training for the telephone counsellors. World Vision trained staff to operate the helpline, and the government committed to ongoing funding of staff salaries for helpline workers.

As a result of this cross-sector partnership, children can now call the helpline toll-free from anywhere, at any time, to report abuse. The helpline provides emergency assistance, psychosocial support and advice to children, parents and the general public, and it transfers issues to the relevant authorities. Within the first three years of operation, just under 400,000 calls to the hotline were made – several hundred each day.

The helpline has been so successful that the government is committed to running the service on an ongoing basis. In addition, data generated by the helpline is proving to be an invaluable source of evidence for further advocacy towards improving legislation to protect children and provide appropriate services in the country. In 2017, the Government of Mongolia increased the budget to expand the helpline beyond a reporting and referral service to include temporary shelter accommodation for emergency cases.

Then Mongolian prime minister, N. Altankhuyag, recognised the child helpline as 'an important step for the country towards serving children's rights and protection'. He also congratulated World Vision Mongolia for being the first international NGO to connect the private sector, government and civil society in a joint project to improve child well-being.

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