

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

The Circle of Interconnected Problems in Society



Learn

without fear.



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Admit it! Violence Exists in Every School

What kind of situation do we think of when talking about ‘violence against children in schools?’ Have we experienced or heard of any violent incident? These questions may not be resolved if we do not try to understand them at a deeper level.

Violence against children in schools not only includes visible, physical force towards children but also covers emotional attacks, humiliation, action or omission of action that violate children’s rights. These are all considered violence against children in schools, which we cannot ignore or accept them as norms.



This research conducted by Plan International in Thailand aims to explore the nature and scope of violence against children in schools. The study was conducted in 3 regions of Thailand covering 10 schools. Research findings, analysis and key points should help raise your awareness of existing situations of ‘violence against children in schools,’ which we all can relate to. Public

awareness and attempt to monitor situations will lead to relevant stakeholders seeking prevention and solutions to violence.

Yes! Awareness starts when we begin to raise questions about violence against children in schools. Whether or not the problems will be addressed depends on our open-mindedness to understand the issues. The challenge is also to communicate them to people around us so that they too would understand the situations that affect our children.

Do you consider the following incidents to be violent? Teacher neglecting students; children being taught by a teacher who does not have relevant qualifications; children teasing peers because of their different ethnicity; boys fighting over a girl; a child repeating a grade; or a border patrol police teaching students with a loud voice and strict manner.

We all are a part of the society: for this reason, we all have roles and responsibilities towards other people. Therefore our action (or omission of action) will affect others like a domino effect – regardless of whether or not the impact is visible.

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Published by Plan International Inc. (Thailand Programme Office)
 20th Floor, Ocean Tower II, 75/35 Soi Sukhumvit 19 Road, Khlongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110 Thailand
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Different Society, Different Forms of Violence

Violence against children in schools has occurred repeatedly everywhere. Forms of violence in many schools may be quite similar or different, regardless of differences in location or cultural context. Root causes and factors that facilitate violence can also be different or similar.

Central Region: Urban Setting and Academic Pressure

Students from secondary schools with strong academic reputation all study hard in order to gain entrance to prestigious universities. Their aim is to become proud students who maintain the institution's identity and high standards. For this reason, they feel the need to study vigorously both inside and outside of classroom.

Parents' expectations towards children are enormous. Before their children attend school, parents must provide them with private tuition so that they can gain admission to the school of their choice. Once children attend school, they still have to go to private tuition in order to achieve good grades. Once children achieve good grades, they must maintain their strong academic performance in order to ensure a good future – just as their parents have expected of them.

"I want to study at this school because my family wants me to do so. My relatives graduated from here. It is quite a pressure for me. I started going to private tuition since I was in sixth grade to prepare for the entrance examination. I did not pass the entrance examination; however I had good grades so I filed a request for admission based on my past academic performance."

"I do not skip classes because I would not know what to do with my free time. If you skip classes, sometimes you have to hide and lose good opportunity. It is better to stay in classroom."

Academic competition leads to children divided into cliques based on their academic performance and social status. A core belief is that students who do well academically are good, determined and disciplined students and do not cause trouble. The society overlooks the fact that children's academic performance also depends on other factors such as differences in educational opportunities and skills of individual child etc.

Therefore, categorization of students by their academic performance creates gaps among them. Children are labeled as doing well vs. doing poorly, and financially well off vs. those who are not. Some groups of children cannot handle the pressure. One of their solutions is to form a gang. Several gangs exist in schools. Even though children insist that joining a gang helps them acquire understanding friends, independence, joint group activities and open discussions about any subject; however gang formation may lead to physical violence. An example is a case where different gangs do not like each other. In this case they would start a fight. Members of the two gangs would attack one another.

"There are several gangs with names like 'poor man's gang,' 'kimyong,' 'arb-chin,' 'buddy,' 'penguin,' 'black-white,' 'BBQ pork.' Each gang has its own style. Most children join a gang because they hang out with older friends and naturally join their clique. Children view joining a gang as a way of being with fun, capable and respectable people, and as an opportunity to do activities and to spend leisure time independently."

Feedback from a school in Central Region represents those that focus on academic excellence. This is not a minor matter that we should accept and let go. On the contrary, we must raise questions and review our expectations towards children as well as our roles in guiding and providing education for them.

"Violence already exists in children's mind. High academic competition, in particular, is a form of violence that pressure children the most."

Solutions to violence against children in Central Region schools focus on collaboration between the school, families and society. Other good practices are formation of parents' network acting as a watch group for students; the organizing of positive activities to promote the unity of students (for example, a ceremony to grant students with a school's badge); camping; sports day activities; formation of peer support group among students themselves.



Border Patrol Police: Unintentional Violence

In border patrol police schools, not only that the police have responsibility to ensure peace in community, but they also have to take the role as teachers. Therefore, teaching style in border patrol police school may be different than in most schools in terms of discipline methods used in classroom. This is because border patrol police did not have relevant educational qualifications to be teachers.

The most important recommendation for teachers includes the use of positive thinking in caring for and managing classroom. The core belief is that the use of direct, physical punishment towards children is not necessary.

Northern Region: The Context of Border Areas with Child Protection Risks

Border areas have gone through major changes rapidly in terms of economic, social and political domains. Inevitably, children are also affected by these changes. The survey conducted in Northern Region reflects these situations, most of which highlight violence against children caused by various types of risks in larger society.

The border areas are easily accessed by various groups of people. For this reason, the level of commuting and commercial transportation is high. As a consequence, problems relating to overpopulation, ethnic varieties and drug use are also increasing. Children during growth period are emotionally more complicated. This, combined with social expansion and complication, may lead to children being lured more easily into committing crimes and displaying inappropriate behavior.

When being asked about the 'police/teachers,' the image that came up immediately in everyone's mind is them punishing students by having them do push-ups, sit-ups, and teaching students in loud, firm voice. However, at the same time, police/teachers' manner may also confuse students. Children may have conflicting feelings of whether or not to accept their teachers' untraditional teaching style.

"At first I was scared because the teacher has loud voice, but I get used to it eventually."

"Teachers here are not like in any other places. Sometimes when they teach, it looks like they are out chasing bad guys. They look fierce and intense."

The police/teachers' firm voice may not come from unkindness or malicious intentions. However, it may scare children. The fear that children have may interfere with their ability to study. This is because when children do not understand the lesson, they may be afraid to ask. When children do not understand the lesson, there is a risk that they might skip classes.

Sometimes police/teachers discipline children as a group, aiming at creating unity among them. Many times, children do not understand the reason behind this principle and do not accept the punishment. Consequently, this practice also causes tension between teachers and students.

Violence in Border Areas

Borders areas are politically, socially and economically sensitive areas. Children living in these areas are vulnerable due to constant social changes these days and different information they have learned from various media channels.

In cross-border areas, ethnic differences in communities are common. At the same time, cross-border commuting, merchandise and labour trade are easily accessible. Prostitution, drug trafficking and other inappropriate behavior are commonly seen. These are social problems that children perceive on a regular basis.

In primary schools, most violence start when children tease each other about their ethnic differences. However, the tension is dissolved once children do positive activities or play together. This is not the case when children are older and problems become more complicated.

Many families have to work hard, so parents do not have time for children. Some are illiterate so they cannot help their children with school work. These are reasons that many children spend excessive time with their peers away from home.

“Children think that violence is fashion. They imitate their gang and want to be a hero. Some children are very shy at home, but become a different person at school.”

“(Children’s access to) the media is very crucial. Teachers and parents cannot keep up with the wide spreading distribution of illegal CDs and pornography materials.”

Children feel that the media teach them ‘unconventional knowledge’ that they cannot learn from parents and schools. For example, children watch pornography VCD to learn about sexual relationships and about the use of cohesive power on someone inferior than themselves. Without proper screening or guidance, children may imitate inappropriate behavior, which leads to more violent actions.

Many children are at the age and in situations where they are at risk of drug addiction. Some risky behavior include going out at night, drinking alcohol, (older boys) fighting over a girl, engaging in love affair as well as children from different communities fighting each other.

Various solutions include spending more time with them; organizing positive activities in schools; teachers providing closer supervision; and revising school curriculum. All of these are crucial in order to improve children’s behavioral problems.

Legal Status and HIV/AIDS: Sensitive Issues That Might Turn into Violence

Another interesting finding from the research is the issue of inequality in the society. In the Northern Thailand communities, this is manifested in terms of children’s lack of legal status and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. These two problems have impact on children emotionally and are considered the violation of their rights.

A teacher expressed his intention to help students gain their legal status, hoping that by doing so, he is also improving students’ chance in life.

“Students will have more options in life once they acquire Thai nationality. At the moment they miss out on many good professional and educational opportunities.”

“Children are yet to be ‘real’ Thai.”

Both children living with HIV/AIDS and their parents are discriminated by society. Consequently, students lack enthusiasm to attend classes and to enjoy social life at school. One solution is for the schools to help connect them with the mainstream society. Schools can help create mutual understanding among community members regarding HIV/AIDS issues. A good practice shown in the research is the setting up of HIV/AIDS support group. Group volunteers will help taking care of other members. Funds are also set up to support people living with HIV/AIDS.

One of key interventions identified by Northern Region schools is a ‘home visit program.’ The program aims to monitor and support individual students. In addition, collaborative approach between community, schools, families and relevant agencies is crucial. Local traditions such as the ordination and temple fair will help bring students together. Activities organized by Tambon Administrative Organization are also important. Examples include community’s sports day, scholarship grants, etc.



Violence Starts at Home and Manifests at School

Let’s hear some feedback from teachers and parents:

“Violence against children includes children being neglected, yelled at, and beaten up. Some step fathers are always in bad temper and hit their children. Some children have to work excessively. This all would result in students’ absence from school.”

“A child is afraid of being sexually abused by her step father. She never gets to sleep, and goes to school having to take 20 tablets of painkillers, resulting in her lacking ability to learn.”

“Some children are really addicted to the phone, do nothing besides talking. They do not care about school work at all.”

“A father of sixth grade student came back from work and asked how much the son has earned from working. The dad wants his son’s money to buy alcohol. The child did not have the money, so they fought. The son started being rude. Mother and grandmother were taking his side. When the father was about to beat him up, the son asked his friends to beat up his dad in return. He used to be a polite child, but has totally changed now.”

Research findings have shown that violence manifested in school is caused by domestic violence. Domestic violence results in children’s emotional complications and behavioral problems. An example is a case where some parents encourage their child to buy cigarette and alcohol. Some parents with gambling problem praise their child when s/he gambles and wins. In these situations, parents are not good role models. Other parents may gamble but prohibit their child from gambling. This sends conflicting message to children: and they might turn to troubled friends for support, or display behavioral problems.

Risks mentioned above often lead to problems of violence against children in schools. For example, many children start the fight and get into physical violence with one another after they are drunk.

“I’m worried about my child, but sometimes I’m too tired (to go buy alcohol myself), so I ask him to buy it for me. My daughter sometimes warns me that this is not the right thing to do. I know that most children go out to drink alcohol on their own.”

“At the school party, many boys from other schools will come meet their girlfriends. Once the boys run into each other, they usually don’t like each other. They throw cans, bottles, chase each other, and later on, more and more children join, sometimes almost the whole school.”

Northeastern Region: Labour Community and Backward in Education

In many Northeastern communities, families would take their payment prior to having to work during harvest season. Once the harvest is over, parents, and sometimes their children, will migrate to work outside of their community in exchange for their advanced payment. They work in agricultural sector such as growing sugar cane, potatoes, or work in construction in big cities. The migration leads to children being absent from school, or having to move to a different school. If children do not migrate, they would have to stay with their grandparents. Most of the times, children do not receive adequate care and supervision. Generation gap is also a problem between children and the elderly taking care of them.

In addition to having to migrate to work, some poor families are facing domestic problems such as quarrels, divorces, remarriage, gambling, alcohol use etc. All these issues directly affect children, resulting in their behavioral problems at schools.

As previously mentioned, a large number of children are left with their grandparents while adults migrate for work. Often times, many grandparents do not speak Thai and cannot help children with their homework. Children are also afraid of asking for help from a teacher in class. As a consequence, children become bored, not wanting to go to school and eventually skip classes. Similarly, some children have to migrate with their parents to work or to take care of younger siblings. As a result, they miss many classes, cannot keep up with their friends and not wanting to learn.

“Some of the older children have to help with the household job because they are bread-winners of the family. This becomes a cycle starting from their kindergarten years to secondary education. As a result, children cannot keep up with school lessons.”

When parents are absent from home to work, children feel that there is no one they can talk to. On the other hand, some parents who are rarely home compensate for their absence by unreasonably indulging the children. Lacking attention at home, most children look up to their peers or the media for guidance. Without families’ care and supervision, they are not mature enough yet to distinguish whether or not something is appropriate for them.

“My son would look up to older classmates as role models. He would imitate what they do. If they ask him to smoke, he would. However, he didn’t really smoke, he just rolled up a piece of paper and lit it with fire to make it look cool.”

“Premature love affair among children is difficult to solve. Many parents in community have to work, and leave children home with grandparents. Children like to imitate their peers. Teenagers, around 14-15 years old, are considered hi risk group.”

“Community has a big role in either promoting or reducing violence against children. Media has greater influence on children when family is not united.”

Verbal Abuse Is the Cause of Physical Violence

Rude words are acceptable and used in some families. As a consequence, children are used to this type of behavior and are rude to their friends at school. Teasing is often about making fun of family background, ethnicity or mocking someone. This can lead to a bigger conflict among children themselves or with their teachers.

Moreover, some teachers say rude words to students such as ‘you stupid cow.’ This also worsens the situation; children think that the behavior is acceptable. They cannot distinguish whether or not such behavior is appropriate.

“Some teachers call children stupid, or mock their family.”

“Talking about children’s family in a bad way could also be violent. Sometimes the teachers said so just because they are angry without any bad intention.”

These behaviors may not hurt children physically, but children can feel ashamed and are put under pressure. They might be afraid or do not want to go to school, and skip classes altogether. This (children not attending school) leads to other child protection risks and violence.

“Children are used to profane words from home, so they also use them at school. Teachers then punish children severely using physical violence. This is totally unacceptable because teachers should know better.”

“Yesterday, sixth and seventh grade students were fighting. They carried weapons to school – sticks, knives, chains and knuckle-dusters. At first the groups teased each other back and forth, then things got out of hand. Children are from different ethnicities (Lao and Cambodian).”

Best strategy in addressing this problem is for teachers to be more patient and understanding of children’s behaviors. Root causes must be addressed rather than continually blaming and punishing children.

In Northeastern communities, families have great influence on children’s violent behaviors at schools. The most effective solution is for the schools to solve problems together with families, communities and relevant organizations. Activities should be arranged for children such as music, sports or ethnics class.

Interesting initiatives include ‘babysitting’ and ‘foster parents’ programs. The programs are designed to support children while parents are away to work. Another initiative, ‘home visit program,’ requires regular monitoring by teachers. Discipline methods must be reasonable and constructive to help children realize when they do something wrong. Development of appropriate curriculum is also important, and should be done to suit local context of schools and communities. For example, a curriculum should seek to incorporate activities that children like such as Thai traditional dancing, music, sports, arts – all of which could serve as foundation for their future career.

“There Is No Violence in Our Schools.”

During the data collection of this research, some of children’s answers simply stated that there is no violence in their school. However, if we believe so, we would never get to the bottom of this issue.

More often than not, we are so used to violence that we tend not to think of it as a problem. For example, talking rude, domestic violence, alcohol use and gambling are acceptable for most people. Children are so used to academic pressure and pushing themselves to reach high goals. For this reason, they also tend to accept physical punishment or strict control, believing that the practice would help them to become better persons.

“Children are used to profanity words at home and use it at school.”

“We drink a lot when we get together to work. Children see this and do the same.”

“We accept (strict control by police/teacher) because this practice is the norm in our school. Teachers want children to be patient and learn how to help each other out.”

“Excessive studying is normal for children. Actually, we are willing to do so as well.”

“Punishment here is nothing compared to other schools.”

When children accept and are used to violence, they would not report abusive incidents to their parents, teachers or communities. Parents and teachers would just then assume that there is no violence against children in schools.



Silent Form of Violence: Unacceptable Cases of Neglect

Teachers have a crucial role in addressing the issue of physical and emotional violence. They are the key persons responsible for supervision of children in schools.

When the Ministry of Education issued the ministerial directive to ban physical punishment of students, many teachers have resorted to other punishment methods. All punishments have negative impact on children, either directly or indirectly. Neglect is one of the punishment methods that teachers practice, without thinking that it affects children in a big way.

Informants in the research called this (neglect) a 'silent form of violence.'

'Silent form of violence' can be described as actions of not providing children with essential things that they are entitled to or should be provided for. Neglecting children is a manifestation of silent form of violence. Teachers claim that they cannot physically punish children when they do something wrong, so they decide to ignore children's bad behavior altogether.

In addition to not disciplining children, teachers are also occupied with their own school work in order to get promoted for a higher position. Some teachers do not get along. There is also a lack of communication among teachers themselves. Furthermore, some teachers do not have relevant educational qualifications. All of these issues are considered forms of silent violence, which have great impact on children and are not widely discussed.

Even though silent form of violence does not result in any physical pain, it affects students' performance in class, as well as their thoughts and behaviors. Children may feel depressed and uncomfortable with teachers' behaviors.

Many children said that:

"A friend bullied me. I went to a teacher, but the teacher did not pay any attention, just said that she was busy, and that I should deal with the problem myself."

"I don't understand why a teacher lets us do activities on our own and not teaching. How could I pass high school entrance examination?"

"Sometimes a teacher comes in but does not teach us anything. I'm happy that there is no class."

Parents, teachers and members of school board also provided their feedback:

"Nowadays, teachers have a lot of work to do and bring their school work to classroom. Even worse, they sometimes ask students to help out."

"Due to the ban of smacking, teachers do not want to discipline children because there is a case where parents filed a complaint against teachers. So teachers ignore students' bad behavior now."

"Teachers are not competent and cannot integrate the curriculum. As a result, students miss out on good opportunities. Their rights are not fulfilled."

"In my opinion as a teacher, neglecting students when they do something wrong is considered violence. Such action is considered silent form of violence. Teachers have no idea they are hurting children indirectly."

"Nowadays, we cannot hit students. Therefore teachers just ignore and let children be by themselves or do whatever they want in the classroom for the whole period. I asked my child, "What have you learned today?" He said, "Well, it is great that we have no classes today." How could he learn new things then?"



We All Are a Part of Violence Against Children in Schools

Considering situations of violence in schools mentioned earlier, we may realize and accept that violence in schools is not a single, separated incident; but it is connected to children's issues in larger society, communities and families.

We all are a part of violence against children in schools because we have several roles in society, such as being a mother at the same time as being a teacher; being a child as well as being a student; being a media personnel as well as being a father and a member of school board etc. Ultimately, we are also members of society.

For this reason, it is important that we acknowledge and understand our different roles, as well as factors that facilitate violence against children in schools. This is so that we will be able to address the problems effectively.

As Students...

Every child is different physically, intellectually, mentally and emotionally. Compared to children in elementary schools, the teenagers may be more emotional, are eager to try new things, seek acceptance from peers, and become interested in opposite sex etc. However, at the same time, teenagers are not mature enough to analyze the risks accurately and for this reason, they may have tendency to display aggressive behavior or violence.

Furthermore, students may accept violence in schools as norm. They may encourage or take pride in violent behaviors. For example, some students may view skipping classes without getting caught or fighting with others as cool behaviors.

For this reason, children must receive love, care and understanding from adults in order to grow into responsible individuals. They must also be taught necessary life skills in order to effectively deal with the risks.

As Parents...

Parents play a key role in child rearing and educating children. They need to understand about child development at different ages; to be able to solve problems; to manage time effectively in order to provide children with proper care and attention. This is so that children will not depend heavily on their peers and information acquired from the media.

Furthermore, parents should be good role models for their children - such as not taking illegal substances, gambling, or provoking domestic violence. Parents also need to know how to discipline their children appropriately. Positive discipline include communicating with children; explaining to them about what is appropriate or not and reasons; and setting ground rules together with them. Doing so will help children to become mature intellectually and emotionally.

"Parents leave their children with grandparents. Children heavily rely on their friends who display behavioral problems."

"Although parents are not involved with major illegal acts, they do smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol because it is a local practice. Parents then give small portion of alcohol to their children. However, these behaviors are risky because children get used to such behaviors at a young age. When these people attend local festivals, they drink from dusk till dawn. Even little girls start drinking."

"Family has great impact on children's behaviors. Some families spoil their child to the point that children do not play by rules. In the past, physical punishment is common, but now children run to their parents even for small incidents. Parents got upset and blamed a teacher; however, they were soon calm down after listening to the teacher's explanations."

As Teachers...

How would you feel if you are a teacher and has heard this feedback?

"The teacher hates my nephew so much. She made my nephew repeat a grade even though he got good scores and only one F. The teacher told our nephew that she does not like him because he is stubborn."

Teachers must always be aware of their role as caregivers. They are like second parents to children at school. For this reason, they should be kind and understanding towards children, as well as have knowledge about child development and positive discipline for different age groups. At the same time, teachers should be open-minded, willing to listening to students' opinions, and are determined to reduce school violence that they themselves may cause, either intentionally or unintentionally. Teachers should be aware of child protection issues such as causes of corporal punishment and discipline methods, neglect and how to teach children effectively. Moreover, teachers must have good relationship with students, other teachers, school management, communities and other relevant agencies.

"Teachers from different groups are enemies and do not collaborate well. Children are the ones who suffer as a consequence."

As School Authorities, In Terms of Curriculum Development...

The lack of effective curriculum in schools is considered structural violence. Schools that put too much emphasis on academic excellence may cause students to experience pressure and stress. On the other hand, schools that neglect their students and employ unqualified teachers causes students to miss out on learning opportunities in order to develop into their fullest potentials.

School should provide appropriate curriculum, which is adjust to suit local context. Religious teachings should be a part of school curriculum, for example, such as inviting a monk to teach students. School should contribute to community cohesion. In addition, they should have a child psychologist at the school to look after children of different ages.

Meanwhile, schools should recruit qualified teachers. They must maintain appropriate student-teacher ratio so that classroom size is manageable. By

doing so, teachers will be able to provide adequate supervision for students.

"There are no math and English teachers at school. No one applies for the position because the school is in a remote area."

"Our strategy is to promote home school approach. Teaching format need to be adjusted. Instead of having students memorize things and follow adults' instruction, teachers need to encourage students to think for themselves. New curriculum must be developed according to school's policy. Students should excel not only in academics but in every aspect of their lives."

"Schools should incorporate religious teachings into their curriculum. Teenagers would behave well if they have an opportunity to spend time with the monks. Many schools effectively incorporate Buddhism into its curriculum."



As Community and Relevant Agencies...

Children and schools are part of community. Community members should provide support when children have problems. Adults must also be neutral and reconcile any conflict that happens.

"Sometimes students fight each other at school. The one that loses a fight complains to his parents who soon show up at school. Sometimes the whole village shows up including monks and neighbors to protect the student regardless of who is right or wrong. Such incident creates chaos at school."

Media As Channels to Pass On Violence

The research findings reveal that the media contributes to violence in school. The roles of media need to be looked at closely in order to create awareness among relevant stakeholders about the impact of media on children.

Public media refers to media distributors such as newspapers, radio, television and Internet etc. Children often look up to media personnel and celebrities, and also try to imitate them. For this reason, the media may be viewed as having great influence in causing violence against children.

The study found that public media has less influence on first to sixth grade students compared to those in seventh to twelfth grade. For first to sixth grade students, individuals such as family members, parents and teachers, have more influence on their behavior compared to the media. Older students are at the age when they want to try new things;

Community and relevant agencies must love and understand children. They should be willing to support schools such as providing them with school equipments, scholarships and technical expertise. In addition, they should not focus on past mistakes but must collaborate with schools to address children's problems – for example, help create a foster parents program, provide support for children affected by migration and HIV/AIDS etc.

therefore the media has great impact on them. For many children, the media creates false perception about violence. Children may misunderstand that violence is acceptable as norm. This may lead to children displaying violent behavior such as engaging in gang/group fights, premature sex and dress inappropriately.

"During last year's camp, children learned how to make plastic bomb and ping-pong bomb because they imitated an incident in the news. Students thought that such action would be fun, but innocent people get hurt in the process."

"Children often imitate behavior they have seen in the media, for example, wearing make ups. They want to be trendy."

"The media has great influence on children. The more vulnerable ones (to the impact of media) are emotionally sensitive children, such as teenage girls."

"Media in our country often portray violence. Teenagers like to imitate what they see in the media – fighting, acting out and yelling. There is a case of girls dressing like Japanese celebrities. In addition, pornography materials are easy to acquire these days."

Children look at people in the media as their role models, especially in cases where they do not stay with their parents or do not spend their leisure time productively. Therefore, we must recognize that the media, inevitably, has significant role in contributing to school violence.

Solutions to Problems: Feedback from the Research

Solutions to violence against children in schools must be sought out with love, kindness and understanding in child development at different ages. This should also come from collaborations in the communities because all causes are interconnected like a domino effect. An action taken on one problem will lead to another.

Disciplining, which is a part of supervision of children in schools, must be done sensitively and with serious consideration. This is because students are in different emotional stages, have different background and family upbringing. A member of school board has expressed that:

“Excessive disciplining will bore children.”

While parents think that:

“You cannot be too hard on children, but must be rational.”

Instead of smacking, the form of disciplining must include verbal reprimands, assigning children to do community services and notifying parents so that they would be involved in the process. If the school cannot manage the disciplining alone, they may follow legal procedures or seek help from police or community leaders. At the same time, the schools must also explore the root causes of children’s problems in order to effectively address them. The schools may divide children into different groups, such as those in the system, at risk and troubled ones in order to address their problems more specifically.

In some regions, collaborations between community members to take care of children help improve children’s behavior. Some of these collaborations include joint activities or support provided for children’s academic activities etc. This is because everyone appreciates mutual benefits that the collaborations bring. Children develop good habits such as being patient, diligent, compassionate, determined, disciplined and outspoken. In other words, children excel both in terms of academics and life skills.

The research reflects tangible, positive results of multi-sector cooperation in addressing violence in schools. Some examples of good practice include:

“Home visit program” is a part of curriculum in many schools. Schools use this program to promote better understanding in children among adults, and help build good relationship between a child’s family and the school in order to address problems quickly.

“In home visit program, a teacher visits student

at home every month for a few hours each time. The program aims for the teacher to see actual situation, to be able to analyze and to resolve issues. The teacher collaborates with parents to set up strategies in helping children. Most importantly, the teacher must follow up on individual cases.”

Besides, teachers have an important role which is to help children analyze issues and find solutions by themselves. Children can be encouraged to engage in problem solving as a group during home room period. The goal is for the children to develop to their fullest potentials.

“Buddhist-oriented school program” specially focuses on seventh to twelfth grade students who are at a turning point in life. The project aims at teaching children about modest living, meditation, praying, and discipline.

Community-based initiatives are other good examples. The initiatives can be in terms of social, traditional, cultural aspects, such as encouraging children to participate in community’s activities. This is so that children from different communities would have opportunity to meet. Subsequently, the likelihood of violence occurring among different groups would be reduced. When children learn to be a part of community, they would develop self-esteem and maintain appropriate behavior without having to be controlled by adults.

“Foster parents” or “babysitting” programs prevent children from being left alone while parents go out to work outside of community for a long period of time.

“Parents’ network” aims to provide supervision and school activities for children.

“Partnership forming” to provide supervision for children is another good practice. In this initiative, school will coordinate with families, communities and other agencies in order to reduce problems and promote appropriate activities for children in schools.

Additionally, school curriculum should emphasize on love and unity. It should teach children of different ages to support one another, promote the election of student president and leaders. The curriculum should be adapted by taking into consideration the community’s way of life. For example, local culture or local wisdom should be highlighted so that children are proud of their community and respect the adults.

At the same time, extra curricular activities such

as sports day, camping and planting the forest all help bring children together and promote good relationship among them. In a way, these activities also help reduce violence against children in schools.

Individually, parents, guardians and teachers must change their behavior. They must not be afraid to show children their love, compassion and understanding. They must be willing to listen to children’s problems and not passing on their responsibility to care for children to others. They must not be scared to admit, adjust and improve themselves. Adults must be good role model for children to learn from. In addition, they must

spend quality time with children with ultimate goal of supporting children to develop to their fullest potentials.

In this study, many stakeholders reflect on overall strategy to address the problems which is derived from collaborations between schools, families and community that:

“It does not matter what rules or punishment would occur. It is most important that school, family and children agree on and create this rule together. This is considered an effective approach in reducing violence problems.”

“Yes!!! We All Are a Part of Violence Against Children in Schools.”

The above sentence is not an exaggerating statement at all at this point.

Plan International advocates for everyone to be aware that violence against children in schools is not a minor issue. The fact that children are experiencing physical or emotional violence, either directly or indirectly is not acceptable and cannot be ignored. This includes bullying among peers in schools. Children must not think of it as minor incident, or accept the practice as norms.

We all must be aware that every child has the right to mature and develop to their fullest potentials. Children must be taken care of and loved in order for their quality of life to be improved. Consequently, problems of violence against children in schools will be addressed or solved collaboratively among relevant stakeholders.

Therefore, Plan International proposes guidelines to reduce and prevent violence against children in schools as follows:

1. Do not turn your back when you witness or receive information about children experiencing violence in schools. Communicate and seek collaboration with the school, parents, guardians, teachers and relevant agencies in order to reduce or stop the violence.
2. If we are parents, guardians or teachers, we must love and pay attention to children genuinely. Be a good role model for them.
3. Be aware of the link between domestic violence and violence in schools in order to seek solutions to the problems before they become more severe.

4. Parents, teachers and school personnel must collaborate closely in order to prevent and address the problems, both inside and outside of schools. The focus must be on promoting the use of “positive discipline” which is appropriate for children’s age instead of the use of corporal punishment.
5. At the same time, communities, government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security or other relevant agencies, as well as child rights organizations must emphasize on the use of positive discipline. They must promote changes in child rearing so that the practice is appropriate for children’s age and development. The focus should also be on the integration of school curriculum so that the contents will prevent and effectively address violence against children in schools. To achieve this, local culture must be taken into consideration.
6. Advocate for the ban of smacking both at home and in schools to be included in the national laws. The contents must be carefully reviewed by relevant agencies and without delay. Clear implementation guidelines and regular follow up system must also be developed.
7. Support agencies that work to stop violence against children in schools. For example, by providing them with resources or attending organized activities etc.

Since we all are a part of family, community and society, therefore we play a crucial role in preventing violence against children in schools. And we can address this issue now.

Please do not forget that “we all can stop violence against children in schools.”

Adapted from research on “the Overview of Violence against Children in Schools” by Thasuk Junprasert and Pattama Ket-Um, 2008.

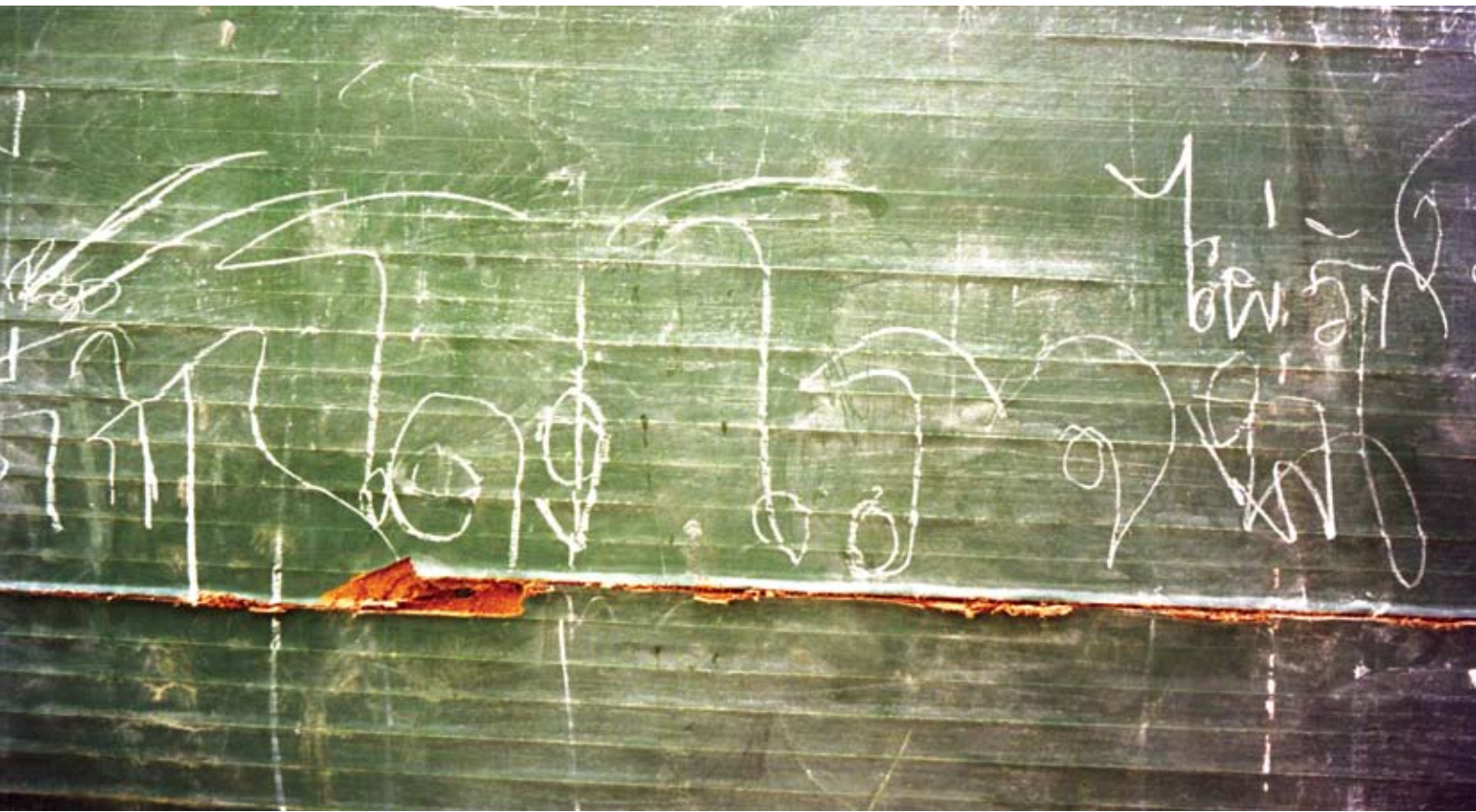
Edited by Sakunee Nattapoolwat / Photo by Connelly La Mar

Photos used in this document feature children from communities and groups with which Plan works, but it should not be inferred that they are necessarily victims of violence.



Plan

Be a part of it.



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