



# VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

## SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE PHILIPPINES REPORT



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OF  
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Every child has the right to protection from violence and from any perpetrator of violence. However, in the Philippines and all over the world, violence against children exists and persists.

It takes many and often multiple forms and can be physical, sexual, and emotional (or psychological), or any combination thereof, and includes bullying, violent discipline, trafficking, and involvement in armed conflicts. It may also involve neglect or deprivation of essential needs.

## **The Philippines has had a markedly high prevalence of violence against children over the years especially online sexual exploitation for which the country has been identified as among the largest known sources.**

Violence against children occurs in any and different settings, such as the home, school, street, community, and increasingly, online platforms. Perpetrators of violence against children comprise a wide range – children’s parents, siblings, other family members, peers, and neighbors – mostly people they trust, as well as strangers, other children, and intimate partners such as spouses, boyfriends, or girlfriends. Some violence inflicts physical harm that can lead to serious injury or even death while some causes psychological damage that can hinder children’s growth and development.

All children can become victims of violence. But there are children who are most at risk – those living with disabilities or HIV and AIDS, those who belong to extremely poor families, those who are in institutional care, those in the streets, and those who are separated from their families or displaced due to conflicts and disasters. Children of certain sexual orientation or gender identity as well as those belonging to marginalized social, cultural, or ethnic groups have similarly increased risk of facing violence.

It is widely believed that many cases of violence against children are hidden due to humiliation, fear of reprisal from the perpetrator, the lack of information on who or where to report and ask for help, or in some cases the victim is dead and there is no one who knows of the crime but the perpetrator. It is common assumption that many instances of violence against children remain invisible and undocumented which prevents help for

victims and deprives children of their right to protection.

The Philippines has had a markedly high prevalence of violence against children over the years especially online sexual exploitation for which the country has been identified as among the largest known sources.

Bullying of children is reported to be a major situation with a recent study singling out the Philippines as having the highest incidence in the schools.

Violent child discipline is found to be prevalent which can be attributed somehow to still prevailing attitudes in favor of physical punishment of children in the country. While there are various existing laws and government policies, plans, programs, and services as well as child protection systems and sectoral and inter- and intra-institutional mechanisms established, the lack of timely, reliable, and accessible data, data sources, and data systems continues to hinder more timely, relevant, and appropriate interventions to address violence against children.

It is vital for women and children and their caregivers to adopt help-seeking behavior which may include acquiring knowledge and building awareness of available mechanisms including legal instruments to protect them from risk of violence or prevent further harm if they have been victimized. It is critical for children and women, including adolescent women, to know where and who to go to when facing risk of violence or upon or after violence has been committed. Republic Act

No. 9262 – The Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 provides for one such mechanism called a protection order to prevent further acts of violence by perpetrators.

A protection order may come with relief to safeguard victims, both women and their children, from further harm and minimize any

disruption in and facilitate opportunity and ability to independently regain control of their lives.

Online sexual abuse and exploitation (OSAEC) and practices harmful to children such as child marriage and child labor are discussed in separate subdimensions. See [Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children](#).

## Child Rights Situation Analysis

Critical indicators on VAC include: reported abuse cases through child protection networks and reporting mechanisms; experience of violence, including discipline among children in emotional/psychological and physical forms, and additionally sexual violence experienced by adolescent girls; attitudes towards physical punishment; and incidence of bullying in schools.

### Child discipline

In 2022, three in five children aged 1-14 years, or 58.8 per cent, have experienced at least one form of violent discipline and two of five children, or 36 per cent have experienced only non-violent form of discipline. Among children that experienced violent forms of child discipline, 48.4 per cent suffered from physical aggression while 39.1 per cent have been subjected to any physical punishment. There were also children who received severe physical punishment constituting 3.4 per cent.

The prevalence of violent child discipline is highest among 3-4 and 5-9 year-old children, estimated at 63.3 per cent and 62.3 per cent, respectively. Children aged 3-4 years suffer most from physical punishment with 49.5 per cent while children aged 5-9 years and 10-14 years are most likely to face psychological aggression at 51.5 per cent and 50.5 per cent, respectively. Among the oldest children aged

10-14 years, 4.1 per cent have been meted out severe forms of physical punishment.

**Non-violent discipline is highest among the youngest age group, 1-2 years old, at 42.7 per cent and decreases among older children.**

However, the percentage of them experiencing violent punishment is quite significant at 45.1 per cent, with 29.7 per cent having faced psychological aggression, 33.8 per cent receiving any form of physical punishment, and 1.6 per cent suffering from severe physical punishment, which however small is a case of one too many.

**Boys are generally more likely to experience any form of violent discipline than their girl counterparts and children in urban areas are more prone to receive violent discipline than those living in rural areas.** Prevalence of children experiencing violent discipline is highest among those whose mothers have had no education or postsecondary education.

Among regions, Regions IX and II have the highest prevalence of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any violent means of discipline, physical or psychological, with 72.3 per cent and 71.7 per cent, respectively, in 2022. Region XI with 69.2 per cent and Region III at 68.8 per cent follow closely while BMM has the lowest percentage of 28.3 per cent.

### Reported child abuse cases

Between January 2022 and April 2023, three in four child abuse cases reported through the Child Protection Network are sexual abuse/assault cases accounting for 73.5 of all cases reported. A total of 11,383 child abuse cases were reported during the period. Physical abuse/assault cases made up the next highest share with 10.4 per cent of all reported cases.

### Child bullying in schools

Overall, three in every ten students have reported being frequently bullied in school in 2022 down from four in every ten students in 2018 but still the highest among 80 countries and economies. **In the 2022 PISA study, over 35 per cent of students reported having bullied frequently slightly lower than the 40.1 per cent of students that reported the same in 2018.** The latest study also showed that 43% of girls and 53% of boys reported being the victim of bullying acts at least a few times a month, higher than the average among participating OECD countries at 20% of girls and 21% of boys.

In 2018, 64.9 percent of both boys and girls reported being subjected to at least one act of bullying a few times a month. Bullying has been found to have major implications for a child's health, social and educational outcomes in childhood and adolescence, with often long-term impacts.

### Violence against adolescent girls

In 2022, one in ten adolescent girls aged 15-19 years has experienced physical or sexual

violence. The percentage of girls aged 15-19 years who have ever experienced either form of violence was estimated at 10.9 per cent in 2022 down from 14.7 per cent in 2017. There was a slightly higher proportion of adolescent girls aged 15-17 years who experienced physical or sexual violence at 11.5 per cent than that among women aged 18-19 years at 10.1 per cent. The percentage of adolescent girls who have experienced physical violence only was 7.6 per cent; sexual violence only, 1.9 per cent; and physical and sexual violence, 1.4 per cent.

**The prevalence of physical violence among girls aged 15-19 years committed by any perpetrator since they were 15 years old has decreased significantly from 17.7 per cent in 2017 to 9 per cent in 2022.** The rate has also dropped for physical violence committed in the last 12 months preceding the survey, from 6.1 per cent in 2017 to 5.3 per cent in 2022. However, the proportion of teenaged girls who have ever been pregnant and experienced physical violence has increased from 3.6 per cent in 2017 to 4.5 per cent in 2022.

Sexual violence ever experienced among girls aged 15-19 years is much lower than physical violence but nonetheless concerning at 3.3 per cent committed by any perpetrator and 2.7 per cent by persons who were not husbands or intimate partners. The prevalence of sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey has increased very slightly but remained at less than one per cent.

**Domestic violence against adolescent girls aged 15-19 years has dropped significantly.** The percentage of ever-partnered adolescent girls who have ever experienced physical, sexual, or emotional or psychological violence from a current or most recent husband or intimate partner has declined from 26.1 per cent in 2017 to 15.5 per cent in 2022.

The proportion of the same cohort of adolescent girls who have experienced any violence in the 12 months preceding the survey has also decreased from 23.4 per cent to 13.4

per cent. Emotional or psychological violence appears to be most prevalent form among young ever-partnered women, almost 4 times higher than either physical or sexual violence.

**More young women are aware of anti-violence mechanisms, such as protection orders, and support.** The percentage of adolescent girls aged 15-19 years who are aware of the different protection orders have increased that is --- from 57.8 per cent in 2017 to 60.9 per cent in 2022 for barangay protection orders, from 41.3 per cent to 47.8 per cent for temporary protection orders, and from 38.1 per cent to 44.3 per cent for permanent protection orders.

Similarly, there has been an increase in the proportion of adolescent girls who are aware of various places where they can seek help from violence.

The percentage of young women who know about Barangay Violence Against Women Desk is up by 8.2 percentage points from 66.4 per cent in 2017 to 74.6 per cent in 2017; PNP Women and Children's Protection Desk, from 67 per cent to 72.2 per cent; and WCPUs, from 47.8 per cent to 56.8 per cent, among others. A slight decrease was observed in adolescent girls' awareness of DSWD regional center for women and girls, from 78.6 per cent to 76.6 per cent between 2017 and 2022.

### **Attitudes on physical punishment**

In 2022, one in ten adults or 11.9 per cent, believe that physical punishment is needed to bring up, raise, or educate a child properly. Female adults were found to be slightly more likely than male adults to suggest that physical punishment is necessary, with 12.2 per cent of them agreeing with the practice.

Similarly, although with small variation, adults in urban areas are marginally more likely to support using physical punishment. Among regions, Region IX and Region X had the highest proportion of adults who think that physical punishment is necessary to discipline

children, with 20 per cent and 19.9 per cent of adults, respectively. In contrast, Region II had the lowest percentage at 7.8 per cent.

**By education level, adults with no education are most likely to be supportive of physical punishment, with a considerable 16.8 per cent agreeing with the practice as are those with college education at 14.3 per cent.** Lower percentages were recorded among adults who reached Grades 1-12 and postsecondary level. Although by a slim margin, there are more adults in the highest wealth quintile who think that physical punishment is necessary to raise or educate their children at 13.7 per cent than those in lower wealth brackets.

**The use of physical punishment to raise and educate children is associated with a range of adverse health and development outcomes and is found to be less effective than non-violent methods and positive forms of punishment.** Furthermore, physical punishment infringes upon a child's right to dignity, bodily integrity, and equal protection with adults.

### **Children in situations of armed conflict**

There were 115 verified grave violations against 104 children (62 boys and 42 girls) in 2020 and 2021 (Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Philippines). Killing and maiming, recruitment, and use and attacks on schools and hospitals were the three most verified violations.

**Killing and maiming remained the most prevalent, accounting for more than half of all violations (67).** The main perpetrators were the New People's Army, the Armed Forces and the Abu Sayyaf Group. In the reporting period, Mindanao was the most affected region, with 83 per cent of the total number of verified violations. However, it is suspected that the actual number of violations is much larger than recorded as the task force for the monitoring and documentation of violations faced numerous challenges of limited capacity

and movement challenges presented by COVID-19. In 2020, ongoing conflict in the BARMM region and child casualties have continued to cause concerns regarding commitment to international humanitarian law, in line with Republic Act No. 11188 of 2019.

Lack of facilities and limited capacity of social workers to address the special needs of detained children are an ongoing challenge, including in the implementation of the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act (Republic Act No. 11188).

## Equity & Risk

### EQUITY

#### Gender

**Gender-disaggregated data for rates of children who have experienced violence have not been determined under this subdimension.** However, violent conflict typically impacts children differently according to their gender.

For example, boys are more at risk of violent death and recruitment into armed groups, while girls are more at risk of gender-based violence and sexual violence in conflict areas. It has also been noted that reporting is greater for girls than boys in the Philippines, which may lead to an underestimate of the level of violence against boys.

#### Disability

**Children with disabilities may be especially adversely affected by conflict,** given their increased vulnerability and because certain conditions like ADHD can make children more likely to develop challenges around their anger management which can be exacerbated by conflict and violence.

#### Subnational

**The regions with the highest rates of VAW are Region V and Region I.** It is not clear as to why this might be the case, although it appears efforts are being made in Region V to tackle these high rates. Meanwhile, Region IX and Region X had the highest rates of physical punishment against children.

#### Others

Factors that affect VAW and girls include:

- **Age**  
Older women are more likely to have experienced all three types of abuse - emotional, physical and sexual - in their lifetime than younger women and girls.

This may indicate that the incidence of VAW is reducing over time. However, it could also mean that women in the Philippines are more likely

to experience abuse later in their lives.

- **Religion and ethnicity.** Emotional violence rates are noted to be highest among women identifying as Protestant or Roman Catholic, and physical and emotional violence rates also high among the Aeta ethnic group.
- **Low education rates and poverty.** Those of lower educational level or from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds are more deprived under this subdimension.

## RISKS

### Natural hazards

- Climate change poses indirect risks to child protection. It can increase vulnerabilities, particularly for those who are displaced due to severe weather events and natural disasters.
- Reallocation of development and government funding to emergency response is an ongoing risk faced in planning and programming across all child rights fields, likely to be exacerbated by climate change.

### Conflict

Children in conflict situations are at increased risk of harmful practices like GBV and child soldier recruitment. Additionally, there are reportedly instances of children in conflict zones being arrested on suspicion of terrorism despite little basis for these arrests.

### Health Crisis/Pandemic

No health-related risks were identified as yet under this subdimension.

### Other risks

**There is the constant risk that child protection laws might be repealed.** Child protection in emergencies, particularly when it comes to armed conflict, is politically sensitive. For example, laws against child military training were only recently enacted yet there are reportedly moves within some decision-making circles to water down this legislation. This represents a risk of backlash against progress made in human and child rights protection fields.



# Legislation & Policy Analysis

The Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence Against Children 2017-2021 is a multi-stakeholder integrated response against violence under the Council for the Welfare of Children (the National Network to End Violence Against Children Mechanisms), approved in May 2018.

It is part of the government's "general commitment to build an enabling environment that respects, protects and fulfils the rights of all children", and aims to harmonize plans and efforts to "[address] the factors that cause both violence against children in different settings and among the most vulnerable children."

The plan includes roles for DSWD, the Department of Education, Department of Justice, Council for the Welfare of Children and the Department of Interior and Local Government. The main pieces of legislation applicable to Violence Against Children (VAC) are the Anti Child Abuse Law (Republic Act No. 7610), Anti-Rape Law (Republic Act No. 8353), Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Act of 2004 (Republic Act No. 9262), Republic Act No. 11648 on rape and sexual exploitation and abuse, Republic Act No. 11596 on child marriages, Republic Act No. 11188 to protect children in situations of armed conflict (CSAC), and Republic Act No. 11930 on the protection of children against online sexual abuse and exploitation and child sexual abuse material.

The latest periodic reports submitted by the Philippines on Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination highlight the Republic Act No. 11188 of 2019, or the "Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict Act", as a key accomplishment which "strengthens protection mechanisms for children involved in, affected, and displaced by armed conflict situations, and sustains the operationalization of a system on monitoring, reporting and response system on grave child rights violations."

Additionally, street children are at additional risk of violence and exploitation in the Philippines, including risk of arbitrary detention. The DSWD is implementing programs for street children, including work to promote educational assistance and housing assistance.

While there are councils and committees set up to address VAC and many service providers see both VAC and Violence Against Women (VAW) survivors, this situation analysis could determine no formal integration policies or programming guidelines.

## Bottleneck Analysis

Demand

**Not all incidences of VAC are reported due to victims' fear of repercussions.** This is a common challenge, particularly on matters like GBV.

Supply

**There are grave child rights violations reported, but these again may be under-reported. Grave violations against children are reported mostly in BARMM.** However, this may not always be because most violations are there, but because

the attention is more focused on BARMM as a conflict-affected region. So reporting is an identified bottleneck which needs to be addressed to get a more accurate picture of the national situation.

Enabling environment

- **Birth registration issues result in protection issues for unregistered children.** For orphaned children of Filipino overseas workers, repatriated to the Philippines from countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, birth registration challenges mean they are often undocumented and therefore have no legal identity which can prevent their participation in protection schemes and leave them vulnerable to exploitation. This is a particular challenge in the BARMM region, although work is under way to try to tackle this issue.
- **Implementation of anti-VAWC laws and policies is a challenge.** The Philippines has a strong bedrock of policies and laws seeking to create an enabling environment in which violence against women and children can be tackled. However, implementation of these laws is reported to be challenging.

For example, the Mandanas Ruling affects the sustainability of child protection programs, there is often limited budget and long-term budget planning for anti-VAWC programs and change in leadership among LCEs is often a challenge as priorities and commitments change. Other challenges include limited capacities among some duty bearers, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation of programs, again often due to limited capacities.

DRAFT

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