



Learn

without fear.

THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO

END VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

report summary





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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.

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Designed by Plan.

Plan is one of the oldest and largest international development agencies in the world, operational in sixty-six countries.

We work in 49 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas and have offices in another 17 countries in Europe, North America, East Asia and Oceania. The Learn Without Fear campaign focuses on these 66 countries, but it also aims to create a global momentum for change that will improve the lives of millions of children beyond Plan's direct reach.

This is a summary of the report Learn Without Fear: the global campaign to end violence in schools (Plan, October 2008). A complete list of references can be found in the full report. The report was drawn from information from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (www.endcorporalpunishment.org) and specially commissioned research:

- Nicola Jones; Karen Moore; Eliana Villar-Marquez; and Emma Broadbent (2008) Painful lessons: the politics of preventing sexual violence and bullying at school. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Catherine Blaya and Eric Debarbieux (2008) Expel violence! A systematic review of interventions to prevent corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying in schools. Bordeaux: International Observatory on Violence in Schools
- Karen Moore; Nicola Jones; and Emma Broadbent (2008) School violence in OECD countries. London

All these documents are available on our website:

plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear

Above: © Alf Berg. Schoolgirl, India.
Right: © Mark Read. Role play.

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Violence against children in schools is a global problem. It has a devastating effect on the lives of millions of children every year.

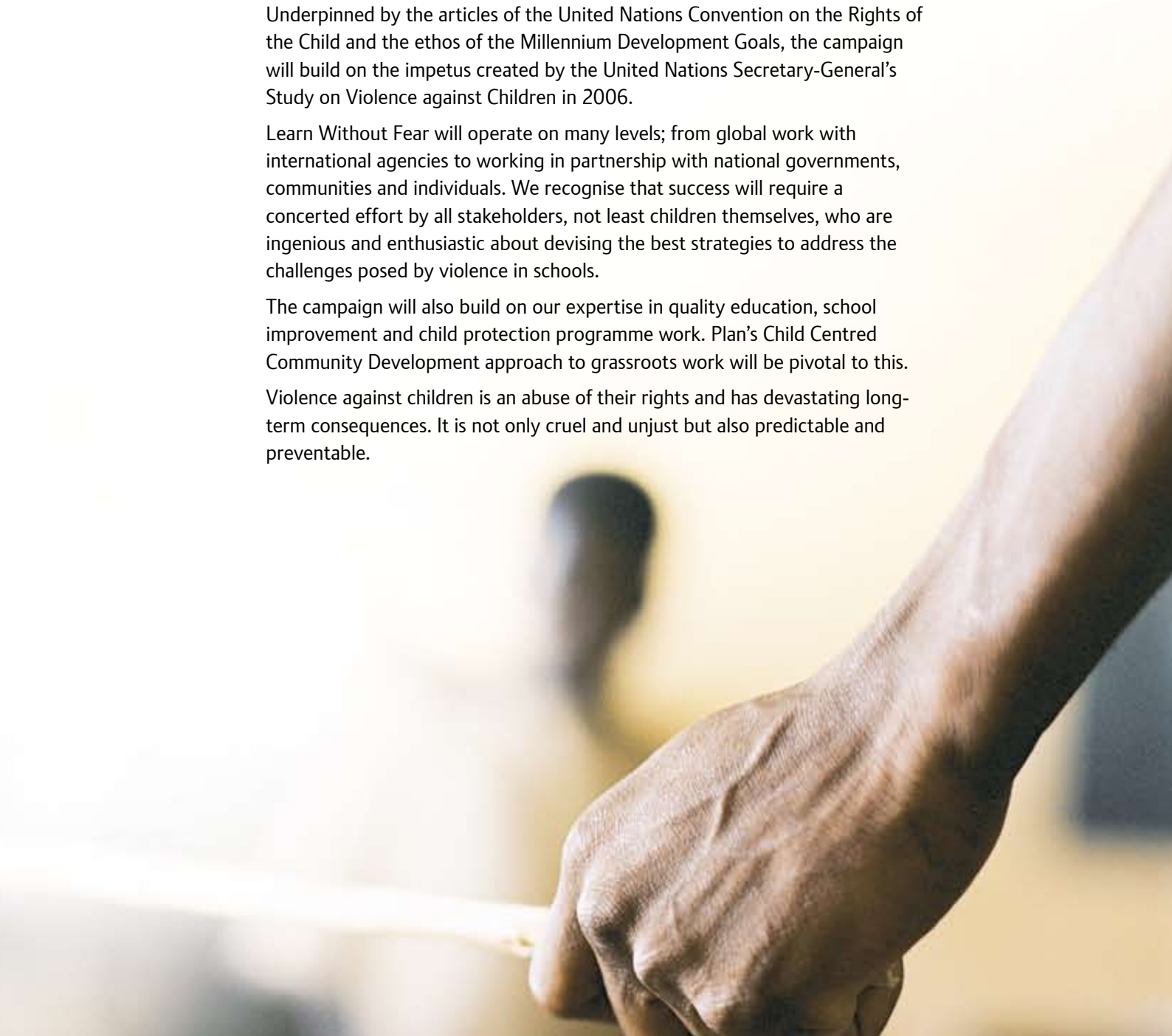
Plan's Learn Without Fear campaign will challenge the culture of complacency that surrounds violence against children in school. The campaign focuses on corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying – the main issues affecting the school children and communities we work with.

Underpinned by the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ethos of the Millennium Development Goals, the campaign will build on the impetus created by the United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children in 2006.

Learn Without Fear will operate on many levels; from global work with international agencies to working in partnership with national governments, communities and individuals. We recognise that success will require a concerted effort by all stakeholders, not least children themselves, who are ingenious and enthusiastic about devising the best strategies to address the challenges posed by violence in schools.

The campaign will also build on our expertise in quality education, school improvement and child protection programme work. Plan's Child Centred Community Development approach to grassroots work will be pivotal to this.

Violence against children is an abuse of their rights and has devastating long-term consequences. It is not only cruel and unjust but also predictable and preventable.



If they hit me, I learn to hit.

Girl, 12 years old, Spain

Corporal punishment

Extent

Corporal punishment in schools takes many forms, ranging from teachers hitting children with a hand, to burning, scalding or forcing children to sit in uncomfortable positions for lengthy periods of time.

Ninety countries out of 197 monitored by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children permit teachers to legally beat children. Even in countries where corporal punishment is illegal, laws protecting children are often not enforced.

Boys typically suffer greater violence at the hands of their teachers than girls. In Egypt, for example, 80 per cent of boys have suffered corporal punishment at school, compared to 67 per cent of girls. One quarter of the children punished said they sustained injuries as a result. And children already discriminated against on the basis of, for example, disability, poverty, caste, class, ethnicity or sexuality are more likely to suffer corporal punishment than their peers.

Corporal punishment in schools is not restricted to developing countries. It is legal in Korea, France and a number of Australian and US states. In the US, schools are the only institutions where the use of violence is legal. It is banned in psychiatric hospitals, the military and prisons.

Causes

Corporal punishment is often defended in the name of tradition and sometimes in the name of religion. The supposed beneficial impact on children's behaviour is also frequently used as an argument to defend physical punishment as a discipline method. In some countries, hitting a child is considered the 'right' of parents and teachers. In fact, corporal punishment is more likely to cause children to act violently than to improve behaviour.

Even where corporal punishment is illegal or limited by law, its cultural acceptability undermines law enforcement. In many countries, suspected perpetrators are not held accountable.

Problems are compounded in countries where teachers have poor training and motivation. In Ecuador, for example, many teachers are poorly paid and untrained in positive ways to manage classes. As a result, they often resort to punitive and physically violent methods of control.

Consequences

At its worst, corporal punishment can lead to physical injury or death. At the very least, it has a detrimental effect on the learning achievements of children. Children who face corporal punishment at school are also more likely to drop out of education. A study in Nepal, where corporal punishment is routine, found that 14 per cent of school drop-out can be attributed to fear of teachers.

Corporal punishment is more likely to encourage children to act violently than it is to improve behaviour in school. Children who are physically punished are less likely to engage in altruistic behaviour or empathise with others.

In the longer term corporal punishment is associated with suicide, depression and problem-level drinking. Victims are more likely to engage in disorderly and aggressive conduct and more likely to hit their spouse and their own children, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence in their families and communities.



© Alf Berg. Child's drawing.

Our teachers should be there to teach us and not to touch us where we don't want ... I feel like disappearing from the world if a person who is supposed to protect me instead destroys me.

Girl, 15 years old, Uganda

Sexual violence

Extent

The World Health Organization estimated that 150 million girls and 73 million boys had been raped or suffered other forms of sexual violence. But there are currently no reliable estimates of how much of this abuse takes place in schools.

However, we do know that sexual violence is usually carried out by people known to the child and that school-based sexual abuse is a major problem in many countries. Research in Uganda found that eight per cent of 16 and 17 year-old boys and girls questioned had had sex with their teachers and 12 per cent with ancillary staff. In Ecuador, a study of female adolescent victims of sexual violence found that 37 per cent named teachers as perpetrators.

Girls are at greater risk of sexual violence at school and often face a dual threat from both male teachers and students. Studies in Africa and Latin America have found that some girls are coerced into sexual acts by teachers who threaten them with poor grades if they do not cooperate. Such abuse is often seen as an inevitable part of school life and education authorities are often reluctant to tackle the problem or bring perpetrators to justice.

In Thailand, the Children and Family Protection Centre reported that every week at least one teacher sexually abuses a student. A study in the Netherlands showed that 27 per cent of students reported being sexually harassed by school personnel and in Sweden, among 17 and 18 year-old girls, 49 per cent felt that sexual harassment at school was a significant problem.

Causes

The causes of sexual violence vary greatly but teachers' behaviour and traditional gender stereotypes are key factors. By not responding seriously to complaints of sexual abuse, teachers and school authorities convey the message that it will be tolerated. In addition, a lack of public

prosecutions in many countries means that perpetrators are not held to account for their crimes.

Girls in societies where women have a lower status are more likely to suffer sexual violence at school. In Latin America, South Asia and Islamic South East Asia, sexual violence against girls tends to remain a silent crime because of the importance attached to girls' sexual purity. In some parts of South Asia, rape is viewed first and foremost as an offence against the honour of male members of the family. In Latin America, girls who get pregnant are often expelled from school and those infected with HIV face discrimination.

In some African countries, the 'folk' belief that AIDS can be cured by having sex with a virgin, has led to the abuse of students with disabilities who are seen as easy targets and assumed (not always correctly) to be sexually inactive.

Consequences

Victims of sexual violence suffer physical and psychological trauma and are at risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Young girls also face major health repercussions, including the consequences of unwanted pregnancy such as death, unsafe abortions, social stigma and being forced to leave school.

An Australian study found long-term associations between child sexual abuse and issues such as sexual and mental health problems, domestic violence and problems in intimate relationships later in life. Some children turn to alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism and can end up becoming offenders themselves.

Sexual violence forms a major barrier to girls' and young women's access to education and their ability to benefit from it. It is a powerful factor in influencing parents to keep girls out of school, for girls themselves avoiding school and for girls' underperformance in the classroom.

Once a friend hit me in front of the teacher, he punched and kicked me
... and I got hurt. The teacher did nothing.

Boy, 13 years old, Ecuador

Bullying

Extent

Bullying is a common behaviour in schools across the world. Surveys conducted in a wide range of countries found that between one fifth (China) and two-thirds (Zambia) of children reported being verbally or physically bullied in the past 30 days.

In a Kenyan survey of 1,000 students in Nairobi public schools, between 63.2 per cent and 81.8 per cent reported various types of bullying; one district in Benin found that 82 per cent of teachers and 92 per cent of pupils confirmed incidences of bullying. A study in Bogota, Colombia, with more than 1,000 participants found that 30 per cent of boys and 17 per cent of girls had been involved in a fight. One-fifth of respondents had been victims of bullying every day.

Boys are generally more likely than girls to be both victims and perpetrators of bullying, although not always – girls are more frequent bullies in Japan. Boys are more likely to use physical intimidation and violence, while girls tend towards verbal and social bullying.

Cyber bullying, the use of the internet, mobile phones and other digital technologies to threaten or abuse children, means bullying can now take place at any time almost without limitation.

Causes

Despite the widespread nature of the problem, only five of the 66 countries examined in Plan's research – Korea, Norway, Sri Lanka, the UK and the US – have laws prohibiting bullying in schools.

Children often become targets for bullies because of their ethnicity or sexuality. Disabled children are also more likely to be targets, as are the youngest, smallest and weakest children. Bullying of children from families affected by HIV is a growing problem.

Bullying is linked to experiences of violence in the home, as children learn that violence is a primary mechanism for negotiating relationships. Children who suffer family violence are more likely to be bullies and be bullied.

Physical violence in general and bullying in particular is also more common in schools which are overcrowded with inadequate adult supervision and poor school policies. Children attending schools located in violent or poor neighbourhoods or where discrimination against ethnic or other groups is accepted are also more likely to experience violence.

Most victims do not report what they are suffering because they blame themselves and feel ashamed. Moreover, few victims believe their schools will take real action to improve the situation. Bullied children tend to have a reduced network of friends who might give support and protection.

There is also evidence that economic need and social inequality are key factors that fuel both bullying and sexual violence in a range of countries. Rising levels of deprivation, inequality and social exclusion play a large part in school-based violence.

Consequences

Victims of bullying may lose self-esteem, feel shame, suffer anxiety and come to dislike school. They often play truant to avoid further victimisation. Those that remain in school often develop concentration problems and learning difficulties. Others react aggressively, sometimes bullying other classmates in an effort to regain status.

Most seriously, victims of bullying suffer from increased stress, a higher risk of substance abuse and suicide. Children who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed than their peers and bullied girls are eight times more likely to be suicidal.

But bullies also suffer problems - they are more likely to experience anxiety and depression and are at higher risk of suicide and self-harm.

A number of African studies suggest childhood experience of bullying increases anti-social and risk-taking behaviour in adult life. In the US, 60 per cent of bullies will have at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24.

My teacher is different. If she sees two children talking she will come and sit with them or send them out of the class but not use violence.

Participant in Plan's physical and emotional punishment prevention project, Vietnam

Tackling violence in schools: what works?

Although the available evidence identifies interventions that have contributed to a reduction in school violence, it is important to understand the social, political and cultural context in which programmes are delivered. What works in one particular community, country or region might not be effective elsewhere.

Local interventions

Nevertheless, the available research suggests that the most effective local strategies for tackling school violence are those that concentrate on the school itself, such as changing classroom techniques via teacher training, promoting awareness of child rights and establishing clear rules regarding behaviour in school. The active commitment and support of adults, particularly teachers and parents, is critical and often requires training for parents.

Much also depends on how the school implements change. Schools that are already organised in a proactive and democratic manner with strong links to their communities have a stronger chance of success.

Effective programmes are generally those based on encouragement, not on repression. Military training style programmes - where they have been introduced - have not reduced the number of assaults.

Promoting children's awareness of their rights and encouraging their participation in school governance is of fundamental importance in overcoming authoritarian school environments and promoting non-violent discipline.

Legal and social mechanisms

Legal prohibition of violence in schools is a vital first step towards making schools safe for children. If violence is not outlawed then it becomes difficult to convince communities, school authorities and parents that it is unacceptable. A school that tolerates one form of violence against children – such as corporal punishment – is likely to be permissive of others. Indeed different forms of school violence are linked. A girl who submits to giving sexual favours to a teacher will expect to avoid being beaten, whereas one who turns a teacher down risks a beating.

Currently, there is very little attention paid to the quality of laws to tackle violence in school or their enforcement. This contrasts sharply with the policy debate about violence against girls and women in which considerable emphasis is placed on legal measures.

But laws alone are insufficient. Strong enforcement is a necessary next step to reducing the number of children who suffer violence at school. Without enforcement, laws become largely irrelevant.

Resources are also vital - securing sufficient and reliable budgets ensures funding to implement positive changes in schools and signals political commitment to addressing the problem.



© Plan. Schoolgirls, Pakistan.

Plan's call to action

No country is immune from violence in schools and sexual abuse, corporal punishment and bullying can have devastating effects on children.

A violence-free school is the right of every child.

Plan will work towards a world where:

1. No one can inflict violence on children in schools without facing punishment
2. Children are able to report violent incidents and expect appropriate care and support when they are affected by school violence
3. Children are recognised as critical participants in developing strategies and solutions to address violence in schools
4. Governments establish holistic data collection systems and carry out research to ascertain the scale and severity of violence in their schools
5. Significant resources are earmarked by governments and international organisations to tackle violence in schools
6. UN agencies, multilateral donors, development banks and international NGOs increase support to governments to tackle violence in schools
7. Pupils, parents, all school staff and the community work together to expel violence from schools



© Plan, Schoolgirls, Bolivia.

Plan will play its part. In addition to campaigning for change, we will integrate programmes to prevent school violence into our education and child protection projects and train our staff and volunteers to tackle the issue head on. We will work with governments to develop and enforce laws against school violence, work in alliances to develop reporting and referral systems for children affected by school violence and advocate for the establishment of child helplines. We will work with teachers and parents to discipline children without using violence and partner with education authorities to develop and implement plans of action to achieve violence-free schools.

All violence against children is preventable. And there are many simple solutions that will help to achieve dramatic change. But creating this change requires each one of us to take individual responsibility to stop violence against children in schools.

Plan is ready.

We urge others to join us.

To find out more and get involved visit our website at:

plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear

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