

**THEMATIC BRIEF****Teachers at the Centre:****The Role and Needs of Asia-Pacific Teachers in Addressing  
Violence and School-Related Gender-Based Violence****Summary**

School violence refers to physical, psychological, and sexual violence that takes place in school, on the way to school, online, and wherever school relationships exist. Some forms of school violence may be explicitly or implicitly gender-based. School related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). In a holistic approach to addressing school violence, including SRGBV, teachers have key roles at multiple levels.

Drawing primarily on two recent studies, this brief highlights the experiences and voices of teachers in the Asia-Pacific region and argues for greater investment in teachers' professional development in violence prevention and response, as well as improvements in supportive structures in the education system.

Data from the first study was collected by UNESCO through the online survey of teachers' perceptions and practices related to school violence, including SRGBV, during February to April 2020. Focus group discussions were also conducted by UNESCO in Nepal and Thailand in conjunction with the survey. Additional data comes from the second study that synthesizes findings from monitoring surveys, focus group discussions and

interviews with teachers who taught content from a curricula resource for SRGBV prevention in Thailand, Timor Leste and Viet Nam between 2019 – 2020.

The UNESCO study revealed that teachers in the Asia-Pacific region responding to the online survey and focus group discussions had a greater understanding of physical violence than sexual and psychological violence. In addition, many of the same physically or emotionally abusive behaviours described as violence when perpetrated by a student were less likely to be considered examples of violence when perpetrated by a teacher, except for the sample from India; worryingly, around one-third of surveyed teachers in the Asia-Pacific region did not consider certain forms of sexual violence by teachers against students to be violence. Overall, teachers in the Asia-Pacific region were more likely to hold misunderstandings about the effectiveness of corporal punishment in improving performance and behaviour than teachers in other regions, and some teachers felt that there were no alternatives.

Findings from small-scale pilots of an SRGBV prevention curriculum-based programme, Connect With Respect (CWR), revealed that the programme was effective at improving students' attitudes and knowledge. Teachers also applied new knowledge in gender, SRGBV and communication skills and recommended the programme to improve teachers' emotional self-regulation, learn positive discipline skills and develop pedagogies in participatory methods.

Qualitative data from the CWR pilots showed that:

- Teachers recognize capacity-building needs in gender, gender equality and identifying all forms of violence and abuse,
- Skills in positive discipline and non-violent classroom management are essential to ending violence in schools and should be taught from the beginning of teacher pre-service training and available to all in-service teachers,
- Teachers value having peer movements to support change, and
- Several other school and community factors affect teachers' ability to play positive roles in preventing and responding to school violence, including SRGBV.

The CWR study findings highlighted the importance of school administrators and parents understanding the benefits of positive discipline and supporting the expansion of teachers' skills for violence prevention and effective classroom management. The findings also signal the need for child protection referral pathways and Codes of Conduct to be clearly delineated, relevant, actionable and up to date.

COVID-19 has produced new challenges to addressing violence in school. The increased use of remote and hybrid learning since the pandemic potentially brings

with it the further movement of bullying and other forms of school violence to online learning spaces. In many contexts, students and teachers have had greater psychosocial and mental health needs as schools reopen. Nonetheless, reopenings may grant the opportunity to renew commitments to safe, inclusive and health-promoting learning environments. This involves greater attention to mental well-being in education sector strategies to address school violence and skills-building among learners and teachers in digital safety and civility.

School violence, including SRGBV, is not only a violation of children's rights but also impacts learning attendance, completion and attainment. Building teachers' confidence to teach gender equality and violence prevention, as well as empowering their best selves as protectors of children, needs to be prioritized as a fundamental building block of the education sector in Asia-Pacific countries and as a critical component of the learning recovery and transforming education agenda.

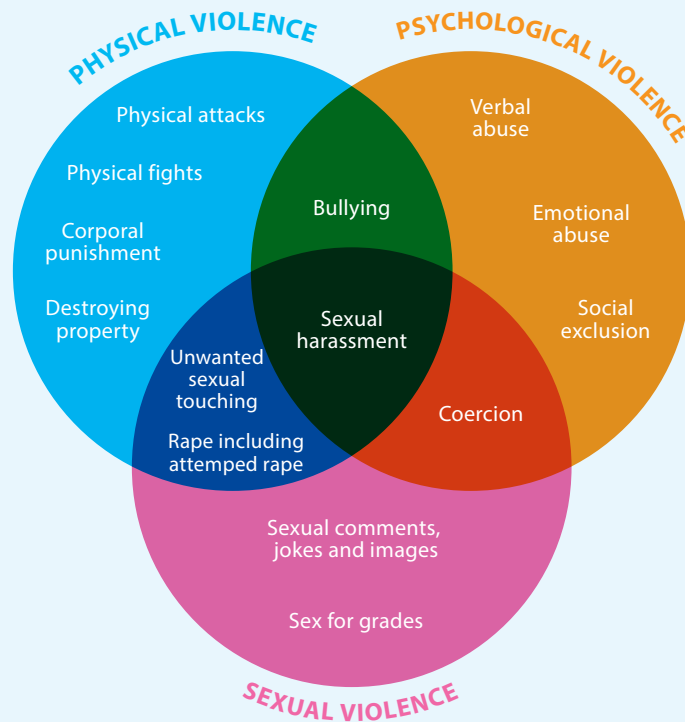
## Introduction

School violence refers to physical, psychological, and sexual violence that takes place in school, on the way to school, online, and wherever school relationships exist. Figure 1 summarizes different forms of school violence, among which some are explicitly and implicitly gender-based. Explicit manifestations of gender-based violence include sexual comments. School violence may be implicitly gender-based because of how the gender of the person(s) who experience or perpetrate violence shapes the behavior. For example, boys experience more corporal punishment than girls.

Such school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is thus defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of harmful gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). SRGBV is a global problem that violates the rights of children and compromises their learning, health, and overall well-being. It can be perpetrated by students, teachers, or other school staff.

With its growing economies and young demographics, the Asia-Pacific region has enormous potential to develop its human capital, particularly towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education and the creation of just and sustainable societies (see Figure 2 for relevant targets). The COVID-19 pandemic has set back progress towards quality and inclusive education. The impacts of school violence, including SRGBV, undermine investment in the learning recovery agenda, impacting attendance, completion rates and attainment. However, the present focus on learning recovery and transformation of education offer an opportunity to strengthen holistic efforts to eliminate school violence including SRGBV as

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for school violence including SRGBV



Source: Adapted from UNESCO, 2019, and UNGEI and UNESCO, 2015

Figure 2: SDG-4 targets related to addressing school violence, including SRGBV

**SDG TARGET 4>A**

Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.



**SDG TARGET 4.7**

Ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development ... human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.



classes resume or move online (Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence, 2020; Safe to Learn, 2020; UNESCO, 2021c).

A holistic approach to preventing and responding to school violence, including SRGBV, operates at multiple levels from individuals and schools to the broader community and legal structures.<sup>1</sup> Figure 3 shows the nine components of the whole-education approach to address bullying and cyber-bullying (UNESCO and French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020, p. 3), which is similar to the whole-school approach to prevent and respond to SRGBV (UNGEI, 2019) and other holistic approaches. In these models, teachers sit at the nexus of efforts, as implementers of programmes and curricula, classroom managers, behavioural role models, reporters of violence, subjects of law and policy and often the public faces of the school to families and communities. The success of programmes to prevent and respond to school violence is not possible without the success of teachers.

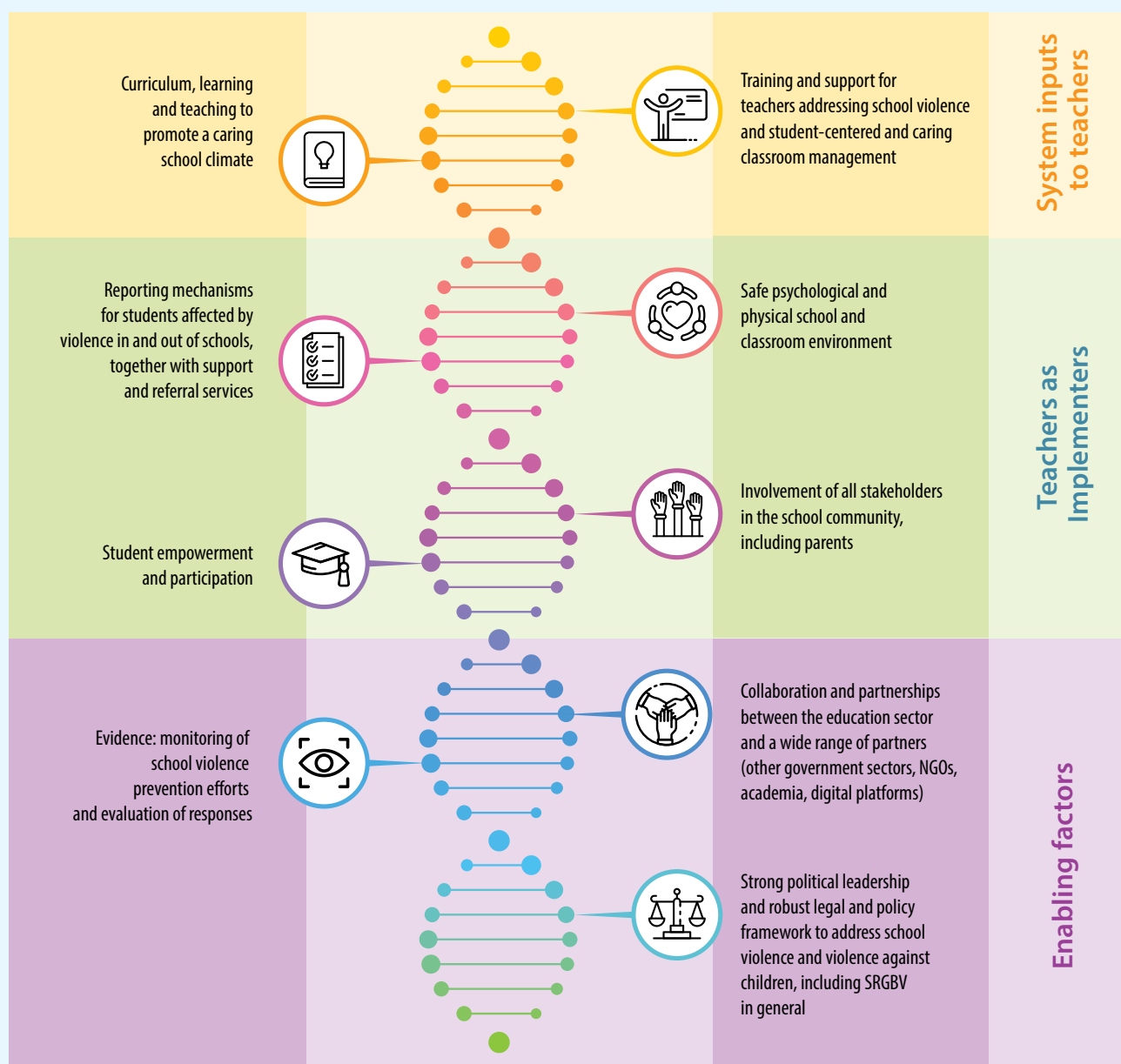
Yet, teachers are also representative of the institutional, social and cultural contexts around them. Their attitudes, knowledge and skills are

<sup>1</sup> Holistic approaches include whole-school (UNGEI, 2019) and whole-education (UNESCO and French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020) approaches. A whole-school approach is a collective action addressing the needs of learners, staff and the wider community, not only within the curriculum, but across the entire school and learning environment. For a whole education approach, which includes but is not limited to school-based efforts, please see Figure 3.

shaped by social and gender norms, their own education and training, experiences in their personal lives and the institutional structures within which they work. It is important to recognize the full range of roles that teachers and other school staff can play when school violence, including SRGBV, happens; at a minimum, they may be protectors, observers, enablers, perpetrators or victims of school violence (Attawell, 2019). Teachers also

play a critical role in identifying and receiving reports of abuse happening outside school, including on the way to and from school, and referring students to the relevant authorities for assistance. Developing teachers' capacities to act as positive role models and agents of change against the normalization of school violence, including SRGBV, and all forms of violence against children is a key task of the education sector.

Figure 3: The relationship of teachers to the 9 components of the whole-education approach



Source: Adapted from UNESCO and French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2020)

This brief highlights the experiences and voices of teachers in the Asia-Pacific region, including those who have participated in an SRGBV prevention programme. It aims to demonstrate that policymakers and training institutions need to make further investment in teachers' professional development in violence prevention and supportive structures, including as part of medium- and long-term education sector recovery after the COVID-19

pandemic. The information presented here draws on data from an online survey of teachers' perceptions and practices related to school violence, including SRGBV, referred to in this brief as the UNESCO Teacher Survey. Focus group discussions were also conducted in two countries of the Asia-Pacific region in conjunction with the survey. Additional data comes from monitoring surveys, focus group discussions and interviews with



teachers who taught content from a curricular resource in SRGBV prevention, Connect With Respect. There were 1,655 responses to the UNESCO Teacher Survey from 33 countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region, although 76% of these were from mainland China and India.<sup>2</sup> Teachers responding to the survey were

selfselected and not a random sample. Likewise, sample sizes for interviews and focus group discussions tended to be small for both the UNESCO Teacher Survey and Connect With Respect pilot studies; see Table 1. Findings are not representative of teachers in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Data sources and sample sizes for teacher samples. Note that the studies included larger samples of students (not shown).**

Data sources	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
UNESCO. [Forthcoming]. Safe to learn: What do teachers think and do about violence in school? Data collection February–April 2020	Online survey: 1,655 teachers from 33 Asia-Pacific countries and territories (including 555 from China and 704 from India)	<b>NEPAL</b> Focus group discussions, each with 7-10 teachers: 4 <b>THAILAND</b> Focus group discussions, each with 7-10 teachers: 4
Cahill, H., et al. 2022. Analysis of experience and outcomes of Connect with Respect violence prevention programme, a five-country study. Paris, UNESCO. Data collection October 2019–June 2020	<b>THAILAND</b> Teacher training exit survey: 157 Teacher monitoring survey: 22 <b>TIMOR-LESTE</b> Teacher training exit survey: 20 <b>VIET NAM</b> Teacher monitoring survey: 32	<b>THAILAND</b> Teacher interviews: 10
McCracken, K., et al. 2021. Final Evaluation Report: Stepping Up Solutions to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls in Asia and the Pacific (2017–2021). UN Women. Data collection April–August 2021		<b>TIMOR-LESTE</b> Teacher interviews: 5 <b>VIET NAM</b> Focus group discussions, each a mix of 6-8 teachers and students: 5

## Teachers’ views of peer violence among students

**Teachers surveyed in the Asia-Pacific readily identify physical bullying as a form of violence.** In the UNESCO Teacher Survey, the majority of Asia-Pacific teachers recognized that fighting between peers that involves slapping, hitting, shoving, kicking or striking another student constitutes violence. Yet, this was not unanimous; 20% of Asia-Pacific respondents, and up to 33% in India – did not call these behaviours forms of violence.

**Teachers surveyed in the Asia-Pacific region identified several forms of sexual violence against students.** In a focus group discussion, teachers in Nepal reported that girls are subject to unwanted touching, staring, and sexualized comments at school, from peers and teachers alike. Teachers also noted that they lack visibility into violence that occurs in their absence, such as on the way to school. Another study in Nepal found that eve-teasing (cat-calling and sexual comments) and other forms of sexual harassment on the roads to and from

schools are experienced by 77% of 16–18-year-old girls (Thapalia et al., 2019).

In Thailand, some teachers in focus group discussions considered sexual violence to be physical or verbal fighting between romantic partners or between those who are in competition for romantic partners, stemming from jealousy. Other teachers recognized that sexual assault takes place between students and that comments that sexualize someone or a part of their body are also forms of sexual violence. Teachers also reported bullying based on someone’s perceived sexuality or insulting by calling someone gay, although some suggested that this behaviour is less common than it used to be.

**Psychological violence was more likely to be normalized and accepted than other forms of violence.** Surveyed teachers were less likely to recognize forms of psychological violence, such as name-calling, excluding students from activities and threatening violence. For example, 27% of urban and 37% of rural teachers in China did not consider threats of violence to be violence. In India, female teachers were more likely

<sup>2</sup> Globally, 34,877 teachers responded to the survey, dominated by those in Central and South America, as 70% came from one country, Ecuador. Therefore, the analysis here, while primarily qualitative, attempts to compare the Asia-Pacific to regions other than Central and South America when quantitative data allows it.  
<sup>3</sup> See the full reports from Table 1 for more information.

(65%) than male teachers (43%) to call threats violence. In focus group discussions, teachers in Thailand and Nepal reported that bullying based on family names or caste was common between students. In some cases, common behaviours were not considered violence, or at least not something that needed to be addressed. For example, teachers in Thailand said that verbal abuse between students, such as insults and name-calling, is 'normal' in all-male schools.

In focus group discussions, teachers identified at what point playful 'joking' becomes abusive. There were two factors mentioned: the intent of the person joking or teasing and the emotional impact on the person being targeted. A teacher in Thailand explained,

*'It's a thin line between humour and violence, but if it's fun in the classroom, if it is someone else's fun, if it does not affect anyone, it is okay. But if you see that a pupil has a sad or angry face, it's not fun, it's going to be violent.'*

In Thailand, some teachers expressed the idea that an incident does not constitute violence if the perpetrator does not intend to cause harm, especially for younger students who have less understanding of how their behaviours might affect others. Other teachers said that they cannot determine that someone is being hurt unless that student shares it with the teacher or is visibly upset. In China, a teacher reported that 'some teachers do not agree that certain behaviours are violent, but rather jokes.' In the UNESCO Teacher Survey, urban and younger teachers in China more often recognized a broader spectrum of behaviours as examples of violence compared to their rural and older counterparts.

## Teachers' views of teacher violence

In the UNESCO Teacher Survey, **many of the same behaviours described as violence when perpetrated by a student were less likely to be considered examples of violence when perpetrated by a teacher.** Responses from China reflected the global pattern in that surveyed teachers were less likely to agree that threatening, hitting, slapping or calling names is violence when it is done by a teacher than when it happens between students. Responses from India were the exception – surveyed teachers were more likely to recognize all forms of violence included in the survey when perpetrated by teachers, except for verbal threatening.

Overall, one-third of surveyed teachers in Asia-Pacific countries disagreed that hitting, shoving, whipping or caning a student can be defined as physical violence. Another study reported that 46% of teachers in Nepal disagreed that corporal punishment is violence (Shrestha et al., 2017); according to the UNESCO Teacher Survey focus group discussions, the practice is less common there since it was outlawed in 2018. In India and China, 61% and 86%, respectively, of teachers in the UNESCO Teacher

Survey reported that they occasionally, sometimes, often or always use different disciplinary strategies for girls and boys. Other studies have shown that boys are more likely to experience corporal punishment than girls, a pattern that contributes to boys in Nepal and Timor-Leste feeling less safe in schools than girls (Aryal et al., 2017; UNICEF ROSA, 2021; Cahill et al., 2022).

### Surveyed teachers in the Asia-Pacific region were more likely to believe that corporal punishment improves student behaviour and academic performance than teachers in other regions.

Up to 25% of teachers responding in India believed that corporal punishment has benefits, compared to 6% of the global sample. Many parents hold the same misconception – in focus group discussions, teachers in Nepal and Thailand said that parents expect them to be at their children as a form of discipline and may hit a child in front of the teacher so that the teacher knows that the child has been punished for bad behaviour. A secondary teacher in Thailand said, 'Even today, teachers are still beating students in my school, but they have a deal with parents that they can beat their children.' However, other teachers in Thailand said that physical punishment and shaming are not effective at changing student behaviour or that violence by teachers is explained as a problem of a small number of teachers with poor emotional management or high levels of stress.

**Some surveyed teachers felt that there are no alternatives to corporal punishment,** or they are confused about what kinds of discipline are acceptable and effective. This may stem in part from a lack of good understanding of what corporal punishment is. A teacher in China expressed this confusion,

*'[Teachers need to know] the difference between corporal punishment and punishment. Appropriate punishment is needed. After all, it is still a child. They must know that they are responsible for doing something wrong. But the way to punish for the teacher is not clear, and sometimes the teacher is at a loss.'*

Another teacher in China felt unable to teach, '[A]ny educational measures taken by teachers are regarded as corporal punishment or corporal punishment in disguise. Teachers face dismissal, so teachers dare not educate students.'

### Verbal and emotional abuse from teachers was not always perceived as violence.

Instead, it was considered motivation to work harder. As a focus group participant in Thailand said, 'I view fierce words or rigid character as a technique for some teachers to try to motivate deviant students to work hard.' Another described calling a student 'fat' or 'dark' as 'unintentional violence'. According to a teacher in a rural primary school in Thailand, parents and teachers are not being good examples for students in online behaviour; they 'use online violence such as rude words to hurt other people's feelings.' In China, one teacher said, 'Some teachers, under

the banner of being good for their students, chanting the dignity of teachers, wantonly insulting students, and showing no respect and equal attitude towards students, is also a form of invisible violence.' Although it did not ask whether teachers perceived the behaviours as violence, another study of teachers in the Asia-Pacific region found that in each of the 18 countries included, there were participants reporting that abuse was perpetrated by teachers upon students who were attracted to the same sex or identified as gender non-conforming (Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health, 2019).

**A significant proportion of surveyed teachers in the Asia-Pacific region did not consider some forms of sexual violence by teachers against students to be violence.** Alarming, one-third of surveyed teachers in the Asia-Pacific region (a sample dominated by responses from China and India) disagreed that teachers offering students money, goods or favours in exchange for sex is a form of sexual violence. According to focus group discussions in Nepal, inappropriate touching and staring by teachers occur somewhat regularly against girls. These findings call for more research into how teachers view engaging in sexual behaviour with students.

## How teachers view their role in addressing school violence

**Surveyed Asia-Pacific teachers were less sure than their counterparts in other regions that it is their responsibility to keep students safe.** The UNESCO Teacher Survey found that Asia-Pacific teachers who responded were less likely to 'strongly agree' with the statement, 'It is my responsibility to ensure that students feel safe from all forms of violence in my classroom' than teachers in other regions, although adding the 'agree' response resulted in similar proportions as other regions. In China and India, 5% and 7%, respectively, of teachers disagreed with the statement. In focus group discussions, secondary teachers in Thailand felt that they have a duty to address violence, assisted by school counsellors.

Clearly, more engagement is needed with teachers in the region to understand how they view their role in addressing violence. Teachers' accounts of what they do to prevent and respond to school violence, discussed in the next section, may be the best available evidence.

## School violence prevention

Prevention of school violence happens at multiple levels – education system-wide endeavours, such as legislative and policy reform; school plans and programmes; classroom management; gender transformative curriculum; and interventions with individual students

and their families. The broader community is also an essential part of building a safe environment for children and young people – for example, by maintaining or changing social norms about gender, power and violence – and we know that violence at home or in the community is often carried into schools (Lloyd, 2018). Teachers play pivotal roles in these efforts, as educators, role models, protectors of children, and often the interface between schools and parents.

**Holistic approaches to violence prevention include policies, codes of conduct for teachers and staff, and curricula or co-curricula initiatives.** Nepal adopted a national Child-Friendly School policy, which has been successful in reducing corporal punishment and increasing the inclusion of marginalized groups (Samuels et al., 2017). Codes of conduct for school teachers have been implemented under Nepal's policy but are not routinely updated, and there is no system outside of a head teacher's supervision for monitoring teacher compliance. As a result, teachers and other staff are rarely held accountable for abuses of power. However, 55% of Asia-Pacific teachers responding to the UNESCO Teacher Survey said they felt fully supported by school management in their efforts to prevent and address violence, a higher proportion than teachers in most other regions.

Several Asia-Pacific countries have adopted national curricula or co-curricular frameworks that incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL), citizenship education, or peace education with topics such as intercultural understanding, tolerance, compassion, conflict resolution and others (UNESCO, 2015). However, less than half of the respondents to the UNESCO Teacher Survey in the region said that they teach values like tolerance, inclusion, diversity, and gender equality or knowledge of children's rights and recognizing abuse. In China, around one-quarter of teachers said they teach this material. One teacher in Nepal said that they teach respect and peace through the celebration of different religious festivals (Christmas, Dashain, Eid, etc.) and encouraging sharing at mealtimes. In addition, the Rupantaran life skills education package<sup>4</sup>, in which gender and violence are discussed within a human rights framework, is widely used in Nepal, although not commonly implemented in full.

**Teachers have taken leadership roles in driving change at sectoral and institutional levels in the Asia-Pacific region.** For example, teachers' unions in Malaysia developed a joint action plan for addressing SRGBV and holding teacher perpetrators accountable (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016, p. 87). In focus group discussions, teachers also gave examples of school-level activities that they participate in, like this teacher in China:

<sup>4</sup> Rupantaran was developed for adolescents in Nepal. It aims at 'overall empowerment' with a subject focus on comprehensive life skills and social education; financial education; and livelihoods awareness, including microenterprise development training.

“I am a member of the school’s mental health work department. Part of our work is the prevention of and intervention in school bullying. We organize an anti-bullying education week throughout the school every year to encourage teachers and students to build a safe campus together. In addition, school leaders and representatives of teachers and students formed a bullying intervention committee to discuss issues related to bullying. There is also a bullying anonymous reporting system, which can report any bullying incident online and offline. Employees will follow up and investigate and discuss support plans with the victims. But there are also many challenges in the work.”

*Teacher in China*

### **In the classroom, teachers employed several strategies to create positive learning environments that do not support violence.**

In the UNESCO Teacher Survey, teachers in China felt that they mostly relied on their own efforts to create safe classrooms. Several teachers in focus group discussions in Thailand mentioned generating agreements on expected behaviour with the whole class at the beginning of a term to proactively generate commitments to mutual respect and raise awareness of individual rights within a class. Other strategies included highlighting the positive, that is, praising good behaviour regularly and pointing out the positive qualities of those students who are more likely to be victims of violence due to their differences in ability, nationality or other characteristics. Teachers also mentioned introducing digital citizenship topics to promote understanding of rights and appropriate online behaviour among students, with one specifically telling students that posting photos of others or violating privacy online is a kind of cybercrime.

In addition, a few teachers said that they worked together to effectively monitor the greater school environment. For example, a teacher in Thailand explained that teachers scatter to various places outside the classroom during transition periods, such as the cafeteria, to deter violent incidents.

## **Responding to school violence, including SRGBV**

When students experience violence at or around school, schools and education systems have a duty to act to ensure the child is safe, their health and psychosocial needs are met, and perpetrators are sanctioned appropriately. Teachers are often the first to respond, through direct intervention, referral to specialized staff or outside services, or recording events. Unfortunately, the studies included in this brief did not investigate teacher and school identification of, and response to child abuse and other child protection concerns taking place outside of school, but these issues should also be integrated into robust and holistic policies and procedures to address violence against children.

### **The strength of school-level systems to respond to school violence varies across Asia-Pacific countries.**

Data from the UNESCO Teacher Survey suggest that

violence response systems in some schools need strengthening. For both China and India, teachers reported that, following a violent incident, they were less likely to refer a student experiencing or perpetrating violence to another staff or outside professional (China, 25%; India, 11%) than to handle it themselves. Low reliance on the support of other trained adults may indicate that such support is limited. As one teacher in China commented, ‘Professionals are needed to handle such cases.’ Another said, ‘The school never makes rules,’ suggesting that there are no guidelines for violence response.

Likewise in Nepal, most schools lack a counsellor. One teacher is identified as a Gender Focal Point, but there is no compensation for their extra work, no standard training and confusion about roles and responsibilities. Under the national Child-Friendly Schools policy, complaints and response mechanisms (CRMs) have been established in a number of schools to facilitate anonymous reporting. However, a review found that they have not been well utilized, as students are generally not taught how to submit complaints. Furthermore, students are not aware or do not trust that complaints are handled anonymously, and they fear reprisal from teachers. The low use is probably also a consequence of the lack of response when complaints are made; there are no standard protocols for handling reports of violence and linking to referral pathways for gender-based violence response services, and schools do not maintain records of complaints (UNICEF ROSA, 2021).

In contrast, school systems for reporting violence seem to be well utilized in some schools in Thailand. In focus group discussions, teachers mentioned forms for tracking incidents and the behaviour of problematic students, with semesterly reporting and information-sharing with other teachers and counsellors. Severe incidents involve police and medical care as needed. Some schools have an assigned police officer, although their role may be more about mediation than about law enforcement. Still, some teachers asked for more teachers, psychologists and guidance counsellors to address violence in their schools.

### **Teachers reported adopting an individualized response to peer-to-peer violence in their classrooms,**

especially where systems were weak. The UNESCO Teacher Survey results suggest that teachers largely handle incidents of violence on their own or with parents of those experiencing or perpetrating violence.



The most common responses in China and India were communicating with parents and individually with the students involved to develop resiliency against abuse or gain skills in emotional regulation and self-control.

In Thailand, several teachers in focus group discussions mentioned employing agreements between two students in conflict with each other, to clarify expected behaviour and facilitate peaceful relationships. Other interventions ranged from bringing work to a student's home when they felt too unsafe to attend school to redirecting the energies of perpetrators of violence into volunteer roles.

There are challenges in these approaches, however. As a teacher in China said, 'Verbal bullying and social bullying among students are more difficult to supervise than physical bullying.' In addition, even though compared to most other world regions in the UNESCO Teacher Survey, teachers in Asia-Pacific countries were more likely to say that they felt supported by school management in addressing violence, in focus group discussions, teachers did not always feel supported. In Thailand, some focus group participants expressed a fear of parental complaints as a result of students fighting in school, leading to them being made to apologize to the parents. They also reported a reputational risk for the school, especially where school competition for enrolment is strong, and a reluctance to report incidents to parents because of the negative image that might be created. Sometimes schools proactively involved parents in addressing perpetrators' behaviours, for instance, by engaging parents to help identify early warning signs of school violence and support response measures.

**How teachers respond to violence perpetrated by other teachers is understudied.** Teachers are susceptible to a bystander effect as much as are students. As noted in the UNESCO Teacher Survey, a teacher may think that if they themselves are aware that another teacher has abused students, others must already know, and therefore it is already being addressed or not their responsibility to report. Although the UNESCO Teacher Survey and group discussions did not explore how teachers respond to colleagues perpetrating violence against students, some teachers made comments that suggest that the onus of reporting teacher violence is on students. For example, a secondary teacher in Thailand said, 'When a teacher has a temper with students, I don't think that teacher is violent. I feel that the students are in the wrong. If students are not happy, they can always write a letter to the principal. In case of sexual harassment, verbal violence or physical violence by teachers, then students can also complain to the principal.' A member of a school's mental health team in China spoke of the difficulty in holding teachers accountable, 'Teachers' violent behaviour towards students is difficult for us to deal with unless the students have conclusive evidence. It is difficult to provide evidence for some abuse or neglect of students.'

## How teachers learned to prevent and address school violence, including SRGBV

### Teachers said that they learned how to prevent and respond to violence primarily through experience.

The UNESCO Teacher Survey and focus group discussions found that teachers in the Asia-Pacific region (as well as globally) rarely received practical training on preventing and responding to violence. For example, in China, more than half of teachers said that they received no such training at all. Pre-service education may include theories of psychology and behaviour management, such as positive and negative reinforcement, skills in individual counselling and the law on child protection, but teachers across countries agreed that this subject matter does not provide practical techniques to foster safe schools and diffuse or manage violence.

Instead, teachers said that they learned through experience. It is not surprising, then, that, globally, older teachers expressed more confidence in handling violence and using positive discipline than younger teachers. In fact, many said that they have relied on sharing experiences with other teachers to develop related skills, a process that begins with teaching practicums in which the senior educator can model effective methods for the student teacher. In focus group discussions, some teachers reported having informal support networks with colleagues to find solutions to classroom violence. A teacher in Nepal said,

*'We learned mainly from practice, by sharing ideas with one another. We just convert theories of psychology to practice by discovering some possible solutions by ourselves.'*

## Teachers' experiences with the SRGBV prevention programme, Connect with Respect

Several programmes have aimed to supplement teachers' skills in recognizing, preventing and responding to SRGBV, beyond those that they develop through day-to-day classroom experience. These include pre-service and in-service trainings and efforts to prevent teacher violence and corporal punishment, using positive discipline and classroom management methods. Similarly, the introduction of codes of conduct for teachers and school staff has reduced abusive discipline when staff are oriented to the code and understand what is expected. To reduce student peer violence, programmes may adopt holistic approaches, such as the whole-school approach, that target teachers as one set of stakeholders within the broader community, as teachers can play strong roles in changing the school culture. Curricula designed

for children and young people in SRGBV and violence prevention are typically delivered by school teachers who are often approaching these topics as learners themselves, as the content is new to them.

This section examines the experiences of lower secondary teachers in three Asian countries (Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam) who participated in training in, and delivery of the CWR programme, developed for the Asia-Pacific region. CWR covers seven key topics in gender and equality, positive role-models, gender-based violence (GBV), SRGBV, communication skills in relationships, bystander skills and help-seeking. The toolkit has two parts – one with guidance for teachers and administrators and another with the classroom programme. Activities are participatory and can be integrated into regular classroom subjects such as social studies or health (Cahill et al., 2022). Note that the programme also incorporated elements at community, institutional and policy levels in addition to the teacher and classroom activities.

**Monitoring and evaluation of the pilot CWR programmes showed that it was effective at improving students' attitudes and knowledge** of gender equality, respectful cross-gender relationships, how to support peers experiencing violence, how to seek help, and GBV in and out of school. Teachers noted improvements in respectful behaviour between students, with less inappropriate teasing and violence. For students in Thailand and Timor-Leste, girls reported the greatest improvements in their relationships at school. A teacher in

Thailand summed up the changes in students by saying that they learned 'how to help each other, solve the problem by themselves, be not violent, and sympathetic to others' (Cahill et al., 2022; McCracken et al., 2021).

#### **Teachers applied new knowledge in gender, GBV and communication skills with students.**

Importantly, many of them said that they became more knowledgeable about how SRGBV can affect students and more confident in recognizing students' needs and supporting students experiencing violence. Relationships with students improved as teachers delivered new communication and listening skills. Nearly 90% of participant teachers in Viet Nam reported significant improvement in their knowledge and understanding of GBV, help-seeking and supporting students. In Thailand, teachers also expressed a high level of confidence in teaching gender and gender equality content at the end of the programme.

**Teachers recommended the CWR programme for teachers to improve their emotional self-regulation and learn positive discipline skills.** The impact of the programme on teachers' discipline practices is difficult to discern from the available data. In some cases, there were declines in corporal punishment; in other cases, there were increases, likely because students were better able to recognize abusive treatment when it occurred. However, for some teachers, the programme presented a revolutionary new way to manage the classroom:

*"I was one teacher who always used violence to scare the students. That one week [of training] totally hanged my behaviour and taught me how to teach students with love, with passion, without using any violence . . . Before when I taught, I used screaming and beating to make them scared. Now, I communicate, they can approach me, they're not afraid of me, because I use good communication with them. I'm really happy with this."*

*Teacher in Timor-Leste*

**The participatory methods used gave teachers new pedagogical skills.** In Thailand, a high percentage of teachers said that the CWR training was effective at improving knowledge of effective teaching strategies and that the training was essential to their ability to teach the programme. Most felt that the programme did not increase their teaching load but supplemented their teaching. Yet, there were also requests for more training in participatory methods and sensitive topics. A teacher in Viet Nam said, 'My difficulty was talking about sexual violence. It was a bit sensitive when teaching to children because they were shy and ashamed; however, this issue is very important to be provided to them.'

**Teachers experienced change in their personal lives as well.** Learning about gender and violence and how they shape one's own life is often transformative. Teachers in the CWR programme reported improved

understanding of the harms of violence and the benefits of gender equality and respectful relationships. In Thailand, 95% said that CWR helped them understand their personal relationships. Teachers in Timor-Leste said that they had a greater commitment to non-violence in their personal as well as professional lives.

There were also challenges to programme implementation, including large class sizes that make interactive teaching difficult, inconsistent support from administrators, and lacking sufficient time to fully implement the curriculum. A common comment from teachers was that they would benefit from stronger collaboration with each other for mutual support and shared learning. They were also aware that other changes were needed to protect children from violence, such as counselling services, family interventions and better national policy.

## Recommendations for teacher capacity-building and support

This section looks at recommendations from published literature for developing teacher competencies, in terms of content and modality of training, followed by school- and community-level factors<sup>5</sup> that are necessary for preventing and responding to school violence, including SRGBV, with reference to teachers' comments during focus group discussions. It also looks at preparations for returning to school after COVID-19 closures and integration of SRGBV prevention into the learning recovery agenda.

### Competencies for teachers

Resources on building a safe school environment call for incorporating several topics and skills into standard curriculum for students. Curricula in SEL, gender equality, comprehensive sexuality education, anti-bullying and prevention of violence have brought benefits to students in well-being, positive attitudes, pro-social behaviour, academic performance, healthy relationships and reductions in risky behaviours such as violence and substance abuse (Wodon et al., 2021, p. 71). Recommendations are to include explicit discussions of violence in age-appropriate ways, such as 'good touch-bad touch' lessons for younger children and dating and intimate partner violence for adolescents (UNESCO, 2021a; UNESCO and UN Women, 2015). Online violence and cyberbullying are increasingly of concern and warrant the development of national digital citizenship frameworks and mandatory personal safety skills programmes that address safe internet use and privacy (UNESCO and French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020). However, cyberbullying is often linked to, and may be an extension of in-person bullying, with digital spaces offering additional opportunities for perpetrators to reach their targeted individuals. Building respectful relationships and resilience are fundamental social-emotional skills that reduce risks to perpetrating and experiencing violence both online and offline. Digital literacy and citizenship skills must build on these fundamentals.

In Asia and the Pacific, nations have begun to make progress in integrating these topics into learning, as they increasingly recognize the emerging requirements for productive and harmonious societies in today's world (UNESCO, 2015). Within the discussion of what students should learn, what is required for educators to teach knowledge, skills and values in such things as gender-based violence and healthy relationships – and to model respectful relationships, equality and non-violence – has received less attention.

**Ensure that teachers understand gender and gender equality.** Globally, few teachers feel prepared to teach concepts and non-cognitive skills in gender equality and human rights (UNESCO and Education International, 2021). In Thailand, 61% of teachers said they did not have the skills necessary to teach sexuality education, which includes gender topics (UNESCO, 2021b). Yet we know that training is effective at raising teachers' comfort with and confidence in topics like gender equality, human rights, and sexual orientation and gender identity (Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health, 2019; McCracken et al., 2021).

In addition, teachers need to develop awareness of the various dynamics among students and between teachers and students in their classrooms and how they are shaped by gender, power, ethnicity, individual biases and other social dimensions (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016, p. 66). Power imbalances between students or between teachers and students enhance vulnerabilities to violence. As teachers said in the UNESCO Teacher Survey focus group discussions, understanding how gender shapes one's experiences aids the recognition of gendered forms of violence. Made explicit, teachers and students alike can question gender norms and how they enable violence. Therefore, teacher training needs to assist teachers in examining their values about gender equality, challenge gendered assumptions, and explore how gender influences the way teachers approach their work and relationships (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016, p. 67). Once gender is well understood, it is easy to see the role that it plays in some forms of violence and how building gender-equitable classrooms and schools will reduce SRGBV. In addition, teachers who have undergone critical reflection on the role of gender norms and practices in their own lives can bring that experience to teaching gender transformative content to their students (Boender et al., 2019).

**Prepare teachers in pre-service and in-service training to recognize all forms of violence and abuse, their impact on students and managing safety, including in online spaces.** Material should include sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, dating violence, consent, online violence, coercive relationships, emotional or psychological abuse, economic abuse or extortion, and other locally relevant concerns such as gang violence or transactional sex (UNESCO, 2021a; UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Teachers in focus group discussions also stressed the need for training in managing online violence and cyberbullying. In many contexts, adults are less skilled than children in information technology and navigating the internet, not to mention rapidly evolving social media platforms. As the use of remote learning and digital tools expands and sites like Facebook are increasingly used for school communication, it is important that teachers' knowledge of managing safety risks for students and themselves maintains pace – for instance with technical

<sup>5</sup> These factors fit into a holistic (or whole-school) approach to school violence prevention and response. See World Health Organization, 2019; UNGEI, 2019; and UNESCO and UN Women, 2019.

skills in moderating group dialogue online or ensuring confidentiality of private messages on social media. (See also below recommendations on reopening schools after COVID-19 closures.)

**Skills in positive discipline and non-violent classroom management are essential to ending violence in schools.** Building these skills in teachers is one of the most effective ways to reduce violence in schools. Evaluated programmes have lowered the use of physical violence by teachers and staff and improved students’ sense of safety at school. Teachers need to understand how their use of corporal punishment or emotional abuse as disciplinary measures erodes, rather than generates, respect in the classroom. It also negatively impacts academic performance (Wodon et al., 2021).

In the Asia-Pacific region, the high level of acceptance of corporal punishment and belief that punitive approaches improve students’ learning is a pattern that can be shifted with high-quality training in positive

discipline, equitable classroom management and social-emotional skills. Comments from teachers in focus group discussions showed that they are aware of bans on physical punishment, but some are unsure what other kinds of discipline are acceptable or effective and are left feeling powerless. Other skills that teachers need in order to change their practices include self-awareness, emotional self-management and stress reduction. Self-aware teachers are able to monitor how they replicate gender dynamics in their classrooms and strive to treat girls, boys and students of other genders equitably in terms of attention, pedagogies, behavioural expectations and discipline methods. Teachers in Thailand also recommended inclusion of listening skills and maintaining privacy in teacher training so that teachers know how to maintain trust with their students and better empathize with them.

Figure 4 suggests some of the competencies that teachers require to prevent and respond to violence in schools, including SRGBV.

**Figure 4: Teacher competencies for preventing and addressing violence in schools<sup>6</sup>**

Understanding gender	Preventing violence	Responding to violence	Employing pedagogical skills	Understanding teacher accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing norms and stereotypes</li> <li>Identifying power dynamics and inequalities</li> <li>Values clarification</li> <li>Gender, sex and sexuality knowledge</li> <li>Employing gender-responsive pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflict management</li> <li>Modelling respectful relationships</li> <li>Managing digital spaces</li> <li>Facilitating positive group dynamics and safe, inclusive classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing violence and forms of SRGBV</li> <li>Connecting to referral services</li> <li>Knowledge of school child protection policy, procedures and reporting requirements</li> <li>Teaching help-seeking</li> <li>Communicating with parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching SEL</li> <li>Self-awareness</li> <li>Self-management</li> <li>Responsible decision making</li> <li>Social awareness</li> <li>Relationship skills</li> <li>Collaborative learning strategies</li> <li>Delivering transformative curricula</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Code of conduct comprehension</li> <li>Benefits and methods of positive discipline</li> <li>Recognizing inappropriate contact with students</li> <li>Maintaining privacy</li> <li>Commitment to non-violence</li> </ul>

### Modalities for teacher capacity-building

**Introduce skills in equitable, safe and inclusive classroom management and discipline from the beginning of teacher training.** Pre-service training institutions have an outsized role in establishing teacher practices that will create school cultures. Trainings in classroom management and pedagogy should introduce equitable approaches, positive discipline, and gender awareness from the start, at the formative point in teachers’ careers. Similarly, gender, SRGBV, conflict management, safe and respectful internet use, psychosocial support of students and SEL should be required topics in pre-service education (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016; UNESCO and French Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2020), with the content integrated into knowledge required for teacher qualification. Unfortunately, studies have found that abusive and

violent behaviours are often tolerated and learned in teacher training establishments. Student teachers at these institutions are themselves entitled to safe environments and equitable treatment during their education. However, in the absence of such treatment, when they begin teaching in their own classrooms, they are likely to reinforce the same negative culture that they themselves experienced as learners (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). In some settings, many teachers are themselves facing domestic violence. This is a potential additional barrier that could prevent teachers from having the types of responses to violence in schools. There is a broad value to having schools communicate what violence is, that it is not acceptable, and how to seek help- even for teachers and other school officials.

**Offer training in violence prevention and gender equality to all in-service teachers.** A complaint from

<sup>6</sup> Draws on UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO, 2018; UNESCO et al., 2018; and, Garcia, n.d.



teachers in focus group discussions was that most teachers do not have the opportunity to attend in-service trainings on violence and safe schools. Rather, attendance is often limited to guidance counsellors or focal point teachers. As frontline responders to violence and the architects of safe classroom settings, all teachers that manage classrooms and have face-to-face time with students need to develop relevant skills. Teachers specifically mentioned needing training in conflict resolution and communicating with parents about difficult situations. In addition, focus group participants recommended using real (but anonymized) case studies of events that have happened in schools and how the situations were handled. Role-playing of such scenarios would provide teachers with some practice intervening.

### **Build teacher networks and movements for change.**

In focus group discussions, some teachers mentioned their appreciation for informal circles of peers that share experiences managing conflicts between students, applying appropriate discipline, and creating safe classrooms. One idea was to create a working group of the teachers implementing the CWR curriculum. Such support groups can be formalized as well, organized by a school or an administrative unit (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Teachers also requested that psychologists, counsellors, or senior teachers mentor or coach the less experienced teachers.<sup>7</sup> Teachers' unions can build networks of professionals committed to safe schools for mutual support, information sharing, production of toolkits and lesson plans, development of master trainers, and recognition of teachers leading on the issue (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016).

## **School- and community-level enablers**

**Clearly delineate referral pathways and decision-making about activating them.** Teachers and schools often serve as the link between students experiencing violence and outside services, such as medical care, law enforcement, counselling services and protection services. Establishing standard protocols that define the steps to be taken by a teacher on witnessing, suspecting or receiving a disclosure of violence or abuse and ensuring that teachers are aware of their obligations are critical to building safe schools. Commonly, internal referrals are made to the school counsellor, principal or child protection focal point, who follow protocols on parameters and accountabilities for referral to outside agencies when a different set of professional skills is needed (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Such procedures must comply with national policies, including on GBV prevention and response, and national child protection laws, for example mandatory reporting laws. Having an adequate number of counsellors or psychologists available in school is also important, as teachers noted in focus group discussions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Treat codes of conduct as 'living' documents and keep them relevant, actionable and up to date.**

Involving teachers in the development or updating of codes of conduct is a smart practice to ensure that codes remain relevant to their daily lives. Codes of conduct should be regularly re-signed to refresh teachers' commitments to non-violence and child protection (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016), and participatory sessions with teachers can clarify the expectations set out in the agreement. Monitoring and improving compliance rely on an administrative system of tracking infractions, but teachers also play a role in enforcing codes of conduct and other policies against violence (Wodon et al., 2021; UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Confidential reporting mechanisms should be available for when a student or teacher feels unsafe reporting violence (Wodon et al., 2021).

### **Ensure that school administrators support expanding teachers' skills and positive discipline measures.**

In focus group discussions, some teachers mentioned that they would have benefited from greater support from school leaders in implementing the CWR curriculum. Their full support is required for releasing teachers' time for capacity-building; integrating violence prevention, gender equality and related topics into other classroom work; and effective positive discipline. Teaching about the prevention of violence and healthy relationships can be seen to be in competition with regular subject matter on which students are tested, especially when teacher and administrator performance is judged by those test scores. Support for addressing violence should therefore be written into job expectations for school leaders, and they should be subject to awareness-raising activities and advocacy, accountability frameworks and participation in peer learning networks for violence prevention and response.

### **Educate parents on the benefits of positive discipline and violence prevention.**

As the focus group discussions showed, parents sometimes expect teachers to physically punish their children. Public message campaigns can help raise awareness among parents that the absence of harsh punishment does not mean the absence of disciplinary measures and that positive discipline can improve student well-being and academic outcomes. A holistic approach brings families and communities towards a collective goal of a violence-free environment where children feel safe to learn.

## **Contextualization to COVID-19 responses and school reopenings**

### **Be prepared for students to have greater psychosocial and mental health needs after school closures.**

During remote schooling periods, school violence including SRGBV can continue in different ways.

<sup>7</sup> See Yoder and Gurke, 2017, for a coaching toolkit in SEL.

<sup>8</sup> See UNICEF, 2020, for a referral pathway template and guidance.

For example, physical bullying can continue in digital spaces as cyberbullying (except in the poorest countries where TV and radio have been the primary media for lessons). In addition, during school closures, domestic violence and online violence have reportedly increased. The experience to date has been that students experience more violence than usual during school closures, as families are more confined together and access to safe spaces, services and the oversight of community figures such as school teachers are reduced. A global survey from Save the Children (2020) found that when schools were closed, children reported violence in the household at over double the rate from when schools were open, and the child attended in person. Globally, rates of gender-based violence have increased in the COVID-19 era, a pattern that has been called the shadow pandemic. For example, in Timor-Leste, violence response service providers noted a marked increase in sexual violence against children during school closures (United Nations and General Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Timor-Leste, 2021). This was exacerbated by the closures of schools, which often identify and refer children suffering violence to support and protection services. As a result, students returning to school are likely to have higher levels of mental health needs and stress than they did pre-pandemic. A teacher in Thailand expressed these needs,

*‘Students are increasingly affected by domestic violence as they have to live with their parents for a longer period of time. They cannot adjust to the situation. Moreover, many parents are unemployed during COVID-19, so they are under a lot of pressure and economic stress.’*

Teachers and staff may need additional capacity to identify students at risk of, or experiencing violence (UNESCO, 2021c).

**Offer teachers mental health and psychosocial support before and as schools reopen.** Teachers carry their own COVID-19-related stress and may be susceptible to emotional overloads that lead to violence against students. For example, organizations in Timor-Leste have noted an increased use of corporal punishment in schools following COVID-19 closures (United Nations and General Directorate of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Timor-Leste, 2021). Teacher skills in self-awareness and emotional management should be strengthened before return (Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence, 2020).

**Reset commitments to safe, inclusive, gender-equitable schools at reopening.** Reopenings may grant the opportunity to renew the education system and individual schools’ commitments to creating violence-free, positive learning environments. Refreshing codes of conduct for teachers and staff, fortifying the safety of toilets as hygiene facilities are prepared, and designing plans for physical distancing to prevent virus transmission all offer chances to improve safe infrastructure and

processes. Referral systems should be reviewed, as protection systems may have modified how to access services and new procedures are likely to be in place. Teachers’ knowledge of the school’s protocols to respond to violence should be refreshed as well (Safe to Learn, n.d; UNICEF, 2020).

**Where remote or blended learning is being used, integrate digital safety and citizenship into instructions for teachers and students.** Increased time online means that cyberbullying is more likely to happen, and teachers are more likely to witness it (UNESCO, 2021c). Students need to be aware of good practices to protect themselves online and how to engage respectfully with each other in digital spaces, building on the fundamental skills of respectful relationships and communication. Teachers need to know how to respond when cyberbullying is observed, including what technological options are available to document abuse, meet with students or parents individually, and report incidences or patterns of behaviour.

## Conclusion

School violence, including SRGBV, is not only a violation of children’s rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child but also carries a large economic cost in lost lifetime earnings when students drop out or fail to reach their potential and in missed productivity due to lasting physical and mental health effects (Wodon et al., 2021). Alternatively, healthy school relationships feed a virtuous cycle of trust, security, well-being and academic achievement. Promising interventions in violence prevention have high returns on investment and a whole school approach to ending violence is critical.

This brief has focused on teachers’ experiences as captured in the UNESCO Teacher Survey and with one promising classroom-based intervention, the Connect With Respect programme. It is important to listen to teachers and elevate their voices as the education sector continues to work towards violence-free schools. Building their confidence to teach gender equality and violence prevention content and empowering their best selves as protectors of children need to be prioritized within education transformation efforts, as a key component of the learning recovery agenda, and as a fundamental building block of the sector.

However, teacher development and curricular approaches cannot stand alone. The challenge of ending school violence including SRGBV must be met with more robust laws and policies, national action plans, safe physical environments, well-resourced community referral services, and movements of stakeholders to shift inequitable gender norms and practices. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region can lead the way towards meeting commitments to end violence in schools with a holistic approach.

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