



Country Report

Towards Safer Schools for Children: Thailand

Preventing Violence Against Children in Schools
in South and Southeast Asia



Coalition for
Good Schools





About Coalition for Good Schools

The Coalition for Good Schools is a collection of leading Global South practitioners committed to preventing violence against children (VAC) in and through schools across Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Coalition elevates insights and evidence-based interventions in order to provide critical tools, data and best practices for sustainable, local solutions. This ten-country document review series has been initiated by the Asia Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools, coordinated by Samya Development Resources Private Limited (SAMYA).

The Asia Hub commissioned 10 country reports on the state of VAC in and around schools in the broader region, in collaboration with core partners in each context. Each report provides an overview of how violence manifests in educational settings, explores contributing social, cultural and economic factors for VAC in each context, and provides a brief review of the policy landscape, national leadership and strategy for ending violence. While school violence is the primary focus, violence in other physical and online settings is explored. These reports are thus developed for all those working on the issue of VAC, particularly for those who see schools as an ideal entry point for its prevention.

These 10 reports are developed to stand alone, and are summarized in a scene-setting "Synthesis Report" which can be found on our website at www.coalitionforgoodschools.org.

Acknowledgements

This series of reports, produced by the Asia Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools presents background information, infographics and key resources that aim to foster change and development in both schools' settings and communities in the field of prevention of Violence Against Children across Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. This would not be possible without the diverse inputs of practitioners and researchers throughout each context. The Asia Hub is grateful to the following people for their contributions:

Writers

Yoeurn Yoeurt, Senior Research Officer, This Life Cambodia

Manith Chhoeng, Research & Policy Program Lead, This Life Cambodia

Editors

Devin Faris, Coalition for Good Schools

Philip Gover, Director of Strategic Engagement, Impact Learning and Effectiveness, This Life Cambodia

Johanna Higgs, Section Lead, Impact Learning and Effectiveness, This Life Cambodia

Dr. Komal Ganotra, Founder Director, Safetitude

Anuradha Mukherjee, Consultant - Social Development & Safeguarding

Suneha Kandpal, Feminist Researcher

Expert Reviewers

Dipak Naker, Coalition for Good Schools

Pranita Achyut, Senior Director- Research & Programs, ICRW Asia

Shanaaz Mathews, University of Cape Town

Shruti Johri, Research Specialist and Published Author

Sunita Menon, Chief Thematic Officer, Breakthrough Trust

Country Expert Review

Asia Hub – Core Group Members

- Awaz Foundation (Pakistan)
- Enfold Proactive Health Trust & Kidpower (India)
- CWIN & Voice of Children (Nepal)
- This Life (Cambodia)

Graphics and Design

Macro Graphic Pvt. Ltd.

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Samya Development Resources Private Limited

The Country Profile

THAILAND



Population



66.05

Million (2023)¹

Primary ethnic groups



75%

Thai

15%

Thai-Chinese

3%

Malay

The rest are Khmer Mons and hill tribes²

Languages



Thai

Age Structure



15.63%

0–15 years

12.31%

16–25 years

21.50%

26–45 years

37.70%

45 years and above

GDP per capita



\$7,331

(2023)

Poverty Rate



6.3%

(2021)

Literacy rate



96.65%

(2024)³

Key Findings

- ❖ Physical, psychological, and sexual violence from teachers and peers remains common in Thailand's schools, and corporal punishment remains a widely practiced form of discipline.
- ❖ School violence is linked with violence in the home, in online spaces and in continuing challenges with child labour and trafficking, though these are being met with more government response.
- ❖ To ensure the 2025 ban on corporal punishment is practiced, system-wide interventions are needed to promote non-violent norms at the school level and in surrounding communities.

¹ Ministry of Labor, National Statistical Office of Thailand, Ministry of Interior, The World Factbook, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council

² <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/thailand-population>

³ https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW&ver=1.0&dq=.ED_15-24_LR..&startPeriod=2011&endPeriod=2021&lastnobservations=1

Overall snapshot of violence against children in Thailand

For far too many children in Thailand, violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect are everyday realities, even despite noteworthy progress. Violence against children (VAC) in Thailand continues to be driven by gender and social norms and attitudes, and efforts to increase children's, families' and communities' ability to recognise and prevent violence have been limited.

Existing data has found that 75% of children have been violently punished in schools. Other research suggests that 700,000 children in Thailand, or 5% of children, are either at 'intolerable risk' of violence⁴ or have already experienced it. Some evidence suggests that domestic violence rose to more than 42% during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that 58% of parents use violent discipline at home⁵. According to data from a 2015-2016 National Statistical Office survey, 4.2% of children aged 1-14 reported receiving severe physical punishment in Thai homes.

School bullying is also rampant and regularly receives national attention in the media.⁶ Physical violence and mental health issues are found to be common particularly among boys, who are more likely to be struck, kicked, pushed, shoved, or trapped inside of a building; physical violence, lack of parental bonding and psychosocial distress are common among girls, who are more likely to be made fun of with sexual jokes, statements and gestures (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2013). Suicide rates among children are high, as loneliness and vulnerability increase through these experiences.⁷

Although Thailand already saw high internet usage among children before COVID-19, the pandemic forced many schoolchildren and young people to spend much more time online. This resulted in a significant increase in cases of cyberbullying in recent years. Additional factors increase children's risk to violence in Thailand, where an estimated 55,000 children are not living with their parents and are not receiving parental care, but instead residing in extensive, occasionally uncontrolled institutional settings all over the country⁸.

In 2025, Thailand became the 68th country to ban all forms of corporal punishment including in educational settings, though shifting to a prevention-focused mindset and deeper collaboration across institutions is needed to ensure this ban leads to reductions of violence in Thai schools.

Prevalence of different forms of VAC

1. Corporal punishment

Thailand has a history of corporal punishment within the education system. Research conducted in 2015-2016 as part of UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) programme found on average, 75% of children aged 1-14 years experienced some form of violent discipline (psychological aggression and physical punishment) in the month prior to the survey. On average, 62% of children experienced psychological aggression, 56% experienced physical punishment, and 4% suffered severe physical punishment (hit or slapped on the face, head, or ears, hit repeatedly, or hit or slapped anywhere as hard as a parent could). 21% of children experienced only non-violent forms of discipline, though this was more common for girls than boys (23% compared to 19%) and more common in the wealthiest households than the poorest (32% compared to 16%).

The Thailand Development Research Institute conducted a survey in which up to 60% of pupils

⁴ National Statistical Office of Thailand. Thailand Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019, Survey Findings Report, 2020.

⁵ The Department of Children and Youth, Thailand Development Research Institute and UNICEF. Child Protection Act Costing Analysis and Budgeting (internal document), 2020.

⁶ <https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30380328>

⁷ <https://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/tswj/2013/254083.pdf>

⁸ The Department of Children and Youth and UNICEF. Review of Alternative Care in Thailand: Policy to Implementation with Special Focus on Children Affected by HIV/AIDS, 2015.

said that they were subjected to physical aggression, including corporal punishment. This data is illustrative, although even while interest and research on corporal punishment have been evident in many countries, there is a dearth of such studies in Thailand (see Gershoff et al., 2010; Lansford et al., 2010).⁹

Thailand's school violence is known to occur within a broader ecosystem of norms that allow violence to persist in childhood across multiple settings. A National Statistical Office survey conducted in 2015–2016 revealed that 4.2% of children aged 1–14 had suffered severe physical punishment at home in the month before the survey. This included being struck repeatedly by their parents as hard as they could or being hit or slapped on the face, head, or ears. If this percentage represents the entire country, that would equate to about 470,000 cases.

According to The Department of Children and Youth, Thailand Development Research Institute and UNICEF (2020), 58% of parents in Thailand use violent discipline.¹⁰ Data from October 2018 to September 2019 on reports¹¹ of VAC and young people averaged five cases per day, with three of those cases classified as domestic abuse, according to information from the 1300 hotline. The most frequent type of domestic abuse that children encounter is when their parents physically abuse them. Startling findings have also shown prevalence of family violence in Thailand increasing from 34.6% in 2017 to 42.2% in 2021 during the COVID pandemic (Wapa et al., 2023). According to the Thailand Domestic Violence Information Centre, the number of cases involving VAC has increased by an average of 17% per year over the past ten years.

Children with disabilities, as well as migrant and stateless children, are even more at risk of violence and neglect as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis, which led to the loss of parental care due to illness, death, or separation. A 2018 survey carried out in Thailand revealed that even before the pandemic, one in three households experienced family violence, and that 48.1% of cases of domestic violence were related to income and drug abuse (Neelapaichith, 2017). It was also found that children and women living with alcohol-consuming family members, and those families from hill tribes were at greater risk of experiencing violence (Panjaphothiawat, 2021).

2. Peer violence and bullying

Bullying remains a serious problem in Thai schools¹², and there is more data available on this diverse form of VAC in schools. According to one report, almost 600,000 students—or 40%—are victims of bullying (Yuvabadhana Foundation, 2019). This poll states that bullying at school involves classmates abusing one another physically or mentally and that 13% of children experience depression because of it. Thus bullying does not only occur in verbal and physical forms (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2020; Institute of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 2018).

The School-based Student Health Survey conducted by the Department of Health in 2015 showed that 29% of students aged 13 to 15 years reported being bullied in the past month and 26% were involved in a physical fight at least once in the past year. Another survey of 15 schools by the Lawyers for Children and Youth network revealed that among students aged between 10 and 15 years old, 91.79% said they had been bullied. Such forms of bullying included assault, verbal abuse, online harassment, beatings and being mocked and harassed on social media.

Another study on bullying in schools in Thailand found that while boys were more likely to be struck, kicked, pushed, shoved, or trapped inside of a building, girls were more likely to be made

⁹ <https://tdri.or.th/en/2020/12/teachers-need-to-learn-child-rights/>

¹⁰ The Department of Children and Youth, Thailand Development Research Institute and UNICEF.

¹¹ Child Protection Act Costing Analysis and Budgeting (internal document), 2020. <https://tdri.or.th/en/2020/08/time-to-give-child-protection-a-boost/>

¹² <http://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30380328>

fun of with sexual jokes, statements and gestures.¹³ In 2017, the World Health Organisation conducted a mental health survey in Thailand and found that 21% of students reported experiencing bullying, while 30% of Thai students reported being tormented by friends. Research has shown that one of the main factors influencing children's psychological health is their experience of bullying.

Bullying has been found to be more common among younger, less physically active and absentee students in Thai schools. According to Pengpid and Peltzer (2013), students who experience psychosocial distress and lack of familial affection are also more likely to be bullied. 43% of Thailand's five million primary school children reported being bullied in 2019 (BICT, 2019) and 0.06% (1,756) of them dropped out of school, a notable increase of 0.03% (OBEC, 2018).

3. Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying¹⁴ in Thailand is also on the rise. In 2017, Charnwit Pornnopadol collected data about cyberbullying from 14 countries around the world. The study found that 45% of Thai youths have experienced cyberbullying. Thailand ranks 5th out of 14 countries, four times more than the USA, Europe and Japan (Pornnopadol, 2017). Another survey involving young people from educational institutions nationwide who were no older than 25 found that 5.24% had both engaged in and been the victim of cyberbullying, while 12.4% had only experienced such abuse (National Institute of Development Administration, 2017).

During the pandemic, cyberbullying reportedly increased as many children and young people increased their online time. The Child Online Protection Action Thailand (COPAT), a collaboration of the Department of Children and Youth, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Internet Foundation for the Development of Thailand, found 31% of 15,318 Thai children age 6–18 had faced online threats (Department of Child and Youth, 2020).

This is consistent with studies using the Child Internet Safety Index (COSI) created by DQ Institution about internet safety for children. A study conducted between 2017 and 2019 to evaluate Thai children's and youths' Internet usage habits found that two out of every three Thai youngsters and children have been the victims of cyberbullying. These findings indicated that there is significant internet risk for Thai children and teens, who are vulnerable to verbal abuse, group bullying and attempts to dissuade others from contacting a victim via social media leading to further isolation. These risks also include social media posts that embarrass children, use of inappropriate photographs or videos, or relationships that defraud youth to obtain money or information, including threats to one's personal safety (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2019).

According to other available data, 9% of Thai internet users between the ages of 12 and 17 years reported experiencing severe cases of online sexual abuse and exploitation in the previous year alone. This involves forcing minors to participate in sexual activity by threats of money or presents, distributing their sexual photos without consent or blackmailing them into doing so¹⁵ (ECPAT, INTERPOL and UNICEF, 2022).

¹³ <https://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/tswj/2013/254083.pdf>

¹⁴ Cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person. Online threats and mean, aggressive, or rude texts, tweets, posts, or messages all count. So does posting personal information, pictures, or videos designed to hurt or embarrass someone else. <http://www.unicef.org/thailand/media/4181/file/Guidance>

¹⁵ Disrupting Harm in Thailand (2022) is part of an unprecedented large-scale multi-country research project into OCSEA that draws on the research expertise of ECPAT, INTERPOL, UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti and their networks of national and global partners. The Fund supports it to End VAC through its Safe Online initiative and focuses on 13 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/DH_Thailand_advocacy_brief_FINAL.pdf

4. Sexual violence and harassment

According to the research agency YouGov, which surveyed 1,107 Thai youth, 21% of the participants, both male and female, said that they had been sexually harassed.¹⁶ Sexual harassment has also been reported to take place in schools, with the perpetrators often being protected by other teachers and school principals.¹⁷ For example, in May 2020, serious allegations were made regarding the rape of two girls aged 14 and 16 years, allegedly by their teachers and former students from a public school.¹⁸ According to data from the Ministry of Public Health, most of the approximately 9,000 children receiving hospital treatment for maltreatment in 2017 involved sexual abuse. These numbers probably represent the tip of the iceberg because most abuse incidents are only reported when they are considered to be severe. Thailand is also a source, transit and destination country for children subjected to trafficking for sexual exploitation (ECPAT, 2019). Certain areas of Thailand, like Pattaya, Phuket or throughout the North are deemed unsafe for children, especially those from ethnic minorities. 90% of 200 children connected with the street surveyed in Pattaya in 2015 were found to be the victims of sexual exploitation.¹⁹ Boys between the ages of 12 and 17 comprised most of those involved.²⁰

Drivers of VAC in Thailand

1. Normative factors

In Thailand, according to one report, 77% of boys and 73% of girls have faced some form of violence from their parents due to beliefs that physical punishment is needed to raise a child properly.²¹ According to recent YouGov research, parents in Thailand are divided on whether it is appropriate to discipline their children physically at home. Nearly two out of five parents (37%) disagree that physical punishment should be made illegal, while two out of five parents (41%) believe it should and 20% are unsure. More people support criminalising corporal punishment than those who do not use it at home (55% as opposed to 38%).

2. Sexuality

Bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity is reportedly widespread, with 31% of students teased or bullied for being or being perceived to be LGBTQIA+ reported absence from school in the past month (UNESCO, 2016). 55% of LGBTQIA+ students experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence in the month before the study, while 24% of heterosexual students experienced homophobic or transphobic violence because of their gender expression. A 2014 study in Thailand found that 24% of heterosexual students suffered violence because their gender expression was perceived as non-conforming to gender norms.²²

3. Poverty

Attending school can be a particular challenge for children from poor backgrounds in Thailand. It is estimated that around 670,000 children miss school each year due to their families' financial

¹⁶ <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/featured>

¹⁷ <https://tdri.or.th/en/2020/12/teachers-need-to-learn-child-rights/>

¹⁸ <http://www.unicef.org/thailand/press-releases/mukdahan-case-painful-reminder>

¹⁹ UNICEF, Situational analysis of the commercial sexual exploitation of children Thailand, November 2015, available at: https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SITAN_THAILAND_ENG_FINAL.pdf

²⁰ UNICEF, Situational analysis of the commercial sexual exploitation of children Thailand, November 2015, available at: https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SITAN_THAILAND_ENG_FINAL.pdf

²¹ <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332394/9789240004191-eng.pdf>

²² UNESCO, 'From Insult to Inclusion: Asia-Pacific report on school bullying, violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity', UNESCO, Paris and Bangkok, 2015

hardships.²³ Children from low-income families are also much less likely to be able to continue with their higher education. They are estimated to have only a 5% chance of being able to continue their education at a higher level. Sexual exploitation and trafficking in Thailand encompasses both girls and boys, even if the figures regarding boys are less abundant. Poverty seems to remain the main factor perpetuating this (UNICEF, 2015); according to the 2017 Safe Child Report, traffickers in Thailand primarily target children hailing from impoverished rural backgrounds and minority ethnic regions. Additionally, children in Thailand are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes because of human trafficking. Children, some as young as age 12 years, also participate for remuneration in Muay Thai competitions, an area of hazardous work in which there is evidence of severe head injuries.²⁴

4. Conflict

In Thailand's southern provinces Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, a long-running conflict between Islamic separatist insurgents and Buddhist government security forces have made teachers and schools the target of violence. Government schools have been attacked, set on fire and many Buddhist and Muslim teachers have been killed or harassed. The conflict has also disrupted hundreds of thousands of children's accesses to education.²⁵ Recent eruptions of violence along the Thai-Cambodia border further increase the risk of violence for many children.

Prevention and Response to VAC

In Thailand, several programmes have been implemented in the last ten years to better safeguard children against all types of maltreatment, violence, exploitation and neglect. To treat, care for and support vulnerable children as well as children who experience violence and abuse, one-stop crisis centres and protection shelters were established in every province. Additionally, the 1300 Hotline was made available for reporting any social issues, including child abuse. However, Studies on the efficiency of the child protection mechanism by Thittayaporn Deekaew (2016) and Coram International (2017) show that staff in the child protection system lack the skills and tools necessary for their operation, such as regional children situation databases, suggesting a need to improve the national child protection system.

The Ministry of Education has adopted a more inclusive approach by setting up a centre to protect and support students who are the victims of sexual assault.²⁶ In 2015, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security along with UNICEF launched the "End VAC" campaign to create awareness of the negative impact on children, and to urge Thai parents, caregivers and teachers to stop using any form of VAC.²⁷ The government also recently piloted its first shelter to provide more inclusive services to LGBTQIA+ victims. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, with support from UNICEF adopted an innovative public-private partnership, "The Thailand Safe Internet Coalition" with telecommunications companies, private sector and civil society for safer digital spaces for children and young people.

In 2020, Thailand made advancements in efforts to end certain forms of VAC. The government made the Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force a permanent agency. It led the most extensive online child sexual exploitation sting operations to date. However, as noted by ECPAT, state actors cannot rely on arrests alone, but must move from policing to prevention strategies that are collaborative across agencies and sectors, and backed by strong political will.²⁸

²³ <http://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/1870244/dont-leave-any-of-the-kids-behind>

²⁴ https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2020/thailand.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.loc.gov/item/2011414099/>

²⁶ <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/>

²⁷ <https://www.khaosodenglish.com/sponsored/2015/01/21/1421780389/>

²⁸ <https://ecpat.org/2024-2025-annual-report/>

Institutional Mapping of the country to deal with VAC

1

Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Ministry of Digital Economic and Society, Ministry of Justice and law enforcement agencies

2

UNICEF, ECPAT International, Save the Children, Child Rights Coalition Thailand, The Hug Project, Peace Culture Foundation and other local CBOs

Budget and policy

The Ministry of Education first introduced “*the Regulation on Student Punishment 2005*”, which prohibited any acts to punish students with violent methods or with harmful, angry or revengeful intentions.²⁹ The national teacher’s council is the primary authority for monitoring teachers nationwide.³⁰ However, there remains no specific law governing cyberbullying acts or protecting minors against online violence. The case of cyberbullying will be governed by either the Penal Code (PC) regarding defamation and insult or the computer-Related Crime Act B.E. 2560 (2017) (CRC Act).

Thailand has several laws and provisions to protect children from violence. The Penal Code, for example, provides for offences of violent acts in general, including offences relating to sexuality, offences against life and body and offences against liberty and reputation. The Child Protection Act of 2003 stipulates the treatment of the child, social welfare and safety protection of all children³¹. Laws to protect children from violence include the Modification of Criminal Procedure Code Act (No. 20) of 1999 on Investigation of Child Witness, the Act for the Establishment of and Procedure for Juvenile and Family Court of 1991.

In addition, there are laws relating to specific types of VAC that include the Labour Protection Act of 1998, the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act of 1996, The Measures to Prevent and Suppress the Trafficking in Women and Children Act of 1997 and The Boxing Sports Act of 1999. A new law also sets the minimum age for workers employed as deep-sea divers at 18 years old. It also proposed an amendment allowing teenage children of boat captains to intern only on their family’s fishing boats.

In 2025 Thailand became the 68th country to pass a full prohibition of all forms of corporal punishment in all settings. Prior to this ban, article 1567(2) of the Civil and Commercial Code which stated that parents could impose “reasonable” punishment for discipline continued to reinforce social acceptance of violent discipline. Prohibition is a major step, but this legal milestone needs to be met with sufficient norm-change programming to continue abating all cruel or degrading forms of punishment in schools, in the home and all other settings where adults have authority over children.

²⁹ <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/Thailand.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2032299/teachers-need-to-learn-child-rights>

³¹ <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/thailand/>

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Suggestions on the Way Forward

As the understanding of safety in educational environments continues to evolve, there is increasing recognition of schools as spaces where non-violent and just societies can be co-created. The findings presented here aim to inform a growing network of national and regional practitioners, policymakers, civil society groups, researchers and funders committed to preventing all forms of violence within Thailand's schools. While the Coalition for Good Schools encourages stakeholders to review the full recommendations outlined in the regional synthesis report, insights from the Asia Hub highlight key areas for action:

- **Education delivery system as an entry-point:** *The education system offers a strategic avenue for the prevention of violence against children. Effective multi-sectoral government action at the national level is crucial for catalysing these interventions.*
- **Children's experience and agency:** *Prioritising children's lived experiences within schools and fostering their agency should be central in education policies and interventions.*
- **Whole-school approach:** *Implementing a comprehensive, whole-school strategy that nurtures a positive school culture and upholds the inherent dignity of every child can produce long-term outcomes. Meaningful engagement with teachers, school staff, and the local community is essential for the success of such initiatives.*
- **Knowledge generation and dissemination:** *Ongoing documentation, sharing, and expansion of knowledge and evidence is vital for deepening understanding of effective interventions, strengthening local efforts and supporting scale through the education sector.*

There are proven solutions to end violence, and with collective effort, violence can be prevented within our lifetime. For instance, Connect with Respect, a curriculum tool to assist teachers to build their knowledge and awareness on gender equality, social cohesion and respectful relationships among young people, has been rolled out in schools in Thailand. Collective advocacy of CRC Coalition Thailand, a network of 46 child rights organizations helped lead to the 2025 amendment to ban all forms of corporal punishment. These efforts reflect a growing movement dedicated to violence prevention in Thailand, but deeper collaboration between government and civil society is still needed to ensure that the new legal milestones are met with sufficient support for schools.

Effective foundational interventions should incorporate several core elements:

- **Recognising schools' role in nurturing and developing children's potential.**
- **Promoting justice, equality, and empathy as foundational school values.**
- **Affirming children's rights and agency within the educational context.**
- **Supporting progressive pedagogies that encourage positive change.**
- **Honouring the dignity of every child, irrespective of gender, sexuality, race, caste, creed, or other categorisations.**

Prevention programmes must also adopt an intersectional perspective that acknowledges the overlapping and reinforcing characteristics that shape children's unique experiences of violence. This approach recognises that certain groups of children may face increased risks and that the severity and frequency of violence can vary considerably.

While sometimes sites of violence, schools also hold significant potential as primary sites for learning and implementing strategies to prevent it. School-based initiatives can yield multiple positive outcomes, serving as catalysts for broader change.