In most countries, children spend more time in educational settings than anywhere else outside of their homes. Schools can be sites of violence or places of safety and inclusion. The school environment can support and promote children's dignity, learning and development as well as challenge the factors that increase violence, such as negative gender norms. Creating safe, non-violent and inclusive schools is a significant global policy priority for the next 15 years through the SDGs.

This data brief utilizes Global School Based Health Survey (GSHS) Data in Myanmar to explore the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of School Violence and Bullying (SVB). This data brief also explores the gender implications of SVB. Findings show that Myanmar is the only country globally where SVB trends for all types of violence are increasing highlighting that increased investment in prevention is urgently needed. Data gaps also show that more work is needed to further define, monitor and measure SVB in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals so that all children have access to safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments.

This data brief explores the prevalence, drivers and consequences of SVB in Myanmar and will feed into the Safe to Learn Campaign, a global initiative over the next several years by UNICEF, UNESCO, the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), DFID and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children to generate evidence and accelerate action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals of creating safe, inclusive and non-violent learning environments by 2030 globally.
The GSHS is a collaborative surveillance project led by the World Health Organization and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It assesses behavioural risk and protective factors in 10 key areas, including alcohol/drug/tobacco use, mental health, physical activity, sexual behaviours and violence. Since 2003, 96 countries and territories (across all regions except Europe and North America) have conducted the national school-based survey, with most conducting it every 3-5 years.

In Myanmar it has been conducted in 2007 and 2016, led by the Ministry of Health and Sports. The 2007 survey sampled students in grades 8-11 while the 2016 survey sampled students in grades 7-10, which are typically attended by students aged 13-17 years. Both surveys used a two-stage cluster sample design was used to produce data representative of all students in the respective grades.

The GSHS provides the best data on violence in schools, measuring different types of bullying (psychological, physical and sexual), physical fights and physical attacks.

A global secondary analysis (Kann, 2018; UNESCO, 2019) commissioned by UNESCO explored the risk factors for school violence, including age, gender, race, nationality or colour, physical appearance, religion, and family and peer related factors. The secondary analysis also explored the mental and physical health consequences of bullying, as well as the trends of school violence over time. This global analysis allowed for comparison between Myanmar and other GSHS countries.

**DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

**SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND BULLYING**

**Bullying**

The Global School Based Health Survey (GSHS) is one of the best comparable sources of global data on bullying. This includes harmonised questions about bullying victimization asked across all the countries that participate and several questions about both physical and psychological bullying. Bullying was described as occurring “when a student or group of students say or do bad and unpleasant things to another student. It is also bullying when a student is teased a lot in an unpleasant way or when a student is left out of things on purpose. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight or when teasing is done in a friendly and fun way” (UNESCO, 2019).

The GSHS also measures the prevalence of students self-reporting being physically attacked one or more times in the previous year. While this question does not specify the location or perpetrators of the attack, it is a good measure of how much physical violence outside of bullying that children may be facing globally. A physical attack was described as occurring “when one or more people hit or strike someone or when one or more people hurt another person with a weapon (such as a stick, knife, or gun). It is not a physical attack when two students of about the same strength or power choose to fight each other. Whereas, a ‘physical fight’ was described as occurring “when two students of about the same strength or power choose to fight each other” (UNESCO, 2019).

**Attacks on Schools**

Data on attacks on schools is from the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack’s Under Attack Reports (2014, 2018). The inter-agency coalition, including UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children, Human Rights Watch and other international organizations, was formed in 2010 to address the problem of targeted attacks on education during armed conflict. It monitors and reports on attacks on education and produces the Education under Attack series.
Out of 96 countries that participate in the GSHS, Myanmar is the ONLY country where there is an increasing prevalence trend across all violence-related variables.

### Trends of school violence and bullying in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical attacks</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical fights</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY FINDINGS**

**Prevalence of school violence and bullying**

GSHS data shows that the prevalence of physical attacks and physical fights is similar or lower than the regional and global medians. However, the prevalence of bullying is much higher than the regional and global medians.

### National, regional and global prevalence for types of school violence and bullying in last 30 days, GSHS (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bullying</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>Regional median</th>
<th>Global median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical bullying</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a physical fight</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender is not just about differences between boys and girls, but is a conceptual lens for examining intersecting structural power inequalities, as well as a way of understanding how these are constituted and perpetuated in homes, classrooms and communities. Gender is a particularly important concept for looking at both violence in childhood and the impacts on learning where gender norms are learned in everyday interactions, and where normative deviations are controlled through exclusion and often violence as well as the hidden, implicit practices, which reproduce inequality and injustice. (Parkes et al., 2015; Humphreys et al., 2008). School-related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) can be defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016).

Among students who reported being bullied, psychological bullying is more commonly reported in Myanmar compared to regional and global estimates.

This is in contrast to other trends in the region where being hit, kicked, shoved around, or looked indoors was one of the top two most common types of bullying in every region and sub-region except Central American and South America (median 7.4% and 9.6% respectively) with the highest median prevalence in the Pacific region (23.8%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (22.9%).

Sexual bullying is less frequently reported as the most common form of bullying experienced by students in Myanmar compared to regional and global medians.

**School-related gender-based violence**

Among those who experienced bullying in last 30 days, those who reported each type of bullying as the most common, national, regional and global prevalence, GSHS (2016)
Boys are slightly more at risk of experiencing all forms of school violence according to GSHS data. However, for being bullied, this occurs for nearly 1 in every 2 girls and just over 1 in every 2 boys.

When examining the gender differences between types of bullying, boys report physical bullying much more frequently than girls. Whereas, girls are more likely to report psychological bullying, a trend that is consistent globally. Boys also report experiencing more sexual bullying than girls. This follows regional trends. In most countries, girls are also more frequently made fun of with sexual jokes comments and gestures except in Asia and the Pacific and Central and South American regions where boys report experiencing this more frequently. However, the same gender norms around masculinity underpin both sexual harassment of girls and boys.
Age and school violence and bullying

Adolescents of younger ages are also slightly more at risk for all types of violence but surprisingly the difference in prevalence between ages is minimal.

Drivers of school violence and bullying

This section focuses on the drivers of school violence and bullying. A driver is defined as factors at institutional and structural levels that create environments in which violence against children is more likely to happen (Maternowska et al., 2018). These drivers interact with risk and protective factors – or those factors at the individual, interpersonal and community levels that make a child more vulnerable to violence or a child, teacher or another adult more likely to use violence (Maternowska & Fry, 2018). These two factors cannot be understood in isolation of a child’s experiences within the school, home, community and cyber environments.

There are several variables in national datasets including socio-economic status, gender, migrant status, sexual orientation etc. that allow us to aggregately look at these factors in relation to various experiences of school violence and bullying at national levels and across countries. Each of these factors relates to an underlying driver – so that when we analyse gender as part of our analyses, we can start to unpack the elements of school violence and bullying driven by gender inequality and negative gender norms– especially as it is triangulated by other mixed methods studies. By looking at poverty and social status, this allows us to begin to understand how macro-level inequalities impact on the everyday lives of children as they learn and interact with their peers and teachers.

Drivers of school violence and bullying

![Diagram showing drivers of school violence and bullying]

Being made fun of because of their physical appearance was more common among girls than boys, whereas boys are more likely to report being fun of because of their race, nationality or color. Being made fun of because of their religion was the least common driver of bullying among both boys and girls.

Reasons given by students for why they experienced bullying by gender, GSHS data (2016)

![Bar chart showing reasons for bullying by gender]

Made fun of because of their physical appearance: 30.0% for males and 30.0% for females.

Made fun of because of religion: 6.6% for males and 4.9% for females.

Made fun of because of their race, nationality or color: 17.9% for males and 15.0% for females.
The previous Figure shows gender differences in drivers of school violence in that more males than females (21.5% compared to 15%) reported being made fun of because of their race, nationality or colour. However, more females than males (30% compared to 17.9%) reported being made fun of because of their physical appearance.

Data from around the world highlights how children with disabilities are at an increased risk of experiencing violence (Jones et al., 2012), though there is little disaggregated information available about their experiences of violence at school.

There are many reasons for this increased vulnerability including: stigma and social norms that create environments where children with disabilities are discriminated against and are more isolated from potential protective factors; close and often intimate proximity to adults who act as caretakers (including school staff); and, some physical and communication impairments that make it more difficult for children to disclose experiences of violence (Fry et al., 2017). The limited data available shows that children with certain difficulties may be more vulnerable to different forms of school violence.

Peer and family factors influencing bullying

GSHS data shows that more of those who had experienced bullying – compared to those who had not reported being bullied - reported that most students in their school were kind and helpful, that they had parents or guardians who understood their problems and worries and had parents or guardians who really knew what they were doing in their free time.

The available data globally shows that children with disabilities are vulnerable to violence from both their peers and teachers.

The consequences of bullying

The figures below show health related consequences of bullying, specifically that more of those who had been bullied said they felt lonely (12.2%), were so worried they could not sleep at night, had seriously considered attempting suicide (14.1%) and had no close friends, than those who had not experienced bullying. Further, those who had been bullied reported higher alcohol use and being overweight or obese in comparison with those who had not been bullied.

Peer and family correlates with bullying in Myanmar, GSHS data (2016)
Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is still legal in all settings. A study in 2012 found that 82% of students had been beaten at school (Gershoff, 2017). As with other forms of physical violence seen from the GSHS data, corporal punishment may be more common among boys as the DHS survey found that only 0.7% of girls had experienced physical violence from a teacher.

In the follow-up qualitative study to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2009/2010), it was found that the type of discipline used in schools across the country was influenced by teachers, the practices of the school discipline committee and the school environment. Across all the participants, the most common forms of discipline in schools included scolding, corporal punishment and sitting/standing many times while holding or pulling ears in view of all classmates (UNICEF Myanmar, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development & Ministry of Health, 2013). In this study many respondents said that beating a child for misbehaving in class is considered normal and many students, even when it happens to them, say it is for their own good.

Teacher’s perspectives on school violence

The qualitative follow-up to the MICS found that educators in general said they were not aware of any specific nation-wide school policy on abuse and violence; it is addressed by each school if it occurs.

- Policy and procedures for school personnel to follow if they should discover that an adolescent is being abused or neglected at home were not referred to by any respondents.
- Most said there was no history of sexual abuse and violence at their schools.
- In Bago, educators stated that most cases of sexual abuse and violence are hidden and they suggest undertaking a survey on abuse and violence in schools and the community.
- Most educators said that the topic of abuse and violence is not addressed in the curriculum aside from a few who said they address it in the life skills course.

Conclusion

This data brief provides a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of the scope, nature, drivers and consequences of SVB in Myanmar. Findings highlight that increased investment in prevention is urgently needed. Data gaps also show that more work is needed to further define, monitor and measure SVB in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals so that all children have access to safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments.
References


About this Data Brief

This data brief was written by Dr. Deborah Fry from the University of Edinburgh.

The Understanding Violence Against Children in Myanmar Series aims to contribute to this growing body of evidence to understand better why violence against children is happening and what is driving it. The Series draws data from both nationally representative data as is presented in this report and from the UNICEF-supported interventions where diverse information is being collected as part of programme monitoring. The Series attempts to give it a closer look at the data and information at hand and dig deeper the issue of violence against children in Myanmar. We hope to generate evidence, create deeper understanding of the issue and stimulate discussions – all to better inform programming to address violence against children in Myanmar.

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