

Parental Engagement

Empower parents to support children's academic success

Philippines SEA-PLM 2019



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Context

Parents¹ play the most important role in children's health, protection, growth, and social-emotional well-being throughout the life course.² Quality parental support in children's education also makes a substantial difference in their academic performance. In particular, a parental role in education is amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic when access to in-person schooling is limited and parents are even more expected to support children's learning.

In the Philippines, parents often participate in school activities as members of parents-teachers associations (PTA) or representatives in school governing councils. However, their primary role is limited to resource mobilization and volunteer work. As such, parents are seldom recognized as an integral part in helping children learn and succeed in education.



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1. In this brief, parents are not limited to biological and adoptive parents, but the definition extends to any guardian or caregiver providing consistent care to children.
2. UNICEF. (2021). *A UNICEF Vision for Parents*. New York: UNICEF.

Analysis and Key Findings

Boys and children from families of the lowest socio-economic status (SES),³ rural areas, and public schools are less likely to have academically engaging parents

It was found in the *SEA-PLM 2019 National Report of the Philippines*⁴ that Grade 5 students whose parents were more involved in their academic activities had higher scores in reading, writing, and mathematics. Moreover, among the six SEA-PLM 2019 participating countries, Filipino children had the largest gap in test scores between those with the highest-engaging parents and the lowest ones,⁵ implying that parents' involvement in academic activities is essential in children's school performance.

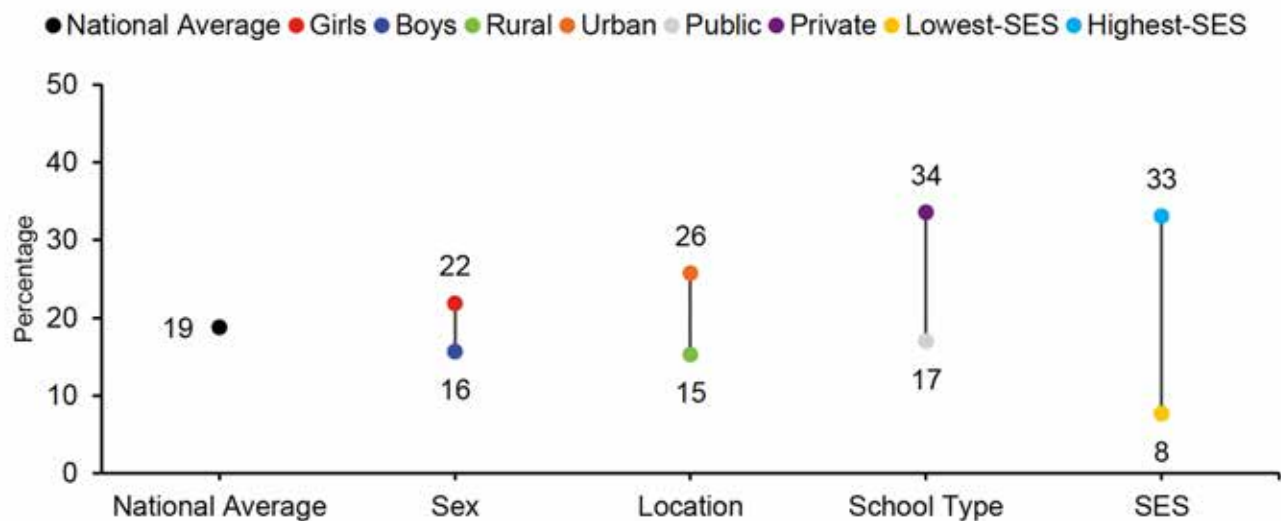
In general, although gender disparity remains relatively small, girls are slightly more likely to have the most academically engaging parents than boys. Specifically, 22% of girls are supported by the highest-engaging parents on learning⁶, compared to 16% of boys (Figure 1).

In terms of geographic location, parental engagement in academic activities is more prominent in bigger municipalities and cities, with 26% of children from urban areas⁷ having the highest-engaging parents, compared to 15% of children from rural areas.

There is also a marked disparity by school type at the expense of children from public schools. Thirty-four percent of children in private schools are supported by highly engaging parents, while the figure is only 17% for children in public schools.

However, disparity by SES appears more significant than disparity by gender, location, and school type. In particular, 33% of children from the highest-SES families have the most academically engaging parents, compared to 8% of those from the lowest-SES households.

Figure 1:
Share of Grade 5 students with the highest-engaging parents by gender, SES, location, and school type



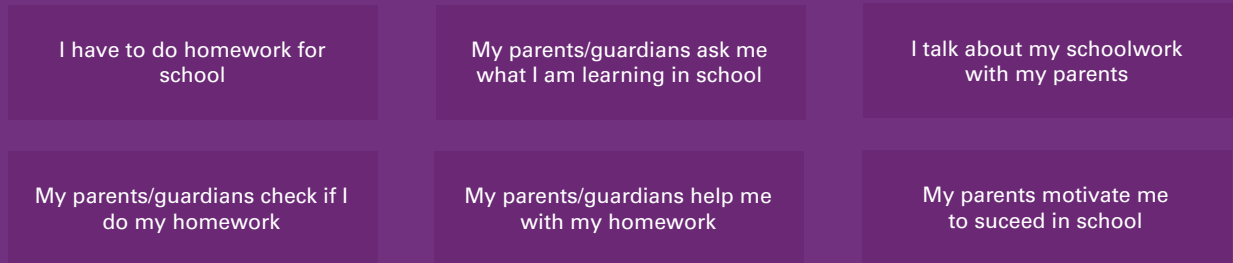
Source: Philippines SEA-PLM 2019

3. The SES Index was computed per child in SEA-PLM 2019. It is the composite of parental education, parental occupation, and home possessions. A higher value of the index means more resources available for the family.
4. UNICEF & DepEd. (2021). *SEA-PLM 2019 National Report of the Philippines*. Manila, The Philippines: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & Department of Education (DepEd).
5. UNICEF & SEAMEO. (2020). *SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report, Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries*. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) – SEA-PLM Secretariat.
6. The parental engagement index was collapsed into quintiles to generate the highest-engaging parents and lowest-engaging parents.
7. Large city and city are categorized as urban; and village, small town, and town are grouped as rural.

Box 1: Definition of parental engagement in SEA-PLM 2019

In SEA-PLM 2019, parental engagement is defined as the behaviors and actions exercised by parents in their children’s learning activities. The index on parental engagement is generated in the SEA-PLM regional study based on the following six variables to summarize parental engagement in academic activities (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Composites of parental engagement index



Parents from the lowest-SES families are less supportive of children’s various learning activities. About a quarter of the lowest-SES students hardly receive any parental support on learning at home every day

The findings from the previous section suggest that children’s SES largely sets apart parental engagement practices. Dissecting the components of parental engagement by SES yields further insights on the relationship between family types and parents’ involvement in children’s academic activities.

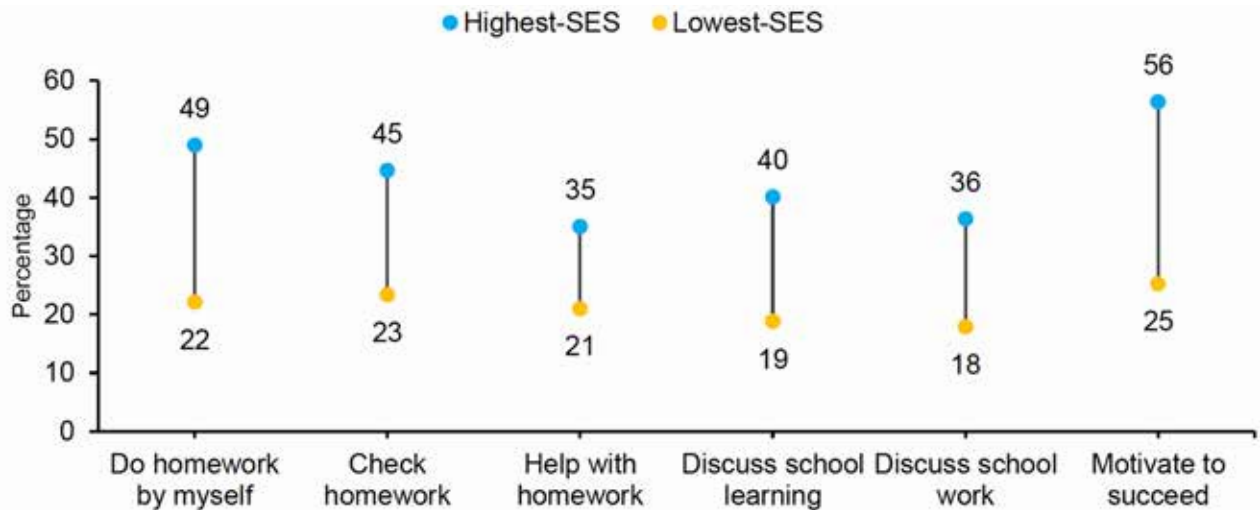
While 49% of the highest-SES students do their homework on their own, about 45% of them reported that their parents check if they do their homework every day, whereas the figure is 23% for the lowest-SES students (Figure 3). Moreover, about 35% of the students from the highest-SES families are assisted daily by their parents when doing their homework, compared to 21% for those from the lowest-SES households.

Likewise, in the highest-SES families, 40% of children reported that their parents ask what they are learning in school on a daily basis and 36% of children talk to their parents about their schoolwork every day. In contrast, 19% of the lowest-SES children are not asked by their parents about their learning in school daily and 18% do not consult with their parents about schoolwork.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that 56% of children from the highest-SES families are regularly motivated by their parents to succeed in school, while the figure is only 25% for the lowest-SES children.

It is also important to note that at least a quarter of the lowest-SES students hardly receive any form of parental support in all the learning activities every day. Given the positive association between parental engagement and children’s academic performance, many low-SES students have the disadvantage of not having parental support at home to supplement learning received in school.

Figure 3: Differences in daily parental engagement on learning activities between the highest- and lowest-SES Grade 5 students



Source: Philippines SEA-PLM 2019

Children with the lowest-engaging parents encounter multidimensional disadvantages in family characteristics, practices, and values that may associate with their academic performance

Parental engagement in children’s learning widely differs by the family SES. Looking more closely, there are other differences in family environment, practices, and values between families whose parents are highly and hardly supportive of children’s learning.

The number of siblings in the family is associated with the intensity of parental engagement. In particular, children with fewer siblings are more likely to have highly supportive parental engagement in learning at home. Sixty-seven percent of students with less than three siblings tend to have the highest-engaging parents on academic activities, compared to 33% of those with three or more siblings (Figure 4).

Similarly, parents’ occupation is linked to parental engagement practices. Fifty-two percent of children with the least supportive parents have a father working in domestic help, agriculture, or skilled labor, while 38% of those with the most supportive parents have a father working in these industries. Moreover, in families where a father is working in these industries, 55% have mothers who also have paid jobs. Working parents may find it challenging to attend to children’s learning at home.

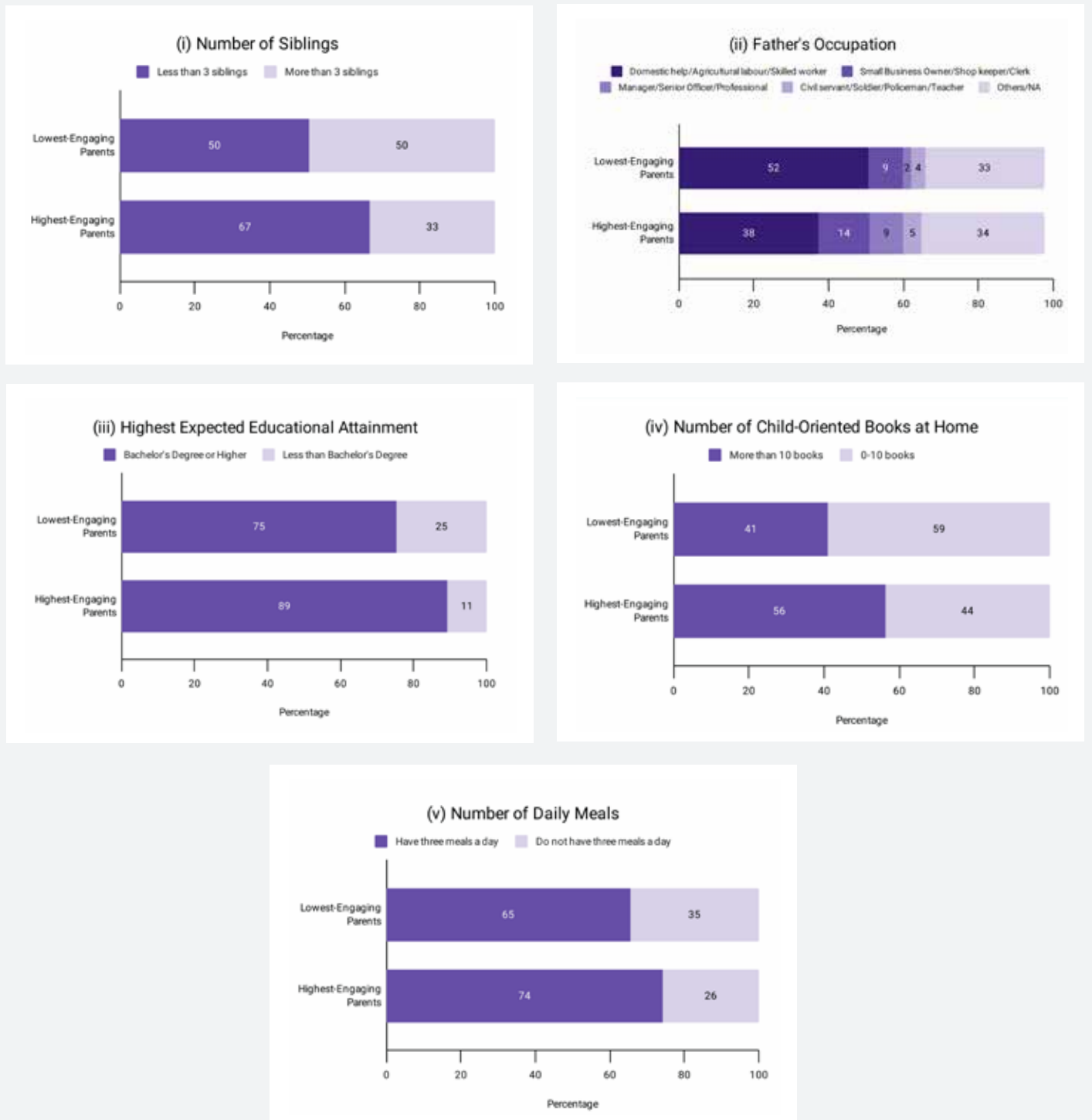
There is also a difference in the highest level of education that parents expect their children to complete. About 89% of the highest-engaging parents expect their children to attain a bachelor’s degree or higher, while 75% of the lowest-engaging parents expect the same level of educational attainment for their children.

A body of research has also demonstrated the importance of the availability of child-oriented books at home as well as nutrition practices in children’s learning.⁸ Fifty-six percent of children of the highest-engaging parents have more than 10 books at home. In contrast, 59% of children of the lowest-engaging parents have 10 books or less. Similarly, children of the highest-engaging parents have slightly better eating habits, with 74% of students with the highest-engaging parents having three meals a day, compared to 65% of those with the least engaging parents.

As evidence suggests, children with the lowest-engaging parents are likely to come from families with many siblings, and parents working in domestic help, agriculture, or skilled labor. The nature of work and family commitments for those parents may make it difficult to spare time in supporting children’s learning at home. Furthermore, these children are at a disadvantage in terms of parents’ expectations in educational attainment, the availability of books at home, and nutrition practices.

8. UNESCO. (2020). *Stepping up effective school health and nutrition: A partnership for healthy learners and brighter futures*. Paris: UNESCO; UNICEF. (2020). *Parental Engagement in Children’s Learning: Insights for remote learning response during COVID-19. Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2020-09*.

Figure 4:
Share of the highest- and lowest-engaging parents by different family characteristics



Source: Philippines SEA-PLM 2019

| Recommendations

The findings suggest that parental engagement in children's learning at home varies by children's gender, geographic location, and types of school. In particular, the household SES is highly associated with the likelihood of providing quality parental engagement. Children from lower-SES families are less likely to have parental support in homework, talk to parents about learning and schoolwork, and be encouraged by parents to succeed in school, compared to peers from higher-SES families. Moreover, children who have less academically engaging parents may also face disadvantages in various aspects of family characteristics, practices, and values that may affect their academic performance.

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations may enhance parental engagement in children's learning, especially among low-SES families.



Implement policies by engaging multiple sectors around parental needs to enhance parents' engagement in children's learning

As the need for parental engagement in children's learning is intensified in times of disruption of in-person classes during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) has identified the increasingly important role of parents in children's learning through activities such as information sharing on strategies and best practices on parental support in home learning.⁹ As the data suggest, the disadvantages that children of less academically engaging parents face are multifaceted, therefore it is crucial to ensure cross-sectoral support to mitigate the burden of parents who cannot afford quality engagement in children's learning at home. For example, the Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) budget, which currently provides funds for public schools, could be used for activities to strengthen the capacity of low-SES families in supporting children's home learning. Moreover, more child-oriented books can be distributed to disadvantaged households. Businesses could also further support working parents in low-resource contexts with family-friendly policies¹⁰ that enable parents to have the time, resources and services they need to participate in children's learning.¹¹ In coordination with other government agencies, DepEd could lead the development of a holistic policy to support parents in children's health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security, and social-emotional well-being with the objective of enhancing children's learning at home and removing constraints that prevent adequate parental engagement in children's learning.



Upgrade the existing national programs to provide parents from low-SES families with better parenting knowledge and skills to respond to the learning needs of their children at home

As parents play a major role in children's learning, targeted support can be provided for parents from low-SES families, utilizing the existing interventions. For example, capacity building activities can be implemented as part of the existing Family Development Session (FDS) of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps), the national conditional cash transfer program to provide cash to poor households. The FDS is a monthly parent group activity aiming to strengthen the capacity of the beneficiary families to become more responsive to the health and education needs of their children.¹² A new module on parental engagement in education can be introduced so that low-SES parents are oriented on their responsibilities to send their children to school, which is the requirement for receiving the 4Ps, as well as support their learning activities at home and transform their attitude, beliefs, and behavior toward children's learning.

9. Department of Education (DepEd). (2021, November 17). *DepEd empowers parents for a better home learning experience with children*. https://www.deped.gov.ph/2021/11/17/deped-empowers-parents-for-a-better-home-learning-experience-with-children/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=deped-empowers-parents-for-a-better-home-learning-experience-with-children

10. UNICEF defines family-friendly policies as those that "positively impact (a) workers' abilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities; as well as advance (b) the well-being and development of their children". See United Nations Children's Fund, *Family-Friendly Policies: Redesigning the workplace of the future*, Policy brief, UNICEF, New York, 2019, www.unicef.org/documents/family-friendly-policies-redesigning-workplace-future

11. UNICEF. (2021). *Elevating Parenting in Existing UNICEF Programmes: Technical Note*. New York: UNICEF.

12. DSWD. (2018). *Assessment of Family Development Session of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps: Effects of FDS on Family Life (Final Report)*.



Empower schools as a partner to promote parental engagement in children's learning

Schools should also be capacitated to involve parents beyond school management and volunteering activities. In particular, they are encouraged to identify parents whose circumstances are challenging to frequently engage with their children in home academic activities and actively extend support to those parents. Global evidence suggests that communicating with parents on children's school performance enhances learning.¹³ As such, regular in-person meetings as well as communication via phone calls and text messages with parents of low-performing students are encouraged to increase parents' awareness of children's progress at school and involve them in the learning process. Furthermore, schools could give clear guidance on the curriculum at the beginning of each term, which may enhance parents' awareness of learning expectations in school so that they can better support learning at home. Moreover, schools may invite parents to participate in tutorial sessions with their children. This is another way for parents to understand what their children are learning in school and how they can assist their children with their homework. Parent-to-parent support can also be strengthened by schools serving as a venue for parents to interact and learn from each other on parenting practices. This may encourage emotional support and information exchange among parents. A ground-level support system may be critical so that parents are empowered to provide concrete, clear, and impactful support for children's learning at home.



Inform parents of evidence-based parental policy and practices to guide them on effective parental engagement

Access to evidence-based positive parenting intervention is essential for parents to strengthen their relationships with their children, as solid evidence from research can be translated into effective parenting practices. For example, UNICEF Philippines supports a contextualized Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) intervention called *Masayang Pamilya* (MaPa). It is a community-based parent support intervention designed for low-resource families to promote locally adapted positive parenting practices. A series of investigations show significant benefits of MaPa in improving parent-child relationships.¹⁴ As a result, the MaPa parenting intervention has been applied to various activities including an online parenting support group program (the e-MaPa Online Parenting), MaPa parenting webinars, and radio programs for the social service workforce. In this way, it is crucial to conduct research on various aspects of parental engagement in children's learning and promote evidence-based parental engagement practices.



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13. FLN Academy. (2022, February 2). *Evidence-based principles for effective parental engagement* [Webinar].

14. UNICEF. (n.d.). *Masayang Pamilya (MaPa) Sa Panahon ng COVID-19: Promoting Positive Parenting and Preventing Violence Against Children During the Global Pandemic*.

SEA-PLM 2019 Datasets:

To access and download SEA-PLM 2019 datasets, codebooks, background questionnaires, and a data user manual, please submit a registration form via the link below:

<https://link.seameo.org/SEAPLMDatasets>

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For further information, please contact:

Aki Osawa
Education Officer (JPO)
aosawa@unicef.org