



# Prevention pays: the economic benefits of ending violence in schools



Learn

without fear.

**The impact of violence in schools is often devastating for individual children, and can have wide-reaching social and economic consequences.**



**Learn**

**without fear.**

In October 2008, Plan launched a global campaign to eliminate violence against children in schools – *Learn Without Fear*. As of August 2010, the campaign is operating in 44 countries.

This report summarises the main arguments of the Plan/ODI report *The Economic impact of school violence (2010)*<sup>1</sup> and draws on Plan's campaign and programme experience of the past two years tackling violence against children in school.

<sup>1</sup> Pereznieta, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and Coarasa, J. (2010) **The Economic Impact of School Violence**. London: Plan International & Overseas Development Institute. Available at [plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear](http://plan-international.org/learnwithoutfear)

# 1. Introduction

School can be the most exciting or the most terrifying time of a child's life. For far too many children, it is the latter.

For parents, handing over the care of their child to the school can be a wrench. They need to know she or he will be safe and learning, and that the sacrifices they are making – which are often great – will be worthwhile.

Most societies place a high value on education. It is a route out of poverty for individual children and their families, and is crucial to a country's economic development. Yet its returns are being diminished by violence in schools – a critical factor influencing non-attendance and school dropout, and a considerable drain on the public purse.

No country is immune from school violence. According to the UN's study on violence against children, 20-65% of all schoolchildren report being verbally or physically bullied. Some 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experience forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002. A study in Nepal, where corporal punishment is routine, found that 14 per cent of school drop-outs can be attributed to fear of teachers. Millions are beaten by their teachers and subjected to other painful and humiliating punishment.<sup>2</sup>

And this violence comes at a price. Not only is it harming and traumatising individual children and violating their right to protection and education, it has an economic impact. Children who experience violence at school are likely to earn less, be in greater need of healthcare and other services, and contribute less to their countries' economies.

Based on research commissioned by Plan<sup>3</sup> this paper outlines the cost implications of violence in schools and the economic arguments for preventing it.

**The total cost of school violence in terms of foregone social benefits<sup>4</sup> in just 13 countries for which information is available is up to almost US \$60 billion.**

**That's equivalent to the World Bank's estimate of additional foreign aid needed to achieve every Millennium Development Goal by 2015.**

<sup>2</sup> Pinheiro, P.S. (2006) **World Report on Violence Against Children**. Geneva: United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> Perezniето, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and Coarasa, J. (2010) **The Economic Impact of School Violence**. London: Plan International & Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>4</sup> In this summary, we refer to 'foregone social benefits' as productivity and tax revenues lost to each government as a result of children not finishing their education.

This includes lower potential earnings, lower contribution to growth and the higher likelihood that children who experience violence will need to use the social safety net, relative to those who stay in school.

## 2. Extent and types of violence in schools

International research has identified school violence as a problem that affects both developed and developing countries.

However, it is impossible to calculate its true extent because children are often too ashamed or too afraid to tell anyone about it, or are not aware of how or where to report it. In India, 69% of children said they had been physically abused in different settings, including schools, but most said they had not reported it to anyone.<sup>5</sup> In many cases it is ignored or even condoned.

Plan's research focused on the three forms of violence in schools – corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying. Corporal punishment in schools is legal in 88 countries.<sup>6</sup> Even in those where it is banned it is often seen as an acceptable form of discipline. In a number of countries, sexual violence against girls and women is the more common than expected. And – mimicking power relations in the outside world – schoolchildren bully their more vulnerable peers, such as those with disabilities, different sexualities and different ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>5</sup> Perezniето, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and Coarasa, J. (2010) **The Economic Impact of School Violence**. London: Plan International & Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>6</sup> Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2010) Global progress towards prohibiting all corporal punishment (Online) Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org) (Accessed 12.09.2010).

# Corporal punishment

In 88 countries – including France and a number of US states – teachers are legally allowed to physically punish their pupils.<sup>7</sup>

In Egypt, 80 per cent of boys and 67 per cent of girls have suffered corporal punishment.<sup>8</sup> The defence lawyer of one teacher who beat a student to death for not doing his homework claimed in court that his client had not broken the law because “hitting (a child) is not banned in schools”.

Even in countries where corporal punishment is banned, laws protecting children are often not enforced. Despite corporal punishment being prohibited in Ethiopian schools, it is still practised widely. One study found that 80 per cent of children were forced to kneel, hit about the head, pinched, slapped and hit with a stick.

**“I was beaten because I had not completed all the questions.”**

**John,\* Kenya**

Along with eight other children in his class, John was whipped with an electric cable for not completing his English homework. He was injured on his back, arm and abdomen. As well as reporting the teacher to the police (despite being told not to by the headteacher), John’s father took his son to a clinic.

Plan staff estimated his medical costs to be between US \$5 and US \$10. Given that most Kenyans live below the poverty level of \$1 a day,<sup>9</sup> this could represent up to two weeks’ earnings and have severe consequences for the family.

\*not his real name

<sup>7</sup> Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2010) Global progress towards prohibiting all corporal punishment (Online)

Available from: [www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org) (Accessed 12.09.2010).

<sup>8</sup> Plan (2008) *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*. Woking: Plan International Headquarters.

<sup>9</sup> BBC News Channel (2010) *Kenya country profile*. (Online) Available from [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country\\_profiles/1024563.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1024563.stm) (Accessed 12.09.10)

# Sexual violence

In 2002, the World Health Organization estimated that **150 million girls and 73 million boys had been raped or suffered other forms of sexual violence.**<sup>10</sup>

In a study conducted by students in Sierra Leone, 59 per cent of girls had been sexually abused. In Ecuador, 37 per cent of adolescent girls who were the victims of sexual violence named teachers as perpetrators. In South Africa, teachers were found guilty of one third of child rapes. In Uganda, research found that 8 per cent of 16- and 17-year-olds had had sex with their teachers and 12 per cent with ancillary staff. And Thailand's Ministry of Education says that every week at least one teacher sexually abuses a student.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the shame and fear of recrimination felt by girls who have been raped, sexual violence often goes unreported. In Sierra Leone, studies show that girls are abused in exchange for grades or school fees.

## Tanzania – sexual violence forces Ann\* to drop out of school

Ann was made pregnant by her teacher when she was 14 years old, and out of shame dropped out of school. The teacher who made her pregnant tried to get her parents to keep it secret. They reported it to local leaders, including the education officer, but nothing was done about it. The teacher continued to teach at the school and the head teacher refused to let Ann return, saying that the school's role ended as soon as she got pregnant.

Ann had her baby, and has so far missed over a year of education.

\*not her real name

<sup>10</sup> Plan (2008) *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*. Woking: Plan International Headquarters.  
<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

# Bullying

Bullying is common in schools across the world – and is only illegal in five. Surveys conducted in a wide range of countries found that between 20 and 65 per cent of schoolchildren report being verbally or physically bullied.<sup>12</sup>

Bullying often replicates violence and power imbalances in wider society. Those who are perceived as different or weaker are the most vulnerable.

According to recent research in the USA – where **the cost of youth violence is estimated to exceed \$158 billion** each year – 30 per cent of schoolchildren are directly affected by bullying every semester.<sup>13</sup> Many students, particularly boys, take a weapon to school. In 2007, 23 per cent of students reported gangs in their schools and 12 per cent of students said they had been in a physical fight during the 12 months before the survey.

Many schools in Brazil have become dangerous places for children, with brutal violence and even homicide, as well as sexual abuse, robberies and damage to property. When asked, 84 per cent of students in six state capitals thought their school violent and 70% said they had been the victims of violence.

This reflects high levels of violence in the rest of Brazilian society, where **youth violence is estimated to cost nearly US \$19 billion a year, US \$943 million of which can be linked to school violence.**<sup>14</sup>

## Maria,\* now aged 19, Lima, Peru

When she was 16, after receiving several threatening letters and texts, Maria was attacked by one of her classmates who cut her face with a razor blade hidden between her fingers. A worker at the school took her to the local medical centre but her father, a cobbler, couldn't afford **the immediate or long-term medical costs – equivalent to 20 times their weekly household income** and relied on the support of family and friends.

Maria's parents reported the case to the police who took the case to court, even though this cost the family the equivalent of Maria's father's monthly income.

As a result of this incident, Maria missed two months of school.

\*not her real name

<sup>12</sup> Plan (2008) *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*. Woking: Plan International Headquarters.

<sup>13</sup> Pinheiro, P.S. (2006) *World Report on Violence Against Children*. Geneva: United Nations.

<sup>14</sup> Perezniето, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and Coarasa, J. (2010) *The Economic Impact of School Violence*. London: Plan International & Overseas Development Institute.

# 3. The economic cost of school violence

Violence in schools has far-reaching consequences for children, their families, their communities and countries, and on global economic development.

As well as causing pain and trauma, treating injuries caused by school violence costs families money – often more than they can afford and money that could otherwise be spent on food, education and health care.

Because violence is a major factor keeping children out of school, it lessens their chances of working their way out of poverty. It takes valuable resources away from essential services and, by reducing educational achievement and subsequent earning capacity, lowers tax revenues.

Violence in schools reflects and contributes to social breakdown. Children who experience violence at school are more likely to engage in violence in later life, to place greater demands on health, welfare and judicial services, and are less likely to contribute to society.

## Average cost of treating injuries caused by violence in schools

Country	Average cost of treating injuries caused by school violence	No. of days pay lost*
Benin	US \$23	8
Ghana	US \$17	20
Kenya	US \$6	2
Pakistan	US \$4	3
Togo	US \$20	2.5

\*Based on calculations made by Plan staff in above mentioned countries

## **Violence in schools is a major reason for children not attending school or dropping out early. In Nepal, 14% of dropouts were because children were afraid of their teachers.**

The Plan/ODI research produced a variety of findings which show the severity of the economic impact of violence against children in schools. Here are some of the key findings:

**In Guatemala and Argentina, the foregone benefit to society from overall early dropout is nearly 59 per cent and 11.4 per cent of GDP respectively. In Egypt, nearly 7 per cent is lost in potential earnings.**

**In the UK, 16-year-olds who were bullied at school are twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training, and to have lower wage levels at age 23 and 33. Young men who are not in education, employment or training are three times more likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to have a criminal record.**

**Over their lifetimes, each young person in the UK who is not in education, employment or training will cost public finance £71,000. Overall, the burden of cost to the national economy will be £13 billion. In addition, there will be an opportunity cost to the state of a further £22 billion.**

**In Ethiopia, 40 per cent of parents said that school violence would discourage them from sending their daughters to school. Sixty per cent of girl students and 42 per cent of boy students said that violence had a high impact on girls' absenteeism.**

Sexual violence in schools leads to unwanted and dangerous pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. **In Swaziland, 17.4 per cent of 13-17-year-old girls have been taken out of school because of pregnancy, and 10.6 per cent because they have been forced to have sex. A fifth of these rapes took place at or on the way to school.**

Women who have had an education tend to have fewer and healthier children. In fact, one of the most important factors determining a country's economic development is girls' education.

**The economic cost of 65 low-income, middle-income and transition countries failing to educate girls to the same level as boys is US \$92 billion per year.**

Children who have witnessed or been beaten at school are likely to think violence is acceptable. Corporal punishment can make students aggressive and angry, and teaches them that domestic violence is permissible.

**In Morocco, it costs a woman US \$274 to get help from the justice system following an incidence of domestic violence, and a further US \$211 for treatment. In other words, getting justice and treatment would cost a fifth of her total annual income.**

In Uganda, a victim of domestic violence has to pay US \$5 – five times the average daily income – to get treatment for her injuries. Involving the police costs the equivalent of almost ten days income.

**In 2002/03 domestic violence cost the UK £23 billion and Australia more than \$8 billion.**

## **In OECD countries, an extra year of schooling will, on average, mean 5 to 15 per cent higher wages.**

# 4. Taking action – a cost-effective alternative

Eradicating violence from schools takes commitment and resources. But failing to invest in it costs more.

**There are many examples of cost-effective measures that have been successful in combating violence and making schools safer. These include:**

- training teachers in positive discipline so they do not resort to corporal punishment
- increasing the proportion of women teachers
- improving school facilities, for example, providing adequate and separate toilets for girls and boys
- setting up conflict mediation systems and school codes of conduct
- broadening the curriculum to include gender equality, conflict resolution, children's rights and citizenship
- improving communication between schools, families and communities.

# The Learn Without Fear campaign in India

Corporal punishment in schools in India has recently been made illegal, but it is used widely by teachers. In one survey, sixty-five per cent of children reported having been beaten. In some states, the figure was more than 90%.

Punishments range from hitting with hands or sticks to making children stand in various positions for long periods and tying them to chairs. These severe punishments cause many children to abandon school – because they are afraid of their teachers, because of their injuries and because of the impact the violence has on their learning.

The *Learn Without Fear* campaign works with government agencies to ensure that the law banning corporal punishment is enforced across all states. It has consulted with children and developed ways in which they can report incidents of corporal punishment. It has also developed a module to train teachers in positive discipline.

**School violence – predominantly corporal punishment – costs India up to US \$7.4 billion in foregone social benefits. Running the *Learn Without Fear* campaign for every schoolchild for a year would cost just over US \$67.4 million.**

# The Making Room Programme in Brazil

The Making Room Programme in Brazil – where violence in schools costs the national economy US \$943 million per year – provides young people with constructive ways to use their free time and take part in leisure activities.

Schools are open at weekends, with workshops run by paid monitors and volunteers, mostly young people and other members of the local community.

The programme costs between US \$0.30 and US \$0.70 per participant per month, which covers workshop running costs and providing a meal. In comparison, the cost of jailing a young offender for a month is US \$1,500.

Headteachers have reported fewer fights in school, improved student behaviour, greater community involvement in the school, better relationships between students, less vandalism and damage to school property, and less verbal abuse and humiliation.

**The national cost of violence in schools is estimated at US \$943 million per year. The cost of running a national Making Room Programme would be US \$16 million per year.**

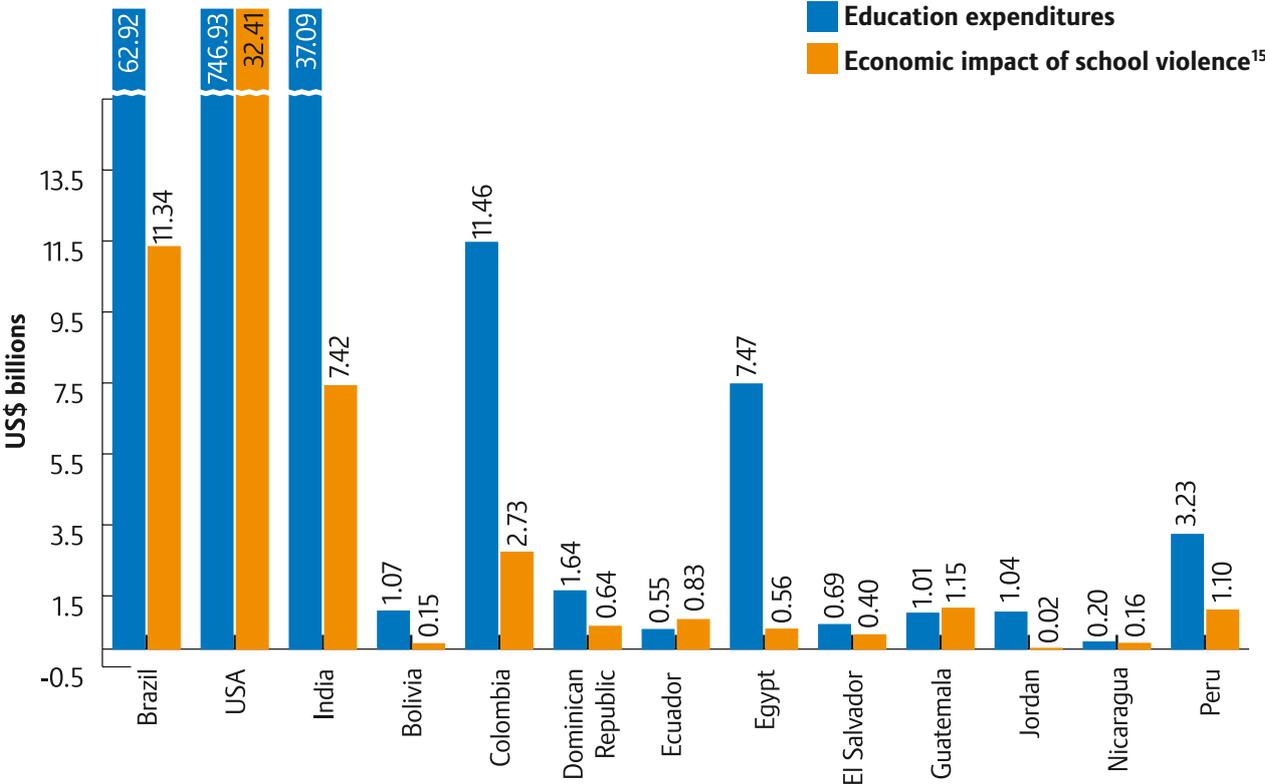
# The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has been implemented in more than a dozen countries and in thousands of schools in the USA, and has been successful in reducing or even eliminating bullying. The programme operates on three levels – school, classroom and community. The greatest costs are during initial start-up, although resources are needed for ongoing training and other activities aimed at maintaining staff commitment.

Some of the immediate benefits, which help cut day-to-day costs of the programme, include cutting down on lost teaching time and staff burnout, and protecting schools from legal actions relating to bullying. In the long term, the programme aims to reduce the costs to society caused by the effects of bullying on both the student who is bullied and those who bully.

**School violence costs the US economy \$7.9 billion per year. The cost of implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme in all US schools would be \$625 million per year.**

## Annual education expenditures vs. Economic impacts of school violence resulting from Early School Leaving



Adapted from CIA country profile<sup>16</sup> and Perezniето et al<sup>17</sup>

For the 13 countries where data is available, the economic impact of school violence totals up to US \$58,919,215,887.

<sup>15</sup> The projected shortfall in government revenue through children not completing their education.  
<sup>16</sup> US Central Intelligence Agency (2010) **The World Factbook**. (Online) Available from: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankfinder/2206rank.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankfinder/2206rank.html).  
<sup>17</sup> Perezniето, P., Harper, C., Clench, B. and Coarasa, J. (2010) **The Economic Impact of School Violence**. London: Plan International & Overseas Development Institute.

# 5. Call to action

The fundamental reason for eradicating violence in schools is because it violates children's rights. It is also a significant barrier to achieving Millennium Development Goal 2 on universal primary education, as school violence is a significant cause of truancy, dropout and under-performance.

And, there are also strong economic arguments. Violence in schools is costing children their futures and keeping them poor. It is preventing countries from developing and perpetuating violence that has an impact on every society.

Because violence in schools is underreported, measuring its exact cost is a challenge. However, given the data we have, it is clear that it is costing governments more than they can afford – especially at a time of economic downturn. We believe no state can afford to ignore it.

**Preventing violence in schools requires investment and the allocation of resources, but it is an economically sensible investment, bringing immediate financial savings and long-term development.**

**We are calling on donors and governments to:**

- earmark funds to scale up proven interventions to eradicate violence in schools
- invest in quantitative research and longitudinal studies to track the true extent of violence in schools, its cost to individuals, society and development.

**We are calling on governments to:**

- recognise that ending violence in schools is critical for their societies
- introduce and /or enforce legislation and policies banning violence in schools, including corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying.

**We are calling on donors, governments, education authorities, schools and civil society organisations to promote a non-violent culture and make schools safe by:**

- investing in teacher training, support materials and school inspections
- investing in more women teachers
- establishing school and teacher codes of conduct prohibiting violence in schools
- providing better pay and conditions for teachers
- improving school facilities, including adequate and separate toilets for girls and boys
- broadening school curricula to include learning on gender equality, conflict resolution, children's rights and citizenship
- enabling children to play a critical role in shaping the solution to violence in schools
- supporting children's families and communities to reduce violence by promoting positive forms of discipline
- improving reporting and referral mechanisms
- promoting a more thoughtful use of media by families and a more responsible depiction of violence by broadcasters and media content producers.

**Preventing violence in schools requires investment and the allocation of resources, but it is an economically sensible investment, bringing immediate financial savings and long-term development.**

Cover photo: © Plan / Dina Torrens. Group of children from Plan supported primary school in Udaipur, India.

Published by Plan Limited, Chobham House, Christchurch Way, Woking, Surrey GU21 6JG.

Plan Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Plan International, Inc. (a not-for-profit corporation registered in New York State, USA). A Limited Company registered in England. Registered number 03001663.

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Suggested citation: Ellery, F., Kassam, N. and Bazan, C. (2010) **Prevention pays: the economic benefits of ending violence in schools**. Woking: Plan.

Design: Bell Design

Printed by Park Communications on FSC certified paper.

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## About Plan

Founded over 70 years ago, Plan is one of the oldest and largest children's development organisations in the world. We work in 48 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty.

Plan works with more than 3,500,000 families and their communities each year.

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