

RELEASE & REPORT

Girls in Asia-Pacific face increasing risk of violence, abuse and exploitation following COVID-19 lockdown measures.

New report from Save the Children and Plan International

BANGKOK, July 22 – Violence against children threatens to escalate dramatically because of the COVID-19 pandemic, with girls disproportionately affected. For many girls, this and the additional risks of child or forced marriage could become more of a threat than the virus itself.

Nearly [10 million](#) children – mostly girls – may never return to school following COVID-19 lockdowns. [According to the UN](#), an extra an extra 15 million gender-based violence cases are expected for every three months the lockdown continues globally. The [UN](#) also estimates that COVID-19 could result in an additional 13 million child marriages worldwide over the next ten years.

In a joint report by [Save the Children](#) and [Plan International](#) released today, ‘*Because We Matter: Addressing COVID-19 And Violence Against Girls in Asia-Pacific*,’ the two leading children’s aid agencies lay out the alarming extent of the problem in the region, and what must be done to address it.

Bhagyashri Denge, Asia-Pacific Regional Director, Plan International, said:

“While children in Asia have been spared the worst direct health effects of COVID-19, it has exposed millions of girls to the risk of violence, abuse and exploitation during lockdowns and periods of movement restrictions. Girls already living in violent family situations are particularly vulnerable as they may be confined at home with their abuser. At the same time, access to health and protection services have been disrupted. There is also evidence that sexual abuse of girls has increased, both offline and online, during the pandemic.”

Hassan Noor, Asia Regional Director, Save the Children International, said:

“Worldwide school closures have affected more than 1.5 billion students – more than half of whom are in Asia-Pacific. Such closures, combined with financial insecurities means girls are more likely to either be without a caregiver, or living in homes that have come under sudden and intense stress, exposing them to increased risk of violence or abuse. Many may never return to school once they re-open. This pandemic could undo much of the progress made in reducing levels of child marriage across Asia-Pacific in recent decades.”

“Regional governments must do everything they can to protect the rights of girls during this crisis, including by supporting vital social services, and helping the most marginalised families with financial aid so they can get through the hardship caused by the pandemic.”

Huu is an 18-year-old girl from Vietnam. She told us:

“I know two girls who have just gotten married during this pandemic. I truly think that education offers us a chance to a brighter future. However, due to the current

pandemic, many girls are giving up their learning opportunities for marriage to alleviate the new economic hardship.”

Phulan is an 18-year-old girl from Nepal. She told us:

“When I learned that my parents wanted to marry me off, I knew I couldn’t let it happen. If I did, what kind of message would I be sending to other girls? With community support, I told my parents I’d go to the police if they didn’t give up. I am now continuing my studies.”

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About Save the Children:

100 years ago, a courageous woman named Eglantyne Jebb founded Save the Children in response to the terrible suffering children were facing as a result of war. Today, Save the Children is a global membership organisation, made up of Save the Children International and 29 national members. We champion the rights and interests of children worldwide, putting the most vulnerable children first. With 25,000 dedicated staff across over 110 countries, we respond to major emergencies, deliver innovative development programmes, and ensure children's voices are heard through our campaigning to build a better future for and with children.