UNESCO Bangkok and EAP UNEGI Press Release

Study Sheds Light on School-Related Gender Based Violence in Asia-Pacific

BANGKOK, 6 March 2014 – Children in Asia-Pacific are being robbed of their ability to learn in a safe environment as a result of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and current policy approaches do not adequately address the problem, according to a study released today.

The review, “School-Related Gender-Based Violence in the Asia-Pacific Region”, commissioned by UNESCO Bangkok and implemented in partnership with the East Asia Pacific Regional UN Girls’ Education Initiative, is the first to examine the evidence on SRGBV and related policy and programming in Asia-Pacific. Policy information and studies pertaining to SRGBV from the majority of countries in the region were analyzed in the review.

Violence against children in schools is a complex, multifaceted issue. It is closely linked to broader social norms around the acceptance of violence, deeply ingrained gender inequalities and rigid gender expectations. SRGBV refers to violence affecting schoolchildren that occurs in or around educational settings and is perpetrated based on gender roles or norms, and expectations of children based on their sex or gender identities.

The review paints a disturbing picture of the extent and effects of SRGBV in Asia-Pacific. The most common forms of SRGBV in the region are: corporal punishment; physical violence and abuse; psychosocial violence and abuse; bullying including cyber-bullying; and sexual violence and abuse.

SRGBV is driven by rigid constructs of femininity and masculinity as well as social expectations. Many young people in the region who do not conform to these gender constructs face SRGBV, including sexual violence and bullying.

Verbal and emotional abuse and social exclusion or discrimination are common and often characterized by verbal humiliation based on caste, status in society, gender identity/expression or perceived sexual orientation, and disability. Girls appear to be more likely to face this type of psychological abuse, including discrimination and social exclusion, whereas boys are more vulnerable to physical attacks.

Those who are believed to be same-sex attracted or gender non-conforming are also subjected in many settings to psychosocial violence and abuse in multiple forms.

 Corporal punishment is also a hugely prevalent form of SRGBV in the region, common even among countries that specifically outlaw the practice.

The effects of SRGBV can be devastating and long-lasting, the report finds.
“This report highlights that the experience, or even the threat, of SRGBV has detrimental educational outcomes. This includes irregular attendance, dropout, truancy, poor school performance, and low self-esteem of those affected, which may follow them into their adult lives,” says Justine Sass, Chief of the HIV Prevention and Health Promotion (HP2) Unit, UNESCO Bangkok.

SRGBV is a disturbing violation of children’s fundamental human rights and directly contravenes the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which all countries in the region have ratified and most have signed.

“All children, girls and boys, should have the right to learn in a safe context. Anything less should never be accepted. UNGEI in East Asia and the Pacific, and globally, is committed to addressing all aspects of school related gender based violence by advocating for change on behalf of children,” says Dr. Chemba Raghavan, Regional Focal Point for the UN Girls’ Education Initiative in East Asia and the Pacific.

The review found that existing policies in the region for the most part lack an evidence base, are fragmented in their approach and are heavily influenced by cultural and social gender stereotypes. Policies in the region boast “only a few successful results”.

The review ends with a call for countries to adopt the following steps to address the problem of SRGBV in Asia-Pacific:

- review data and clearly articulate the problem of SRGBV;
- establish mechanisms for comprehensive and integrated action and promote inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration;
- develop and implement policies underpinned by robust evidence, and establish effective legislation and regulation mechanisms;
- put in place mechanisms for a safe and effective reporting of, and response to, incidents of SRGBV;
- train relevant personnel within the education system and implement gender transformative teaching and learning mechanisms;
- promote the principles of, and establish mechanisms to ensure, accountability and transparency and participation and inclusiveness in SRGBV prevention and response efforts.

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For further information, please contact: Noel Boivin, UNESCO Bangkok Media and Communications Officer: [n.boivin@unesco.org](mailto:n.boivin@unesco.org)