



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: 4 November 2016

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 1600 GMT SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2016

Childhood violence in Asia is costing society dear, experts say

Violence against children costs countries in the East Asia and Pacific region more than \$200 billion - or nearly two per cent of the area's Gross Domestic Product.

Health and productivity in the region could rise significantly if countries intervened earlier to reduce abuse, experts say – and bring an end to untold human suffering.

Preventing violence against children could reduce teenage pregnancy by a quarter, cut illicit drug use by 17 per cent, early smoking by 21 per cent and alcohol-related problems by 10 per cent.

The findings are published in a University of Edinburgh report, *Preventing Violence Against Children*, written in partnership with the aid agency UNICEF, and in the journal *BMJ Global Health*.

The report will be presented to Prime Ministers, Ministers of Finance and Planning at the high-level meeting on cooperation for child rights in the Asia-Pacific Region in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 7 to 9 November 2016.

Experts say that tackling child abuse could prevent a third of attacks against women by their partners, because of a link between experiencing violence in early life and perpetrating it as an adult.

For the same reason, the rate of threatening or injuring someone with a weapon could also be reduced – by 27 per cent for women and 20 per cent for men.

Experiencing violence at a young age may have a permanent impact on the development of children's brains, the report says. The damage can affect learning and undermine behavioural, social and emotional functioning, which puts a burden on a country's health, educational, judicial and social services.

The subsequent economic loss for the whole region is \$206 billion a year. This includes the cost of emotional violence – \$65bn, physical violence – \$39bn, sexual violence – \$39bn, neglect – \$32bn, and witnessing domestic violence – \$31bn.

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The report makes several recommendations for leaders attending the Kuala Lumpur summit. These include stronger legislation to ban all forms of violence against children, publically challenge the social acceptance of childhood violence and creating safer spaces for children.

Dr Deborah Fry, Professor of Child Protection at the University's Moray House School of Education and report author, said: "These findings show that if there is one investment governments can make that might have the greatest impact on society, it would be to invest in preventing violence against children which has a profound impact not only on individuals but also families and communities."

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines violence against children as "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".

The 32 countries in the study include China, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, and Vietnam.

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