

Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) Child Protection

Birth registration and certification are milestones to ensure the rights of a child

Birth registration is the official recording of a child's birth by the government. This establishes the existence of the child under the law and provides the foundation of safeguarding many of the child's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that every child has the right to be registered at birth without any discrimination.

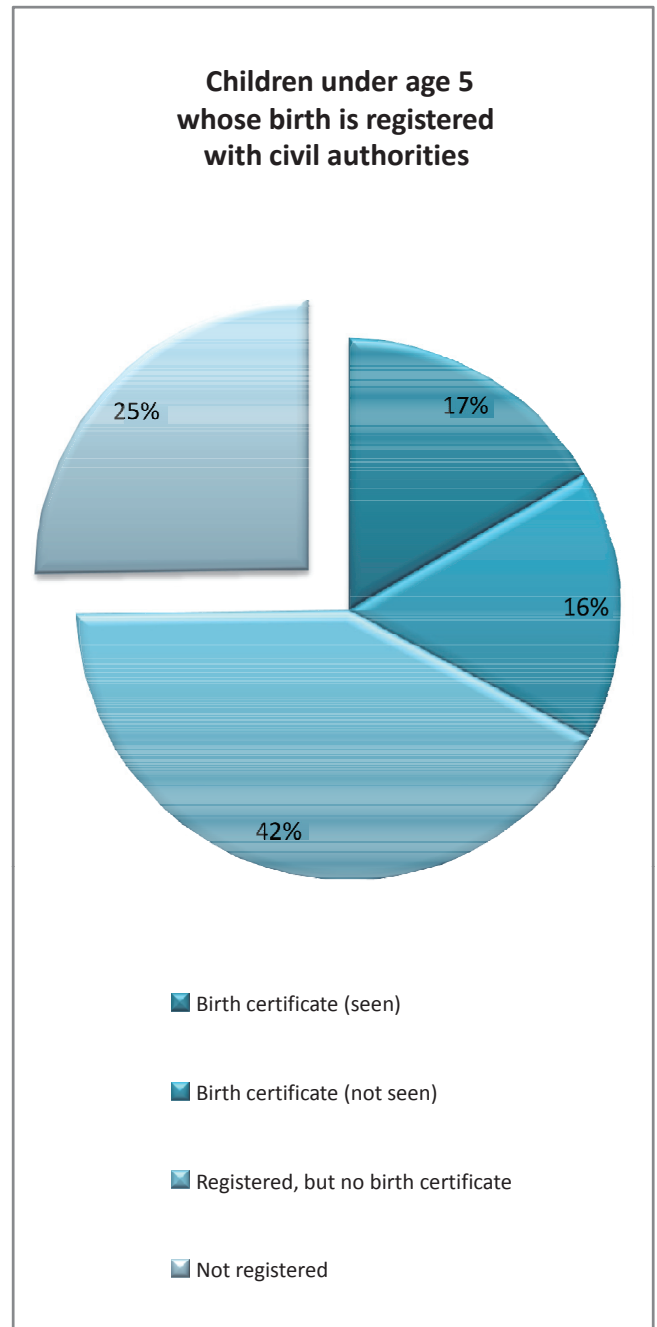
Universal birth registration is a powerful instrument to ensure equal access to services such as health and education. Knowing the age of the child is also central to protecting children from child labour, child marriage, illicit changes to their identity, exploitation, illegal migration and trafficking.

A birth certificate, as the documentary proof that registration has taken place, helps children to secure the right to a nationality and also enables them to claim their rights.

In Lao PDR, 75 per cent of all children under the age of five are reported to be registered. Of children in this age group, 33 per cent are reported to have a birth certificate and only 17 per cent have a birth certificate their families could show.



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The percentage of children who are registered steadily increases as mothers' education and wealth increase. The percentage of children registered is highest among Lao-Tai headed households (82 per cent) and lowest among Hmong-Mien headed households (58 per cent).

Every child has the right to be protected from all forms of violence

Violence against children includes emotional and physical abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, sexual exploitation and abuse. It can occur within the family but also in schools and communities.

Violence can affect a child's physical and mental health, impair their ability to learn and socialize, undermine their development as adults and good parents later in life and, in the most severe cases, can cause death.

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to be protected from all forms of violence.

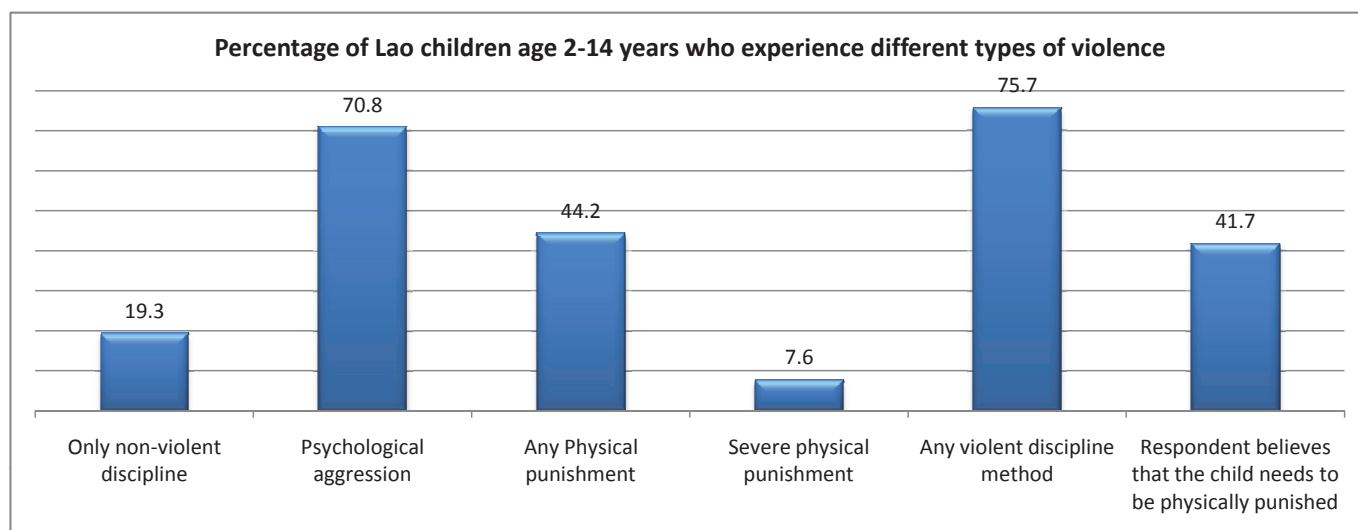
Seventy-six per cent of all Lao children age 2-14 are subject to at least one form of psychological aggression or physical punishment from an adult in their household. Of these, 77 per cent are boys and 74 per cent are girls. The percentage of Lao children who experience violent discipline remains high across all education levels of household heads and wealth quintiles – one of the few statistics that does not vary considerably in relation to education level of household head and wealth.



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Eight per cent of Lao children experience severe physical punishment from an adult in their household. Of these, 9 per cent are boys and 6 per cent are girls. The percentage of children who experience severe physical punishment increases with decreasing education levels of household heads and wealth quintiles. Ten per cent of children whose household heads have no education experience severe physical punishment compared to 4 per cent of children whose household heads have higher education. The percentage of children from the poorest quintile who experience severe physical punishment is more than twice that of children from the richest quintile (11 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively). Children from rural areas without road (12 per cent) experience more severe physical violence than children in urban areas (8 per cent). The percentage is double the national average (16 per cent or higher) in Sekong, Luangnamtha and Huaphanh. By ethno-linguistic group, the percentage is highest among children in Chinese-Tibetan households (16 per cent).

Some 42 per cent of Lao adults believe physical punishment is necessary to properly raise a child. This opinion varies considerably across provinces, from a low of 7 per cent in Luangnamtha to a high of 94 per cent in Oudomxay. Forty-six per cent of respondents with no education believe that a child needs to be physically punished compared to only 27 per cent of respondents with higher education. Similarly, 47 per cent of respondents from the poorest quintile and 31 per cent from the richest quintile hold this opinion.



Child marriage can lead to premature pregnancies and an increased risk of infant and maternal mortality

‘Child marriage’ or ‘early marriage’ is defined as the marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18, and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children age under 18 live with a partner as if married. Child marriage affects both boys and girls, but affects girls disproportionately.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the right to free and full consent to marriage. Consent cannot be “free and full” when at least one partner is not sufficiently mature to make this decision because of age. For both boys and girls, early marriage has profound physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional impact, cutting off educational opportunities and chances for personal growth. For girls, it will almost certainly mean premature pregnancy with an increased risk of infant and maternal mortality.

Teenage pregnancy is a major health concern because of its association with higher morbidity and mortality for both mother and child. Childbearing during the teenage years frequently has adverse social consequences as well, particularly on educational attainment, because women who become

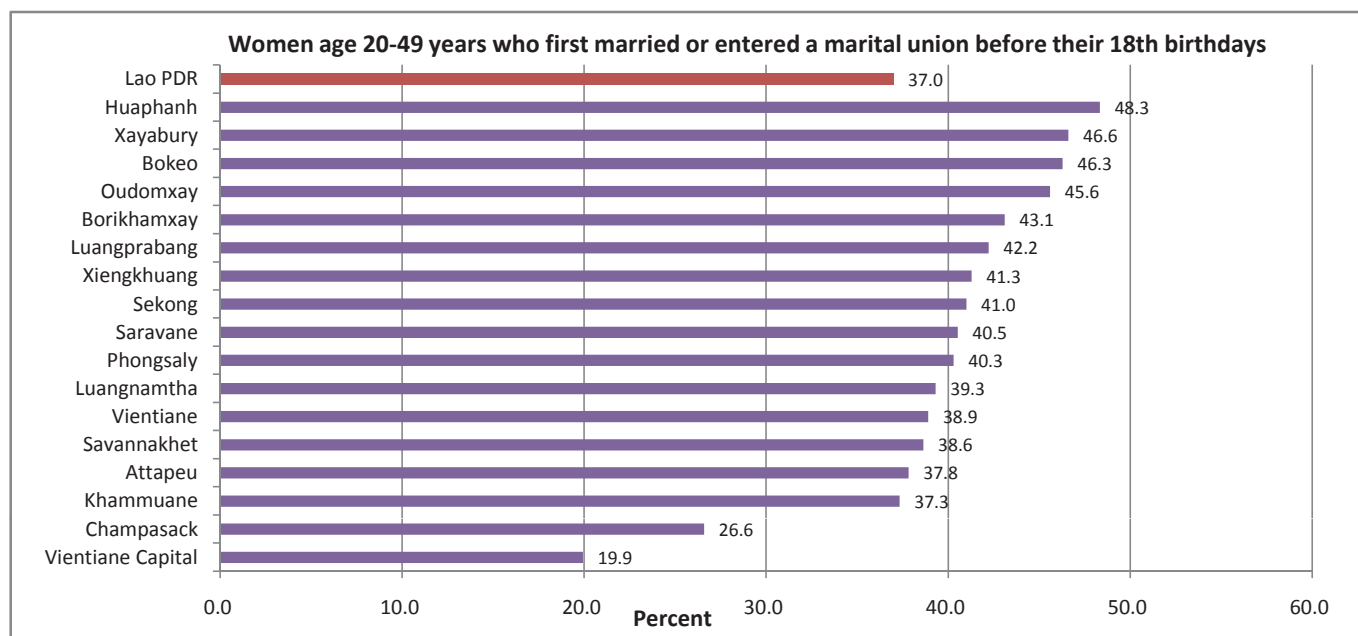


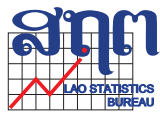
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mothers in their teenage years are more likely to curtail their education. According to UNICEF State of the World’s Children 2009, girls who give birth before the age of 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their twenties. The risk of an infant dying in the first year of life is 60 per cent greater for mothers under the age of 18 years.

In Lao PDR, 9 per cent of women age 15-49 were married before the age of 15 and 37 per cent of women age 20-49 were married before the age of 18. The strongest relationship to marriage before age 18 is with education. Half of all women age 20-49 with no education were married before age 18 compared to only 2 per cent of women with some education. A similar inverse relationship is seen by wealth index quintiles. Fifty-seven per cent of women in Hmong-Mien headed households marry before the age of 18; the highest among all ethno-linguistic groups.

Eighteen per cent of women age 20-24 reported having had their first live birth before their 18th birthday. Early childbearing has a strong association with education; the proportion of women age 20-24 who reported having had a live birth by age 18 decreases dramatically with increasing education. Thirty-five per cent of women with no education had a live birth by age 18 compared with only 3 per cent of women with upper secondary education. Early childbearing is most common among women in the poorest quintile (36 per cent), and in Hmong-Mien headed households (39 per cent).





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