



Violence Against Children

Media Coverage in October 2025

October 2025 revealed a concerning rise in violence against children across Sri Lanka, with 64 incidents affecting 177 victims. Three major school-related food poisoning incidents accounted for many cases, underscoring serious gaps in institutional safety. Sexual abuse remained a major issue, mainly affecting girls aged 11–14, while boys were more often harmed in physical abuse cases occurring in community settings. Schools recorded the highest number of victims due to these large-scale incidents. PEACE | ECPAT Sri Lanka's media team compiles and analyses this information daily using UNICEF's ICVAC framework, ensuring reliable, evidence-based insights for strengthening child protection. Previous newsletters are available on our website at <https://ecpat.lk/newsletters/>.



Awareness-raising is one of the four pillars of PEACE | ECPAT Sri Lanka, which continues to have a strong impact nationwide. Over the past 15 months, the organisation has reached 5,709 parents across all 25 districts, of whom 4,612 are mothers, recognising the vital role mothers play in protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. Our teams travel to rural and remote communities to ensure no parent is left behind. This photo captures one such session, where mothers listen attentively and engage with our staff on keeping their children safe.

This newsletter provides a data-driven analysis of child protection incidents reported through media monitoring during October 2025. A total of 64 separate incidents were reported, affecting a calculated total of 177 victims across the country.

Key Highlights – Violence Against Children Snapshot

- Neglect and Sexual Abuse dominated the month, with Neglect topping the list (16 incidents) and Sexual Abuse close behind (15), reflecting ongoing gaps in child supervision and protection.
- A single major school-related neglect case led to 45 children being hospitalised, significantly impacting the total victim count and highlighting weak safety standards in educational settings.
- Physical Abuse remained a concern with 11 cases, mainly affecting younger children within home environments.
- Most perpetrators were known to the child, including family members (13 incidents) and teachers/coaches and other authority figures (12 incidents)—reinforcing the need for stronger safeguarding measures in homes and schools.
- Strangers and unknown perpetrators together accounted for 20 incidents, reminding us that community-level vigilance and public-space safety remain essential.
- Monaragala (10), Colombo (7), and Jaffna/Kurunegala/Puttalam (5 each) emerged as the main hotspots, showing where intensified monitoring and targeted interventions are urgently needed.

Type of Violent Incidents

64 incidents of violence against children were recorded across Sri Lanka in October 2025, affecting 177 child victims.

Drug Abuse	Negligence	Physical Abuse
Schoolchildren are heavily involved - at least 10 boys and girls were caught with drugs. 2 of the significant incidents involved student groups selling or distributing drugs. Adults supplying narcotics to students, including a female dealer and a phone-shop owner. Cannabis, heroin, ICE and pills are the main substances recovered from children.	45 children were hospitalized in one mass-neglect incident due to unsafe food. At least 4 children died from preventable hazards, drowning, falls, and unsafe environments. Most negligence cases involve young children (0–10 years), who are highly vulnerable. Nearly all incidents occurred in community or home settings, linked to poor supervision.	11 children were physically assaulted in October. Most were severely injured and hospitalised. Boys were the main victims, with over 70% of physical-abuse cases. Schools and community spaces account for majority of assaults - attacks by teachers and peers. At least 3 children (aged 1–7) suffered serious injuries from violence within home or community settings.
Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Abduction
24 children were sexually abused - almost all were girls aged 10–15. Most perpetrators were known - fathers, neighbours, teachers, and online contacts. Homes and community spaces were the highest-risk locations, with several school-related cases. Three victims were involved in online grooming, including messages, luring, and digital exploitation.	Three children faced psychological abuse this month. Victims included a 14-year-old girl and two boys aged 5 and 15. Perpetrators ranged from a parent to peers, showing abuse can occur at home and in the community. All cases involved severe intimidation, threats, or degrading treatment requiring police action.	Two teenage girls were abducted in two separate cases this month. A 17-year-old boy abducted a 14-year-old girl under the pretext of a love affair. A 48-year-old three-wheeler driver abducted a 15-year-old girl after luring her near a tuition class. Both suspects were arrested quickly, showing effective police action in abduction cases.
Missing	Suicide	Homicide
One missing-child case was reported this month, a 16-year-old boy from Vavuniya. The incident involved a lone male victim with no witnesses identified. Police have launched an investigation, but the child's whereabouts remain unknown. Limited details were available, indicating gaps in reporting and follow-up.	A 16-year-old girl died by suicide in Kilinochchi this month. The case involved an individual victim with no other injuries reported. The cause behind the suicide has not been revealed by authorities. Police and the NCPA have initiated investigations into the incident.	One case involved a mother killing her 3-year-old son before taking her own life. Child homicide occurred in the home environment, showing extreme violence within families.

Age Distribution

Below 1 Year	Aged 1 - 5 Years	Aged 6 - 10 Years
3 newborns (under 1 month) were affected, highlighting extreme vulnerability. All cases involved abandonment or severe neglect, the highest-risk form of harm for infants. Every incident showed collective or family-level negligence.	10 cases involved children aged 1–5, indicating this is a highly affected group. Severe harms were common, including drowning, accidents, assault, torture, and sexual abuse. Most incidents were caused by caregivers, indicating collective negligence and unsafe environments.	6 incidents, showing a steady rise in risk as children become more mobile and independent. Serious harms: sexual abuse, physical punishment, drowning, and misconduct by authorities. Most cases involved parents, teachers, or known adults within a child's immediate environment.
Aged 11 - 14 Years	Aged 15 - 18 Years	Unspecified
15 incidents involved, making it the most affected age group. Sexual abuse is high, with multiple cases involving girls aged 11–14. Groups harmed many children at once. Increased risks in school and community settings.	14 incidents, making this a high-risk group of late teens. Girls and boys are affected by sexual abuse, assaults, disappearances, and serious injuries. Incidents involve teachers, parents, peers, or known adults.	15 incidents involved children of unspecified age group. Many of these cases involved large groups - 45 victims, 40 victims, and 7 victims. Most incidents relate to negligence, unsafe environments, or exploitation.

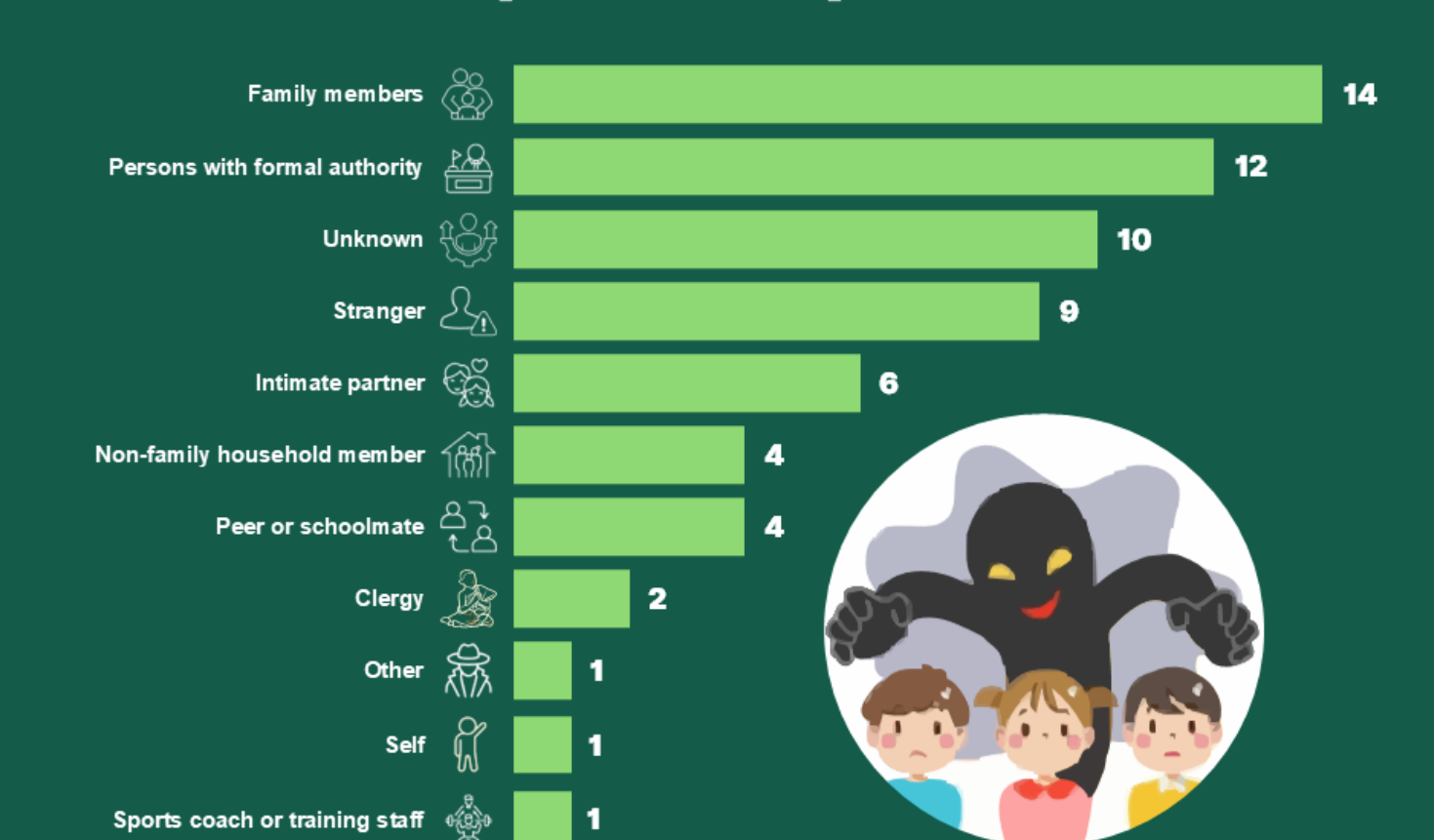
Gender Distribution

Female	Male	Not specified
33 Nearly half of all incidents (47%) affected females - 30 cases. Number of victims 33 (19%) 19 girls are disproportionately affected by physical abuse. At least 2 females were directly affected by physical abuse. 19 girls (ages 11–14) affected by sexual abuse.	35 35 male victims - 20% of cases, from 21 incidents. Boys are more often victims of physical abuse - 12 boys vs 2 girls. 5 boys were victims of sexual abuse. In mixed-group incidents, at least 6 males were victimised compared to 3 females.	109 Almost 62 % of the victims' gender was not specified due to group incidents. 45 children (gender not specified) were hospitalised after eating school-provided fried rice on Children's Day. Allergic reaction from the morning meal sent 40 junior school students to hospital. Neglect identified in groups, affecting both genders.

Individual vs Group Perpetrators

Individual perpetrators	Group Perpetrators
Individual perpetrators are involved in 37 incidents, accounting for a significant share of all reported cases in October 2025. Sexual abuse is the dominant category among individual-perpetrator cases, with 16 incidents, indicating that most sexual offences are committed by single offenders rather than groups. Physical abuse is also commonly carried out by individuals, with 8 incidents, showing a strong tendency for one-to-one violence in family or household contexts. Drug-related exploitation cases (6 incidents) also predominantly involve individual perpetrators, highlighting personal-level grooming or influence. Individual offenders are responsible for the most serious cases - sexual abuse, physical assault, abduction, and neglect.	5 group-perpetrated incidents were recorded, far fewer than individual-offender cases. 9 children victimised in mixed-group incidents - 6 boys vs. 3 girls, showing boys are more affected when groups offend. Large-scale harm is common in group incidents, including 45 children hospitalised after consuming contaminated school food. Another mass-impact case: 40 junior school students developed allergic reactions after consuming their morning meal. Group incidents tend to cause multiple victims per case, reflecting collective negligence or systemic failures rather than targeted abuse. Group-perpetrated incidents often stem from institutional or collective negligence, where unsafe practices or poor supervision result in multiple children being harmed at once.

Perpetrator Specific



Settings Where Violence Occurred

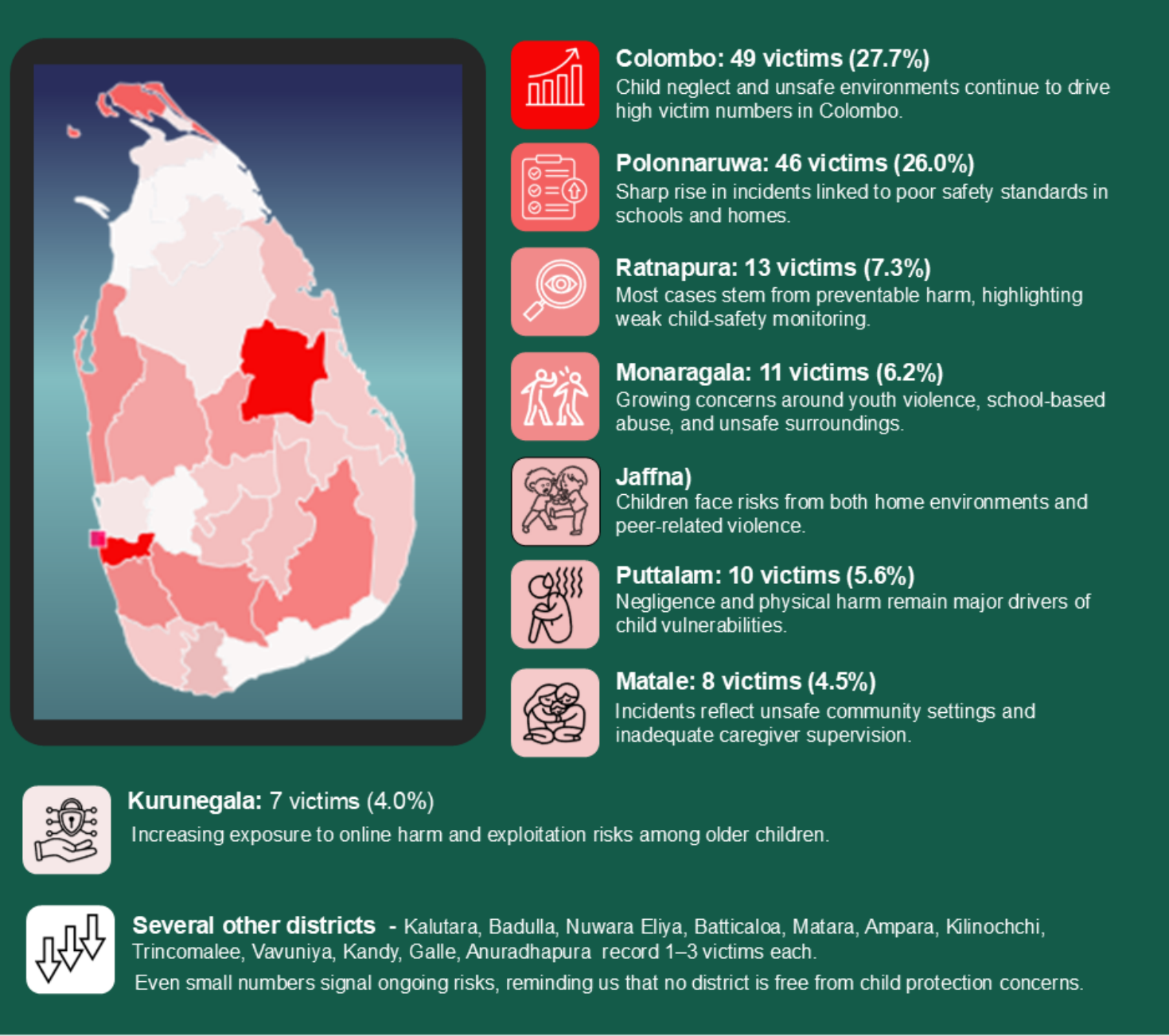
Community	Community settings are the most incidents, largely tied to physical abuse, or harassment. Community incidents disproportionately affect boys, mainly through physical assaults. Community incidents lack perpetrator identification, hindering accountability and response.	Violence tends to be individual, not mass, with most incidents affecting one child at a time.
Home	Home-based violence is significant, driven by neglect, abandonment, and severe physical abuse. At home, neglect and assault are most often committed by parents or close family members. Children below 10 face high-risk in-home incidents, frequently left unsupervised or in unsafe conditions.	Violence at home usually targets one child at a time, rather than groups.
School	Schools show the highest victim count, driven by three major neglect incidents (45, 40, 13 victims). Institutional negligence, unsafe food handling, and poor supervision are the key risk factors. Teachers and staff are commonly involved, whether through negligence or abuse.	This setting affects children of all ages, including large groups of unspecified ages.
Temple	Three monks were arrested for sexually abusing two novice monks inside the temple. Boys are most often affected, as they are more involved in temple-related activities. Reports from temple premises include sexual abuse, physical harm, and a child death.	Although low in number, incidents highlight gaps in child safety within religious institutions.
Digital Space	Digital-space violence appears under-reported, with only one recorded case despite growing online risks. A cyber-harassment case was reported, underscoring continued digital vulnerabilities. Victims include adolescents, who are more active online and therefore more exposed.	Under-reporting reflects gaps in disclosure and tracking, not a lack of incidents.

Key points

Community settings report the highest number of incidents overall.	However, schools account for the most victims, mainly due to large-scale food poisoning events.	Homes remain a major site of violence, including neglect, physical abuse, and some sexual abuse.	The digital space shows at least one recorded case, highlighting ongoing but underreported online risks.
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Geographic Distribution

By the number of victims



A Call to Action

The data from October 2025 reinforces that child vulnerability is high and multifaceted, spanning neglect, sexual abuse, and physical harm. The pervasive involvement of both Family Members and Persons with Formal Authority highlights a systemic failure to protect children in spaces they are supposed to trust, the home and the school.

We urge all stakeholders to

- Strengthen institutional accountability by tightening vetting and closely monitoring all teachers, coaches, and authority figures to ensure children's safety.
- Boost family support by investing in community-based parenting and counselling programs to reduce neglect and violence at home.
- Focus intervention and awareness campaigns in high-incident districts, particularly Monaragala and Colombo.