

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND ITS PREVENTION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Gender based violence is any harm or suffering that is perpetrated against a woman or girl, man or boy and that has a negative impact on the physical, sexual or psychological health, development or identity of the person. This paper addressed the concept of gender based violence, types, occurrence in schools, consequences, preventive strategies against gender based violence in schools and strategies for intervention. It was concluded and recommended among others that students needs to be enlightened through the help of parents, teachers and the mass media on what constitutes violence and how it can be addressed.

Key word: *Prevention, Gender, Violence in schools.*

Introduction

Schools need to actively promote a gender equality, respectful, non-violent culture amongst students, teachers and other staff. The potential for young people to act as agents of change provides one of the greatest hopes for achieving the social transformation necessary to end Gender Based Violence and can be unlocked through high-quality, gender sensitive education (UNICEF, 2006).

Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours associated with a person's assigned sex at birth. Behaviour that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender normative, and incompatible behaviour considered gender non-conforming. Such behaviours include things like the way they dress, the things they do and the way they relate to others. Gender roles and expectations are learned, can change over time, and can vary within and among cultures (Action Aid International, 2004).

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), (2010), defined Gender-based violence (GBV) as one of the most widespread, but least recognised, human rights abuses in the world. It refers to any harm perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of gender; the socially ascribed differences between males and females. In other words, Gender-based violence is any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering against someone based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations and gender stereotypes.

Though women and girls are overwhelmingly the targets of GBV, men and boys can also be subject to GBV, especially if they are perceived to be acting outside the prescribed social norms for males (Heise, 1999). According to the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1992), GBV includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse; trafficking; practices such as female genital cutting, forced marriage and honour crimes; and widespread sexual violence and exploitation during and after conflicts and natural disasters. Survivors can face long-term physical and mental health problems as well as social exclusion and reduced ability to maintain economic security.

Gender-based Violence in School

According to UNESCO and East Asia Pacific, (2014), in identifying who experiences violence and gender-based violence at school, all young people can experience violence at or around the school. But, experiences of violence can be different for girls and boys. Evidence suggests that boys are more likely to be the targets of physical violence and girls are more likely to be the targets of sexual violence and verbal harassment.

Violence in schools reflects underlying social norms regarding authority and expected gender roles. Societal expectations can normalise negative aspects of male and female behaviour. Dominant conceptions about manhood may condone boys acting out expressions of aggression, violence and sexual power. Conversely, expectations of girls can include deference to men and boys, submissiveness and passivity (Lansford and Dodge, 2008). Witnessing or experiencing violence in the home teaches children that violence is 'normal' and increases the risk of them bullying or perpetrating sexual violence in their own lives. Gender norms often dictate that boys settle disputes with physical violence, and some may enact the gender-based violence observed in their own homes or communities against female students in schools (UNESCO and East Asia Pacific UNGEI, 2014).

Ajuwon as cited in Dworjan, (2015) lamented that female adolescent students had been victims of at least one sexually coercive behaviour, the most common being unwanted kiss and touch of the breast, rape which was perpetrated mainly by boyfriends and other persons well known to the victims. A review of the incidents of rape from police records in a Nigerian city shows that within a year, a total of 124 cases were officially reported and that all the victims were females. In agreement to this assertion, Obikeze, (2009) findings revealed that male students are involved in violent acts such as fighting, bullying, pushing damaging school property, gangsterism, physical assault, and aggression more than their female counterparts.

According to Leach, Dunne and Salvi, (2014), school-related gender-based violence is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics. It also refers to the differences between girls' and boys' experiences of and vulnerabilities to violence. SRGBV includes explicit threats or acts of physical violence, bullying, verbal or sexual harassment, non-consensual touching, sexual coercion and assault, and rape. Corporal punishment and discipline in schools often manifest in gendered and discriminatory ways. Other implicit acts of SRGBV stem from everyday school practices that reinforce stereotyping and gender inequality, and encourage violent or unsafe environments. The finding of UNICEF, (2014), revealed that, high rates of school-related gender-based violence are more likely where there is an acceptance of violence within the society. Social acceptance of gender-based violence varies by country. In some countries, up to 90% of women think that gender-based violence is acceptable in certain situations. Men also have high acceptance of gender-based violence, though in many cases their level of acceptance is lower than women's

Recent estimates from Plan International (2013), based on the number of children affected by verbal bullying, a common form of violence in schools, show 246 million boys and girls suffering school-related violence every year. In France, 40% of students report being victims of cyber bullying (Blaya, 2013). In Zambia, 61% of school children reported being bullied also (Fleming and Jacobsen, 2010). And millions more suffer physical violence at school under the guise of discipline: over one-half of all children worldwide live in countries where they have no legal protection from corporal punishment (UNESCO, 2014).

Psaki, Mensch and Soler-Hampejsek, (2017), in a study on Associations between violence in school and at home and education outcomes in rural Malawi, revealed that girls and boys are equally likely to experience school violence. Overall, 51% of girls and 53% of boys ages 14–17 had experienced some type of SRGBV in the current school year at baseline. About one-third of students (girls and boys) had experienced physical violence, and 15% had experienced sexual violence.

Fleck, (2012), stated the evidence which indicates that school-related gender-based violence affects millions of children and adolescents worldwide. It is one of the worst manifestations of gender discrimination and violates a wide range of children's rights. Education is critical in empowering and transforming the lives of young people, especially girls, yet widespread gender-based violence in and around schools seriously undermines the achievement of quality, inclusive and equitable education for all children.

GBV takes place worldwide, irrespective of age, sex, religion, class or caste. The shocking truth is that violence against women and girls takes place in

all countries, in homes, workplaces, schools and communities (World Health Organization 2013).

Gender-based violence creates tension in the school system and threatens the realization of the educational objectives. Violence has a huge impact on the smooth running of a school and students' learning ability, and is capable of ruining a child's future if it is not properly managed. In secondary schools administration therefore, the principal whose responsibility it is to plan, organise, direct, coordinate and control human and material resources for the realization of educational objectives and goals, has to ensure a serene environment for effective teaching and learning. The extent to which the principal is able to do this, would determine the level to which students go to school to learn and achieve their academic goals (Okonkwo, Nwankwo, & Oputa 2015).

Types of Gender Based Violence in Schools

Psychological: Excluding those who don't conform to gender norms; Circulating gossip or rumours; insulting or rude gestures, facial expressions or body movement

Physical: Harassment of those who do not fit gender norms by pinching, beating, slapping, pushing, kicking, or throwing objects; Forcing gendered labour or service (e.g. girls having to stay behind and clean the classroom); Using more severe forms of corporal punishment against male students; Corporal punishment is a widely reported form of violence in schools in many parts of the world. It is estimated that over half of all children worldwide live in countries where they are not legally protected from corporal punishment in schools, (UNESCO, 2014).

Bullying: It is non-sexual form of intimidation, which is perpetrated with intention to harm, either physically or psychologically. The act of bullying is grounded in the power differential that exists between perpetrator and victim (Kibiya, Tkach, Ahn, Valdez, Xu, and Zhang, 2016).

Sexual: Unwanted kissing, groping or touching; Making sexual remarks about another's behaviour or reputation; forced sexual contact; rape, forced viewing of sexual acts or pornography; exchange of sexual services for better grades (Leach, et al, 2014).

Gender-based violence on the way to school: Various studies show that students may experience gender-based violence while they are walking to or from school or waiting for a bus or taxi (Plan International 2013, and Action Aid International 2004). This includes violence committed by transport drivers or by people on the street. In some locations, girls who have to travel especially long distances may be at higher risk for assault. In conflict or emergency affected areas they may be

vulnerable to kidnapping or trafficking (UNESCO and East Asia Pacific UNGEI, 2014).

Consequences of Gender Based Violence

Victims of GBV are at high risk of severe and long-lasting health problems, including death from injuries or suicide. Health consequences can include unwanted pregnancy, unsafe self-induced abortion, infanticide, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Psychological trauma, as well as social stigma and rejection, is also common. Most societies tend to blame the victim in cases of sexual violence, which increases psychological harm, the exact nature and severity of physical and emotional trauma vary greatly among victims. (The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2016). Exposure to violence, as well as the acute stress it causes, can damage the health of those who experience GBV. The physical consequences include injuries, mental disorders, illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension or the development of insulin-dependent diabetes (WHO, 2013). Functional disorders are among the most common consequences of GBV in terms of the victim's physical health, i.e. ailments that have often no identifiable cause such as chronic pain (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005).

Uwameiye and Iserameiya (2013), itemised effects of school-related gender based violence on learning to include: being unable to concentrate, attaining lower grades, losing interest in school, fearful to participate in class activities, afraid to ask the teacher for help, exclusion from various school activities (e.g. sports), transferring to different schools, leaving school altogether, and reduced options in subject and career choices.

Psychological outcomes of school-related gender-based violence include increased risk of: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, poor physical health, loss of trust in others, high risk sexual behaviour, family conflict, self-harm, suicide, and uptake of alcohol or other drug use (Uwameiye, *et al* 2013).

Kibiya, *et. al*, (2016), discovered that in Ghana, students who experienced bullying perform worse academically than non-bullied students, students' performance in mathematics and science decreases between approximately 17 and 23 points on the TIMSS examination compared to non-bullied students. At an average score of approximately 321 points, it was concluded that bullying decreases mathematics scores by approximately 5% and science scores by about 7%.

The experience of gender-based violence on the way to school can affect attendance; parents may decide to remove their children from school if they feel that they cannot get there safely (Government of Papua New Guinea and Development Partners Gender Forum, 2012).

Sometimes teachers or other school staff perpetrate gender-based violence. For example, the use of physical discipline, or corporal punishment, is a form of violence, and it can have a gendered profile. School wide efforts to reduce gender-based violence usually include a focus on eliminating corporal punishment, this can be challenging as in many parts of the world teachers and parents believe that physical disciplinary measures, such as hitting, smacking, slapping with the hand, stick, or a belt, are good methods for reducing anti-social behaviour among children or young people (Morrell, 2001). However there is little evidence that corporal punishment is effective; rather there is evidence that corporal punishment fails to stop negative behaviour and fails to teach positive social behaviour (Gershoff and Bitensky, 2007).

Aucoin, Frick, and Bodin, (2006) were of the opinion that, when teachers use violence, it teaches children that using violence is acceptable and studies have also shown that corporal punishment, negatively affects learning, resulting in lower grades or in student drop-outs, negatively affects children's health and wellbeing, including causing anxiety, helplessness, humiliation, and fear of teachers or of schools, which damages relationships between teachers and students, resulting in decreased trust, communication and positive interactions.

Preventive Strategies against Gender based Violence among School Students

The number of years a person spends in school has been shown to have a positive correlation with a decrease in both future victimisation and perpetration of physical and sexual violence (Plan International 2012). Education increases women's employment opportunities and socio-economic status, the empowerment of women reduces the unequal power relationship between women and men which has been identified as the root cause of GBV; However the level of education is a very blunt measurement, and if not properly addressed, schools can instead turn into reproducers of harmful societal norms and practices and become unsafe (Sida, 2010).

Prevention includes raising awareness, disseminating information on gender-sensitive human rights methodologies, media and communications campaigns, and extensive efforts directed toward building non-violent, gender-sensitive curricula in primary and secondary educational institutions (Drezin and Lloyd-Laney, 2003).

According to Pedro, (2013), children and youth may produce generational changes in terms of behaviours and attitudes. For that reason, both should be observed as an opportunity for sustainable changes. Young generations better educated have a more open mind and nurture new values and intended behaviours inside households and for the next generations. School-based communication programmes should address gender norms and attitudes before they became

deeply ingrained in children and youth. According to, Nigeria NPC, UNICEF and CDC (2015), teachers are similarly an important target group, as most of them use violence to punish or educate their students. In spite of this situation, empirical observation demonstrates that there should be a channel on civic education amongst their students, namely human rights, gender and sexuality for conflict and violence prevention, such as sexual abuse in adolescence, which is a common occurrence all over the world as demonstrated by baseline data, police reports and testimonies. Through education it is possible to empower communities for engaging positively with peers and family members, increasing children and youth's self-esteem and feel supported in discussing and processing trauma from abuse and violence (Pedro, 2013).

Strategic Areas for Intervention

General interventions with the objective to improve the quality and length of education are important to prevent GBV, but they are insufficient in isolation. Targeted action is also necessary, in the classroom, with teachers, and throughout the school environment. According to Sida, (2010) and Emma, Kerr-Wilson and James, (2014), to contribute to the prevention of GBV in schools and also in communities the following strategies can be utilised:

1. Encourage educational reforms that strengthen gender equality in the overall educational system, for example interventions that include gender perspectives and tools (such as gender sensitive methods) in teacher and counsellor training programmes, and include sexuality education in school curricula.
2. Use a "whole-school" approach where several interventions are done simultaneously in order to achieve more sustainable results. Such approach should target both girls and boys. For example: - Training for teachers on how to use gender-responsive methods in the classroom is one of the keys to addressing GBV in education. Trainings should focus on raising awareness of gender stereotypes in the education process, improving abilities to analyse planning, and conducting lessons from a gender perspective. Promote the development and implementation of school policies and action plans on how to address all type of violence, including SRGBV, to specifically foster a safe and discrimination free school. Examples of issues to be analysed and addressed: managers responsibility to prevent GBV; the role of the grading and examination system, including level of transparency, for discrimination and sexual harassment; the importance of school uniforms for boys and girls for their abilities to take part in different activities, Integrate sexuality education in school curricula for primary and secondary schools. - Improve safety at, and on the way to and from school including by

- establishing a safe and violence-free environment by improving infrastructure such as transportation, separate sanitation facilities and improved lightening. Create a gender awareness counselling system that gives effective support to victims/survivors of GBV by training relevant staff. Develop a gender-aware career guidance system for students.
3. As schools and other educational institutions are directly affected by the overall societal context, interventions can also focus on involving other key stakeholders in the transformation of gender discriminatory norms, attitudes and behaviours. For example, support and coordinate existing government and civil society initiatives from different sectors working to enact laws and improve existing laws on GBV and education.
 4. Involve local communities and parents through parent-teacher associations to change attitudes and behaviours on a societal level, but also assure that educational institutions are held accountable in their preventive work.
 5. Support group education (outside school) combined with community mobilisation. These interventions usually provide training on topics like masculinities, gender equality and GBV to adolescents who in turn mobilise others through different community events

Conclusion

A gender responsive school is one where the academic, social and physical environment and its surrounding community take into account the specific needs of both girls and boys. The academic delivery, including teaching methodologies, teaching and learning materials, classroom interaction and management of academic processes, should be gender responsive. Although achieving success in the prevention of gender based violence in schools is a complex and challenging task but not unachievable if only we try to understand that they are children and adolescents that needs to be continually re-oriented about living with one another. Parents and teachers play's a major role in preventing violence among children.

As enrolment increases, ensure sufficient resources are available to improve or maintain school quality, in addition to testing and scaling up innovative approaches to preventing gender based violence in school.

Schools should have well-trained female and male teachers, sufficient facilities and materials, curriculum linked to life and workforce skills, appropriate class sizes, and safe environments. There should be effective grass roots campaign involving the use of various media such as radio, television and posters to enlighten the general public about the educational implications of gender based violence on school children.

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