

Violence in schools from a gender perspective

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Definitions

Violence is 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse' (article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Gender-based violence 'involves a violation of human rights that results in all forms of violence based on gender relations. It includes physical harm, sexual acts, emotional/psychological abuse and economic deprivation' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002)

What counts as violence in school?

- Physical
- Verbal
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Psychological

Also:

- Fear of violence

Overlapping terms:

- Bullying
- Teasing, gossip, spreading rumours
- Intimidation, threats
- Assault
- Rape
- Sexual harassment / abuse
- Sexual corruption
- Verbal abuse
- Corporal punishment
- Ostracism, victimisation
- Cyber-bullying
- Vandalism, arson, theft etc

The scale of the problem

Globally, difficult to assess due to:

- limited scope of many studies
- methodological challenges
- differing terminology, conceptualisation of the problem

e.g. regional concerns:

- Sub-Saharan Africa: sexual abuse (of girls) linked to HIV/AIDS
- Latin America: physical violence (by boys) linked to gangs, drugs and guns
- Asia: corporal punishment, bullying (largely genderless)
- USA: youth violence/sexual harassment (more recently ... bullying)
- Europe: bullying, violence (largely genderless)

The evidence: international studies

Numerous studies of **bullying** e.g. Olweus (1993) and **school violence**, e.g. Akiba et al (2002) study in 37 countries; Smith (2000) in 17 European countries, UNESCO (1997) in 6 countries. Little attention to gender dimension.

UN (2006) *World Report on Violence against Children*: 5 settings (home, school, care institutions, workplace, community) with some gender analysis

Gender-based studies/focus on girls:

Amnesty International (2007) *Safe Schools, Every Girl's Right*

Panos (2003) *Beyond Victims and Villains: addressing sexual violence in the education sector*

ActionAid (2004) (research-based campaign) *Stop Violence against Girls in School*

USAID/Wellesley Centers for Women (2003) *Unsafe Schools: a Literature Review of School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries.*

‘The Study has found that too often, violence is perpetrated by those responsible for the child’s safety and well-being—their parents, teachers, their guardians, the police. Children often have no place to go to report such violence, and no recourse when it occurs. They are betrayed not only by those who subject them to beatings, sexual violence, torture or even murder, but also by the authorities who fail to protect them or take appropriate action to hold perpetrators accountable.’

*Statement from the NGO Advisory Panel at the launch of the UN report,
11 October 2006*

The evidence: country studies with a gender perspective

Africa: at least 10 countries since 2000 (Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Zimbabwe). Most focus on girls, are small scale and qualitative.

Asia: Nepal (1997), Pakistan (2006), India (2007); most evidence from broader studies e.g. Govt of India study of child abuse (2007)

USA: AAUW (2001)

Europe: Scandinavia (2003), England (1999, 2006), Russia (2002)

Related research on masculinities and youth violence, homophobia in schools, youth and sexuality, HIV/AIDS, school health, and children in conflict also reveal gender violence

Also: regional desk surveys for the UN study (www.violencestudy.org/r57)

Frequent media reports

The importance of a gender perspective

- Violence is largely a product of social inequities, including unequal gender relations
- It is often associated with hyper-masculinity and socially sanctioned forms of masculine and feminine behaviour
- Gender interacts with other social markers of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality
- Females and males experience violence in very different ways
- Blaming the individual e.g. the bully will not reduce violence in schools

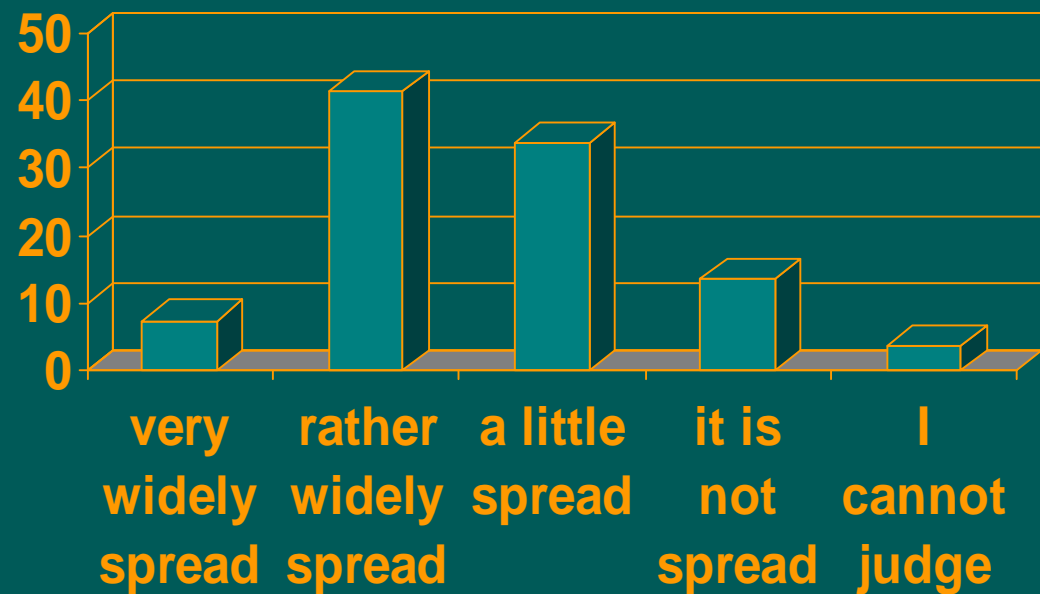
‘Gender-based violence’ suggests some forms of violence are not gendered, so is ‘gender violence’ a more accurate term?

Unhelpful data: study of sexual abuse in schools in Ghana

Being afraid of sexual harassment	Feeling safe at school					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	44	11.6	29	56.9	73	17.0
No	335	88.4	22	43.1	357	83.0
Total	379	100.0	51	100.0	430	100.0

Unhelpful data: study of violence in schools in Kosovo

teachers' opinions of how widespread violence against children is in schools

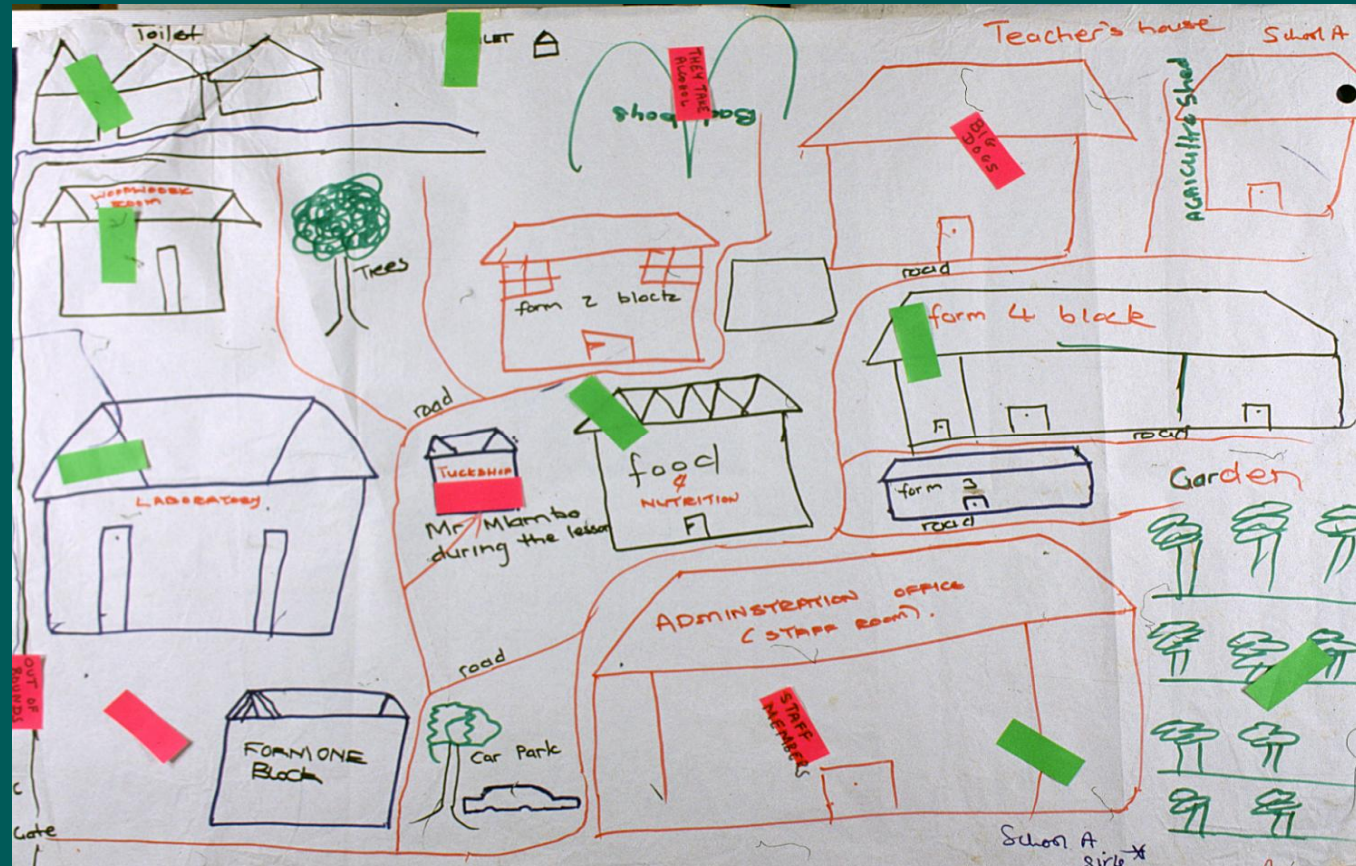


Findings from studies in Sub-Saharan Africa

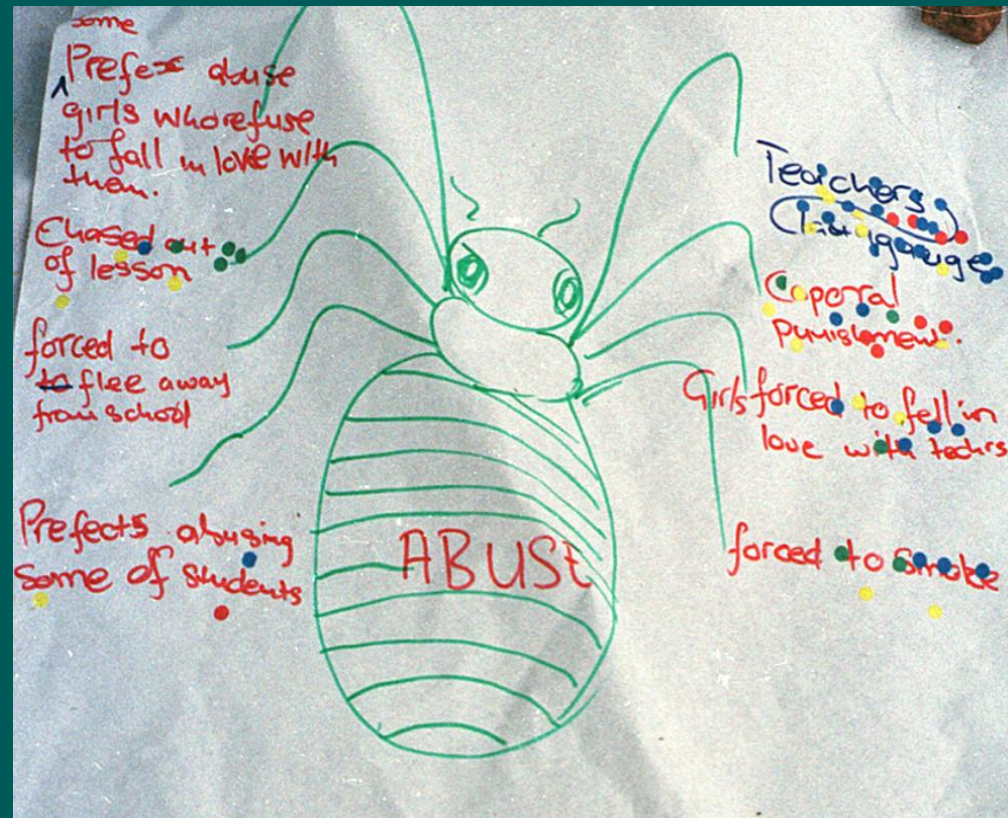
Girls report:

- Inappropriate / unsolicited sexualised touching by boys; intimidation in lessons
- Beatings and threats by teachers and boys
- Verbal abuse by teachers and peers, sexualised insults, name-calling
- Propositioning for sex by teachers, male students and men in the community
- Theft of food, money, pens, books ...
- Rape, forced sex
- Punishments by teachers, including corporal punishment
- Running errands for teachers
- Fear of violence

Girls' experiences



girls' drawing, Zimbabwe (Leach and Machakanja, 2000)



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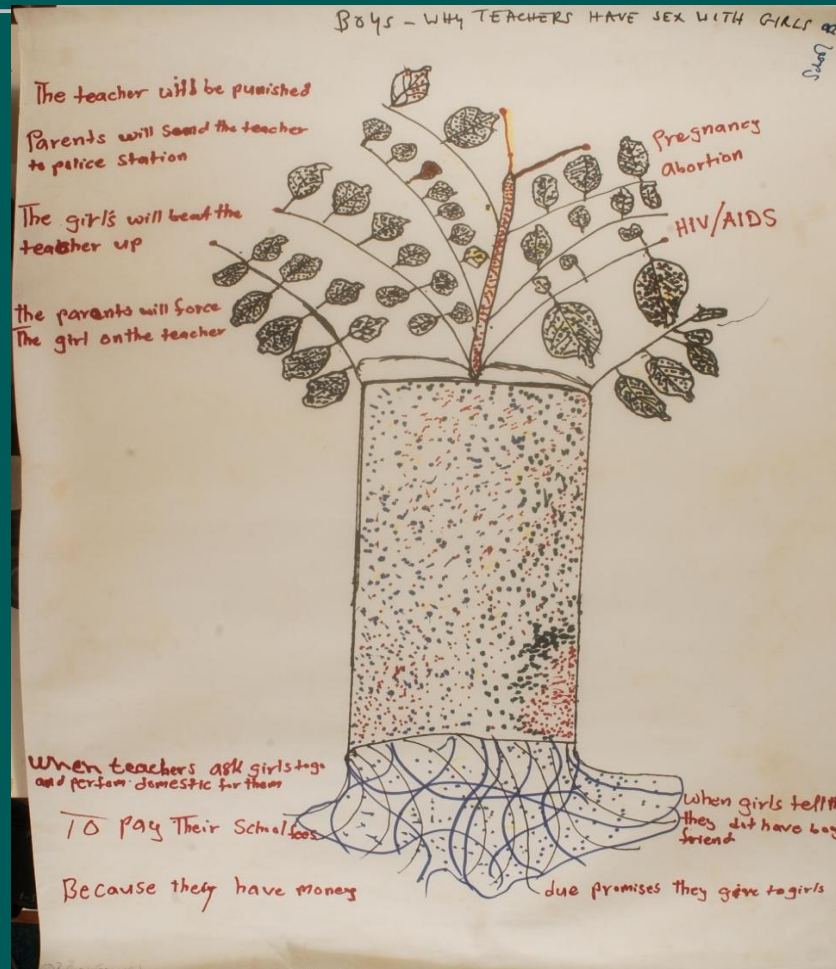
Findings from studies in Sub-Saharan Africa

Boys report:

- Excessive corporal punishment, boys targeted unfairly
- Teachers' preferential treatment of girls, boys picked on by teachers
- Verbal abuse by teachers
- Playing truant for fear of being beaten
- Negative attitudes/low regard for girls (seeking favours from teachers, e.g. high grades, free tuition)

Also some evidence of homophobic bullying/ girls bullying boys

Boys' perceptions of pupil-teacher relations



boys' drawing, Ghana (Leach et al, 2003)

Neglected areas of research

- Sexual abuse of boys – evidence from church-run schools (Europe & USA) and Koranic schools (Pakistan)
- Student-on-teacher violence, including sexual harassment of (young) female teachers and verbal (sexist) abuse
- Homophobic violence
- Girl-on-girl violence
- Sexual misconduct by female teachers

Also:

- new forms of school-related violence, e.g. cyberbullying (Shariff, 2008)
- context-specific forms, e.g. jackrolling (South Africa); acid attacks, eve-teasing (South Asia)

Why does gender violence exist?

Factors external to the school

Economic and social conditions:

- Poverty – school fees, uniforms etc
- Lack of accountability, transparency and law enforcement
- Gender inequalities, low status accorded women and girls
- Acceptance of rigid norms of male and female behaviour; tolerance of male violence
- Low awareness/recognition/enforcement of human rights
- Civil conflict, widespread violence in society
- Discrimination against minority groups (e.g. gay and lesbian/ ethnic and racial/ disability/ HIV)

These conditions are reflected and reinforced in school

Why?

Factors internal to the school

Schools as institutions:

- Schools are bounded by formal rules and informal practices which regulate behaviour
- These 'normalise' unequal power relations through hierarchies of gender and age/authority (gender regimes)
- School cultures affirm and endorse heterosexual norms of masculine and feminine behaviour, e.g. through the gendering of duties, interactions and space
- Contravening rules and accepted practices risks punishment or victimisation
- Poor accountability and weak leadership allow violence to go unchecked
- So it becomes part of school life, with males more likely to both invite and inflict violence
- One type of violence feeds on another/is reinforced by home and society

The impact

Social:

- Breeds more violence and the acceptance of violence in adult relationships
- Impedes development of social skills, self-confidence
- Increases social/economic burden on governments

Health:

- Long term physical, psychological and emotional damage; depression, trauma, anxiety, suicide; low productivity
- High risk behaviours, e.g. substance abuse, alcoholism, smoking, eating disorders
- Early pregnancy and STIs, including HIV/AIDS

Educational:

- Absenteeism, truancy, dropout, under-achievement

WEAK

- Gendered violence accepted as part of school life
- 'Boys will be boys'; girls 'asking for it'; beatings harden boys – rite of passage; girls need to 'say no' (while being compliant)
- Prosecutions and dismissal of teachers for sexual misconduct are rare; official indifference, obfuscation and denial
- Lack of transparency and information on complaints procedures
- Slow implementation of awareness raising and training for teachers
- Local, national and international initiatives inadequately resourced and supported

What is being done?

- Legislative frameworks – international agreements/national legislation
- Activities for schools, e.g. curriculum materials (life skills/HIV prevention), teachers' manuals, participatory projects e.g. theatre, film, art, video
- Improved information for parents and pupils, e.g. anti-bullying websites
- Some tightening of teachers' codes of conduct, disciplinary procedures
- Some teacher education: pupil-centred, skills-based, gender training
- NGO programmes and advocacy work
- Media exposure

What NEEDS to be done?

- Research: large scale cross-national studies, appropriate methodologies and common definitions
- Legislation: enforce/tighten existing laws and policies, global commitments (e.g. on corporal punishment)
- Intersectoral and inter-agency collaboration
- Advocacy and awareness raising: among officials, communities, teachers, students (including gender sensitisation and legal literacy)
- Involving children in designing interventions and finding solutions
- Strengthening state and civic responsibilities, engagement and actions: holistic approaches, strong leadership, greater accountability, community mobilisation
- Changing school cultures and perceptions of appropriate behaviour, child-friendly schools, e.g. Rights Respecting Schools (UNICEF)
- Challenging conventional gender stereotypes and excessive authoritarianism

Reflections and challenges after a decade of research

Early research was simplistic, mostly focused on girls, portrayed girls as victims and boys as aggressors; role of agency underplayed, differences among girls and among boys ignored; interaction of gender with other social markers neglected.

Some recent research offers a more mature and complex understanding of school violence and its links with unequal gender relations.

However, there remain challenges:

- Sensitivity of research topic; methodological challenges e.g. unreliable data (boys overplay, girls underplay sexual activity); size of sample
- Culture of denial by teachers and officials
- Complexity of gender relationships, e.g. coercion v. consent in transactional sex
- How to make an impact and ensure long-term change

Web-based resources

Anti-bullying websites: www.bullyingnoway.com.au, www.bullying.co.uk

Cyber-bullying/internet porn campaign (ECPAT) www.make-IT-safe.net, www.becta.org.uk

Multi-media for children: www.soulcity.org, www.storyworkshop.org

Activities/books for children: *Safe You, Safe Me & Our Right to Be Protected from Violence*

www.violencestudy.org, Auntie Stella www.auntiestella.org

Manuals for educators: Finding Our Voices www.unicef.org, Opening Our Eyes

<http://iirc.mcgill.ca/txp/index.php?id=83> Safe Schools Program

www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/, ActionAid Kenya

Participatory work with children/youth (art, photo-voice, video) www.ivmproject.ca, with male youth e.g. Program H & M www.promundo.org and with educators

www.theatreforachange.com (theatre), www.comminit.com/en/node/276417/38 (memory work)

Information and lobbying networks, e.g. Child Rights Information Network www.crin.org,

Global initiative to end all corporal punishment against children

www.endcorporalpunishment.org

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