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## **Gender and violence in schools**

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International research into delinquency deviancy among girls is often part of “gender studies,” but investigation of violence by and towards them in schools is much less common. It was many years before school violence was seen on its own rather than just an extension of urban or domestic violence (Debarbieux & alii, 1999). Violence by and towards girls in schools can be broadly analysed using general models for studying female delinquency but it is still special and linked to the nature of the school environment, which can foster or diminish it. The impact of schools themselves has to be looked at to avoid regarding the violence as normal and to work out how best to deal with it.

After a brief review of general research into violence by and towards girls, we shall discuss the situation in schools and end with the most recent data from the European Observatory of Violence in Schools.

### **Victimisation of girls and violence by them**

Research clearly shows that, contrary to strong popular belief, boys are much more targets of school violence than girls. A survey of a representative sample of US children (Finkelhor D., Dziuba-Leatherman J. 1994) showed that 25% of children aged 16 – and three times more boys than girls – said they had been harassed in some way or physically or sexually attacked in the previous year. A French equivalent of the big Europe-wide ESPAD survey showed that 17% of teenagers (and twice as many boys as girls) said they had been physically attacked (Choquet, M. and Ledoux, S. Adolescents. National Survey).

Review articles about school bullying are just as emphatic that boys are more involved in violence than girls, both as victims and aggressors (see, for Germany, Schäfer, M. & Korn, S. 2002, and for Portugal, Sebastiao, J., Campos, J. and de Almeida, A. 2002). The broad agreement of empirical studies on the subject is striking, as shown for example by review articles about teenagers' mental health (Michaud, P.A., Alvin, P., Deschamps, J.P. 1997).

These findings contradict the stereotype of the vulnerable schoolgirl victim but fit very well with modern mainstream criminological thinking, about lifestyles and differential association (Cusson 1983 and Cusson 2000). Boys, according to the male stereotype, usually have a more risky existence, fighting among themselves and operating more often in gangs. There is obviously nothing natural in this but it is part of building male social domination (Bourdieu 1999 and especially Bourdieu 1997). This domination is exercised first over other boys and is a key to the “daily oppression” of routine violence.

However one type of violence where roles are reversed, and where girls are not usually aggressors and much more often victims, is sexual violence. A report by the special adviser to the Canadian health and social welfare ministry about sexual aggression against children (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. Health and Social Welfare Canada, 1990) showed that between 7 and 20% of girls and from 1 to 8% of boys under 17 said they had

been sexually abused. A Swiss national survey (Narring & alii 1994) reported 18.6% of girls and 3.9% of boys between the ages of 15 and 20 had been sexually harassed or abused. A French survey (Choquet and Ledoux, 1994) of 18-year-old girls showed 9% had been victims of sexual attacks other than rape.

Researchers in Quebec (Poitras, M., Lavoie, F. A., Preliminary study of the prevalence of sexual violence in adolescent dating relationships in a Quebec sample. Groupe de recherche sur l'appropriation psychosociale, Ecole de Psychologie, Université Laval, 1994) asked 644 "heterosexual, middle class" teenagers (average age 16½) about sexual violence suffered or perpetrated by both sexes. Six per cent of girls and 14% of boys said they had used some kind of sexual violence against their partners. The attacks by girls were often attributed (Gagné, M.H., Lavoie, F., Hébert, M., 1994) to revenge (jealousy) and those by boys to drunkenness, drugs or the desire to dominate.

Girls are clearly more often victims of sexual violence. In a study of 2,626 American adults (Finkelhor, Hoteling, Lewis and Smith, 1990), 27% of women and 16% of men said they had suffered some kind of sexual abuse as children or teenagers. These conclusions match those of Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman (1998), reached from the meta-analysis of 59 surveys made of university students, where 27% of a total of 21,999 women and 14% of 13,704 men said they had been sexually abused as children.

While boys are usually the perpetrators of violence, and (except for sexual violence) also the victims of it, some researchers (mostly British and American) have in recent years been looking at violence and delinquency by girls. They have taken a different approach from previous researchers and do not see it as a media curiosity or just footnotes in a wider study of juvenile delinquency. They also do not see such female delinquency in the traditional terms of a symptom of disturbance.<sup>1</sup> Neither do they share the traditional views about converging gender roles that deny the significance of the target and that put the violence down to simply unusual and inappropriate behaviour. Theories of masculinisation of female delinquency<sup>2</sup> hold that the increase in female criminality is due to women's liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. But many studies have shown the opposite, that support for feminism is inversely related to delinquency (Cernkovich and Giordano (1979)<sup>3</sup>).

In the 1950s, gender theories emerged to dispute and counter the biological cause school and has steadily gained ground. They show that boys are socialised to be active, aggressive and independent and that ignoring or opposing convention is accepted and even rewarded among boys, while girls are socialised to be passive, considerate and dependent and to stick to the rules. In fact, studying differences between male and female delinquency means looking at how each sex is socialised and thus accepting that their delinquency will be different. Ronald J. Berger (1989)<sup>4</sup> notes that overall, delinquent boys are more often arrested than girls, except in cases of runaways and prostitution.<sup>5</sup> Whether the figures are official or

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<sup>1</sup> See Pollack, O., *The Criminality of Women*. New York: Barnes (1950); Cowie, J., Cowie, V. and Slater, E., *Delinquency in Girls*, London: Heinemann (1968). Some still attribute female delinquency to biological causes, as in Slade, P., "Premenstrual emotional changes in normal women: Fact or fiction?" in *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 28, 1-7 (1984); Binder, A., Geis, G. and Dickson, B., *Juvenile Delinquency: Historical, Cultural, Legal Perspectives*, New York: Macmillan (1988); Herrnstein, R. and Wilson, J.Q., *Human Nature: The Definitive Study of The Causes of Crime*, New York: Simon and Schuster (1985) and Konopka, G., *The Adolescent Girl in Conflict*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, New Jersey (1966).

<sup>2</sup> Simon, R. J., *Women and Crime*, Lexington Books, Mass. (1975). [G&L].

<sup>3</sup> Cernkovich, S. and Giordano, P., "A comparative analysis of male and female delinquency" in *Sociological Quarterly*, 20, 131-145 (1979).

<sup>4</sup> Berger, Ronald J. "Female delinquency in the emancipation era: a review of the literature," in *Sex Roles*, 21, 375-399.

<sup>5</sup> He cites FBI figures for 1987 for arrested juveniles, showing boys involved in 89% of violent crime (murder, rape, fraud), 79% of crimes against property (burglary, arson, theft, car-stealing), 91% of vandalism and 81% of

from the many self-reporting surveys, boys are always responsible for more serious or violent offences.

For example, official French crime figures since 1998 show structural stability (based on changes in crime and delinquency since 1950) in the face of sharply rising petty offences and drug-related crime, connected with growth of a consumer society and resulting from unemployment and social alienation.<sup>6</sup> They also show a clear majority of males responsible for offences by minors, who committed about 21% of crimes between 1998 and 2000. In that, girls only accounted for 12% in 2000 and a little less in the two previous years. For every type of offence, far fewer girls are involved than boys. For example, minors accounted for more than a third of various street crimes over the three years but only 6% of them were girls.

The self-reporting survey of crime done by Claire Flood-Page, Siobhan Campbell, Victoria Harrington and Joel Miller<sup>7</sup> (2000) produced interesting results. Gender differences in crime were not noticeable until the age of 14, with the most common offences by girls being property damage, handling stolen goods and fighting. Theft and verbal insults by girls declined after 16 in favour of fraud and handling stolen goods, which remained common after the age of 21 as all other female crime fell. These findings confirmed those of David P. Farrington<sup>8</sup> (1994), the MORI YLS<sup>9</sup> (2000) and the first Youth Lifestyle Study done in 1992-93 by John Graham and Benjamin Bowling – that more than half of boys and more than a third of girls admitted to having committed a crime, with most (boys and girls combined) saying they had committed one or two minor offences such as property damage or handling stolen goods.

Several studies show that crime rates among girls and boys are much closer to each other in self-completed questionnaires than in official statistics. Some of these studies (N. B. Wise,<sup>10</sup> 1967; Michael J. Hindelang,<sup>11</sup> 1971) show very similar kinds of criminal behaviour too. Others<sup>12</sup> (Krakovski, 1975; James F. Short Jr. 1968; F. Ivan Nye, 1958) note that boys admit more crimes than girls and often admit doing things that confirm “traditional beliefs about male and female delinquency, that males are naturally more aggressive.”<sup>13</sup> But Marc

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disorderly behaviour. Cited by Artz, S., *Sex, Power, and the Violent School Girl*, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York and London (1999). [first published by Trifolium Books, 1998 Canada] (p.13).

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of the Interior, National Police Authority, Central Police Investigations Department, Research and Forecasts Division, Delinquency Research Headquarters. *Les aspects de la criminalité et de la délinquance constatée en France en 1998 par les services de police et de gendarmerie d'après les statistiques de police judiciaire*. La documentation française, Paris 1999 (p.31).

<sup>7</sup> Flood-Page, C., Campbell, S., Harrington, V. and Miller, J., *Youth Crime: Findings from the 1998/99 Youth Lifestyles Survey*, Home Office Research Study 209 (2000). The survey is based on questionnaires completed by 4,848 people between 12 and 30 in England and Wales. A total of 27 offences were listed, including arson, theft, burglary, shoplifting and handling stolen goods, as well as four kinds of fraud. Violent crimes included threatening someone with a gun, fighting and assault. It was the second Youth Lifestyle Survey, after one carried out in 1992-93: Graham, J., and Bowling, B. (1995), *Young People and Crime*, Home Office Research Study 145, London: Home Office.

<sup>8</sup> Farrington, David P., “Human Development and Criminal Careers” in Maguire, M., Morgan, R. and Reiner, R., *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Oxford, Clarendon Press. (pp. 361-408), 2nd edition, 1997. (1994).

<sup>9</sup> *MORI Youth Survey 2000: research conducted for the Youth Justice Board*, London: Youth Justice Board (2000).

<sup>10</sup> Wise, N. B., “Juvenile delinquency among middle-class girls,” in Vazed, E.W., *Middle-Class Juvenile Delinquency*, New York, Harper and Row, 1967 (pp. 179-188).

<sup>11</sup> Hindelang, Michael J., “Age, sex and the versatility of delinquent involvement,” in *Social Problems*, 18, 1971 (p. 522-535).

<sup>12</sup> Short, James F. Jr., *Gang delinquency and delinquent subcultures*, New York, Harper and Row, 1968; Nye, F. I., *Family relationships and delinquent behaviour*, New York, Wiley, 1958.

<sup>13</sup> Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, *Cahiers sur la femme et la criminalité*, Editions du CNRS, Centre Régional de Publication de Paris, 1979 (p.90). Gender analysts see evidence in this of tighter social control of girls and women and their strong moral principles.

Leblanc<sup>14</sup> (1977), summarising 18 North American studies about gender and crime, says the gap between boys and girls is much less than that shown in official statistics.

In France, Sébastien Roché<sup>15</sup> (2001) asked youths between 13 and 19 what crimes they had committed over the previous two years. Their replies, especially when compared with official crime figures, confirmed the US and British findings, noting a male taste for violence. Roché also says girls feature less in official data, especially where more violent crime is concerned. This is not observed with offences such as theft and marijuana or alcohol consumption.<sup>16</sup> Roché confirms that gender participation in crime can be predicted and confirms Pascal Duret's conclusion that "in working class areas, male values are adopted by females."<sup>17</sup> Roché adds that "physical aggression varies more with social class among girls (sometimes doubling) than among boys (only by a third) ... For example, the sons and daughters of white collar workers do not use force as much as those of manual workers."

Roché says that girls are less often spotted or picked up by the authorities for offences, whether serious ones (18% compared with 20% for boys) or minor ones (8.5% against 17.5%). Boys get labelled, which leads to tighter monitoring of their behaviour, he says, while girls are treated more leniently by the police. However, he notes that though girls are adopting violent male behaviour, they are much more often found and arrested than boys in crimes involving physical injury.

Self-completed delinquency questionnaires help to balance official data with more precise findings about real crime and to indicate that "delinquents" are not just confined to the officially-recognised categories. Official figures show that crime by girls is very small, but to judge by the surveys mentioned here, their involvement in it is the same as boys up to a certain age and where certain crimes (property damage, handling stolen goods, fighting, theft and marijuana and alcohol consumption) are concerned, if not greater since sometimes more than a third of them admit to having committed an offence (YLS, 2000). Boys are only in the majority where serious or very violent crime is involved.

## Gender and violence in schools

Until the 1990s, British national surveys of bullying did not take into account victims under 16. Children that age or younger were only of interest if they were the bullies. Anderson (Anderson et al., 1994) was the first to show, in field-work in Edinburgh, the dimension of violence against teenagers. Over a nine-month period, half the sample were physically attacked, threatened or robbed, and 52% of girls and 36% of boys said adults had been aggressive to them, ranging from offensive looks or indecent behaviour. Racism, sexism and elitism, in the form of attitudes and low expectations towards some categories of pupils were part of the violence the children experienced. The work of Swann and Graddol (1988) on

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<sup>14</sup> Le Blanc Marc. *La délinquance à l'adolescence : de la délinquance cachée et de la délinquance apparente*. Groupe de recherche sur l'inadaptation juvénile. Université de Montréal. Février 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Roché Sébastien, *La délinquance des jeunes. Les 13-19 racontent leurs délits*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, October 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Roché compares these findings with those of Francis Bailleau (1996), who found that 32.3% of shoplifting and 10% of car thefts were done by girls, while their involvement in other offences was between 2 and 5%. Bailleau, F., *Les jeunes face à la justice pénale*, Paris, Syros, 1996 (p.151), cited by Roché, S., *La délinquance... op. cit.* (p.41). Krakovski found "no difference between sexes in the incidence of youth culture elements such as use or sale of drugs, alcohol consumption, petty theft, driving without a licence, truancy and school expulsion." Krakovski, P. C. and J. E., "Changing patterns in the delinquent activities of boys and girls: a self-reported delinquency analysis," in *Adolescence*, Vol. X. n° 37, 1975 (pp.83-91), cited by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, *Cahiers sur la femme... op. cit.* (p. 90).

<sup>17</sup> Duret Pascal. *Les jeunes et l'identité masculine*. P.U.F. Sociologie d'aujourd'hui. 1999. (p.28).

sexism showed it could take the form of different ways of speaking to boys and girls and different levels of strictness according to gender (Parsons, 1999).

Surveys of violence in schools and of bullying began to focus in the early 1970s on violence and victimisation of teenagers (Olweus) and noted that it was done by girls as well as boys (Olweus, 1993; Tattum, 1994; Duncan, 1999; Smith, 1999; Gillborn) and that this factor had long been underestimated, as Smith and Sharp pointed out in their study of Sheffield (1994). The work of Smith and Shu among 2,308 pupils between 10 and 14 in 19 English schools, as well as that of Blaya (2001)<sup>18</sup> among 1,672 English schoolchildren found there was no significant difference between the behaviour of the two sexes.

But divergences show up when other forms of violence are considered. A Canadian national survey of violence in schools (Gabor, 1994) highlighted an increase in violent incidents, the number of pupils who were armed and violence among girls. Artz and Riecken, in a self-reported survey of violence among 1,500 pupils between 13 and 16, found that 51.9% of boys said they had been hit at least once during the previous year, as well as 20.9% of the girls. Compared with the studies of Hindelang, Hirschi and Weis (1981) and Berger (1989), the boy/girl ratio went from 3:1 and 4:1 to 2.5:1. The participation of girls in delinquency and violence at school, though less than boys, was confirmed by a French national survey of deprived junior secondary schools (Debarbieux, 1999), where 7.5% of girls said they joined in extortion, compared with 11.5% of boys.<sup>19</sup>

So teenage girls are also delinquents and are much less detected by police and other authorities, except when they act strikingly out of line with “genderism,”<sup>20</sup> or the perpetuation of expected gender-based behaviour. Girls may be violent like boys, but boys are still more involved, as shown by German surveys of school violence (Funk, 2001; Spaun, 1996; Schubarth, 1997; Fuchs et al., 1996; Holtappels and Schubarth, 1996; Schwind et al., 1999; Meier et al., 1995; and Greszik et al., 1995: 270), as well as some done in Spain (Ortega, 2001) and Greece (Artinopoulou, 2001).

Bullying by schoolgirls is usually more indirect and involves less physical violence than when done by boys. They use teasing or spreading rumours. Boys are more likely to be physically attacked by other boys while girls are attacked by both sexes. Boys are more likely to perpetrate violence and more likely to be victims of it than girls, whatever the country (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1985; Nabuzoka et al, 1993; Lindström, 1995; Smith, 2002, Gottfredson, 2001). A Swedish survey on drugs and violence (Lindström, 1996) showed that about 10% of girls and 20% of boys between 12 and 13 had been attacked during the first half of the 1995 school year. An earlier study, in 1995 (The Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and other Drugs, see Andersson and Hibell, 1995), found that 5% of boys between 15 and 16 and 1% of girls had been victims of school violence that needed medical treatment. Between 12 and 14% of boys and 4-5% of girls were victims without needing treatment.

These findings echo those of the extensive ESPAD surveys in 30 European countries. Blaya (2001) showed that boys in English schools were twice as likely to be attacked than girls, with only 15.7% saying they had never been attacked the school year compared with 30% of girls saying the same thing. The boys were also attacked more times, with 8.9% attacked at least four times, compared with only 2.1% of girls, who reported verbal violence and ostracism more than boys (Troyna and Hatcher, 1992).

This type of aggression can have serious psychological effects, ranging from poor academic results because of concentration difficulties, absenteeism through fear, (Sharp 1995, 1996; Blaya 2002, 2003), anxiety attacks and temporary or chronic depression sometimes

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<sup>18</sup> An investigation of the social ambiance and violence in poor urban schools involving 1,672 teenagers (972 boys and 700 girls).

<sup>19</sup> This research was done between 1998 and 2000 and involved 7,679 pupils.

<sup>20</sup> A term used by Erving Goffman in his book *The Arrangement Between Sexes* (1977).

leading to suicide. A survey by Marcotte (2002) showed that depression affected 16% of boys and 25% of girls between the ages of 12 and 14 and that it harmed academic results, led to later problems as adults (in relationships and at work), as well as irritability and aggression. It could also lead to violence, with the victim becoming a bully (Olweus, 1993; Sharp, 1996).

This has been studied from the aspect of gender inequality viewpoint and violence against girls by Artz (1998), who says schoolgirls see their violence and hot-headedness as a way to obtain identity and recognition and that when they realise their domination and power over other girls, they cannot give it up because they would be giving up the only kind of power and satisfying status that they have (p.196). Likewise, Gelles and Strauss (1988), in a study of domestic violence in the US, say gender inequalities are the main cause of it and that fighting against sexism curbs it. Sexism and attacks on women have both individual and social consequences. Crawford (1998) puts the cost of gender-based violence in the health services in Canada at 1.5 billion Canadian dollars a year.

Sexual violence by teachers against pupils, especially girls, has been studied very little. Recent surveys, not yet published, by members of our Observatory done in several black African countries (Debarbieux 2003) show the importance of “sexual communication” in the parlance of schoolgirls and teachers. A very large study in Brazil (Abramovay and Das Graças Rua, 2003) based on a sample of 33,655 pupils, 3,099 teachers and 10,255 parents, shows how common such abuse is by teachers. Sexual harassment perceived and complained about by Brazilian schoolchildren is the main kind of violence they get from their teachers.

Sexual harassment is defined in this study as “various forms of sexual intimidation – looks, gestures, jokes, obscene remarks and displays – and abuse, such as remarks, insinuations and apparently unintentional physical contact, as well as gossip, remarks and drawings in the toilets. Pupils’ descriptions of sexual violence ranges from “games” to rape but mostly they mean “jokes” or remarks made by teachers or other pupils, and mostly by males towards females, though a wide range of sexual violence affects both boys and girls.

The authors quote many people who blame the way girls dress for sexual violence against them. “Transferring responsibility for the violence to the female victims (...) strengthens the view that sexual harassment is due to female provocation.” (p.288). This is accompanied by frequent minimisation of such violence.

One headmaster of a state school in Fortaleza, whose girl pupils complained bitterly about almost daily sexual violence, said: “I don’t know if we should say this, but a girl will come to me and say: ‘He touched my bottom, he touched my breasts.’ Sometimes I joke and say: ‘If I was them, I’d touch you too.’” (p.289).

Several pupils said teachers or other adults at the school tried to force them to do things and that the toilet area was a common place where abuse occurred. Both pupils and teachers had many examples of sexual violence or rape, notably in regions such as the Federal District (9% of pupils and 20% of adults), Sao Paulo (11% and 18%) and Cuiabá (12% and 6%). Sexual abuse and rape also took place near schools. Knowledge of such happenings made pupils afraid to go to school or even caused them to drop out. This study is especially interesting and ground-breaking, since there is still a very strong taboo against discussing such behaviour in schools.

It also shows there are other kinds of violence against girls that do not necessarily result in physical contact but involve the symbolic violence of domination, as discussed in classic works, especially French sociologists inspired by Bourdieu and some social psychologists. For Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1997, p.99), the greatest form of “symbolic” violence is when “the dominated members of a group dominated by ostensibly-rational authorities (such as those wielding the decisions of a school or citing the orders of economic authorities) are obliged to bend to the arbitrary behaviour of the rational authority.” The social order of

domination is built up by socialising genders and reproduces itself. The expectations tied to stereotypes lead to girls being systematically considered less worthy.

They are especially acute in scientific disciplines seen as “male” and the empirical work of Acker (1984) and Spear (1983) back up an analysis in terms of a “Pygmalion” effect (see also Duru-Bellat, 1990). Spear shows the effect on school assessments and marks of this lesser confidence by teachers in the abilities of girls in science subjects. Identical tests assigned at random to boys and girls were given to teachers to mark. The result showed unconscious incorporation of these expectations. The papers said to have been done by boys were usually marked highest because of their supposed scientific accuracy and good understanding of principles involved (p.62).

Physical force may seem to be less often used by and against girls in school, but sexual violence is present in a still hard-to-measure way since few studies have been done on it specifically in schools. Symbolic violence against them can be severe and merits greater public and political attention.

## **Conclusion: the makings of violence**

The surveys cited here clearly show differences in the behaviour of each sex, though this is far from involving all aspects of violence and delinquency in schools. Research shows boys are three times more likely to manifest disturbed behaviour than girls. This is a key factor, along with family problems and especially poverty, and a Canadian study said 6.9% of boys displayed it, compared with 2% of girls (Fortin and Bigras, 1996, p. 8), which also means 93% of boys behave themselves even if they are three times more likely to cause trouble.

Research on risk factors, which shows well the cumulative effect of family, social and personal situations, should not be systematically, definitively or prejudicially applied to some family types (especially single-mother families) or social classes, such as the poor. The contribution of the schools themselves to creating such violence must also be taken into account. Research by the European Observatory of Violence in Schools clearly shows that the number of girls who perpetrate or are victims of violence differs greatly from school to school and from country to country, even when social and economic conditions are equal (Debarbieux 1996, 1999; Blaya and Debarbieux 2001).

So in a sample of 36 deprived French secondary schools, the percentage of girls involved in extortion ranged from 0.8% to 13%, while the percentage of girl victims of it was between 1.1% and 17.2%. Detailed studies of some schools in the survey showed the importance of adult teams, especially stable ones, in these different female delinquency rates. The stability of the teams depends on national policy, which assigns young teachers to tough areas, far from their normal environment, and so causes a high turnover of staff teams.

Comparative studies involving England (Blaya 2001) and Spain (Blaya, Debarbieux, Del Rey, Ortega, 2002, to be published) show how this greater stability, closer ties with the community and different professional socialisation can avoid or lessen violence by both boys and girls. So gender differences should not mask other differences just as important in explaining such violence, such as those involving local education and teaching conditions. Violence by girls is built, or rather co-built, in a system where economic causes and local interactions need to be examined, to avoid attributing it absurdly and simply to biological differences, which is more society's imagination than anything scientific.

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