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## **Gender and violence in schools**

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# Gender and Violence in Schools

## A. The Manifestation of Gender-based Violence in Schools

### 1. Introduction

This analytical review will consider the evidence of gender-based violence in schools in developing countries and summarise the measures taken to address them. A central problem in identifying the nature and scope of the review is the fact that many forms and incidents of gender violence in schools are not reported as such. Most often, gender violence is not considered differently from other forms of school violence.<sup>1</sup> Identification of gender-based violence in schools as a barrier to increased educational participation, in particular of girls, in the poorer countries of the world, is recent and our understanding of its causes and consequences is not well developed. As a result, the appropriate gender-sensitive framework required to observe and to intervene does not exist, so that these least desirable aspects of school life are either left unreported or unrecognised as gender violence. There is no doubt, however, that this is not an isolated phenomenon, as studies directed at investigating a range of problems in education in developing countries such as underachievement, high pupil drop-out, poor quality of teaching and low levels of teacher professionalism, hint at its presence in schools. There is therefore a need to explore and categorise its manifestations within an explicit gender framework and to examine its impact on the school experience and student learning. Without this, it will be impossible to identify effective system-wide strategies to address it.

Cases of gender-based violence in schools may be categorised and reported differently and without reference to gender, e.g. unregulated and excessive corporal punishment, bullying and physical assault (sometimes with guns or knives) should be included alongside sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape because they are also manifestations of gender violence. Using a gender-sensitive frame of reference, gender-based violence can be broadly clustered into two overlapping categories: *explicit* gender (sexual) violence, which includes sexual harassment, intimidation, abuse, assault and rape, and *implicit* gender violence, which includes corporal punishment, bullying, verbal and psychological abuse, teachers' unofficial use of pupils for free labour and other forms of aggressive or unauthorised behaviour that is gender specific. These latter are categorised as 'implicit' because they are forms of violence which are physical, verbal or psychological in nature but have a gender dimension; in the case of verbal abuse, this may be overtly sexual, e.g. abusive language that seeks to humiliate females, or it may have little sexual content. All these forms of gender violence may be perpetrated by students on other students, by teachers on students, and by students (usually male) on teachers (usually female). Importantly, these forms of gender violence are understood and reported predominantly within a framework of heterosexual gender relations. Both explicit and implicit forms will be covered in detail in later sections of this review.

In order to understand gender violence in schools, it is also important to locate its analysis within the context of the school's culture, its structures and processes. This will allow for an appropriate level of understanding of the causes and consequences of this phenomenon

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<sup>1</sup> A recent study (Akiba et al., 2002) of school violence in 37 nations (of which three could be conventionally classified as 'developing') based on TIMSS data views school violence largely in terms of delinquency, youth crime and classroom disruption. Although figures on rape are provided, there is no attempt to distinguish sexual violence from other forms of school violence.

and subsequently the ability to intervene at the level of the system. What follows then is a summary of the relationship between gender relations and gender violence in schools, followed by an overview of the evidence of school-based gender violence in developing countries and the extent to which it is being addressed.

## **2. Gender relations and gender violence in schools**

International efforts to increase participation in schools, especially for girls, and to improve the quality of the school experience have tended to assume that the institution of the school is universally benign or at least 'neutral'. Recent research, however, shows this not to be the case. A number of studies have investigated not only formal aspects of the school which have impacted on access and participation, for example the curriculum, examinations and teaching quality, but also and more significantly, the informal school environment and the part that this plays in perpetuating gender differentiation in education. Some examples of the latter are: Gordon (1995), Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe and Chilangwa (1995), Kutnick *et al.* (1997), Miske and Van Belle-Prouty (1997), Sey (1997), Swainson *et al.* (1998). Such insights enhance our understanding of the daily life experiences of children in schools and their impact on outcomes. Understanding this dynamic and complex school context will have a direct bearing on the extent to which the incidence of gender violence can be reduced through appropriate intervention strategies.

The school as a social arena is marked by asymmetrical power relations that are enacted not only through gender but also through age and authority; additional social indicators may be ethnicity, disability and language. All are fundamental to school experiences and the quality of school life. Within the institutional culture of the school, there are norms of interaction and explicit and implicit rules and codes that guide behaviour which are re-enacted and re-enforced in the everyday life of the school. Within school the 'gender regime' is constructed through everyday, 'taken for granted' routine practices. For example, in many schools girls are predominantly responsible for cleaning and boys for digging the school grounds; in the classroom girls may sit at the front of the class and boys at the back (where it is easier to misbehave). The gender boundaries within the institution thus help to construct and reinforce feminine and masculine identities within the school. Gender identities are not given or accomplished passively but are constantly performed over time through individual and collective acts of resistance and accommodation (Butler, 1990). Examples of resistance might include boys' refusal to carry out duties that involve sweeping or washing in school, which they see as the girls' preserve, and their insistence on playing sport during breaks.

The gender regime is critical to students as they 'come of age' through rites of passage to adulthood. Gender-specific routine behaviour contributes to the production and regulation of sexual identity and forms of femininity and masculinity (Mac an Ghail, 1994). Transgressions across the boundaries of accepted gender behaviour are discouraged through peer pressure, and in some cases through violence, e.g. physical assault, intimidation, verbal abuse, deprivation (of access to resources, space etc.) and ostracism. Among students, violence is perpetrated more often by boys and on both girls and other boys, for example on boys who do not conform to dominant norms of masculinity or on girls who are not sufficiently modest and retiring in their 'feminine' demeanour. Both girls and boys play a part in 'policing' the boundaries of gender relations and punishing transgression. These boundaries are determined by the norm of compulsory heterosexuality, which the school as an institution actively promotes (Mirembe and Davies, 2001).

The age/authority relations between teacher and student are a fundamental structure of schooling that interacts with the gender regime. The institution of the school officially condones teachers' regulation and control of appropriate student behaviour through, for example, the allocation of rewards and sanctions, the distribution of their time and attention in class, and corporal punishment. In this way, by using their age/authority power position, teachers 'normalise' certain aspects of male and female behaviour. For example, fighting between boys or their intimidation of girls may be dismissed by teachers as unimportant or as 'teasing', using expressions like 'boys will be boys', rather than being addressed in any serious and systematic way. Similarly, the teachers' use of violence as a form of student discipline is also gendered in that corporal punishment is used differentially by female and male teachers; it is also received differentially by female and male students (Dunne and Leach, 2001; Dunne, Leach *et al.*, 2003). Significantly, it is often used in contravention of official rules or national policy directives.

Given the structured asymmetrical power relations of schooling, the excessive use of disciplinary sanctions can lead to abuse by those in positions of authority (teachers and head teachers, also school prefects and monitors) and by those who are able to exercise control through other means, for example physical strength or economic advantage (e.g. male pupils over female pupils or younger male pupils). In many cases, the gender violence engaged in within schools is sexual abuse. Aggressive and intimidating behaviour, unsolicited physical contact such as touching and groping, assault, coercive sex and rape all constitute abuse<sup>2</sup>, as does any sexual relationship formed by a teacher with a pupil. In most contexts the latter is a disciplinary offence according to the conditions of teachers' employment and/or a criminal offence where the sex act involves a minor. Such teachers, and others working in a professional capacity with children (hostel wardens, social workers etc.) are exploiting their position of authority and failing in their duty of care. Sexual abuse is also perpetrated outside the school by adult men (sometimes called 'sugar daddies') who engage in transactional sex (sex in exchange for gifts or money) with children under the age of consent (16 in most countries, 14 in some). Particularly important is the fact that the adult, whether sugar daddy or teacher, may be misleading the schoolchild (e.g. making promises of marriage or expensive gifts) in their efforts to tempt her/him into a sexual relationship. These forms of abuse need to be examined in the context of heightened concerns surrounding HIV infection rates among adolescents, in particular girls, who are the most vulnerable to infection. Latest estimates (UNAIDS, 2002) indicate approximately 29.4 million people are now living with HIV/AIDS, of whom 58% are women (aged between 15 and 49) and 10 million are young people. In the worst infected countries, girls are five to six times more likely to be HIV positive than boys of the same age ([www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk)). Much of the evidence of gender violence in schools comes from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) due the international attention given to HIV/AIDS in this region, where infection rates are by far the highest in the world.

This notwithstanding, it is important to remember that gender-based violence in schools is not just a developing country problem, nor purely an African problem. The work of agencies such as Zero Tolerance in the UK ([www.zerotolerance.org.uk](http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk)) and the AAUW

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<sup>2</sup> 'Abuse' is a legal term that is recognised in most countries of the world, although definitions of what precisely constitutes abuse vary; it may be sexual, verbal, physical, emotional or psychological in nature. The term 'child abuse' applies to children and adolescents who are taken advantage of by an adult (and sometimes by another child) by virtue of his/her superior power and for his/her own benefit or gratification.

(whose 2001 report *Hostile Hallways* documents sexual violence in US high schools) and studies such as Homel's (1999) review of the literature in Australia show that this is clearly not the case. It is, however, true that its incidence is likely to be highest in contexts with limited development of civic institutions, civil disorder and civil or political conflict, where drugs and arms trafficking is commonplace, or where heavily asymmetrical gender relations are culturally prescribed and gender-based violence is considered 'normal'. Where law and order has broken down, behaviour in school is likely to reflect this, with young people being routinely exposed to violence and coming to accept it as an inevitable part of their daily lives.<sup>3</sup>

Within the traditional hierarchical power structures of schooling, gender-based violence is a principal means of control and regulation, used by both teachers and students in many forms. It is integral to schools as institutions, which presents serious challenges not only to the task of its elimination but also to achieving gender equity in schooling. It has implications for the quality of the school experience and the participation and performance of both boys and girls, all of which act to sustain the gender gap (Dunne, Leach *et al.*, 2003). An exploration of gender violence in schools also needs to take into account the fact that the violence may stem from discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, age or disability as well as of gender. However, it is beyond the scope of this review to include all forms of violence in school. Thus, for the current purpose, we have focussed on gender violence which includes 'explicit' forms of violence such as sexual violence and sexual abuse and 'implicit' forms such as corporal punishment, verbal abuse and bullying.

### **3. The nature of gender violence in schools**

The few studies of gender violence in schools that exist come almost exclusively from sub-Saharan Africa. Rather than indicating that it is most prevalent in African countries, the studies are likely to be the result of a concentration of donor and lending programmes in this region, where efforts at poverty alleviation through improved health, education, governance etc. are present on a large scale, and where there are very high rates of HIV/AIDS infection.

#### *3.1. Explicit (sexual) violence*

Studies from sub-Saharan Africa have focused almost exclusively on heterosexual relations and violence against girls and have not investigated the incidence of violence against boys or against teachers. They have also addressed primarily the sexual abuse of female pupils by male teachers and male pupils<sup>4</sup>. For example, Leach and Machakanja (2000) and Leach *et al.* (2003) examined the abuse of junior secondary school girls by older boys, teachers and 'sugar daddies' in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi and found that there was a high level of sexual aggression from boys, which went largely unpunished in the schools, and some cases of teachers propositioning girls for sex. This behaviour was largely tolerated and 'normalised'. All three educational systems were characterised by a reluctance to take action against either teachers or pupils. Teachers downplayed or dismissed the suggestion that some teachers had sex with their pupils, although both male and female pupils talked about teachers offering to give girls high grades or gifts in exchange for sex. At the same

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<sup>3</sup> Akiba *et al.* (2002), however, state that their study of 37 nations shows that violence in schools has more to do with in-school factors than crime rates in the wider society.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2002) refers to coerced sexual relationships between young men and adult women, known as 'lizard women', in Zambia. Generally, these are viewed as positive for the young man's sexual initiation.

time, there was reluctance among girls to report incidents for fear of being blamed for having 'invited' the abuse, being ridiculed or victimised (e.g. a male teacher singling a girl out for beating in class because she turned him down, or threatening to fail her in tests and exams).

Omale (1999) reported similar behaviour in schools and higher education institutions in Kenya, including incidents of rape on the way home from school, teachers found guilty of sex with primary pupils and in some cases impregnating them. She reminds us of the infamous St Kizito incident in 1991, in which boys went on the rampage through the girls' dormitories in the school, killing 19 girls and raping 71 others. Hallam (1994) has also reported sexual harassment in the SSA region. It is important to note, however, that sexual violence in schools is not a new phenomenon. Niehaus (2000) documents the history of masculine sexuality as a political issue during the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and shows that sexual liaisons between male teachers and schoolgirls were commonplace in the 1950s and continue today.<sup>5</sup> Much supplementary evidence of sexual abuse comes from media coverage in a range of countries. The recent furore over sexual abuse by UN workers in refugee camps has further highlighted the issue.

Other studies from sub-Saharan Africa and other regions of the world have uncovered explicit gender-based violence in schools as part of more general research into girls' education. It is interesting to note how the issue of sexual violence is raised: Brenner (1998) talks of 'girls trying to get too close to male teachers'; Anderson-Levitt *et al.* (1998) mention 'a tiny minority' of male teachers pressurising girls for sexual favours and of boys 'teasing' girls who have rejected their sexual advances. The issue is dealt with largely as an 'aside' which is barely worthy of comment and the terms chosen to describe it appear to be an attempt to downplay its seriousness or suggest that the authors are too embarrassed to mention it. It is also of note that many studies of girls' education provide evidence of high levels of pregnancy and drop-out among girls but very few make the link with sexual harassment and coercive or transactional sex.

Some of the most interesting studies of adolescent violence are located outside the school setting within discussions of adolescent sexuality. For example, Wood and Jewkes' (1998) study of violence in heterosexual relationships among pupils in a South African township found that physical assault, rape, and coercive sex had become the norm, making it very difficult for young women to protect themselves against unwanted sexual intercourse, pregnancy, HIV infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Masculine prowess was largely defined by numbers of sexual partners or claimed conquests, choice of main partner, and ability to control girlfriends. As a result, multiple sexual partners featured in intensely competitive struggles for position and status within the male peer groups. The boys clearly saw sex as their right and so forced sex was legitimate. Girls found it difficult to escape from violent relationships because of the status attached to being in a relationship and fear of reprisals. At the same time, in accepting this subordinate relationship girls were showing themselves to be complicit in the construction of their own unequal gender

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<sup>5</sup> In Africa, cross-generational sexual relationships between young girls and much older men are commonplace and often involve transactional exchanges (Luke and Kurz, 2002); this tradition may blur the boundary between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in a school setting, especially as social norms regarding sex outside marriage are changing.

relations. Mensch *et al.* (1999), in a study of pre-marital sex in Kenya, cite a report where one third of 10,000 girls reported that they were sexually active, of whom 40% said that their first sexual encounter was forced. CIET, a South African NGO running a community project in Johannesburg, found that one in four adolescent men in a sample of 30,000 male and female youth claimed to have had sex without a girl's consent before the age of 18 (Dreyer, 2001). The WHO World Report on Violence and Health (2002), referring to studies in parts of Nicaragua, Peru, Indonesia, Tanzania, South Africa, Mexico, Zimbabwe and the UK, suggests that 'up to one-third of adolescent girls report forced sexual initiation' (p.18).

Other studies on HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Bennell *et al.*, 2002, on Botswana, Malawi and Uganda; Mirembe and Davies, 2001, on Uganda) have similar findings which expose adolescent sexual violence in schools (see also special issues of the South African journals *Agenda*, 53, 2002 and *Perspectives in Education*, 20,2, 2002). Clearly in this context, there is an important contradiction between the school as a location for high risk sexual practice and the school as an effective forum for teaching about and encouraging safe sex.

Beyond sub-Saharan Africa, the evidence of sexual violence is very sketchy. Save the Children in Nepal has worked with girls who reported being harassed by boys at school and subject to inappropriate touching by male teachers (including on the buttocks and breasts) and undoing of girls' brassieres (Save the Children Fund, n.d.). Fox (1997) found that female students in Papua New Guinea fear sexual assault and violence in schools and in society generally, and feel threatened by male teachers' sexual advances and by unemployed youths on their way home from school. Evidence that teachers are not just the perpetrators of violence but also its victims comes from a USAID (1999) report of girls' access to primary school in rural areas of North West Pakistan, where female teachers are frequently threatened or assaulted in the villages where they work and are frightened to leave the school. Some teachers were under pressure to marry local men who seek financial gain from the teacher's salary.

### *3.2 Implicit gender violence*

There is a wide range of implicit violence in schools which is perpetrated by teachers and students. Bendera, Maro and Mboya (1998) looked at gender and violence in selected primary schools in six areas of Tanzania, which included insults and verbal abuse, stealing money, food and stationery. Bunwaree (1999) found high levels of verbal abuse in schools in Mauritius; this was also found by Leach and Machakanja (2000) in Zimbabwe and was particularly prevalent among female teachers, who often preferred to use it rather than corporal punishment. Brenner (1998) studied gender differences in classroom interaction in Liberia and Anderson-Levitt *et al.* (1998) examined factors affecting girls' participation in schooling in Guinea. Some studies have uncovered gender violence while investigating underachievement, e.g. Gordon (1995) in Zimbabwe, Dunne, Leach *et al.* (2003) in Botswana and Ghana. Terefe and Mengistu (1997) look at violence in secondary schools in Ethiopia, and Human Rights Watch (2001) in South Africa. With the exception of the latter, they are all small scale studies.

Corporal punishment is the most widely reported form of implicit gender violence in schools and there are numerous studies and reports documenting its abuse worldwide. There is evidence of very widespread use of corporal punishment in many of the above reports. This is reported against girls even where it is banned e.g. in Zimbabwe (Leach and

Machakanja, 2000) and there are cases where teachers get students to give corporal punishment to other students (Anderson-Levitt *et al.*, 1998). Beyond sub-Saharan Africa, reports of violence in schools exhibit only slight, if any, consideration of gender in the analysis and are largely interpreted within gender-blind frameworks of school discipline and security (e.g. Ohsako, 1997), or of human or children's rights. A UNICEF overview of school corporal punishment in seven countries in South Asia (2001) found examples of excessive forms of corporal punishment such as tweaking ears and slapping, and in Bangladesh and in Pakistan there were reports of children being put in chains and fetters. A 1998 government report in India cited in the UNICEF document cited above noted that physical and verbal abuse was often directed at lower caste pupils by higher caste teachers.

The nexus of gender, age/authority relations (which is often further complicated by caste, socio-economic status, ethnicity etc. depending on the location and the circumstances) is crucial to an understanding of the gendered nature of corporal punishment. A report by Kuleana (1999) (a children's rights organisation) investigating corporal punishment in seven schools in Tanzania offers some clues. The beating of girls was rationalised by a few of the girls and women interviewed as being part of their socialisation into becoming respectful and obedient wives and mothers. Conversely, the harsh beating of male students by male teachers could be viewed both as performance of domination by an adult male in authority over a juvenile male in an inferior position, and as a juvenile male's initiation into adulthood. This latter interpretation is underscored by comments by (male) teachers and head teachers that corporal punishment can be used to 'toughen' them (UNICEF, 2001).

It is precisely this 'coming-of-age' that makes some older boys contest a teacher's authority (Kuleana, 1999), particularly a female teacher's, as gender takes precedence over authority (Mirembe and Davies, 2001; Dunne, Leach *et al.*, 2003). Such performances of masculinity are also evident in relations between students where the boys subject the girls to a range of physical and other forms of implicit violence. In parts of Africa, prefects too are often encouraged to enforce discipline in the absence of the teacher and to beat other students (Kuleana, 1999; Bendera *et al.*, 1998). Peer violence, especially through authority and gender relations, is condoned and discipline thus blurs with bullying. This is associated largely with student interactions, including male on female as well as older male student on boys in the lower classes. The absence of evidence of girl on girl violence presents girls as innocent victims, although they may in fact be complicit in such acts. Bullying takes a variety of forms including verbal and physical violence. Examples include the appropriation of space and resources in the classroom and school compound, the use of teacher time, boys shouting down girls trying to answer teacher questions and public ridicule. In Latin America bullying is manifest in extreme forms of violence e.g. gun culture and male gang conflict.

#### **4. The scale of gender violence in schools**

##### *4.1 Explicit gender violence*

As regards the scale of gender violence in schools and whether it is endemic in educational systems across the developing world is difficult to answer, given that this is largely uncharted territory. The Akiba *et al.* (2002) study of school violence in 37 mostly industrialised nations found that it is widely prevalent, while the six case studies provided by Ohsako (1997) (all but one in the developing country category) reported sharp increases to what were in some cases already very high rates. However, there are no surveys that specifically examine gender violence in schools. Most countries gather statistics on sexual

assault and rape of children but their published statistics do not identify whether the victims are school children, nor where the rape took place. However, domestic violence, mostly against women and children, is well documented in most societies, as is sexual violence in situations of civil conflict (where rape is a common form of retribution) and in many social institutions, including religious organisations, children's homes, prisons, the military and refugee camps. Region-specific forms of violence such as dowry deaths and acid attacks in South Asia and jackrolling (ritualised kidnapping and gang rape) in South Africa may implicate women as well as men. Given the school's role in the production and reproduction of forms of social relations and social control, it would be surprising therefore if gender violence was not endemic across the education sector in all countries, but in more overt and aggravated forms in certain schools and locations. As schools are not immune from social forces in the outside world, it would not be surprising that increased poverty and unemployment, family disintegration, migration, AIDS, divorce etc. contribute to increased violence in schools.

Most of the statistical evidence on sexual violence against schoolchildren comes from sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Kenya Gender Series briefing book on violence and abuse against women, men and children documents physical and sexual abuse throughout the life cycle and in all locations (Population Communication Africa, 2002). According to Terefe and Mengistu in Ohsako (1997), 20% of the 240 violent incidents reported in schools in and around Addis Ababa in 1996 were of attempted rape.

South African society is well known to have very high levels of violence, including rape. The Human Rights Watch report (2001) entitled *Scared at School* has a wealth of statistics on rape but does not provide school specific data. It cites one research study which states that from 1996 to 1998, girls aged 17 and under constituted approximately 40% of reported rape and attempted rape victims nationally. The South African Police Service in 1998 reported that rape accounted for one third of all serious offences against children and another police report stated that girls aged 12-17 constituted the highest ratio of rape cases per 100,000 with 472 cases per 100,000 nationally (in Western Cape this was nearly 900 per 100,000). It also noted that young children are increasingly perpetrators of sexual violence. A recent article in the UK medical journal *The Lancet* by Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga and Bradshaw (2002) reported on a 1998 study of the frequency of rape among a nationally representative sample of 11,735 South African women aged 15-49: this found that, of the 159 women who had been the victims of child rape (under the age of 15), 33% had been raped by teachers. Young girls are increasingly targeted in locations where HIV/AIDS prevalence is high because they are seen to be free of the AIDS virus; the myth that sex with a virgin cures AIDS has led to the rape of very young infants.

Shumba (2001) analysed reported incidents of child abuse by teachers in Zimbabwe, covering sexual, physical and emotional abuse. On the basis of 246 reported cases of abuse by teachers in secondary schools between 1990 and 1997, 65.6% were cases of sexual intercourse with pupils, 1.9% cases of rape or attempted rape and the remainder were cases of inappropriate teacher conduct (writing love letters, fondling, kissing and showing pornographic material to pupils). A Ghana survey of violence against women and adolescent girls reported that 49% of the 481 adolescent girls surveyed had been touched against their will at some time in their lives, 12 % of the offenders being pupils and 2% teachers; 4% of sexual assaults on adolescent girls were by fellow pupils and 2% by teachers (Appiah and Cusack, 1999: 69).

In Latin America, the World Bank country study of Ecuador (2000) reports that 22 per cent of adolescent girls were victims of sexual abuse in an educational setting. Salas in Ohsako (1997) reports high levels of sexual abuse in the Latin American countries covered by the report (Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru) but not within the school context. However, since reports on domestic violence in the region point to a high percentage of sexual abuse and rape of women by men, it would not be unreasonable to presume that it is also an issue in schools, which has yet to be researched. The school violence that is reported in Latin America is largely seen as political violence or related to gangs and drug trafficking, not as gender violence.

There are indications that boys too are victims of sexual abuse in schools. A UN study (2001) on sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people in Pakistan reported boys being sexually abused by teachers; the predominance of single sex schooling would suggest that the perpetrators were male, although it is not stated. Also in Pakistan, a USAID (1999) evaluation of a programme to improve girls' access to primary schools in rural areas in the North West of the country reported that some boys are enrolled in girls' schools because families believe that female teachers are 'less likely to be sexually abusive or violent' (p. 13). In a large nationwide survey on peer sexual harassment in Jewish and Arab state schools in Israel (Zeira *et al.*, 2002), interestingly, boys reported much higher levels of sexual harassment (between 21 and 50.5%) than girls (between 11.4 and 35.7%). Sexual assault and rape were not included in the survey; nor were respondents asked to identify the sex of the perpetrator. Reports of the coercion of boys or young men into sex by older women have also been reported in the wider society (WHO, 2002) so it is possible that such abuse also occurs in schools.

Another un- or under-reported area of school gender-based violence is that which is directed at gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgender pupils, particularly since the existence of people outside the heterosexual 'norm' is denied or criminalised in many countries. However, a recent report by Human Rights Watch and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (HRW & IGLHRC 2003, pp. 107-109) investigating such rights violations in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa highlights its prevalence in schools in all these countries. Gay pupils interviewed frequently experienced physical or verbal abuse or harassment from peers, teachers and, on occasions, even from head teachers. In Namibia, nearly all gay and lesbian interviewees had experienced some form of gender-based discrimination. While gay pupils feared physical or verbal harassment more, lesbian pupils feared sexual violence. As one lesbian pupil explained, there is a popular myth that rape by a man will make a lesbian 'straight'. The Director of Sister Namibia, a women's rights NGO, reported that most black lesbians she knew had dropped out of school. In Uganda there have been cases of gay/lesbian students being expelled from school on account of their sexual orientation (Mirembe and Davies, 2001).

In their study of a Ugandan boarding school, Mirembe and Davies (2001) note that not only are homosexuals ostracised, but the term 'homosexual' is also used as a term of abuse for boys who refuse to or do not have girlfriends. Morrell (1998) recounts similar behaviour in South Africa.

As with heterosexual gender violence, this is neither an exclusively African nor a developing world phenomenon (see HRW 2002b for similar reports from the US, UK, France, Australia and New Zealand) In Brazil, high rates of gender-based violence,

including murder, have been recorded against lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people in society more generally ([www.ilga.org](http://www.ilga.org)) while similar press coverage on attacks reported in other countries in Latin America and Asia point to a worldwide societal phenomenon. This is likely to be as much an issue *in* school as it is out of school and is an area of gender-based violence which needs to be further researched and addressed.

#### 4.2 *Implicit gender violence*

Corporal punishment is the most widely reported form of implicit gender violence in schools and there are numerous studies and reports documenting its abuse worldwide. Although difficult to assess the scale, many qualitative studies indicate the institutionalisation of implicit forms of gender violence in schools. The widespread incorporation into formal and informal aspects of daily life in schools normalises violent gender and age relations. The few studies that have been carried out suggest that much gender violence in schools is unreported or under-reported; students fear victimisation, punishment or ridicule (HRW, 2001; Leach *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, girls might not report some incidents of abuse because they have been ‘normalised’ to the extent that they don’t recognise them as violations and the *laissez-faire* attitude of teachers around the ‘natural’ inter-relations between boys and girls results in their non-intervention in incidents of implicit gender violence, usually against girls (Humphreys, 2003).

Similarly, violence perpetrated against young female teachers by male teachers, and also by (older) male pupils goes unreported. The study by Dunne, Leach *et al.* (2003) and also a report on retention of female teachers in rural areas of Ghana by Casely Hayford (2001) suggest that these might not be isolated cases. Dunne, Leach *et al.*’s study also shows that boys often refuse to be punished by female teachers. Their analysis suggests that the boys’ performances of masculinity attempt to subordinate female teachers according to the gender order in school and society and thus challenge the female teachers’ authority position in the school hierarchy. In some cases this gender hierarchy is reinforced by the female teachers using their male colleagues to administer corporal punishment on their behalf.

There have also been several quantitative studies on the issue, for example in Malaysia (Ahmad & Salleh, 1997), in Korea and China (Kim *et al.*, 2000) and in Israel (Benbenishty *et al.*, 2002), but these reports do not give gender-disaggregated data, nor is there any exploration of the gender-differentiated dynamics of the teachers and the pupils involved.

Even in countries which have abolished corporal punishment in schools, it is widely practised, e.g. in China (Kim *et al.*, 2000) and in Pakistan (UNICEF, 2001). In other countries where corporal punishment is permitted, it is usually specified that it should be administered as a last resort and according to strict guidelines. These regulations, however, are frequently contravened as pupils are reportedly kicked, punched, slapped or hit with instruments other than the official cane (Tafa, 2002; HRW, 2002b). In The Human Rights Watch (1999) investigation into corporal punishment in 20 schools in Kenya, only one school was found to be applying corporal punishment according to the regulations. The numerous reports of violations of corporal punishment regulations in Africa (Youssef *et al.*, 1998; HRW, 1999; Chianu, 2000; Tafa, 2002) are supplemented by evidence of its widespread use and abuse by teachers in Asia (UNICEF, 2001).

Other forms of physical punishment include being forced to ‘frog jump,’ a practice banned on women even in military camps in Tanzania and yet practised in schools (Kuleana,

1999), or '*murgha banana*', a punishment reported in North West Pakistan where the child is made to squat down, buttocks raised ready to be beaten while holding on to their ears with their hands. (NGOs' Coalition on Children's Rights, 2001).

The Kenya Gender Series briefing books report high levels of physical violence; 65% of 'out of home' physical abuse takes place at school and is perpetrated by peers and teachers (Population Communication Africa, 2002). In a survey of eight junior and senior secondary schools in Ethiopia, 72% of student respondents said that girls were the main victims of school violence (Terefe and Mengistu, 1997). Evidence from the previous section strongly supports this finding in terms of explicit gender violence and this is also likely to be the case for implicit forms of gender violence, especially bullying by peers. The majority of studies, however, indicate that boys experience more frequent and harsher forms of corporal punishment from teachers (Youssef *et al.*, 1998; Lloyd *et al.*, 2001; Benbenishty *et al.*, 2002). Occasionally, these have resulted in serious injury, loss of consciousness, hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death (HRW, 1999; Kuleana, 1999; Chianu, 2000).

Boys are also more likely to be involved in public acts of implicit gender violence in the school and classroom. In South America, the dominant male culture in the region is 'machismo', which is significant in the construction and performance of a form of hyper-masculinity (Welsh, 2001). Widespread male on male violence contributes to the highest regional murder rate which is usually associated with extreme poverty, unemployment, crowded living conditions (Rogers, 1999) and drug related crime. Often violence from gang members outside the school moves into schools, as students and teachers are subjected to explicit and extreme forms of bullying through threats of, and actual physical violence (Guimarães, 1996; Webb, 1999). In some cases schools are controlled by local gangs who simultaneously offer protection from rival gangs. Similarly, intrusions from the wider society occur in school in contexts of civil conflict e.g. abduction of students from schools in Congo (HRW, 2002) and the burning of girls' schools in Afghanistan (UN Commission on the Status of Women, 2003). Again in these studies, there is limited attention to the gendered dimensions of this violence.

### **5. Impact of gender violence in schools**

It is only through the above named studies that we can assess the impact of gender violence in schools. They suggest that gender violence is an important cause of poor performance and drop-out, although it is difficult to establish cause and effect. The study by Dunne, Leach *et al.* (2003) on the impact of gendered experiences on retention and achievement found that gender violence in the form of sexual intimidation, verbal abuse and physical assault was a significant contributor to irregular attendance and underachievement of girls. Pregnancy (which in some cases may be the result of sexual abuse) has been identified in other studies also, along with early marriage, as a major reason for girls' drop-out. Schoolgirls who became pregnant rarely returned to school. Boys developed strategies to avoid excessive corporal punishment, of which truancy was the most common; this also led to permanent drop-out in some cases.

The same study shows how the manipulation of gendered space by boys both inside and outside the classroom constrained girls' participation in lessons while boys themselves are distracted by the need to confirm their masculinity through performances of disrupting the lesson, demanding the teacher's attention and distraction (boys sitting at the back of the class and gossiping and eating snacks). Other studies report that boys resent girls being

'favoured' by male teachers (Brenner, 1998; UNICEF, 2002) and that seeing male teachers proposition female students encourages them to behave likewise (Leach and Machakanja, 2000); this may, in turn, contribute to further bullying and sexual harassment. So, for both girls and boys, the gender relations that are played out in the school serve to reduce academic performance.

A number of the above studies also show that teachers' widespread use of verbal abuse (especially by female teachers who resort to verbal abuse rather than corporal punishment) generates low self-esteem and is found by many pupils to be more hurtful than corporal punishment. Loss of self-esteem may also stem from teachers' low opinion of either male or female students, e.g. in Zimbabwe, Gordon's (1995) study found that some teachers viewed girls as less able academically, as lazy and as lacking in concentration; they were said to 'only think about boys'. The HRW *Scared at School* (2001) study reports the consequences of gender violence on girls in South Africa as including disrupted education (absenteeism, changing schools, drop-out), ridicule by classmates (especially taunting by boys), diminished school performance through trauma, emotional or behavioural disorder, and risk to health.

## **B. Measures to Address Gender based Violence in Schools**

As has already been stated, studies specifically about gender-based violence in schools have only been carried out in a very small number of countries in the developing world, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, measures to tackle the problem are equally sparse and concentrated in the same countries, in particular where the issue has received most publicity, and donor funding has been made available<sup>6</sup>. Because the existence of widespread gender-based violence in schools is not fully recognised, or is classified as, for example, bullying, lack of discipline, youth crime and excessive corporal punishment, it is unlikely that many governments will have addressed the issue explicitly at the policy level. It has not been possible within the scope of this review to investigate fully whether any Ministries of Education have developed such a policy and so what follows is by necessity partial. There is no doubt, however, that the country that has made the most effort to develop interventions to tackle the issue is South Africa, largely within the context of HIV/AIDS.

### *1. National initiatives*

Ministries of Education have policies on school discipline and codes of conduct for teachers that outline procedures for disciplinary measures, sanctions and prosecution in cases of teacher misconduct. However, all the evidence from the reports cited above points to a lack of enforcement, with efforts at the national level to tackle teacher misconduct being patchy at best. The studies from sub-Saharan Africa (and regular media coverage) suggest that prosecutions of teachers for having sexual relations with their pupils, or for sexual assault or rape are rare, that those few that are followed up take years to progress through the courts and that they do not often end in dismissal. There is a lack of political will to tackle the issue and much shifting of responsibility from one government office to another (HRW, 2001; Leach *et al.*, 2003). Cumbersome bureaucracy, a backlog of cases and a reluctance to confront the problem mean that the only punishment a teacher found guilty of sexual abuse is likely to suffer is transfer to another school. At the school level,

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<sup>6</sup> See Mirsky (2003) *Beyond Victims and Villains: addressing sexual violence in the education sector*, for additional examples of interventions.

head teachers are reluctant to report cases as they know it will lead to lengthy paper work and possibly unwanted media attention. Through their inaction, education officials and Ministries are implicated in perpetuating gender violence in schools. Many charges against teachers for sexual misconduct with a pupil are dropped by parents themselves, who either prefer to make a financial settlement with the teacher, or who find the court proceedings too onerous, time consuming, incomprehensible and/or expensive. Police units tasked with tackling rape cases of children report that parents drop cases at the last minute and teacher unions fight to defend teachers accused of rape (Leach *et al.*, 2003). Communities also find it difficult to report teachers or head teachers for misconduct, whether for sexual abuse, excessive corporal punishment or misappropriation of school funds. As for sanctions against students, although a girl who becomes pregnant will have to leave school, the boy is rarely required to do likewise, even in countries such as Botswana where there is a policy that he should. National policies in sub-Saharan Africa to allow for the re-admittance of schoolgirl mothers appear not to be working effectively (See Chilisa, 2002).

Student on student violence is often shrugged off as part of growing up, except where it involves severe injury or the use of weapons, when it is likely to result in dismissal. As for implicit forms of gender violence such as corporal punishment by teachers and bullying by students, as the above has made clear, both are endemic in many educational systems and are largely seen as a necessary part of school life.

Although most governments have made explicit commitments to meeting the goal of gender equity in education, and some are taking active steps on gender mainstreaming at the policy formulation and implementation stages, there is little evidence of national strategies and/or examples of good practice specifically to tackle gender violence in schools. South Africa stands out in that the government has recently introduced initiatives to address it by banning corporal punishment, developing a National Crime Prevention Strategy for schools and requiring through the Employment of Educators Act the dismissal of teachers found guilty of serious misconduct, including sexual assault of students (HRW, 2001: 7). However, it has yet to produce a national policy on gender violence in schools (although Western Cape province has developed one). Evidence also from Uganda (Hyde *et al.*, 2001) suggests that resolve by the Ministry of Education there to address the issue, leading to the dismissal/expulsion and imprisonment of some teachers and male students who have had sex with under-age girls, has had a positive impact in reducing sexual misconduct and violence in schools.

There is also little evidence that Ministries of Education have incorporated topics about gender violence in schools in their curricula. South Africa's Curriculum 2005 has tried to do this within the context of its Life Skills programme for schools. The Department of Gender Equity in the Education Department has produced a training manual for use by teachers and other educators entitled *Opening Our Eyes: Addressing Gender-based Violence in South African Schools* (Mlamleli *et al.*, 2001). A national NGO, CIET (Community Information Empowerment and Transparency Foundation) has also developed two training models for primary school teachers on the topic of 'Gender and Conflict'. The 'Safer Schools' Intervention (Khoza, 2002: 76) is seeking to tackle the issue 'through a holistic intervention to address all forms of violence and crime in schools'.

Beyond the sphere of government policy, there have been a number of national initiatives using the media which have tackled gender violence among adolescents and developed associated materials for use within schools. Again from South Africa, the best known

example is Soul City ([www.soulcity.org.za](http://www.soulcity.org.za)), a TV drama series set up by a national NGO with a focus on health (in particular HIV) and development issues, which has been running for over ten years. It periodically tackles issues of gender violence and rape. The project has subsequently expanded to include a radio series, a second TV and radio series aimed at primary-aged children, and packs of educational materials such as cartoon strips, booklets etc. for use in schools. Some of the Soul City materials are now used in other African countries and in parts of Asia and Latin America. Another South African national programme which harnesses popular media to tackle HIV/AIDS is the LoveLife campaign ([www.LoveLife.org.za](http://www.LoveLife.org.za)). It is designed for 12-17 year olds both inside and outside school. It has four main innovative features: LoveTrain, an outreach train staffed by volunteers who offer peer counselling and recreational services to rural towns and villages; LoveTours, a roving broadcasting unit, also staffed by volunteers; Love Life Y Centres, which also run events in schools, and the Love Games, which consist of annual inter-school sporting, debating and drama competitions. Additionally, there are regular newspapers, magazines, a helpline and a website. On-going monitoring from both these initiatives indicates positive responses from adolescents.

In South Asia, Save the Children Fund and UNICEF have used film to help boys question their views of gender and masculinity so as to develop more positive attitudes towards women and girls (Poudyal, 2000).

## *2. International and regional initiatives*

A common framework to tackle gender violence has been produced by the Commonwealth Secretariat as part of a series of gender mainstreaming manuals; this is entitled *Promoting an Integrated Approach to Gender-based Violence* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002a). While the materials acknowledge that both women and men can be 'victims' and 'perpetrators' of gender-based violence, it is emphasised that women and girls are most at risk. Education is also included in the reference manual *Gender Mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002b).

ActionAid's *Stepping Stones* (Welbourn, 1995) is a widely used HIV/AIDS prevention programme. Originally designed for use with illiterate rural communities in Africa using participatory methods, it has now been adapted for use in various contexts with people of all ages in over 100 countries in Asia, North and Latin America and Europe and has been promoted for use in schools (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002b). Feedback suggests increased awareness, improved self-confidence and attitudinal change among participants (Jewkes *et al.*, 2000; Welbourn, 2000), although in some case the facilitators have found the content of the materials too controversial or difficult to deal with.

Peer counselling is judged to be an effective way to approach sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS and sexuality, gender violence and abuse. In Latin America, Save the Children Fund has been working with the Institutes of Education and Health in Brazil, Colombia and Peru to train young people as peer counsellors to work within schools on sexual and reproductive health issues from a gender perspective. In Peru, an evaluation (Webb, 1999) suggested that the programme has led to increased levels of self-esteem, greater awareness and discussion of gender and HIV issues, and more widespread use of health facilities.

The relatively late realisation by organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention and care that they need to integrate gender into their interventions has led to the development of a number of internationally promoted HIV/AIDS workshop manuals such

as IPAS' *'Sex or Gender: Who Cares?'* (De Bruyn and France, 2001). Developed in close collaboration with the *Instituto de Educacion y Salud* in Peru, this is aimed at peer or adult educators of young people and has been used in various countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. It specifically addresses gender-based violence as one of its key issues within a gender framework which is not exclusively heterosexual. Similarly, the UNIFEM training manual on gender, HIV and human rights (Nath, 2000) presumes both hetero- and homosexual relationships.

Nicaragua has also been heavily involved in getting men involved in exploring their masculinities and developing skills in critical reflection and gender awareness through the organisation CANTERA (Welsh, 2001). This runs workshops for men to get them to assist women in achieving their practical and strategic gender needs. Using a popular education methodology, CANTERA has developed training manuals which other groups in Latin America could use. In a similar vein, MAVG (Men Against Violence Group) has flourished in Nicaragua and has now spread to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica. What remains is for men's groups to be established in schools.

There are also a number of anti-violence interventions in schools, which centre on the abolition of corporal punishment. As the research studies show, the gendered nature of both the process and the effects of corporal punishment are often not acknowledged by researchers or policy makers, although the differentiated application of corporal punishment in many countries points to a subconscious gendered practice. Corporal punishment in schools has in fact been outlawed in many countries and is only allowed as a last resort and under very strict conditions in many other countries. And yet, its practice and abuse is widespread worldwide, particularly in developing countries, where it has many advocates among teachers and parents, and even among pupils (provided that it is administered fairly and with moderation). Its continuing widespread use confirms that strong statements at government policy level and government commitments to international conventions on human rights, for example, are not sufficient to ensure behavioural change.

UNESCO is involved in an international anti-violence initiative in schools called Living Values Education ([www.livingvalues.net](http://www.livingvalues.net)). Founded by a Hindu spiritual leader, the programme was launched in 1993 to reach a wider audience and now operates in 66 countries in 4000 sites, many of which are schools. It has a rights-based approach to fostering positive self-development and social cooperation in children and young people. The programme provides activities, methodologies and materials for teachers and facilitators to use with young people.

Although not explicitly aimed at schools, the White Ribbon Campaign, which started in Canada in 1991 and has spread worldwide, is an international campaign aimed at involving men in working towards eradicating all forms of violence against women. By wearing the white ribbon, men are taking a public stand against gender violence. They are also encouraged to participate in awareness-raising and fund-raising events for women's shelters and advocacy campaigns. Some women have also been involved in promoting the campaigns in schools. UNICEF also supports an initiative to coordinate the work of organisations working with men and boys to end violence against women and girls (Hayward, 2001), some of which operate in schools. The aim of the initiative (which in 2001 listed 60 such organisations) is to foster networks and to share good practice, to stimulate the creation of more groups to combat violence, and to counteract stereotypes about masculinity and violence.

UNICEF has also been instrumental in producing excellent materials for use in Guidance and Counselling lessons in a number of sub-Saharan African countries. These include topics on sexuality, sexual health and violence. However, evidence from research in Zimbabwe (Leach and Machakanja, 2000) suggested that teachers did not like using these books as they required a pupil-centred approach which they had not been trained to use, and they tackled difficult topics such as homosexuality, which they were uncomfortable talking about.

### *3. Local initiatives*

Much of the most innovative work with young people has been done by NGOs, mostly in connection with HIV/AIDS education. Some of this work has been carried out with schoolchildren, although not always in a school setting, with the overall aim of changing sexual behaviour and developing more constructive gender relations. Again, South Africa has been the most pro-active. NGO initiatives tend to have in common the use of participatory approaches and popular media forms, including drama and storytelling. For example, The Storyteller Group based in Cape Town uses comic stories ([www.id21.org/education/gender\\_violence/index.html](http://www.id21.org/education/gender_violence/index.html)) as a dramatic tool to explore previously undiscussed topics such as rights over one's body, male violence, sexual double standards, teenage sexuality, and traditional gender roles. Dramaide, a national NGO, has used drama to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and gender among schoolchildren in Durban ([www.id21.org/education/gender\\_violence/index.html](http://www.id21.org/education/gender_violence/index.html)). The drama work allowed the learners to reflect critically on their lives and to challenge entrenched ideas about gender inequality. In Namibia, parents in one community took the initiative, with assistance from the UK NGO ACORD, to develop 'The Total Child' programme, which sought to create a safer and more conducive school environment for their children in the face of an increasingly violent world (ACORD, 1998). In Asia, the Safe Spaces project in Nepal, funded by Save the Children Fund, has involved girls in participatory research which has proved a source of empowerment for them by allowing them to identify the characteristics of a safe environment and to develop an action plan to 'take back their space' ([www.id21.org/education/gender\\_violence/index.html](http://www.id21.org/education/gender_violence/index.html)).

The difficulty with such initiatives is that of scaling up as they are by their nature small scale and expensive. Such projects have been developed by NGOs outside the formal school setting in part because Ministries of Education have chosen not to address the issue of gender violence themselves. There is therefore an urgent need for the development of national gender-sensitive initiatives to tackle gender violence in schools, which can be fully integrated into the educational system and addressed through the curriculum and teacher training. It is particularly important, in the face of the threat to young people from HIV/AIDS, that schools become an effective forum for teaching about and encouraging safe sex. That is not possible while violence is allowed to go unchecked.

In tackling gender violence in schools, a whole school approach involving management, teachers, pupils and the curriculum is necessary to ensure that the messages are consistent and reinforced by teachers and pupils alike. Teachers can be key instruments for change. However, they have their own experiences as gendered beings. To play an effective role in addressing gender-based violence, teachers need to understand and confront their own attitudes and experiences regarding gender and violence. Given that some teachers are perpetrators of abuse, and others may be victims of abuse, it is important that strategies to address gender violence in schools acknowledge and address teachers' experiences as well

as pupils', so that constructive and collaborative relationships can be encouraged. The teacher training curriculum will need to prepare teachers for such a role.

### **C. Conclusion**

This review has sought to document the extent of gender-based violence in schools in developing countries. Much of the evidence comes from sub-Saharan Africa, although, as has been shown, this does mean that it does not exist elsewhere in both the developing and the developed world. In the developing world, however, the failure of educational authorities to acknowledge its existence and to address it, in particular in contexts of weak policy compliance, low resources and entrenched gender roles, has allowed it to flourish unchecked and to become institutionalised. To prepare for effective interventions against gender-based violence in schools, it is important that broad dissemination of the analysis of gender relations and their complexity as well as further research using an accepted gender sensitive framework of analysis be undertaken.

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