



Violence Against  
Women & Girls

**VAWG**

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**EDUCATION SECTOR BRIEF**

**April 2015**



The Global  
Women's Institute  
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY





*I know education is what separates a girl who is trapped in a cycle of poverty, fear, and violence from one with a chance at a better future.*

—Malala Yousafzai (July 13, 2014, *The New York Times*)

## KEY POINTS

- Experiencing violence in schools can negatively impact girls' enrollment as well as the quality of the education they receive. Evidence suggests that sexual harassment is widespread in educational settings in many parts of the world. For example, one study in Brazil found that 8% of students from 5th to 8th grade had witnessed sexual violence within the school environment.<sup>1</sup>
- Parental concerns about girls' safety in school and while traveling to and from school appear to lower female school enrollment in settings such as South Asia, Africa and the Middle East.<sup>2</sup>
- Children who have witnessed violence at home or experienced violence have lower educational attainment. A study in Nicaragua, for example, found that 63% of the children of abused women had to repeat a school year and dropped out of school on average four years earlier than others.<sup>3</sup> In Zambia, girls who experienced sexual violence were found to have more difficulty concentrating on their studies, some students transferred to another school to escape harassment, and others dropped out of school because of pregnancy.<sup>4</sup>
- Few ministries of education around the world have explicit policies on sexual violence and harassment as unacceptable, and few have developed guidelines on the definition of harassment and how educational institutions should respond. Often, only the most egregious cases of school-based sexual violence result in criminal prosecution.<sup>5</sup>

## INTERSECTION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND VAWG

- Schools are one of the most important environments for children's socialization. Education is a powerful tool for empowerment, and schools can contribute to building respectful relationships between boys and girls.<sup>6</sup> School environments can also reflect characteristics of the communities that surround them, including gender norms and levels of violence. Across the globe, there are girls who face violence in, around, and on the way to and from schools. This violence includes sexual harassment/assault and bullying, and it is perpetrated by other students, out of school youth, teachers, school administrators, and others.
- The challenge for schools is two-fold: to reduce all forms of discrimination that contribute to violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the school setting and secondly, to strengthen the capacity of schools to promote non-violence in families and communities.<sup>7</sup> As such, the formal education system can be a key site for eliminating gender-based stereotypes in educational curricula by: providing gender-sensitivity training for teachers; creating a school environment that rejects and prevents violence, including VAWG; offering specialized courses on human rights,



including women’s rights; and fostering non-violent social relationships and mutual tolerance among students.

- Ministries of education and other policy makers, with the support of communities and schools, can engage in the prevention of VAWG by reforming education sector laws and policies, improving the institutional response to VAWG at the school level, and promoting community mobilization in support of girls’ safety and rights.<sup>8</sup>
- The education sector can also collaborate with other sectors to ensure that girls’ and young women’s well-being is safeguarded. It can also provide vital support to community-level social norm/behavior change interventions to reduce the acceptability of VAWG.



## ETHICAL AND SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VAWG INTERVENTIONS<sup>9</sup>

Any intervention that aims to prevent or address VAWG should include precautions above and beyond routine risk assessment to guarantee no harm is caused. This includes following ethical guidelines related to: **respect for persons**, **non-maleficence** (minimizing harm), **beneficence** (maximizing benefits), and **justice**



to protect the safety of both service providers and the survivors. The sensitive nature of collecting information about VAWG demands additional precautions above and beyond routine risk assessments to guarantee no harm is caused. Interventions should:

- Assess whether the intervention may increase VAWG
- Minimize harm to women and girls
- Prevent revictimization of VAWG
- Consider the implications of mandatory reporting of suspected VAW cases
- Be aware of the co-occurrence of child abuse
- Minimize harm to staff working with survivors
- Provide referrals for care and support for survivors

For further details on these Ethical and Safety Recommendations, visit the [Ethics](#) section of our website.

## RAPID SITUATION ANALYSIS

Integrating VAWG prevention and response into education projects requires an understanding of the legal, social, and epidemiological context of VAWG and how this relates to education initiatives. Project teams should work with ministries of education, teachers' groups, other governmental stakeholders, private sector partners, non-governmental organizations, local experts, communities and other counterparts in the country to answer some or all following questions:

For general questions to undertake a Rapid Situation Analysis visit the [Integrate](#) section of our website.

### Specific questions for the sector:

- What is the educational status of boys and girls, i.e., enrollment, pass, and completion rates? What type of cultural and social constraints do girls face that might limit their educational attainment?
- What is the prevalence of VAWG in schools (if data are not available, what mechanisms are required to support data collection)? Who are the main perpetrators of VAWG in schools? (These might include other students, teachers/staff, or others.)
- Are there any traditional practices, norms, or dynamics that may increase girls' vulnerability to violence in the school context?



- Are there institutional codes of conduct for teachers/administrative staff? Do these provide definitions of violence and harassment and specify sanctions for these behaviors?
- What obligations do teachers, administrative staff, and the Ministry of Education personnel have with regard to situations of VAWG?
- What are the current protocols and norms regarding the identification and care of violence survivors, particularly students? Are there training programs on VAWG response for education sector personnel?
- Is the education sector participating in any inter-institutional coordination mechanisms for addressing VAWG?
- What initiatives are being implemented in schools to prevent VAWG? Are there VAWG awareness-raising and violence prevention activities for students? For Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)?
- Do community members, and girls in particular, view schools as safe environments? Are the routes to school safe?

## KEY AREAS FOR INTEGRATING VAWG IN EDUCATION

### Policy Level

The first and most important step toward eliminating violence against girls in schools is to develop a strong and unequivocal policy statement that sexual violence and harassment are unacceptable in educational institutions and will not be tolerated, accompanied by clear definitions about what constitutes harassment and sexual violence.

In addition, the vital role of the education sector in building skills that contribute to violence prevention in homes and communities should be outlined at the policy level.

Specific actions may include:

- **Support laws and policy design or reforms to establish a role for the education sector in preventing, identifying, and responding to VAWG.** Recommend specific budget allocations for their implementation and for the resulting response mechanisms.<sup>10</sup> Monitor the impact of existing legislation on women.<sup>11</sup>
- **Support the preparation of national action plans to address VAWG in schools.** These should include sexual harassment policies and enforcement mechanisms for educators, staff, and students. The plan should also include a clear dissemination strategy to ensure awareness of the policy by all those participating in the educational establishment.
  - Ensure the plan includes mechanisms for students, faculty, and staff to safely and confidentially report violence. The policy must also include referrals to appropriate services for survivors after violence is reported.<sup>12</sup>



- Data collected in the context of service provision (including referral services) can be collected in a safe and ethical way that does not put the survivor at risk for identification. No identifiable information should be included in records. It may be useful to analyze the reporting trends from service provision institutions and, where available, compare them to trends found in [Violence Against Children Surveys](#).
- Depending on the specific country context, national action plans can be stand-alone or form part of broader “safe schools” or “coexistence in schools” initiatives, which are emerging in a growing number of countries. For examples and further information, please see the links listed under Guidance/Tools at the end of this brief.
- **Develop institutional codes of conduct** for teachers and administrative enforcement mechanisms that, among other elements, prohibit sexual harassment, sexual contact with students, or other abuses of students.

### Institutional/Sectoral Level

Efforts to improve the institutional commitment to eliminating VAWG and to augment schools’ contributions to violence prevention and response could involve the following:

- **Develop and carry out a training curriculum for teachers and school staff to build their capabilities to promote gender equitable norms as well as to detect and prevent sexual abuse.** The curriculum should include the entire teaching and administrative staff and involve parents as well as the wider community.
  - Teachers and school staff should be made aware of institutional codes of conduct, including the unacceptability of sexual harassment and misconduct within schools, as well as how to respond appropriately to students who are experiencing or witnessing violence, including abusive relationships, intra-family violence, and sexual violence.<sup>5</sup>
  - Modules on the prevention of sexual harassment prevention and gender discrimination should be included in teacher certification requirements and continuing education curricula.

#### Box 1. *Promising Practices...* Raising awareness about VAWG among youth and their communities

Papua New Guinea’s National Gender Policy and Plan on HIV/AIDS (2006–2010) includes activities that promote safer sex education based on gender equality, human rights, and consensual sex free of violence. The target audience for this activity includes both in-school and out-of-school youth (male and female). Other activities involve awareness-raising among adults and youth in communities about the negative impacts of early marriage, intergenerational relationships, physical and sexual violence against women, sexual harassment in schools and workplaces, child sexual abuse and exploitation, incest and polygamy.

*Source:* UN Women. (2012). *Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence Against Women.*



- **Foster the integration of the prevention of VAWG, including school-based harassment, in sexual and reproductive health and/or life-skills curricula for students.** This is a low-cost and effective activity that can reduce partner violence among youth, and, if combined with sexual health classes, increase safe sex through condom use.<sup>13</sup> See Box 1.
- **Promote curricular reform** to update textbooks with content that promotes gender-equitable norms and nonviolence among students and educators
- **Expand school-based counseling and referral services** by putting in place at least one counselor or teacher who can be a first point of contact for students experiencing VAWG. Ensure the counselor or teacher is aware of ethical and safety guidelines, has access to referral services (including social services), and has access to a space where student confidentiality and privacy can be respected.<sup>14</sup> See Box 2.





#### Box 2. *Promising practices...* Increasing access to counseling and referral services

A number of schools have tried to improve their response to sexual violence and harassment by providing counseling and referral services to students. For example, the TANESA “Guardian Project” in Tanzania aimed to improve girls’ safety by designating one teacher from each of 185 primary schools as a “guardian” or *mlezi* (Mgalla et al, 1998; Mirsky, 2003; Guedes, 2004). *Mlezis* were trained to counsel girls who experienced sexual violence or harassment, or who needed advice about other sexual and reproductive health issues. The program was evaluated through interviews with teachers, *mlezis*, and 1,219 students in 40 schools where TANESA was implemented and 22 schools where it was not. Over 61% of girls consulted the guardians during the first year. In control schools, not a single girl said that she would ever report sexual harassment by a teacher, compared to 52% of girls in schools with a *mlezi*.

*Source:* Bott, S, Morrison, A., and Ellsberg, M. (2005). *Preventing and Responding to Gender-Based Violence in Middle and Low Income Countries: A Multi-Sectoral Literature Review and Analysis*. (Policy Research Working Paper 3618). Washington, DC: The World Bank.

- **Carry out school-based programs specifically targeting the prevention of dating violence among youth.** Evidence has shown that school activities focusing on improving conflict management skills and changing harmful gender norms, in combination with complementary community activities, can reduce psychological abuse and sexual violence perpetration among youth in abusive relationships.<sup>15</sup> Longer-term transformative approaches within education should include social and emotional skills and learning strategies that promote these skills. See Box 3.
- **Address cyberbullying, a growing form of violence to which girls are particularly susceptible.** One study from the United States in 2010 found that over one third of adolescent girls participating in a study reported that they had been bullied online. While cyberbullying may often take place outside of the school environment, almost 70 percent of the victims reported that the abuser was someone they knew from school.<sup>16</sup> Although limited evidence is available on the effectiveness of prevention interventions, schools should at a minimum educate students, teachers, and parents about online safety, internet use and the many negative consequences of cyberbullying.
- **Employ edutainment approaches to promote changes in attitudes and behavior among youth,** including radio or TV awareness campaigns and theater. This is a cost-effective and powerful strategy for changing norms and behaviors that can be adapted for use either in schools or within the community or be used in conjunction with dating violence prevention curricula.<sup>17</sup> See Box 4.



### Box 3. *Promising practices...* Preventing Adolescent Dating Violence

1. The *Safe Dates* program (Foshee et al., 1998), carried out in the United States among youth in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, found significantly less psychological abuse and sexual violence perpetration among youth in abusive relationships after they participated in the program. *Safe Dates* consisted of both community and school-based activities. School activities included: a) theatre performances by students, b) a 10-session curriculum for students, and c) a poster contest, all of which aimed to change norms, decrease gender stereotypes and improve conflict management skills among youth. Community activities consisted of services for youth in abusive relationships, including crisis lines, support groups, materials for parents, and community service provider training.

2. The *Fourth R: Skills for Youth Relationships* program (Wolfe et al., 2009), a cluster-randomized trial carried out among Canadian students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, used an expanded, yet similar approach to the *Safe Dates* program by integrating 21 interactive classes on dating violence prevention with lessons on healthy relationships, sexual health, and substance abuse. The study found that teaching youth about healthy relationships as part of a school curriculum reduced physical violence among dating couples and, 2.5 years later, increased condom use among sexually active youth. This effective program had a low cost at \$16 CAD per student.

*Sources:*

Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C., Jaffe, P., Chiodo, D., Hughes, R., Ellis W., Stitt, L., and Donner, A. (2009). A school-based programs to prevent adolescent dating violence: a cluster randomized trial. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 163(8), 692-9.

Foshee, V.A., Bauman, K.E., Arriaga, X.B., Helms, R.W., Koch, G.G., and Linder, G.F. (1998) An evaluation of Safe Dates, an adolescent dating violence prevention program. *American Journal of Public Health* 88(1), 45-50.

- **Improve girls' safety at school.** This could entail hiring more female teachers in schools with high percentages of male teachers, and/or providing in-service gender sensitivity training to teachers, administrators, and inspectors.<sup>18</sup> (See Box 5.) Considerations should also be made as to where and how schools are built as this can impact the overall safety of students.<sup>19</sup> For example:
  - Build schools in locations perceived as safe by the communities, away from bars and areas with high crime rates;
  - Consider girls' physical safety in the design of school infrastructure
  - Ensure greater visibility by maximizing the number of windows and doors in classrooms, offices, and other spaces);
  - Provide separate and adequate sanitation facilities to prevent sexual assault in these areas;
  - Improve lighting in and around school grounds;
  - Use perimeter and access point fencing and monitoring



#### Box 4. *Promising practices...* “Edutainment”

One promising approach to behavioral change is “edutainment”—the use of plays, music, and radio and television programs to promote health and social change. The strategy, used in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, has demonstrated effectiveness in changing attitudes related to reproductive health, AIDS education, and the status of women. Edutainment initiatives can be used in school and community settings to reach a large audience with important and engaging social change messages. Nongovernmental organizations have recently begun to use radio and television edutainment to address violence against women. One well-evaluated example targeting gender relations (including gender-based violence) was the *Sexto Sentido* television program in Nicaragua. A longitudinal study of more than 4,000 young people found significant improvements in attitudes toward violence and gender equity among those who watched the show regularly. Whether it can be effective in changing violent behavior has not yet been demonstrated, but its success in other areas suggests promise for violence prevention.

*Source:* Morrison, A., Ellsberg, M., and Bott, S. (2007). Addressing Gender-Based Violence: A Critical Review of Interventions. *The World Bank Research Observer* 22(1), 25-52.

- **Increase girls’ safety on the way to and from school.** Reduce the distance girls must travel to school and establish “safe passage” routes that are patrolled. Other examples include providing school transportation or subsidies for students to use public transportation in places where use of public transportation does not increase their risk to violence. In other contexts, work with local civil society organizations, community groups, and parents to help facilitate groups of students that can walk or arrange safer shared transport options.

#### Box 5. *Promising practices...* Breaking the cycle of violence through safer schools

Evidence from “girl-friendly” schools shows that adjusting the physical school environment can dramatically improve girls’ attendance, retention, and achievement. Changes included the construction of sex-segregated latrines, clean water supplies, and an array of outreach activities to promote girls’ education. In Burkina Faso, girls’ enrollment increased by 5 percentage points over that of their male counterparts after girl-friendly adjustments had been made. Both girls and boys showed improved test scores in the intervention schools, pointing to positive effects for both and increasing their likelihood of school completion. And because the risk of perpetrating violence is linked to men’s education level, this improvement for boys can also translate lower rates of violence committed in their adult years.

*Source:* Kazianga, H., Levy, D., Linden, L. and Sloan, M. (2013). The Effect of ‘Girl-Friendly’ Schools: Evidence from the BRIGHT School Construction Program in Burkina Faso. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 3(5), 41-62.; World Bank Group, 2014.

- **Carry out sexual assault prevention programs at the university or college level.** There is a multitude of research on the effectiveness of such programs, almost all undertaken in the United States. While the evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of such programs in reducing violence is limited, they have shown effectiveness at changing norms and attitudes related to non-partner abuse.<sup>20, 21</sup> Key lessons learned from sexual assault prevention programs within university settings include:



- Longer duration interventions (several sessions spanning months) are more effective than one-off activities.<sup>22</sup>
- Professional presenters can be more effective than peers, although this may be due to peer educators receiving limited support and supervision.<sup>23</sup>
- Course content should focus on risk reduction, gender role socialization, or information and discussions on myths and facts about sexual assault rather than rape empathy.<sup>24</sup>
- In some circumstances, single-gender groups may be more helpful and/or appropriate, particularly for women. Programs should consider the goals and topics of the presentation before deciding whether to use single or mixed-gender groups.<sup>25</sup>

### Community Level

Participatory activities that mobilize communities, such as community workshops, facilitated discussions, and theater can be useful for engaging the entire community in countering harmful gender norms that condone violence against women and girls. Emerging evaluation research in Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Malawi found that these types of activities raised awareness of abuse, increased parents' willingness to report abuse, and allowed the community to confront the problem of abuse without putting individual girls at risk of retaliation.<sup>26</sup>

- **Increase buy-in for VAWG prevention and response through strategies to engage the entire community** - youth, parents, religious and social leaders, teachers, and other influential adults. Such strategies might include:
  - Parenting education programs: there is increasing evidence that parenting education programs can serve as key interventions to reduce or prevent child maltreatment. Parenting programs can also be effective for addressing antisocial childhood behaviors linked to violence perpetration later in life.<sup>27</sup>
  - Community-based workshops, theater, etc. to raise awareness of the issue of school-based VAWG, educate the community on teacher and student sexual misconduct, and decrease tolerance of sexual harassment/violence among the broader community.<sup>28</sup>
  - Disseminating official (ministry of education) policies on sexual harassment and abuse in schools to parents, PTAs, school committees, and community groups, along with the correct procedures for students and parents to follow in reporting a case.<sup>29</sup>
  - Strengthening the capacity of parent/teacher and community organizations to monitor the performance of schools, and provide social accountability on VAWG.<sup>30</sup> While PTAs are often tasked with the management of finances and resources needed to run schools, they can also be harnessed to support VAWG prevention and response activities, such as linking with district education offices to report incidents and follow up cases.
  - Engaging and strengthening partnerships and collaboration between schools and NGOs.



## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR INTEGRATING VAWG INTO EDUCATION SECTOR PROJECTS

### Guidance/Tools

American College Health Association (ACHA) (May 2008). [Shifting the Paradigm: Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence: An ACHA Toolkit](#). A CDC supported toolkit that provides facts, ideas, strategies, and resources for the prevention of sexual violence, primarily within the university context.

#### [Coexist Learning Project \(CLP\)](#)

CLP is a comprehensive and education outreach project. Its mission is to prepare students and teachers to interrupt violence in its less destructive stages.

Common Sense Media (2011). [Cyberbullying Toolkit](#).

[Doorways Training Manual](#) (USAID, 2009). Available in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian, this set of three manuals is designed for teachers, students, and volunteer community counselors. The *Doorways* program can be integrated into any comprehensive national or local plan to reduce VAWG.

#### [Ecole de la Paix](#)

This program in the DRC focuses on reconciliation, non-violence and harmonious "coexistence" in schools.

Futures Without Violence (2012). [Beyond Title IX: Guidelines for Preventing and Responding to Gender-based Violence in Higher Education](#).

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J. W. (2009). [Responding to Cyberbullying: Top Ten Tips for Educators, Cyberbullying Research Center](#).

Limber, S. P., Kowalski, R. M., & Agatston, P. W. (2008-2009). [Cyber Bullying: A Prevention Curriculum, Violence Prevention Works](#).

Milofsky, A. (2011). [The Peacebuilding Toolkit for Educators – Middle School Edition](#). United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

This toolkit is designed to support the work of educators as peacebuilders, and focuses on peace-building as well as conflict avoidance/resolution.

Overcoming Obstacles - Life Skills Program (2010). [Overcoming Obstacles Anti-Bullying Handbook: Creating a Positive Environment in the Classroom and Beyond](#). Community for Education Foundation, Inc.

#### [Peaceful Schools International](#)

Peaceful Schools International provides support to schools that have declared a



commitment to creating and maintaining a culture of peace

Plante, E.G., Banyard, V.L., Moynihan, M.M., and Eckstein, R.P. (2007). *Facilitator's Guide: Bringing in the bystander. A prevention workshop for establishing a community of responsibility.* This guide focuses primarily on engaging bystanders, the surrounding community, and preventing violence at the post-secondary level.

[Contact Victoria Banyard (Victoria.Banyard@unh.edu) or Mary Moynihan (marym@unh.edu) for a copy of the Facilitator's Guide]

Promundo (2013). [Program HJMJD: A Toolkit for Action Engaging Youth to Achieve Gender Equity](#)

While not specifically geared towards the education sector, this toolkit provides hands on activities and exercises to help youth question norms that condone violence against women and girls and can be used in a classroom setting.

UN WOMEN and World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (2013). [Voices Against Violence.](#)

This curriculum is a global non-formal education curriculum to engage young people in efforts to prevent and end violence against girls and women. The co-educational curriculum is designed for various age groups ranging from 5 to 25 years and is available for download.

UNICEF (2009). [Child-Friendly Schools Manual.](#)

Chapter 5 is particularly relevant, as it analyzes threats to children's health, safety and security and discusses how to ensure schools provide a protective environment.

### Research

Action Aid. (2013). *Stop Violence Against Girls in School: A cross-country analysis of change in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique.* Retrieved from:

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- <sup>10</sup> UN WOMEN. (2013). *A transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women’s rights and women’s empowerment: imperatives and key components*.
- <sup>11</sup> Ellsberg, M. (2008). *Violence Against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building Global and Regional Promising Approaches*. AusAID.
- <sup>12</sup> **Note:** reporting of violence against children is mandated almost everywhere. See page 13:  
[http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_final/web\\_safe\\_final.pdf](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/publications_final/web_safe_final.pdf)
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- <sup>23</sup> Anderson and Whiston, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> Anderson and Whiston, 2005.
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## PHOTO CREDITS

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