

Gender Violence in Schools 4

Malawi

Gender violence – What’s the evidence? How can we tackle it?

Studies from around the world show that gender violence is a major feature of school life for many adolescent pupils, especially girls. For girls in sub-Saharan Africa, particular aspects of this violence include sexual abuse and harassment by older male pupils and male teachers, and, in the vicinity of the school, by ‘sugar daddies’ who seek sex in exchange for money or gifts. Boys as well as girls are exposed to regular verbal abuse and insults from both teachers and other pupils, and excessive corporal punishment from both male and female teachers. Boys too may be victims of sexual abuse.

Violent schools are breeding grounds for potentially damaging gendered practices which remain with pupils into adult life. Some may themselves become abusers. When school authorities fail to clamp down on gender violence, they send the message to pupils that it is a ‘normal’ feature of life. Failure by those in authority to investigate allegations and to report offenders, lack of prosecution of teachers and others guilty of sexual misconduct, and lack of information for parents and pupils about their rights and available channels for complaints, allow such behaviour to continue unchecked.

Gender violence is a sensitive area to research because it involves sexual abuse, which is a taboo topic, one which we would prefer to ignore. Abuse of schoolchildren remains largely hidden because victims are reluctant to talk about their experiences to teachers and parents and those in authority may find it easy to excuse a lack of action. In Malawi, as elsewhere, people prefer to talk about abuse as being something experienced by others.

Girls are particularly at risk of violence and abuse because:

- m Women and girls occupy a subordinate status in society and are expected to be obedient and submissive; this makes it difficult for them to resist or complain
- m Boys learn that masculine behaviour involves being aggressive towards females
- m Girls who make allegations of sexual abuse by teachers and other men are often not believed
- m Teachers often fail to take action against boys who use aggressive and intimidating behaviour towards girls

- m Girls have fewer opportunities to earn casual income than boys, so poverty pushes some girls into having sex as a means of paying school fees or meeting living expenses. Girls who engage in transactional sex or sex with multiple partners are at greater risk of HIV and AIDS.

Gender violence includes:

- m sexual harassment and abuse
- m bullying, intimidation and threats
- m verbal abuse, taunts and insults
- m physical violence and assault, including corporal punishment and other physical punishments
- m emotional abuse (e.g. tempting someone into a sexual relationship under false pretences such as promises of marriage)
- m psychological abuse (e.g. threatening to beat a pupil or to fail them in an exam).

The Government of Malawi is committed to achieving the goal of Education For All and has greatly increased enrolments over the past decade through the abolition of primary school fees. With the help of external donors, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has put in place initiatives to promote the education of girls, which have had some positive results. However, little has been done to protect the girl child from abuse and harassment in school. The greatest gains in girls’ participation have been in urban schools. In rural areas, where the majority live, fewer girls are enrolled than boys, dropout rates are higher and achievement is lower. It may be that abusive and intimidating behaviour in schools undermines efforts to improve girls’ participation. The recent move to tighten up the rules and sanctions for teachers who engage in sexual misconduct with pupils through the revised Code of Conduct is very welcome but much more needs to be done.

Malawi has a very high HIV infection

rate. It is well known that girls in the 15-24 age group are the most vulnerable to infection. Multiple partners in sexual relations are common among adolescents and many girls and boys become sexually active at a very early age. Schooling is important in increasing adolescent knowledge of HIV/AIDS but if the school is a site of sexual abuse, it can increase the risk of infection.

There is an urgent need for a more coordinated, proactive and system-wide response to combat the problem of school-based abuse. The study revealed weaknesses in terms of linkages between the district education office and the national level response to violence and abuse in the school environment. A holistic approach is required, working with all categories of stakeholders, e.g. teachers, parents, pupils, government officials in education, health and social welfare, the police and child protection agencies, and NGOs working with women and children. The current decentralisation process, which is intended to devolve power to hire and fire teachers and other education staff to the lower levels offers a window of opportunity to address the issue more effectively.



Girls’ workshop drawing of a tree showing the causes (roots) and consequences (branches) of abuse.

Zomba Workshop

A 2 day workshop was held in January 2003 at Chancellor College, Zomba, with 31 representatives from MoEST, Ministry of Gender and Community Services, regional and district education offices, University of Malawi, Malawi Institute of Education, teacher training colleges, DFID and other donor agencies, and NGOs. The aim was to disseminate the research findings, identify suitable strategies to address abuse in schools and develop action plans and monitoring mechanisms. Since then, MoEST has finalised its revised ‘Statement of Professional Ethics and Code of Conduct for Teachers’, which includes more explicit and stringent regulations on teachers’ sexual misconduct. One NGO which attended the workshop has run a radio programme on child sex abuse and opened listener clubs in some schools; another has carried out further research into abuse by teachers in one rural district as part of its child rights programme.

The research

The research was part of a three country study of the abuse of girls in Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe. In Malawi, it was carried out in three government primary schools in one region, one urban, one peri-urban and one rural school. The schools were selected because of recent reported cases of sexual abuse involving teachers.

Interviews were conducted with 106 girls aged 10-18, from Standards 5-8 (30-40 in each school), 65 boys (20-25 in each school) and 13 teachers (6 female and 7 male) together with the three school heads. Focus group discussions were also held with separate groups of girls and boys in each school, and also with members of the School Committee and Disciplinary Committee. The police officer in charge of the regional domestic violence unit was also interviewed. A similar format was used for the research in Ghana and Zimbabwe.

The research started with a series of two day participatory workshops with pupils in the three schools in February 2001, followed by interviews and focus group discussions. The final phase consisted of a series of strategy workshops with key stakeholders in July 2001, the aim of which was to identify viable strategies based on the research findings as a way forward to tackle the issues of abuse raised in these schools. Action plans were developed and follow up visits made to monitor progress in the schools.

Sexual abuse of schoolgirls

In the Ghana study, in one school 10 out of 16 girls reported that they had been propositioned for sex by a teacher in the school, 5 reported that they knew of a girl in their class who was having sex with a teacher, and 3 knew of a girl in the school who had become pregnant by a teacher. In this school, it turned out that the guilty party was the head teacher who had been abusing schoolgirls for many years. After an investigation by the district education office, his only punishment was to be transferred to an all boys' school.

In the Zimbabwe study, out of a total of 112 girls in four schools (three mixed and one single sex), 92% said that they had been propositioned by adult men, whether strangers, neighbours or relatives, and over half said that they had experienced unsolicited physical contact or assault from strange men or out of school boys, of whom 13 had been grabbed or pinched on the breast and 7 grabbed by the buttocks. Of the 73 girls in the three co-educational schools, 19% said that they had been propositioned by a teacher and 74% said that they knew of girls who had sugar daddies. Several named girls currently having an affair with a teacher in their school.

Findings: Malawi

The research provided evidence of teachers engaging in sexual misconduct with pupils in the three schools involved in the study and of little disciplinary action being taken by the authorities to deal with it.

It was clear from the interviews that many cases go unreported and are condoned by school personnel, sometimes with the consent of the girl and her family. However, the greatest daily threat of gender violence to girls came from older boys in the school, who often engaged in aggressive behaviour and sexual harassment. Girls were also accosted by older men (sugar daddies) around the school and in the community, seeking sex in exchange for money or gifts.

39% of girls knew of a teacher having sex with a girl in the school

had been propositioned by a teacher but 53 girls (50%) said that they knew of at least one girl who had been approached for sex and 27 girls (25%) said that the girl had accepted the teacher's advances. A third of the sample also said that they knew of a girl who had become pregnant by a teacher, compared to 47% who knew of a girl who had got pregnant by a boy in the school. Some girls (36%) thought that other girls encouraged teachers to make advances. Nearly half said that they had been propositioned by men outside the school.

On the topic of corporal punishment, over 80% of girls in the three schools said that they had been beaten by at least one teacher, even though this practice is not permitted in Malawi schools, and 70% said that they disapproved of corporal punishment. The great majority thought that male teachers beat pupils more than female teachers. There was evidence that fear of excessive corporal punishment discouraged participation in class and led to absenteeism. However, 50% of girls said that teachers also used verbal abuse, in particular terms that were insulting of girls. The focus group discussions revealed that both girls and boys found verbal abuse more upsetting and humiliating than

Teacher violence

Table 1 shows that there was widespread awareness of teacher sexual misconduct in all three schools, although girls were embarrassed to talk about this in relation to themselves. Of the 106 girls interviewed, only 12 (11%) said that they

Table 1: Girls' views of sexual relations and pregnancies in their school

	Urban 39 (%)	Peri-urban 35 (%)	Rural 32 (%)	Total 106 (%)
Has received a 'love proposal' from a teacher in the school	4 (10.3)	5 (14.3)	3 (9.4)	12 (11.3)
Knows at least one girl who has been propositioned by a teacher	18 (46.2)	15 (42.9)	20 (62.5)	53 (50.0)
Knows of a girl who accepted the teacher's proposal	10 (25.6)	8 (22.9)	9 (28.1)	27 (25.5)
Knows of a teacher having sex with a girl in the school	11 (28.2)	11 (31.4)	19 (59.4)	41 (38.7)
Knows of a girl who became pregnant by a teacher	3 (7.7)	13 (37.1)	20 (62.5)	36 (34.0)
Thinks some girls encourage teachers to make advances	15 (38.5)	7 (20)	16 (50)	38 (35.8)
Knows of other girls having sex with boys in the school	21 (53.8)	18 (51.4)	17 (53.1)	56 (52.8)
Knows of a girl who got pregnant with a boy in the school	20 (51.3)	16 (45.7)	11 (34.4)	47 (44.3)
Has been propositioned by men outside the school	18 (46)	21 (60)	7 (22)	46 (43.4)

A study undertaken by Development Aid from People to People (DAPP) and funded by ActionAid was conducted in 33 primary schools in Chiradzulu District in 2003. Many reports of teachers having sexual liaisons with schoolgirls had been made in the Child Rights Clubs set up in schools in this rural district by DAPP. The study confirmed that teacher sexual misconduct was common: pupils brought up the topic in every school and head teachers indicated that such cases were on the increase. The researchers found that the majority of teachers in the schools were male, many had little teaching experience or training and they were poorly supervised. School Committees hardly functioned. Reasons given as to why a girl might grant sexual favours to a teacher included: arbitrary punishments by teachers and bullying by older male pupils, which encourage girls to seek protection from teachers: girls who do less well in class than boys, especially in science subjects, may also seek to avoid punishment for poor results in this way. In addition, pupils lack positive adult role models in their communities and get confused messages about sex: it is hardly ever discussed at home or in church, yet TV and videos show explicit sex scenes.

physical punishment and that this had a negative impact on their behaviour and full participation in school life. Girls in particular also complained about teachers exploiting them to run errands for them.

Pupil violence

Both girls and boys were reluctant to talk about their own sexual activity and to say whether they had a sexual partner, but they were relatively willing to talk about others. Both confirmed that there was strong peer pressure to enter sexual relationships; dominant views of male and female identity pushed boys into trying to get girlfriends so as to increase their status in the group, while girls were encouraged to make themselves attractive to boys. Girls who turned down boys' proposals risked being subjected to aggressive behaviour such as threats to beat them up or rape them, verbal abuse and assault. 64% of girls said that they had experienced problems with boys in the

Girls who make allegations of abuse are often not believed

school, including unsolicited touching on the breasts and buttocks. Boys largely saw getting girlfriends as a competitive game and would often fight over girls. However, teachers were more likely to discipline boys for being late to school than for assaulting a girl.

Table 2 shows that there was a widespread perception among the boys interviewed that many girls engaged in sexual activity. 65% said that they knew of a teacher having sex with a girl in the school and 78% said that they thought that girls preferred older boys and men.

Other male violence

The interviews revealed that girls were more likely to be accosted by a male adult (stranger, relative or neighbour) asking for sex in the peri-urban area (60%) and the urban area (46%) than in the rural area (28%). Teachers said that many girls were dropped off at school in the morning and picked up after school by mini-bus drivers, who gave them free lifts in exchange for sex. Girls reported that they were sometimes intercepted on the way home from school by boys and men who were under the influence of alcohol or marijuana, and who shouted threats and verbal abuse when they rejected their advances. Some boys waylaid girls in order to fondle their breasts or pinch their bottoms.

Consequences

Although older male pupils pose more of a daily problem for girls, the impact of the minority of male teachers who engage in sexual misconduct is much greater because of

Table 2: Boys' views of girls and sexual relations

	Urban 20 (%)	Peri-urban 25 (%)	Rural 20 (%)	Total 65 (%)
Knows a girl in his class having sex with her boyfriend	13 (65)	21 (84)	18 (90)	52 (80.0)
A lot of girls in the school have boyfriends	15 (75)	21 (84)	20 (100)	56 (86.2)
Knows a teacher having sex with a girl in the school	8 (40)	15 (60)	19 (95)	42 (64.6)
Knows boys with girlfriends outside the school	7 (35)	10 (40)	13 (65)	30 (46.2)
Girls prefer older boys and men	16 (80)	18 (72)	17 (85)	51 (78.5)

their position of trust in the school and community. Male teacher misconduct also presents a negative role model to boys.

Where victims or parents make official complaints, the schools often fail to discipline offenders. By not wanting to report or prosecute teachers out of a desire to protect their image or the reputation of the teaching profession, education authorities are shielding perpetrators and helping to perpetuate serious sexual misconduct. In those cases where teachers are disciplined, they are usually transferred to another school, which is an insufficient deterrent to prevent further abusive behaviour.

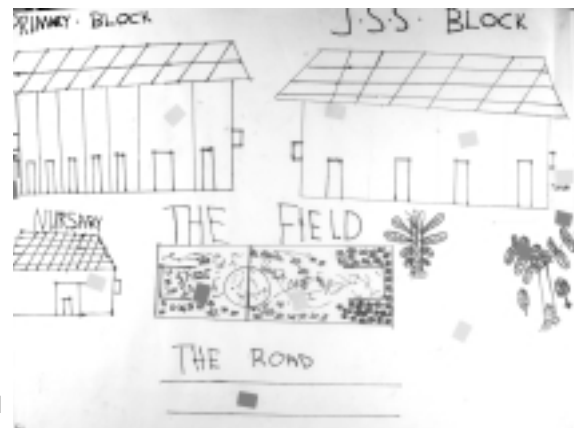
Girls who report to the school authorities are often victimised, ridiculed and stigmatised by pupils and teachers. Suffering the effects in silence damages their confidence and self-esteem and retards their educational progress and achievement.

Such attitudes continue to foster an authoritarian culture where the behaviour of teachers cannot be questioned and girls come to accept such behaviour by boys as well as by teachers as an inevitable part of their daily school life.

Violence within the school encourages pupils, especially girls, to drop out; in such cases girls will be more at risk of sexual violence from men in the community.

A 2001 survey of sexual harassment among 560 secondary school students in Botswana found that 67 percent said they had been subjected to, among other things, unsolicited touching, patting or pinching and pressure for dates. A quarter said they had been subjected to such harassment on a regular basis. Twenty percent said they had been asked by teachers to have sex with them. Almost half (42 percent) of these accepted, mainly because they feared lower grades if they refused. The vast majority of students believe that having a sexual relationship with their teachers is wrong. They say students lose concentration, fail exams and end up on the streets.

Source: Rossetti, S (2001) Children in School: a Safe Place? Botswana: UNESCO



Girls' workshop drawing of safe and unsafe places in school.

Production: Fiona Leach with Esme Kadzamira and Eve Lemani

Design: Robert Wheeler

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Source: Leach, F, Fiscian V, Kadzamira, E, Lemani, E and Machakanja, P (2003) An Investigative Study of the Abuse of Girls in African Schools, Education Research Report No 54, London: DFID

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- 1 What is it and why does it happen?
- 2 What can be done?
- 3 Ghana
- 4 Malawi
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Recommendations

The following are for consideration by stakeholders at every level of the educational system.

National level

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) can strengthen policies, structures, guidelines and procedures.

- m Widely disseminate current government policies on sexual abuse of pupils by education staff and on corporal punishment
- m Tighten and simplify procedures for dealing with teachers' sexual misconduct through the revised Code of Conduct for Teachers; devolve responsibility for handling such cases to the district level, where they can be dealt with faster
- m Provide DEOs, School Committees, PTAs and school heads with detailed guidelines on how to deal with abusive behaviour by staff and pupils; provide intensive training, especially for DEO staff, in personnel policy and legal provisions dealing with abuse
- m Review School Committee and PTA functions and empower them to monitor teacher conduct as well as performance
- m Ensure that all cases of sexual abuse are dealt with promptly and decisively. With evidence of a criminal offence, i.e. statutory rape or defilement, cases should be handled by the justice system.
- m Ensure that teacher training curricula cover issues of abuse and harassment fully, so that teachers understand MoEST policy, the consequences of forming sexual liaisons with pupils and the procedures for bringing cases to court
- m Introduce awareness raising for both trainers and trainee teachers, with greater emphasis on ethical standards of behaviour and on creating a child-friendly school environment
- m Intensify efforts to establish a national programme of Guidance and Counselling in schools, including at the primary level, given the rise in cases of abuse and the HIV/AIDS pandemic
- m Provide detailed guidelines for School Disciplinary Committees on their functions and composition.

District level

District Education Offices can strengthen links between their officials, school authorities and community representatives and make a positive impact through improving communication and ensuring effective enforcement of regulations.

Working with schools

- m Improve collaboration between district and zonal offices and the School Committee through the DEO's representative on the Committee, so

that school staff cannot ignore or mislead School Committees in cases of teacher sexual misconduct

- m Improve School Committee and PTA members' knowledge of MoEST regulations on the management of schools, in particular concerning school heads and teachers; provide guidelines on how to run the school; improve training to prepare them for the challenging role of monitoring teacher performance and conduct
- m Provide intensive training of school heads and teachers in child-friendly approaches and how to deal with gender violence, so that they can create a conducive gender-sensitive learning environment, especially for girls; scale this up through future school and zonal based programmes
- m Provide training for School Disciplinary Committee members in G&C, so that they can ensure that school regulations on teacher discipline are observed, with punitive measures for offenders.

Working with communities

- m Provide communities and their representatives, e.g. members of School Committees and PTAs, with the knowledge to address the problem of teachers abusing girls, especially in rural schools; develop awareness of the regulations governing teacher conduct so that they can act appropriately when required
- m Encourage NGOs, such as CRECCOM, the Story Workshop and others dealing with human rights and women's issues to become involved in schools, using radio drama, participatory theatre and community meetings
- m Sensitise and encourage local leaders such as MPs, councillors, traditional and religious leaders to address such issues when they are conducting meetings
- m Strengthen community links with higher levels of education management through the Primary Education Advisers (PEAs).

School level

Head teachers and teachers

Head teachers are crucial in ensuring that pupils learn in a supportive environment. Less authoritarian schools are not necessarily ones with poor discipline. Strong leadership is key.

Studies show that schools with high attendance and achievement are those where expectations of both teacher and pupil behaviour are high, where the school culture is supportive of both (and includes teacher professional development) and where regulations are enforced fairly and firmly.

- m Create a pupil-friendly environment which is conducive for learning, by working with pupils, especially girls, supporting their personal development and protecting their rights

- m Develop programmes that target pupils in schools on rights, sexuality and abuse. Much abusive behaviour in schools is perpetrated by male pupils; existing school clubs, e.g. the Anti-Aids TOTO clubs, provide a suitable forum to discuss abuse issues and empower pupils to take appropriate action.
- m Foster more trusting relationships between pupils and teachers; the research showed that pupils distrust their teachers and rarely confide in them
- m Provide G&C sessions, using participatory methods that allow space for reflection, analysis and open discussion of taboo topics; G&C currently does not exist in primary schools and pupils do not approach their teachers with problems because of the authoritarian school environment
- m Attach importance to gender equity in a whole school approach
- m Make boys aware of the negative impact of aggressive behaviour
- m Take effective action against all cases of abuse and bullying, by confronting the issue and treating it as a serious disciplinary matter

Teacher training colleges

Teachers are key to change in the school setting but they need to have the necessary awareness and skills to act.

- m Incorporate a rights-based approach into the curriculum to ensure that schools promote and do not abuse the rights of children
- m Provide gender-based training courses and workshops for all teacher trainers and trainees to promote awareness of ways in which teachers perpetuate negative stereotypes about female and male behaviour and the need to treat girls and boys equally
- m Raise awareness about the importance of ethical professional conduct so that they understand the seriousness of abusing the trust placed in them
- m Familiarise all trainees with the teachers' code of conduct and the penalties and procedures for dealing with misconduct and negligence.

Parents

Parents and carers should be encouraged to:

- m Listen to what children tell them and refrain from blaming girls when they make allegations
- m Provide their children, especially girls, with basic school items
- m Refrain from using abusive language towards children
- m Show interest in their children's progress in school, monitor their attendance and discuss their education with teachers
- m Refrain from entering into negotiations for compensation with teachers who have made their daughters pregnant.