

Stop Violence Against Girls in School

A cross-country analysis of change in Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Recent reviews on what works to challenge violence against girls have concluded that the evidence base is weak, and there is a clear need for robust research to help inform interventions. This study is one of the first comprehensive attempts to address this gap in knowledge.



It does this through analyzing the influence of a multi-level intervention, ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls in School, a five year project (2008-3013) funded by the UK's Big Lottery Fund. This report presents a cross-country review of findings from endline studies carried out in three districts in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique for Stop Violence Against Girls in School. The study aimed to assess change over the course of the project, and to consider the implications for future interventions concerned with gender violence in schools and communities. The research questions that guided the study are:

1. How have schooling experiences for girls changed since 2009? Have there been changes in the gendered patterns of enrolment, completion and achievement in project schools, and in gender relations within schools? How can we account for any changes and continuities?
2. Since 2009, have there been changes in attitudes to violence and inequalities? How have these manifested in everyday relationships? How are these linked to the political, social and economic context? How are these linked to the intervention?
3. Have there been changes in patterns of violence that girls experience in schools, homes and communities, and in their responses to violence? How has the intervention influenced changes?
4. How have legislative and policy frameworks changed? How have policies and laws been enacted at local level, particularly in relation to formal and informal protection systems? How has the intervention influenced changes?

The research was guided by a conceptual framework, which highlights how in order to understand patterns of violence against girls, it is important to look not just at the acts of violence and individual perpetrators and victims, but at the interactions in schools, families and communities that surround and underpin these acts, and at the inequitable institutions that perpetuate violence. Data was collected in 2013 in 13 primary schools and communities in Ghana, 15 in Kenya and 14 in Mozambique. While all three project areas have high levels of poverty, the communities in Ghana and Kenya are mainly rural and remote, while in Mozambique they are close to a peri-urban centre. A total of 2,739 respondents participated in the endline study, including girls and boys, teachers and head teachers, parents, SMC members, community and religious leaders, women's group leaders, District Education Officers, District Health Officers and Police. The study combined quantitative and qualitative methods, including longitudinal qualitative data collected in four schools and communities in each country. Comparisons with baseline data collected in 2009 enabled robust analysis of change. Research was conducted by research institutes in each country (see acknowledgements).





Key findings:

a) Girls' experiences, attitudes and responses to violence, gender and inequity

There have been many changes in how violence is experienced, prevented and responded to by girls, boys, their teachers, families and communities. However, change has been uneven, and violence against girls in 2013 remains commonplace, with 83% of girls in Ghana, 90% of girls in Kenya and 80% of girls in Mozambique saying that they have experienced some forms of violence in the past 12 months. Measuring intervention effects through reductions in levels of violence, however, is problematic because of the likelihood that an intervention will increase young people's confidence to recognise and speak out about the violence they experience. The unevenness of change in this project suggests that the reasons for violence are complex and that the project has not had a uniform effect.

Girls in towns in all three countries are more likely to say they have experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months than girls in more remote areas. On the other hand, in Kenya and Mozambique girls in remote rural areas are more likely to say they have experienced physical violence than those in towns. Relationships between poverty, violence and gender norms are far from straightforward and there is no evidence that the poorest or most marginalised are more likely to accept, internalise or take for granted disadvantage.

There are positive changes in girls' knowledge and attitudes towards gender, rights and violence across the three project districts. Girls in Ghana, and particularly in Mozambique, are more likely than in 2009 to report their experiences of violence to someone, though this is not the case in Kenya.

Features of modernisation in Mozambique are having a dual effect on sexual violence. On the one hand, with high levels of migrant labour there is evidence of enhanced sexual risks in girls' precarious relationships with older men. On the other hand, the peri-urban context brings better access to services, broader networks of information and communication on sex and relationships and less conservative views about teenage sex. Girls in Mozambique are now more confident to speak out about violence.

Girls' clubs have had positive effects in all three countries on girls' knowledge, confidence, attitudes and practices in managing violence and inequality. Where they also make possible open discussion on intimacy, they may be more effective at enabling girls to break silences on taboos around sex and sexual violence, and to change their own reporting practices. Such discussions can be particularly challenging in remote, rural contexts with

conservative gender norms. In a context where attitudes are already changing due to closer links to urban centres, broader communication networks and migration, as in the case of Mozambique, the potential for an NGO to support girls negotiating more agency in handling sex and violence may be enhanced.

Boys' clubs show promise for working with boys on addressing violence against boys, and for critically analysing what it means to be a boy or a man, the connections with violence against girls, and the alternatives.

b) Shifting attitudes, knowledge and practices in families and communities

Some changes have been influenced by events outside the project, including droughts, floods and, in Kenya, horrific conflict. They have also been influenced by personal crises and family disruptions, including bereavements, parental conflict and loss of livelihood. Sometimes there have been unexpected ripple effects from the project, when for example girls' increased confidence has been reflected in their mothers' capacity to speak out on violence and gendered inequality.

There is persuasive evidence that the project has had an influence on family dynamics in the project communities. Working in tandem with concerted EFA campaigns, grassroots community based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), the project has helped to shift the gendered divisions of labour for children and to increase awareness of girls' right to schooling. In some families, messages against corporal punishment at school are filtering into the discipline at home.

But norms about gender, including female submission, still persist, and the area where project work has been most difficult, and sometimes evoked hostility, has been engaging with discussions in communities about teenage sex and relationships. The project has been particularly effective when it has built alliances with community based organisations, including local women's groups, enabling discussions on sensitive issues to



take place across different spaces and sites of disagreement. While community engagement has been a strong dimension of the project, the varying perspectives signal both the challenge of and the need to engage and obtain the support of parents and the wider community, particularly of men, alongside the intensive work with girls.

c) Changes in schools as sites for challenging gender inequality and violence

Over the five years of the project, there have been notable changes in project schools. Girls' enrolment has increased by 10% in Mozambique, 17% in Kenya and 14% in Ghana. Teachers and children perceive that there has been an improvement in pupil participation and gender equality in classroom processes, and knowledge and attitudes about gender and violence have improved. Many of these changes can be traced to project interventions, particularly the training for schools, as well as through the ways girls' clubs may be shifting the patterns of interaction between pupils and teachers. Changes are also to do with the broader educational context. In Ghana, although the district is conservative in gender norms, the education sector has been driving changes that are clearly impacting, in for example the accessibility of junior high schools.

But improved access is not always reflected in issues of quality and equality in school. In some contexts, though caning is used less often, it has been replaced by other forms of harsh punishment, like kneeling or squatting for long periods. While there is more resistance to corporal punishment and evidence that practices are changing, particularly in Mozambique, still in all three countries teachers lack knowledge and the capacity to use alternative forms of positive discipline, and the continuing poor conditions in which they are required to teach hinder change. The areas that have proved most difficult to change are those that threaten norms about childrearing, gender and sexuality.

While the in-service training has been effective in influencing teachers' knowledge, more attention is needed to institutionalise change in school structures and practices, including planning and policy work with all members of school communities, and supported by district education officials, ministries for education and teacher training institutions and unions. Gender-sensitive and child-friendly schools also entail attention to the conditions in which teaching and learning take place, and the ways in which children continue to be unable to participate in later phases of education.

d) Legal and policy enactments on violence against girls: from national to local

The project work at national level demonstrates the importance of coalition-building in working to influence governments, and there have been some improvements in the attention paid to issues around violence against girls within national governments and the media, linked in part to the project's advocacy work. In each country this has helped to strengthen legislative and policy frameworks related to violence against girls, though progress has been uneven.

At the community level, there have also been improvements in knowledge about child protection processes and in strengthening community-based structures that coordinate between informal and formal judicial systems.

In Mozambique, there are indications of improved outcomes for girls who experience extreme violence, where the peri-urban setting provides easier access to services, though this is less evident in some of the more remote communities. The greater confidence of girls in this context to speak out about violence may also mean that they are somewhat less inhibited by the pressure to avoid bringing shame onto the community than girls in the more rural contexts of Ghana and Kenya. However, there are still clearly weaknesses in the formal protection systems in all three countries.

Conclusion

The multi-dimensionality of the project has successfully enabled change to take place at many levels. Girls' clubs have had a positive effect on girls' knowledge, confidence, attitudes and practices in managing violence and inequality, and boys' clubs have begun to show promise for similar work with boys. Discussions with parents in communities have led mothers and fathers to reflect on and discuss gender roles and norms, in some cases influencing family dynamics and easing the burden of labour from girls. Work in schools has influenced school management and classroom processes, strengthening pupil participation and gender equality. New structures for child protection at community level have strengthened dialogue between formal and informal justice systems.

In all these areas, there remain issues about sustainability beyond the life of the project. Advocacy work to institutionalise interventions has been mixed, and our recommendations outline actions proposed to build on the successes of the project, to learn from its weaknesses, and to fill continuing gaps in our knowledge about how to address violence against girls.



Recommendations

Direct interventions with young people:

Girls' clubs: Girls' clubs in schools run by trained female mentors can be critical spaces for girls' empowerment. They can act as positive role models, and increase knowledge and confidence to speak out against violence and broader inequalities. Girls' club manuals can provide effective guidance on how to run clubs. More research is needed on how to ensure fair membership criteria, avoid elitism, tailor club approaches for specific local contexts (particularly in relation to addressing sensitive taboo topics, including sex and relationships), maintain motivation and support for mentors, and how to institutionalise the clubs within the broader school culture, rather than being seen as an NGO intervention external to the school.

Working with boys: More research is needed on boys' experiences of violence, including sexual violence. Boys' clubs have potential for addressing violence against boys, and for critically analysing what it means to be a boy or a man, the connections with violence against girls, and the alternatives. While providing separate spaces for boys and girls to discuss these themes is important, mechanisms to bring boys and girls together for discussions on gender relations is also important.

Girls out of school: Often the most marginalised members of communities, projects need to involve girls who are out of school, listening to and responding to their concerns, and facilitating their return to school or to alternative educational, training and employment opportunities.

Interventions with schools:

Tackling corporal punishment: Legislation banning corporal punishment, reinforced in codes of conduct for teachers and with the support of teachers' unions, are important steps in reducing physical punishment in schools. These must be reinforced by interventions in schools and teacher training programmes that provide skills in classroom management and positive discipline approaches. Involving local partners in the development of such training programmes will enable them to sensitively address norms and beliefs about child-rearing

Codes of conduct for teachers: National guidance needs clearly to set out acceptable and unacceptable conduct and sanctions for breaking the code of conduct. Working closely with teacher unions is important in ensuring effective guidance and implementation. Sanctions like relocating teachers who have sexual relations with pupils to other schools should end. Codes of conduct should be shared with all members of school communities and pupils, teachers and parents should be educated on their content.



Sex and relationships education: Teachers and project staff need training and support in how to address sex and relationships. While provision of curricular guidance will be valuable, staff will need support on how to address issues like safe, healthy sexual relationships in contexts where there are taboos on teenage sex. The curriculum needs to make links with broader discussions on masculinities and femininities and link to work in communities (for example, work with traditional leaders on cultural norms around gender and sexuality). Young people need access to safe, legal contraception methods.

Strengthening school infrastructure: Governments need to ensure that schools are safe spaces, with solid buildings, desks and chairs, single sex toilets with access to water, textbooks and other learning materials.

Teacher provision: Governments need to ensure schools have sufficient numbers of trained female and male teachers to avoid over-crowded classrooms. In rural areas, this entails addressing the working and living conditions that reduce teacher motivation. Presence of female teachers in all schools can help to reassure girls, though both female and male teachers should be trained in skills to counsel and mentor their pupils.

Training and support for teachers: In-service training is an effective way to build knowledge and change attitudes about gender and violence, and to ensure this transfers into changing behaviour, ongoing support for teachers and SMC members is needed alongside work with teacher training organisations and Ministries of Education to strengthen training. Club mentors or other selected staff members could become focal points in a school for work on gender violence. Head teachers need to be involved in all training, which should include the development of school action plans to integrate learning into school practice. There needs to be monitoring and follow up support process to help ensure learning is institutionalised.

Institutionalising interventions in schools: Whole school approaches may be most effective in ensuring that gender violence is addressed through strengthening gender-sensitive child-friendly classroom processes, in-service training, work with school management and broader school communities. To ensure that specific issues on violence are not dissipated through this approach, specific outcomes and indicators should be developed and progress carefully monitored. Working in partnership with district education officials and teacher training organisations, as well as line ministries at national level, can enhance these approaches.

Secondary schooling: Governments should provide free secondary schools, remove examination systems that deny girls and boys access to this level of schooling and develop initiatives to

enable poorer girls to stay in school. Projects should work across primary and secondary schooling to enable work with girls on violence and gender to be sustained across phases of education.

Supporting pregnant school girls and adolescent mothers: Re-entry policies need to be accompanied by material support for girls and their families, training for schools on providing supportive environments for girls. Seeking girls' perspectives will be important to determine their own needs.

Interventions with families and communities:

Engaging families: Creating dialogues with parents and carers through Reflect circles, home-school discussions and home visits can help parents to reflect on and re-negotiate gender dynamics and violence in the family. They can help parents to respond effectively to violence and to support girls to have safe relationships and be safe from violence. These opportunities are particularly important for reinforcing direct work with girls in clubs, helping parents to feel included and girls to feel supported in discussions about sensitive issues within families.

Partnerships with community based organisations: Working in coalition with established local women's groups and child rights organisations can help to secure community support, enhance the effects of interventions, and increase their sustainability. These relationships can be particularly important for engaging discussions on sensitive issues, such as those on corporal punishment and teenage sex, to take place across different spaces and sites of disagreement and discord, and to obtain the support of parents and the wider community, particularly of men, alongside the intensive work with girls.

Engaging traditional and religious leaders: Work with opinion leaders, including traditional and religious leaders can be an effective strategy to get buy in and support for promoting gender equality and addressing violence.

Addressing values and beliefs: It is important to combine work that emphasises knowledge of rights and implementing laws in communities with more dialogic work with different groups, that addresses the fundamental values and beliefs that underpin practices that may be harmful to girls, and build alliances within communities for change.

Ending female genital mutilation: Building coalitions and alliances in communities can encourage discussion of customary, legal, health and sexual rights in relation to FGM with range of community members (female and male adults and young people, religious and traditional leaders). To avoid driving the practice underground, and to find ways to discuss difficult issues about female sexuality and marriageability, and consider alternative rites of passage, sensitive work is needed, ensuring that discussions with girls avoid repeating the distress caused by FGM.

Coercive sexual relationships, early marriage and exchange sex: Interventions need to be carefully tailored and adapted for local contexts. For example, in more urban areas, with high levels of labour mobility, work is needed with community members on how to curb sexual harassment and coercion through material means; in rural areas, work is needed on accessing effective services, information and support, including working with parents to curb practices of forced marriage. Dialogue is needed with all groups in communities to make explicit the links between ideals of manhood and girlhood with sexuality and gender violence.

Informal and formal justice systems: Building local groups of women and men trained in issues relating to violence against girls can be an effective way to strengthen access to and coordination between informal community justice systems and formal judicial and support services. However, they should not be seen as an alternative to formal systems, including health clinics and hospitals, police and legal services, that need to be resourced and trained to provide effective, efficient services and multi-sectoral responses to violence.

Strengthening formal protection systems: Formal systems need better coordination and more investment. It may be unrealistic for an NGO project such as this one to be able to build formal systems within a project, but future projects could focus further on this through lobbying for better funding and coordination in the respective ministries or through partnerships with multilateral or bilateral agencies which may be in a better position to strengthen infrastructure.

Coordinated poverty reduction and crisis management initiatives: Provision of piped water and electricity can help to reduce the female burden of labour and extend study opportunities for children; efficient communication systems are needed in crises (e.g. extreme weather; conflicts) between non-governmental and governmental bodies for fast response to crises. A future project may enhance its outcomes by linking with social protection and/or livelihoods schemes to address poverty.

Planning NGO interventions:

Conceptualising violence: To address acts of physical or sexual violence, it is necessary to address the everyday interactions and institutional inequalities that produce these acts.

Integrated interventions: Projects that combine work with girls, boys, schools, communities, and district and national advocacy work are important for addressing the multi-dimensionality of violence.

Partnership approaches: Projects that combine multiple organisations are needed to provide integrated interventions, but are highly complex with risks of conflicting priorities, understandings and delays. Such projects need to be effectively managed, with specific strategies developed to coordinate within and between partners, and build capacity as necessary.

Inception and capacity-building: The complexity of these multi-partnered and multi-country projects means that sufficient lead-in time before project implementation starts is essential to build common understandings, good relationships, shared commitment and implementation plans in projects that deal with sensitive issues and challenge deeply held beliefs. During the project design and inception phases, conceptual frameworks need to be developed and capacity assessments conducted. Including capacity building in project design can enable this to be effectively planned and budgeted for, as well as ensuring that organisations are able effectively to deliver and manage projects. Throughout the project, repeated opportunities for discussion and capacity-building about concepts and approaches are needed.

Collaborations across education, health and women's rights: Interventions should emphasise girls' rights to bodily integrity and being able to make decisions about own bodies. This may not always be easy in contexts with strong moral codes around sexuality. Organisations working on violence in schools and girls' education within the child protection and/or education sectors and could learn a lot by partnering with organisations working on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights on how to effectively work with communities on teenage sexuality.

Robust research-based evidence base: Rigorous and comprehensive data is needed to strengthen knowledge about what works. This should involve carefully planned baseline and endline research, together with a monitoring and evaluation system developed and agreed by project partners. Quantitative measures should be combined with qualitative data to create a robust evidence base that is also sensitive to context. Project implementation plans need to be guided by the baseline research findings. Sufficient budgeting for research and M&E is essential.



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Duration of projects: Five years is a minimum period for projects for longer lasting effects on gender and violence, and ten years would enable more sustainable interventions. Longitudinal research is needed to build knowledge about processes of change on gender and sexual norms, and violence.

Scaling up: The evidence base from research and project work on gender, violence and schooling needs to be shared widely, with national and international policies drawing on the research-based evidence base. Successful approaches, such as girls' clubs, should be scaled up by governments.

Post-2015 Development Agenda:

A strong commitment to address gender violence and child-friendly schooling is essential in the post-2015 international development agenda, including sex-disaggregated data collection, as well as goals that address gender violence in schools and communities. At the same time, it will be important not to rely on over-simplified measures of violence, but to combine quantitative and qualitative evidence on a range of indicators, including how violence is experienced, prevented and responded to and how this is influenced by varying features of contexts.

The cross-country report stems from coordinated end line and longitudinal studies carried out by research teams in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique under the coordination of Dr Jenny Parkes and Jo Heslop at the Institute of Education, University of London

To access further information on ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls at School project, including the full end line and longitudinal report, go to www.actionaid.org/what-we-do/education/stop-violence-against-girls-schools.

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