



From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Make Education Safe for All!

Teachers, Schools and Safe Spaces for Teaching and Learning: The Imperative to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence

School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) is a phenomenon that affects millions of children, teachers and education personnel, as well as their families and communities. It occurs in all countries of the world. Young people have different experiences of SRGBV depending on their sex, their gender identity, their country and context. SRGBV occurs as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and is enforced by unequal power dynamics. Inequitable gendered practices are “performed” in schools through policies, pedagogies and curriculum, and through everyday relationships between and among students and teachers that establish a ‘gender regime’.

Schools are places of learning and growth, but can also often become unsafe spaces, where students, both girls and boys, can be victims and perpetrators of violence. Too often, teachers are viewed as part of the problem with regard to violence be it for administering corporal punishment or demanding sex in exchange for grades, for example. At the same time, schools are also places of work in which teachers and education support personnel can be both victims and perpetrators of violence.

Several studies have found that teacher training establishments do not necessarily equip teachers to challenge abusive behaviour and attitudes about violence against women and children. While there is limited data on the impact of SRGBV on teachers and education personnel, anecdotal evidence indicates that female teachers are particularly vulnerable to GBV, experiencing harassment and abuse at the hands of students, fellow teachers, school management, in teacher training institutions and systems of administration. Educators also witness discrimination, violence and abuse, which reinforces their vulnerability at school and at home. This poses a challenge, because violence is never excusable and teachers must uphold the highest standards of ethics and care. However, knowing that teachers too may be victims and understanding how this manifests can enable educational systems to provide informed support to teachers, so that they in turn can provide the best possible support and help for students and act as agents for positive change.

SRGBV is a grave violation of human rights and impedes a child's right to education: it affects their psychological, physical and social well-being and ability to learn.

Globally, teachers must be valued as the most important education resource globally, who have a crucial role to play in ending SRGBV. Initiatives addressing SRGBV necessarily must involve teachers – not only in terms of enabling them to perform their duties of providing quality education to their students and promoting values of gender equality, non-violence, child rights and equity, but also by creating safe spaces for them to work in. It is imperative, therefore, to take a broader perspective on the role of teachers – as change agents and as professionals within the education system. Skills and capacity development must be combined with efforts to create an enabling environment where teachers can fulfill their duties and exercise their rights.

In recognition of the critical role teachers play in ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence, the Global Working group to end SRGBV calls on DEVELOPMENT ACTORS, EDUCATION UNIONS, DONORS and GOVERNMENTS to:

Recognise teachers as key influencers in the lives of children and in preventing school-related gender-based violence. Teachers, in the eyes of children, can be an authoritative voice on matters. They are often seen as role models and an important socializing force, together with family members and peers. The curriculum itself - but also the way that it is delivered by teachers – conveys messages to students about the legitimacy and power dynamics of gender norms. Teachers can be positive agents for change by adhering to attitudes and modelling behaviours of respect, non-discrimination, equality and non-violence; and they can also bring curriculum, exercises and external expert resources into the classroom to deliver age-appropriate content on human rights and equality.



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Adopt a systems wide approach in addressing SRGBV across the education sector, so that teachers have a supportive enabling environment. Eliminating gender-based violence in schools requires structural change. Teachers in developing countries face difficult working and living conditions. A lack of quality school infrastructure and equipment, over-crowded classrooms, double shifts, extraordinary workloads and insufficient pay often handicaps their efforts. Many teachers take on other jobs to support themselves and their families. The situation is even worse for teachers in remote and rural areas, who have to travel long distances to work and to collect their salary.

Teachers must be supported through professional development and training. A framework of clear expectations and policies is also essential. Gender-reviews of education sector plans are an effective mechanism to ensure the right gender-responsive policies and plans are in place to tackle GBV in schools and across the education system.

Work with education unions and Ministries of Education to shape policies and plans to address SRGBV. Governments must require and fund high-quality pre-service and in-service training on SRGBV, effective violence prevention strategies, and positive discipline methods for all teachers and school administrators. Teachers' unions have a critical role to play in raising awareness of SRGBV among their members, and supporting them to access appropriate training and support on SRGBV, and to raise awareness about SRGBV both within schools and in the wider community.

Unions are key partners in both motivating teachers to change classroom behaviours and practices, and in working with the wider education system to strengthen support, capacity and readiness to address SRGBV. Working with teachers' unions can help education systems strengthen teachers' mandate to better promote and create safe learning environments.

Strengthen professionalism and accountability for SRGBV in the teaching profession. Teachers are responsible for providing a safe and inclusive learning and environment and should be held to account when they do not effectively report, refer or address SRGBV occurring in the classroom. Teachers are professionals, and should be held accountable to their professional code of ethics, which should prohibit all forms of violence and provide effective procedures for reporting, monitoring and working with victims and perpetrators. While most countries have teacher-developed professional codes of ethics, too many teachers are simply not aware that these exist.

Enforcement mechanisms and sanctions are not clearly defined so that when acts of SRGBV perpetrated by teachers occur within schools and are reported, lack of protocols, or the failure to apply them, too often leads to insufficient response and action. The Education International Declaration on Professional Ethics can be made accessible and available to all in the global education union movement and beyond, accompanied by guidelines on its use and application, which refer explicitly to SRGBV. To ensure accountability measures are effective they must be reinforced by legal and policy frameworks at government, district and school levels, be widely disseminated and be enforced through effective leadership. The repercussions of perpetrating SRGBV must be clear; in line with children's legal rights; and strictly enforced, in order to prevent a culture of silence around SRGBV.

Provide teachers with the skills and tools to address SRGBV. Teacher agency in promoting a safe learning environment relies on their ability to think, feel and act to foster values and attitudes to transform violence. Teachers who reinforce norms of non-violent communication, champion equality and rely on constructive, positive discipline are more likely to create safe spaces for teaching and learning in which both girls and boys can excel. Appropriate training, awareness workshops, and support should be provided to improve teachers' capacities to understand the links between harmful gender norms, power inequalities between adults and children, girls and boys, and violence.

Training should equip teachers and school staff with: strategies to reduce students' risk of exposure to GBV; the mandate, authority and skills to report and refer incidences of SRGBV; and knowledge about the consequences of perpetrating or failing to report cases of SRGBV. In place of punitive approaches to classroom discipline, pre-service and in-service training should include teaching techniques aimed at positive reinforcement, constructive criticism and participatory methodologies. Additional support strategies for teachers include developing community volunteer and peer support systems.

To learn more about the Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence Visit the Working Group online: www.ungei.org/srgbv/index.html