

Ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence

A Series of Thematic Briefs



Brief 1:

Applying a whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence



Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence

The Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) was created in 2014 to respond to SRGBV by raising awareness and finding solutions to ensure schools are safe, gender-sensitive and inclusive environments, where boys and girls can learn to unleash their full potential. The Group has expanded to more than 100 members representing 50 organizations, including humanitarian actors, civil society organizations, and regional and national offices.

www.ungei.org/what-we-do/school-related-gender-based-violence

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Introduction

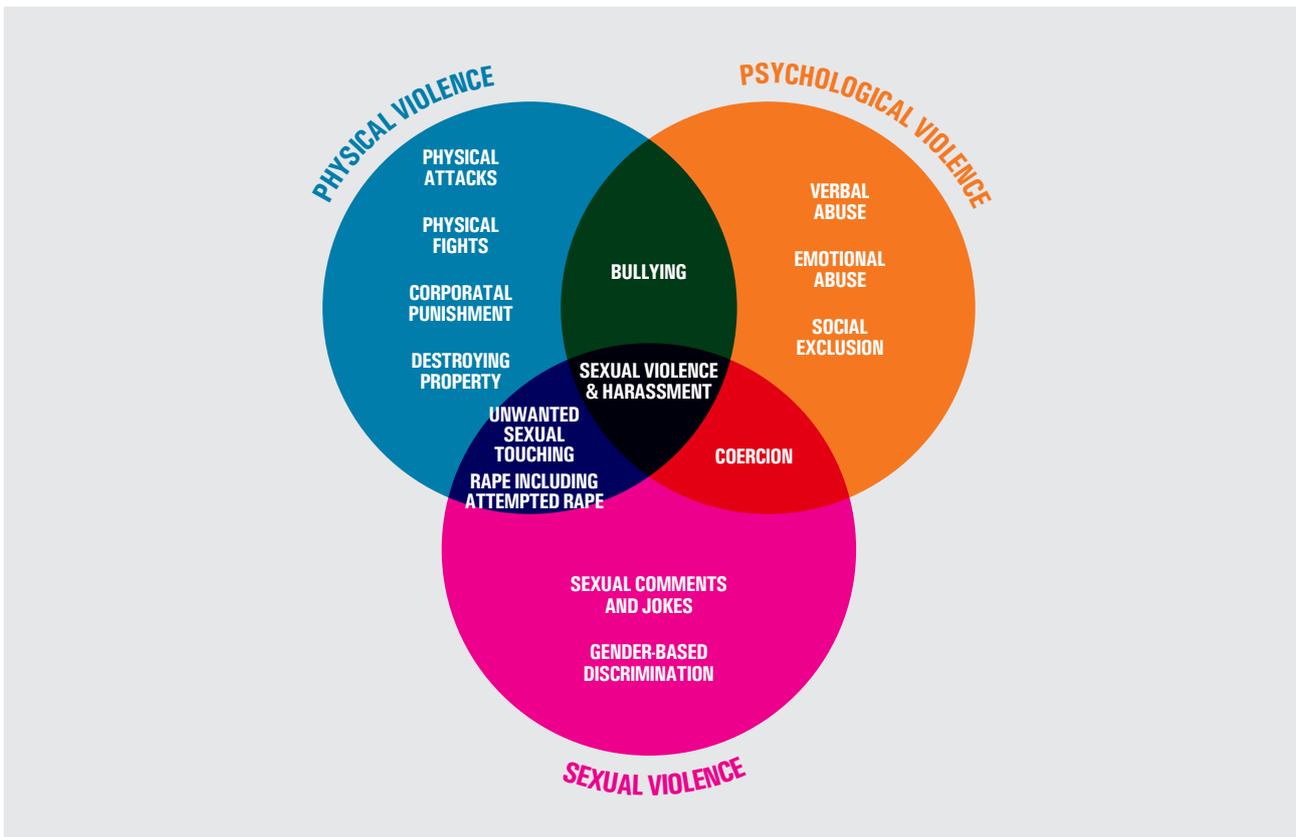
School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.¹

Discriminatory gender norms are one of the key driving factors for many forms of violence, including violence in schools. This means that it is essential to apply a gender lens when developing violence prevention and response approaches. School-related gender-based violence violates children's rights and is a significant barrier for girls' and boys' access to and participation in education.²

There has been increasing recognition of SRGBV as a pressing issue requiring global attention if the Sustainable Goals 4, (Education), 5 (Gender equality) and 16.2 (Violence against children) are to be met. Much work remains to be done requiring accelerated and multi-dimensional prevention and response efforts.

This series of **thematic briefs** is targeted at policy makers and practitioners. It aims to summarize the latest learning and evidence synthesized from two regional workshops on how best to prevent and address SRGBV held in West and Central Africa and East and Southern Africa. Other briefs in this series include 2. Engaging teachers to create safe and gender-responsive learning environments; 3. Shifting harmful gender norms through curricular approaches; 4. Establishing safe and confidential reporting mechanisms; 5. Investing in data and evidence to inform the response to SRGBV; and 6. Integrating SRGBV into national policies and education sector plans.

Figure 1: Violence in schools takes many forms, many of which are rooted in gender norms and inequality



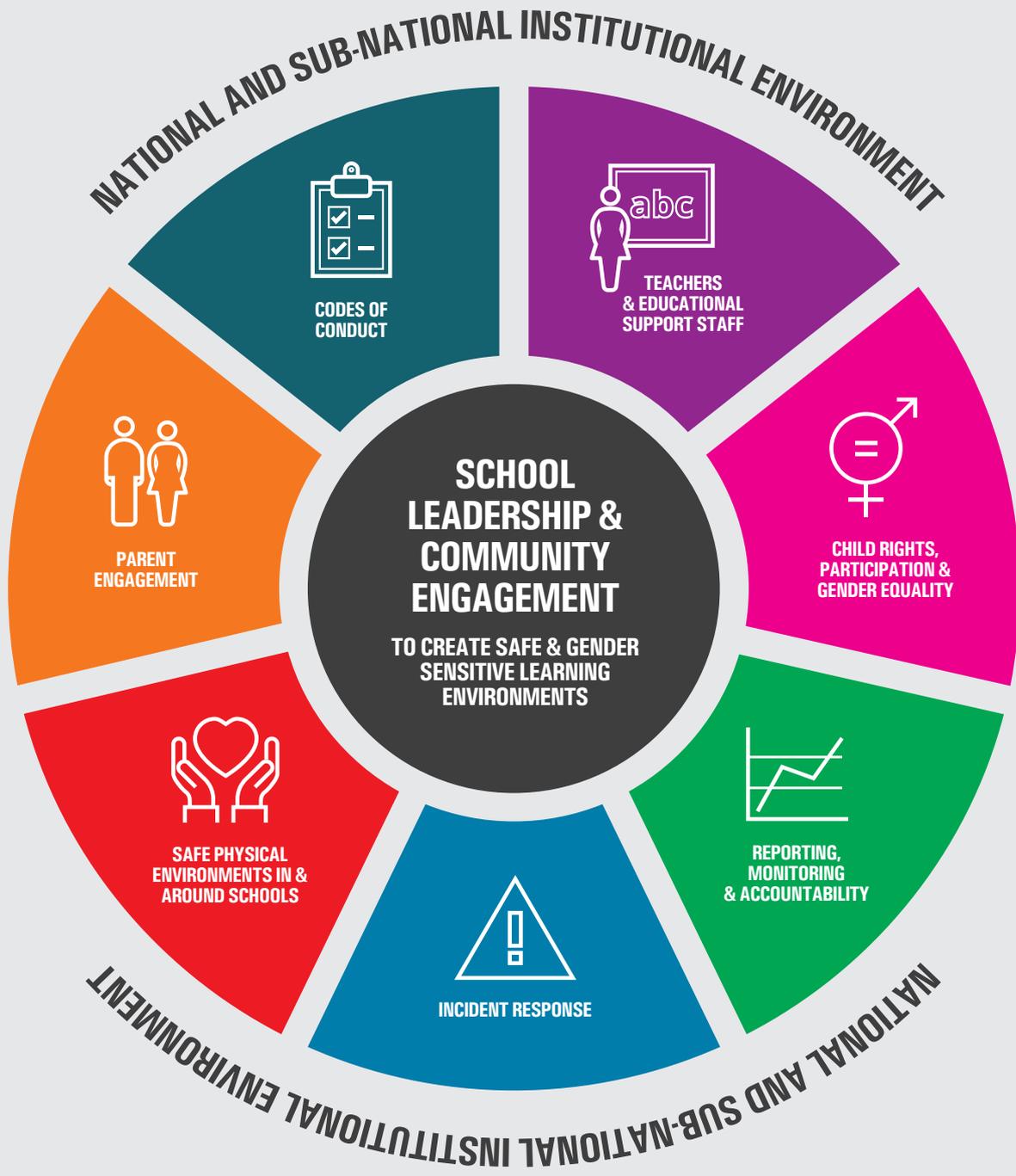
What is a whole school approach?

A 'whole school approach' refers to a set of interventions that work at multiple levels, within the school and the community, to prevent and respond to SRGBV. Evidence suggests that effective whole school approaches address a range of areas simultaneously. These include those related to the school environment, culture and pedagogical approaches.³

A whole school approach requires strong leadership, and engages parents and the broader community.⁴ The need to apply a comprehensive whole school approach is widely recognized as best practice in working holistically to promote student health and wellbeing and echoes evidence from other school-based health and violence prevention initiatives.^{5,6} Addressing one part of the problem in isolation is less effective because violence prevention relies on a broader enabling environment of support. Meaningful and sustained change requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses the drivers of violence, as well as changing institutional practices that perpetuate unequal power dynamics, discrimination and gender stereotypes.⁷

UNGEI's Whole School Approach Minimum Standards and Monitoring Framework outlines eight inter-related domains to establish a safe, gender-responsive and inclusive learning environment. These are: (1) effective school leadership and community engagement; (2) establishing and implementing a code of conduct; (3) capacity building of teachers and educational staff; (4) empowering children with knowledge of child rights, participation and gender equality; (5) improving reporting, monitoring and accountability; (6) addressing incidents; (7) strengthening physical learning environments; and (8) engaging parents (see figure 2).⁸

Figure 2: Whole school approach to prevent and respond to SRGBV



What have we learned about implementing an effective whole school approach?

Strengthen school leadership

The support and leadership of school principals and governing bodies is essential in driving activities that establish a culture of non-violence and respect in the school. A strong and committed school leadership team can ensure that codes of conduct are implemented (see example 2), reporting and incident response systems are monitored, and actions taken as necessary.

Successful policy implementation at the school level also requires support from the provincial education authorities, the school management and principals, as well as focal point teachers who receive training.⁹

Work on shifting gender and social norms along with school culture

Establishing a school culture that actively promotes respectful relationships and positive discipline has shown to help reduce violence. This can be done through engaging teachers (see Brief 2), employing curriculum-based approaches (see Brief 3) and promoting open dialogue.

Efforts to shift harmful norms take time and concerted efforts. Studies of previous

initiatives have shown mixed results. For example, an evaluation of the Good Schools Toolkit, guiding a whole school approach to SRGBV in Uganda found that despite efforts, harmful norms around using violence against students remained in some schools.¹⁰

Another study found that social norms in the wider community continued to affect the vulnerability of certain groups, in particular girls, who were found to participate less and continued to be at risk of experiencing violence. The study underscored the need to address negative gender norms that keep girls from participating in school activities and cause them to be punished when they are late for or tired at school because of their household responsibilities.

Early findings from the longitudinal study of the Journeys SRGBV prevention programme in Uganda (see example 1) showed that harmful norms, when addressed through participatory processes and dialogue, can and do shift the school community culture toward more equitable gender attitudes.¹¹



Engaging with youth, communities and parents is critical

Implementing school-based activities intended to shift negative social and gender norms can result in resistance from parents and community leaders and potentially put children at risk of further violence at home.

Putting a whole school approach into practice requires consulting with and gaining the support of the entire school community—including parents, community and religious leaders, and local community-based organizations, youth organizations and activists—to identify, prevent, and respond to SRGBV. This is particularly crucial for responding to severe abuse and violence and to safeguard students against backlash (see example 1).

Parents and community members can be active participants in planning activities to create safe and gender-responsive learning environments through student bodies, Parent Teacher Associations or School Management Committees.¹² Findings from a study of school culture and climate in Malawi and Uganda suggested that a positive school culture fostered the social-emotional learning of both staff and students. This, in turn, led to improved relations among staff, students, and the community. One of the most valued aspects of a positive school culture reported by participants in this study was cooperation between teachers, parents, students and school management committee members to solve school and community issues, including prevention of SRGBV.¹³



Example 1

Journeys Programme

Uganda

The Journeys programme implemented in primary schools in Uganda takes an integrated approach to building a positive school climate and preventing SRGBV. An extracurricular activity programme for students is delivered within a broader set of activities seeking to engage multiple stakeholders in positive school change, including community members, teaching and non-teaching school staff, and students themselves.

The programme for pupils presents a set of extracurricular activities to be led by ‘teacher patrons.’ Students engage in participatory activities and games designed to trigger discussions on gender, rights, equality, personal and learning challenges, problem solving, and peer support. This includes activities exploring the many forms of violence that pupils witness or personally experience when they are at school or travelling to and from school.

The programme for community members is intended to enable community ‘change agents’ to facilitate activities that deepen community members’ understanding of the nature and extent of SRGBV and support them in working together to establish a school and community where inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, and positive child support is normal. In the programme for teachers, selected school change agents organize and facilitate the activities, bringing all school staff together regularly to take them through the Journeys

activities and support them in their efforts to realize their vision for a safe and caring school.

This programme is unique in that rather than focusing on training or sensitization, it builds critical awareness skills, such as guided reflection, participatory processes and dialogue, and prototyping to allow social change actions to emerge naturally. In this way, it facilitates a process in which community members are directly involved in naming the issues that need to be addressed and developing and implementing strategies to create a safe and caring school and community.

Initial research findings support the idea that school climate plays a central role in fostering social and emotional learning, shaping attitudes that are more favourable to gender equality, and preventing all forms of SRGBV.¹⁴

Journeys was developed and is being monitored in partnership with the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports/Gender Unit by RTI International, with support from USAID.



Example 2

Good Schools Toolkit

Uganda

Produced by Raising Voices, the Good School Toolkit aims to help teachers and administrators create a violence-free learning environment where students can develop their skills and confidence and become constructive, creative and thoughtful members of their community. While the primary goal of the initiative is to address corporal punishment in schools, the kit takes a holistic approach, aiming to achieve three objectives:

- To equip teachers for increasing student confidence and success
- To create a learning environment that is safe and respectful
- To support the administration in becoming more transparent and accountable

Specific behaviour-change techniques for staff, students, and administration include setting school-wide goals; developing action plans and timelines; encouraging empathy by creating opportunities to reflect on experiences of violence; providing new knowledge to teachers on alternative non-violent discipline; and providing opportunities for teachers to practise new behavioural skills. Reinforcement of new information and ideas, feedback on progress, and modelling of new techniques and behaviours is provided by visits and phone calls from the programme support team. In addition, children participate actively,

and form committees and groups related to different activities. Schools reward successful achievement of their goals and action plan deliverables by having celebrations. The model builds social support for positive behaviours by engaging multiple groups including teachers, school administration, students and parents.

A control study of the toolkit's outcomes in Uganda found that prevalence of past week physical violence was lower in the intervention schools than in the control schools. Students in intervention schools reported feeling safe and supported and experiencing less corporal punishment.¹⁵ Secondary outcomes were safety and wellbeing in school, improved mental health status and scores on educational tests.

While studies have concluded that the intervention is highly effective at reducing violence against children in school, the focus was on short-term outcomes and it was noted that the overall prevalence of violence remained high. It was acknowledged that schools would require additional intervention and support to bring about effective and sustained change.¹⁶ Following positive evaluation of the programme in primary schools, Raising Voices is now working with the government to adapt and pilot the toolkit in secondary schools which face a higher prevalence of violence.



Challenges

-  Whole school approaches can be complex to implement because of the range of activities and stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, school leadership, and community members) that are needed to work together and build a positive school environment.
-  A significant investment of time and resources is needed to help teachers, students, education staff and principals work together within school management committees and parent-teacher groups.
-  Whole school approaches require effective coordination between the education system and child protection services, police and judiciary at the district level and in schools, which can be challenging if not mandated by policy or in contexts where services are weak.
-  Sustaining a positive school environment is often driven by the commitment of the school principal and administration, which can be disrupted by job transfers or school budgetary constraints.
-  Monitoring activities and evaluating the effectiveness of whole school approaches can be challenging because of the multiple pathways of change that can occur. This has resulted in a limited evidence base on implementing whole school approaches.

Recommendations

-  Implement a whole school approach that is tailored to the needs and priorities identified by the school community and strengthens the school system to prevent and respond to SRGBV.
-  Accompany school-based activities with community engagement, awareness-raising, mobilizing, and advocacy work with community leaders, women's organizations, youth groups and religious leaders to help create a sense of ownership among stakeholders.
-  Work with education authorities at the district and national level to ensure that school-level systems for reporting (see Brief 4) and school action plans to address SRGBV (see Brief 6) have adequate resources and are monitored.
-  Invest in monitoring, accountability mechanisms and gathering relevant data on whole school approach models that contribute to reducing violence and are sustained.



Endnotes

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Notes on figures

- 1 Source: UNESCO. (2019) Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying, Paris: UNESCO. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/Pf0000366483>
- 2 Source: Global Working Group to End SRGBV & UNGEI. (2018) A Whole School Approach to Prevent School-related Gender-based Violence: Minimum Standards and Monitoring Framework.

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