

Ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence

A Series of
Thematic Briefs



Brief 2:

Engaging teachers to create
safe and gender-responsive
learning environments



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

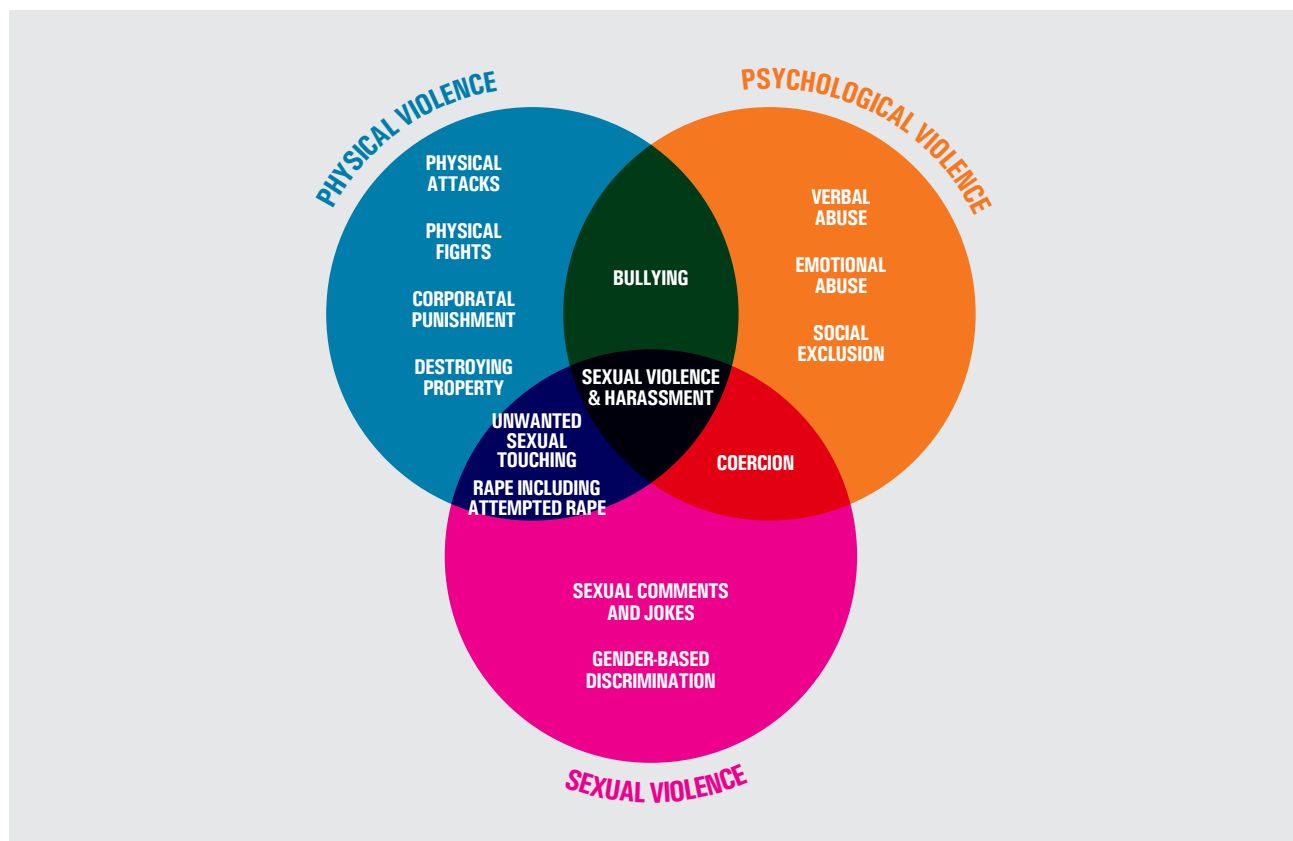
School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.¹

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: 1. Applying a whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence; 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



Why is it important to engage teachers to address SRGBV?

Teachers have a critical role to play in fostering a safe and gender-responsive environment for students within schools. School environments reflect the societies in which they are embedded, which means that social norms about violence, gender roles, as well as unequal power dynamics between adults and children, women and men, and boys and girls will be evident in the classroom as well.

Teachers are and often have the potential to be change agents and champions against school violence in their schools and communities. In reality, a majority of teachers are not perpetrators of violence but operate within a bigger, complex system, which brings with it several stress factors. Some examples are: unsupportive school leadership and administrators; pressures to deliver curricula alongside other administrative duties; limited scope for professional development and growth; and separation from family and friends in rural posts.³ A range of strategies are needed to equip teachers to use positive discipline and create classroom environments that are nurturing, participatory and gender-equitable. More examples of promising approaches are needed on what motivates teachers to change their practices and how to support their social

emotional well-being as possible victims of violence themselves.

The use of violence to discipline or control students' behaviour is seen as acceptable and even necessary by parents and community members in some contexts. Studies find that teachers will often uphold prevailing social norms and gender inequality and use violence against boys and girls. They may also have illicit and abusive sexual relationships with students. These abusive behaviours may take place even when there are school policies and national laws that prohibit them.⁴ Education systems and teacher training establishments do not necessarily equip teachers to challenge these norms or have mechanisms that support teachers and educators who witness or experience discrimination, violence and abuse. One Nigerian study found widespread sexual harassment and abuse of female teachers in teacher training institutions, suggesting that abusive behaviour and discriminatory attitudes may be learned before teachers enter the classroom,⁵ reflecting deeply embedded structures of gender inequality.

In the conversation about school violence, it is easy to view teachers as perpetrators or merely as vehicles for delivering behaviour change curricula to students. Moving beyond this perspective makes it possible to promote teachers' capacity to be mentors, role models, and more effective teachers, while enabling them to recognize the gender violence in their own lives.

What have we learned is effective for equipping teachers to create gender-responsive and safer learning environments?

Reflective processes that allow teachers to consider their own views and experiences of violence

Work with teachers on addressing sensitive topics such as gender-based violence has shown that teachers' self-reflection is a critical component. Facilitating opportunities for teachers to examine their attitudes and values about violence and gender is important. In

addition, providing a safe space in which teachers can feel comfortable to deal with their own biases and experiences of violence serve as a protective measure. It has been shown to have a transformative effect and lead to greater understanding of the deep-rooted structural inequalities and norms that give rise to gender-based violence (see example 2.1).⁶

Building empathy and teachers' confidence

Asking teachers to think about the impact that beating or verbal abuse might have on a child can help them develop empathy towards students. Exercises where teachers consider scenarios that involve a child experiencing violence allow teachers to view the event from a child's perspective and have a greater impact on shifting attitudes. An experimental study conducted by the International Rescue Committee with the Behavioural Sciences team in the Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Tanzania found this approach to be effective. The group of teachers who participated in the empathy-based modules were also asked to affirm a positive self-image of themselves as individual teachers, and contrast that with certain negative behaviours and practices that they might use with their students.⁷ Building teachers' empathy towards their students and



encouraging them to identify with the skills and self-image that they value can strengthen teachers' confidence to try innovative methods in the classroom. It is also helpful to draw on the available data to highlight the effect of positive discipline and participatory teaching approaches on students' well-being and learning (see Brief 5).

Enabling peer learning and building networks of peer educators

Transferring knowledge and skills about new methodologies often requires investing time and resources in mentoring that are not always readily available. A peer learning approach allows a pool of facilitators or teachers to share and learn from each other. For example,

in an initiative led by UNICEF Togo, a group of teachers went through a process of learning child-centred, participatory teaching methods, and came together at regular intervals to share and learn from each other about their classroom practices. This created a network of support and peer learning with teacher-led modelling. It also helped transform social norms around use of violent discipline toward new and positive ways of teaching and learning. The project demonstrated that focusing on children and participatory classroom practices led to reduced rates of violent discipline and shifted power dynamics between teachers and students. Building teacher networks within a country can also address the shortage of local trainers to implement new methodologies, by drawing on already-trained teachers to mentor their peers.



Example 1

Using a self-reflective process to enable education unions to take action to end SRGBV

**Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya,
Sierra Leone, South Africa,
Uganda and Zambia**

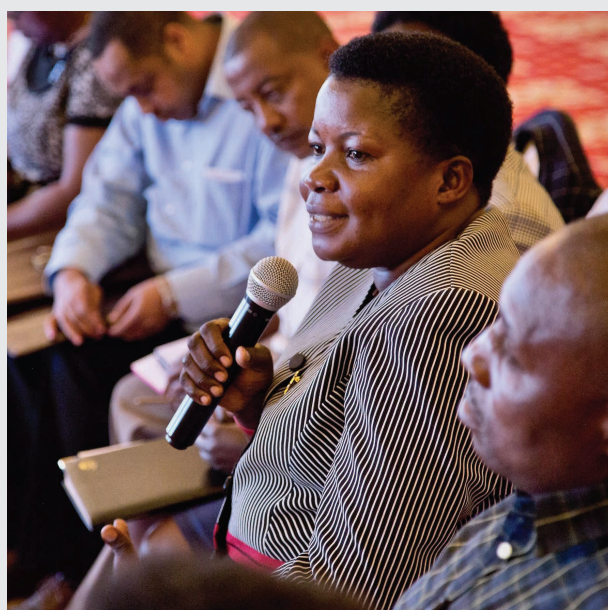
The Gender Action Learning process (GAL) is an approach developed by Gender at Work to address women's rights and gender equality within organizations.⁸ Gender at Work used this model with nine teachers' unions in sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia) to promote critical reflection and spark change projects to address gender inequality and violence. Because unions represent large parts of the teaching profession in most countries, they provide a powerful forum for educators to respond to SRGBV.

'Change teams', comprising four or five members from different levels of the union structure, developed an experimental intervention to address SRGBV within their union and participated in a peer learning process over two years. Through storytelling

and collages, facilitators encouraged reflection on the history, culture, and programmes of the unions, and on the conditions and contexts of gender norms and violence in women's and men's lives.

As a result of the reflection process, the teams developed 'change experiments', receiving mentoring and capacity building to help them test and adapt their experiments. The change projects have ranged from strengthening women's leadership and representation within the union structure and union policy reform to end SRGBV to working with school clubs and pilot schools to empower teachers and students to end SRGBV. Several individual stories of transformation showed how teachers shifted from corporal punishment to use empathy and positive discipline in their classroom practices.

Since 2016, 396 union staff and members have been directly engaged in actions to address SRGBV, reaching over 30,000 individuals. One outcome of the GAL process has been a ripple effect on unions that did not participate in the initiative but have decided to address SRGBV as part of their core work. All of the unions are members of Education International, the global federation of education unions.



Well written codes of conduct provide a necessary structure for teachers to address SRGBV

Codes of conduct should be developed in collaboration with teachers, communities and a range of stakeholders to ensure that they are a tool for supporting teachers and school personnel to promote a positive learning environment. Codes, when well developed and disseminated, can promote responsibility and ownership for the highest levels of professionalism, whilst also clarifying expectations for behavioural norms and actions (see example 2.2). Consequences should be agreed by all parties during development of national codes, and clearly laid out to respond to cases of violence or abuse.

Adaptation of new tools or methodologies by and with teachers

Tools and methods from a different context must be adapted by and with the teachers who will use them (see Brief 3). Particularly when dealing with topics related to gender-based violence, gender norms, and discriminatory

practices, inviting local experts who understand the gender and social dynamics and traditional and cultural values of the community helps with finding appropriate language and examples to illustrate the concepts. Materials on SRGBV that are adapted in consultation with the curricula department of the ministry of education, teachers union members, and national curriculum experts have a better chance of being used by teachers within the classroom environment.

Strengthening leadership support and enabling environment for teachers

Teachers can play an instrumental role in establishing a safe and gender-responsive learning environment, from engaging school management committees to reporting incidents of violence. However, support from school leadership and administrators (see Brief 1) is vital for them to be effective. Insights from the Good Schools Toolkit show the importance of leadership development for school principals in establishing a school culture that promotes respectful and equitable relationships between students and teachers.



Example 2

Implementing a school code of conduct in Ethiopia

A national Code of Conduct on Prevention of School-Related Gender-Based Violence in schools was developed by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, with support from UNICEF and consultations with members from the Ethiopian Teachers' Association, civil society organizations, and representatives from the health, education, gender, justice, and police sectors. The code addresses gender-based violence by school staff or students and includes guidance on sexual harassment, which was not part of the existing administrative disciplinary guidelines in schools. The code also specifies that a seven-member committee representing gender clubs, students, teachers, parents, administration, and leadership should be in place in each school and meet regularly.

The code is being rolled out in all regions across the country by distributing printed copies and conducting intensive training at the provincial level for teachers who will serve as gender focal points in their schools. Each gender focal point is responsible for training others on the code, monitoring the implementation of the code at the school level, taking part in the SRGBV committee, and facilitating the gender clubs. Students and student parliaments have helped disseminate and raise awareness of the code.






A study led by researchers at the Institute of Education, University College London

examined the implementation of the code in six selected schools. The study found good evidence of the potential for codes of conduct on SRGBV to be effective and made the following recommendations to strengthen implementation:

- Codes of conduct should go beyond punishment for violations, to building on and enforcing positive and preventive actions in and around schools.
- Codes should address a wide range of violence in and around school, such as bullying, corporal punishment, and child marriage, ensuring alignment with other national policies and laws.
- Guidance for responding to the range of mild to severe forms of violence perpetrated by students and teachers should also uphold rights to education and safety for all students.
- Resources are needed to support schools with training, consultation, and girls' club activities, which can be supplemented by partnerships with other government departments and civil society organizations.
- Strengthen capacity for record keeping and monitoring at the school level and make linkages with child protection, mental health, and other services in the community.



Challenges

-  Teachers may be at risk or feel vulnerable raising issues that challenge existing gender norms and patriarchal practices in the community and may face resistance or retaliation.
-  Changing the way teachers see themselves and their role as educators does not happen quickly — it takes time and specialized support.
-  Resources may be limited — including time, funds, skilled trainers, and learning materials — to help teachers develop the skills and capacity they need to address SRGBV.
-  Consultative processes for reaching agreement and developing tools such as a Code of Conduct requires an investment of time and commitment to success from all stakeholders.
-  Without appropriate incident response mechanisms in and around schools and support for victims, teachers may not feel safe talking about SRGBV with students for fear of eliciting emotional responses or raising student expectations about the school's capacity to respond.



Recommendations



Integrate topics related to SRGBV in pre- and in-service teacher training so that these are not unfamiliar ideas and teachers have a range of skills and the capacity to address SRGBV.



Work with teachers' unions and other stakeholders to revise codes of conduct and promote these as a key tool to support teachers' professionalism and practice. Unions can be an important ally to advocate for the adoption and implementation of codes of conduct, and for teacher training and response services to address SRGBV, which affects both students and teachers.



Ensure teachers are trained on how to manage incidents in a confidential, survivor-centered way and appropriate reporting and response mechanisms are in place (see Brief 4) in the school with strong connections to community-based child protection mechanisms.



Enable teachers to use curriculum-based approaches within school-wide efforts to promote a gender-responsive, respectful, and non-violent classroom environment (see Brief 3).



Ensure teachers are supported and do not feel vulnerable by engaging a range of stakeholders (see Brief 1) including school management, communities, religious leaders, youth and women's groups.



Build a community of teachers who can support each other and share their classroom practices and challenges in addressing SRGBV in their schools. This also contributes to shifting norms when more than one teacher at the school is using new methods or practices.



Endnotes

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Notes on figure

1. Source: UNESCO. (2019) Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying, Paris: UNESCO. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>

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