

Ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence

A Series of Thematic Briefs



Brief 3: Shifting harmful gender norms through curricular approaches



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.

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Introduction

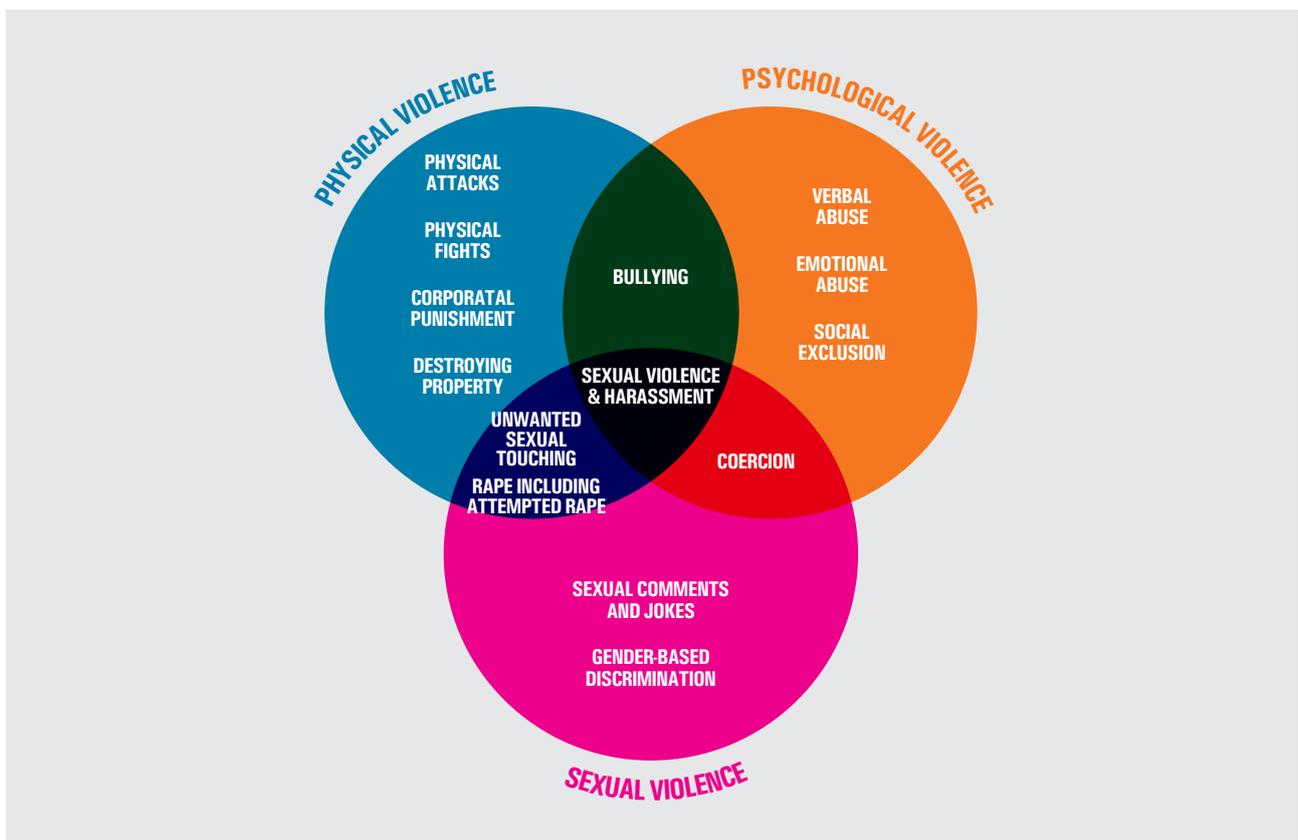
School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.¹

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; 2. Engaging teachers to create safe and gender-responsive learning environments; 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 use curricular approaches to shift harmful gender norms?

Gender norms refer to beliefs, behaviour, and practices that define what it means to be a man, woman, girl, or boy in a community or society. Norms are also dictated by a person's social status and income, ethnicity or race, disability status and gender identity. These norms often create boundaries and expectations around what girls and boys should wear, how they should behave, their education, the kind of work they can do, and whether and whom to marry. For example, gender and social norms in many cultures create expectations that women and girls should be gentle, passive, and compliant, while men and boys should be dominant, aggressive, and assert control.³ Harmful gender and social norms are recognized to be key to driving and sustaining gender-based violence.⁴

The authority to maintain these norms often lies in the hands of adults.⁵ Institutions such as the school, the family, religious institutions, and informal social groups also play a role in reinforcing norms and power structures and can keep gender discrimination and violence hidden.⁶ For example, teachers may inadvertently reinforce gender norms through the content that they teach and the way that they interact with male and female students (see Brief 2). The gender dynamics behind school bullying and violence can also remain

hidden, but where data is available, gender norms have a strong influence on the kind of bullying that is experienced and perpetrated both between peers and between teachers and students.

While schools can be a site in which gender norms may be reinforced and where gender-based violence can occur, schools are also a strategic site in which to actively promote a gender-responsive, respectful, and non-violent culture. Curricula are an important component of the educational process that can engage young people in discussion and reflection about their roles in society and help them develop positive gender attitudes and norms. This, in turn, can help empower them to recognize violence and abuse, how to protect themselves from harm, and take action to avoid harm to others.⁷ Curricular interventions also provide the opportunity to develop positive perceptions of gender, reflect on what it means to be masculine, feminine, or non-binary (not exclusively masculine or feminine), and increase understanding and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity.⁸ A growing body of evidence suggests that well-designed and delivered curricular interventions can help shift harmful social and gender norms, promote gender equality, and reduce rates of GBV and other forms of anti-social behaviour.⁹



What have we learned about using curricular approaches and safer learning environments?

Work with local experts to adapt curriculum content and delivery to the local context

Several promising curricular resources exist that can be adapted to different contexts. Engaging with multiple stakeholders when adapting programmes or curricula helps to ensure the content is responsive and that gender terms and meanings are used appropriately in the context. Pilot testing a

curriculum with students and other young people is especially valuable for gaining insight into the issues girls and boys face, as well as widely-held attitudes and norms. It also helps to foster ownership and assists young people to understand and become advocates on gender issues and SRGBV.

Ongoing training and mentoring of facilitators who deliver the curriculum are essential

Training for teachers or facilitators who will be delivering the curriculum is the foundation for work on gender norms. Experience-based learning¹⁰ about working to address gender norms suggests that it is critical for facilitators to reflect and challenge their own biases to build teachers' understanding of the concepts and their confidence in using participatory methods. Ongoing training and support are recommended. In addition, positive behaviour management training can help teachers manage participatory activities, and also contributes more broadly to positive disciplinary practices within the school.



Example 1

Connect with Respect

Eswatini, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, Viet Nam, Zambia and Zimbabwe

Connect with Respect is an example of a curriculum-based approach to prevent SRGBV. The resource is designed for delivery in schools with students aged 11 to 14 years and can be integrated into an existing school curriculum or delivered as a stand-alone programme. Connect with Respect has seven topics that help students understand important concepts such as gender, gender-based violence, and rights, as well as promote social and emotional learning and communication skills for respectful gender relationships.

Connect with Respect enables teachers to guide discussions about violence-prevention with students, in part by using carefully constructed learning activities and scenarios. They assist students in questioning harmful attitudes and practices without resorting to blaming or naming, and without needing to call on their personal stories. Practical and relevant learning activities help students engage in discussions about the topics, think critically about social and gender norms, and rehearse positive communication strategies. This includes activities such as sharing in pairs, small group discussion, and role play.

In both the Southern and Eastern Africa region and the Asia Pacific region the programme was introduced with a participatory process to

adapt it to the local context. Representatives from education and health ministries, school staff, civil society organizations, and teacher training institutions came together to review the resource and help ensure the content was responsive to the cultural context and reflective of the different forms of SRGBV that play out in schools. In addition, teachers were trained to further adapt the resource to be responsive to the needs of students in their specific context. This process has shown to be important in putting the issue on the agenda of various stakeholders and fostering ownership of the programme. The Connect with Respect resource is available online and is currently being implemented in four countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region and three countries in the Asia-Pacific region with support from UNESCO and UN Women.



Integrate SRGBV as a topic in existing programmes or curricula

SRGBV issues can be woven into existing curricula on a range of topics (see example 2). For example, several evaluated interventions that have included SRGBV or GBV have been delivered through curricula on comprehensive sexuality education, life skills education, healthy relationships, gender equality, bullying and other forms of violence, and bystander programmes.¹¹ Content delivered through extra-curricular activities such as safe spaces and girls' and boys' clubs have also shown promise in several contexts.¹²

Curriculum-based interventions need to use interactive and participatory methods to be effective

Research has found that using participatory approaches to providing students with opportunities to rehearse and apply skills in a safe space (that can then be applied in day-to-day life) may make curricular or extra-curricular interventions more successful.¹³

Curriculum-based approaches are an entry point into further efforts

Curriculum-based approaches can be a useful entry point into further efforts to address SRGBV. In several countries, the process of introducing and adapting curriculum has helped to shed light on this critical issue and triggered a range of other interventions.

Example 2

Youth Living Peace

Brazil and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Youth Living Peace was designed as an educational programme for adolescent girls and boys to address the root causes of violence and prevent sexual and gender-based violence against girls (aged 13-19). Through a curriculum delivered via group and individual activities, the approach encourages girls and boys to challenge and shift attitudes and behaviours about gender equality, use of violence and self-efficacy. The approach had a strong psychosocial and counselling support component to enable adolescents to heal from trauma and break away from harmful gender norms and break intergenerational cycles of violence.

Youth Living Peace was implemented with the intention to scale and institutionalize this individual level work. School-wide campaigns and advocacy with key stakeholders in schools, government, and civil society organizations was part of the intervention to embed policies and programming to prevent and respond to violence against adolescent girls and boys.

Coordinated by Promundo and implemented by Instituto Promundo (Brazil) and Heal Africa (DRC), the programme reached over 9000 community members, 1150 adolescents, 125 education professionals and 87 government representatives.

An external evaluation of the programme after three years of implementation in Brazil and DRC generated the following:

- 28% decrease in female participants who reported having been insulted or humiliated in the last three months and 37% decrease in experiences of verbal and psychological violence among male participants.
- An increase from 88% to 100% of teachers who would report a case of abuse to child protection/social services.
- In DRC, girls reported more self-confidence and had more opportunities to play active roles at school after participating in the programme.
- In DRC, the Ministry of Education operationalized the Youth Living Peace curriculum within the Division of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education Plans, to address gender issues, reproductive health, sexuality and relationships.



Challenges



Curriculum-based discussions about unequal gender norms with students within the school environment can empower them to challenge these at home and in the community. Without sufficient community-based awareness and dialogue, this may also put them at risk of backlash and violence from community leaders or family members.



Shifting gender norms is difficult and time-consuming and often also requires a wider shift in discourse across the country. Some norms are more difficult to shift because of social expectations, for example around marriage and housework. Teachers and curriculum facilitators may also have their own values and biases and may need support to reflect on this and build an understanding of the hidden nature of the problems and the harm associated with gender norms and gender-based violence.



Teachers can find it difficult to integrate new content due to pressure to complete the required syllabus or simply due to large class sizes and lack of materials.



Teachers and facilitators may have also experienced gender-based violence themselves and may require support to be able to deliver violence prevention curricula without experiencing secondary trauma (see Brief 2).



Using a range of participatory methodologies that make curriculum-based interventions effective requires certain skills and capacity. Teachers may not always feel comfortable adapting these methods when they are used to traditional methods.



Measuring shifts in norms can be challenging because it requires time and investment in the process of capacity development, mentoring and curriculum delivery.



Recommendations

-  Embed curricular interventions as part of broader whole school efforts. The messages conveyed through curriculum-based approaches will be reinforced when they are situated within broader efforts to promote a positive school environment including trusted reporting mechanisms (see Briefs 1 and 4).
-  Work with the curricula department within the ministry of education to identify entry points to deliver content on SRGBV (for example, lessons on guidance and counselling, values education, reproductive health etc.). This enables ownership within the ministry and creates opportunity for it to be integrated in formal curricula.
-  Invest in workshops for teachers and school staff to foster a common understanding of social and gender norms that perpetuate SRGBV and develop teachers' skills and capacity to lead discussions about norms with students.
-  Facilitate extra-curricular activities such as girls' and boys' clubs and school-community events as forums to introduce messages on gender norms, social cohesion and respectful relationships, which complement school-based efforts.
-  Invest in working with teachers' social and emotional needs and ways to address these, given that teachers may have their own experiences of violence and trauma (see Brief 2).
-  Monitor the implementation of curriculum-based programmes including mechanisms to track shifts in attitudes and behaviours over time.



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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>

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