
Inter-Sectoral Collaboration: Sexual Exploitation in and around Schools in Africa

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Defining the issue and context

- Sexual exploitation and sexual violence in or around schools is a serious and pressing problem throughout Africa that necessitates greater policy attention. The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. This, combined with the fact that such violence is generally carried out by offenders known to the child (relatives and authority figures, including teachers and school authorities), provides a hint of the magnitude of the problem of school-based sexual violence.
- According to a 2006 survey of 10 villages in Benin, 34% of school children interviewed confirmed that sexual violence occurs within their schools and 15% of teachers acknowledged that sexual harassment takes place within the school and yet rarely are such incidences reported or perpetrators held accountable^[1].

^[1] Interviewee: Patrick Sottin (Initiative pour la Recherche et les Actions pour le Développement Mondial (IRADM). Interview conducted by email, translated from French by Karen Moore, (Jones et al., 2008).

In Ghana, a study conducted in 2003 suggested that 6% of the girls surveyed had been victims of sexual blackmail over their class grades, 14% of rape cases had been perpetrated by school comrades, while 24% of boys in the study admitted to having raped a girl or to have taken part in a collective rape (UNICEF Bureau Regional Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre 2008).

The long-term consequences of such high incidence of sexual abuse and exploitation are profound;

- sexual exploitation at and around schools compromises the rights to education, freedom from oppression and equality as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.
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- For girls, sexual exploitation also undermines gender equality and prevents girls and women from obtaining equal educational and public sphere opportunities.
 - Denial of access to quality education, or feeling intimidated in or en route to the classroom, can also reinforce poverty by lowering school attendance rates.
 - Sexual abuse may also result in serious health effects, such as the transmission of sexual infections, particularly HIV, unwanted pregnancies and psychological trauma.
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During the First World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm 1996, child commercial sexual exploitation was defined as:

- ✓ A fundamental violation of children's rights
- ✓ It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object
- ✓ Commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery

Elsewhere,

- ✓ Sexual abuse in and around schools falls under *the general heading* of what the WHO's identifies as community violence – that takes place between individuals who are largely unrelated, and who may or may not know each other, generally taking place outside the home. This includes both 'random' acts of violence by strangers, as well as violence in institutional settings such as schools and other education facilities such as care homes and orphanages
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Sexual exploitation takes place within schools, perpetrated by teachers and other care providers, but also between students and whilst journeying to and from school.

Sexual abuse in a transactional capacity is a particular problem in African school settings. According to one estimate 6% of female students interviewed in Ghana said that a male teacher had at some point blackmailed them with sexual favours for good grades (Pinheiro, 2006).

Other research by Plan Togo has highlighted a wide range of language used by students to refer to girls' sexual relations with their teachers (PLAN Togo 2006). Forms of transaction include 'sexually transmittable grades' in which

sexual favours are given by students to teachers in exchange for good grades, as well as 'sexually transmittable means' which describes sexual acts in exchange for school materials, food or tuition support.

Complex experiences of abuse such as these are poorly researched and/or documented and therefore the figure of 6% likely represents only the tip of the iceberg. Often such threats go unreported as girls feel ashamed, due to cultural values and the importance placed on purity and/or do not know who to inform.

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- In Kenya, media reports indicate an increase in the number of cases touching on gender based violence (GBV). Research also shows that although girls and boys, men and women suffer acts of sexual and gender based violence, girls and women suffer the most. Many communities still adhere to traditional beliefs and practices rooted in patriarchy that still militate against women and girls' rights.
 - As a result of socialization, both boys and girls tend to acquire gender stereotyped roles, attitudes, values and norms which, propagate the status quo. Further, many cases are not reported due to cultural inhibitions and women acceptance of GBV as part of their life (MoE, Kenya 2007).
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Social-Cultural Causes:

Cultural dynamics

- Schools– like any other social context – are the sites of power relationships between teachers, staff and students and among students themselves. In particular, the power relationships between elders and juniors that flourish in the home also exist in the school environment. Sometimes these relationships are articulated in abusive ways, in part reflecting broader authoritarian and hierarchical models (authoritarian political structures; a history of military rule; and/or a very hierarchical socio-economic structure based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, class and wealth differences).

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- In many countries violence at school has been legitimized as a “natural” form of discipline and a way of establishing and maintaining hierarchical teacher-student and boy-girl relationships.
 - As a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study on school-related gender-based violence in developing countries noted, the problem “takes place in a context of gender inequality and specific cultural beliefs and attitudes about gender roles, especially those concerning male and female sexuality, a pattern of economic inequality, and in some instances significant political unrest and violent conflict” (Kim and Bailey 2003: iii).
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- Authoritarian school cultures where physical discipline is viewed as an integral part of the classroom (Mugawe and Powell, 2006) as well as pervasive patriarchal values and norms that encourage male aggression and female passivity are identified as critical underlying reasons for sexual school violence (Harber 2001; Nhundu and Shumba 2001).
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Economic factors

- ✓ Widespread poverty and limited livelihood opportunities for many families in Africa, often as a result of many factors including conflicts, can force children and adolescents to engage in transactional sex to pay for their education (Leach et al 2003).
 - ✓ Girls in particular are often vulnerable to sexual abuse due to the lures of transactional sex where sexual services are exchanged for money, school fees, gifts or food (George 2001).
 - ✓ Some teenage girls even come to see their bodies as economic assets and thereby normalise transactional sex (Burton 2005).
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- ✓ Teachers, who are often underpaid, or occasionally not paid at all, and frequently endure difficult living and working conditions, may perceive sexual favours from students as a form of compensation. This situation is in large part a reflection on the focus within education sector policies on infrastructural development rather than investments in educational quality.
 - ✓ The economics of sexual violence are also linked to the breakdown of traditional family structures as labour migration to urban areas of one or both parents increases. In such instances there may be even more onus on children to support themselves, resulting in a higher proportion resorting to transactional sex.
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Gendered experiences

- ☑ In the school context, children's experiences of sexual violence are highly gendered. Sexual harassment and violence appears to be overwhelmingly carried out against girl students by male students and teachers (Save the Children Alliance 2005).
 - ☑ This is reinforced by a broader culture of gender violence and inequality, including family violence and the dominant view that women 'belong' to men and have lower status and value (ibid). These attitudes and behaviours are often modelled by teachers who accept unequal power relations and differential behavioural patterns among boys and girls (Dunne 2007)
 - ☑ Through action and inaction teachers reinforce culturally acceptable gender practices and attitudes. Perhaps most importantly, by not reporting or responding seriously to complaints of sexual abuse, teachers and school authorities convey the message that sexual abuse is permissible or to be tolerated as part of life.
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- ☑ Teachers and male students frequently exploit cultural sexual dynamics by enforcing their gender and authority as a sign of power; often offering good grades or tuition for sexual relationships. This is all part of a corrupt school system which does not penalise sexual relationships between teachers and students.
 - One example of this is the case of a school in Ghana where the head teacher's sexual misconduct over many years was an 'open secret' in the community, but where there were no outlets to voice complaints and/or take action (Leach et al. 2003).

 - ☑ Research suggests that the gendered dimensions of school geography are particularly important in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation (Burton 2005). Girls in particular are likely to feel unsafe in certain places for fear of harassment or attack. Girls report that they are most likely to be abused in or near toilets, empty classrooms or dormitories, the perimeter of the school grounds, as well as en route to school (George 2001).
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Some case studies:

✓ The St Kizito Tragedy:

On July 13 1991, 71 girls of ages 14-18 were raped in the St. Kizito Secondary School, Meru District, in Kenya's Eastern Province. Of these 19 of them died following strangulation and being crushed beneath the iron bunk beds. An enquiry was made into the incident but was never published.

Official reports indicated that the boys in the mixed secondary school were angry because a soccer game had been cancelled and decided to vent rage on the girls. They therefore invaded the dormitory in the night after cutting the power supply, raped and strangled the girls.

✓ The Keveye Girls Schools Saga

In Keveye Girls, Vihiga District, Western Kenya, in 1996 alone 12 girls were pregnant at the same time. The male teachers were implicated in the pregnancies, never interdicted, but two were transferred to other schools.

Such transfers are the escapism adopted by the Ministry of Education in dealing with teacher - student sexual violence in schools. Schools administrators do not take matters seriously. Often parents are duped into negotiating the matters and accepting payments, yet the girls continue to suffer psychologically long after the parents have expended the payments.

✓ The Mareira Mixed School Ordeal

In Mareira Mixed Secondary School, a Catholic sponsored school in Kenya's Muranga District (in Central Province) a number of girls were attacked and raped by their colleagues and villagers on July 7, 1996. As it were, mutual friendships had developed between the boys and girls and it was usual for the boys to escort the girls to their dormitories.

The principal felt that this situation would breed sexual temptation and immorality and so he ordered that girls leave their dormitories 10 minutes before the boys. The boys were mad, because of this and other things in the school. They therefore with the help of the villagers attacked the girls, raped them and burnt the school down.

The Political Environment

- Throughout Africa, children's issues receive little attention from politicians, in part because children do not represent politicians' main constituencies.
 - Politicians themselves are frequently subject to the cultural norms of the society they come from and as such may be sensitive to push issues concerning sexual behaviour at the national policy level, as they might render themselves unpopular
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- Throughout Africa there is also a lack of inter-ministerial cooperation which is necessary in order to ensure coordinated action between Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Interior and Social Affairs to develop adequate preventative responses (Jones et al 2008).
 - There is also a lack of capacity amongst Parliamentarians to review law proposals and analyze national budgets to ensure that children's protection is taken sufficiently into consideration or managed by cross department initiatives (Plan 2008) [\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) This briefing paper is informed by: Increasing Visibility and Promoting Policy Action to Tackle Sexual Exploitation In and Around Schools in Africa: Focus West Africa, ODI, September 2008 (commissioned by Plan West Africa)

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- The current international drive to achieve education for all has also had an indirect impact on children's vulnerability to school violence throughout the region and African continent due to the very rapid increase in school enrolment. With an emphasis on quantitative expansion rather than educational quality, school classroom sizes and pupil to teacher ratios have increased dramatically, rendering it more difficult for teachers to maintain control (Woldehanna and Jones, 2006) or to intervene in cases of student violence.
 - Where regulations or legislations have been introduced to address school violence, this has not been met with a concomitant increase in resources to tackle violence and enforce new regulations.
 - Similarly, the drive to increase girls' enrolment rates has in most cases not been met by increased resources to address their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.
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Legal Framework

- ✓ Most of the countries in Africa have legislation which provides general protection to children against sexual violence. Legislation on sexual violence is explicit throughout the region
 - ✓ All of the countries in Africa to the exception of Somalia ratified the CRC of 1989 between 1990 and 1993
 - ✓ Reinforcing this international agreement in 1990 the African Union and its member states adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which came into force in 1999
 - ✓ Restrictions of legislative measures shaped by the dual legal systems that characterize many African countries
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- Customary regulations, laws and norms often exist in tandem with modern judicial frameworks, and at the community level, the former often dominate
 - Limited awareness of international and national legislation amongst judicial personnel, local administrative officials, teachers, parents and children
 - When cases of sexual exploitation are reported to the police or legal officials, they are hindered by the under-developed child justice systems, which dissuade future victims from reporting
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Responses to SGBV –

Policy Statements in Kenya

To eliminate sexual harassment and gender-based violence, the government and partners have done the following:

- ☑ Mainstreamed policies that address GBV at all education levels
 - ☑ Established modalities for dealing with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including sexual harassment
 - ☑ Developed a framework for coordination of stakeholders involved in efforts of providing a safe learning and teaching environment, and
 - ☑ Developed and implemented clear anti-sexual harassment and anti-gender based violence policies at all levels in the Ministry of Education and all educational institutions
 - ☑ But the Challenge remains non-implementation of the good intentions
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Other Programmatic Responses

The concern that sexual coercion and abuse put girls and young women at extremely high risk of HIV infection has given rise to many different responses globally, especially in Southern Africa. Some of the initiatives by international NGOs extend beyond schools.

- ✓ ActionAid's 'Stepping Stones' training programme aims to prevent HIV transmission, in doing so, addresses sexual and gender-based violence in hundreds of communities in Africa.
 - ✓ In Ethiopia, communities have taken the initiative in establishing Girls Education Advisory Committees (GEACs) that address the problem of providing girls with access to education of a high standard. GEACs have established Girls' Clubs that serve as safe places for girls to talk, encourage them to report problems about harassment and abuse.
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- ✓ Other GEAC initiatives include disciplinary committees to hold teachers accountable; 'police' to protect the girls on their way to and from school; constructing separate latrines for girls; insisting on female teachers in schools; training boys and girls on how to treat each other respectfully providing counseling for girls in safe places. As a result, in one primary school in Ethiopia the drop rate for girls fell from 57% to 19%.
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RECOMMENDED POLICY AND PROGRAMME ACTION TO TACKLE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS

Raising awareness and Information Sharing

'Improvement in the situation of violence in schools must occur through: awareness-raising; communication of messages to change behaviours; training; the struggle against poverty especially in grassroots communities; implementation of laws; and legislation.' (Initiative pour la Recherche et les Actions pour le Développement Mondial worker: Benin, Painful Lessons 2008).

National Strategies:

- ✓ Educating children about gender equality
 - ✓ Training teachers
 - ✓ Strengthening youth civil society organizations
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Involving Multiple Stakeholders

There is increasing recognition that if sexual abuse is to be effectively tackled a wide range of stakeholders need to be made aware of the problem, take ownership over and implement community-appropriate responses.

National Strategies

- ✓ Developing manuals to educate community leaders and parents about the problem and how to report
- ✓ Involve ministries of education, parents associations and teachers' unions in the fight against sexual abuse and corruption
- ✓ Encourage and assist local support groups/civil society orgs
- ✓ Media and Resources: Undertake media monitoring

International Strategies

- ✓ *Issue Champion:* Establish a single well-resourced issue champion to oversee a regional international framework, encourage and support the creation of regional observatories to combat sexual exploitation in schools
 - ✓ *Legal and Judicial Reforms:* Train intermediaries to support children in the court system, offer free legal advice and train female police officers
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Providing Gender Specific Facilities and Services

Due to social, cultural and economic determinants women are more commonly affected by or involved in sexual exploitation and therefore sustainable strategies need to focus on providing educational facilities that take the geography and gender dimensions of abuse into consideration.

National Strategies:

Geography and Infrastructure: Take into account gender-dimensions in infrastructural development -

- improving street lighting and creating safe routes for children on their way to school
 - child-friendly classrooms equipped with appropriate furniture and textbooks, a borehole to provide safe water, separate male and female latrine blocks for sanitation, and housing units for teachers
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Providing for the Long Term Effects of Sexual Abuse

- ✓ *Health schemes:* Implement health orientated schemes which pay attention to treating the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS,
- ✓ Scale-up local health initiatives and advocate for mental health issues

Increasing political will

- ✓ Motivate and train parliamentarians on child protection including issues concerning sexual exploitation and budget work
 - ✓ Encourage political support for improving systematic data collection, quality education, child protection and psycho-social support for victims
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Improving legal Mechanisms

National Strategies

- ✓ Periodic reporting
- ✓ Meet international standards
- ✓ More detailed national legislation

International Strategies

- ✓ Situational Analysis
 - ✓ Meet international standards
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Promoting Life Protective skills

National Strategies

- ✓ Self-defence training
- ✓ Sexual rights and health training

International Strategies

- ✓ Hold regional forums to draw attention to the problem of sexual exploitation and other forms of school related violence, to disseminate knowledge on how to alleviate the problem and to teach skills for personal protection.

Dissemination and Communication

National Strategies

- ✓ Media campaign
- ✓ Print and multi-media:
- ✓ Incentives on best practices
- ✓ Accessible legal documentation

International Strategy

- ✓ Support the development of networks to share experiences and strategies and to tackle school based violence.
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Service provision

National Strategies

- ✓ Preschool programmes
- ✓ Child-sensitive facilities
- ✓ Training

Monitoring and Evaluation

- ✓ Revise laws
 - ✓ Best practice
 - ✓ Accountability mechanisms
 - ✓ Monitor risk behaviours
 - ✓ Incentivise the media
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Thank you !

