

Learning without fear: Strategies to address violence in schools

Based on lessons from DFID's Girls' Education Challenge

Thematic review

Girls'
Education
Challenge



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Introduction

In 2019, all Girls' Education Challenge Transition (GEC-T) projects were invited to respond to a short 'Violence in Schools' survey which aimed to map project activities related to safeguarding and addressing violence in schools. This paper draws on the survey responses from 30 of these projects, interviews with staff from five projects and qualitative data about violence in schools from a small number of GEC midline reports.

Ensuring adolescent girls – particularly the most marginalised – are safe on the way to, and in, schools is integral to achieving quality education and to ensuring participation. This is why **all** GEC projects have integrated safeguarding interventions into their education programmes.

Globally, the evidence base on what works to prevent and respond to school violence is still limited and the GEC provides an opportunity to learn more about activities which aim to tackle violence in schools and create safe learning environments. This paper will first outline the rationale for integrating violence prevention activities in education programmes, before proposing a holistic approach to addressing violence. Using this holistic approach as a framework, the paper outlines eight interesting findings from across the GEC portfolio which can be used within the GEC to strengthen our response.

The impact of violence on adolescent girls

It is now widely recognised children cannot learn well when they are fearful.¹ Many of the GEC beneficiary girls are living in contexts of crisis, displacement and extreme poverty which heightens their risk of abuse and exploitation. Girls' sense of safety is linked to their emotional well-being and there is an important relationship between emotional well-being and the ability to learn. Girls who have experienced, or fear, violence are often distressed, more likely to be anxious or depressed, may struggle to concentrate and learn, and are more likely to drop out of school.

GEC midline reports have shown that as girls get older safety concerns increase, particularly around sexual harassment and abuse. Parents of beneficiary girls are also more likely to keep girls at home as their concerns for safety increase. Evidence across several midline evaluations have shown links between safety concerns and a negative impact on both attendance and learning.

It is important to recognise that boys are also victims of violence – particularly physical violence. However, girls are generally more at risk due to deeply entrenched gender norms rooted in unequal power relations. Girls are

'Girls felt that the humiliation associated with corporal punishment distracts them and demotivates them from their learning. They "feel bad" when they get the punishment. The passion with which they spoke about being demeaned, humiliated and scorned by some teachers was telling about how much this plays on their minds.' GEC project midline report.

¹ M. J. Elias, Academic and social-emotional learning. International Academy of Education, France: SADAG, 2003; Blaya, C. & Debarbieux, E. (2008). Expel violence! A systematic review of interventions to prevent corporal punishment, sexual violence and bullying in schools. Bordeaux: International Observatory on Violence in Schools.

easier to target due to their lower visibility in the community at large, their lack of voice and power, and their economic vulnerability. This means that it is essential to apply a gender lens when developing violence prevention and response approaches.

'In Tanzania, sexual harassment (euphemistically called 'pestering') is so prevalent and ingrained that almost all girls interviewed regarded it as part of everyday life. Schools, particularly on the east coast of Tanzania, are based in a society where girls are condoned to have sex from puberty or at a young age. And in a country which only banned marriage for 14-year old girls in 2016, power relations, peer pressure and cultural expectations play out in schools.' GEC project midline report.

A holistic approach

DFID's Whole School + Theory of Change (TOC)² outlines a holistic approach to improving safety in schools via four outcome areas: school, the community, the national/district and undercutting all of these is the fourth outcome area – that of functioning and responsive reporting mechanisms. By focusing on these four outcome areas, education programmes can strengthen their approaches to addressing violence.

The following sections will look at emerging lessons for each outcome area, noting that there is overlap between the pillars – for example some of the lessons that come under community can also apply to school and vice versa.

Findings from GEC projects



This paper outlines some interesting findings from GEC projects. However, it should be noted that in many cases there is no clear evidence yet at the impact level of the effectiveness of these activities. The aim rather of this paper is to highlight the diversity of approaches projects are taking and to support learning across the GEC portfolio.

² Safer Schools: Addressing school violence through education programming. DFID Guidance note. January 2019

Community-level action

The most common GEC community-level activities related to preventing violence against children are child protection and safeguarding training, community awareness activities and community dialogues. These activities typically involve a range of different stakeholders, including parents/caregivers, religious and community leaders, and community-led school management councils. The impact of these activities appears to be stronger where projects are implementing multiple, complementary activities. For example, one project ran community dialogues sessions, workshops with men and boys and radio advocacy and ensured that these activities were overlapping and mutually reinforcing so that some men and boys in workshops also attended community dialogues, and during dialogues community members listened to radio messaging campaigns.

FINDING #1: Projects tend to develop multiple, complementary community-based activities, including training and awareness-raising activities to address violence, rather than one activity in isolation. Where possible, it is important to integrate activities, so they are overlapping and mutually reinforcing.

FINDING #2: Engaging men and boys requires the adoption of specialised packages that explicitly target harmful masculinities.

Engaging men and boys meaningfully is also a key component of community engagement. Global evidence suggests that the prevention of violence against women and girls requires developing and adopting specialised packages that explicitly target harmful masculinities.³ This can be done in co-ed or separate sessions, depending on

the cultural context. The following case study illustrates some promising practice in relation to engaging men and boys.

Engaging men and boys

The Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP) Phase II conducts several activities targeting men and boys. At the community level, the project conducts training with men and boys in refugee camps in Kenya. The training focuses on gender inequality and how it negatively affects women, girls, men and boys. The training also includes content on negative masculinities and how they can seem to justify men's capacity for violence, control over women and girls, and dominance in the educational sphere; and bystander intervention and workable strategies for change within the camp contexts. According to the project, some evidence has emerged from pre and post-test surveys that those male stakeholders participating in training activities are more aware of how they can be involved in stopping violence against women.

Another finding at the community level is that activities appear to be more successful in shifting attitudes and behaviours when they are interactive (instead of didactic), build participants' critical reflection of their own experiences and support decision-making and action. This is in line with evidence from DFID's What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme, which found that both school-based and community-based violence prevention interventions are more effective when they develop critical thinking skills, communication and empathy, and include activities to promote critical reflection on gender norms, roles and power.

FINDING #3: Facilitating personal reflection, decision making and action builds community ownership, which is critical to shifting norms around violent behaviour and attitudes.

³ Alexander-Scott, M., Bell, E. & Holden, J. (2016) Shifting Social Norms to Tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). DFID Guidance Notes.

For example, the IGATE-T project in Zimbabwe encourages dialogue and problem solving through its community score carding. In a recent community score carding activity, girls engaged in a dialogue to identify the issues affecting them, and then engaged with stakeholders, including community and religious leaders, school heads, the Ministry of Education, and other stakeholders, to develop corresponding action plans and to select a monitoring committee to ensure accountability. One key issue to emerge was girls' vulnerability to early marriage to their perpetrators after experiencing sexual abuse. Actions identified to address this included continued awareness raising with religious groups and community members and ensuring that girls have access to channels for reporting abuse.

School-level action

Many projects are implementing life skills or leadership sessions with girls and are using these sessions as a platform to support violence prevention. Many include building awareness of safeguarding mechanisms such as how to report cases of violence. In a number of cases these are enhancing girls'

FINDING #4: When projects are building girls' confidence in reporting cases of violence, there need to be adequate and confidential reporting and response mechanisms in place to ensure the principle of 'do no harm'.

confidence which may in turn lead to increased reporting of cases of violence. Where these activities exist, it is important that other complementary activities are being implemented. For instance, if aiming to build girls' confidence to report cases of violence, it is important to ensure that the safeguarding and reporting mechanisms that are in place are fully functioning, reliable and confidential.

FINDING #5: An explicit focus on improving teacher capacity in terms of pedagogy and engaging learners can be an impactful approach to fostering non-violent classroom management, with shifting relationships between pupils and teachers leading to reduced tendency for teachers to feel they should use corporal punishment.

All 30 GEC projects who responded to the survey are incorporating child protection and safeguarding elements into teacher professional learning workshops or trainings and the majority have activities addressing corporal punishment. Many projects have found it to be more impactful to move away from didactic trainings – for example on codes of conduct or

corporal punishment – to trainings that focus on non-violent classroom management.

There are several ways that projects are approaching non-violent classroom management. Some projects are incorporating skills-building in positive discipline approaches such as the use of praise or implementing reward systems. Other projects are facilitating a process of critical self-reflection where

“If we beat up a student who was struggling but making efforts, we may destroy his/her future. That will become a problem. The student will drop out of school as a result.” (Teacher, SOMGEP midline report)

“If you are a teacher, you cannot beat the student if the student did not understand something. It may have happened when we were students, but the situation is different now. Teachers are receiving lots of training about how students understand something.” (Teacher, SOMGEP midline report)

teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences. They may reflect on their own experiences of corporal punishment as a child, or more recent experiences of perpetrating corporal punishment - in both cases with an element of reflection on the impact of abuse.

Some projects are approaching non-violent classroom management through a focus on pedagogy rather than discipline; the aim being to shift towards mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students. This can focus on topics such as: drawing on the knowledge students bring to the class, having engaging lessons that are more learner-centred and not punishing students for giving the ‘wrong’ answer, but instead providing encouragement.

Different approaches to supporting teacher use of non-violent classroom management

The Viva and Children at Risk Action Network (CRANE) project in Uganda implements regular teacher professional development several times a year, with topics decided based on teachers’ learning needs. In the past, the project has implemented teacher learning courses with components of self-reflection on childhood experiences of corporal punishment and has also included skills development content on positive discipline. According to the project, although these activities have led to some positive change, the most successful behaviour change (i.e. reduction in perpetration of corporal punishment) has emerged from a teaching approach where teachers are provided with skills to integrate new styles of teaching, enhancing student engagement and thus reducing the teachers’ tendency to resort to corporal punishment. In this approach, there is an explicit focus on shifting relationships between students and teachers.

Many GEC projects are focusing attention on training and capacitating facilitators who are leading sessions on violence prevention and response with educators and community members. Although the content of violence prevention activities, including training, curricula and manuals is important, it is just as important to have well-trained facilitators who are prepared to be flexible and can guide the process of participants’ self-reflection.⁴ This is particularly important in challenging contexts where discussing and addressing violence against women and children is sensitive and can take time. It is also important to encourage facilitators and project staff to question their own gender biases - thus they can more effectively facilitate gender-transformative attitude change in others.

FINDING #6: Facilitators and trainers may need support and capacity development so that they can guide a process of participant self-reflection. This should involve gender-transformative approaches, including encouraging facilitators and project staff to question their own gender biases.

Ensuring facilitators are well prepared and trained

Let our Girls Succeed in Kenya invests in training facilitators and ensuring they have the necessary skills and flexibility to successfully drive social norm change through several activities, including Community Conversations. The project’s Trainer of Trainers (TOT) manual for facilitators includes a number of activities aimed at reducing gender bias and supporting critical reflection about gender inequality and how to address it. According to the project, an important facilitation skill is guiding participants to voice their own issues and priorities and come up with their own conclusions about training or engagement topics to build ownership. Through this approach, some communities have raised the issue of physical discipline of children, which has created entry points for training on child protection and non-violent discipline. Having the flexibility to allow time for reflection, understanding group dynamics and when to mix or separate different groups, are also important.

⁴ Jewkes, R., Stern, E. and Ramsoomar. L. (2019) *Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Community Activism Approaches to Shift Harmful Gender Attitudes, Roles and Social Norms*. Evidence Review.

Action at the district and national level

DFID's Whole School + TOC emphasises the importance of not just engaging with the Ministry of Education but also incorporating a multi-sectoral approach that engages health, justice, finance, social welfare and other sectors.⁵ Many GEC projects are working with sectoral groups on violence prevention and response and these activities can be classified under three types:

1. Training and capacity building
2. Developing safeguarding mechanisms
3. Participating in working groups

FINDING #7: Supporting multi-sectoral approaches is important and can be done at low cost but with potentially large impact, for example through active participation in external cluster meetings and existing technical working groups.

Across these three types of activity, projects are engaging several different sector groups, including the health sector, the police, the legal/justice sector, the social welfare and human rights sector. Viva Crane's project in Uganda has focused its violence prevention work on the justice sector, with evidence of strong impact on children survivors of violence who are in contact with the law (see Case Study below).

Sectoral approaches to preventing violence against children

Viva Crane's 'Live, Learn, Laugh' project in Uganda has trained public prosecutors in child development and counselling to help minimise further distress of children in contact with the law and to help in the process of securing convictions of child abusers. The project has also set up child-friendly rooms in offices or police stations, including for children giving witness statements. These activities have had tangible results, including prosecutors handling children's cases differently, and evidence and witness testimony being handled in a non-traumatic way. For instance, prosecutors addressing cases of child abuse and violence are now drawing more from video testimony and using anatomical dolls to assist in collecting evidence in a way that reduces harm against children who may feel uncomfortable speaking in public about the abuse they experienced.

CAMFED has set up Community Development Committees (CDCs) in each district where it works. The CDCs have a role in the protection and welfare of marginalised girls. They operate across sectors and consist of government departments, community-level local government, traditional leadership and community organisations, as well as members of the CAMFED Association (CAMA) – women leaders educated with CAMFED support. In Zambia a CDC member discussed their role with regards child protection:

"As a (Social Welfare) department, as well as a member of this committee, we have a child protection committee secretariat. This child protection committee has members from education, the judiciary and other organisations. We have centralised this structure with the village-level child protection committees and with our colleagues for education who have emphasised the child protection policy in schools. We do not forget to do the monitoring to ensure that every school has a child protection policy in place [...] And apart from that, we are working hand in hand with the Zambian police; they make sure the perpetrators of these violent offences are quickly taken by [the] police. So, we are actually working as a team in a district and also working within our respective sectors to ensure that the welfare of children improves."

⁵ Addressing School Violence: A 'Whole-School+' Theory of Change. UK Aid from the British People.

It is recognised globally that reducing violence through safeguarding requires mitigation, prevention strong reporting and response mechanisms, with adequate accountability mechanisms. Ensuring that safeguarding policies are monitored and cases are followed up on accordingly builds trust in the system.⁶ For instance, child protection policies or plans, or training in how

FINDING #8: Safeguarding through mitigation, prevention, reporting and response, and through effective accountability mechanisms is critical for increasing reporting of cases of violence and reducing harm.

to implement them, are backed up by implementation of anonymous reporting and response mechanisms with multiple entry-points, which are further supported by accountability mechanisms, whether through participatory monitoring or child protection response committees. GEC projects that are implementing all these types of activities in an integrated way have had positive outcomes, including girls feeling more comfortable and confident to report cases of violence, and an increase in community confidence that due process will be followed in these cases.

Summary of findings

#1: Projects tend to develop multiple, complementary community-based activities, including training and awareness-raising activities to address violence, rather than one activity in isolation. Where possible, it is important to integrate activities so they are overlapping and mutually reinforcing.

#2: Engaging men and boys requires the adoption of specialised packages that explicitly target harmful masculinities.

#3: Facilitating personal reflection, decision making and action builds community ownership, which is critical to shifting norms around violent behaviour and attitudes.

#4: When projects are building girls' confidence in reporting cases of violence, there need to be adequate and confidential reporting and response mechanisms in place to ensure the principle of 'do no harm'.

#5: An explicit focus on improving teacher capacity in terms of pedagogy and engaging learners can be an impactful approach to fostering non-violent classroom management, with shifting relationships between pupils and teachers leading to reduced tendency for teachers to feel they should use corporal punishment.

#6: Facilitators and trainers may need support and capacity development so that they can guide a process of participant self-reflection. This should involve gender-transformative approaches, including encouraging facilitators and project staff to question their own gender biases.

#7: Supporting multi-sectoral approaches is important and can be done at low cost but with potentially large impact, for example through active participation in external cluster meetings and existing technical working groups.

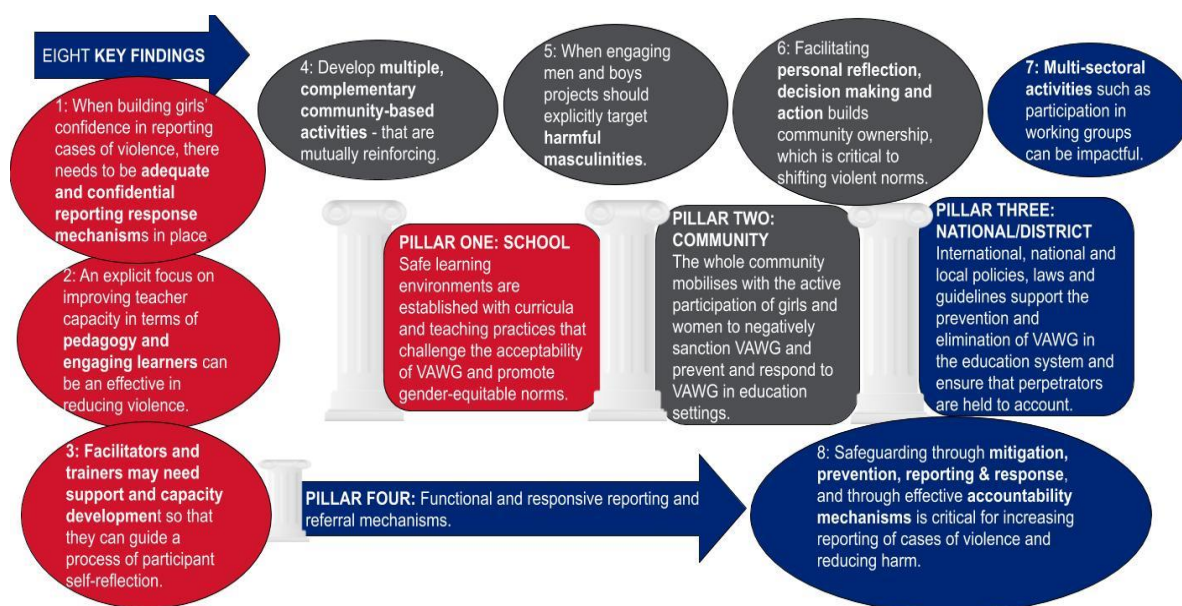
#8: Safeguarding through mitigation, prevention, reporting and response, and through effective accountability mechanisms is critical for increasing reporting of cases of violence and reducing harm.

A final important issue to highlight is the importance of the intersecting characteristics, in addition to gender, that increase adolescent girls' vulnerability to violence - such as poverty or living in a context affected by conflict or crisis. Girls with disabilities are also particularly vulnerable to violence, and often have limited knowledge about, or access to, reporting mechanisms.

⁶ *End Violence in Schools: Safe to Learn. A Call to Action*. UNICEF 2018.

Conclusion

Addressing violence in schools should continue to be prioritised, particularly by those working with the most marginalised adolescent girls. This is not beyond the remit of education projects and it is in fact the responsibility of projects to ensure their beneficiaries – both boys and girls – are safe. For projects concerned with improving learning outcomes, creating a safe space is integral to achieving learning gains; we are learning that education projects will be more successful if violence prevention and response activities are considered from the outset.



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