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A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa

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A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to quality education is a fundamental right of all children, and a prerequisite for socio-economic development and poverty reduction. Children's education and protection rights are neither respected nor fulfilled by West and Central African States when school-based violence and abuse put boys' and girls' physical and psychological well-being at risk. This can result in long-term psychological effects on children as well as school drop-out and thus compromise the achievement of Education for All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the full participation of boys and girls in society.

The prevalence, frequency and intensity of violence in schools are yet to be fully and systematically documented in West and Central Africa. There are no comprehensive reporting systems of violent acts in the region, whether they occur inside or outside schools. Nevertheless, existing studies on school-based violence in West and Central Africa reveal that many schools in the region, both private and public, need to improve to become safe and protective environments for children.

Violence in schools

School-based violence is not a problem confined to schools but a complex, multifaceted societal issue. Schools are social spaces within which the power relationships, domination and discrimination practices of the community and wider society are reflected. Violence against children in schools is linked to socio-cultural traditions, political agendas, the weaknesses of education systems, community practices, and to global macroeconomics. Conditional aid flows, as well as internal efficiency in education expenditure, impact on national education systems and can result in insufficient recruitment of teachers and cuts in teacher training budgets.

The complexity of the phenomenon and its interaction at all levels of society is presented below. School-based violence has root causes in and consequences for all spheres of the diagram.
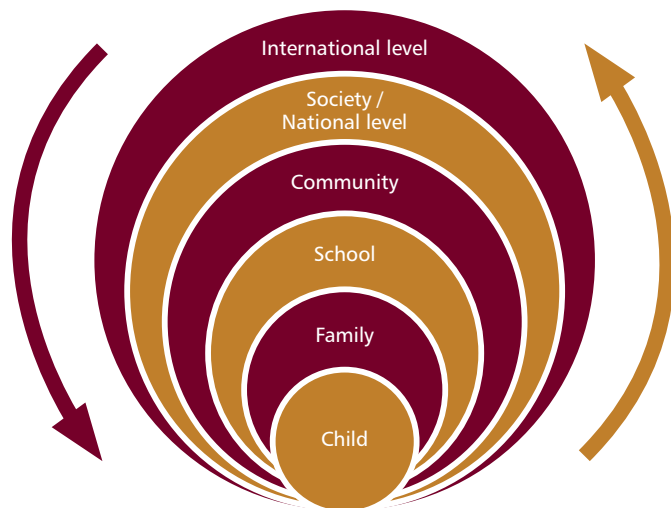
Forms, causes and effects of school-based violence

In West and Central Africa, children can be exposed to successive or concurrent forms of violence throughout their schooling.

Corporal and degrading punishment

Evidence shows that corporal and degrading punishment is widespread in most countries of the region. Degrading by nature, corporal punishment encompasses the use of sticks, whips, belts or any other objects, blows to the head, slaps, boxing of ears and enforcing uncomfortable positions such as kneeling. Verbal insults and threats are other forms of degrading punishment.

Boys and girls are both affected by corporal punishment which is administered by male and female teachers alike. In Benin, Senegal, the Central African Republic and The Gambia, studies show that more than half of primary school children have been victims of corporal punishment in schools. Evidence from Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia reveals that Koranic scholars, predominantly boys, are at particular risk of violence throughout their Koranic education.

Violence can be perceived as a legitimate form of correction of behaviour in the home and the school, and corporal punishment an educational virtue. Beyond deeply rooted socio-cultural factors, systemic causes also explain the prevalence of corporal punishment. Insufficient teacher training impacts on teachers' level of preparedness and lack of awareness of non-violent forms of discipline which would enable teachers to better deal with stressful classroom situations.

Corporal punishment impacts negatively on children's health and concentration, class participation and performance and can have lifelong repercussions on the psychological and social development of the child.

Sexual violence, abuse and exploitation

Sexual abuse (sexual violence perpetrated by taking advantage of a situation of superiority) and sexual exploitation (sexual abuse with resultant economic, social or political gain) are widespread forms of violence in and around schools across the region.

Sexual abuse happens in schools (toilets, classrooms, staffrooms), on the way to/from school and in teachers' houses. All available studies in the region confirm that sexual abuse is perpetrated mostly by men, be they teachers or school staff, other men from the community (young men, soldiers at check points, bus drivers, sugar daddies), or male students. Victims are mostly girls. There is no common hierarchy of perpetrators across the region. In Ghana, a study reveals that the main perpetrators of sexual abuse are classmates. In the Central African Republic, teachers are identified as the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse against primary school girls.

Data varies greatly across the region on the prevalence of sexual exploitation, partly because it is often combined with sexual abuse. However, the most reported practice of sexual exploitation is sex for grades, usually involving a male member of staff and a girl student.

Much sexual violence is situated within gender-based norms and gender-based sociali-sation dynamics prevalent in parts of West and Central Africa in which male violence is accepted and female submission and passivity is promoted. Sexual exploitation has root causes in poverty. Poor girls may engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff or other adults to financially support their education or family. The lack of economic power of teachers and other education staff also results in sexual favours from students being seen as a form of compensation. The persistence of sexual violence in schools may also be explained by the dearth of female teachers in both primary and secondary schools in West and Central Africa, and by the impunity of perpetrators.

Sexual violence has dramatic effects on the psychological well-being of children, under-mining their self-esteem and leading to depression. Sexual violence has repercussions on the child's later sexual behaviour (victims of sexual violence are at greater risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviour at an early age), and on the child's health (risk of sexually trans-mitted infections and HIV infection). For girls, a dramatic consequence of sexual abuse is unwanted early pregnancies which can be detrimental to both maternal and child health and seriously compromise their education.

Other forms of violence

Studies suggest other forms of violence are also prevalent in the region. Psychological violence is not systematically documented but there are reports of threats and public shaming in school practices. Boys and girls are affected by the phenomenon of bullying. Physical fights are often cited as the most common form of violence in schools, in par-ticular at primary level. Evidence from Togo, Liberia and Ghana shows the prevalence of obligatory chores (boys working in teachers' farms or girls undertaking domestic chores in teachers' houses), which increase children's vulnerability to other forms of violence and reduce the time children can dedicate to learning, resting or recreation.

While bullying and other forms of psychological violence can be explained by age and gender hierarchies or the felt need for material possessions, chores are a practice trans-ferred from family and community life to school. The level of violence in the home and the community also impacts upon school-based violence, children and young people being likely to replicate in school the aggressive behaviours to which they are exposed outside of school on a regular basis. Root causes of school-based violence are therefore also found in domestic and gender-based familial strategies in the home. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a study found that for 72 per cent of students, the lack of adequate parental support was the prime cause of violent acts in schools.

The curriculum can also implicitly be a vector of violence. Curriculum content, teaching and learning materials may include gender, ethnic and other bias that lead to discrimina-tion within the school.

Physical violence, psychological violence and bullying all affect a child's emotional and cognitive development and his/her ability to flourish and positively contribute to personal, family and wider community life.

Impact of school-based violence

School-based violence denies children's right to education

Violence denies children's education rights in West and Central Africa. It denies their right to access (or remain in) education, it negates their right to an education of quality and it denies their right to respect and non-discrimination in school. This is illustrated by the levels of school drop-out that are directly linked to school violence, particularly among girls. Evidence from Nigeria, Senegal and Benin shows that beaten children and child victims of sexual abuse tend to be absent from schools, participate less in class and perform poorly. The denial of children's right to education impacts upon their current and future ability to participate socially and economically in their society. Limited employment opportunities, poor health and illiteracy can be direct or indirect consequences of school-based violence.

School-based violence threatens social cohesion and development

Violence in the home, school and community is a continuum. Violence leads to violence, and school-based violence is therefore a threat to social cohesion. Failing to address school violence also compromises the achievement of the MDGs and EFA goals. Economic development and human development levels are threatened by low levels of education. When children drop out of schools as a direct consequence of violence, the economic growth of a country is at stake. Studies show that each year Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria lose US$974 million, US$301 million, and US$1,662 million respectively by failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys[i].

Protection frameworks

Although countries in West and Central Africa have ratified international instruments that protect children's rights to non-violent education (UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), national provisions to fulfil these rights are often inadequate.

This is due to both international and national constraints. Many countries in the region have suffered from the negative impact of regulations around aid flows, resulting in insufficient recruitment of qualified teachers to support quality education. More than a million primary school teachers are needed in Sub-Saharan Africa to reach the EFA goals by 2015. It is also due to national constraints such as the lack of political will to address the issue of school-based violence, the lack of legislation enforcement, and weak institutional and coordination capacities. Although Professional Codes of Conduct and school regulations and procedures are being developed at national and school level, poor dissemination and lack of awareness limit their potential impact on the reduction and response to school-based violence.

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i   Plan (2008). *Paying the price: the economic cost of failing to educate girls. Children in Focus.* Plan, Woking, UK

Recommendations

Schools are a unique entry point to holistically address the issue of violence against children. By bringing education and national child protection systems together, response to school-based violence and education outcomes can be dramatically improved.

Recommendations for governments:

- recruit more qualified teachers, encourage the recruitment of female teachers, and invest in teacher training and continuing professional development

- enforce and harmonise legislation and policies for the protection of children and the prosecution of perpetrators, and improve cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial coordination to increase violence prevention and response

- increase the evidence base to inform policies by establishing a centralised mechanism to record, report and monitor violence in and around all types of education institutions.

Recommendation for Bretton Woods agencies:

- increase financial commitments to close the annual US$16 billion financing gap currently estimated to achieve Education for All and ensure aid money can be spent on recurrent costs such as teachers' salaries and teacher training.

Recommendation for development agencies and NGOs:

- support and engage with all duty bearers to meet their obligations to prevent and protect children and communities from violence.
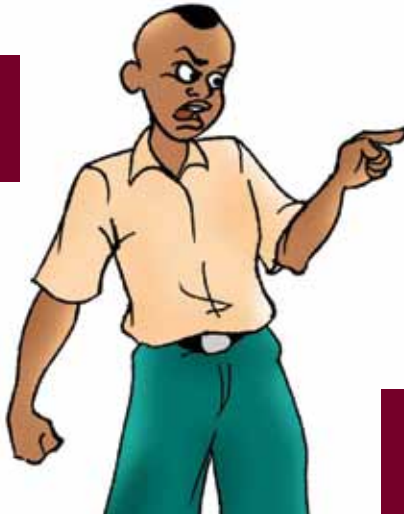
Recommendations for teacher corps, educational staff and unions:

- engage in discussion and mobilisation on issues related to school-based violence, including prevention of and response to violence, and link these to related professional debates around recruitment practices of non professionals in schools (contract teachers), teacher training and professional development, and conditions of service

- take the lead on the consultation on and the establishment of professional Codes of Conduct that will protect both teachers and students.

Recommendations for schools:

- develop inclusive and non-discriminatory school regulations and procedures to address staff and students' conduct and outline school-based violence prevention and response mechanisms

- strengthen pastoral care systems and facilitate children's participation in the reduction of school-based violence.

Recommendations for families, youth and children:

- participate in and promote dialogue, awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives addressing the negative social attitudes that push education staff and communities to accept or minimise the importance of school-based violence

- engage with religious and traditional leaders to promote the virtues of a non-violent and non-discriminatory educational environment

- support capacity development projects aimed at helping children and young people to advocate and take action against violence against children, in and outside schools

- participate in monitoring of violations of children's rights and promote existing response and assistance mechanisms within and outside schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to quality education is a fundamental right of all children, and a prerequisite for socio-economic development and poverty reduction. Children's education and protection rights are neither respected nor fulfilled by States when school-based violence and abuse put boys' and girls' physical and psychological well-being at risk.

The achievement of Education for All (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is seriously compromised by violence in the educational environment in West and Central Africa. Evidence shows that many schools in the region, both private and public, are not safe and protective environments for children. Causal links between school violence and drop-out rates are being established in many countries in the region, and sexual violence is increasingly understood as a particularly pressing problem, especially for girls.

More than one million primary school teachers are needed in Sub-Saharan Africa to approach the Education For All goals by 2015. This shortage, perpetuated by the impact of global macroeconomics and worsened by the lack of teacher training, contributes to the degradation of education systems and to learning environments which are unable to deal with societal problems such as violence, let alone prevent them. The lack of political will to address the issue of school-based violence, translated into non-enforced legislation and lack of coordination between institutions, increases the pressures on schools to respond alone to a problem the root causes and consequences of which lie beyond their walls.

About this report

Following the publication of the United Nations Report on Violence Against Children[1], ActionAid, Plan West Africa Regional Office, Save the Children Sweden West Africa, and UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office joined forces in 2008 to establish an Education and Child Protection initiative, with the objective of strengthening and accelerating interventions against violence in schools in West and Central Africa.

This report is aimed at policy makers, education and child protection programmers, and broadly at education stakeholders from teachers' unions, educators, and children and communities. The report aims to:

- help understand the context and causes of violence in and around schools in West and Central Africa, its nature, and its impact on students' physical, psychological and sexual well-being and more broadly on communities and nations

- synthesise evidence on the prevalence, frequency and intensity of school-based violence

- propose key recommendations for tackling the problem.

This report is complemented by a document *Addressing violence in schools: Selected initiatives from West and Central Africa* presenting selected current responses to school-based violence at national, community and school levels[2].

Scope of the study

This synthesis study covers violence against children (boys and girls aged 0 to 18 years) in educational settings from nursery school to higher education. With insufficient data available at pre-school level or in special needs schools, the evidence presented here pertains mainly to primary and secondary educational settings. Most studies focus on public, although some also address private and Koranic schools. There is little evidence from community schools.

Although the focus here is on children, violence in schools is not limited to students. Teachers and school staff, especially women, can also be victims of violence in their place of work and surroundings. This report does not address this issue.

Methodology and limitations

This report is a reworked and re-written version of a desk review commissioned by the Education and Child Protection Joint Initiative in 2008[3]. Three categories of documents were reviewed: (i) academic and non-academic ethnographic literature about children in West and Central Africa; (ii) national, regional and international studies and reports about school-based violence (25 documents); and, (iii) general literature on Education for All and child protection.

Most national studies across the region have been conducted from 2005 onwards. They are usually commissioned by UN agencies or INGOs and conducted in partnership with national education or children's rights coalitions, and with ministries. These studies vary in breadth and depth. Some focus on school-based violence only while others have a broader scope. Some address only specific forms of violence, such as corporal punishment, sexual abuse (combined or not with sexual exploitation), or gender-based violence. School sampling methods, number of respondents and methodologies vary greatly. Lastly, none of these studies investigate school-based violence over time.

This report is based on evidence presented in the literature. It does not compare the prevalence of violence between countries since available data is not comparable. It also does not identify trends over time (on types of perpetrators, victims, etc) or draw conclusions on whether school-based violence (or any particular form of violence) has been increasing or decreasing across the region.

Evaluations of interventions tackling school-based violence are scarce. This report does not provide an overview of initiatives conducted at national or regional level to address the issue.

"Where the social and physical environment of the community is hostile, the school environment is unlikely to be spared.

The levels and patterns of violence in schools often reflect the levels and patterns of violence in countries, communities and families. These, in turn, reflect prevailing political and socio-economic conditions, social attitudes, cultural traditions and values, and laws and law enforcement. Where it is legal, considered acceptable and perhaps even commendable for men to control women, and the wealthy or privileged to control the poor and disadvantaged, and parents to control children through violence and the threat of violence, then it is likely to be legal, considered acceptable and perhaps even commendable for both adults and children to use similar methods in schools. By being victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence, children learn that violence is an acceptable way for the strong and aggressive to get what they want from the comparatively weak, passive or peaceful."[4]

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro

2. THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

Violence against children in schools cannot be understood without an examination of violence in other parts of children's world; it needs to be addressed within the broader cultural and community contexts which construct social norms around hierarchy, discipline and conformity, and within the larger socio-political and economic environment of the countries where it takes place.

Definition of violence

There are many definitions of violence pertaining to inside and outside school settings. Definitions vary in depth and breadth. Some address mainly forms associated with physical and psychological violence, others include structural and institutional violence related to the family and cultural and social practices.

This report uses the World Health Organization's definition of violence: '*the intentional use of physical force, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation'*[5]*.* Building on this definition, the report further adopts the four categories of interpersonal violence described in the Violence Prevention Alliance initiative (World Health Organization): physical, sexual, psychological and deprivation or neglect[6].

Violence in and around schools

Little work has been done to date on understanding the direct links between violence in schools and the wider environment. By recognising that school-based violence is not a problem confined to within schools but a complex, multifaceted societal problem, our understanding of the phenomenon can be deepened.

Schools are social spaces within which the power relationships, domination and discrimination practices of the wider society are reflected. Violence against children in educational settings draws from violence in other parts of children's lives, in the family, in the community and in society. It embeds social and cultural norms around authority, hierarchy, gender discrimination and discipline.

Education systems in West and Central Africa have been shaped by historical events, cultural traditions, political agendas, community practices and economic realities. Governments' decisions in education have also been constrained by the international aid architecture and guided by international commitments.

The level of complexity of the phenomenon and how school-based violence is at the interface between private and public spheres can be schematised by the diagram below.

Children are socialised in different environments: the home, the school, the community and the wider society. They experience different forms and degrees of violence and neglect in each environment. Their education is dependent on cultural, social, political and economic factors and decisions made by a range of duty bearers, from international organisations to governments, from ministries of education to teachers, from civil society organisations to local government, and from community leaders to parents.

All these dimensions affect each other, hence the multifaceted characteristic of violence, which crystallises societal and economical problems in the school environment and impact negatively first and foremost on children, and as a boomerang effect on the family, the community and the wider society.

Contextual factors and effects are presented in a continuum from home to school to community and the wider society (see arrows on the diagram). Violence can occur at any level and have repercussions on all other levels.
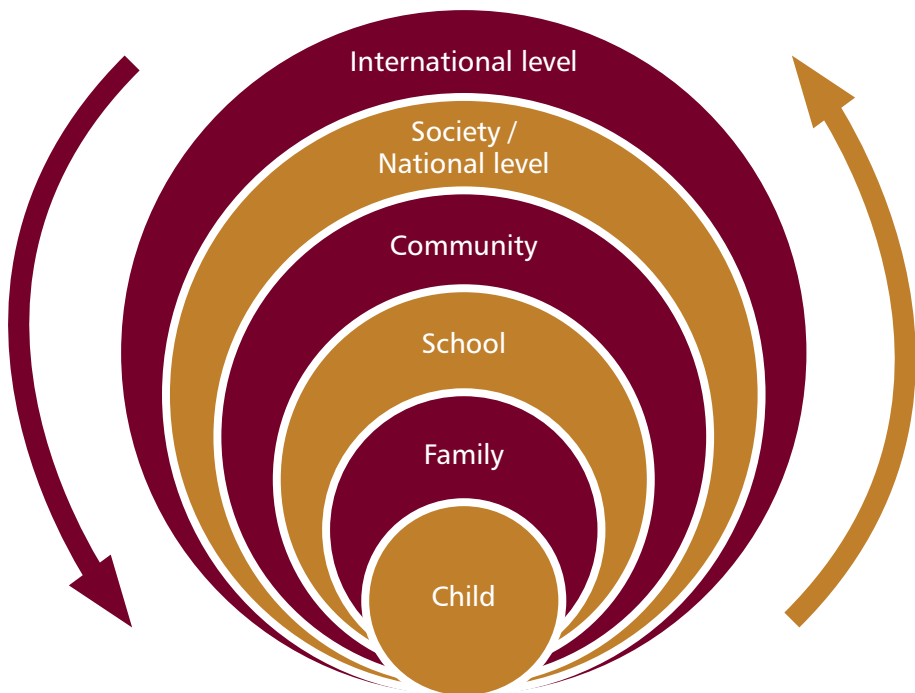
Endogenous and exogenous factors

Two types of factors impact on violence in schools in West and Central Africa: exogenous and endogenous factors. Understanding these is a first step towards the identification of violent acts in schools and the formulation of appropriate responses.

Exogenous factors are political, economic, social or cultural factors external to the school and the education system. Analysing the causal links between social norms and violence, and scrutinising the way in which families and communities socialise individuals to internalise violence as a way of asserting authority and/or instigating submission is key to understanding school-based violence holistically.

Endogenous factors are internal to the school or the education system. These systemic factors can include issues of teacher recruitment and training, the curriculum, or school governance. Analysing the impact of the learning environment on school-based violence and its potential to reduce violence against children in and around schools effectively contributes to a deeper understanding of the issue.

Exogenous and endogenous factors can be mutually reinforcing. Macroeconomics and aid delivery impact the development of national education systems (for instance by constraining teachers' recruitment)[7] which in turn impacts on students' opportunities and experience of education. High adult illiteracy rates resulting from a failing education system will impact on parental attitudes towards educational practices.

Main forms of school-based violence in West and Central Africa

The prevalence, frequency and intensity of violence are yet to be comprehensively documented in West and Central Africa. There are no comprehensive reporting systems of violent acts in the region, whether they occur within or outside educational settings. Children, and their parents, are often afraid to speak up when assaults are committed by persons in a position of authority, from the school or the community[8]. In Nigeria for instance, a study revealed that only 4 per cent of incidents of sexual violence and 40 per cent of acts of physical violence were reported by children[9].

Most forms of violence intersect with each other and have common root causes in political, societal, cultural and educational practices. For clarity, this report articulates their presentation around three categories that are encountered in West and Central Africa's school environments: (i) degrading and corporal punishment; (ii) sexual violence, abuse and exploitation; and (iii) other forms of violence, be they expressions of physical violence, psychological violence or bullying.

This categorisation helps think about the ways in which violence occurs, why, and with what direct effects on children. However, it is important to recognise that all forms of violence are linked and that children are often exposed to successive or concurrent forms of violence throughout their schooling.

Furthermore it is critical to acknowledge that the above-mentioned forms of violence put additional strains on the education of children often compromised by parental decisions to send them to school either infrequently or not at all, and by local and national realities that reduce children's opportunities to go to school or to receive an education of good quality.

The African child and discipline

Children in West and Central Africa are socially and economically valued. They provide status, respect, and potentially labour and income. The well-being of families relies, therefore, upon the child adhering to shared goals and maximising the common good of the household unit. Children's education thus benefits both the child and the family.

In much of the region children are born into large, extended families which operate in a hierarchical manner allocating power and status by age and gender. Complex power relations in the family can include mother-in-law and mother relationships or co-wives rivalry. This complexity is enhanced by the role of surrogate carers (older siblings) or child fostering practices whereby children are sent to the home of relatives away from their biological parents to acquire an education.

In this environment, child discipline is provided by multiple adults or older children, with different levels of authority, different agendas and different principles and practices of discipline. The level of tension within households and the prevalence of domestic violence in particular influence how children are disciplined. Boys and girls are likely to be disciplined differently, depending on the gender norms prevalent in their communities[10].

3. CORPORAL AND DEGRADING PUNISHMENT

"When the school year started, my father refused to provide my school dues. Since I did not have textbooks, I was beaten in front of others and driven away from school for one week. I was very ashamed and thought of leaving school." (Girl, 10 years-old, Cameroon)[11]

"The African child is brought up in a culture that uses canes as a form of punishment for children to learn and follow instruction. If we do not enforce the same practices, our schools will experience reduced academic standards." (Ghanaian teacher)[12]

What is corporal and degrading punishment?

The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines corporal punishment as "*any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light*"[13]. Corporal punishment is invariably degrading. It encompasses the use of sticks, whips, belts or any other objects, blows to the head, slaps, boxing of ears and enforcing of uncomfortable positions such as kneeling down. It is usually administered for unsatisfactory academic performance or as a punishment for misconduct or disrespect, although children also report cases of corporal or degrading punishment for no apparent reasons.

Other forms of degrading punishment may include verbal insults and threats. These practices, when common in the community, are easily transferred to the school environment.

Who is affected?

Boys and girls are both affected by corporal punishment, although in West and Central Africa boys tend to be more subjected to it, in particular in primary schools[14].

- In Benin, recent research found that 54.8 per cent of children had been victims of corporal punishment in schools[15].

- In Senegal the proportion is similar, with a children-led study reporting that 55 per cent of students were victims of corporal punishment[16].

- In the Central African Republic, a study revealed that 52 per cent of primary school teachers inflict corporal punishment every day[17].

- In The Gambia, boys reported being beaten or subjected to other degrading punishments more often than girls[18].

Evidence shows that both male and female teachers and school staff inflict degrading or corporal punishments. In The Gambia fewer male teachers (22 per cent) than female teachers (36 per cent) reported beating students often or very often[19].

Corporal punishment in school usually takes place within a culture of silence. Children may fear that reporting school punishment at home would lead to additional violence for their "bad behaviour at school", and parents would rarely challenge the authority of a teacher in a context where corporal or denigrating punishment is considered an acceptable form of discipline.

Children who are particularly at risk

Children with disabilities are often subjected to physical or verbal violence in the classroom. Children with autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia or other learning difficulties are at great risk. Awareness of such conditions and appropriate training for teachers on how to deal with these are low in West and Central Africa, and children are likely to be beaten and publicly ridiculed for their lack of school performance, be it in the family or at school[20]. This reinforces other forms of neglect that children with disabilities experience throughout their schooling (when they are sent to school by their parents) due to the lack of appropriate equipment, support or trained staff.

Migrant and refugee children are also vulnerable to corporal and degrading punishment in schools. For instance there are reports that children displaced from Anglophone Sierra Leone to Francophone Guinea Conakry were physically punished in their new schools for not being able to understand French[21].

Koranic scholars (also called garibous or talibes) – predominantly boys – are at particular risk of violence and psychological trauma during their education, under the charge of Koranic teachers for their education. There are reports of physical and psychological violence against these children who in some countries are sent off to beg for money and food, forced to live in poor conditions and beaten to improve their Koranic learning[22]. In Mauritania a study revealed that 76 per cent of surveyed Koranic school teachers confirmed practising corporal punishment[23]. In Senegal a study reported that 64 per cent of surveyed Koranic scholars were victims of corporal punishment[24]. There are, overall, few studies in the region to quantify the problem.

"I don't think the fact that the marabout [Koranic teacher] hits us is a problem because even in schools the teachers hit the pupils. It is for our own good. The marabout tells us to go and beg – this isn't bad of him – it's because he hasn't got the means to feed us." (Garibou, Mopti, Mali)[25]

"I had a marabout who made me go out and get money. If you didn't bring anything back, the marabout would hit you. One day we went out begging and one boy amongst us stole something and the owner of the item brought the child back to the marabout. The marabout told him 'I never told the children to go out and beg'. When the people went away, he hit the boy on the head with a wooden stick and he died because his skull was fractured and there was a lot of blood. That's what pushed me to leave and go on to the streets."
(Street child, 13 years old, Bamako, Mali)[26]

Why does corporal punishment happen in schools?

Socio-cultural factors

Schools tend to *mirror surrounding social structures and relationships*. In West and Central Africa, conformity and submission that may be demanded of children by families and communities is translated in the school setting into compliance with the will of teachers and school staff. When children do not comply with the norms, violence is perceived as a legitimate form of correction of non-conforming behaviour.

Parents and educators commonly refer to the *educational virtue of corporal punishment*. In Mauritania parents confirmed that physical violence was a part of education and necessary *"in order for the child to understand his mistakes, apprehend social and moral values and learn to respect his elders"*[27]. Other studies in Benin[28] and Togo confirm this finding.

This belief and the acceptance of such a form of physical violence by men and women in many countries contribute to the trivialisation of violence, its replication in educational settings and the fact that it is generally tolerated to a certain extent by societies.

Recruitment of unqualified teachers and lack of training

Corporal punishment can also be explained by systemic causes. In West and Central African countries, wage caps on civil servants have lead to large recruitment of contract teachers and of volunteer teachers, who are recruited by communities to work in schools. *These teachers are often under-qualified and untrained.* This phenomenon, in combination with the reduction of the length of pre-service teacher training in many countries[29], contributes to a teaching force lacking the skills to manage classes and instil discipline. Teachers feel insecure and are ill-prepared both in terms of subject content and classroom practices. This is likely to lead to increased stress levels and behaviour such as verbal threats, pressure and physical violence. In Mauritania, 84 per cent of teachers admitted administering corporal punishment under the feeling of anger[30].

As a corollary, most teachers are not trained in methods of non-violent forms of punishment or positive discipline despite existing classroom techniques to convey behavioural boundaries to pupils[31]. This *lack of awareness and internalisation of non-violent forms of discipline* is a factor which is likely to perpetuate institutionalised violence in school settings.

However, there are no comprehensive studies measuring occurrences of corporal and degrading punishment in relation to teachers' qualifications and level of training in the region.

What are the effects of corporal punishment on children?

"If the teacher hits me, everything immediately goes from my head. Even if I had lots of ideas before, the moment he hits me, I lose everything – I can't think." (Primary school student, Togo)[32]

Corporal punishment has both physical and psychological negative consequences on children. It results in physical injuries from bruises and bleeding to trauma or haemorrhage and can lead to death[33]. It leads to a feeling of fear of others and fear of education institutions, with negative impacts on concentration, class participation[34] and performance[35]. It also has lifelong repercussions on the psychological and social development of the child. Effects of school-based violence on school drop-out, communities and societies are discussed further in this report (Section 6).

4. SEXUAL VIOLENCE, ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION

Three forms of sexual violence are reported and documented in most West and Central African countries[36]: sexual violence, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation[37].

Sexual violence is the umbrella term to refer to any sexual act, or attempt to initiate a sexual act, using coercion, force, threat or surprise. Evidence suggests that sexual abuse and sexual exploitation are common forms of sexual violence in educational institutions across the region.

What is sexual abuse?

"After the war when I was 14 years old, my mother decided to send me back to school in Kolahan town. I had to drop out one year later. The 45-year-old teacher approached me and I became pregnant. I have a baby now but apart from my mother no one helps me take care of it. The teacher denies what happened and refuses to pay for the child."
(17-year-old Liberian girl)[38]

"The head teachers and the school administrators are all involved so there is no way that you can denounce this kind of thing in our school".
(Male pupil, 18 years old, secondary school, Sikasso, Mali)[39]

Sexual abuse covers any act, or attempted act of a sexual nature, committed by an adult against a child (or by an older child against a younger child), including inappropriate touching, carried out using force, perpetrated under duress or **by taking advantage of a situation of superiority.**

Sexual abuse can include verbal or physical harassment with sexual connotations, inappropriate touching, sexual assault or rape. The abuse is often followed by verbal threats aimed at preventing the child from reporting the incident.

Perpetrators

Around schools, perpetrators of sexual abuse include men of all ages, known or unknown to the child. Within schools, perpetrators of sexual abuse are most commonly male students or teachers and other staff. Female teachers and students tend to be much less involved as perpetrators[40].

Male students can take advantage of their situation of superiority to abuse younger or weaker children. There is increased evidence that male students are largely responsible for sexual violence in schools, especially against girls.

• In the Central African Republic a study revealed that 42.2 per cent of secondary school boys in Bangui confirmed having perpetrated sexually violent acts in or around the school[41].

• A more recent study in Ghana showed children's perception of perpetrators of sexual abuse in schools was schoolboys with 82.1 per cent[42].

• In Cameroon, a study found that 30 per cent of sexual violence experienced by girls were perpetrated by school boys[43].

• In Ghana a study revealed that 14 per cent of rape cases committed against girls had been perpetrated by school fellows, while 24 per cent of boys in the study admitted to having raped a girl or to have taken part in a collective rape[44].

Sexual abuse by male students is particularly problematic at secondary school level, with most reports identifying them as the prime perpetrators of sexual abuse[45]. Male students are also the principal perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse against girls according to a study in Democratic Republic of Congo[46].

Male teachers or school staff can in some circumstances take advantage of their situation of authority and trust to abuse children. Although the large majority of teachers are not to blame, there are reports in the region of abuse of authority.

• In Democratic Republic of Congo 46 per cent of school girls taking part in a study confirmed being victims of sexual harassment, abuse and violence from their teachers or other school personnel.[47]

• In Cameroon female pupils who were sexually abused designated teachers (8 per cent) as perpetrators[48].

• In the Central African Republic, teachers are identified as the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse against primary school girls[49].

• Similar findings emerge from a Senegal study where school girls identified teachers as the main authors of sexual harassment, at 42 per cent[50].

• In Niger, a research revealed that 47.7 per cent of students had observed teachers expressing feelings of love for a fellow student, and 88 per cent of teachers confirmed existence of sexual acts between students and teachers at their school[51].

• In Ghana, children's perception of perpetrators of sexual abuse in schools was teachers at 7.7 per cent[52].

Other adults. Most studies in the region report a fair number of sexual abuses, especially against girls, perpetrated by adults, generally men, on children's way to school. These adults can be known to the children (family friends, bus drivers), or not (community young men, soldiers in conflict or post-conflict areas).

- In Ghana, a recent study reveals that 39.5 per cent of perpetrators of sexual abuse are neighbours, 12.8 per cent relatives and 13.7 per cent male adults in the community[53].

- In Nigeria a study reports how bus drivers, 'okada' riders and school boys use inappropriate vocabulary to describe the girls or their desire to touch the girls' bodies[54].

What is sexual exploitation?

"The teacher sometimes can seize a girl's certificate if she [does not] agree to love to him." (Boy, Liberia)[55].

"Teachers use [girls'] weakness to exploit them. If she fails, the teacher usually uses the word 'see me', which means 'come, let's negotiate', and usually this ends into having sex for grades." (Male Teacher, Liberia)[56].

Sexual exploitation refers to any abuse of vulnerability, position of authority or trust, for sexual ends, with **remuneration in cash or kind** to the child or a third person, or **social and political gain** resulting from the abuse. Sexual exploitation in schools is a manifestation of corruption. In the region, it includes mainly transactional encounters such as good reports or good marks in exchange for sexual acts, or sexual relations as payment for school fees or supplies (girls can also be 'offered' by male students to teachers in return for reduced fees).

Data varies greatly across the region on the prevalence of sexual exploitation. In Ghana, a 2003 study revealed that 6 per cent of the girls surveyed had been victims of sexual blackmail over their class grades[57].

The vocabulary used in several languages to describe sexual exploitation practices in schools is very eloquent and reveals to a certain extent the prevalence of the problem. It also tends to trivialise the exploitation and disguises the fact that it is inappropriate, illegal and corrupt.

The range of vocabulary referring to sexual violence in schools demonstrates its prevalence and banality[58].

"La menace du bic rouge" (Mali): The threat of the red biro, ie of bad marks if girls do not cede to the sexual advances of their teachers.

"Moyennes Sexuellement Transmissible" (Gabon, Cameroon, across the sub-region generally): Sexually transmitted marks, playing on the French acronym MST Maladies Sexuellement Transmissibles or sexually transmitted infections.

"Droit de cuissage" (Côte d'Ivoire): The right (of teachers) to deflower.

"Bush stipend" or *"Chalk allowance"*: Sexual favours from girls as teachers' reward for being sent to remote areas.

"BF, Bordelle Fatigue" (Togo): BF is a soap brand in Togo, 'bordelle fatigue' refers to a girl exhausted by her numerous sexual relationships with teachers.

Perpetrators

Male teachers, head teachers and other staff are the primary perpetrators of sexual exploitation in schools according to most studies published in the region. Sugar daddies (older wealthy men who give gifts or pay school fees and supplies to young children, usually girls, in return for sexual favours) are also prevalent in West and Central Africa.

There is evidence of teachers or school staff working collaboratively to harass pupils (for instance in Ghana and Mali[59]). This indicates that in some instances sexual harassment becomes an ingrained part of the professional behaviour of many school staff.

The flip-side of sexual exploitation in schools is that teachers can also be subject to sexual harassment from girls who are using this as a survival or education success strategy. Some studies (in Burkina Faso and Senegal for instance) explain how girls get social kudos for being friends with or flirting with teachers[60].

Who is affected?

Girls are the primary victims of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation perpetrated by male teachers and school staff or male students. This is confirmed by all studies in the region. Sexual violence of boys by teachers (both male and female) appears to be marginal. The phenomenon reflects socially ingrained gender-based power disparities which exist both inside and outside the classroom.

Vulnerability factors

A number of child vulnerability factors lead to, increase, or intersect with sexual violence in and around schools. In general the vulnerability of children, girls in particular, increases when the traditional protection mechanisms by families and communities are unavailable, or disrupted in the case of conflict[61]. In some countries (for instance Burkina Faso), studies revealed children were more at risk of sexual abuse in rural and suburban areas[62].

Les jours suivants, les notes d'Afi ont subitement diminué.

Evidence from Nigeria and Ghana indicates that *adolescent girls* are more vulnerable than pre-adolescents[63], revealing the importance of age as a vulnerability factor. Girls are seen as women as soon as they have reached puberty, making them more vulnerable to sexual violence perpetrated by adults.

The UN Study on Violence against Children found that *children with disabilities* were frequently the victims of violence, including sexual violence, in and around school[64]. They are particularly at risk on their way to and from school[65]. Sexual abuse of children with disability also occurs in special needs residential schools, both in dormitories and classrooms. Children with disability, especially girls, are particularly vulnerable since their physical or mental impairments may prevent them from defending themselves from sexual assaults. Children with disability and their parents are less likely than others to report abuse because of stigmas attached to the children's conditions. Data is thus lacking to provide an accurate picture of the phenomenon, but this should not undermine the devastating effect that sexual abuse or exploitation can have on these children and their families.

Where does sexual violence happen?

Sexual violence occurs in various locations in and around schools. Children have reported assaults on the road to and from school (girls and disabled children in particular[66]), from men, but also from soldiers at checkpoints[67]. It is often on the way to school that girls can fall prey to so-called 'sugar daddies'.

Sexual violence can also take place around the school gates, where strangers and young men may be met, near or in the toilets (especially when toilets are mixed for boys and girls, or for teachers and students), in empty classrooms, the staffroom, in teachers' houses, and in and around dormitories in the case of boarding schools[68]. The social expectation, or in some instances the agreement between communities and school staff, that children should undertake chores for teachers increases the risk of children being the victims of sexual abuse in teachers' homes.

What are the causes of sexual violence in schools?

Socio-cultural factors

Gender relations are extremely important in understanding sexual violence against children. Much violence in and around schools is situated within gender-based norms and gender-based socialisation dynamics prevalent in parts of West and Central Africa in which male violence is accepted and which promotes female submission and passivity. African masculinities can be constructed on notions of virility, male sexual power and competition which have direct negative consequences on girls and women. Gender inequality in patriarchal societies is rooted in the economic, political, social and educational culture of society.

Gender norms also have repercussions on the denunciation or under-reporting of sexual violence in schools. Some teachers may minimise young boys' negative attitudes towards girls, interpreting them as normal adolescent attitudes. Some girls may also accept a certain level of gender-based violence and discrimination in the school environment because that is aligned with what they experience and have been socialised to accept as 'normal' in the home and the community.

Puberty is also not recognised as a distinct phase in the girl's lifecycle in West and Central Africa. The girl child becomes a woman as soon as she starts menstruating, and is expected to be fully responsible for her sexuality at an age when her body is still developing, her mind still maturing and when she is likely to still be lacking appropriate information on sex education.

Economic factors

The role of **poverty**, chronic in some parts of West and Central Africa, is not to be minimised in the occurrence of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation.

Poor girls may engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff or other adults to financially support their education. In some cases parents may also turn a blind eye in their children's sexual relations with teachers or other adults to mitigate lack of cash to support their schooling. Girls may also engage in risky relationships with sugar daddies either to support their education or in exchange of presents for themselves or contributions in kind to the family revenue.

The lack of economic power of teachers and other education staff (who receive low salaries and are sometimes posted to remote and poor areas) results in sexual favours from students being seen as a form of compensation.

Education system factors

Most sexual abuse and acts of exploitation attributed to teachers tend to be committed by male rather than female members of staff. Thus, there may be a link between the persistence of sexual violence and the *dearth of female teachers* in both primary and secondary schools in West and Central Africa.

The *school environment* itself, and in particular the location of *toilets*, whether separated for boys/girls, teachers/students, and whether they have secured doors also has an incidence on the likelihood of sexual violence and abuse, in particular against girls.

Lastly, *impunity* for perpetrators of sexual violence leads to the repetition of such a crime. Some studies stress the fact that the only sanction for teachers who have been found guilty of sexual abuse against children is to be transferred to another school[69]. Education authorities and the teaching corps turning a blind eye to the incident in order to protect the reputation of their colleague, district, school or profession[70] contributes to the trivialisation of sexual abuse and exploitation.

What are the effects of sexual violence on children?

School-based sexual violence can have immediate effects on the *psychological well-being* of the child. Feelings of isolation and anxiety have been reported, often leading to depression, alcohol or drug consumption and sometimes to suicide attempts[71]. *Self-esteem* can be undermined by verbal violence and bullying. Girls who are sexually abused may experience feelings of guilt although they are the victims.

Sexual violence also has tremendous *repercussions on the child's own sexual behaviour*. Child victims of sexual violence are at greater risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviour at an early age[72]. Girls who are sexually abused in the school environment may also trivialise commercial sexual encounters for good grades, lodging or food.

In Nigeria, a study reports that girls live in fear of sexual harassment which is often combined with verbal abuse from boys and teachers. Girls are thus unable to relate to their classmates in an atmosphere of trust. This fear is accentuated by the prevalent belief that the victim of sexual harassment or assault 'did something to bring it on'. As a result, girls are constantly under pressure to interpret and re-interpret, construct and deconstruct experiences and encounters with male peers[73]."

Sexual violence may have particularly harsh *health consequences*. Girls and boys are both at risk of sexually transmitted infections and *HIV infection*[74]. For girls, a dramatic consequence of sexual abuse is *unwanted early pregnancies*. These can be detrimental to both maternal and child health, or can lead to unsafe abortions or infanticide. In most cases the girl's education is compromised.

Unwanted pregnancy contributes in certain societies to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the girl's mother who may suffer from family and public disapprobation and lack of support. It also often leads to *early marriage*[75] for girls, with school drop-out as a corollary (see Section 6).

5. OTHER FORMS OF SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

Aside from corporal punishment and sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, there are other forms of school-based violence in West and Central Africa. The most commonly reported in studies across the region are psychological violence, fights, bullying, and other obligatory chores children must undertake in the school environment.

Psychological violence and bullying

> "I don't always do my homework because my textbooks and notebooks
> are stolen from my bag and the teacher gives me a bad mark."
> (Primary school child, Central African Republic)[76]

Psychological violence takes various forms. The most common ones are insults, threats (to punish the child physically, to withdraw one's love and affection from the child) and other forms of neglect including repeated lack of attention, refusal to check students' homework or repression of the child's emotions. The prevalence and frequency of psychological forms of violence is less documented, because they are difficult to define and measure, although recent studies in Togo, Burkina Faso[77] and Benin[78] mention them.

"*A student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.*"[79] Bullying comprises the notions of "repetition, harm and unequal power"[80]. It includes a wide range of actions including name calling, false accusations to make trouble for the victim with authority figures, damaging or stealing belongings, threats and intimidation including through mobile phone and the internet[81]. Bullying can occur within and across groups of boys and girls.

In Ghana, 62 per cent of girls aged 11 and 12 in junior secondary schools said they had experienced bullying in school[82].The World Health Organization's Global School-based Student Health Survey (2003–5) found similar figures for boys in Ghana with around 60 per cent reporting that they had been bullied in the last year. In Benin 92 per cent of pupils reported they had experienced bullying both within their own group and between teachers and pupils[83]. In all of the African settings where questions were asked about bullying, the Global School-based Health Survey found that over half of all students reported that they had been bullied within the last 30 days.

Both education staff and students can be responsible for psychological violence towards or bullying of students.

T., a Nigerian schoolgirl, was often called "endomorph" by a teacher because she is fat. This was picked up by her classmates who continued to use it and laughed at her and because of this she once missed school for two days[84].

Fighting

Physical fights, pushing and beating in and around schools affect primarily boys, but also girls. A study in the Central African Republic revealed that 50.7 per cent of primary school students ranked physical violence as the most common form of violence in their school[85]. Evidence from Morocco and Senegal suggests insecurity and violence is a problem for one parent out of ten[86]. In the Global School-based Health Survey in Ghana 55.3 per cent of boys and 56.4 per cent of girls said that they had been in a physical fight in the last year[87]. In Burkina Faso, a study revealed that primary school boys were fighting with their peers more than primary school girls, with 63.8 per cent and 36.2 per cent respectively[88].

Obligatory chores

> "If he [the boy] has money he bribes [the teacher]. If not, he has to work on the teacher's farm or fail for the year." (Young boy, Liberia)[89]

Sometimes communities and schools – or school staff – have an agreement on the use of children's labour as a form of renumeration for teachers. Evidence from Ghana, Togo, Liberia and Burkina Faso reveals that girls may be requested to fetch water or undertake house chores such as cleaning laundry[90]. Evidence from Liberia shows that boys may be requested to work in teachers' fields during the harvest season, or help transporting construction materials[91]. These chores can reduce the time children can dedicate to learning, be it during school hours or free time. They can be beyond children's strength and capacity and most importantly they can put children in vulnerable situations and at risk of sexual and other violence on their way to school or within school staff houses or compounds.
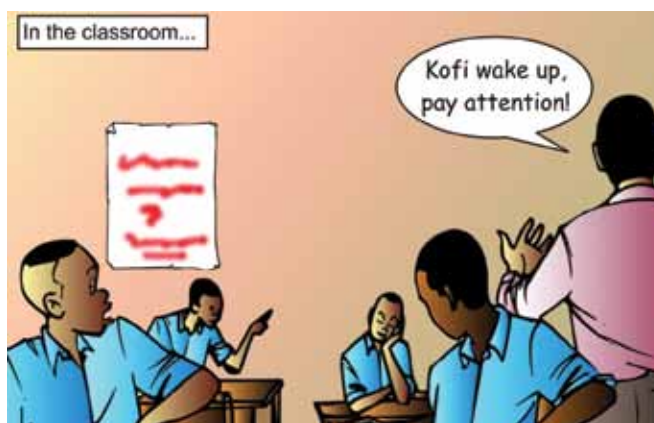
Who is affected?

Boys and girls are both victims of such violence. *Girls* are particularly vulnerable to chores in and around schools and boys to physical fights. *Young boys* are vulnerable to bullying since older male pupils often choose younger and weaker boys as targets.

Studies from the region report that belonging to a marginalised group increases children's vulnerability to violence such as insults, harassment and bullying.

Children with disabilities are often the victims of bullying. Their conditions not being well understood in many countries of West and Central Africa, these children tend to be stigmatised or ridiculed by community members, students, teachers and other school personnel. For instance, studies from Nigeria[92] and Burkina Faso[93] note epileptic children being highly stigmatised in school as their illness evoked fear of supernatural forces among fellow pupils and even teachers.

In the Central African Republic[94], the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon[95] there are reports of bullying based on *ethnicity (including indigenous people) and religion. Orphans or fostered children* may be more vulnerable to violence in and around schools, because of the lack of an authoritative adult figure to protect them[96]. *Sexuality* and the level of homophobia in some West and Central African countries may be aggravating factors affecting violence against boys and girls. This is linked to notions of expected gender behaviour and reprisal for children not displaying traditionally accepted qualities of masculinity or femininity. Lastly, there is evidence (Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) of *migrant and refugee children* being at greater risk of insults, bullying and sexual violence, be it from school staff, students or other community members on their way to school[97].

> "The pupils here treat us as DG (déplacés de guerre), as attackers and they often yell at us in the corridor 'attackers, go back home!' Those of us who can't take these insults don't come to school."
> (Fourth grade female pupil Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire)[98]

What are the causes of these forms of violence?

Socio-economic factors

Age and gender hierarchies and attitudes influence school dynamics, with clear power relations between teachers, staff and students, students themselves, and older and younger children. School-based child labour is anchored in power hierarchies in the region according to which young people must show respect and obedience to elders. It is a common practice *transferred from family life to school*, in particular for girls who are traditionally responsible for domestic chores.

Young people's increased *felt need for material possessions* (phones, training shoes etc) to enable them to fit in with their peers can also result in extortion or bullying of weaker or richer pupils to relieve them of their possessions and money[99]. Children can also be stigmatised by poverty or external signs of wealth[100].

Familial factors

The level of violence in the home and the community impacts upon school violence, children and young people being likely to model aggressive behaviours to which they are exposed on a regular basis.

Domestic violence and gender-based violence in the home, against children or in presence of children contributes to the creation of a violent environment in the school and the community and to the normalisation of violence.

One study in Nigeria noted that 81 per cent of married women reported being physically abused by their husbands and, of these, 46 per cent were abused in the presence of their children[101]. Additional evidence from Nigeria suggests that a large percentage of Nigerian women agreed that a man is justified in beating or hitting his wife; 66.4 per cent and 50.4 per cent of never-married and unmarried women respectively expressed consent for wife beating in the 2003 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey[102]. Similar data concerning women's acceptance of their husbands' violence against them appears also in Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey's from other West and Central African countries.

The causes of bullying have been studied cross-culturally and appear to be closely related to *parental strategies* in the home. Research indicates that children who experience hostility, abuse, physical discipline and other aggressive behaviours by their parents are more likely to imitate that behaviour in their peer relationships[103]. By contrast, children raised in non-authoritarian homes are less likely to bully at school. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a study found that for 72 per cent of students, lack of adequate parental support is the prime cause of violent acts in schools[104].

Education related factors

The curriculum can implicitly be a vector of violence. Curriculum content and teaching/ learning materials may include gender and ethnic bias that lead to discrimination or perpetuate gender stereotypes about the domestic and reproductive roles of women and about male aggression in the school environment[105].

School curricula may also catalyse children's participation in conflicts, either by containing political propaganda that promotes violent ideas or revisionist views of history pitting ethnic or social groups against each other[106].

Large classes, although not a cause of violence in themselves, may make it more difficult for teachers to exercise control, or pay sufficient attention to all children. For instance there is some evidence that 'pushing, shoving and hitting' is more frequent in larger classes than in smaller classes[107].

Education in conflict and post-conflict situations

> "The children have the soldiers as role models and they bring a culture of warfare to the heart of the society." (Teacher in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire)[108]

Violence, within and outside schools, increases in *situations of conflict* and to a certain extent in post-conflict situations, where authoritarian attitudes, gender and ethnic hierarchies are exacerbated in a widespread climate of violence. There is significant evidence that in times of conflict *the presence of soldiers around the school*, including at check points on the roads leading up to school premises, can greatly endanger female students.

Schools are often breeding grounds for the *recruitment of children by armed forces*. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Chad, research has indicated that rebel forces often actively go into schools, or capture children on their way to school and force them to fight[109]. Many subsequently experience severe psycho-social trauma, especially girls who are often recruited, not just to fight, but to be the sexual partners of male soldiers[110].

In South-Kivu province (Democratic Republic of Congo) 4,500 women and girls were raped in the first half of 2007, according to a UN expert. Many of the victims were school-aged girls. In North-Kivu province, where dozens of rapes were reportedly committed in early 2006 during the occupation of Kibirizi by a renegade army brigade, the majority of the victims were girls aged from 12 to 18 and members of the Nande and Hunde ethnic groups[111].

The *physical school environment in post-conflict zones* often reflects the climate of violence surrounding the school; buildings and infrastructure have deteriorated. A study from Guinea described the poor environment of a school in a community which had experienced an influx of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone. The interviewees reported excessive violence among pupils and that the school had many broken windows, peeling paint and leaking roofs which did nothing to encourage children to take pride in their surroundings and subsequently their behaviour[112].

In post-conflict settings, pupils who actively participated in the war co-exist with children who did not. The presence of children who were associated with armed groups and forces can create an atmosphere of conflict in the school. Emotional distress associated with the old age of many demobilised children associated with armed groups and forces often leads to bullying practices and sexual violence, especially against girls[113].

In addition, children, whether they have been associated with armed groups and forces or not, suffer very high degrees of psycho-social trauma from having witnessed or been subjected to atrocities during civil unrest. How the school in general and teachers in particular *address the psychological well-being of children in post-conflict situations* also has an effect on the prevalence of school-based violence and on the capacity of children to deal with non conflict-related violence in the school environment.

What are the effects of these forms of violence on children?

Psychological violence and bullying can lead to lifelong psychological problems for children by affecting their *emotional development*, undermining their *cognitive development* and producing long-term mental distress[114]. Low self-esteem, aggressiveness and mistrust in others are common and damaging consequences for children.

Physical violence, psychological violence and bullying all impact upon the child's development, ability to flourish and positively contribute to personal, family and wider community life.

6. BEYOND CHILDREN: EFFECTS OF SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE ON EDUCATION RIGHTS AND SOCIETY

Beyond the personal effects of school-based violence presented in previous sections, hide other consequences such as denied educational and social opportunities, as well as broader consequences on the community and the broader society in terms of social and economic development.

Effects of school-based violence on education

Violence in educational settings threatens or impedes the right of children to education. School-based violence prevents children from accessing education, receiving quality education and from being respected and not discriminated against in educational settings[115].

Access and retention

There is evidence from West and Central Africa that *violence denies children's right to access (or remain in) education*. This is illustrated by the levels of school drop-out that are directly linked to school violence, either because child victims of violence or witnesses of violence are afraid of going back to school, or have lost all motivation to study[116]. Parents do also actively withdraw their children, particularly girls, from school, or decide not to enrol them at all, once they realise that bullying or sexual harassment is occurring.

A representative from the Ministry of Education of Senegal at a UNESCO Conference in 2007 stated that in West Africa, violence was the primary reason why students abandon school, suggesting that 67 per cent of boys and 57 per cent of girls would leave school because of violence, in particular corporal punishment[117]. In Benin, students from secondary schools identified school drop-out (14.93 per cent) as a direct consequence of school-based violence[116]. Another Benin study revealed that 43 per cent of female primary students and 80 per cent of female secondary students knew of fellow girl students who left school due to gender-based violence in the learning environment[118]. This confirms how girls' retention in education is dependent on school-based violence.

Girls' rights to education are further violated when they fall pregnant. They are rarely given the opportunity to finish their studies, be it because of traditional leaders' bans, institutional and school practices forbidding pregnant girls or girl mothers to attend school, or family and societal pressures[120]. This has direct consequences on girls' opportunities to earn a decent living, not to mention the stigmatisation they face and the possible negative effects on the schooling of their own children. It is also a remarkable gender injustice.

There is evidence from a study in Nigeria that "corporal punishment is also used as a means of shaming older girls and its use as such encourages absenteeism by girls who seek to avoid it.[121]"

Education quality and performance

School-based *violence negates children's right to an education of quality*. Research indicates that corporal punishment does not improve learning or discipline among children. In addition, physically punishing children for academic errors contradicts all streams of modern pedagogy which assert that trial and error is the basis of any learning process.

Beaten children can tend to be absent from school and perform poorly. Victims of sexual abuse or bullying may also experience difficulties in concentrating in class and withdraw from participating, with obvious consequences for their performance, motivation and enjoyment[122].

In Nigeria it was estimated in the study leading to the National Strategic Framework that around 9 per cent of boys and girls are absent from school at any one time because of either the results or fear of violence in school[121]. In Senegal a study established direct links between rape and decreased school performance (53 per cent) and repetition (37 per cent) for girls[123]. In Benin, students from secondary schools identified bad performance (11.70 per cent) and repetition (11.89 per cent) as major consequences of school-based violence[124].

Quantifying the consequences school-based violence on boys' and girls' school performance is a difficult task which not many studies in the region have addressed.

Respect and non-discrimination

Lastly *violence denies children's right to respect and non-discrimination in schools*. Violence motivated by individual characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity, sexuality or disability is an offence to children's identity. Similarly the physical and mental integrity of children is not respected when they are subjected to corporal punishment, assaults, sexual abuse or bullying. Teachers neglecting students' learning and schools discriminating against pregnant girls or girl mothers are other manifestation of the denial of children's education rights.

Effects of school-based violence on society

The denial of children's right to education impacts upon their current and future ability to participate socially and economically in their society. Limited employment opportunities, poor health and illiteracy can be direct or indirect consequences of school-based violence. These are negative consequences for the individuals but also for the wider society.

Violence in the home, school and community is a continuum. Violence leads to violence[126], and *school-based violence is a threat to social cohesion* within communities. The Committee on the Rights of the Child comments: "*Addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States Parties under the CRC. It is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.*"[127]

Research around the world has suggested that child victims of violence or witnesses of violence tend to become violent and aggressive themselves, as children and as adults. Bullying for instance may repeat itself inter-generationally, with those who have been bullied during their childhoods subsequently raising children who resort to the same tactics of intimidation and harassment[128]. Bullying at school can continue when young people enter the workplace for instance. Violence exercised by adults in position of authority against children can also result in feelings of unfairness and anger in the victims, which can then be redirected against authority figures in general.

Failure to address issues around violence in educational settings also has wider societal and economic implications.

It has direct repercussions on the *non achievement of education Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals*. Denied access to quality education and school drop-out generated by the level of violence in schools threaten both universal primary education targeted by MDG 2 and all of the EFA goals.

Failing to achieve MDGs and EFA goals has in turn *social and economical consequences*. The psychological effects of school violence on individuals might constrain both their economic and social participation, adding to other constraints to participation, especially in the case of girls and women.

Gender-based violence in schools prevents the *attainment of gender equality*. Gender equality is both an MDG in itself (Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women) and a condition for the achievement of the other goals[129]. Violence against girls in schools perpetuates gender inequalities in schools, in communities and in the wider society, thus obstructing the achievement of the MDGs[130]. It also runs counter to country commitments to work towards gender equality made through ratifying CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and other international commitments.

In addition, failure to educate girls clearly limits social development since studies show correlation between women's educational attainment and child health and survival[131].

School-based violence also limits *economic development* in countries. With education rights under threat, countries are at risk of lowering human development levels, since badly educated adults can have reduced access to paid employment and may contribute

less to the country economy[132]. Violence has a cost to the economy through its burden on healthcare and judicial systems. Most importantly a failing education system negatively impacts on economic growth, not least the failure to educate girls. Studies show correlations between women's educational attainment and child survival, and the positive effect of girls' education on economic growth[133]. Calculations of the cost of failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys reveal that countries can lose millions of US dollars on annual economic growth. In the region, it is estimated that the annual economic cost of countries such as Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria is respectively US$974 million, US$301 million and US$1,662 million[134].

International commitments signed by West and Central African countries	Threats to agreed goals because of school-based violence
Access goals Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2: universal primary education Education for All (EFA) goal 1: early childhood care and education EFA goal 2: all children complete primary education EFA goal 4: adult literacy, especially for women	School violence leads to dropping out in primary school School violence is a structural barrier to access to school, in particular for girls and students with disabilities Victims of school violence, especially girls, may never want to access any other type of education throughout their adult life
Quality goals EFA goal 2: all children complete primary education of good quality EFA goal 3: learning needs of young people are met through access to appropriate life-skills programmes EFA goal 6: quality education for all (literacy, numeracy, life skills)	There is no such thing as quality education when violence occurs in the school and the classroom Violence impedes children and young people's ability to learn and achieve in literacy and numeracy. It also compromises their access to life saving information such as information about HIV/AIDS, hygiene or survival skills
Respect goals MDG 3: equal educational opportunities for girls and women EFA goal 2: all children complete primary education – particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities EFA goal 5: gender disparities in primary and secondary education are eliminated	Gender-based violence and sexual violence and abuse against girls is discriminatory and deprives girls and women from basic education opportunities Gender-based violence increases gender disparities in primary and especially in secondary education

7. PROTECTION: LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE

States and other stakeholders, including international agencies, donors and national education and protection institutions and professionals, are the primary duty bearers for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling children's rights to education and protection. Legislation, national institutional frameworks and education institution frameworks can mitigate the prevalence, contextual factors and effects of school-based violence.

At the international level

What are the international human rights instruments?

All West and Central African countries have ratified three international or regional rights instruments which are binding on State Parties.

The UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) has protective implications, for girls' and women's rights in education and against discrimination.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) asserts that one should always consider the best interests of the child and preserve his or her identity and integrity. The CRC includes the *right to education* in Article 28, on the basis of equal opportunity. It reasserts that primary education should be available free of charge, that State Parties should take measures to encourage attendance and reduce drop-out and ensure school discipline respects the child's dignity. In Article 19, the UNCRC requires State Parties to *protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence or abuse* including sexual abuse when he or she is under the care of any person or institution, including schools and teachers. Article 37 reinforces the need for States Parties to *prevent degrading punishment* of children. Further, Article 29 calls for the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and preparation of the child for responsible life, in the spirit of understanding, *peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship* among all peoples.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child in the General Comment 1 (2001) reasserts that schools should be free of all kind of violence. "*Education must also be provided in a way that respects the strict limits on discipline reflected in article 28(2) and promotes non-violence in school. The Committee has repeatedly made clear in its concluding observations that the use of corporal punishment does not respect the inherent dignity of the child nor the strict limits on school discipline.*" In 2006, General Comment 8: "*In this General Comment the Committee emphasizes that eliminating violent and humiliating punishment of children, through law reform and other necessary measures, is an immediate and unqualified obligation of States Parties.*"

What are the regional human rights instruments?

The **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** (1990), adopted by the African Union one year after the UNCRC, addresses the specific circumstances of the African child, respecting dimensions of African culture including traditional values and notions of duties of the child and his or her contribution to society. The African Charter balances clear acceptance of the notion that the child has rights, and that her or his well-being is of primary concern, while at the same time introducing elements about discipline at home and at school, as well as recognition that obligations are parallel to children's rights.

Article 11 of the Charter reasserts children's right to education and States Parties' obligations to provide free and compulsory basic education, and to take appropriate measures *"to ensure that a child who is subjected to school or parental discipline shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the child and in conformity with the present Charter"* and *"to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue with their education"*. Article 16 further describes children's protection rights, requiring States Parties to *"protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse"*.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the Maputo Protocol, was adopted by the African Union in 2003. The Protocol includes articles on non-discrimination and women's dignity, including the protection of women from all forms of violence (Article 3, 4 and 5). It also stipulates the age of marriage for women shall be 18 years. With regards to education rights, Article 12 reasserts States Parties' obligations to take appropriate measures to *"eliminate all stereotypes in textbooks, syllabuses and the media, that perpetuate such discrimination"* and *"protect women, especially the girl-child from all forms of abuse, including sexual harassment in schools and other educational institutions and provide for sanctions against the perpetrators of such practices"*.

What constrains the application of international conventions?

Although countries in West and Central Africa ratified international rights instruments that protect children's rights to non-violent education, national provisions to fulfil these rights are often inadequate, due to both international and national constraints.

International constraints

Many countries in the region suffered from the negative impact of the Structural Adjustment Programmes sponsored by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank from the 1980s. To meet targets and conditions for loan agreements, governments in the region had to freeze the recruitment and salaries of civil servants and make drastic budget cuts in public expenditures including in the education sector. As a result countries could not recruit all the teachers needed to match the increase in school population due to EFA and MDG pushes, and also had to reduce the length of teacher training programmes. Contract teachers, were recruited instead, at low cost, often without the necessary qualifications and with less social protection. In Niger, 71 per cent of teachers are contract teachers[135] and therefore not official employees of the government. Similar situations are found in Togo[136] and many other countries of the region. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics esti-

mates that 1,159 000 additional teachers are required in primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa to fill the teacher gap by 2015. Sixteen countries of West and Central Africa have a severe teacher gap: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, The Gambia, Liberia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo[137]. The percentage of trained primary teachers has also decreased over time in the region. In Togo it fell from 21 per cent in 2000 to 17 per cent in 2005[138], and in Ghana it decreased from 72 per cent to 59 per cent between 1999 and 2006[139].

Without qualified teachers, there is no quality education. The economic realities of countries in the region, constrained by regulations around aid flows, have therefore contributed to the lack of realisation of education rights.

Political will

Political will at national level also has a role to play in translating international commitments into national realities. Political will can be expressed in terms of political and legal commitments, leadership and responsiveness[140]. To honour international and regional education and protection rights commitments, governments must take political steps to publicly stand by these and take leadership in ensuring they are translated into legal and institutional actions both at national and local levels[141]. Political will in West and Central African countries is often restrained by socio-cultural and traditional barriers that hamper politicians from taking decisions that may be seen unpopular by voters, not least by teachers who constitute a large part of the electorate and can, through large mobilisation exercises, manifest their discontent and disturb the smooth running of everyday life. Some politicians hide behind the lack of ownership of African countries in drafting the UNCRC.

At the national level

Effective prohibition of violence against children in and around schools requires that it is explicitly prohibited in national statutory law.

What legal provisions exist on violence against children?

National legal provisions on violence against children in education settings are often fragmented into general provisions against violence in constitutional provisions (National Constitution), acts (Children's or Education Act), laws (anti-discrimination laws), and penal code provisions. Some of these instruments address sexual abuse, some non-discrimination, others corporal punishment. Only rarely is violence against children in and around schools addressed holistically or systematically in national legal instruments[142].

There are no comprehensive studies on West and Central African countries which present the translation of international commitments or national constitutional provisions into legislation covering all types of violence in educational settings.

However, data exists for corporal punishment[143] in formal education. Out of the 24 countries in the region, 12 countries have not yet prohibited corporal punishment in schools in law. These are Benin, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial

Guinea, The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone. Although in some countries government circulars advise against the use of corporal punishment in schools, prohibition in law is still absent (for instance in Benin or Cote d'Ivoire).

Comprehensive data on legal prohibition of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation in and around schools is lacking. Combining data from several sources[144], 16 countries appear to have some kind of legal prohibition of sexual violence in schools (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).

Data on prohibition of bullying in schools is even scarcer but at least half of the West and Central African countries do not have legal provision prohibiting bullying in schools, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo[145].

What national policies exist on violence against children?

Other measures can be taken at national and local levels, which do not have legislative force but contribute to the creation, or not, of an enabling environment to combat violence against children in educational settings.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) rarely provide an adequate analysis of violence, let alone in schools. Some refer to gender-based violence, mostly in the context of domestic violence, but the analysis is not pursued in the education section[146]. In Cameroon for instance gender-based violence is mentioned in the 2003 PRSP in the discussion on the socio-legal status of women but the education section "*does not refer to sexual harassment in the schools by teachers as a possible reason for low enrolment of girls*"[147].

National policies

Education policies and other national policies such as gender, child protection or youth policies can provide an institutional framework for professionals to work within.

Not all policies, however, address issues around school-based violence and child protection in educational settings. When they do, they usually cover only one aspect of school-based violence but fail to address the issue holistically. A review of Education Sector Plans of countries that have been supported by the EFA Fast-Track Initiative (including Ghana, The Gambia, Niger, Sierra Leone and Liberia) shows that very little attention is paid to school-based violence, which is neither recognised and described, nor addressed through prevention or response initiatives[148]. According to a survey from UNICEF, five countries (Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia, Liberia and Togo), cover the issue of sexual violence in their educational policies. In addition, two countries (Burkina Faso and Senegal) address sexual violence in schools in their national action plan against sexual abuse and exploitation of children[149]. Some countries include provisions against school-based violence in national gender policies (see text on Liberia on page 44).

One exception is Nigeria, which adopted a National Policy Framework on Violence Free Basic Education. Developed by the Ministry in collaboration with UNICEF, the framework is based on: (i) a National Policy on Violence Free Basic Education, (ii) institutionalisation of counselling units in all schools, (iii) sensitisation and capacity building, (iv) research promotion, and (v) monitoring and evaluation. It includes objectives, activities and progress indicators and identifies implementation stakeholders[150].

Liberia has two national plans relevant to gender-based violence. The five-year National Plan on Gender-Based Violence (2006) includes child sexual abuse and exploitation in its definition of gender-based violence and proposes activities targeting schools through the development of a gender-based violence syllabus to be used in the formal education system by trained educators[151]. The National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2009) includes the review and development of policies, structures and mechanisms to prevent violence against women and girls, including those with disabilities and special needs (the Plan specifically mentions that policies should include actions for schools, and the appointment of Gender Focal Points for sexual and gender-based violence in schools)[152].

National child protection systems and assistance to victims

National child protection systems in West and Central Africa are very weak. Most countries do not have, or have very weak complaint and response mechanisms and referral systems in place to guarantee the security of and assistance (medical, legal and psychosocial) for the victims of school-based violence and their families[153]. For instance in Ghana, a study showed 87.2 per cent of the children did not know of any institution that supports victims of sexual abuse[154].

Why is policy lacking and legislation not enforced?

Despite some level of legal provision, the prevalence, frequency and intensity of school-based violence in the region is still acute as reported in the previous section. This can be explained by a number of factors.

Political agenda

As discussed, violence against children may be tolerated nationally, thus not attracting the attention it deserves from politicians. Weak political will and the lack of reporting mechanisms lead to underestimations of the phenomenon which results in keeping *school-based violence outside the national political agenda* in most countries in the region. Without political attention, accountability for violent acts in the region is not fostered. This is a vicious circle.

In addition legal frameworks may only slightly reflect the commitments made in international conventions. Although the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child explicitly recognises the right of the pregnant girl to an education, this has not yet been translated into practice in some countries despite legislation (there is anecdotal evidence from Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo).

Non-enforcement

When there is a legislative framework in place, *non-enforcement and the weak application of the law* lead to impunity and the repetition or perpetuation of violence against children. This is manifested through:

- The lack of government commitment to follow-up the implementation of laws through implementation decrees, awareness raising, capacity building, investigation, jurisprudence and research. In Nigeria, after heated debates in the Parliaments for several years, the Child's Rights Act was passed in 2003. However, as of 2007, the Act had only been promulgated into Law in 15 States out of 36[155].

- Weak institutional capacity to establish policy and action plans and insufficient sectoral cooperation and harmonisation. A comprehensive and integrated child protection system requires intersectoral and multisectoral cooperation (for instance health, education, social services and justice sectors), based on the coordinated involvement of all government and institutional actors who act under pre-established common objectives, on an agreed timeline, under the supervision of a designated body, with sufficient capacity, including human and financial resources[156].

- Insufficient rate of complaints followed up by investigation and investigations that conclude with a court decision[157].

- Penal Codes which fail to define aggravating circumstances when violence against a child is perpetrated by a person in charge of the child, or appropriate sanctions and penalties.

Social norms and customary laws

Social norms often condone some level of violence against children which becomes tolerated by adults and accepted by children themselves. The lack of public awareness and understanding of rights, laws and policies in force against violence at school contributes to their non application. Similarly, social norms can weaken the application of national legislation. For instance, in countries which have adopted a re-entry policy for pregnant school girls such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea or Nigeria, social practices can still lead to school drop-out, preventing girls from completing their education.

As legal frameworks are distant from people's realities, *customary laws* and practices are still, in some West and Central African countries, the reference for communities to rule their lives or solve their problems, including those relating to violence against children. For instance in northern Sierra Leone, village chiefs promulgated a new local law recently stating that when school girls are impregnated by male students, both must drop out of school[158], preventing them from completing their education. There are also many reports in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Ghana of parents referring to traditional leaders or even fetish leaders to solve situations where girls have been sexually abused by teachers or school staff. These traditional legal forms usually place the best interest of the community above the best interest of the child. Agreements can be settled by the marriage of the victim to the abuser when a girl is pregnant or financial compensations to support the unborn child.

The case of Z.: "I was in Junior Secondary School 3 (16 years old) when the headmistress sent me home to do her laundry. I was doing the washing (…) when the husband came in (…). He forcibly had sex with me in spite of my protests. I wept bitterly after the incident and reported it to my mother. The matter went to the queen mother for settlement. He (perpetrator) was asked to apologize to me and my mother and also to pay cash compensation of Gh¢ 5.00 a month towards my education cost till I complete Junior High School. I was not happy the way the case was handled but my mother said that was the decision of the queen mother."[159]

At the school level

Education systems can apply a range of measures to positively engage with their responsibilities for education and protection rights.

What are Professional Codes of Conduct?

Codes of Conduct provide guidelines on the required behaviour of a professional group. To be effective, Codes of Conduct of teacher and school personnel should be clear, comprehensive and enforceable[160]. The 1984 ILO/UNESCO document on the status of teachers provides recommendations in this regard, including the need to clearly define disciplinary measures for teachers in breach of professional conduct and to designate the competent authorities to propose and apply sanctions[161].

According to a UNICEF study, only six countries in the region had included references forbidding sexual violence, abuse and exploitation in schools in their codes of conduct for teacher and administrative staff in 2006: Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, and Senegal. The survey shows, however, that enforceability measures were not necessarily included in the code. Guinea for instance has no punishment for sexual violence offences. In contrast, the Senegalese code makes provision for sanctions. The study also showed that only Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo had integrated modules about the identification, prevention and response to school-based sexual violence in the teacher training curricula[162].

Nigeria's Teacher Code of Conduct: *Article 38 Sexual misconduct and related abuse of office:* Teachers should not use their position to humiliate, threaten, intimidate, harass or blackmail any learner to submit to selfish motives, or to engage in sexual misconduct, drug, addiction and trafficking, cultism, human trafficking and other related offences. *Article 43 Corporal Punishment:* Teachers should not under any circumstances administer any corporal punishment except otherwise permitted by the school authority. Although disciplinary measures are not indicated in the document, the responsible authorities for carrying out investigations and deciding sanctions are named[163].

The Ghana National Association of Teachers adopted a Code of Ethics for teachers in 1998[164]. Recently, a National Review Committee on the Teachers' Code of Conduct was set up to review the code. With support from USAID, a new Code of Conduct was established in 2008, in consultation with key stakeholders, for presentation to the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service[165]. While the first code was very evasive with regards to violence in schools and the conduct of teachers, the new code focuses on all forms of violence against children in and around schools. Key steps towards child protection include (i) the definition of improper use of child labour, (ii) the interdiction of all forms of physical, psychological and sexual violence against boys and girls, with detailed clarification on what may constitute such violence, (iii) the identification of clear penalties for each type of misconduct, (iv) procedures for reporting criminal gender-based violations, and (v) identification of authorities for imposing penalties. The code clearly forbids any type of violence against children by also placing an obligation on teachers to intervene to prevent any form of violence from a child or teacher against another child.

Is violence a school governance issue?

Research shows that school management can be complicit in school-based violence. In a climate of **corruption**, education officers in positions of authority exchange grades, school fees and supplies for sexual favours. Prevalence of violence is increased where **school regulations or codes of conduct**, organising the life of the school and regulating relationships between all school actors, including school staff and children, do not exist or are not made public. In addition, occurrence of violence is not recorded or accounted for where reporting mechanisms are not in place, and where appropriate sanctions for pupils and teachers perpetrating violence are not taken.

Schools often hide behind the lack of legislation not to tackle problems of violence. However, studies in the region reveal that violence occurs despite legislation and regulations. In Benin for instance, a recent study shows that 86 per cent of teachers are aware of the ban on corporal punishment, but only 25.4 per cent are applying it[166].

School Codes of Conduct and regulations

Institutional measures at school level play a critical role in creating an enabling environment to prevent school-based violence, to protect children and to combat impunity for perpetrators (adults or children). These measures may include the development of school policies and regulations that forbid all forms of violence, promote non-discrimination and the respect of one's identity and integrity, comprise disciplinary procedures for perpetrators of violence (adults and children) and provide a clear set of procedures to report cases of violence and assist victims, and school codes of conduct for staff and students.

School Code of Conduct in The Gambia[167]. It provides guidelines in three areas: (i) discipline, particularly on a) the legislation on corporal punishment and the penalties imposed in such an event; b) alternatives to corporal punishment; (ii) sexual harassment: defines sexual harassment and the sanctions applicable; (iii) prevention and management of pregnancies in schools. Committees have been put in place in schools (respecting the confidentiality of victims). Punishments that can be applied have been defined precisely, especially: (i) pregnant pupil: the two pupils are expelled from school; (ii) guilty teachers: administrative sanctions going from temporary suspension to dismissal. In the case of rape, a legal prosecution is undertaken.

Challenges

Codes of Conduct can be seen as both preventive and protective measures for teachers and students. However, the uneven dissemination of codes in West and Central Africa to teachers, unions, parents' associations, local education authorities, inspectors and social services, and the failure to address these codes in teacher training in most countries, limit the impact they could have on the reduction of school-based violence. Community schools are also not often informed of the existence of such codes.

Another challenge is ensuring the quality of codes of conducts to guarantee that they take the child's best interest into consideration. The code of conduct from The Gambia on page 48 shows that (especially in regard to issues such as teenage pregnancy at school) codes - as much as laws - might not necessarily reflect children's best interest. The development of international standards for codes of conducts could help resolve this problem.

In addition, constraining factors on school-based measures to combat violence effectively include:

- the lack of awareness of school policies and codes of conduct when they exist and the limited involvement of parents, parent-teacher associations and school boards[168] in designing them in the first place

- unclear reporting procedures for cases of violence, in particular procedures that would guarantee the confidentiality of the victim, and identify alternative adults to complain to when adults in position of authority in the school are involved in an act of violence against a student[169]

- amicable settlements being the way forward preferred by parents and school authorities[170]

- limited visibility of social services in school (including counselling services[171]), and lack of coordination with such services outside the school.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented below address the key elements and findings highlighted in this report: the types of violence, the causes and effects of violence at different levels, and legal and institutional provisions, and challenges in terms of prevention and protection. They draw on international, regional and national reports on violence against children in educational settings, bringing education and national child protection systems together to improve the response to school-based violence.

The recommendations are framed by the necessity to adopt a **holistic approach** to addressing school-based violence, and to acknowledge:

- the importance of qualified teachers and gender balance in the teaching corps to positively influence the school environment and better equip schools to prevent and respond to the problem of violence

- the necessity to adopt multi-level measures to tackle the problem strategically and consistently across sectors, while aiming at transforming both systems and attitudes

- the existence of a continuum of violence between the home/family, the school and the community

- the power hierarchies reflecting social norms that are at the heart of the issue of violence.

Fati on her way to her teacher's house

For governments

Providing quality education is a key component of the preventive response to school-based violence. One of the major parameters of quality education is qualified teachers, their recruitment, and their training and professional development. Governments are therefore urged to:

1. **Recruit more qualified teachers and encourage the recruitment of female teachers in the public education system. Recruitment should go hand in hand with:**

   - developing human resource plans in line with country education goals and priorities

   - securing fair remuneration for teachers, incentives for teachers posted in remote areas and improving the general working conditions of education staff.

2. **Invest in teacher training and professional development and strengthen professional standards by:**

   - increasing the length of pre-service training, and improving its quality by ensuring teachers are adequately trained on both academic content and classroom management techniques

   - strengthening or developing teacher training modules on child development, cognitive development, gender, children's rights and protection, legislation and institutional frameworks around school-based violence and non-violent forms of discipline

   - ensuring teachers and head teachers are sufficiently and appropriately trained on detection of signs of abuse, on possible responses to school-based violence and on reintegration strategies for children affected by violence.

Following ratification of the UNCRC, States Parties have the obligation to protect the rights of children, that is to prevent violations by third parties, and to fulfil these rights by taking appropriate legislative, institutional and administrative measures to ensure the full realisation of the rights. States Parties must therefore take positive actions in these areas, namely:

3. **Enforce and harmonise legislation and policies for the protection of children and the prosecution of perpetrators. This can be done through:**

   - building/strengthening inclusive national child protection systems from community to national level in collaboration with the education sector

   - defining penalties and sanctions for each type of violence and making reparation for the victims systematic

   - training magistrates, judges, jurists, traditional leaders and para-legals and the police on existing provision and new legislation

   - providing or improving accessible and effective reporting and referral mechanisms for children and families wishing to make a complaint.

4. **Increase the availability of evidence to inform policies by establishing a centralised mechanism to record, report and monitor violence in and around all types of education institutions. This can be done through:**

   • including violence against children in schools and other settings in national surveys such as Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys

   • implementing research programmes and undertaking intervention and policy evaluations to inform policies

   • including violence in schools in national child protection information management systems.

5. **Develop or improve coordination mechanisms between education, social, legal and medical services at the national and local levels to increase violence prevention and strengthen the speed and effectiveness of intervention when necessary.**

6. **Improve or develop norms, standards and accountability mechanisms for all schools, including Koranic schools.**

For donors and Bretton Woods agencies

International macroeconomic policies impact negatively on national budgets in general and national education, health and social services budgets in particular. Constraints on investment in recruitment and training of the teaching force contribute to the stagnation or deterioration of school systems in many countries at a time when enrolment increases as a result of the Education for All and Millennium Development Goal's action for education. In light of these contradictions, donors and international agencies are urged to:

1. **Increase financial commitments to close the annual US$16 billion financing gap currently estimated to achieve Education for All.**

2. **Take measures for resources to reach, without conditions, countries where needs are the greatest, and ensure aid money can be spent on recurrent costs such as teachers' salaries and teacher training.**

For development partners and NGOs

Development partners and NGOs should:

1. **Hold donors, Bretton Woods organisations and governments accountable for their promises and commitments.**

2. **Support all duty bearers to meet their obligations to children and communities by:**

   • developing a common understanding and a common language around the issue of school-based violence

   • supporting the development of standards and guidelines for policy development and providing capacity building

   • providing technical assistance on legislation review, development and enforcement

   • participating in national awareness and communication initiatives based on sound research

   • sharing and disseminating local, regional and international good practices.

For teacher corps, educational staff and unions

Teachers' unions have a key role to play in addressing school-based violence. With their wide base, their legitimacy linked to the representation of their members, and their strong tradition of mobilisation, unions must lead on improving national systems that will protect both teachers and students against school-based violence. Unions and professional associations of teachers and education staff should:

1. **Engage in discussion and mobilisation on issues related to school-based violence, including prevention of and response to violence, and link these to related professional debates around recruitment practices of non professionals in schools (contract teachers), teacher training and professional development and conditions of services.**

2. **Develop information campaigns on school-based violence and train union members on the issue.**

3. **Take the lead on the consultation on and the establishment of professional Codes of Conduct that will protect both teachers and students. This can be done through:**

   • the focus of Codes of Conduct on children's rights to quality education, teachers' rights and obligations, and the assurance that they are clear, comprehensive and enforceable

   • dissemination of Codes of Conduct through teacher training and professional development courses, national education fora and annual conferences of teachers' unions

   • dissemination of information to personnel on the breach of professional obligations related to violence against children, of the possible legal and professional consequences and sanctions, and of the end of impunity for perpetrators.

For schools

Educational institutions should aim to create an environment which is: (i) aware of the possible causes of violence and of the prevalence of violence, and (ii) able to respond to school-based violence situations. Schools should:

1. **Develop inclusive and non-discriminatory school regulations and procedures in accordance with national guidelines that will:**

   - outline the school's responsibility in detecting, responding and reporting cases of school-based violence, and on increasing safety on school premises

   - include a school personnel and a learners' Code of Conduct which addresses harassment, violence and abuse

   - include confidential complaint procedures and reinforce the role of students' councils in informing and reporting about violence in school

   - accept, encourage and support the re-entry of pregnant girls/mothers

   - be developed in collaboration with teachers, parents, Parent Teacher Associations, School Management Committees, students and other relevant stakeholders

   - be submitted to inspectors and education officials for compliance, and be inspected for implementation and enforcement.

2. **Promote the inclusion of human rights, peace and tolerance education and life skills in teaching plans, gender sensitivity and non discrimination in particular against children with disability or learning difficulties, which is one of the core components of Child Friendly School (CFS).**

3. **Strengthen pastoral care systems and facilitate children's participation in the reduction of school-based violence by:**

   - creating and strengthening youth associations, health, rights and girls' clubs in and out of school

   - training peer educators among students to detect violence, support children reporting violence and accompany children during reintegration and rehabilitation.

For communities, families, youth and children

The attitudes of communities, children and young people are critical in prevention of and protection (including detection and reintegration) from school-based violence. Therefore communities, including young people and children should:

1. **Participate in and promote dialogue awareness-raising campaigns and initiatives addressing the negative social attitudes that push education staff and communities to accept or minimise school-based violence**. **This can be done through:**

   • engaging with local artists and media personalities to create performances and media programmes and awareness on the topic.

2. **Engage with religious and traditional leaders to promote the virtues of a non-violent and non-discriminatory educational environment.**

3. **Support capacity development projects aimed at helping children and young people to advocate and take action against violence against children inside and outside schools.**

4. **Participate in monitoring of violations of children's rights at community level and promote existing response and assistance mechanisms within and outside schools.**
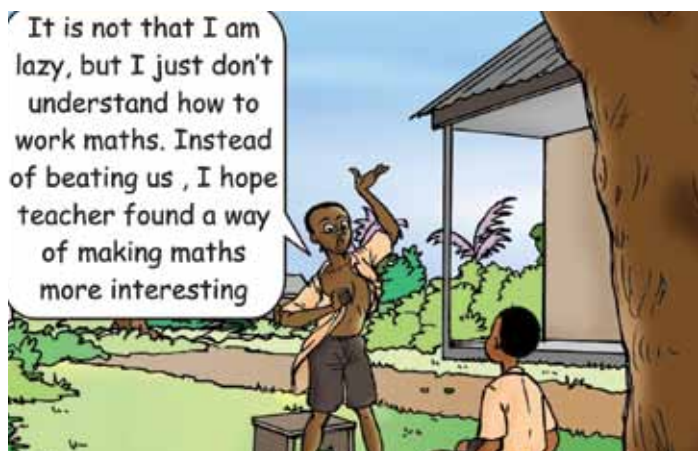
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This publication has been developed and designed together by UNICEF, Plan West Africa, Save the Children Sweden West Africa and ActionAid as part of their conjoined efforts to end all violence against children – in education settings, families and communities.

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

Plan's vision is of a world in which all children realise their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity. Plan works to achieve lasting improvements for children living in poverty in developing countries, through a process that unites people across cultures and adds meaning and value to their lives.

Save the Children Sweden fights for children's rights. We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. Save the Children works for a world which respects and values each child, which listens to children and learns, where all children have hope and opportunity.

ActionAid fights to end poverty and the injustices that cause it by helping poor and excluded people secure and exercise their rights.