

A Girl's Right to Learn Without Fear:

Working to End Gender-Based Violence at School

Canadian edition



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF LAW

INTERNATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS
PROGRAM



BECAUSE I am a
GiRL

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List of Acronyms

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DFAIT	Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICTs	Information and communications technologies
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NWAC	Native Women's Association of Canada
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States or United States of America
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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Finally, we would like to thank the many girls and boys whose stories are included in this report. Their courage is inspiring and calls us to action to end gender-based violence in and around schools.



2022-2023

EVERY CHILD, EDUCATION IS THE RIGHT	
Student Name	_____
Age	_____
Sex	_____
Class/Section	_____
Teacher	_____
Principal	_____
Signature	_____
Date	_____

Plan
Bharat
Bharatiya

Foreword



For over 75 years, Plan has been mobilizing millions of people around the world to support social justice for children in developing countries. Our work spans 69 countries across the globe, including 50 developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas. We give children, families and communities the tools they need to break the cycle of poverty and build sustainable solutions for improving their own lives.

Here at Plan, we believe that universal access to, and completion of, at least nine years of quality education is fundamental to achieving gender equality. It is essential for enabling girls to transform their own lives and break the cycle of poverty for generations to come.

A major focus of Plan's **Because I am a Girl** initiative is overcoming the barriers to girls' successful completion of a quality education. This report focuses on one major barrier to that goal: the prevalence of gender-based violence in and around schools. In collaboration with children, parents, teachers and partners around the world, we are working to see girls successfully complete a quality education in institutions that value both their education and their safety.

This report offers constructive recommendations to combat gender-based violence in schools around the world and offers evidenced-based global principles to underlie effective policy. Through global advocacy Plan will be working with partners to take these recommendations forward in all countries where we work, including here at home.

While Canada has taken important strides in addressing many of the barriers raised in this report, we are not immune from the reality of gender-based violence in and around Canadian schools. This is particularly true when we look at the serious disparities that affect many marginalized groups within our country. While Canada can and should celebrate its efforts and achievements so far, much work remains to be done.

Plan Canada is committed to helping the Canadian Government be a crucial part of the solution. With a reputation as a global leader in promoting women's rights and children's right to education, Canada is poised to show leadership to prevent gender-based violence in schools. It can help to ensure that not only Canadian children but all children benefit from a quality education in safe and inclusive schools.

We can do more, and this report provides a way forward. We call for the concerted commitment of all involved, including the federal and provincial governments, to ensure that students are free to learn without fear in nurturing school environments that unlock the potential of girls, and all children.

Rosemary McCarney
President and CEO
Plan Canada

Foreword

The International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law advances the field of international human rights law through advocacy, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building initiatives that provide legal expertise to civil society and experiential learning opportunities for students.

We are honoured to partner with Plan on this groundbreaking report, and to lend our legal expertise to ensure its highest impact. By focusing on gender-based violence in and around schools, this report highlights a significant, systemic, but mostly invisible problem that is a serious barrier to the advancement of girls' human rights across the world and here at home.

What makes this report unique is that it offers hopeful examples of change and translates them into accessible policy solutions that can be adopted today. Taking seriously the recommendations outlined in this report has the potential immediately and positively to impact the rights of the most marginalized Canadian children, girls with disabilities, Aboriginal girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) children.

Commitment to the solutions outlined in the report can help better the lives of children around the world. When it comes to the rights of women and girls, Canada has historically set the bar, and we have the opportunity to continue to take a leadership role. If we act decisively now, other countries will surely take notice. Moreover, if Canada commits its significant international development assistance program to tackle this persistent and global problem, we can expect real change.

That is the power of this report: it is a blueprint for transformative change at home and around the world.

For the past 25 years, the International Human Rights Program at the University of Toronto has capitalized on the tremendous energy and idealism of youth. I am always amazed by what can be accomplished by a few young people with fire in their hearts. From that perspective, we know how important it is that all levels of government work together to protect girls' right to education. We all lose out when girls cannot access education due to fear and violence, since girls have the power to change their families, communities, countries, and the world. That is the central message of Plan's **Because I am a Girl** initiative, and it is the promise and hope of this report.

Renu Mandhane

*Director, International Human Rights Program
University of Toronto Faculty of Law*





Executive Summary

Since 2000, the world has focused its attention on achieving universal access to primary education, and gender parity, under Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) #2 and #3 – the world’s vision for what we would like to achieve at the dawn of the 21st century.

Yet, as we approach the deadline for achieving the MDGs in 2015, it is clear that we must look more deeply into why so many girls are failing to successfully transition to, and complete, a quality secondary education: 66 million girls are missing an education at a time when it not only has the power to transform their own lives, but also the world around them.¹

Education is not only a fundamental human right, but a promise: it is key to unlocking a girl’s full potential and that of the world around her. Adolescent girls in particular, have much to gain from greater educational attainment: those who complete primary and secondary education are more likely to earn a greater income over their lifetimes, to have fewer unwanted pregnancies, to marry later, and to break cycles of poverty within families and the communities around them.

“There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls.”
– Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

A major focus of Plan’s **Because I am a Girl** initiative is helping girls overcome the barriers to their successful transition from primary to secondary education. Today’s challenge is to ensure not only that children have access to schools, but that they have access to quality education. Plan believes that quality education must include learning that is relevant to the needs, rights and aspirations of girls; that is delivered in safe and secure school environments free from gender bias; and that promotes gender equality. This report focuses on a major barrier to the achievement of that goal: the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in and around schools. Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year,² many in the institutions that we trust most to protect and nurture our children: schools.³

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence inflicted on children in and around schools because of stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them because of their sex or gendered identity. It also refers to the ways in which experiences of and vulnerabilities to violence may be gendered. In most societies, unequal power relations between adults and children, and the gender stereotypes and roles attributed to girls, leave schoolgirls especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation, and discrimination from teachers, staff, and peers. Boys and girls who do not conform to dominant notions of heterosexual masculinity or femininity are also vulnerable to sexual violence and bullying.

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The prevalence of GBV experienced by schoolchildren is unacceptable. Worldwide, an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys have experienced sexual violence.⁴ Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.⁵ Reports indicate that children as early as six are victims of rape.⁶ Bullying is also pervasive: surveys show that between one-fifth (China) and two-thirds (Zambia) of children reported being victims of verbal or physical bullying.⁷ Millions of children also live in daily fear of being physically abused under the guise of discipline: in some countries, more than 80% of students suffer corporal punishment at school.⁸

This violence – unjustifiable and largely preventable – is a major barrier to the realization of all children’s right to education and to learn in a safe and supportive school environment, free from violence or the threat of violence.⁹ While the causes are complex, the consequences of inaction cannot be ignored. SRGBV is correlated with lower academic achievement and economic security, as well as greater long-term health risks. SRGBV also perpetuates and reinforces cycles of violence across generations to come. Without addressing this barrier, many countries will not only fall short of meeting their international human rights commitments, but will also compromise the world’s capacity to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves in the 21st century.¹⁰

This report is solutions-oriented. It draws on country examples from around the world and shares fundamental policy principles built on promising global practices aimed at preventing, mitigating and responding to GBV against girls and boys. It focuses on the need for integrated action on violence prevention to balance a strong approach to response. Drawing on policy examples, as well as global civil society campaigns, international instruments, and the voices of girls themselves, Plan calls on governments to prioritize actions, tied to eight key principles, that are essential to ensure that all children are free from violence within their school lives, and that girls benefit from their equal right to education.

This report also looks at how Canada fares compared to leading policy approaches taken by countries around the world. While Canada has taken important strides in addressing many of the issues raised in this report, we are by no means immune from the challenges of addressing GBV in and around Canadian schools, particularly when we look at the serious disparities affecting marginalized groups.

Canada has a reputation as a global leader in promoting women’s rights and championing their freedoms. Most recently, Canada was named the best G20 country in which to be a woman.¹¹ In terms of education, the fulfillment of children’s right to attend school is near universal. Canadian girls are making important progress in educational attainment. Due to concerted efforts, girls are now outpacing boys in nearly every measure of scholastic achievement.¹²

The eight key principles for framing effective government action against school-related gender-based violence are:

1. Comprehensive and integrated action
2. Effective legislation and regulation
3. Safe and effective reporting and response
4. Evidence-based policy
5. Well-supported, well-trained personnel
6. Partnership
7. Inclusiveness
8. Participation

And yet, when we dig deeper, much work remains to be done. Canada's ranking is lower when we consider women's equality with men in terms of income, life expectancy, and education.¹³ Not all children benefit equally from a good quality education; and despite efforts by most schools to provide safe and inclusive learning environments, Canadian children, particularly girls, continue to be vulnerable to violence within their school lives.

Sexual violence remains a serious and prevalent issue. Nearly a quarter (24%) of Canadian girls and at least 15% of boys have experienced sexual abuse before they reach age 16.^{14, 15} While we have only a snapshot of the violence suffered by girls and boys from marginalized communities, the lowest estimate is that 25% of Aboriginal adults have been sexually abused before reaching age 18;¹⁶ and an estimated 40-70% of girls with intellectual disabilities will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.¹⁷ All too many Canadian children regularly suffer sexual touching, harassment, and online sexual exploitation as part of their everyday school experience.^{18, 19, 20}

The numbers on bullying in Canada are also sobering: the World Health Organization (WHO) ranked Canada 27th lowest out of 35 countries for its bullying victimization rates.²¹ Within Canada, the full scope of the problem may be seriously under-recognized. Many interventions have focused on boys, failing to recognize the serious and long-term consequences of the particular ways in which girls experience this form of GBV.

The particular experiences of marginalized children are also too often invisible, despite the reality that children who suffer discrimination on multiple grounds face greater barriers and are even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. A national survey found that almost two-thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school, compared to fewer than one-sixth (15.2%) of their heterosexual peers.²² Too little is known about the specific experiences of Aboriginal girls – who are uniquely vulnerable to violence in schools, due to the complex mix of intersecting historical and socioeconomic factors. More work is clearly required to secure the equal rights of all Canadian children to a safe and quality education.

While Canada can and should celebrate the great strides we have made so far, it is important that we do not look to them as grounds for complacency. We must do more to fulfill Canada's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – which holds that every child has the right to feel safe at school, at home, and in the community –²³ and under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – which requires that girls benefit equally from that right.²⁴

We can do more. This report looks to policy solutions within Canada and around the world in recommending a robust and integrated approach to eliminating GBV in Canadian schools. Several countries have aimed to tackle SRGBV within the wider context of an integrated action plan to prevent



and eliminate violence against women. We fully support this approach. While a coordinated strategy on violence against women is still needed, the Government of Canada has shown leadership in the form of a recent announcement of anti-trafficking legislation and a national action plan to tackle this form of GBV. It has also taken a leadership role by focusing on primary prevention and solution-based strategies aimed at engaging men and boys in efforts to reduce and prevent GBV. The government is poised to broaden this approach by taking action on its commitment in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne to address the problem of violence against women. As part of this effort, it can tackle all serious forms of GBV, including within our schools.

Comprehensive and coordinated action between the federal and provincial governments is crucial to addressing this issue. Schools are where girls from all communities intersect with the larger society during a transformative period of their development. To unlock the potential of girls, and all children, a whole-of-government approach and concerted effort are needed to ensure that all students are free to learn without fear.



Summary of recommendations

The Government of Canada should:

1. Commit to working in partnership with the provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive whole-of-government action plan on GBV prevention, response, and provision of services. Provide sufficient funding to implement the action plan effectively. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.
2. Develop a separate gender-responsive action plan to prevent and address SRGBV against Aboriginal girls and boys.
3. Lead in bringing the issue of the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence to the global discussions on a post-2015 development framework. It should also strengthen SRGBV prevention, as a cross-cutting issue, within the implementation of the Canadian International Development Agency's Children and Youth Strategy.
4. Strengthen awareness-raising strategies and programs aimed at recognizing and preventing cyber-bullying and other forms of relational violence.
5. Provide sufficient support for Statistics Canada to collect and consolidate disaggregated national data regularly, in order to inform evidence-based policy and monitoring on the prevention of SRGBV.
6. Support civil society efforts to engage whole communities – including men and boys – in national, provincial and local efforts to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms that lead to gender-based violence. It should also support youth empowerment initiatives, with a particular focus on girls and marginalized communities.



“I have been very much disturbed; emotionally disturbed and very much stressed. I am trying very hard to forget how it happened, but I am failing. I can’t just forget it; it’s like it’s just about to happen again, like it’s just happening. I remember every detail.”

– Girl raped by her teacher, 15, Zambia⁴¹

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of every child. In schools, children can develop their critical thinking and acquire life skills that enable them to live with dignity as engaged citizens. Education also fuels the social and economic development of families and societies as a whole. In recent decades, global development efforts have focused on enrolling all children in primary school. Today, the challenge is to ensure that children can stay in school and benefit from a quality secondary education.

More than one billion children attend school every day.²⁵ However, the right to education can be fulfilled only when children are able to learn in nurturing environments free from violence.[†] Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year, many within school walls;²⁶ Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls annually suffer school-related violence.²⁷ For these children, the daily commute to and from school may be fraught with intimidation, aggression, and harm. They may see or experience violence on school grounds, often at the hands of known and trusted people, including teachers and peers.

As governments make progress in increasing the number of children in school, increased enrolment is often not matched by increased resources, and the level of school violence has sometimes intensified.²⁸ Teachers may be more likely to resort to violent discipline under stressful conditions such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate support.²⁹ In countries affected by chronic conflict, droughts or frequent natural disasters, additional pressures such as insecurity, damage to school buildings, and displacement can exacerbate the problem. Without sufficient resources, teachers have less capacity to prevent and respond to peer-to-peer violence.³⁰

School-related violence undermines the power of education to unlock all children's full potential. When we fail to take action to protect all schoolchildren from violence, we violate children's right to education in safe and supportive schools, and compromise their development and wellbeing.

Yet such violence often takes different forms for girls and boys, affecting their education and life chances differently in turn. Girls' education may be rendered precarious by the pressures of poverty and the low value parents give to their schooling. The education of girls is often undervalued because of existing patterns of discrimination, including harmful gender norms and the lower social status of women and girls. Despite large increases in primary school enrolment, girls' primary completion rates often lag behind that of boys, as does their rate of transition to secondary school.³¹ Girls may leave school to help at home, because they get pregnant, because they are married, because school is far from home, or because parents worry about their daughters' safety and reputations.

Between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence every year, many within school walls.

The experience of violence at school reinforces all of these pressures. School-related violence thus has far-reaching implications, impacting girls' education, health, wellbeing, and their ability to transform their own lives and those of their communities and nations.

† 'Violence' is used here as an umbrella term including physical or psychological violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, bullying, including cyber-bullying, or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

Secondary education can have a transformative effect on a girl's life

Adolescent girls who complete both primary and secondary education are:

- More likely to marry later and have fewer children, who in turn will be more likely to survive birth and infancy and be better nourished and educated
- Better able to make free decisions about whether, when and who to marry, and to plan their families and pregnancies
- Less likely to be abused as adults
- Better paid in the workplace, and empowered to participate in socioeconomic and political decision-making
- More likely to break generational cycles of poverty within families.^{32, 33}

What is school-related gender-based violence?

SRGBV refers to acts:

- Of sexual, physical or psychological violence
- Inflicted on children in and around schools
- That are due to stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them on the basis of their sex or gendered identity.

SRGBV also refers to the ways in which experiences of and vulnerabilities to violence may be gendered. In most societies, unequal power relations between adults and children, as well as deeply-rooted gender stereotypes and roles, leave girls especially vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation, and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers. Boys, by contrast, are more vulnerable to physical violence at the hands of adults and other children. Boys and girls who do not conform to dominant social, cultural and religious norms, including dominant norms of masculinity or femininity, are also vulnerable to sexual violence and bullying.

Both boys and girls are perpetrators of violence in schools, although the form it takes may differ. Gender norms often dictate that boys should address disputes with peers through physical violence, and may reproduce GBV experienced in their own households on female peers at school. Girls are more likely to engage in verbal or psychological forms of aggression.

SRGBV can occur in any school area or during travel to or from school. Latrines, empty classrooms and corridors are all potential spaces where violence can occur. Boarding schools, which may offer additional access to school for girls and harder-to-reach children, may also put students at higher risk of abuse.³⁴ Isolation and lack of sufficient oversight and management can exacerbate the problem. Outside school walls, millions of girls and boys are at

risk of bullying, rape, unwanted touching, and unprovoked sexual advances in transit to and from school, along walking routes, at bus stops, and at taxi stands.^{35, 36}

Punishment in schools often manifests itself in gendered ways. Boys generally experience more frequent and severe physical punishment, while girls are more likely forced to submit to unwanted sexual advances³⁷ and are more vulnerable to psychological forms of punishment.

Conflict-affected students are at heightened risk

Conflicts exacerbate the risk that children, particularly girls, will lose the benefit of a quality education and will suffer SRGBV within their school lives.

- One-third of children in conflict-affected countries do not go to school (compared to one in eleven in other low-income countries).
- Secondary school enrolment rates in conflict-affected countries are nearly a third lower than in other developing countries, and far lower still for girls.
- In many conflict-affected areas, schoolchildren are more likely to be subject to violent attacks. Boys, in particular, are often targeted for recruitment by armed groups in schools. For girls, the likelihood of sexual violence creates insecurity about going to school.
- The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has been widespread, and many victims are young girls. The impact extends far beyond individual survivors. It can have a serious effect on girls' rights, with fear and the breakdown of family and community life becoming barriers to girls' access to education.³⁸

Why focus now on SRGBV?

Plan's Learn Without Fear campaign has already documented the devastating impact of violence against children in school. With the launch of the **Because I am a Girl** initiative, we are now applying a gender lens to the challenges facing both boys and girls. Doing so deepens our understanding of root causes and power relations, is essential for making smart investments, and illuminates solutions to these problems.

Girls and boys learn that society expects them to behave differently and to fulfill socially-constructed gender roles. Gender and age affect how people are valued and how their rights are realized. For instance, girls and women face barriers to rights because they are valued less and have less power than boys and men. Further, gender stereotypes affect the realization of rights. They lead us to mistake learned behaviours and attitudes for biological traits, and they can lock girls and boys into behaviours that prevent them from developing to their full potential. By dictating power relations and influencing boys' and girls' vulnerabilities, gender norms can also drive violence against children.³⁹

In the school setting, gender norms can become further entrenched. Explicitly and implicitly, messages about what girls and boys can and should do are relayed in curriculum, physical spaces, classroom management, teacher conduct, and schoolyard dynamics.

"We are beaten mercilessly in school. As a result we are unable to sit properly."

– Boy, 12, India⁴⁰

“When you go to school and do well, the world forgets what you cannot do and starts seeing what you can.”

– *Female, 19, India*⁴⁴

Why focus on girls?

Plan recognizes that systemic discrimination against girls and women is one of the critical underlying conditions and causes of poverty. Girls and boys have the same entitlements to human rights, but face different challenges in accessing them. Though girls’ circumstances vary greatly, in many places they are less likely than boys to be enrolled in and complete school; have less access to medical care; and are more likely to be deprived of food.⁴²

The poorer and more marginalized the population, the greater the differences likely to exist between boys and girls. These multiple pressures may result in girls engaging in violent behaviour. Although much attention has been paid to boys as perpetrators, it is important to acknowledge the role that girls play as well.

In many developing countries, girls experience more violence and sexual harassment; and they are expected to work long hours on domestic chores, limiting their ability to study. This is not only unfair and unjust but counterproductive to societal wellbeing: educating girls and young women brings exponential benefits to girls, their families, their communities and their countries.⁴³ Everyone benefits, including boys and men.

Social justice, equality of opportunity, and developmental impact are three reasons that Plan has made the **Because I am a Girl** initiative one of its flagship priorities. And in light of the potentially transformative power of education for girls in particular, Plan has chosen to focus this campaign on a crucial period in girls’ lives: the transition to, and completion of, secondary education. SRGBV is a key barrier to this achievement, undermining adolescent girls’ sense of themselves and their ability to succeed as students. For that reason, Plan has identified the elimination of SRGBV as a key focus of its efforts.

Men and boys: Integral partners in supporting girls’ education

Men and boys – in their roles as grandfathers, fathers, brothers, peers, mentors, teachers, principals, coaches, religious leaders, law enforcement personnel, and policymakers – can support efforts to cultivate a school culture and community environment that condemns violence and promotes the value of girls and women.

Plan not only involves young men and boys in GBV prevention within schools, but also engages them in initiatives that address their own unique needs and vulnerabilities. Boys from marginalized groups, or those who do not conform to the social norm of ‘real men’, are especially vulnerable. Research shows that boys who witness violence as children are more likely as adults to justify the use of violence as a means of resolving conflict within their relationships. Plan creates spaces for men and women of all ages within a community to reflect on their attitudes and biases – part of a strategy enabling them to adopt beliefs and behaviours that support gender equality, non-violence, and girls’ empowerment.

Putting solutions into action

Proven policies and programs can transform schools and communities into safer places. Teachers have and can be engaged as allies in stopping violence against children. Schools can become catalysts for non-violence, tolerance, and gender equality – not only within their walls but within families and across the broader community. Attitudes and behaviours justifying the use of violence can be transformed. Facilities whose weak institutional capacity and poor infrastructure make boys and girls vulnerable to violence can be reformed. Existing programs and policies that offer support for victims and establish accountability for perpetrators can be strengthened, and made a standard part of education systems and community-based child protection mechanisms.

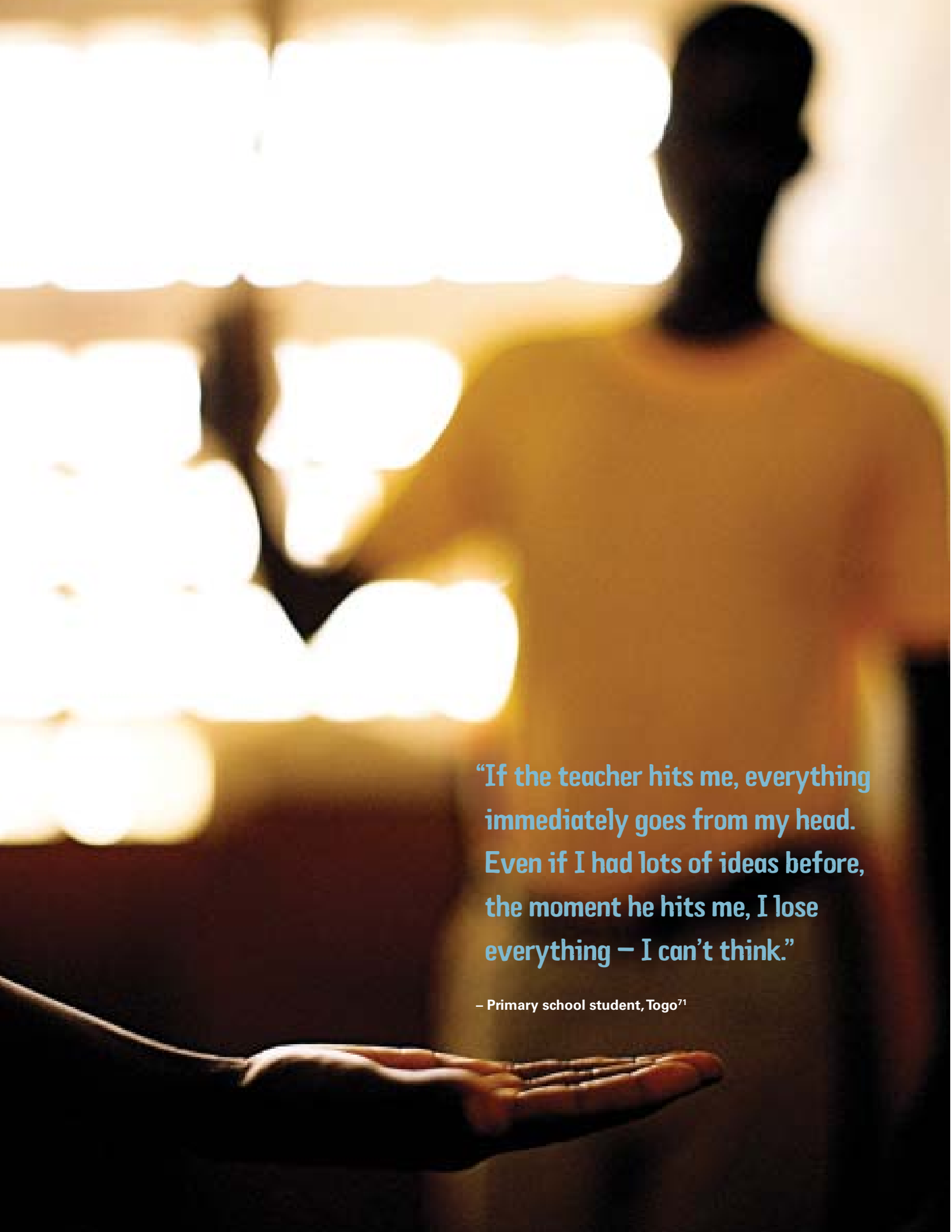
This report outlines such solutions, drawing on examples from countries showing promise in tackling SRGBV, as well as on global civil society campaigns, international legal instruments, and the voices of girls themselves. It recommends specific policy foundations governments should establish as catalysts for change. While governments are by no means the entire solution, they are an important part of it. When appropriate legislative frameworks, policies, systems and services are in place at the national and local level – and when there is a strong commitment to acting on them – change is fostered in further spheres. Institutions, communities, parents and children become empowered to join together in confronting the violence and discrimination that limit so many lives.

“Both the governments and the civil societies should initiate awareness raising campaigns at every community on gender equity.”

– Girl, 14, India⁴⁵

Effective national child protection systems and community-based child protection mechanisms are vital to prevent and respond to GBV in and around schools. Effective child protection mechanisms require multiple stakeholders – the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, health professionals, welfare and education services, teachers and school staff, as well as pupils and parents – to work together using a coordinated and integrated approach to address the issue holistically.



A silhouette of a person stands in front of a wall of bright, circular lights, creating a bokeh effect. In the foreground, a hand holds a string that extends across the bottom of the frame.

“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, Togo⁷¹

Forms of school-related gender-based violence

Sexual violence: Harming the lives of millions

Sexual violence – including harassment, rape, abuse, coercion, and exploitation – has affected an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18.⁴⁶ Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.⁴⁷ Of women who had their first sexual experience before their sixteenth birthdays, 45% reported being victims of sexual coercion.⁴⁸

Most cases of sexual violence are perpetrated by people a child knows including teachers, peers, and members of the community. While teachers are often key allies in preventing SRGBV, they can also exploit their authority and power to engage in ‘sex for grades’ or the waiving of school fees.⁴⁹

During conflict, when institutions, accountability structures and social networks are weakened, girls and boys are at greater risk of being sexually violated.⁵⁰ Teenage girls may be particularly exposed to sexual violence and harassment when parts of their schools are used as barracks or bases by armed forces, armed groups, or police. Fears of such abuse can cause girls to drop out, be pulled out, or not enrol in higher years of studies.⁵¹ In countries where sexual violence is used as a weapon of war, the outcome is severe: for girls, the consequences of rape (which include psychological trauma and stigmatization) put their right to education at risk for the rest of their lives.⁵²

Bullying in schools: Extended aggression in diverse forms

Bullying, often the most common form of violence in schools, reflects an imbalance of power and is carried out through repeated verbal or physical acts whose purpose is to inflict suffering over a period of time.^{54, 55} It remains largely unchecked on most school grounds. Surveys in several countries found that between one-fifth (China) and two-thirds (Zambia) of children reported being verbally or physically bullied in the past 30 days.⁵⁶

Though bullying may not always target a child based on his or her sex or gendered identity, the way it is expressed is often gendered. Boys are more likely to engage in and be victims of physical bullying, while girls are more likely to engage in verbal and psychological bullying.⁵⁷ Students from marginalized groups are at greater risk of being bullied; such students may be targeted because of their race, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

“Our teachers should be there to teach us and not to touch us.”

– Girl, 15, Uganda⁵³

“It’s always against the weaker children that can’t defend themselves. The bullies want to execute power, because they can’t do it in other ways. Violence in schools is often underestimated, especially psychological violence.”

– Female, 19, Germany⁶³

“She turned on me, and not only did she turn on me, but she got other people involved and also got them to turn on me and it just got out of hand ... I posted one status [on Facebook], within about one minute I had 63 comments on there, telling how people were going to kill me and to kill myself and if I don't kill myself they'll do it ... at the time, it was like death was my only option for getting out. I hated everything about me because I had been put down so much.”

– Girl, 12, UK⁶⁴

Bullying is sometimes inappropriately considered an adolescent rite of passage. The use of fear, intimidation, and physical force has been seen as part of boys growing up. Girls tend to use verbal harassment; and, in developed nations at least, girls may be more likely to engage in indirect forms of peer aggression (a subtle form of violence that uses relationships to harm or manipulate others and to injure a girl's sense of social acceptance).⁵⁸ Girls bully one another through rumours, gossip, and social exclusion.⁵⁹ This relational violence, which specifically targets a girl's critical social relationships, can increase her risk of long-term socio-psychological distress.⁶⁰ It is often overlooked by educators and policy-makers as a mere expression of 'girls being girls', despite the long-term consequences.

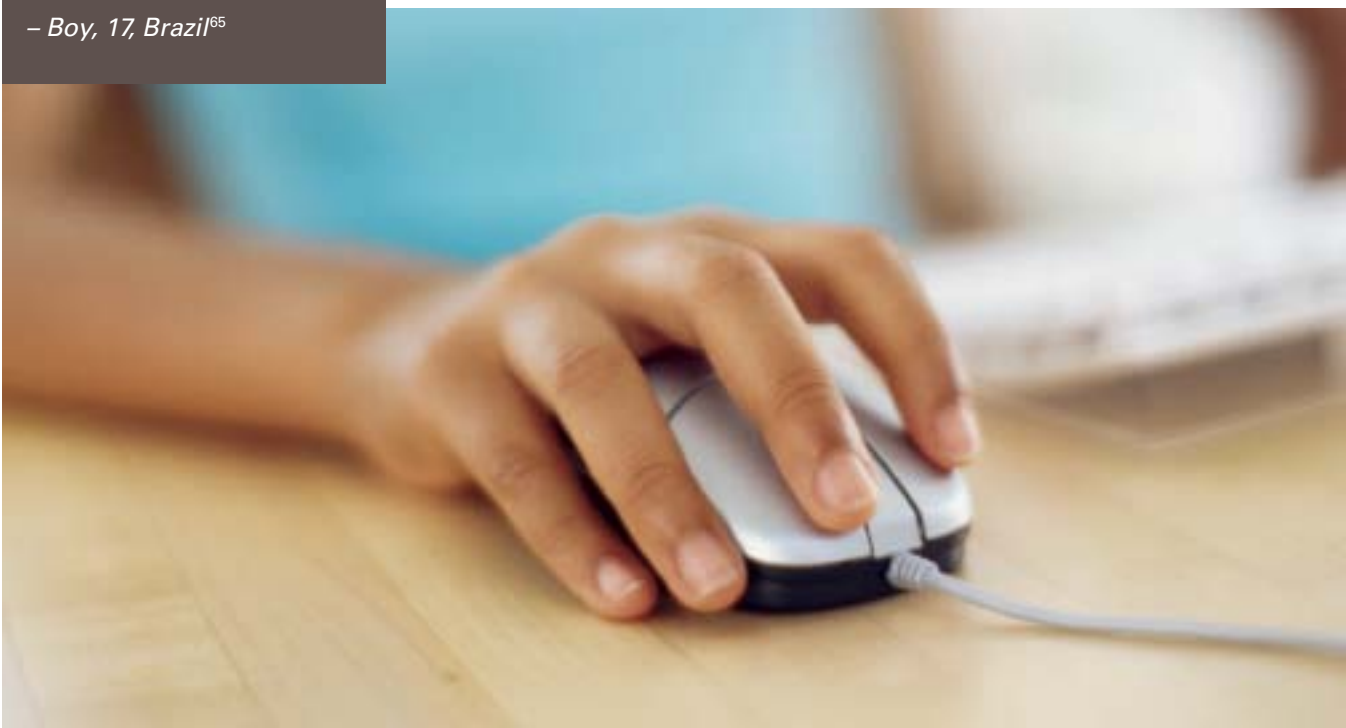
Teachers themselves may engage in psychological bullying when they speak in a derogatory way to students based on the student's sex, race or class. Girls may be made to feel worthless, unteachable or stupid if they are viewed as behaving in a manner inconsistent with their assigned role in society.⁶¹

Cyber-bullying: Raising the stakes online

In recent years, information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the use of text messages, email, and social media have permitted new manifestations of violence among schoolchildren. So-called 'cyber-bullying' extends fear, intimidation, and in some instances sexual violence well beyond school grounds. While the digital world can provide positive opportunities for girls, it also presents new dangers – particularly during adolescence, when girls are developing into sexual beings without necessarily having developed the skills or the knowledge to protect themselves. Girls are often subject to online harm from friends, classmates, or boyfriends. While cyber-bullying is an extension of 'offline' bullying, there is an important distinction: online bullying follows children home, and victims may experience it every time they turn on their mobile phone or computer.⁶²

“You cannot go home from the internet ... It is like being haunted.”

– Boy, 17, Brazil⁶⁵





Physical and psychological violence as ‘discipline’

Students in many parts of the world are routinely subjected to corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Millions of boys and girls in school live in daily fear of being spanked, slapped, hit, smacked, shaken, kicked, pinched, punched, caned, flogged, belted, beaten and battered by teachers, school administrators, or security personnel – people whom students often know and may trust. In some countries, more than 80% of students suffer corporal punishment at school.⁶⁶ In 2006, half of the world’s children lived in countries where corporal punishment is not yet banned. As of June 2011, corporal punishment in schools was unlawful in 117 countries, although 80 states have yet to fully implement relevant reforms. Gender discrimination in this respect is sometimes reflected in law: in Singapore, for example, corporal punishment of boys (but not girls) is legal.⁶⁷

In some circumstances, the use of physical force with the intention of inflicting pain reflects teachers’ impulsive reaction to behaviour they dislike. Teachers may be more likely to resort to punitive discipline under stressful teaching and classroom conditions, such as overcrowding, insufficient resources, and increased emphasis on student achievement.⁶⁸

There is near total impunity for this violence, since it can be justified under the guise of discipline. Impunity for corporal punishment reflects deeply entrenched beliefs about acceptable forms of discipline, and often stems from a lack of institutional accountability.

In addition to physical violence, psychosocial punishment is also inflicted on children through actions designed to belittle, humiliate, threaten, scare or ridicule.⁶⁹

“Our school principal punishes very hard. She makes us go down on our knees over small stones or bottle screw tops for over 20 minutes and also she often pulls our ears.”

– Girl, 8, Paraguay⁷⁰



Causes and consequences of SRGBV

SRGBV is a complex social problem that results from more than just school-related issues.⁷² Violence against children in educational settings reflects – and sometimes intensifies – deeply embedded social and cultural norms regarding authority, hierarchy, discipline, and gender and other forms of discrimination.⁷³

Social and cultural norms condone violence and reinforce gender inequalities in many of the schools attended by the world's one billion schoolchildren.⁷⁴ Patterns of GBV in schools are influenced by discrimination against specific groups: women and girls, ethnic minorities, people living with disabilities, those from lower castes, students living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), LGBTQ, Indigenous, and older students enrolled below their grade level.

The prevention of and response to SRGBV are slowed by weak institutional capacity to implement child protection policies, as well as by limited enforcement of laws in education settings. This is particularly relevant in conflict-affected countries, where pervasive unrest weakens the functioning and accountability of justice and policing systems.

Consequences of SRGBV include lower academic achievement and health risks that may affect children for years to come.⁷⁵ School-related acts of physical and sexual violence also impede children's access to a key human capital investment, and contribute to reinforcing cycles of violence and poverty across generations.⁷⁶

Harmful social, cultural, and religious norms

Children are influenced by others' attitudes and behaviours, imitating what they see and behaving in a certain way if people they respect validate those actions. These underlying norms, where supported by broader patterns of inequality, teach children lessons about what their roles are and about consequences for those who do not conform. Children who suffer from family violence, for example, are more likely to be bullies or to be bullied.⁷⁷ Adult men who experienced or witnessed violence as children are more likely to justify violence as a means of resolving conflict.⁷⁸ Women who witness or experience violence are more likely to justify acts of violence perpetrated against them by male partners or adult males they know.⁷⁹

Violence in schools is a manifestation of underlying gender and age inequalities and power dynamics. Through the reinforcement of values in family, school, community, media and society, children can learn to view violence as socially acceptable.⁸⁰ Children internalize concepts of so-called family honour, which they may feel responsible for upholding. Dominant versions of manhood may call for expressions of aggression, violence, competitive sexuality, sexual power over women, and homophobia.⁸¹ Conversely, social expectations of girls can include deference to men and boys, sexual submissiveness, passivity, and virginity.

Through the reinforcement of values in family, school, community, media and society, children can learn to view violence as socially acceptable.

"They all think that girls are supposed to be their doormat. I think boys must be taught to look at girls as people."

– Girl, 15, South Africa⁸⁵

"If they hit me, I learn to hit."

– Girl, 12, Spain⁸⁶

Harmful gender norms, and the lower social status of women and girls relative to men and boys due to patriarchy, restrict the roles girls are able to assume.⁸² Adolescent girls in countries where child marriage is socially acceptable are often pressured to stop their schooling and prematurely assume roles as child brides, thereby limiting their educational and earning potential, and exposing them to additional risk of GBV.⁸³

In schools, unequal gender and power relations can undermine the prevention, reporting or sanction of violence.⁸⁴ School administrators and teachers may dismiss boys' disrespectful attitudes or harassment of girls, considering them 'normal' male behaviour. Girls themselves may learn to tolerate a certain amount of GBV and coercion as an unavoidable part of their experience.

Discrimination and social marginalization

Children's vulnerability to violence increases if they are part of already marginalized groups. Disability, sexual orientation, HIV status and membership in a minority group, Indigenous community, or caste render children even more at risk.⁸⁷ In Europe, for example, children with disabilities are nearly four times more likely to experience violence than their peers without disabilities (a figure likely to be much higher in poor and middle-income countries).⁸⁸ Girls with disabilities experience discrimination and heightened vulnerability on account of their gender as well as their disability.⁸⁹ Membership in a marginalized group may influence the severity of violence as well: children from groups experiencing social stigma and discrimination may experience more intense corporal punishment.⁹⁰

Many government ministries and institutions have begun to address bullying based on race, religion, or disability; but few are taking steps to address bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity.⁹¹ The problem is often ignored or invisible, even though LGBTQ youth are increasingly victims of violence in school.⁹² Efforts are needed to understand the vulnerability of LGBTQ youth to violence, and to develop methods of response and prevention. The challenge is heightened by social attitudes toward homosexuality and atypical gender identity, which are often discriminatory and permit homophobic bullying.⁹³

As economic inequality has grown between and within countries, poverty has become more concentrated among socially marginalized groups.⁹⁴ Poverty makes children – especially girls – vulnerable to pressure and manipulation from adults and other children. Children who live in rural areas and attend school in resource-poor communities (which generally have entrenched patriarchal values and lower levels of awareness about children's rights) may be more vulnerable to violence than their urban peers.⁹⁵ Poor girls may engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff, or other adults to obtain school fees or to support their families.⁹⁶ Teachers may even demand sexual favours in return for better grades or waiving of school fees.⁹⁷ Parents may ignore their children's sexual relations with teachers or other adults because they need the money or do not wish to confront other members of the community.

"They do discriminate.
There are some guys
who say ... you are poor,
I have money[.]"

– *Schoolboy, Paraguay*⁹⁸

"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*⁹⁹

Missing legal safeguards and weak institutional capacity

As part of their legal obligations under international treaties such as the CRC and the CEDAW, many countries have enacted laws and established policies aimed at eliminating violence in schools. They may also have enacted laws related to protecting girls from abuse, violence, and discrimination in their communities. However, many other countries lack such laws – and even in places where they do exist, they are often not implemented or enforced.¹⁰⁰ Too few education systems specifically adopt and disseminate gender-sensitive child-protection guidelines. Reporting and accountability mechanisms are often weak, if they exist at all, and do not protect victims' privacy and rights. This is a particular problem for girls, whose education and rights are often undervalued and under-protected.

The poor management of violence in schools, and the lack of community-based child protection mechanisms, can result in impunity for the perpetrators of SRGBV. Country studies show that teachers or security personnel may not report violations due to fear of retribution or the desire to protect the reputations of colleagues, students, or the school.¹⁰¹ In some cases where staff or students are found guilty of SRGBV, administrators have responded by simply transferring them to another school. Such a response casts the problem as an issue specific to the individuals involved, thereby implicitly condoning the violence (and often continuing to expose children to abuse).

Weak institutional capacity means that the broad range of people who shoulder the responsibility for creating a protective school environment for children often do not know how to support gender equality and create a violence-free school culture. It also contributes to the creation of unsafe school spaces. For instance, poorly designed or managed physical infrastructure increases the vulnerability of students (especially girls) to sexual violence and abuse. Sexual violence is most likely to occur in or near latrines, in empty classrooms or dormitories, on the perimeter of the school grounds, or en route to and from school.¹⁰² The risk of abuse is heightened when these areas are inadequately maintained (for example, having dim lighting or broken locks). Other institutional weaknesses, such as a lack of school rules or limited supervision of children's interaction on and around school grounds, also increase children's vulnerability to violence.



"I have a friend who reported what a teacher had done. She told the principal, but nothing ever happened."

– Student, Benin¹⁰³

"In 1998, I was at a school near Vilakazi High School. When I arrived, there were no students. They had left because two teachers had been fighting. One of the teachers wanted to take a standard six girl for himself. Another teacher had said that it was wrong, and they were fighting. I couldn't believe it. I then had to go to another school nearby and I told them what had happened, saying that it was wrong for teachers to behave like this. One of the teachers there said to me: 'No. The department is not paying us enough money. So this is a fringe benefit. But standard six is too young: standard nine and ten is where we play.'"

– Social worker who visited schools in Johannesburg's townships¹⁰⁴

“My grades are horrible. I’m not doing well because I missed so much school.”

– *Girl sexually assaulted by her teacher, 15, South Africa*¹¹²

“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.”

– *Girl, 17, Liberia*¹¹³

Lower academic achievement and higher health risks

Girls and boys who witness or experience SRGBV are less likely to do well in school.¹⁰⁵ Experiencing and fearing violence, or feeling disempowered to condemn it, can prevent girls and boys from attending school. More research is needed on the relationships between violence and poor educational outcomes, dropping out, and school completion in developing countries.¹⁰⁶ However, the available evidence shows that sexual harassment and violence are major factors in school dropout rates for adolescent girls, and partly explain girls’ lower enrolment rates at the secondary level.¹⁰⁷

Beyond the psychological suffering and trauma they experience, young female victims of sexual violence face unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.¹⁰⁸ These health risks compromise girls’ schooling and their broader development. Many schools do not permit pregnant girls to attend school, or allow girls to bring their babies or return to school following childbirth.¹⁰⁹ Young mothers often experience delays in progression to higher school grades and periods of withdrawal from school. In some regions, girls are significantly less likely to return to school after the birth of their child.¹¹⁰ The young victims are also commonly stigmatized, undermining their status within the community and their ability to access health and social services.¹¹¹

Reduced economic opportunities

By contributing to poor performance, lower enrolment, absenteeism, and high dropout rates, SRGBV reduces the chances for young people (particularly rural girls) to find decent jobs, and lowers their lifetime earning capacity.¹¹⁴ Disparities in school attendance between wealthier boys and girls are generally small; but girls from poor, rural, or ethnic minority communities face some of the greatest disparities in relation to boys.¹¹⁵

Failure to meet international development goals

Without making a more concerted effort to eliminate barriers to development, many countries will fall short of meeting several MDGs by 2015. GBV against children in schools is limiting progress toward MDGs such as universal primary education, gender equality, and reductions in global poverty. MDG #2 acknowledges the critical role education plays in eliminating poverty and giving children the chance to improve their lives. It will not be achieved unless governments, international organizations, local communities, teachers, parents, and children work together to uphold children’s right to a violence-free education. Strengthening child protection systems and community-based child protection mechanisms is also crucial. The billions of dollars spent on education are a poor investment if children are too scared to attend school and to concentrate on their lessons.

Plan's advocacy for a common vision beyond the MDGs

Plan is working to make girls' education central to the global development agenda. Through this work, we emphasize the urgent need for action to end all forms of GBV in and around schools, in order to overcome barriers to the achievement of, in particular, universal primary education (MDG #2) and gender equality (MDG #3).

As 2015 approaches, Plan is advocating for a more comprehensive global framework that includes the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence in the context of poverty. With respect to MDG #2 and #3, in particular, any post-MDG framework must aim to ensure that adolescent girls successfully transition to, and complete, quality secondary education.

This can be promoted by:

- Building on the recent achievements at primary education enrolment levels
- Redefining basic education to include the successful completion of at least nine years of quality education, with an emphasis on gender equality
- Taking an equity approach and including gender equality indicators, both quantitative and qualitative
- Emphasizing quality of learning in addition to enrolment and access
- Recognizing that a quality education requires freedom from gender bias
- Supporting gender reviews of education sector plans, and action to address identified gaps
- Empowering girls and boys to participate in global and national initiatives aimed at developing policies and actions to remove barriers to girls' education.





A global overview of SRGBV

Global data on SRGBV



1. In Canada, over 50% of lesbian, gay and bisexual learners and 75% of transgender learners report verbal harassment; 10% report regularly hearing homophobic comments from teachers.¹¹⁷

2. In the United States, 4,000 reported incidents of sexual battery and over 800 reported rapes and attempted rapes against girls and boys were reported in public high schools in 2010.¹¹⁸

3. In Colombia, there were 337 reported incidents of sexual violence in schools just in 2007.¹¹⁹

4. In Bolivia, 12 children and adolescents are raped every day on average, with some rapes occurring during school hours.¹²⁰

5. In Ghana, more than half of schoolchildren ages 13-15 years (59.6% of boys and 57.3% of girls) report having been bullied at least once within the last 30 days.¹²¹

6. In Uganda, more than a third of schoolchildren ages 13-15 report having been in a physical fight during the school year.¹²²

7. In Kenya, UNICEF has documented rape of children as young as age six.¹²³

8. In Zambia, a school-based survey found that 10.8% of boys and 4.3% of girls experienced sexual comments from teachers. 4.4% of boys and 1.4% of girls experienced teachers touching them in a sexual way. Triple the proportion of boys (6.2%) compared to girls (2.5%) reported having had sex with a teacher.¹²⁴

9. In Mozambique, a study by the Ministry of Education found that 70% of girl respondents reported knowing that some teachers use sexual intercourse as a condition for promotion between grades. 80% recognized that sexual abuse and harassment occur not only in the schools, but also in the communities.¹²⁵

10. In India, 50% of homosexual men had experienced harassment from learners or teachers when in school.¹²⁶

11. In Australia, one-third of students report being bullied on school grounds.¹²⁷



Collecting data on children's experience of violence is controversial and challenging. Comparable national data does not exist for many countries. There is also much diversity within and between countries with regard to socioeconomic development, cultural background, political stability, and colonial history, all of which affect the extent and nature of documented SRGBV.¹¹⁶ The available data, however, paints an alarming image of the extent to which violence affects millions of children around the world. Statistics likely underestimate the prevalence of SRGBV, in fact, since children are often hesitant to report violations because of a desire to protect so-called 'family honour', or for fear of being shamed, stigmatized, or retaliated against. Weak reporting mechanisms and inconsistent enforcement of national legislation also undermine data accuracy.

Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa, national surveys of male and female students find that GBV is common at school. In several countries, sexual violence against schoolgirls appears to be an institutional norm.¹²⁸ Patriarchal values and attitudes that encourage male aggression, female passivity, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage are drivers for SRGBV across Sub-Saharan Africa.^{129, 130, 131}

In countries affected by armed conflict and ethnic violence (including the Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and Sudan), insecurity and fear prevent millions of girls from attending school.¹³² WHO surveys find that 73% of students surveyed in three provinces in Zimbabwe had been physically abused within the last year.¹³³ In Zambia, 63% of students reported being bullied at least once during the previous month, and nearly a third of students (32.8% girls and 31.7% boys) had been forced to have sexual intercourse by fellow students or teachers.¹³⁴

Field studies by Plan's West Africa Regional Office in seven African countries (Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Liberia, and Uganda) reveal that violence in primary and secondary schools, while varying across the individual countries, is prevalent. It can be manifested as inappropriate sexual relations between male teachers and female students, transactional sex to cover school fees and the cost of school materials, sex for grades, and excessive use of corporal punishment.¹³⁵ When asked about early pregnancy, 16% of children in Togo named a teacher as responsible for the pregnancy of a classmate; this figure was 15% in Mali and 11% in Senegal. In Ghana, 75% of children cited teachers as the main perpetrators of violence in school; in Senegal, the figure was 80%.¹³⁶



Asia and the Pacific

In 2002 and 2003, Pakistan's Minister of State for Religious Affairs recorded more than 2,500 complaints of sexual abuse by clerics in religious schools, none of which led to successful prosecutions.¹³⁷ Outside the classroom, particularly in parts of Southeast Asia, notions of so-called 'family honour' and women's virginity until marriage make girls less likely to report sexual exploitation and abuse.¹³⁸

Girl students and teachers of girls have been killed, violently attacked, and intimidated by armed groups who ideologically oppose the education of girls, the education of girls of a certain age, or the education of girls alongside boys. Schools where girls study have also been burned and bombed.¹³⁹ Pakistan and Afghanistan are two countries in which girls' schooling – and schools – have themselves been attacked.¹⁴⁰

In India and other parts of South Asia, caste systems and discrimination against ethnic minorities make some students more vulnerable to bullying.¹⁴¹ In India, two-thirds of schoolchildren were victims of peer-to-peer physical abuse on and near school grounds in 2007.¹⁴² Teachers from higher castes frequently humiliate children from lower castes.¹⁴³

Compared to other regions, peer bullying is less pervasive in East Asia and the Pacific, but it is on the rise. At the lower end, school-based studies find that 19.4% of students in Myanmar have been bullied within the last 30 days; this figure reaches 50% in Indonesia.¹⁴⁴

GBV has also been largely normalized in parts of the Pacific. In the Solomon Islands, for example, 73% of women in a population-based household survey reported believing that violence against women is justifiable, particularly where women do not conform to specific gender roles.¹⁴⁵ Of women aged 15-49, 37% had been sexually abused before the age of 15.¹⁴⁶

In more developed countries such as New Zealand, Japan, and Australia, the expanding access to online technologies is driving new forms of SRGBV violence, such as cyber-bullying based on sexual orientation.¹⁴⁷ In Australia, where approximately a third of children report being bullied by peers on school grounds, cyber-bullying affects one in ten students.¹⁴⁸





Middle East and North Africa

In the Middle East and North Africa, violence against children is a common occurrence, most often hidden and not publicly discussed.¹⁴⁹ In recent years, conflict and migration have further compromised children's schooling and protection.¹⁵⁰ For example, almost 60% of Palestinian and Lebanese students who study in refugee camps directly associate 'getting hurt' with being victims of physical violence in school.¹⁵¹

In countries where data was collected between 2006 and 2011, at least 51% of boys aged 13-15 reported having been physically attacked or involved in a physical fight on or near school grounds.¹⁵² Among boys, physical violence is reported more often than bullying. WHO surveys find that bullying affects girls and boys to a similar degree in the Middle East and North Africa region. Due to limited political and institutional accountability, data on sexual violence in schools is scarce.¹⁵³

Latin America and the Caribbean

The UN Regional Consultation in Latin America in 2005 noted that the region is characterized by a high level of social tolerance towards acts of violence in general, and alarming levels of impunity for perpetrators of GBV.¹⁵⁴ In Latin America and the Caribbean, violence is often justified as a means of resolving conflicts between adults and children, as well as conflicts between young people themselves.¹⁵⁵ Socioeconomic inequality in urban and rural communities has also been linked to children's vulnerability to violence.

In Chile, Costa Rica, Panama, and Peru, school-based surveys have found between 5% and 40% of adolescent girls reporting experience of sexual abuse.¹⁵⁶ Girls in the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua report being victims of sexual coercion from teachers, sometimes under the threat of their grades suffering if they do not accept sexual advances.¹⁵⁷ Approximately 60% of children in the Caribbean have witnessed violence in their schools, an experience associated with high levels of fear, absenteeism, and school dropout.¹⁵⁸ Bullying is the main driver of peer-to-peer male violence in the region. The number of students having engaged in or been victims of bullying is 40% in Brazil, 36.7% in Ecuador, and 28% in Uruguay.¹⁵⁹



Europe and Central Asia

Most European countries have adopted legislation to protect schoolchildren from GBV, and have drafted guidelines for promoting accountability. In recent years, heightened media coverage of school-related violence has raised awareness of its pervasiveness and its impact. Much of this media attention has focused on the phenomenon of bullying in person and online, especially against already-marginalized schoolchildren. For example, 65% of LGBTQ children report experiencing homophobic bullying in Britain's schools.^{160, 161}

Data affirms the need for a greater focus on preventing peer-to-peer GBV in schools. Peer violence accounts for up to 87% of SRGBV in Europe and Central Asia, and young adolescents (age 12-16) are responsible for 80% of reported incidents of violence on school grounds.¹⁶² Students' experiences vary considerably across Europe: at the low end of the scale, 15% of Swedish students report being bullied within the last two months, as compared to 65% of Lithuanian students.¹⁶³

Throughout Europe, girls are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment, and boys report higher rates of physical fighting. Boys carry out approximately 85% of reported incidents of bullying in the region.¹⁶⁴ In the Czech Republic, 69% of boys and 27% of girls reported having been in a physical fight in the past 12 months.¹⁶⁵ By contrast, students report much lower levels of physical violence and bullying in Tajikistan and Macedonia.¹⁶⁶

North America

In North America, numerous high-profile tragedies have elevated the subject of school violence in public discourse. Even though school shootings are in large part responsible for the increased attention, a far more common form of violence within schools is peer bullying, both in person and online.¹⁶⁷

In some instances, bullying and cyber-bullying have escalated to violent 'hate crimes': violence intended to hurt and intimidate someone because of race, ethnicity, national origin, religious, sexual orientation, or disability.¹⁶⁸ In the United States (US), schools are the third most common location where hate crimes occur.¹⁶⁹ In Canada, most bullying occurs in person on school grounds; however, the situation is reversed for girls who report sexual harassment: 70% of these incidents occur over the internet.¹⁷⁰





“No violence against children is justifiable; [and] all violence against children is preventable.”¹⁷¹

International human rights standards and SRGBV

At the global level, international and regional human rights treaties articulate legally binding standards that States parties must respect when developing effective laws, action plans, and policies to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all children.

Comprehensive national laws and policies, where implemented, provide a foundation for protecting children from discrimination and violence in all settings, including in and around schools. Yet across borders and within countries, the development, implementation, coordination, and enforcement of SRGBV policy varies considerably. In most jurisdictions, more can be done to protect children's right to freedom from violence in schools, and the right to inclusive schools.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which all countries save the USA and Somalia are signatories, requires governments to adopt all appropriate measures to protect children's right to be free from all forms of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, bullying, and cyberbullying.¹⁷² This right requires immediate implementation, and governments must use all available resources to ensure its fulfilment.¹⁷³ The CRC Committee, a body of experts that monitors States parties compliance with the CRC, stresses that proactive prevention of violence is in the best interests of the child.¹⁷⁴ Where violence does occur, it mandates that governments must take all appropriate measures to support child victims in their physical and psychological recovery.¹⁷⁵

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) condemns all forms of violence against girls. The UN General Assembly and the CEDAW Committee have explicitly recognized that GBV is a form of discrimination that violates women's and girls' human rights.¹⁷⁶ Governments must take positive measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish any incidents.¹⁷⁷ The European Committee on Social Rights likewise holds that compliance with the European Social Charter¹⁷⁸ and Revised Social Charter¹⁷⁹ requires legislative prohibition against any form of violence against children, whether at school, in other institutions, in their home, or elsewhere.¹⁸⁰ Educators have specific obligations as well. Teachers and staff are responsible for protecting children from violence while they are at school and in transit to and from school.¹⁸¹

Governments who have taken comprehensive and integrated action on violence prevention have been recognized for their efforts. The CRC Committee, for example, welcomes Australia's adoption of a series of institutional and policy measures aimed at reducing violence against women, protecting children, empowering youth and addressing the specific needs of the Aboriginal population.¹⁸²

Corporal punishment

The CRC requires school discipline to be consistent with a child's human rights and dignity.¹⁸³ The CRC Committee has established that all forms of corporal punishment (including non-physical acts that belittle or humiliate the child) are invariably degrading.¹⁸⁴ Governments have an immediate and unqualified obligation to prohibit and eliminate its use in the family, school, and other settings.¹⁸⁵ Governments should also develop codes of ethics for teachers and school charters that stress the illegality of corporal punishment.¹⁸⁶ The Human Rights Committee, which oversees implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),¹⁸⁷ states that corporal punishment and excessive chastisement in schools are forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.¹⁸⁸ The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has also recognized that corporal punishment and other degrading types of discipline (such as public humiliation) are inconsistent with the right to education, and welcomes national initiatives that promote positive, non-violent approaches to school discipline.¹⁸⁹ The African Commission on Human and People's Rights found that a sentence of lashes imposed on students violated the students' rights.¹⁹⁰ The European Court of Human Rights has progressively condemned corporal punishment of children in all settings, including schools.¹⁹¹

Sexual violence

Both the CRC and the CEDAW condemn all forms of violence against girls, including sexual violence. States parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography are specifically obligated to prohibit the sexual exploitation of children, including transactional sex.¹⁹²



The Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse adopts a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating sexual exploitation and abuse of children.¹⁹³ Beyond requiring governments to adopt legislative measures, it also promotes positive tools that governments can use to prevent violence, including training, violence prevention education, and awareness-raising campaigns.¹⁹⁴ Measures to protect victims include strengthened reporting and support systems and services, and national telephone or internet helplines.¹⁹⁵

The African human rights system also condemns violence against women and girls. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) requires States parties to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights¹⁹⁶ to adopt and implement appropriate measures to ensure the protection of every woman's and girl's right to respect and dignity. They must, in particular, protect her from all forms of violence, including forced sex in both public and private.¹⁹⁷ The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child likewise obligates States parties to take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of violence, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.^{198, 199}

The right to inclusive schools

The right to education is a fundamental right of all children.²⁰⁰ The CRC mandates that governments recognize this right on the basis of equal opportunity. The CRC Committee requires that the educational process itself enables and fosters respect for human rights, and be based on the principles enshrined in the CRC. It emphasizes the promotion of non-violence in schools and of non-discrimination (including on the basis of gender), as well as peace, tolerance, and human rights education.²⁰¹

In designing effective violence prevention policies to combat SRGBV, governments must pay particular attention to traditionally marginalized groups, including girls, racial and ethnic minority children, Indigenous children, and children with disabilities.²⁰² Discrimination, whether overt or hidden, offends the human dignity of the child and undermines his or her capacity to benefit from educational opportunities. It also encourages negative stereotypes that perpetuate violence.²⁰³ The CRC Committee requires governments to revise curricula, textbooks, and other teaching resources and technologies in order to ensure they reflect the educational principles of non-violence, tolerance, equality, and respect for diversity and difference.²⁰⁴ The CEDAW Committee also stresses that governments must eliminate stereotypes in school materials, programs and teaching methods, and must adopt effective education and public information programs to eliminate prejudices and practices that undermine the social equality of women and girls.²⁰⁵ Quality pre-service and in-service training of teachers and educators to promote these principles is also crucial.²⁰⁶

The right to education is a fundamental right of all children. The CRC mandates that governments recognize this right on the basis of equal opportunity.



A global framework for government action on SRGBV

For millions of children, school attendance is compulsory. While many children benefit from an education in a safe environment, far too many students are regularly exposed to violence that compromises their human rights.

By signing and ratifying the CRC, nearly all governments committed to ensuring that every child enjoys the right to an education – one directed at the “development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.”²⁰⁷ The CRC Committee has provided explicit guidance on what governments are required to do in order to prevent violence against all children and to protect child victims. It has also specified what governments must do to develop and enforce an effective framework for action. Bridging the gap between international obligations and country-level practices, however, is a pressing challenge for policymakers.

Several governments have taken concerted action to support effective strategies against SRGBV. Drawing from these promising practices, from recommendations by the CRC Committee, and from research initiatives around the globe, this section outlines eight key principles framing effective government action to end SRGBV.²⁰⁸ Each principle is followed by high-level recommendations for implementation, with a view to providing legislators and government officials with practicable evidence-based approaches they can champion in their own national contexts. In order to address the complex nature of SRGBV effectively, all eight principles should inform the development and implementation of an action plan.

Eight principles for government action to prevent and reduce school-related gender-based violence.

1. Comprehensive and integrated action

Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated, and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

2. Effective legislation and regulation

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.

3. Safe and effective reporting and response

Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, confidential, proportionate, and consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4. Evidence-based policy

Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of school-related gender-based violence.

5. Well-trained, well-supported personnel

Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped and supported to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in and around schools.

6. Partnership

Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector, and civil society organizations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.

7. Inclusiveness

Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.

8. Participation

Girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to address school-related gender-based violence.

Note: Annex 1 outlines further details on recommendations elaborating these principles.

Principle 1: Comprehensive and integrated action

Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

Recommendation: *Develop and implement an integrated action plan focused on SRGBV prevention and response, and the provision of appropriate services. The action plan should aim to ensure that schools are safe, child-friendly and free from gender-based discrimination. It should particularly emphasize measures to address SRGBV experienced by marginalized groups, including Indigenous communities.*

The prevention of GBV in and around schools requires a systematic approach by different levels of government and civil society. It also requires the involvement of communities, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students themselves. Integrated systems-wide strategies are more likely to reduce incidents of SRGBV, improve gender parity in academic achievement, minimize risks of school dropout, and enhance students' wellbeing. A report by the UN Special Representative on Violence Against Children notes that governments should adopt child-friendly school violence prevention programs that address the whole school environment – a crucial component of a systematic national violence prevention framework that works across sectors and engages whole communities.²⁰⁹

Many countries have adopted the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Framework for Rights-Based, Child-Friendly Education Systems and Schools, which outlines global standards for children's education.²¹⁰ It sets clear normative goals for all policies and programs, and provides guidance for a

multi-sectoral strategy that fulfills the rights of children and provides girls and boys equally with a quality education in a safe environment. At the district level, the framework can serve as both a goal and a tool for quality implementation of a comprehensive approach.

The process of developing an action plan is as important as the plan itself, since an effective development process must include society as a whole. Depending on the country context, integrated strategies to reduce SRGBV may form important components of broader frameworks to eliminate violence against women, implement CEDAW, strengthen child protection systems, or realize the goals of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Education for All initiative. In all cases, the process of consultation must be multi-sectoral and inclusive of civil society, with particular attention paid to the accessible and meaningful inclusion of individuals from, and organizations serving, marginalized communities. Governments should inform policy development and implementation by drawing on the expertise of organizations working to end violence against women and children. It is also particularly important to ensure that the diverse voices of children and youth are heard.

In many settings, school curricula and textbooks reinforce harmful norms, and school infrastructure compromises students' safety. Multi-sectoral strategies should apply a gender lens to the full range of issues: the infrastructure of school latrines and the presence of adult monitors in the hallways; pre-service and in-service gender training; support structures for teachers; effective systems of reporting violence; and the implementation of appropriate follow-up measures.

Principle 2: Effective legislation and regulation

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.

Recommendation: Governments should strengthen legislative frameworks to ensure that they explicitly protect all children from violence, including SRGBV. Legislative frameworks should be supported by effective regulations and policies that include binding codes of conduct and appropriate proportionate sanctions.

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.



A legislative framework that explicitly protects children from adult-to-child and peer-to-peer SRGBV and promotes accountability is an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to address SRGBV, and is necessary to its effectiveness.²¹¹ In addition to criminal laws of general application (assault, rape, sexual assault, criminal harassment and hate speech) and specific youth criminal laws, there must be binding codes of conduct that prohibit SRGBV and specifically address the unique position of teachers, staff, students, parents, and volunteers. Teachers should be subject to professional regulation that clearly outlines appropriate and proportionate sanction for SRGBV (including and up to a loss of license to teach or a ban on hiring within the public service). In relation to peer-to-peer violence, criminalization should be a last resort reserved for the most egregious violations or repeat offenders; accountability should otherwise focus on rehabilitation and education.

To protect students and teachers better during times of conflict, governments should enact domestic legislation in line with international humanitarian and human rights law protecting schools and learners.²¹²

Governments should also ensure adequate funding to implement legislation as well as related policies and procedures aligned to a child protection systems approach, and to monitor and assess their effectiveness. Governments should adopt budget line-item investments to reflect their commitment.

Principle 3: Safe and effective reporting and response

Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, proportionate, and consistent with the CRC.

Recommendation: *Governments should develop and strengthen reporting mechanisms at all levels in order to ensure culturally appropriate and confidential means of reporting, as well as effective follow-up services. Responses should include strengthening child protection mechanisms and the provision of child-friendly health care, assistance, and psychosocial support services.*



The best legislative framework will not reduce violence unless children, teachers, staff, and parents are able to report SRGBV without fear or shame, and government officials are empowered and have the resources to investigate and prosecute offenders. As a first step, governments must put in place mandatory reporting requirements to law enforcement and child protection authorities for serious allegations of SRGBV.

Governments should also ensure culturally-appropriate and age-appropriate means of reporting. Reporting mechanisms must not only instill confidence among students and school staff who report violence, but also assure victims' confidentiality.²¹³ Students who witness or experience violence in school should be taken seriously and be able to report violations without fear of ridicule, discrimination, or retaliation. Even in school communities with established reporting mechanisms, field experience has found school-wide perceptions that administrators are complicit in or dismissive of teachers' behaviour (thereby condoning it).²¹⁴ Young female students are often particularly afraid to report abuse because of a reasonable fear of further violence; boys and girls are more likely to assume their bullying is acceptable; and adults may continue violating children's rights with impunity.

Governments must also provide appropriate health and social services to victims of such violence at school. Without the guarantee of adequate support, many victims will not come forward at the outset. Reporting mechanisms and counselling services often lack the resources and skills to support victims' healing and reintegration adequately.²¹⁵

Principle 4: Evidence-based policy

Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of SRGBV.

Recommendation: *Gather and consolidate comprehensive disaggregated national data in order to address research gaps, with particular emphasis on marginalized communities, including Indigenous communities.*

Effective national action plans must be grounded in solid data. Addressing GBV in schools requires further action to collect and consolidate national data on the causes, nature, and scale of SRGBV. Reliable data (disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, Indigenous status or identity, disability, sexual orientation/gender identity, income, rural/urban location, and other relevant statuses) improves prevention programs, informs effective policymaking, and helps assess national progress in violence prevention and response. Research can also be used to strengthen school reporting mechanisms and prevention plans, and to identify gaps in child protection systems.

Governments should support research examining the context-specific dynamics of SRGBV. Ministries of education should support this action by conducting baseline assessments and school safety audits. Such audits provide school leaders with a clearer understanding about the nature and extent of SRGBV, placing them in a better position to recognize their role in preventing and mitigating violence.²¹⁶ Efforts to strengthen data collection systems should be implemented as part of a comprehensive plan to collect data on girls' education and to report progress to relevant UN bodies.

Principle 5: Well-supported, well-trained personnel

Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped, and supported to prevent and respond to GBV in and around schools.

Recommendation: *Require and fund high-quality pre-service and in-service training on all forms of GBV, effective violence prevention strategies, and positive discipline methods for all teachers and school administrators.*

Teachers, school administrators and teachers' unions are key partners in tackling SRGBV. Appropriate training and support should be provided to improve teachers' capacities to understand the links among harmful gender norms, power inequalities between adults and children, and violence. Training should equip teachers and school staff with strategies to reduce students' risks to GBV; cover staffs' responsibility to report GBV; and detail the consequences of taking part in SRGBV, either by directly perpetrating it or by being complicit and failing to report all forms of GBV against students.

The attitudes, skill sets, and strategies that teachers use in the classroom matter. Teachers who reinforce norms of non-violent communication, champion equality and rely on constructive, positive discipline are more likely to create safe spaces for learning in which both girls and boys can excel.²¹⁷ Female teachers, where adequately supported, can act as powerful role models for girls. In place of punitive approaches to classroom discipline, teachers should learn techniques aimed at positive reinforcement, constructive criticism, and clear guidance and instruction.²¹⁸

Principle 6: Partnership

Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector, and civil society organizations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.

Recommendation: *Invest in increased capacity for law enforcement and the transportation sectors to address the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds. Partner with women's and youth organizations that are developing innovative approaches on the ground.*

Governments must also provide appropriate training to all relevant service providers and agencies, including mandatory training for law enforcement and relevant personnel in the judicial system.

GBV often occurs during students' daily journeys between their homes and the classroom.²¹⁹ Field research affirms that both students and adults classify the route to and from school as unsafe 'hot spots'.²²⁰ In some countries, GBV occurs on publicly funded transportation, in which case States are particularly liable for negligent oversight of schoolchildren. In many more communities, young children often walk great distances along poorly lit paths, unaccompanied by parents and unmonitored by officials trained to identify and respond to GBV.²²¹ To reduce students' vulnerabilities to GBV during their commutes, governments must form strategic partnerships with multiple sectors (particularly security and transportation) where viable.



Effective programs developed by civil society organizations should be supported and scaled up to broaden the reach of national efforts to address GBV on and around school grounds.



Principle 7: Inclusiveness

Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.

Recommendation: *Support community-based approaches to engaging community members, including men and boys, to raise awareness and develop local strategies for addressing GBV in and around schools. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.*

Governments can support efforts to raise awareness and support for a violence-free childhood – not only at school, but also at home and in communities. In many settings, policies should aim to redefine deeply embedded norms and behaviours that are harmful for children’s education and wellbeing. Policy actions aimed at preventing and responding to violence in schools must therefore support broader civil society efforts to change attitudes and transform the values of whole communities – including among parents and religious leaders.

Because what it means to be a man or a woman is socially constructed, public policies have a critical role to play in changing learned attitudes and behaviours that increase boys’ risks of perpetuating SRGBV and being victims of it.²²² Governments should support evidence-based primary prevention strategies that work with men and boys in order to make schools and other public spaces free of violence. They can also strengthen the effectiveness of school-based strategies to introduce or improve sexual and reproductive health education by opening dialogue and conducting awareness-raising activities amongst men and boys. The focus should be on discouraging negative sexual practices, education about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, and awareness of the long-term consequences of unhealthy sexual behaviour.

Experiences across diverse settings worldwide confirm that programs can greatly influence how men and boys perceive themselves and their roles in society. Attitudes can change toward more equitable ways of thinking

and being in relation to others.²²³ Acceptance of gender equality by parents, brothers, male peers, religious leaders, teachers, principals, and mentors can promote non-violent positive communication within households, and increase support for girls' education. Men and boys should be empowered to be integral partners in combating violence against girls and young women.

Principle 8: Participation

Girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to address SRGBV.

Recommendation: *Governments should ensure that girls and boys are included in the design, implementation, and monitoring of national and local policies such as action plans, school codes of conduct, curricula, school governance policies, and programs.*

Governments can comprehensively address SRGBV and the underlying norms that promote it only by involving students meaningfully in the policy process. Girls and boys can both shed light on their uniquely lived experience; and better solutions result when girls, particularly the most marginalized, actively identify their own educational, social and cultural needs. Field experiences show that children possess the capacity to protect each other, to identify and support their peers who may be victims of violence, and to transform norms governing their interactions. Involving children as agents for change requires setting up safe mechanisms through which they can express their opinions, enabling them to participate in school governance and to experience firsthand the social benefits of tolerance and non-violence.

Recommendations to bilateral and multilateral donors

Progress on eliminating SRGBV will take place largely at the national and local levels. Donor governments and multilateral agencies can do much, however, to support country-level efforts. They can also work to address violence within the development discourse. These ends can be achieved by:

- Making the issue of GBV (and particularly the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence in the context of poverty) central to global consultations on a post-2015 development framework
- Supporting gender reviews of education sector plans and action to address identified gaps
- Championing and supporting integrated national and sectoral action plans that seek to eradicate violence, including GBV in and around schools
- Strengthening investment in the effective implementation of integrated action plans focused on creating safe, child-friendly, and gender-sensitive schools
- Supporting partnerships with civil society organizations to implement complementary community-based approaches to prevention, response, and provision of appropriate support services
- Supporting the development of effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems to inform policy development and implementation.

Grade 1 Science
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A B C D E F



Global action against SRGBV

Although the factors linked to GBV in and around schools are complex, field research and programs across diverse settings have drawn attention to promising solutions. A number of governments have made important strides in adopting action plans building on policy principles that promote violence-free schools.

This section offers country-level examples of government-led efforts to reduce girls' vulnerabilities to SRGBV. While many countries have made important progress to increase the safety and security of girls at school, there is still much room for improvement, particularly in translating good policies into practice. The country examples point to the need for integrating strategies across multiple sectors and for engaging whole communities to implement the policies at all levels. Adoption of these policies is a critical first step. However, sustained political commitment, continued policy development and support, and effective application are also required to ensure that all children (particularly girls) benefit from a quality education in safe and inclusive schools.

Swaziland

A comprehensive and integrated response, from national data collection to policy implementation and legislative reform

Building the national evidence base for action

Swaziland has the highest national prevalence of HIV in the world, currently at 25.9%.²²⁴ Among adolescents 15-19 years old, the prevalence is just over 20%. Acknowledging the strong association between GBV and the risk of HIV infection, as well as the lack of data on children's exposure to violence in schools, in 2007 the Swazi government launched a national survey to investigate the causes and scale of sexual violence. The study revealed that more than a third of Swazi girls had been victims of sexual violence before age 18.²²⁵

Designing programs that facilitate visible change within communities in alignment with international human rights commitments

Policymakers used the nationally representative information in diverse ways: to publicize the issue of sexual violence; to create safe schools initiatives, including the development of confidential school reporting mechanisms; to increase police officials' capacity to ensure children's rights; and to establish a government unit whose responsibilities include investigating acts of violence against children. Swaziland has also established child-friendly courts that protect children's rights in accordance with international conventions.

A number of governments have made important strides in adopting action plans building on policy principles that promote violence-free schools.

Strengthening national legislation

The government has recently strengthened its national legislative framework. The Education Sector Policy (2011) incorporates formal guidance and counselling curricula that equip teachers and school administrators with tools to address students' age-specific vulnerabilities to GBV and HIV infection.²²⁶ Additionally, in 2011, the lower house of Parliament passed the Children's Protection and Welfare Bill and the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill. These laws extended the definition of rape to include young men and boys, established a public register of sexual offenders, and prevented previous offenders from becoming teachers.²²⁷

Exchanging lessons learned

The Swazi experience has inspired further coordinated community action in other countries in the region. The Together for Girls initiative – which aims to eliminate violence against children at school, at home, and in the broader community – is now supporting national surveys on the causes and scale of violence in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.²²⁸

Next steps

While Swaziland has made progress on the policy side, a key challenge remains implementation. For example, the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill has not yet been enacted, more than five years after it was initially drafted.²²⁹ Teachers have also called for more tools to provide psychosocial support to children who have suffered abuse.²³⁰



Australia

Penal approaches are not enough, primary prevention is critical

Strong legislative and penal responses

Australia has a longstanding political commitment to pursue justice against those who perpetrate violence against children, and to provide services to child survivors. National surveys establish that 14% of adolescent girls aged 12-19 have experienced rape or sexual assault.²³¹ Each of Australia's states and territories has ratified legislation in accordance with international commitments. Local departments of education have taken steps to strengthen reporting mechanisms, and justice systems work to hold perpetrators accountable. These actions responding to violence against children are necessary, but do not constitute a comprehensive response to GBV in schools.

Australia has unified its largely autonomous states and territories around two national documents that channel more resources towards 'primary prevention' and 'respectful relationships': The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children and The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

Primary prevention in schools

Instead of merely responding after the fact to acts of GBV in schools, Australia is scaling up GBV prevention programs across the country in order to empower students and teachers to make changes before violence strikes the school community.²³² These promising programs, such as the Sexual Assault Prevention Program for Secondary Schools, engage male and female students in discussion on attitudes that perpetuate sexual violence. They also promote peer empathy, including towards Aboriginal children, who are relatively more vulnerable to violence. As part of its commitment to make non-violence and gender equality a reality within schools, Australia has also invested in implementing school-based counselling services and in developing curricula to provide teachers with specialized training on positive teaching methods.

Meeting the needs of most-at-risk groups

Australia has recognized that Indigenous girls and boys from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are uniquely vulnerable to violence and abuse.²³³ It has taken steps to link its school-based violence prevention plan with Closing the Gap, a national plan of action to combat the socioeconomic disadvantages of Aboriginal people.²³⁴ Strategies include targeted Local Community Action Grants that focus on building intercultural dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among youth.²³⁵

Next steps

Civil society organizations have urged Australia to strengthen its prevention strategies by engaging men to work towards reducing GBV²³⁶ and by working with Indigenous communities to implement local solutions.²³⁷ At the international level, the CRC Committee has expressed concern that no commissioner exists devoted specifically to child rights. The CRC Committee further recommends that Australia strengthen its efforts to protect children from exposure to violence through ICTs.²³⁸

Philippines

Changing a key barrier to policy implementation: Social norms

Banning all forms of violence against children

Children's right to be free from the threat of violence in school is recognized in the Philippines. Since 1991, laws have prohibited all forms of violence and discrimination against children,²³⁹ and have prohibited the use of schools "for military purposes such as command posts, barracks, detachments, and supply depots."²⁴⁰ The government has also explicitly banned sexual harassment and corporal punishment in schools.²⁴¹ To complement this legislative approach, the Department of Education spearheaded efforts to develop implementation guidelines, teacher training, and a national child protection system.²⁴²

Despite these legislative and policy measures, the CRC Committee reported in 2007 that teachers were responsible for 50% of the cases of child abuse, and that children (particularly girls) remain vulnerable to abuse by janitors, bus drivers, and administrators.²⁴³ Another baseline study of school-related violence found that at least 40% of children in Grades 1-3 and 70% in Grades 4-6 have experienced some form of violence in school.²⁴⁴

Engaging whole communities to change individual biases and institutional norms

In 2009, following a review of school practices, the government publicly acknowledged that deeply engrained social norms justifying teachers' punitive authority over students fostered a disregard for national policies.²⁴⁵ In response, the government committed itself to adopt the UNICEF Child-Friendly School model, with a focus on promoting non-discrimination, gender equality, and non-violence; on supporting children to help develop a child-centred curriculum; on providing safe and healthy school environments; and on involving families and communities in projects and activities beneficial to schoolchildren.

According to a recent evaluation of a pilot program, the model is working: almost all (92%) of children report feeling that their school is 'child friendly'.²⁴⁶ The Filipino experience affirms the need to complement a policy environment with a long-term commitment to engaging whole communities in adopting new belief systems that encourage learning in violence-free spaces.

Next steps

Although the Philippines has enacted strong legislation to protect women and children from violence, challenges remain for its full implementation. These include gaps in the justice system and the failure of national agencies and local government units to exercise due diligence in fulfilling their legal and international human rights obligations.²⁴⁷



Jamaica

Complementing national policies with adequate resources to implement a multi-sectoral approach to GBV prevention and response in schools

Denouncing community violence and its harmful impact

The Jamaican Government has publicly affirmed the pervasive nature of community violence as one of the main barriers to its socioeconomic development. In its 2009 National Report, the Jamaican Government declared:

Gender-based violence is profoundly disempowering for women's well-being and their levels of economic productivity. Violence affects education as schools have to close down or attendance is negatively affected. Trauma affects educational performance, mental and physical health and productivity.²⁴⁸

Continuing to build the evidence base

The government noted that GBV in and around schools is a serious problem, with 57% of victims of sexual violence being younger than 19 years of age. However, due to the lack of specific national indicators tracking violence affecting children on school grounds or elsewhere, the true extent of the problem is unknown. In response, Jamaica has developed a plan to monitor the prevalence of violence by sex, age and type of crime.²⁴⁹

Adopting strong national legislation in alignment with international human rights commitments

In line with its international legal commitments, Jamaica has passed several laws to address violence in early childhood and to enhance mandatory reporting of child abuse, including the development of a Children's Registry.²⁵⁰ To support these measures, the government has focused on restructuring and reforming its police and judicial system in order to provide support services to victims and to eliminate impunity for perpetrators.

Establishing and funding structures that support training and accountability Jamaica has also demonstrated a serious commitment to preventing violence and to providing support to vulnerable youth. It has earmarked increased funds for policy implementation to the Ministry of Education,^{251, 252} and has established the Task Force on Educational Reform and the Education Transformation Program. These bodies focus on training teachers and school leadership to respond to violence and identify anti-social behaviour.²⁵³

Next steps

Although Jamaica has strong political commitment to a multi-sectoral approach, an effective legislative framework is lacking. Despite stated intentions, the government has yet to ban corporal punishment for those over six years old. Civil society organizations and the Office of the UN Human Rights Council have also highlighted the lack of legal implementation (particularly of the Sexual Offences Act of 2009), and the need for effective investigation and prosecution of all cases of GBV.²⁵⁴

United Kingdom

Addressing GBV in schools as part of a national strategy to end violence against women

Bullying is especially widespread in the United Kingdom (UK). According to the 2006 National Bullying Survey, 69% of children in the UK report being bullied; 20% of children admit to bullying others; and 85% have witnessed others being bullied.²⁵⁵ Bullying among schoolchildren is increasingly taking place through the use of mobile technologies and online media, leading some to contemplate suicide.²⁵⁶

Primary prevention in schools

The UK Government has developed a coordinated approach to preventing GBV in schools. The primary focus is to work with teachers and schools to reduce sexual and gender-based bullying in schools; to identify children at risk of violence;²⁵⁷ and to ensure that educators and governments are legally responsive to victims. The Department of Education is developing gender-sensitive curricula, requiring schools to teach about sexual consent,²⁵⁸ and working with youth to transform attitudes and behaviours that justify bullying based on gender, sexual orientation, and/or ethnicity.²⁵⁹

An integrated national approach to ending school violence and violence against women and girls

The UK has explicitly recognized the need to address GBV in and around schools as part of a larger comprehensive strategy to end violence against women and girls within its communities.

By incorporating school-based anti-violence goals into its national action plan for eliminating violence against women, the UK has avoided a piecemeal response to gender-based violence in its various forms.

The UK Government is committed to tackling violence against women and girls through a coordinated, inter-agency, national approach. It also committed to meaningful early and ongoing consultation, policy review, and response. In March 2012 it launched an updated national action plan on violence against women and girls that contains specific targeted strategies in the areas of violence prevention, attitude transformation, services for victims, and accountability for perpetrators.²⁶⁰

This national and inter-agency approach to violence against women is complemented by strong laws and policies prohibiting all forms of GBV and protecting victims. For example, the Home Office, in coordination with other government sectors, has committed to strengthening prosecution and investigation of sexual offences, supporting victims of sexual violence, and preventing its occurrence by tackling pervasive harmful stereotypes about rape.²⁶¹

Partnering across sectors

Recognizing that effective prevention models require cooperation across multiple sectors, the Association of Chief Police Officers, in partnership with the UK Government, has established Operation Encompass, which promotes effective partnerships between the police and schools, including support for children who are victims of abuse.²⁶²

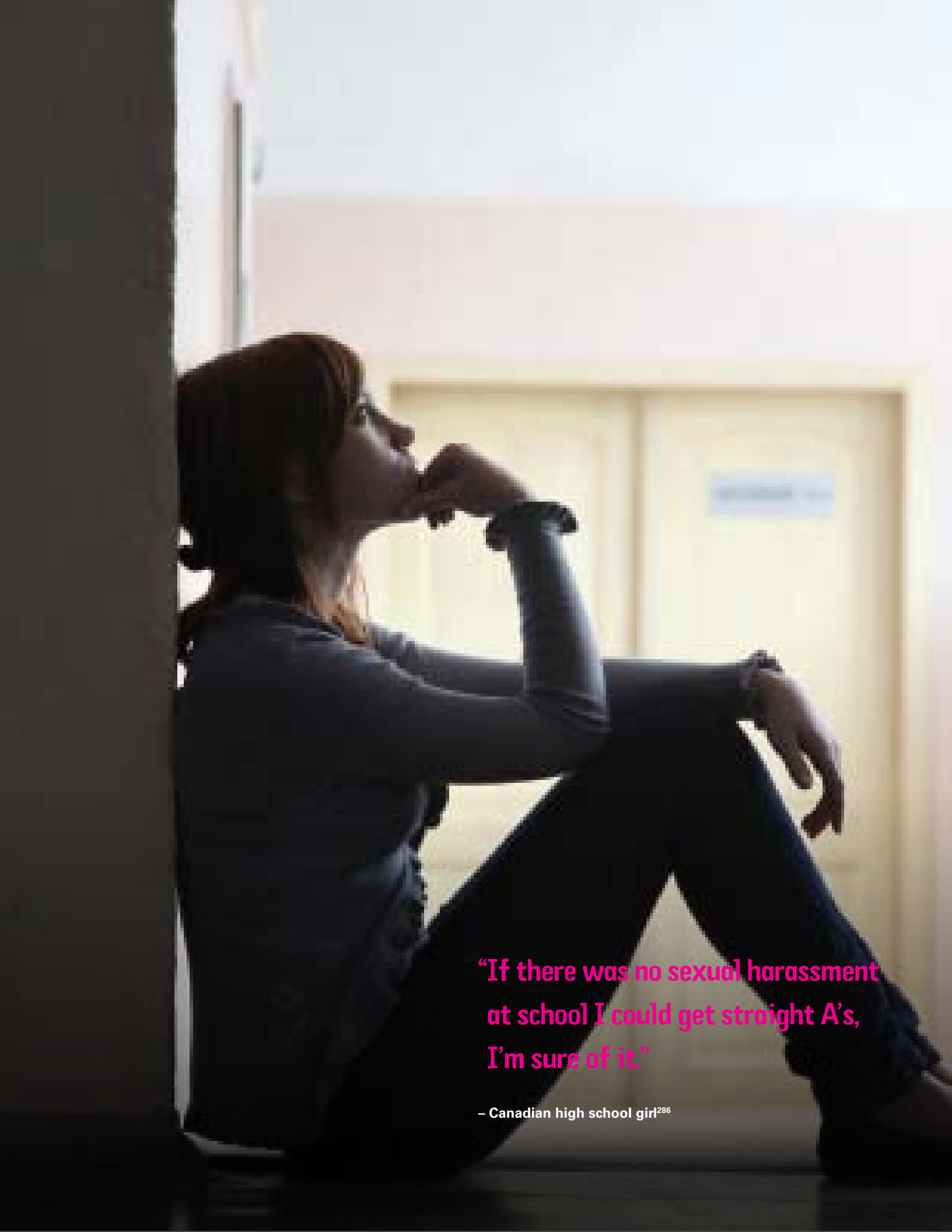
Next steps

The UK has made a strong policy commitment to integrated policy action. However, civil society organizations have recommended that the UK Government strengthen policy implementation at the local level by earmarking sufficient funding to support and ensure delivery of policy commitments.²⁶³ There have also been calls for enhanced victim support services within schools.²⁶⁴



Global conclusion

GBV in and around schools affects millions of children around the world every year. No government is immune from the challenges posed by its prevalence and its repercussions for the fulfillment of girls' right to education and access to quality learning. Governments must do more to unlock the potential of girls to the benefit of all, and to ensure that all children are free to learn without fear.

A young woman with long brown hair is sitting on the floor in a hallway, leaning against a dark wall on the left. She is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. Her right hand is resting on her chin, and she is looking off to the right with a thoughtful expression. The hallway has a light-colored wall and a double door in the background. The lighting is soft, coming from the right side.

**“If there was no sexual harassment
at school I could get straight A’s,
I’m sure of it.”**

– Canadian high school girl²⁸⁶

Canada: No grounds for complacency about SRGBV

Canada is recognized internationally as a country committed to promoting women's rights and freedoms. Most recently, in an expert perception poll, Canada was named the best G20 country in which to be a woman.²⁶⁵ In 2011, Canada was also ranked by the UN as the sixth-best country in the world in which to live.²⁶⁶

In terms of education, the fulfillment of children's right to access education is near universal; indeed, Canadian children have a right to attend a provincial or territorial school without paying a fee.²⁶⁷ Refugee children and children without status in Canada are also eligible to attend school in Canada.²⁶⁸

Importantly, Canadian girls have made great strides in educational attainment over the past 20 years. The proportion of girls who have not completed high school has dropped significantly from 26% in 1990 to 9% in 2009.²⁶⁹ Thirty-four per cent of women aged 25 to 34 now have at least a university-level bachelor's degree.²⁷⁰ Moreover, due to concerted efforts to improve the performance of girls vis-à-vis their male counterparts, girls are now outpacing boys in nearly every measure of scholastic achievement, including reading, writing, and standardized tests.²⁷¹

These achievements are important, and demonstrate that focused attention can lead to significant results.

Yet when we look behind the numbers, there is much work to be done in terms of achieving full gender equity. Canada comes in behind most European countries in rankings of women's equality with men in terms of income, life expectancy, and education levels.²⁷² The adjustments are based on a new UN human development index report that considers deeper equity factors across its rankings, including fairness, social justice, and access to a good quality of life.²⁷³

In Canada there are serious disparities for particular marginalized groups. Not all Canadian children benefit equally from a quality education. For example, young adults with intellectual disabilities are five times more likely than those without such disabilities to have no formal education certificate.²⁷⁴

While the majority of Canadian schools have worked to create safe learning environments, we must confront the fact that Canadian children, particularly girls, remain vulnerable to GBV in their school lives, including physical abuse, sexual violence and bullying.

Aboriginal girls: Disadvantaged on many levels

Aboriginal children and youth consistently have lower academic attainment rates. In 2006, 29% of Aboriginal teen boys and 28% of Aboriginal teen girls were no longer in school, compared to 19% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts across the country. In 2008, the percentage of Aboriginal teens out of school in Canada was almost double the average (15%) across the 31 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).²⁷⁵

These lower academic attainment rates are interlinked with larger patterns of colonization, discrimination, and marginalization. Aboriginal children are part of the most economically and socially disadvantaged peoples in Canada. Aboriginal girls consistently experience higher rates of family breakup, poverty, child abuse, poor health, addiction, lack of access to adequate housing, unemployment, and lower educational attainment rates than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.²⁷⁶ This reality is compounded by chronic underfunding of on-reserve schools across Canada,²⁷⁷ which means that less funding is available for staff, specialist teacher training, early intervention programming, and community outreach and engagement.²⁷⁸

Canadian children are by no means immune from the issues of GBV discussed in this report. While the majority of Canadian schools have consistently worked to create safe and caring learning environments, we must confront the fact that Canadian children, particularly girls, remain vulnerable to the different forms of GBV in and around their school lives, including physical abuse, sexual violence and bullying – in particular, serious relational violence, whose intensity is now magnified through online social media. As is the case globally, boys are at a higher risk of physical violence, while girls are more likely to experience sexual violence²⁷⁹ and social or indirect forms of violence.

A disturbingly high number of Canadian girls are victims of sexual violence. Nearly a quarter of them (24%) have experienced rape or coercive sexual activity before they turn 16.²⁸⁰ During the past 20 years, the lowest estimate is that a quarter of Aboriginal adults have been sexually abused before reaching the age of 18.²⁸¹ Aboriginal girls are hospitalized for suicide attempts at twice the rate of Aboriginal boys,²⁸² and at eight times the national average rate.²⁸³ Studies indicate that women with disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate at least twice that of the general population of women.²⁸⁴ Girls with intellectual disabilities are at particularly high risk, and it is estimated that between 40% and 70% will be sexually abused before they reach 18 years of age.²⁸⁵

“The school dismissed [the bullying] and said she was acting on a whim, that it was commonplace for girls that age to quarrel.”

– Mother of a 15-year-old Canadian girl who committed suicide in 2011 after years of psychological and physical bullying from her female schoolmates

Canadian students also regularly experience other forms of sexual abuse, including sexual touching, grabbing, or pinching.²⁸⁷ Of 1,800 Grade 9 girls in Ontario, 46% had suffered sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or inappropriate looks.²⁸⁸ This form of violence too often goes unnoticed. It may simply become part of going to class every day, with girls concluding that this is the way they should be treated.²⁸⁹ Girls are also particularly vulnerable to online sexual exploitation. In a survey of 565 schoolchildren, 10% received unwelcome words or sex-related photos; and 9% were asked to do something sexual on camera (32% of those by other students). Girls who post explicit pictures of themselves online often feel coerced into doing so.²⁹⁰

Boys too, are at a high risk of sexual violence, with at least 15% of Canadian boys suffering at least one incidence of sexual abuse before the age of 16.²⁹¹ These numbers likely do not represent the actual scope of the violence. Incidents are underreported because of shame, power imbalance, and stigma, as well as the reality that such experiences may be dismissed, excluded, or minimized due to unchallenged stereotypes about male aggression and male sexuality.²⁹²

The statistics on the prevalence of bullying in Canada have been well publicized. The WHO ranked Canada a disturbing 27th lowest out of 35 nations for its bullying victimization rates.²⁹⁴

Relational violence

Relational violence is a conscious attempt to harm another child's social position through acts such as exclusion and gossip. It is motivated by the making and breaking of friendships, which are critical social relationships for children in their early developmental years. These are subtle forms of violence, involving manipulation in order to injure or control another child's ability to maintain their friends, social standing, or self-esteem. The issue of girl-to-girl bullying requires particular attention. Aggression in children is highly gendered, based on larger social conceptions of appropriate behaviours for boys and girls.²⁹⁵ While boys demand the attention of parents and teachers when they act out, get into fights, or become physically aggressive, too often adults miss the subtle signs of aggression in girls: the dirty looks, the taunting notes, or the exclusion from the group.²⁹⁶

The consequences for girls who experience relational violence can be no less destructive than other forms of bullying. Social aggression can damage self-image; destroy social relationships; result in intolerable levels of loneliness, anxiety, depression and low-self esteem; and lead to less satisfaction with school as well as greater school absenteeism.²⁹⁷ Studies show that girls who are highly aggressive in early school years may be at a higher risk for experiencing violence (including sexual victimization, troubled intimate relationships, and family violence) in their later teen and adult years.²⁹⁸

This form of violence is much harder than physical violence to detect, and the true extent of the problem remains unknown.²⁹⁹ However, a recent Canadian study found that incidents of indirect bullying (such as excluding or spreading lies about the victim) are surprisingly common, particularly among girls. Of

"I think the hesitation, embarrassment and fear of being judged. Also, one might think it's 'pointless' for losing hopes in finding solutions. Some of us just get so used to being abused that it becomes normal and part of life and we don't want to be even bothered. Loss of hope basically ..."

– Female of South Asian descent, 19, Toronto, discussing barriers to reporting abuse³⁰⁹

"Teachers don't know how severe the bullying is on Facebook and other social networking sites."

– Girl, 17, Toronto

“In school ... you don’t want anyone to think of you as a ‘gossip’ or someone who says things about other people. Everyone wants to be ‘nice.’ You don’t have to be nice if you don’t want to online.”

– *Girl, 13, Edmonton*³⁰⁸

girls in Grade 6, 76% reported being victims of indirect bullying, compared to 65% of boys; and 68% of girls in Grade 10 reported being victims, compared to 53% of boys.³⁰⁰ Incidents are also likely underreported in schools. One of the reasons that this form of bullying is so successful is that the conflict is too often misinterpreted as a mere squabble between friends or a normal part of girlhood, and thus taken less seriously by teachers and school administrators.³⁰¹ Social bullies are unlikely to get caught; their harmful conduct is masked because the consequences are not as readily apparent as when a child is physically attacked.³⁰² Schools often fail to see what is going on; and even when they do, they are less likely to intervene.³⁰³ Girls are often assumed to be gentler than boys, and schools often fail to take girls’ aggressive acts seriously.

Cyber-bullying: Raising the stakes online

Childrens’ ability to harm other children socially and psychologically has increased greatly with the advent of the internet and cell phones, and the prevalence of technology in the classroom.³⁰⁴ Cyber-bullying is rooted in relational aggression: children use the medium to ‘broadcast’ harmful information about their peers to a wide audience.³⁰⁵ No national data exists on the prevalence of cyber-bullying in Canada. Smaller-scale research has shown that it and other forms of online harassment are likely extremely high. According to one study, 15-25% of students in Grades 7-11 had bullied others, while 25-57% reported being bullied online.³⁰⁶ According to recent data from Ontario, girls may be particularly at risk: while one in five (22%) students in Grades 7 through 12 report being bullied over the internet in the past year, girls are almost twice as likely as boys to report being victims (28% versus 15%).³⁰⁷

Much of GBV in and around schools is unseen, either because children feel too ashamed or fearful to report it, because of stigma within cultural communities, or because it is normalized as part of their everyday experiences.

The information we do have suggests that marginalized children may be doubly victimized within schools and at higher risk of dropping out. These vulnerabilities operate in intersecting ways, which are not well understood due to lack of data and analysis. For example, for both boys and girls, homophobic or transphobic bullying mirrors dominant gender norms and expectations in society. Those who do not act in socially prescribed ways are often targets of ostracism and GBV. Children who have been conditioned to view gender as exclusive prescribed categories can react negatively toward those who do not seem to fit clearly into one or the other.³¹⁰ Similarly, girls, who already face gender discrimination, may be more vulnerable based on discriminatory norms tied to other forms of social difference such as race, ethnicity, Indigenous status or identity, disability, and class.

“To be known as the tough guy is better than to be not known at all.”

– *Canadian student*²⁹³

In one Canadian study of late elementary and early high school students, 17% of students reported being bullied because of their ethnicity.³¹¹ Another study of Toronto students in kindergarten to Grade 8 reveals that race-based bullying is disturbingly frequent, with 43% of students and 36% of teachers reporting that it was happening in their schools.³¹²

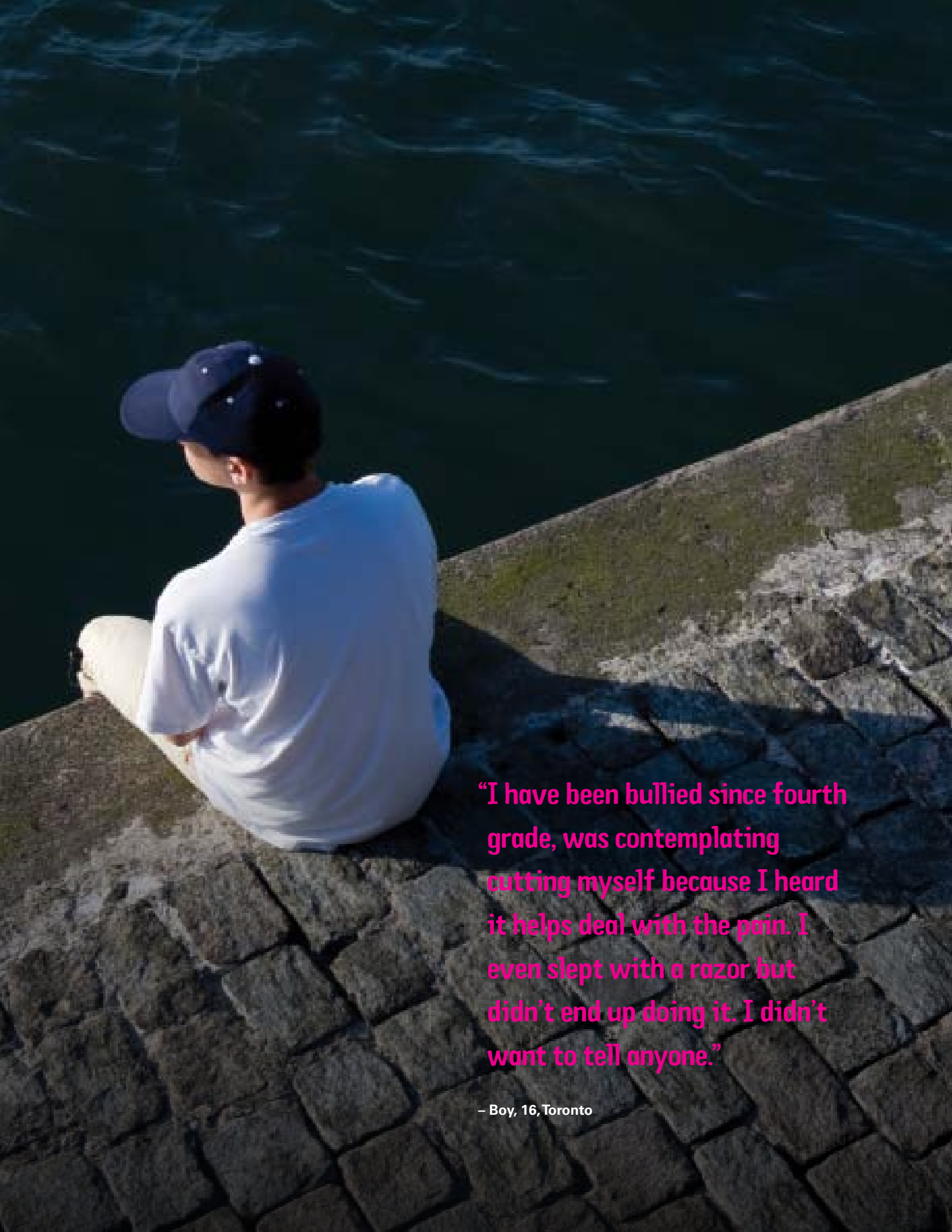
LGBTQ students in Canada are suffering from frequent incidents of verbal, physical, and online violence within their school lives. One national survey of 3,700 students across Canada found that 74% of LGBTQ students report having been verbally harassed about their gender expression. More than one-fifth (21%) suffered physical harassment or assault, and over a quarter (28%) were victims of cyber-bullying.³¹³ Unsurprisingly, almost two-thirds (64%) of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school, compared to less than one-sixth (15.2%) of their heterosexual peers.³¹⁴

Children with physical and developmental disabilities are also more vulnerable to bullying at school. One study reports that 11% of 10 and 11 year-old children with special needs were bullied “all or most of the time,” compared to just 5% of their peers.³¹⁵ Among young people with intellectual disabilities, 41% felt threatened at school or on the school bus within the past year, and more than a third (36%) were assaulted at school or on the school bus.³¹⁶

“He emotionally bottomed out. Every day, he was convinced they were going to get him.”

– *Father of Ontario teen who committed suicide in 2011 following years of homophobic slurs, insults and verbal abuse*





“I have been bullied since fourth grade, was contemplating cutting myself because I heard it helps deal with the pain. I even slept with a razor but didn’t end up doing it. I didn’t want to tell anyone.”

– Boy, 16, Toronto

Impacts of SRGBV on Canada's children and society

As documented by this report, GBV in and around schools negatively affects children's school engagement, academic performance, and mental and physical health.³¹⁷ SRGBV also reinforces cycles of violence that affect individuals and communities across generations.

A failure to address SRGBV has serious repercussions for girls' and boys' right to an education in violence-free schools, particularly for those from marginalized groups. It also undercuts governmental commitments and efforts to provide Canadians with safe and inclusive communities.

Lower academic achievement

Children who experience SRGBV are less likely to do well in school and to complete their education.³¹⁹ Marginalized children, particularly girls, who suffer from intersecting forms of discrimination are also more vulnerable to violence and are at a higher risk of not benefiting from a quality and inclusive educational experience.

- Female victims of sexual harassment report a loss of interest in school activities, increased absenteeism, lower grades, and increased tardiness and truancy.³²⁰
- Bullying and harassment based on race or ethnicity is correlated with school disengagement and poor academic performance.³²¹
- In a national survey, just under one-third of LGBTQ students reported skipping school because they felt unsafe, compared to just under one-eighth of their peers.³²² The Government of Alberta has found that LGBTQ students who suffer harassment report lower grades and higher absentee rates.³²³
- Children with physical and developmental disabilities are more likely to feel left out at school and are less likely to feel safe at school.³²⁴

Health risks

SRGBV can have devastating consequences for children's physical and mental health. Public Safety Canada recognizes that the psychological effects of bullying can be traumatic and long-lasting.³²⁵ Because of its repetitive nature, victims are at a higher risk of impaired social development, mental and physical illness, and suicide.³²⁶ Bullies too are at a higher risk of mental health and learning problems, and criminal activity.³²⁷ Victims of sexual harassment often experience psychological problems including depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of being sad, afraid, scared, or embarrassed.³²⁸ Girls who experience violence are more likely to report these internalizing or emotional problems than are boys.³²⁹

"When I walk into school, I feel like I'm stepping into landmines not knowing what will happen. 'Will I be bullied today, or won't I? Will I have to lay low and be careful of what I say, walking on eggshells, or can I say something?'"

– Canadian participant in national survey on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in Canadian schools³¹⁸

"Most people don't understand the impacts of bullying and gender-based violence – there can be a huge ripple effect."

– Girl, 15, Toronto

“What would I do different?
I witnessed my bro’
stabbed to death at a party
a couple of years ago. I
would have went to school
and took care of myself
and my son. I would of
stayed connected to my
family and Grandma. I
would have stayed home.
And stayed outta jail ...
Maybe if my teachers paid
attention more to me. And
realized that I needed help.
And maybe if I would of
listened to my Grandma
instead of pushing her
and the rest of my family
away. And if my Mom
and Dad weren’t using
drugs and alcohol it would
of made a difference.
If I learned more about
parenting I probably
would of done better. No
one taught me anything.
I didn’t even smudge or
go to a sweat ‘til I went to
(secure facility) ...”

– *Aboriginal female
gang member, 22, who
is a client of a gang
prevention project in
Western Canada*³³⁶

Inter-generational cycles of violence

Many children bully as a result of violence in their own lives and homes.³³⁰ Bullying in schools also contributes to ongoing cycles of violence outside of schools, as it often transforms into other forms of violence in later life.³³¹ Research shows that entrenched gender norms and unequal power relations may be at the root of the problem. Canadian males who adhere to dominant gender-based stereotypes and beliefs, and whose peers also support violent behaviour, are more likely to engage in violence in their dating lives.³³² Girls who experience violence early in life are at a higher risk of domestic violence and other forms of victimization later on.³³³ Boys who engage in sexual violence at a young age are also more likely as they age to use violence in their other relationships, including through sexual harassment, dating aggression, workplace harassment, and marital and child abuse.³³⁴ The Native Women’s Association of Canada has reported that legacies of the residential school system, including past and ongoing exposure to violence and the child welfare system, play a role in the high incarceration rates of Aboriginal women and girls.³³⁵





Current Canadian approaches to SRGBV

While Canada can and should celebrate the great strides we have made so far, it is important that we not take them as grounds for complacency.

We must do more to fulfill Canada's obligations under the CRC (which requires that every child have the right to feel safe at school, at home and in the community),³³⁷ and the CEDAW (which requires that every girl benefit from an equal right to safety and security). We can do more: by looking to promising practices from around the world, we can develop a comprehensive, integrated approach to eliminating GBV in and around schools, so that all Canadian children are free to learn, develop and grow in supportive educational communities.

Canadian schools have the potential to play a greater role as protective spaces for children, and to serve as key agents in linking them to appropriate services. Governments, service providers, and community actors must work together to ensure that schools function as front-line agencies for early intervention against all forms of SRGBV. This strategy requires addressing the underlying causes of GBV against children, not just the symptoms.

Recent legislative initiatives by the Government of Canada to address violence largely focus on punishment rather than prevention and protection. The implementation and enforcement of an effective criminal legal framework to deal with perpetrators of GBV is a critical component of a broader strategy for action, but it is not enough. Several other countries have aimed to tackle SRGBV within the wider context of an integrated national action plan to prevent and eliminate violence against women – an approach we fully support.

While a coordinated strategy on violence against women is still needed, the Government of Canada has shown leadership in its recent announcement of anti-trafficking legislation as well as a national action plan to support service organizations and victims and to strengthen partnerships across the country to tackle this form of GBV. It has also taken a leadership role by focusing on primary prevention and solution-based strategies aimed at engaging men and boys in efforts to reduce and prevent GBV.³³⁸

The government is poised to broaden this approach by putting into action its commitment in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne to address the problem of violence against women. Promising practices from other countries, and the report from the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children, show that fulfilling this commitment through a comprehensive, coordinated, and multi-sectoral action plan – one that balances punishment with prevention and protection – is the best means of addressing all forms of GBV in schools and beyond them.

A focus on prevention is a necessary component of an effective strategy to eliminate SRGBV. GBV has not only serious individual and social costs but economic ones as well. The UK and Australian policy strategies for ending GBV were informed by an analysis revealing the high economic costs at stake. New research released by the Australian Government shows that violence against women costs the nation \$13.6 billion annually; this figure is expected to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021.³³⁹ The total annual cost of domestic violence in the UK has been estimated at about £20 billion.³⁴⁰

Several provincial governments have shown leadership in this area by adopting comprehensive and coordinated legislative and administrative measures to address SRGBV. Both Ontario and Quebec have amended their respective education acts specifically to prohibit a broad range of bullying behaviour³⁴¹ – part of broader prevention and protection models that focus on fostering positive school climates or promoting gender equality and non-violent peer relationships.³⁴² The Alberta Ministry of Education has likewise taken steps to ensure that schools are child-friendly spaces by supporting the Society for Safe and Caring School and Communities initiative,³⁴³ which empowers community members, schools, and children and youth to work together to prevent violence in schools. However, despite best efforts in a few jurisdictions, serious gaps remain. The Government of Canada should draw on leading provincial and international policy approaches to bring a strong national focus to tackling the persistence of SRGBV.

The following section looks at how Canada fares, compared to promising policy approaches taken by countries around the world. Comprehensive and coordinated action on SRGBV is crucial, and this chapter aims to assist with that endeavor. Applying a global framework for promising practice in government policy to the Canadian context, we offer recommendations for the federal and provincial governments to address SRGBV so that all Canadian children can enjoy their right to learn without fear.

A focus on prevention is a necessary component of an effective strategy to eliminate SRGBV.





Recommendations for Canadian Government action

The Government of Canada should:

1. Commit to working in partnership with the provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive whole-of-government action plan on GBV prevention, response and provision of services. Provide sufficient funding to implement the action plan effectively. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.
2. Develop a separate gender-responsive action plan to prevent and address SRGBV against Aboriginal girls and boys.
3. Lead in bringing the issue of the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence to global discussions on a post-2015 development framework. It should also strengthen SRGBV prevention as a cross cutting issue within the implementation of the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Children and Youth Strategy.
4. Strengthen awareness-raising strategies and programs aimed at recognizing and preventing cyber-bullying and other forms of relational violence.
5. Provide sufficient support for Statistics Canada to collect and consolidate disaggregated national data regularly in order to inform evidence-based policy on the prevention and monitoring of SRGBV.
6. Support civil society efforts to engage whole communities – including men and boys – in national, provincial, and local efforts to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms that lead to gender-based violence. It should also support youth empowerment initiatives, with a particular focus on girls and marginalized communities.

Note: Annex 1 offers further details on recommendations that elaborate the global principles, and should be read as applicable within Canada. Annex 2 offers further details on the Canadian-specific recommendations.

Recommendation #1

The Government of Canada should commit to working in partnership with the provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive whole-of-government action plan on violence prevention, response and provision of services. Provide sufficient funding to implement the action plan effectively. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context. It should:

- Commit to the direct and meaningful participation of children and youth, parents, women's and children's rights organizations, law enforcement, and all other relevant stakeholders in policy development, implementation, M&E. Emphasis should be placed on the inclusion of representatives from marginalized communities, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- Develop an intergovernmental Ministerial Steering Committee to provide leadership, accountability, coordination, and consistency in implementing, overseeing, and monitoring the implementation of the action plan.
- Work with the Minister of Finance through the budget process to provide sufficient funding for the effective implementation of the action plan at all levels.
- Apply a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach for all policy and program initiatives in order to understand better the impacts of SRGBV on different groups of female and male children and youth, and these groups' differential needs.³⁴⁴

Provincial and territorial governments should:

- Commit to working collaboratively with the Government of Canada and with each other through the Council of Ministers of Education, as well as with all relevant stakeholders, in order to adopt and implement the integrated action plan.

Rationale:

Promising practices from other countries, and the report from the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children, show that a comprehensive, coordinated action plan that balances punishment with prevention and protection is the best means of addressing all forms of GBV in schools and beyond. This is most effectively done within a broader framework on preventing violence against women. However, as with trafficking, the Government of Canada can begin to address SRGBV immediately by launching a process to develop an integrated whole-of-government strategy.



A comprehensive action plan on SRGBV within a federal system is possible. In Australia, the development of an integrated approach to eliminating violence against women and children across its federal system has led to a higher degree of coordination and effectiveness within the jurisdiction of its states and territories. In turn, this has resulted in cost savings for individual provinces, which can draw on best practices and policies developed at the federal level. A Canadian SRGBV action plan could similarly serve as a blueprint for preventing and eliminating SRGBV across the provinces and territories.³⁴⁵ Canada has an effective legal framework that prohibits and punishes specific forms of violence including assault, sexual assault, sexual offences against children and youth, criminal harassment, and public incitement of hatred. However, the current approach, which is spearheaded by individual provinces, has not been sufficient to prevent GBV and to protect all children in and around schools.

As noted in the global framework section of this report, the process of developing a plan of action is as important as the plan itself. During the development of the integrated action plan, meaningful consultation with women's and children's rights organizations already working to end GBV will be crucial to ensuring that strategies are drawn from existing expertise and reflect the needs of diverse communities. Parents, teachers and students themselves also have unique perspectives that must be taken into account during the strategy development process. In particular, meaningful engagement of girls throughout is critical. The process must empower them to be active as agents and contributors in equal partnership with adults. Research shows a vital link between civic and community participation and the empowerment of young women.³⁴⁶ Further, a commitment to meaningful and ongoing consultation is critical for forging ownership of the policy-making process and strategies for effective implementation.³⁴⁷

Because policy and practice related to education is set by the provinces and territories, and is implemented by individual school boards, both have a critical leadership role to play in strengthening protective and gender-responsive school environments. To this end, child-friendly, gender-sensitive and culturally relevant reporting systems and support services are crucial within schools in order to ensure that all forms of SRGBV are reported and that all children (including victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of violence) are provided with appropriate assistance. Underreporting of violence remains prevalent, with different barriers to disclosure experienced by specific marginalized populations. Children often remain silent because of feelings of humiliation, power imbalance with adults, or a fear of re-victimization.³⁴⁸ They also too often believe that their experiences will be trivialized or dismissed.³⁴⁹ This is particularly true for incidents of sexual touching (for example, grabbing buttocks or breasts); according to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 94% of these incidents go unreported.³⁵⁰ Unless incidents are reported, the effectiveness of other components of a SRGBV strategy will be limited.

Parents, teachers and especially students themselves have unique perspectives that must be taken into account during the strategy development process.

Beyond reporting, a comprehensive and integrated approach to violence prevention is also necessary in order to implement legislative principles at the community level through mutually supportive policies and programs that are sufficiently funded. Legislation, and reporting and response systems, will be effective only in school environments in which core programming directly address GBV and harmful stereotypes targeting marginalized communities. Similarly, violence prevention and victim support must be part of a larger whole-school project to promote respect for children's rights and empowerment. Positive school cultures foster productive relationships among staff and students, positive norms of behaviour, and meaningful inclusion and engagement of all children, with a particular focus on girls and marginalized groups.³⁵¹

Recommendation #2

Develop a separate gender-responsive action plan to prevent and address SRGBV against Aboriginal girls and boys.

The Government of Canada, working with Provincial and Territorial Ministries of Education, should:

- Commit to working in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders (including national Aboriginal organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)), girls and boys, parents and community organizations to develop and implement a culturally appropriate action plan on SRGBV
- Ensure that Aboriginal students benefit equally with their non-Aboriginal counterparts from core components of the integrated action plan on SRGBV
- Prioritize Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education as a core component of the action plan.

Rationale:

In its June 2011 Throne Speech, the Government of Canada committed to building on the work done by the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education in order to "make concrete, positive changes to give First Nations children a better education".

Aboriginal girls share the same concerns as other girls in Canada, but face unique challenges. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) states that "a legacy of colonization, institutional violence perpetrated through the residential school system, racism and socioeconomic disparity has deeply affected many Aboriginal communities."³⁵² The unique perspective and experiences of Aboriginal people, women, girls, and national Aboriginal organizations must be meaningfully taken into account at all levels of consultation, policy development, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of a culturally relevant action plan on SRGBV that prioritizes Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education. Educational strategies and policies will continue to fail these girls in the absence of a full understanding of their experiences and direct input from Aboriginal peoples, girls and organizations. Separate and targeted actions are required to meet unique needs of the different communities.



The Government of Canada, through Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, shares responsibility with First Nations for the provision of education to children ordinarily resident on reserve and attending provincial, federal, or band-operated schools.³⁵³ The federal government is thus uniquely poised to take a leadership role in partnering with Aboriginal women, girls, communities and organizations to develop an action plan.

Recommendation #3

Lead in bringing the issue of the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence to the global discussions on a post-2015 development framework. It should also strengthen SRGBV prevention as a cross-cutting issue within the implementation of CIDA's Children and Youth Strategy.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) and CIDA should:

- Take a lead role in bringing the issue of the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence to all member state consultations on the post-2015 development framework
- Support the development of action plans to integrate gender-responsive anti-violence programming directly into national education sector plans
- Take a lead role in pressing multilateral actors, such as the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Education, and UN agencies, to prioritize gender-responsive anti-violence programming within their strategic approaches for the education sector
- Recognize the need to make child protection a cross-cutting issue within CIDA's education sector programming
- Support partnerships with civil society organizations to implement complementary community-based approaches to prevention, response and the provision of appropriate support services; encourage and support governments to scale up successful pilot projects
- Support the development of effective M&E systems within the child protection systems framework in order to inform policy development and implementation of SRGBV prevention and response strategies. CIDA can take an active role in supporting this agenda through its participation in national education M&E working groups.

Rationale:

While much attention has been paid to violence against women and girls in armed conflict, the issue has been largely absent within the MDG context. As the world considers the post-2015 development framework, it is important to bring to the forefront of development discourse the issue of the protection of girls and boys from all forms of violence in the context of poverty. GBV in and around schools is a major barrier to the achievement of global education and gender equality goals (particularly MDG #2 and MDG #3), and therefore requires due consideration within a post-2015 framework.

Within its Children and Youth Strategy, CIDA is already committed to helping strengthen and implement frameworks to protect children's human rights (particularly those of girls) by working to ensure that schools are child-friendly and violence-free. CIDA has also identified access to quality education as a priority pillar. Gender is a cross-cutting theme across all of CIDA's policies, programs and projects, and CIDA is committed to making its international assistance more effective, focused and accountable.



CIDA can, however, take more effective action to operationalize its Children and Youth Strategy (particularly within the ‘safe and secure futures for children and youth’ component) by ensuring that SRGBV prevention, response, and services are central to all programming under this component. Furthermore, CIDA can take a more comprehensive approach to addressing SRGBV by introducing violence prevention and protection approaches across all of its education sector support mechanisms. This comprehensive approach is critical to ensuring that all children, particularly girls, can benefit both from a quality education and are free from all forms of SRGBV.

SRGBV has a serious impact on school retention and completion rates, particularly for girls. Sexual harassment and violence are major factors in school dropout rates for adolescent girls and partly explain their lower enrolment rates at the secondary level.³⁵⁴ More broadly, as argued in this report, SRGBV significantly undermines national and international efforts to promote children’s – particularly girls’ – access to a quality education, which includes the right to learn in safe, secure, girl-friendly schools.

GBV in and around schools remains a key barrier to girls’ access to quality education in countries that CIDA has prioritized for education investment. In Mozambique, for example, a study by the Ministry of Education found that 70% of girl respondents reported knowing that some teachers used sexual intercourse as a condition for promotion between grades. Eighty per cent recognized that sexual abuse and harassment occur not only in schools but also in their communities.³⁵⁵

Recommendation #4

Strengthen awareness-raising strategies and programs aimed at recognizing and preventing cyber-bullying and other forms of relational violence.

The Government of Canada should:

- Support research and programming resources to address social aggression and indirect forms of bullying
- Partner with non-governmental organizations to scale up evidence-based programming to prevent cyber-bullying, girl-to-girl, and other forms of relational violence and promote healthy relationships
- Support youth-developed and targeted programs aimed at providing children and youth with gender- and age-appropriate education on socially responsible online citizenship
- Support gender-sensitive training of staff at national youth service organizations that enables them to recognize and assist with incidents of relational violence and cyber bullying.

Rationale:

In recent years, governments have paid much attention to the issue of bullying in Canada. To a large degree, both governments and school boards have rejected the notion that bullying is simply a normal part of growing up.³⁵⁶ Yet much work still remains to be done, particularly in scaling up effective programs.

Bullying is also no longer limited by proximity. Social media sites such as Facebook can operate as “a new kind of bathroom wall,”³⁵⁷ empowering users to destroy reputations and relationships with a few simple clicks. According to 2011 data from Ontario, girls may be particularly at risk: while one in five (22%) of students in Grades 7 through 12 report being bullied over the internet in the past 12 months, girls are almost twice as likely to report being a victim of cyber-bullying (28% versus 15%). Girls have an enormous capacity to act as agents of and advocates for change, and to help and protect each other, when they are provided with the necessary support within their schools and communities.

Many of the interventions now underway adopt a gender-neutral lens, assuming that boys are the primary perpetrators of bullying and should be the focus of educational and policy attention.³⁵⁸ An increasing body of research is pointing to a ‘hidden culture’ of girls’ aggression in which bullying is endemic and distinctive.³⁵⁹ Because of its indirect nature, however, it remains much less apparent to school administrators, researchers, and policy-makers.³⁶⁰ Given recent evidence from Ontario finding that only boys, not girls, in Grades 7-12 are showing significant declines in reports of bullying and victimization,³⁶¹ initiatives targeting girls as both perpetrators and victims of SRGBV are critical.

To a large degree, both governments and school boards have rejected the notion that bullying is simply a normal part of growing up.



Recommendation #5

The Government of Canada should provide sufficient support for Statistics Canada to collect and consolidate disaggregated national data regularly in order to inform evidence-based policy on the prevention and monitoring of SRGBV.

The Government of Canada should:

- Commit to reporting progress on addressing SRGBV to the CRC Committee, CEDAW Committee, Human Rights Committee, International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination Committee, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Committee and any other relevant treaty monitoring body
- Partner with the National Network of Research Centres on Violence Against Women, women's and children's rights organizations, and academic institutions in order to support and fund research on emerging issues relating to SRGBV; emphasize projects that focus on the nature, prevalence, and effect of SRGBV on marginalized children, on relational bullying, on cyber-bullying, and on sexualization online.

Rationale:

Relevant national data on SRGBV is an essential component of good policy. Adequate and reliable disaggregated information is indispensable for developing responsive policies and services across jurisdictions. In Canada, there is currently no coordinated strategy for collecting, disseminating, and evaluating data and research on all forms of SRGBV or on effective prevention strategies.

Although violence cuts across all socio-cultural groups in Canada, the way in which SRGBV affects different communities remains largely under-examined.³⁶² In the absence of reliable information on the unique patterns of violence affecting specific groups of children, policy and programmatic efforts cannot adequately reflect or respond to their unique needs. Too little is known about the experiences of Aboriginal girls, who are uniquely vulnerable to violence in schools due to intersecting historical and socioeconomic factors. Crucial data and research gaps also remain with respect to the prevalence and effect of SRGBV on racial and ethnic minority, immigrant, LGBTQ, and children with disabilities. Community-based applied research initiatives can provide a rich source of information on the specific needs of individual communities.

Recommendation #6

Support civil society efforts to engage whole communities – including men and boys – in national, provincial and local efforts to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms that lead to GBV. It should also support youth empowerment initiatives, with a particular focus on girls and marginalized communities.

Federal, provincial and territorial governments should:

- Recruit male leaders within communities to speak at schools and in public spaces about the importance of men and boys leading non-violent lives and standing against violence

- Support evidence-based campaigns that target and engage men and boys in civil society efforts to end GBV
- Scale up evidence-based conventional and social media campaigns and programs, developed by and targeted at youth, aimed at promoting non-violent conflict resolution and healthy relationships; these should have a particular focus on girls, as well as on children and youth from marginalized communities.

Rationale:

Girls, boys, parents, educators, and community leaders must work together to reshape the deeply-rooted norms (including those linked to gender inequality) that mask and lead to harmful behaviour, perpetuating cycles of violence across generations. Men and boys must be engaged as key allies in ongoing civil society efforts to shift gender stereotypes and other harmful norms, and to create more equitable, tolerant and inclusive schools, families and communities. This approach must also focus on empowering children and youth to act as agents of change themselves in shifting harmful norms within their schools and their communities.

Governments can draw on and scale up existing resources that have been developed and implemented by women's, children's and LGBTQ rights organizations. Youth-targeted programs can provide a safe space for children and youth (particularly those from marginalized communities) to focus on positive potential and growth; they can also provide inter-generational mentoring. Empowering children, and in particular girls, yields benefits to society at large as well as to girls themselves. For girls, empowerment gives them confidence to achieve more, fosters relationships of mutual respect and inter-generational strength, and enhances participation in all areas of society. It also benefits the larger society by enabling girls to participate in addressing social challenges within their communities, and by strengthening community ties.

Canadian conclusion

Action on this issue by the Government of Canada will likely have wide-ranging global implications for the right to education. Canada has a reputation as a global leader in education and in the rights of women and girls, and as such is poised to take leadership in addressing SRGBV. By adopting a comprehensive and integrated whole-of-government approach that draws upon promising global policy approaches, Canada can set the bar appropriately high to see that not only Canadian children but all children benefit from a quality education in safe and inclusive schools.

Annex 1

Elaboration of the global framework to address school-related gender-based violence

Principle 1: Comprehensive and integrated action

Governments must adopt a comprehensive, integrated, and multi-sectoral action plan to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

The action plan should:

- Consult meaningfully at all stages of development and implementation with all relevant stakeholders – boys and girls from marginalized populations (including Indigenous communities), parents, child protection officers and other relevant service providers, and civil society representatives
- Undertake a gender review of government education sector plans and support action to address identified gaps
- Take action to see that school textbooks, teaching materials, curricula, and other resources are free from gender-based discrimination and promote equality
- Appropriately fund school reform and infrastructure projects that secure children's safety, in alignment with the UNICEF framework for child-friendly schools³⁶³
- Designate a high-level task force mandated and funded to monitor, enforce, and report on the action plan to appropriate national and international bodies.

Principle 2: Effective legislation and regulation

Laws must explicitly protect children from violence, ensure accountability, and treat all children equally.

Policy-makers should pass legislation and regulations that:

- Where required, specifically incorporate international human rights legal obligations protecting children from SRGBV into domestic legislation, or ensure that their principles take precedence in case of conflict with national laws
- Ensure that existing criminal laws relating to (for example) assault, rape, sexual assault, criminal

harassment, and hate speech clearly apply to and are enforced in relation to adult-to-child SRGBV

- Ensure that discipline for peer-to-peer violence is consistent with the CRC and focuses primarily on rehabilitation and education
- Include binding codes of conduct that prohibit violence in schools and include age- and context-appropriate discipline for teachers, staff, students, law enforcement, and transportation officials corresponding to the seriousness of the issue
- Ensure that teachers and school staff are appropriately regulated and subject to mandatory and context-appropriate discipline for SRGBV (including and up to a loss of license to teach, where applicable)
- Prohibit armed forces and groups from using schools in a manner that either violates international humanitarian law or the right to education under international human rights law.

Principle 3: Safe and effective reporting and response

Reporting and response mechanisms must be clear, proportionate, and consistent with the CRC.

Governments should:

- Require ministries of education and/or schools to develop and implement clear reporting guidelines and systems, ensuring that educators, students, parents and volunteers are informed about referral procedures, their responsibilities, victims' rights, and consequences for non-compliance
- Put in place mandatory reporting requirements to law enforcement and child protection authorities for serious allegations of peer-to-peer SRGBV
- Outline clear contact protocols for police and other social and health services in cases of incidents of violence
- Require that all reporting mechanisms uphold witnesses' and victims' right to confidentiality (unless otherwise required by law)
- Fund and provide SRGBV victims with gender-sensitive, child-friendly, and culturally relevant health and psychosocial services that are non-judgmental, respectful, and ensure confidentiality
- Fund a free and confidential reporting service for child victims, whether by phone, in person, by text or otherwise
- Create or strengthen independent bodies such as national human rights institutions, children's ombudspersons or commissioners on children's rights, in order to increase the capacity for follow-up on cases of SRGBV.

Principle 4: Evidence-based policy

Policy interventions must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of SRGBV.

Governments should adopt measures to ensure evidence-based national policies and strategies by:

- Earmarking funds for regular national disaggregated data collection, with a particular focus on gender and marginalized communities (including Indigenous communities)
- Requiring routine child-friendly and gender-sensitive audits of education systems to provide a national baseline assessment; and
- Partnering with leading research institutions and civil society groups to conduct SRGBV research.

Principle 5: Well-supported, well-trained personnel

Teachers and school administrators must be well-trained, equipped, and supported to prevent and respond to GBV in and around schools.

Governments should:

- Fund high quality pre-service and in-service training on all forms of GBV, on effective violence prevention strategies, and on positive discipline for teachers and school administrators
- Support training on legislation, especially regarding mandatory reporting obligations
- Mandate GBV training within teacher-training programs in order to acquire professional accreditation
- Support and collaborate with parent-teacher associations and school management committees to prevent and respond to GBV.

Principle 6: Partnership

Law enforcement, the judiciary, child protection authorities, the transportation sector, and civil society organizations must be partners in addressing the vulnerability of children en route to and from school grounds.

Governments should:

- Allocate appropriate funds for awareness and sensitivity training for security and transport personnel to equip them to respond better to GBV near schools and along transportation routes
- Penalize law enforcement and judicial personnel for not upholding the law and for failing to take action on complaints from children and community members (including those from marginalized communities).

Principle 7: Inclusiveness

Whole communities, including men and boys, must be involved to change harmful attitudes and shift social norms. Emphasis should be placed on issues of sexual health and sexual rights.

Governments should:

- Support community outreach programs aimed at engaging parents and community members in meaningful discussion and reflection on issues relating to GBV, with particular emphasis on girls from marginalized communities (including Indigenous communities)
- Support monitoring and reporting of SRGBV cases through community-based child protection mechanisms
- Support comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education in order to ensure that adolescents know their rights and are better able to negotiate sex and to make informed and responsible decisions
- Launch public information and awareness campaigns that promote positive attitudes, non-violence, and tolerance as norms for interactions in all settings
- Ensure that boys' specific vulnerabilities and experiences of violence are acknowledged in policy development
- Ensure that boys from marginalized groups within a community are represented in school activities and leadership positions
- Teach non-violence and tolerance to boys in schools, allowing young boys and adolescents to reflect on the ways that social norms in their societies shape their attitudes and behaviours towards their peers
- Recruit male leaders within communities to speak at schools and in public spaces about the importance of men and boys leading non-violent lives and standing against violence.

Principle 8: Participation

Girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to address SRGBV.

Governments should:

- Establish and support student councils of both sexes as well as non-election-based student groups, integrating student involvement into initiatives that aim to prevent and reduce SRGBV at the local and national level
- Fund evidence-based youth empowerment and violence prevention programs within schools and communities
- Create meaningful opportunities for children's voices to be incorporated into legal and policy development, reform, and monitoring processes.

Annex 2

Elaboration of recommendations to address school-related gender-based violence in Canada

Note: No further elaboration on recommendations #3 and #6.

Recommendation #1

The Government of Canada should commit to working in partnership with the provinces and territories to develop a comprehensive whole-of-government action plan on GBV prevention, response, and provision of services. Provide sufficient funding to implement the action plan effectively. The plan should be gender-responsive, take into account the diversity of experiences and needs of marginalized girls and boys, and look specifically at the school context.

The action plan should:

- Ensure that legislation, policies and programs give priority to the best interests of the child, having regard to the views of young people themselves
- Conduct a child impact assessment and gender review for each law, policy or program affecting children
- Amend educational laws, where required, to require school boards to adopt rights-based codes of conduct with context-appropriate proportionate discipline, remedies, and appeals processes – and with the most severe penalties being used only as a last resort in cases of peer-to-peer violence

- Require that codes of conduct be accessible and include mandatory child-friendly, gender-sensitive, and culturally relevant procedures for reporting incidents to designated school staff, teacher certification bodies, or law enforcement as appropriate
- Require that all reporting, remedies, and appeals mechanisms uphold witnesses' and victims' right to confidentiality (unless otherwise required by law)
- Require all school boards to review codes of conduct regularly, in consultation with students, and to report to the Ministries of Education on implementation
- Fund and provide gender-sensitive and child-friendly health and psychosocial services for victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, with such services being accessible by and relevant to marginalized communities
- Integrate GBV recognition and prevention into core curricula models
- Support and scale up the implementation of rights-respecting school initiatives that focus on increased student participation, improved awareness of children's rights, and enriched teaching and learning³⁶⁴
- Require mandatory training for school board trustees and school staff in order to ensure understanding of the complex issues underlying SRGBV, and to ensure informed decision-making about prevention and response.



Recommendation #2

Develop a separate gender-responsive action plan to prevent and address SRGBV against Aboriginal girls and boys.

The Government of Canada, working with provincial and territorial Ministries of Education, should:

- Review and take action to ensure that existing educational laws and policies on SRGBV prevention do not have any disproportionate and negative effect on Aboriginal girls or boys
- Adopt the recommendations in NWAC's *Arrest the Legacy: From Residential Schools to Prisons* report that are relevant to preventing and responding to SRGBV, including curriculum development³⁶⁵
- Support teacher training on how to implement gender-sensitive and culturally relevant curricula, resources, and teaching methods
- Build on existing strategies, including the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada Family Violence Prevention Plan, to fund local and culturally appropriate programs and resources on SRGBV for Aboriginal students, parents and communities
- Expand culturally respectful counselling services for victims of SRGBV that are available in Aboriginal languages and include traditional healing methods, where appropriate.

Recommendation #4

Strengthen awareness-raising strategies and programs aimed at recognizing and preventing cyber-bullying and other forms of relational violence.

Provincial and territorial Ministries of Education should:

- Develop and support pre-service and in-service training of teachers on how to recognize and respond to SRGBV, with a particular focus on cyber-bullying and other forms of relational violence
- Support and scale up evidence-based gender-sensitive youth and peer mentoring programs aimed at promoting non-violent conflict resolution and healthy relationships, ensuring that such programs are accessible to diverse groups
- Support youth-led student clubs that aim to empower students to work collaboratively to prevent and reduce bullying, including cyber-bullying
- Support educational programs that empower girls to use ICTs safely, on their own terms and in ways that promote their overall development
- Engage parents in awareness campaigns for safe and responsible use of online technology.

Recommendation #5

Provide sufficient support for Statistics Canada to collect and consolidate disaggregated national data regularly in order to inform evidence-based policy on the prevention and monitoring of SRGBV.

The Government of Canada should:

- Reinstatement of the mandatory long form census, which provided key data on educational and marginalized communities' demographics
- Ensure that data is disaggregated by sex, age, Indigenous status or identity, race, ethnicity, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation/gender identity, income, and any other relevant status
- Ensure that national data is regularly disseminated in an accessible format (i.e. online)
- Map existing SRGBV prevention programs available across Canada (building on PREVNet resources on bullying) in order to identify evidence-based best practice programs and to provide a basis for evaluating outcomes and impact
- Support research projects that adopt a strong gender and intersectional analysis at all levels in order to identify different types and rates of SRGBV, types of perpetrators, locations of abuse, the impact of violence on both victims and perpetrators, and the support or services required for girls and boys.

Provincial and territorial Ministries of Education should:

- Require that data collection and analysis incorporate a GBA+ framework and examine any differential impact that school violence prevention programs and policies have on marginalized girls and boys
- Require annual publicly accessible reporting of the results of school survey audits on the prevalence of SRGBV, and of progress toward established benchmarks and indicators
- Monitor and evaluate data collection efforts by school boards, and report findings to Statistics Canada annually in order to create a baseline assessment.

School boards should:

- Conduct routine survey audits of schools within their jurisdiction in order to assess the prevalence of all forms of SRGBV, and report progress toward prevention efforts and outcomes to the Ministry of Education annually as part of the school board's regular reporting requirement.



- 1 This number is Plan's best estimate based on the available data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The total number of primary schoolchildren out of school in 2010 was 60,735,118. Of these 32,149,534 were girls. The total number of children of lower secondary school age out of school in the same year was 70,615,238; 34,196,988 of these were girls. Combined this means that 66,346,522 million girls of primary and lower secondary age were out of school in 2010. Sources: <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=184> Accessed 27 September 2012.
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- 3 Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from school-related violence every year. Plan's estimate is based on the following calculation: the 2006 UN Study on Violence against Children reported that 20-65% of schoolchildren are affected by verbal bullying – the most prevalent form of violence in schools. Based on UNSECO's 2011 Global Education Digest report, 1.23 billion children are in primary or secondary school on any given day, and Plan estimates that 20% of the global student population is 246 million children. Therefore, Plan estimates that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from SRGBV every year. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011). *Global Education Digest 2011: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World*. Montreal, UNESCO Institute of Statistics.
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