

## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND ITS IMPACTS ON GIRLS' EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

Gender based violence is a serious violation of human rights and a complex problem all over the world. It is not specific to a particular country or region and women and men of all regions, religion or ethnicity can face discrimination and the consequent gender based violence. While it can affect both men and women, women are the group that is most affected. Gender Based Violence refer to sexual harassment, assault, verbal and physical abuse, psychological and economic violence women are specifically vulnerable to given the lack of power they possess in the society. The problem is compounded by harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation, forced early marriages, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation. Among the causes of GBV are poverty, traditional beliefs, some aspects of modernity and the socialization of girls and boys by the society makes victims accept it as norm. GBV limits girl's access, participation, retention in education and difficulties in finding jobs later. GVB as discussed by authors provides insights into its magnitude however; it is limited to secondary literature. This notwithstanding appropriate education provides an opportunity to learn about equality between men and women and non sexist education makes it possible to deal with traditional stereotypes concerning roles of women and men so as to fight prejudices and discrimination. This paper seeks to demonstrate the need for governments to reform their education systems to give girls and boys equal opportunities to participate and share benefits of education against general belief that GBV is more rampant in illiterate societies.

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**KEYWORDS:** Gender, Violence, Education, Causes and Effects.

### INTRODUCTION

The recognition of the widespread nature of GBV in school settings is becoming an area of concern not least because of its infringement on the rights of the victims but also its impact on achieving the developmental goals related to equal access to education for boys and girls. However MDGS mainly focuses on quantitative targets based on sex disaggregated data but fails to identify and address some of the obstacles presented by gendered school environment that girls must overcome to achieve gender equality in education. Donnellan (2003) observed that European girls and women encountered more obstacles than men in relation to access to education system as pupils, take relatively low level in hierarchy as teachers and experience more difficulties in finding jobs after graduating.

Violence against girls negatively impacts on their participation, retention and performance in schools. Fawe (2004) observed that this problem is not only found in homes where the children are supposed to find security, but also in schools where they are under the custody of some of the very teachers who

abuse them sexually and physically. In many developing countries parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school lest they risk violence, exploitation or defilement on their way to school or within the environment of the school. In many instances the journeys girls take to and from school expose them to assault either on foot or in vehicles. They become easy prey for men in private cars and are prone to other abuses such as injuries, violent robbery, rape and verbal abuse. In Kenya a study by Fawe titled "The Painful "Matatu Ride" revealed that many girls both in primary and secondary schools use the common public means of transport "Matatu" where the touts corrupt the girls with free rides "Sarees" and cash handouts as they enjoy latest music in such vehicles. This rides work against girls' education especially in towns as a significant number ends up pregnant and hence drop out of school or have their education interrupted. The problem is not only one of discrimination but a loss to the society as whole which is depriving itself of the potential of half its population especially at a time when countries need to compete in the world market.

A study study in Uganda and Bangladesh reported that more than 80% and 94% of women surveyed respectively had experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence at some point in their marriage/ intimate relationship. Girls' education is more at risk during conflicts. In northern Uganda, families married their daughters to militia members in order to protect themselves and their daughters. A similar situation was reported in Rwanda during and after the conflict. Girls tended to stay close to their homes, remaining for the most part with their mothers; their education was the first to be sacrificed (UNESCO, 2003).

On the contrarily campus environment was noted to be better and safer than on the street:

There is freedom of movement for all, but of course the boys still enjoy more freedom than women'. Another student mentioned that the campus environment 'is safe and comfortable, but also conservative'. Some of the female students were often accompanied by a guardian or family member on their way to and from the university. Overall, the the campuses were prone to acts of gender based violence, mainly against female students. This finding can be a result of the GBV prevalent in society at large which has reflected itself on the university campuses.

In South Africa, some girls have left school entirely as a result of their experiences with sexual violence. Tolerance of gender-based violence in schools is a serious form of discriminatory treatment that compromises the learning environment and educational opportunities for girls. Girls are disproportionately the victims of physical and sexual abuse at school (Wilson, 2006). In addition girls are raped, sexually assaulted, abused, and sexually harassed by their male classmates and even by their teachers.

Significant progress has been made in improving the situation of women and men across the world. This progress is reflected in narrowing gender gaps in major social economic indicators. However, gender disparities are still apparent almost everywhere including higher institutions of learning entrusted with making women and men equal participants in development and share its benefits. The persistent inequality between men and women holds society to a lower level of production and, ultimately, to a lower rate of economic growth. World Bank (1995), observed that including women in development activities can improve both the quality of women's lives as well as for generations to come.

Despite the sensitization programs, seminars and policy statements the good intensions to improve

girls' education still remain at theoretical level rather than implementation.

### Causes of GBV Causes and Implication

Gender Based Violence manifests itself in various practices in society and even in educational institutions. In addition to lack of resources the socialisation processes that can prevent women from breaking the silence on the experience of gender based violence ensure prevalence of the problem and compound the experience of it. Comparatively males have more access and opportunities than females, and women are more at a disadvantage at the university. The notion of gender equality was not widespread, and lack of access and opportunity were taken for granted, thus limiting the scope of proactively addressing inequality in the university (UNDP and UNESCO, 2010).

Poverty is also recognized as an important factor fuelling child sexual abuse. It forces young people to engage in transactional sex or the "sugar daddy/mammy phenomenon" whereby young women/men gain financial support from older men/women in return for sexual services rendered often the victims are very young and the experiences are abusive. For many girls and women such early sexual behaviour is motivated by the receipt of money or other small gifts (Nui, 2007). Majority of girls have "sugar daddy" partners or *mshikaji wa muda* who provided small "luxuries" in exchange for their sexual services (McCran, Lalor and Katabaro, 2012). At the university level where girls and boys are no longer under the care of their parents many have resulted to transactional sex as a means of coping with campus life and sometimes out of greed for luxurious life competing to remain fashionable. The culture is even more intense in universities in main urban centers in Kenya. This presents a mix of poverty and effects of modernity on the other hand. According to a graduate of one university:

I used to see posh cars parked outside girls' hostel mostly on Fridays. Men with big tummies would pull their heads out and seduce girls as they pass from supper or classes. Eventually they would hook up with some girls whom they would take out for discos and drinking sprees. Many of these girls ended up pregnant or getting infected with HIV AIDs. It never occurred to me that this was gender violence until later after when I got sensitized on gender violence.

In the modern society sexual services are treated as commodities that should be paid for. Some of the girls had more than one "sugar daddy" at a time. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey reports that 15% of adolescent girls who have ever had sexual intercourse have done so in exchange for

money, gifts or favours in the previous 12 months (Government of Kenya,2012).

In universities when young women and men interact it is just taken as natural and people do not see the need to intervene. However, this interaction may have negative effects. Also the type of interaction between teachers and male and female students raises issues. Transactional sex for “good exam results” is replicated both between teachers and pupils in schools and between students and teachers in training colleges. In some situations this becomes normalised, “it’s the way things are” yet girls are blamed from becoming pregnant and damaging family honour. Many schools do not accept their re-entry as mothers yet the punishment on perpetrators is minimal of it all.

In situations where traditional believes are life to achieve gender equity in education is even more difficult. Female students experienced GBV from teachers or fellow male students more so than male students. One female student also reported being sexually assaulted by a fellow male student. In a study by UNDP and UNESCO (2010, 14) an incident was narrated by female student:

A female classmate of theirs did not attend class for one year because of the demands and threats from a male student. His father was a warlord and he kept demanding that this girl build a relationship with him. The harassed girl eventually left the university. She did not complain to management for fear that it would be an issue for her family, as the perpetrator was perceived as a dangerous person. With regards to GBV, an incident was shared by a female staff. She said that a few years earlier a staff member had killed his wife who was also a staff member, because he suspected her of having an extra-marital relationship.

Among the causes of persistent gender inequality allocation of resources at the household level-in health, nutrition, and education are noted to have a profound impact on women, human and economic development. Low educational attainment drags down living conditions for women, their children, the family and the society at large.

The root causes of gender based violence lies within the attitudes of society towards practices of gender discrimination, which often place women in subordinate positions in relation to men. Historically strong patriarchal ideologies affected women unfavorably in that their customary rights were not recognized (Marianne, Josphine, Beoku-Betts and Robert, (1998). For instance their autonomy in certain aspects of decision making and ability to travel was curtailed relegating them to the position

of being dependent on men for access to the cash economy and increased their work at the family level which usually goes unaccounted for. Unfortunately, there are rarely effective and appropriate mechanisms to address the problem of gender based violence.

A study in three universities in Afghanistan revealed lack of gender sensitiveness toward female teaching staff. For instance, some respondents stated that while the relationships between male and female staff members were good, female lecturers had less of a role to play at the university as a whole. However, it was not clear whether the minimal role of female teaching staff in the university is due to their own choice or because it is more difficult for them to play a greater role in university-related activities (UNDP and UNESCO, 2010).

Many cases of gender violence in schools go unreported or under-reported because students fear victimisation, punishment or ridicule. To this end girls have incorporated violent gender relations to such an extent that they have accepted it as part of the school experiences. In Guinea parents reported teacher harassment as a factor that influence withdrawal of their daughters from school after basic skills of literacy and numeracy are acquired (UNESCO, 2003). GBV undoubtedly affects girls self esteem and ability to learn. This situation is even worsened by the fact that parents/guardians are often hesitant to speak out against violence, let alone to press charges even in countries that have legal provisions.

The experience or threat of GBV results in; poor performance, irregular attendance, drop out, truancy and low self esteem. Other factors such as early marriages the risk of sexual harassment, pregnancy; HIV and AIDS infection or sexually transmitted infections and demand for transactional sex have detrimental effects on the achievement of equality in education. In Zimbabwe violent school environment encouraged spread of HIV AIDs among adolescents. Male sexual aggression is institutionalised and considered as normal and girls respond on the whole with resignation and passivity. In addition school based violence is a reflection of abuse found in the home and the community. It was observed that “sugar daddies prey on girls in the vicinity of the school luring them into sexual relations with gifts and money.

The problem is compounded by the belief among older men that young girls are unlikely to be HIV positive and therefore make their sexual escapades safer and they go to all lengths looking for school girls. Misguided men in some countries believe that having sex with virgin girls cure them of the HIV/AIDS infection. This has led to increased

incidences of abduction, rape and murder of young girls. At higher level university girls who have just left secondary schools are suddenly thrust into the world to fend for themselves and some end up into cohabitations (UNDP and UNESCO, 2010).

### **Strategies to Counter GBV**

When seeking responses on GBV there is need to work more holistically to transform school environment into places where gender equality is both rehearsed and learnt. Among the fundamental elements that need to be put in place are systems that safeguard students' protection.

In South Asia a secondary school assistance project was initiated to provide stipends to secondary school girls in about one quarter of the country in collaboration with the government, Asia Development Bank and the Norwegian aid Agency. Such initiatives would work in universities in mainstreaming female students' into economic life through co-ordinated projects. To reduce the cost of girls' education for parents, bank assisted projects were also noted to offer special incentives such as fee waivers, scholarships, text books for girls as well as feeding programs. However, in many regions arguments for promoting gender equality are compelling, but actions still lag.

Equal opportunity girls and boys are offered same opportunities to access and remain in school not only at lower levels but also in higher institutions of learning. This means parents, teachers and the society at large have no gender discriminative attitudes, as well as, equality in job opportunities and same earnings for men and women with similar qualifications and experience.

### **CONCLUSION**

GBV remains a barrier to sustainable social economic development at individual level of the girls and the society at large. The socialisation process at the home and school remains a major challenge to the fight against this vice. This has had negative effects on the girls' education and their lives in general. Regrettably institutions like schools and training colleges reproduce particular gender relations and hierarchies that propagate seeds of gender violence to thrive later in the society. This calls for a more integrated approach where all stakeholders join hands in creating a safe environment for both girls and boys. Sensitisation of the society on how to identify incidents of gender violence, speak about them analyse their root causes and take action remains the weapon to be explored.

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