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Gender Based Violence in Emergencies



Evidence Digest: Benefits of Gender Equality and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Programming in Schools and Educational Settings

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Introduction

Worldwide, schools deliver information and learning to students about social and gender norms. Gender stereotypes and unequal power dynamics found in broader society can be mirrored in educational environments.¹ In such cases, students may be implicitly or even directly influenced to perpetuate and/or accept gender inequality, including gender-based violence (GBV). This makes schools less safe and can have significant impacts on the health and well-being of students. Exposure to violence in childhood can impact brain development, negatively affect educational outcomes, and diminish overall well-being. Children exposed to violence are more likely to face learning difficulties, struggle in school, and face a higher risk of sexual exploitation and abuse later in life.

Conversely, schools that actively promote learning about non-violence and gender equality are not only more likely to be safer than schools that reflect patriarchal gender norms, they have the potential to contribute to children's ability to build healthier, safer relationships, not only with peers, but with family and in the broader community. They can also promote better outcomes for students, not only through reducing exposure to violence, but also because schools that promote non-violence are apt to ensure children exposed to or at risk of violence can access care and support. In addition, schools offer a platform for engaging parents, caregivers, and the wider community in healthy and non-violent social norms, with the potential for widespread ripple benefits to children.

This evidence digest examines available documentation on three main issues: 1) whether and how targeted school-based GBV prevention and response initiatives can *reduce boys' perpetration of violence*, in the present and into adulthood; 2) whether and how targeted school-based GBV prevention and response initiatives can *decrease exposure to violence for girls*, both in the short and long term; and 3) any evidence of *improvements in educational outcomes for children* who participate in school-based GBV prevention and response programs. The research is presented in the form of an annotated bibliography that is organized in three main sections according to these topics. Each section begins with an overall summary of the findings for the specific topic, followed by the bibliographic entries presented alphabetically by author.

¹ Helen Cahill et al., (2023). *A Social Network Analysis and Implementation Study of an Intervention Designed to Advance Social and Emotional Learning and Respectful Relationships in Secondary Schools* (Research report, 07/2023). (Sydney: ANROWS).

The bibliography comprises the results of a preliminary online desk review of research published globally over the past 15 years, with particular attention to case studies and programs in low- and middle-income countries. It covers early childhood to tertiary education and examines both curriculum-based interventions and broader systemic efforts involving school policy, leadership, and teacher training. The interventions also include primary prevention with students—that is, efforts that tackle harmful gender norms and the root causes of GBV to prevent violence from occurring in the first place—as well initiatives aimed at increasing protective behaviours of teachers and students; raising awareness of students about their rights; and improving student access to GBV support services.

It should be noted that this is a preliminary desk review to explore the availability of data across the topic areas; it is not exhaustive. During the search, some reports emerged that were useful in terms of learning about the links between GBV in schools and gender inequality, the impact of GBV on child development, the risks of GBV that students face in schools, and the value for girls' of staying in school to reduce child marriage. However, as these were not directly related to the three areas of research, these findings have been included in a list of additional resources at the end of this evidence brief.

Evidence of School-Based Gender Equality and GBV Interventions to Reduce Boys' GBV Perpetration

School-based interventions to prevent GBV and promote respectful relationships demonstrate significant promise. Findings presented below on respectful relationships education—a model of GBV prevention in schools—underscores the value of addressing gender stereotypes, promoting teacher capacity, and embedding gender equality and non-violence content within school curricula. During their schooling children are in their formative years, during which gendered roles and expectations are heavily reinforced and adolescents often experience their first intimate relationships. Delivering contextualized curricula-based initiatives in schools aimed at healthy relationships and preventing dating violence, can have an immediate impact on these first and formative relationships.

Programs such as the Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships (RRRR) initiative in Australia, and the Connect with Respect program in Zambia, Eswatini, and Tanzania have shown positive impacts on student behavior, attitudes, and interpersonal skills. The RRRR program, through collaborative and participatory methods, achieved reductions in bullying and sexual bullying. Similarly, the Connect with Respect initiative led to notable improvements in students' emotional literacy, gender equality attitudes, and confidence in help-seeking, with over 90% of students endorsing its relevance. The STOP-DRV-GBV systematic review of over 200 school-based interventions globally reinforced these findings, highlighting the effectiveness of comprehensive, whole-school approaches that combine curriculum-based education with supportive policies and community engagement.

While many program evaluations showed improved student knowledge and attitudes, findings emphasize the need for long-term investment, consistent teacher support, and early intervention. Findings also suggest that boys—particularly younger boys, but also adolescents—show strong endorsement for these types of programs. As one evaluator noted, this is important data to assuage anxieties and reluctance teachers may have about engaging boys in discussions of violence perpetration and gender inequality. Overall, the literature indicates that well-designed, contextually relevant, and comprehensively implemented school programs can play a critical role in reducing boys' perpetration of GBV and fostering safer, more respectful school environments.

Review of evidence

Cahill, H., D. Lusher, A. Farrelly, N. Calleja, P. Wang, and A. Hassani. (2023). A Social Network Analysis and Implementation Study of an Intervention Designed to Advance Social and Emotional Learning and Respectful Relationships in Secondary Schools. (Research report, 07/2023). ANROWS.

This report describes findings from an evaluation of the *Resilience, Rights, and Respectful Relationships* (RRRR) program implemented in six secondary schools in Victoria, Australia for 635 Year 7 students and 460 Year 9 students. RRRR is an

evidence-based educational initiative designed to develop social and emotional learning and promote respectful relationships among students. The program includes collaborative learning activities such as small group tasks, role plays, and discussions to build empathy, critical thinking, and relationship skills about topics including (but not limited to) GBV and harmful gender norms to create safer, more inclusive school environments.

Findings collected through baseline and endpoint surveys from 725 students showed reductions in bullying (from 11.8% to 10.3%) and sexual bullying (from 8.7% to 5.9%) among students who participated in the RRRR program. Where the RRRR program was implemented according to its design (representing high-fidelity to the program) classes demonstrated significant improvements in social capability and respectful regard. In focus group discussions students rated lessons on gender equality and the effects of GBV as particularly valuable, with girls and gender-diverse students expressing stronger endorsements.

The evaluation reinforces that programs such as RRRR can have an impact on reducing boys' acceptance and perpetration of GBV; however, findings emphasize the importance of collaborative learning methods--such as small group tasks and role plays--in achieving positive outcomes. Structural barriers, including curriculum crowding, teacher workload, and inconsistent teacher confidence, hindered program delivery and success. As well, the research notes the importance of early and consistent intervention in addressing GBV because boys' support for gender equality was found to decline with age: Year 9 boys participating in the study were less confident than Year 7 boys about whether to intervene in cases of sexual harassment (with the intention to intervene falling from 20.2% to 12.8%). The authors conclude that building students' social and emotional learning (including to support violence reduction and gender equality) requires investing in teacher training, embedding education about social and emotional learning and respectful relationships in the curriculum from an early age, and addressing inequitable societal attitudes and norms.

Cahill, H., Dadvand, B., Suryani, A., & Farrelly, A. (2023). A Student-Centric Evaluation of a Program Addressing Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in Three African Countries. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(15), 6498. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20156498>

Data from a student-focused evaluation of *Connect with Respect*, a program implemented in 92 schools across Zambia, Eswatini, and Tanzania, demonstrated a significant positive impact on students' awareness, attitudes, and skills related to GBV prevention. Designed for students aged 12 to 15, the program used a social-emotional learning approach to advance respectful relationships, promote gender equality, and reduce school-related GBV. A large majority of both girl and boy students across the three countries strongly endorsed the program's relevance, with 90% in Zambia, 84% in Eswatini, and 96% in Tanzania expressing support for its inclusion in all schools.

Both girl and boy students reported that the program improved their relationship skills. In Zambia, 79% of students felt their skills had improved, with 75% in Eswatini and 97% in Tanzania echoing this view. Classroom discussions and collaborative activities led to noticeable shifts in peer dynamics, with students describing increased mutual respect, reduced conflict, and enhanced bonding. Mixed-gender group work and dialogue-based learning fostered understanding between boys and girls, helping students see each other as equals and co-learners. Students in Zambia reported that their classroom environment improved, with more inclusive and respectful interactions.

One of the most highly valued aspects of the program was the focus on gender equality and human rights. Both boys and girls reported that learning about gender roles helped them challenge existing stereotypes and increase their self-respect and empathy. For instance, Tanzanian boys reflected on the need to share household duties equally, while Eswatini girls expressed increased confidence after learning that both boys and girls are equally capable. Students also became more adept at identifying various forms of GBV, including verbal, psychological, and sexual violence, which were previously often unrecognized or normalized. For example, Zambian students acknowledged that they had previously experienced inappropriate behavior without knowing it was a form of violence. This awareness, students noted, was empowering and necessary for breaking the silence around GBV in schools and communities.

The program also improved students' emotional literacy and their ability to express feelings constructively. In Tanzania, 88% of students found this component useful, with similarly positive responses in Zambia (74%) and Eswatini (76%). Students spoke about increased self-awareness and confidence, and many linked emotional expression with reduced

stress, improved empathy, and stronger peer relationships. A large proportion of students also valued the knowledge and skills gained about seeking help and supporting others in doing so (Zambia: 80%, Eswatini: 82%, Tanzania: 91%). Learning how and where to report GBV, such as through school authorities or police gender desks, enabled them to support peers experiencing violence and to understand that help-seeking is a vital and legitimate response to abuse. Many students recognized the importance of building a school culture where help-seeking and peer support are normalized, reducing isolation for survivors and promoting community care.

The evaluators note that these positive findings about the intervention are especially important in terms of addressing concerns about alienating men and boys that often arise for teachers when implementing gender-focused programs. These anxieties can cause teachers to default to general life skills and bullying-prevention programs, neglecting activities that specifically address the gendered aspect of interpersonal violence. The data from this review points to the extent to which both boys and girls appreciate and benefit from curricula that focuses specifically on gender equality and GBV.

Melendez-Torres, G. J., N. Orr, C. Farmer, N. Shaw, A. Chollet, A. J. Rizzo, F. Kiff, E. Rigby, A. Hagell, S. R. Priolo Filho, B. Taylor, H. Young, C. Bonell, and V. Berry. (2024). School-Based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-Based Violence: STOP-DRV-GBV Systematic Review. *Public Health Research* 12 (3). <https://doi.org/10.3310/KTWR6997>

This systematic review synthesized evidence on 211 active school-based interventions to address GBV in both primary and secondary education in 40 countries. The interventions varied in both design and approach. Some were integrated into existing school curricula, embedding lessons on gender equality, rights and respectful relationships within standard subjects. Others focused on training and educating teachers to better identify and respond to dating and relationship violence. Some programs implemented stand-alone activities aimed at promoting respectful relationships among students. Additionally, a number of interventions adopted a whole-school approach, addressing not only classroom practices but also broader school policies and systems to create a supportive and consistent environment.

Programs that integrated multiple components, such as curriculum-based education, skill-building workshops, and peer-led initiatives, were particularly effective in improving students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills around healthy relationships. Interventions that adopted a whole-school approach—engaging school leadership, staff, students, and the wider school community—were also notably successful. These approaches not only targeted individual behaviors but sought to shift the overall school culture and policies to better support violence prevention.

Regarding GBV perpetration, evidence indicated greater short-term improvements in GBV-related knowledge and attitudes compared to long-term improvements, but long-term improvements were still noted. There was some indication that these interventions can lead to lasting reductions in perpetration, and in victimization. In particular, the meta-analysis showed stronger evidence of positive outcomes in preventing dating violence compared to other forms of GBV.

The review also found that programs aimed at improving students' sense of belonging and safety at school can help them develop pro-social skills such as empathy, respect, and cooperation, which in turn may lead to a reduction in GBV perpetration. Few trials assessed long-term outcomes in these domains, and findings often relied on a small number of studies, limiting generalisability. Even so, the review illustrates the need for sustained long-term investment in school-based programs to achieve meaningful and lasting prevention of GBV.

Our Watch. (2021). Respectful Relationships in Schools: Evidence Paper. <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/RRE-resources/RRE-Evidence-paper-AA.pdf>

This evidence paper summarizes a comprehensive rapid review of national (Australia) and international literature on *respectful relationships education* (RRE). The review synthesized key literature to identify the core elements of effective school-based interventions for preventing GBV, examining over 60 publications focused primarily on curriculum-based interventions and scaling up approaches in schools.

The evidence demonstrates that RRE can significantly improve student outcomes by fostering better classroom behavior, strengthening teacher-student relationships, and increasing students' knowledge and confidence in discussing topics such as domestic violence, gender equality, and respectful relationships. RRE approaches that were found to be most effective are those that prompt students to identify, question and challenge the attitudes, behaviours and structures that underlie violence and the framing of it as an endemic social issue also support other potential positive benefits on understanding violence and inequality within society.

Schools that implemented RRE observed a decrease in sexual bullying incidents and reduction in students' adherence to gender stereotypes. RRE programs were also shown to contribute to better classroom behavior, suggesting that addressing issues related to respect and relationships can enhance the overall learning environment. The paper notes that RRE also can enhance teachers' understanding of GBV and the importance of addressing it, which is crucial for the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of these programs. School leadership, including principals, showed increased engagement and awareness of gender equality issues, helping to create a supportive environment for RRE initiatives.

Prezenszky, B. C., E. F. Galli, D. Bachega, and R. R. de Mello. (2018). School Actions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence: A (Quasi-)Systematic Review of the Brazilian and the International Scientific Literature. *Frontiers in Education, Educational Psychology* section, 3. (November 1, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00089>

This quasi-systematic review examined literature from Brazil and internationally to assess the effectiveness of various educational strategies in addressing GBV. The authors systematically reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2016, focusing on those that evaluated curriculum based, extra-curricular and whole of school approaches targeting GBV prevention. The most prevalent type of activities found by the reviewers were information and awareness-raising such as through lectures, campaigns, or performances. Participatory formats, including group discussions and online forums, were less frequent in the literature but notable for their emphasis on engagement. Some programs also focused on organizational development, like setting up school committees, or addressing legal and policy-level actions, including the implementation of laws related to GBV in schools.

This study found that school-based prevention programming--and curricula-based programs in particular--do drive positive behaviour change and promote healthy masculinities when implemented effectively. Critical aspects to support change include ensuring teachers are effectively trained and have appropriate resources, and school leadership is involved and supportive. Teachers play a critical role in modelling healthy and respectful behaviour and significantly influence social and emotional learning for students on negotiation, communication and consent. The analysis also shows that working with the whole school community strengthens outcomes for school-based prevention programming.

Results of the review establish that prevention interventions can impact beliefs, attitudes and understanding on drivers and manifestations of GBV. Some studies, primarily in the international literature, showed changes in behaviour, or a reduction in school-related violence. Overall, however, there was less evidence available on reducing GBV perpetration. The authors note the difficulty of measuring the impact of school programs in reducing incidence over-the long term.

Evidence on School-Based Gender Equality and GBV Interventions to Reduce Girls' Immediate and Long-Term Exposure to GBV

A growing body of evidence from global research shows that school-based interventions can reduce girls' exposure to GBV both in the short and long term. Programs delivered through school, in particular those integrated into the regular curriculum have been found to shift harmful gender norms, improve knowledge about GBV, and reduce acceptance of violence. Effective interventions often include lessons on communication, consent, negotiation, and respectful relationships, and are most impactful when they actively engage students and are supported by school-wide policies and leadership.

Short-term outcomes of these programs include increased self-confidence among girls, improved understanding of consent and increase in help-seeking behaviours. Long-term results include reductions in dating violence, sexual

harassment, and child marriage, especially when interventions are sustained for more than one academic year. Interventions that combine classroom education with broader community and teacher engagement tend to achieve more durable changes in behavior and school culture. Teacher training is particularly important, as it equips educators to recognize and respond to violence, creating safer learning environments.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programs, especially those that prioritize young people's rights and bodily autonomy, have demonstrated measurable effects on delaying sexual initiation, reducing early pregnancy, and lowering rates of dating violence. Early childhood interventions in primary schools and preschools show documented success in challenging gender stereotypes, reducing harassment, and promoting empathy and respect. Overall, the evidence shows that when schools take an active, well-supported approach to GBV prevention, they can play a crucial role in protecting girls from violence.

Review of evidence

Farmer, C., N. Shaw, A. J. Rizzo, N. Orr, A. Chollet, A. Hagell, E. Rigby, H. Young, V. Berry, C. Bonell, and G. J. Melendez-Torres. (2023). School-Based Interventions to Prevent Dating and Relationship Violence and Gender-Based Violence: Systematic Review and Network Meta-Analysis. *American Journal of Public Health* 113, no. 3: 320–330. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2022.307153>

This meta-analysis of 68 randomized control trials evaluated the comparative effectiveness of various school-based programs aimed at preventing GBV among children and adolescents 5-18 years old. The analysis examines shorter-term 'external' interventions with children in schools where programs are not integrated into standard school curricula; integrated curriculum-based interventions; and those involving school policies and systems. The authors also examine differences in results for interventions targeting dating and relationship violence only, versus those that target multiple forms of GBV.

Overall, a positive effect was found against several measures including in knowledge, attitudes and short-term reduction of some forms of violence, with results stronger for a reduction in dating violence than other forms of GBV. Targeted interventions focused on preventing dating violence increased personal help-seeking; however, this effect wasn't maintained over long-term analyses. Interventions focused broadly on reducing all forms of GBV decreased violence acceptance; improved knowledge of what constitutes GBV and its harms; and increased individual self-efficacy in the short term. However, the reduction in violence acceptance was the only measure shown to have an observable long-term effect.

The review identified several key components associated with effective interventions, including skills building for healthy and effective communication; school policies and practices that promote gender equality and respect; and school leadership support. Being resourced for the intervention and being able to adapt the intervention were also found to be important. Notably, there was strongest evidence for success with curriculum-based interventions, which more than other interventions were found to reduce exposure to violence in the short-term, as well as reduce short- and long-term rates of perpetration.

The authors theorize that dating-related violence interventions may show more success because they tend to target individual attitudes and knowledge. The analysis found that meaningful reductions in violence most often require more than one academic year of implementation to become evident.

Gómez, A., A. Munte, and T. Sorde. (2014). Transforming Schools Through Minority Males' Participation: Overcoming Cultural Stereotypes and Preventing Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 29, no. 11: 2002–2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513515949>

Drawing from two longitudinal case studies, this brief examines the impact of engagement with minority male leaders and community members to support violence prevention initiatives in schools. The studies were conducted in primary education settings and report two major benefits: 1) reduction in stereotypes surrounding masculinity and other

gendered beliefs that link to male perpetration of violence; and 2) improvements in males' capacity to engage in effective prevention work on bullying and other school-related violence.

Specifically, the study found that the involvement of minority males from the community in various school activities diminished prevalent cultural stereotypes about masculinity and other aspects of intersectional identity. The participatory approaches that brought males from the community to school environments where bullying and other forms of violence were likely to occur was effective in creating opportunities to reduce violence. The study underscores the importance of inclusive educational practices in transforming school cultures and promoting social cohesion.

Kågesten, A. E., Oware, P. M., Ntinyari, W., Langat, N., Mboya, B., and Ekström, A. M. (2021). Young People's Experiences with an Empowerment-based Behavior Change Intervention to Prevent Sexual Violence in Nairobi Informal Settlements: A Qualitative Study. *Glob. Health Sci. Pract.* 9, 508–522. <https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-21-00105>

This qualitative study explored how children and young people aged 15-21 years experienced a curriculum-based behaviour change intervention aimed at preventing GBV. At least one year prior to taking part in the study, participants completed a 6-week curriculum-based program, delivered in separate groups for boys and girls.

Girls reported that the intervention helped them identify and use protective behaviours, including both verbal and physical strategies to defend themselves. It also supported them in learning how to negotiate sexual consent and exercise greater personal agency. Many girls described feeling a boost in self-confidence because of their participation. Boys shared that the program helped them distance themselves from harmful peer influences and develop a clearer understanding of consent and respectful behaviour. All participants noted key outcomes such as reduced involvement in risky behaviour, better understanding of sexual consent, and a shift toward more positive life values and gender-equitable attitudes.

The findings indicate that even relatively short, school-based interventions can work effectively to prevent sexual violence. Participants emphasized the importance of having skilled, well-trained facilitators and interactive, relevant content that reflected their realities. The authors recommend embedding such programs into the regular school curriculum and involving families and communities to strengthen their impact and ensure long-term sustainability.

Keating, S., and C. R. Baker. (2023). Gender Equality Matters: A Precious 'GEM' to Tackle Gender Inequality through a Whole-School Community Educational Programme. *Educational Review* 77, no. 3: 710–730. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2224939>

This review examined the efficacy of the *Gender Equality Matters* (GEM) program, aimed at raising awareness, building confidence, and enhancing capacity levels among children to tackle gender stereotyping, gender-based bullying and GBV. The program was implemented in primary schools in five countries with over 2,500 participants.

In pre- and post-questionnaires and focus groups, pupils reported a better understanding of gender equality terminology, and significantly increased confidence levels about what to do were they a victim of, or witness to, gender stereotyping, gender-based bullying and GBV. For instance, there was a 9.2% increase in pupils feeling very confident to act if subjected to gender stereotyping. Focus group discussions revealed that pupils gained a clearer understanding of gender equality, gender-based bullying, and GBV concepts. They were able to define these terms and identify real-life examples.

Pupils demonstrated the ability to apply this knowledge to everyday situations. For example, they discussed challenging gender stereotypes in various contexts, such as toy advertisements and classroom tasks, showcasing their ability to translate learning into action. The GEM program included 'Home-School-Links' to encourage discussions between pupils, their parents and peers. Feedback indicated that these conversations were effective in raising awareness and challenging existing stereotypes within families and communities.

The authors conclude the GEM programme has been an effective educational intervention in primary schools, addressing significant gaps in knowledge and fostering positive behavioral changes among pupils. The program has been shown to enhance student awareness, build student confidence, and facilitate community engagement.

Kim, E. J., B. Park, S. K. Kim, M. J. Park, J. A. Jo, M. J. Kim, and H. N. Shin. (2023). A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs on Children and Adolescents. *Healthcare* 11, no. 18 (September 11, 2023): 2511. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11182511>

This article summarizes the results of a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of *Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (CSE) programs in schools in terms of changes in students' sexual behavior, knowledge and self-efficacy. The analysis focused on students in middle and high school aged between 10 to 19 years and included 34 studies published between 2011 and 2020 with 20 randomized controlled trials.

The analysis found CSE programs show positive impacts on participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to sexuality. Programs that prioritized young people's rights, active participation, and personal agency yielded the greatest benefits, closely followed by those that focused on promoting positive sexuality and respectful relationships. The most notable improvements for students were their understanding of sexual health and rights.

Consistently implementing CSE in schools over the long term was shown to significantly enhance students' future health and well-being. Notably, the programs had a measurable effect on delaying sexual initiation and reducing rates of early pregnancy. Participation in CSE also correlated with an increased likelihood of forming healthy and respectful relationships in the future.

However, the authors note that the effectiveness of CSE was not uniform across all groups, illustrating the importance of adapting these programs to meet the diverse needs of different demographic populations. Other key factors for successful implementation noted in the analysis include delivering tailored and high-quality content, maintaining consistency over time, and ensuring programs are scaled effectively, ideally at a national level.

UNESCO. (2022). The Key Role of Teachers in Ending School Violence and Bullying. *Technical brief*. https://teachertaskforce.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/2022_UNESCO_The-key-role-of-teachers-in-ending-school-violence-and-bullying_EN.pdf.

This technical brief draws on findings from two recent studies; one that surveyed 35,000 teachers predominantly from Latin America about their perspectives on violence in schools and their readiness and capacity to respond and from a study analyzing outcomes from the *Connect with Respect School Violence Prevention Programme* in five countries.

The authors conclude that schools that implement clear anti-violence policies, accessible reporting systems, and codes of conduct tend to experience lower rates of school-related GBV over the long term. Furthermore, programs that engaged the entire school community--including students, teachers, parents, and administrators--are more successful in reducing school GBV and fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.

The brief notes that teachers play a central role in creating safe and supportive learning environments. They can model respectful relationships, manage classrooms effectively, resolve conflicts constructively, and encourage students to take active roles in promoting non-violence through peer-led initiatives. However, evidence suggest teachers are often aware of GBV incidents in schools but commonly lack the training to intervene or provide adequate support to students. Studies indicate that targeted teacher training programs significantly improve educators' ability to recognize GBV, respond appropriately, and connect students with relevant support services. These improvements are associated with better outcomes for students affected by violence.

Additionally, the brief highlights that nearly 60% of teachers report that violence in the classroom negatively affects their teaching, motivation, and job satisfaction. This underscores the importance of addressing school-related GBV through

targeted interventions including equipping teachers with practical skills and opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs about violence, gender, and student relationships.

Villardón-Gallego, L., A. García-Cid, A. Estévez, and R. García-Carrión. (2023). Early Educational Interventions to Prevent Gender-Based Violence: A Systematic Review. *Healthcare* 11, no. 1 (January 3, 2023): 142. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11010142>

This systematic review examined 13 studies on early educational interventions aimed at preventing or reducing GBV among children aged 3 to 12. The evidence indicates that school-based programs can be effective in reducing GBV and promoting safer school environments when implemented at early years of education. Across multiple studies, key outcomes included reductions in self-reported incidents of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence, particularly among girls.

Several programs showed strong impacts on knowledge and awareness. An intervention with primary school students in Colombia challenged male and female gender stereotypes, attitudes toward partner violence, and normative beliefs around aggression, enhancing students' affective empathy. Similarly, a program for children in urban settings in the United States improved students' understanding of sexual abuse, identification of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, and awareness of community support resources.

In early childhood settings, a study of a program in Taiwan with 5- and 6-year-olds demonstrated that a gender equality curriculum could disrupt gender stereotypes among kindergarten children. A study of an intervention in pre-schools in Greece, which used video interviews with women in non-traditional careers, led to statistically significant changes in children's gendered perceptions of several professions. A review of a respectful relationships model also reported a shift in early primary students' views, with boys and girls less likely to associate jobs and activities with gender stereotypes after the program. The Reducing Sexism and Violence Program—Middle School Program (*RSVP-MSP*) program, which promoted healthy masculinity among middle school boys in the US, led to decreased endorsement of violence in relationships.

The most direct impacts were seen in reductions in violence and improved school relationships. A study on the implementation of *The Good School Toolkit*, a program focused on creating a safe and supportive primary school environments by promoting participation and dialogue among students and staff in Uganda showed a significant decrease in emotional and physical violence perpetrated by peers and school staff. Girls became more confident in negotiating consent and resisting unwanted advances, while boys reported avoiding risky peer groups and developing more respectful behaviors. The study found a borderline increase in girls' reporting of sexual violence—suggesting increased confidence in disclosing experiences of abuse, even though the statistical significance was limited.

Results of a program designed to prevent sexual violence that has been implemented in the US and Kenya, *Impower*, found that girls reported increased self-esteem and agency and boys demonstrated higher understanding of consent and positive masculinity and increased rates of bystander intervention. empowerment-based intervention. The program focuses on teaching hands-on risk-reduction techniques to recognize and resist various forms of sexual harassment and violence through strategies such as boundary setting, diffusion tactics, verbal assertiveness, negotiation, and physical self-defense (as a last resort).

Another program, *Shifting Boundaries*, is a primary prevention initiative aimed at middle school students (6th and 7th grades) in the US to address youth dating violence and sexual harassment. It focuses on reducing the frequency and prevalence of sexual harassment and dating violence victimization and perpetration. The program uses posters to increase awareness of dating violence and harassment and promotes respectful relationships among young individuals. An evaluation of the program indicated measurable declines in both the perpetration and victimization of sexual harassment and dating violence.

An evaluation of the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformations (*GREAT*) program, which supports school-based participatory activities and increased access to child-friendly GBV response services in Uganda, showed achievements in

long-term behavioral changes, including improved gender-equitable attitudes and reductions in harmful practices among adolescents and community members, sustained three years after the intervention. Importantly, gender-equitable behaviors improved across age groups. For example, more boys reported supporting their sisters' education and helping with household chores. These changes reflect deeper shifts in gender norms and family dynamics, suggesting the potential for sustained impact beyond the school setting.

Overall, the programs reviewed demonstrate that well-designed, evidence-based interventions integrated into the school curriculum and rooted in active learning, dialogue, and community involvement can lead to meaningful reductions in GBV, even among young children. The success of these initiatives underscores the importance of starting GBV prevention early, empowering students with knowledge and agency, and fostering safe, inclusive school environments.

Evidence of School-Based Gender Equality and GBV Interventions in Improving Overall Educational Outcomes for Students

Creating safe and equitable schools is critical to achieving quality education for all children. There is clear evidence that reducing GBV risks in and around schools increases retention at school, particularly for girls, and improves educational outcomes for diverse students.

Students who experience school-related GBV are more likely to perform poorly in school, miss classes, or drop out entirely. For example, analysis from international assessments shows that students exposed to bullying or harassment score significantly lower in subjects like mathematics. Qualitative studies further link GBV to low self-esteem, reduced classroom participation, and a decline in academic motivation. In some cases, particularly where sexual violence or pregnancy occurs, girls are excluded from school or choose to leave due to stigma or safety concerns. There is evidence from tertiary education settings that survivors of GBV experience ongoing struggles with stress and anxiety, a diminished sense of self-worth and academic capability, and difficulties meeting deadlines and academic demands.

Interventions that aim to prevent or respond to school-related GBV have been associated with improvements in educational engagement and retention. Whole-school approaches that involve teachers, students, and communities such as those implemented in Malawi, Uganda, and parts of West and East Africa have led to reductions in violence and improved school environments, helping students feel safer and more supported. These programs often include teacher training, revised codes of conduct, participatory curriculum development, and peer-led support systems.

Community engagement, especially when combined with school-based policies, has also shown promise in increasing girls' school retention and reducing dropout rates. However, the evidence base remains limited regarding the long-term educational impact of infrastructure-focused interventions or the support available to student survivors in higher education settings. In summary, GBV undermines educational access, learning, and progression and addressing it is critical for improving learning outcomes, ensuring school completion, and supporting students' right to a safe and effective education.

Review of evidence

Jongur, I. U., J. Kaibo, Maimuna Gambo Hammawa, and Wilson Adams Wangrecha. (2024). Tackling Sexual and Gender-Based Violence to Improve Girls' School Retention: The Impact of School and Community Based Intervention in Adamawa State, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Studies Trends and Practice* 5, no. 9. <https://ssaapublications.com/index.php/sjestp/article/view/266>

This study examined the effectiveness of school initiatives aimed at promoting the retention of girls and preventing GBV in secondary schools across Adamawa State, Nigeria. A statistical survey was also conducted to assess how community-driven interventions are combining with these school-based initiatives to contribute to keeping girls in school. Using a simple random sampling method, 405 students were selected from nine secondary schools. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed to test relevant hypotheses.

The findings reveal that a dual approach, combining school-based strategies with community engagements, significantly enhances girls' retention in school. Within schools, measures such as enforcing strict behavioral policies and providing water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities were effective in reducing GBV and creating safer learning environments. At the community level, supportive interventions also positively influenced girls' continued education.

The study concludes that integrated strategies involving both educational institutions and local communities are essential for addressing GBV and improving girls' educational outcomes. It recommends that the Adamawa State Ministry of Education scale up these efforts and ensure the consistent implementation and effectiveness of school-based policies aimed at safeguarding girls and fostering retention.

Parkes, J. Heslop, J. Johnson, F. et al. 2020. *A Rigorous Review of Global Research Evidence on Policy and Practice on School-Related Gender-Based Violence*. London: University College London, Institute of Education. <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SRGBV-review.pdf>

This systematic review of 171 studies on school-related GBV (SRGBV) prevention and response identifies specific types of actions that are effective in reducing GBV in and around schools. The review highlights evidence supporting the effectiveness of comprehensive, whole-school approaches. These strategies, which engage the entire school community including teachers, students, parents, and local stakeholders have been shown to reduce school-related violence and promote non-violent, equitable norms.

Supporting educators in reflecting on their own values and beliefs can strengthen their ability and confidence to tackle GBV in the classroom. Programs that create safe space environments where power imbalances are addressed and peer educators are trained, have proven effective. These spaces facilitate participatory approaches that challenge harmful gender norms, promote critical awareness, and confront structural inequalities, often integrating economic empowerment initiatives.

One notable program examined in the review is a three-year action research project across 16 primary schools in Kenya, Ghana, Swaziland, Botswana, South Africa, and Tanzania. This project involved teachers, students, parents, and community members in co-developing a context-specific Sex and Relationships Education curriculum. The curriculum addressed topics such as gender roles, transactional sex, and gender-based bullying, shifting teaching methods from fact-based to relational, problem-solving approaches. The process led to significant changes in perceptions among both students and adults, highlighting the importance of extended dialogue and reflection. In Uganda, the Good Schools initiative mentioned above resulted in a significant reduction in corporal punishment by teachers. The program provided specialized training and ongoing support to schools over an 18-month period, demonstrating the impact of sustained, school-wide interventions.

Conversely, while infrastructure improvements have played a role in enhancing educational outcomes, there is limited evidence on their impact on reducing school-related GBV and enhancing perceptions of safety. Programs like BRIGHT in Burkina Faso and water and sanitation initiatives have focused on constructing girl-friendly schools with adequate sanitation facilities and community support. While these efforts have improved girls' access to education, more research is needed to assess their impact on reducing school-related GBV.

United Nations Girls Education Initiative (2015). *School-Related Gender-Based Violence is Preventing the Achievement of Education for All*. Policy Paper #17. UNESCO and UNGEI. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232107>

This paper reviews evidence on school-related GBV and presents new analysis using data from international and regional learning assessments. The findings underscore how GBV in and around schools undermines efforts to achieve quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all children, especially girls. The findings further indicate that gender equality interventions for girls are important to support girls to stay in school.

Several key risk factors of GBV are identified. These include attending schools with poor infrastructure, having to travel long distances to school, and studying in environments lacking proper policies, safeguards, or accountability systems. Girls who must stay in formal or informal lodging facilities to attend school also face heightened vulnerability. Additionally, the increasing use of digital technologies has extended the reach of violence and harassment beyond school grounds, creating new forms of online abuse. The report highlights significant impacts of school-related GBV on children's wellbeing, school attendance, academic performance, and graduation rates. For instance, analysis of data from 48 countries found that grade 4 students who experienced bullying or harassment scored 32 points lower in mathematics than their peers who did not experience such violence.

Qualitative studies further reveal that school-related GBV contributes to poor academic performance and increased dropout rates among girls. In Swaziland, a nationally representative study of 1,292 young women found that 17% of girls aged 13–17 dropped out due to pregnancy. One in ten girls reported being raped, with 20% of these incidents occurring in or on the way to school. In some countries, policies still permit the expulsion or exclusion of pregnant schoolgirls. Even when girls remain in school or return after childbirth, they often face bullying and verbal abuse from classmates and teachers, further jeopardizing their right to education.

Several strategies have shown promise in reducing school-related GBV. One is to integrate core school-related GBV indicators into national systems—such as education management information systems—to enable better monitoring of trends and improve policy and programmatic responses over time. Strengthening capacity at the district and school levels, particularly in reporting mechanisms, is also highlighted as vital to ensure timely and appropriate interventions.

Examples from specific programs illustrate how targeted interventions can support reductions in violence. In Malawi, the *Safe Schools Program*, launched in 2005, successfully advocated for revisions to the Teachers' Code of Conduct and the stricter enforcement of rules around teacher misconduct. Following training for schools and communities on the updated code, the proportion of teachers who knew how to report a violation increased from 45% to 75%, and most reported feeling a personal responsibility to report misconduct. Holistic school models also contribute to more effective responses to SRGBV.

An evaluation of the Child-Friendly Schools initiative found that students felt safer and better supported in environments where child-centered teaching methods were used and where there was strong parental and community engagement. In low- and middle-income countries, girls' clubs have helped break the silence surrounding school-related GBV. For example, the *Stop Violence Against Girls in School* project showed that clubs led by trained female mentors improved girls' confidence and ability to recognize and challenge violence. These clubs also fostered better links between schools and communities, improving access to safe reporting mechanisms and increasing support for survivors.

Additional Resources

These additional resources highlight issues such as the links between GBV in schools and gender inequality, the impact of GBV on child development, the risks of GBV that students face in schools, and the value for girls' of staying in school to reduce child marriage.

Coffey, J., P. J. Burke, S. Hardacre, J. Parker, F. Coccuzoli, and J. Shaw. (2023). Students as Victim-Survivors: The Enduring Impacts of Gender-Based Violence for Students in Higher Education. *Gender and Education* 35, no. 6–7: 623–637. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2242879>

This article builds on existing evidence to explore the long-term impacts of GBV and related trauma, focusing particularly on how these experiences affect equity in higher education. Drawing on qualitative interviews with student-survivors in tertiary institutions, the study examines how GBV shapes their ability to participate fully in academic life.

The participants described persistent struggles with stress and anxiety, as well as a diminished sense of self-worth and academic capability. These emotional and psychological burdens made it difficult for them to meet academic expectations, including completing assignments and attending classes. The article clearly illustrates how the effects of GBV are not only deeply personal but also structural, creating significant barriers to equitable engagement in higher education.

The research also highlights institutional shortcomings in addressing the needs of survivors. Many higher education institutions lack the comprehensive support systems necessary to respond effectively to the long-term impacts of GBV. This gap underscores the need for universities to better recognize and respond to the complex challenges faced by student survivors. The study authors call for a transformative approach to policy and practice in higher education. It advocates for the integration of trauma-informed support services, the development of inclusive and safe campus environments, and the recognition of GBV as a critical equity issue.

Cosma, A., Y. Bjereld, F. J. Elgar, C. Richardson, L. Bilz, W. Craig, L. Augustine, M. Molcho, M. Malinowska-Cieřlik, and S. D. Walsh. (2022). Gender Differences in Bullying Reflect Societal Gender Inequality: A Multilevel Study with Adolescents in 46 Countries. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 71 (5): 601–608. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2022.05.015>

This article describes a multi-level study of adolescents across 45 countries. Utilizing data from the 2017/18 *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* study, encompassing 200,423 adolescents aged 11 to 15, the researchers employed multilevel logistic regression models to analyze the relationship between national-level gender inequality (as measured by the Gender Inequality Index) and the probability of both perpetrating and being the victim of bullying behaviors.

The results clearly demonstrate a relationship between rates of gender inequality and higher rates of bullying in schools. It also shows that in contexts where there are higher rates of inequality the gender gap in perpetration is higher, with boys significantly more likely to be bullying, both in-person and online.

Results suggest that perpetration of bullying may be linked to social and gender norms that legitimize males' use of aggression as a means of control and enforcing power. Providing boys with more tools for communication and emotional intelligence may impact positively on rates of bullying.

Fitria, M., A. D. Laksono, and I. M. Syahri. (2024). "Education Role in Early Marriage Prevention: Evidence from Indonesia's Rural Areas." *BMC Public Health* 24: 3323. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20775-4>

This study, based in rural Indonesia, highlights a strong link between girls staying in school and a reduced risk of early or child marriage. It shows that the longer girls remain in education, the less likely they are to marry early. Access to family

planning information both through schools and through media was also shown to be a strong protective factor against early marriage.

Girls with only an elementary education were over 400 times more likely to marry early compared to those with a college education. Similarly, those with only a junior high school education faced nearly 150 times higher odds of early marriage than their college-educated peers. The study also identified key contributing factors, including economic hardship and lower literacy levels, as significant drivers of early and child marriage.

Parsons, J., and J. McCleary-Sills. (2015). *Preventing Child Marriage: Lessons from World Bank Group Gender Impact Evaluations*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. [https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/World Bank 2015 Preventing Child Marriage Lessons -impact-evaluations.pdf](https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/World_Bank_2015_Preventing_Child_Marriage_Lessons_impact-evaluations.pdf)

Synthesizing findings from seven World Bank-supported impact evaluations, this evidence brief examines the role of educational access and specific school-based interventions on preventing child marriage. It notes that programs that delay marriage and reduce its prevalence typically focus on increasing girls' educational attainment, improving their societal opportunities, and reducing poverty. These programs often include strategies that use a combined school and community-based approach.

The brief highlights the link between child marriage, poverty, and limited educational opportunities, noting that girls with limited literacy and without access to secondary education were significantly more likely to marry young. It points to the importance of addressing both educational and economic factors in prevention efforts. Cash transfers and subsidies for items like school uniforms, recreational activities, and mentoring are among the measures implemented within or alongside school-based interventions that are identified as effective at supporting prevention of child marriage.

Overall, the brief indicates that schools serve as key locations for interventions aimed at preventing child marriage. It suggests that enhancing girls' access to quality education, addressing economic barriers, and incorporating strategies to change social norms related to early marriage can contribute to delaying marriage and providing girls with more options for their futures.

Samakao, M. and Manda. H. 2023. *Effects of Gender-Based Violence on Students' Well-Being: A Case of Mufulira College*. *HTS Theological Studies* 79, no. 3: 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i3.8492>

The study described in this article employed a mixed qualitative and quantitative design to examine the effects of GBV within a teacher training institute in Zambia. The study examined responses from 150 respondents, focusing on impacts of violence on academic outcomes.

The research indicates that students who have experienced GBV often face significant academic challenges. The trauma resulting from such experiences can severely disrupt their educational journey, leading to diminished focus and performance, even when counselling services are available. The documented effects of GBV on students' well-being included low academic performance (30%), absenteeism (12%), low self-esteem (45%), high dropouts (7%), stigma (18%), mental trauma (38%).

In some instances, students have withdrawn from their studies, particularly those who reported physical or sexual abuse. The stigma associated with GBV in academic settings can impede the healing process, causing many victims to either leave their current institution or transfer to another. Prior to withdrawing, a noticeable pattern of increased absenteeism is often observed, which can persist even in settings where counselling support is available. The profound impact of GBV on students' well-being often manifests as low self-esteem, self-rejection, and a tendency towards social isolation.

Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence. (2016). *Why Ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence Is Critical to Sustainable Development*. <https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/Why-ending-school-related-gender-based-violence-is-critical-to-sustainable-development-2016-eng.pdf>

This policy paper presents evidence linking school-related GBV to a range of negative educational and developmental outcomes. Drawing on global data, it estimates that 246 million children experience violence in or around schools each year, with documented consequences for attendance, academic achievement, and dropout rates.

The evidence shows that school-related GBV—including physical, sexual, and psychological forms of violence—is a widespread issue across countries and regions. It is frequently perpetrated by peers, teachers, or school staff, and is strongly associated with irregular attendance, poor academic performance, and students leaving school early. Studies cited in the paper confirm that exposure to such violence undermines children’s ability to focus, engage, and progress in their education. Evidence from children themselves supports these findings. Students report that violence in and around their schools affects their ability to travel to school safely, participate in class, and remain in school. The long-term consequences include not only educational setbacks but also negative health outcomes and reduced economic security for families.

Research points to the structural drivers behind this violence, including entrenched gender norms, unequal power relationships, and a lack of institutional accountability. These factors are consistently identified across multiple contexts as contributing to the persistence of violence in educational settings. In terms of economic evidence, the paper draws on country-level analyses from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Argentina, and Egypt to demonstrate the financial impact of school-related GBV. These studies show that school dropouts linked to violence result in significant productivity losses and reduced national income.

The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBV AoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBV AoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect’s Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

You can contact the GBV AoR Helpdesk by emailing us at: enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk

The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to 17.30 GMT Monday to Friday.

Our services are free and confidential.