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# Reaching Out

Preventing and Addressing School-related  
Gender-based Violence in Viet Nam



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Gender-based Violence in Viet Nam



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# Acronyms

<b>BOET</b>	Bureau of Education and Training
<b>CCIHP</b>	Creative Initiatives in Health and Population
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>DOET</b>	Department of Education and Training
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GBT</b>	Gay or bisexual man/boy (men/boys) and male-to-female transgender person(s)
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GSHS</b>	Global school-based student health survey
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>ICRW</b>	International Centre for Research on Women
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth interview
<b>iSEE</b>	Institute for Studies of Society, Economics and Environment
<b>LBT</b>	Lesbian or bisexual woman/girl (women/girls) and female-to-male transgender person(s)
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>SAVY</b>	Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>SOGIE</b>	Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression
<b>SRGBV</b>	School-related gender-based violence
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNGEI</b>	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VNIES</b>	Viet Nam Institute of Educational Sciences



# Terminology

## **Adolescent**

Aged from 10 to 19 years.

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## **Bisexual**

Someone who is attracted to, has romantic feelings for, and/or has sex with men and women.

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## **Bullying**

Repeated aggressive behaviour that intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort through physical contact, verbal attacks, fighting or psychological manipulation. Bullying involves an imbalance of power and can include teasing, taunting, and use of hurtful names, physical violence, or social exclusion. A bully can operate alone or within a group of peers. Bullying may be direct, such as one child demanding money or possessions from another, or indirect, such as a group of students spreading rumours.

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## **Child**

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, anyone below the age of 18 years unless majority is attained earlier under national law. Current legislation in Viet Nam defines a child as being under the age of 16.

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## **Corporal punishment**

Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.

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## **Cyberbullying**

Harassment through e-mail, cell phones, text messages, social media, or websites.

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## **Discrimination**

Any form of arbitrary distinction, exclusion, or restriction affecting a person, usually, but not only, by virtue of an inherent personal characteristic or perception of belonging to a particular group.

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## **Gay**

Same-sex romantic feelings, sexual attraction, same-sex sexual behaviour, and same-sex cultural identity in general.

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## **Gender and sex**

The term “sex” refers to biologically determined differences, whereas “gender” refers to differences in social roles and relations. Gender roles are learned through socialisation and vary widely within and between cultures. Gender roles are also affected by age, class, race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as by geographical, economic, and political environments.

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## **Gender-based violence (GBV)**

Violence that occurs as a result of normative role expectations associated with one’s gender and unequal power relationships between genders.

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## **Gender identity**

How a person identifies as being a man, woman, neither, or both, or a combination, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

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## **Gender non-conforming**

When a person’s gender expression generally does not conform with their assigned sex at birth.

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**Homophobia**

Fear, rejection, or aversion, often in the form of stigmatising attitudes or discriminatory behaviour, towards people who have sex with and/or sexual attraction to the same gender.

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**Lesbian**

A female who experiences sexual attraction towards, and the capacity for an intimate/romantic relationship with other women.

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**Sex**

The classification of people as male, female, or intersex, assigned at birth, typically based on anatomy and biology.

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**Sexual orientation**

Emotional and sexual attraction to another person or other people, who may be of the opposite gender, same gender, or another gender identity. Whether an individual is attracted to the same sex, another sex, or both, the term “gender identity” is used to describe whether an individual defines himself or herself as being a man, woman, or some other gender.

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**Sexuality**

The sexual knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviours of individuals. Its dimensions include the anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of the sexual response system; sexual identity, orientation, roles and personality; and thoughts, feelings, and relationships. Its expression is influenced by ethical, spiritual, cultural, and moral concerns.

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**School-related Gender-based Violence (SRGBV)**

All forms of violence (explicit and symbolic forms of violence), including fear of violence, that occur in education contexts (including non-formal and formal contexts, such as school premises, on the journey to and from school, and in emergency and conflict settings) which result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychosocial harm of children (female, male, and transgender children and youth of all sexual orientations). SRGBV is based on stereotypes, roles, or norms, attributed to or expected of children because of their sex or gender identities.

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**Stigma**

Opinions or judgments held by individuals or society that negatively reflect a person or group. Discrimination occurs when stigma is acted on.

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**Transgender**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex assigned at birth. Transgender identity is not dependent on medical procedures. Includes, for example, people assigned female at birth but who identify as a man (female-to-male or trans man) and people assigned male at birth but who identify as a woman (male-to-female or trans woman).

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**Violence and physical abuse**

There are many forms of violence and physical abuse, including (though not limited to) physical bullying, physical threats, physical assault, attacks with weapons, beatings, arson, and theft.

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**Violence and psychosocial harassment**

Emotional and social violence are forms of violence that are also cruel and degrading and violate the rights of children. These forms of violence include embarrassing or shaming, defaming, scapegoating, threatening, frightening, mocking the child, insulting, “eve-teasing,” gossiping or spreading rumours, cursing or using harsh words, and excluding. These actions may be online or cyber-based (technology-related abuse) or in the physical presence of the victim.

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**Violence and sexual harassment**

This may be in the form of verbal innuendo, physical groping or rape.

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# Executive Summary

## ***Rationale***

Global human rights legislation protects all people against discrimination and violence in education, irrespective of their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Viet Nam has committed to a range of global conventions to end school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). Putting these commitments into practice requires first recognising the fact that schools can be sites of violence, and considering the nature of SRGBV in practice so that it can be prevented and its impacts mediated. This report sits within broader efforts by the Government of Viet Nam and in particular the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to recognise, and respond to, SRGBV in schools in Viet Nam. It represents one practical research-based step amongst many in Viet Nam's response to SRGBV.

## ***Conceptual Framework***

A range of sociologists have variously defined school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV). In this report, SRGBV is conceptualised as based on gender and sexuality stereotypes, roles and norms. Any learner, irrespective of their sexual orientation or whether they are female, male, transgender or intersex, may be affected. SRGBV is understood in this report to include, for example, physical, verbal, sexual, social and technology-related violence. SRGBV can occur in a range of settings in and around schools, ranging from in school bathrooms to virtual locations via a range of technology. It can also occur beyond the boundaries of the school itself.

## ***Literature Review***

Despite under-reporting, research literature suggests SRGBV is widespread globally and in the Asia-Pacific region. Research shows SRGBV can have long-term impacts on a child's education, and mental and physical wellbeing. The literature review highlighted some noteworthy work in the region, but also showed there was a strong need for national research on the extent, nature, impacts and supports around SRGBV in Viet Nam. Research objectives for the study emerging from the literature included goals of exploring the awareness levels and attitudes of key education stakeholder groups about SRGBV, the nature and scale of SRGBV (including homophobic and transphobic violence), contributing factors, impacts and prevention/support measures in schools.

## ***Methodology***

An investigation was undertaken into the nature and extent of SRGBV in schools in North, Central and South Viet Nam. Ethical issues were carefully planned including informed consent and privacy for participants. The commitment and support of MOET was essential to enabling stakeholders to freely discuss the sensitive topic of SRGBV. A range of local and international research experts, departmental and school contacts, and community organizations aided the project. The study applied an emancipatory methodology aiming to achieve social justice goals. Mixed methods of in-person and online surveys, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to collect data from four distinct groups of participants. These included general school students, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (abbreviated to LGBT in this report as in the broader literature) students, school staff (including administrators and teachers) and parents.

## Findings

Key findings from the evidence provided by the 3,698 survey participants, 280 participants in Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and 85 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with students, school staff and parents:

- *Awareness of SRGBV:* There was limited awareness of all stakeholders of SRGBV, with most primarily considering actions that cause physical injury and overlooking other forms such as sexual harassment, or psychosocial violence such as ostracism. Parents and teachers were comparatively more aware of, and concerned about, technology-related violence than students. LGBT students demonstrated stronger awareness of the negative long-term effects of verbal and psychosocial violence than other groups. A portion of both students and parents still accepted teachers' methods of maintaining discipline in schools through such behaviours as hitting and scolding. Parents were often particularly unaware of school responsibilities to help prevent SRGBV off-campus, while some same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming youth did not understand that the discrimination they were experiencing was a form of violence.
- *Experience of SRGBV:* More than half (51.9%) of all students reported having experienced at least one kind of violent behaviours in the last 6 months. LGBT students (particularly more 'feminine' same sex attracted males or gender non-conforming/transgender youth) were at particularly high risk of victimisation and exposure to all kinds of violence – 71% of LGBT students had been physically abused, 72.2% verbally abused. Additionally, male students experienced higher rates of all forms of violence (except for being a target of gossip) than females. Incidents of all forms of SRGBV were more prevalent among lower secondary students than upper secondary students.
- *Motivations behind SRGBV:* Stereotypes and prejudices (against femininity, gender non-conformity and perceived 'weakness') were seen to motivate SRGBV. Parents and teachers also mentioned the physio-psychological characteristics of puberty, hormones and identity-establishment among peers as coming into play. Social marginalisation by wealth status, ethnicity, language, or location (e.g. rural areas) were also mentioned by teachers, administrators and parents, and the possibility of the intersections of perceived difference compounding ostracism.
- *Impact of SRGBV:* Victims of SRGBV were more likely to experience reduced academic performance and participation, and have symptoms of negative psychological wellbeing including depression, thoughts or attempts of self-harm or suicide. While these negative impacts were found in victimised students of all categories, this was more pronounced among LGBT victims. The hindered learning opportunities often further impacted and isolated the affected students who failed to meet the expectations of both their schools and families.
- *Students' response to SRGBV:* Roughly one-third of student victims of SRGBV reported seeking assistance from adults; however a portion also expressed a lack of confidence in adults' capacity to solve the problem. Student bystanders who witnessed SRGBV most often took three main options, namely: informing school staff, trying to intervene, and doing nothing. The frequency of all three options was relatively similar, although the proportion of LGBT students who would "do nothing" was higher than that of non-LGBT male and female students. Fear was a powerful determinant for inaction; the students who did nothing in response to SRGBV mainly said that they were scared of getting involved, of revenge being taken upon them, or perhaps becoming bullied themselves.
- *Prevention programmes and response interventions:* There are vast differences between school staff's and students' assessments of SRGBV prevention/response mechanisms in school, with 95.4% of the teachers/school administrators and only 14.6% of students affirming measures in place. Some schools had concrete structural measures to prevent violence from occurring, including camera surveillance systems and counselling rooms; however these measures were not widespread, seemed to be in their early days, and still of limited effect. Limited resources were identified, and their effectiveness limited without holistic plans to address SRGBV.



## ***Discussion & Recommendations***

Curriculum developers and policy-makers need to actively redress the gaps in SRGBV knowledge and process skills of all of the different education stakeholders through clear education resources revision and policy development offering distinct guidelines in a number of areas. Schools need to address SRGBV directly through innovative education techniques and engagement with related campaigns on SRGBV and LGBT themes to create safe and supportive learning environments. Staff training, clear regulation codes and processes, specific counselling provisions and uniform code flexibility, and community partnerships are also recommended. Further research may be needed to overcome some of the gaps in this study including representation of more provinces, longitudinal work, and investigation into what works to reform perpetrators and build resilience among groups at high risk of marginalisation.







# 1 Rationale

**“For child victims of violence, school can become an ordeal rather than an opportunity. The promise and potential of education and the excitement of discovery and learning are undermined by pain, trauma and fear. In some cases children’s academic performance suffers, their health and wellbeing is affected, and their capacity to operate as confident individuals, capable of developing open and trusting relations with others, is compromised. The negative impact of violence in schools goes beyond the children who are directly affected by it. It touches the lives of those who witness it, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and insecurity incompatible with learning.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Marta Santos Pais**  
*Special Representative  
of the United Nations  
(UN) Secretary-General  
on Violence against  
Children*

## Key Points

- Viet Nam has committed to a range of global conventions to end school-related gender-based violence.
- Putting these commitments into practice requires first recognising the fact that schools can be sites of violence.
- This report sits within broader efforts by the Viet Nam Government and Ministry of Education and Training to recognise, and respond to, SRGBV in Viet Nam’s schools.

## 1.1 Committing to Global Policy

Education is a basic human right, recognised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>2</sup> (UDHR) and enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>3</sup> (ICESCR) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>4</sup> The importance of ensuring that this education occurs within safe, secure and non-violent learning environments has been emphasised in these and other treaty bodies and conventions including the General Comments of the Committee on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup> and in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education.<sup>5</sup>

Other international commitments have, in parallel, called for measures to protect all human beings, especially women and girls, from all forms of violence, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>6</sup> the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)<sup>7</sup> and the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>8</sup> Viet Nam has signed and ratified these commitments, demonstrating the Government’s support to relevant global policies in this area.

Education rights’ advocates from around the world joined efforts in 2010 to push for recognition of sexual orientation as a protected ground in international human rights legislation and succeeded.<sup>9</sup> Then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon called homophobic bullying in schools globally “a moral outrage, a grave violation to human rights and a public health crisis,”<sup>10</sup> underscoring the widespread personal and physical consequences to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students from the discrimination and violence they are subjected to in schools around the world. The UN started to prioritise LGBT education rights issues; 200 UN Member States convened for ‘Stop Bullying – Ending Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity’ and the Born Free and Equal policy was released.<sup>11,12</sup>



UNESCO's 'First International Consultation on Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions' in Brazil was attended by governments and researchers from all global regions including Asia-Pacific (and specifically Viet Nam's Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population (CCIHP), who called for education policy and practice change.<sup>13,14</sup> The Global Network Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools (the Global Network) was formed and met every 6 months, promoting policy goals.<sup>15</sup> In 2015, UNESCO Bangkok hosted the first ever 'Asia-Pacific Consultation on School-Related Bullying on the basis of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression'. This ground-breaking event was attended by representatives from Viet Nam's Government and Ministry of Education and Training (MOET); amongst representatives from other Asia-Pacific governments, non-government organizations and academic institutions. Viet Nam's representatives contributed their visions to the development of regionally-specific shared commitments for educational reform on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression outlined in the event's report.<sup>16</sup>

Attention to these issues is even more salient within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as related issues appear in three goals.<sup>17</sup> Goal 4 includes a target to 'Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all'. Goal 16 includes a target to 'Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere'. Goal 5 includes various targets on gender equality and empowering women and girls, ending discrimination and eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres.

## 1.2 Applying to Local Practice

Despite these commitments, global, regional and local research demonstrates that schools and other educational institutions in Viet Nam are not always safe and inclusive spaces for children and young people. In fact, for many, schools can be sites of physical, verbal, psychosocial and sexual violence.<sup>18-21</sup> This violence appears to be on the rise with incidents reported to the Department of Child Care and Protection hotline increasing by a factor of 13 in the last decade. In recent research in two lower secondary schools of Hai Phong City, 56.8% of students surveyed reported that they had been bullied.<sup>22</sup> Further, a field survey carried out by CCIHP with 520 LGBT persons at the average age of 21 has shown that 41% suffered from discrimination and violence in either general education schools or universities.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the LGBT community in Viet Nam can be victims of gender-based violence of various forms (e.g. exclusion, discrimination, or bullying). This violence can negatively impact the wellbeing and education performance of children and young people.<sup>24-26</sup> In the long-term such violence may adversely affect employment prospects and the economic development of the country.<sup>27</sup>

However, despite distinct gaps in the research on SRGBV and a dearth in specific SRGBV-prevention policies, existing local policies in Viet Nam do provide a supportive platform and an opportunity for inquiry towards development work and prevention efforts. The *National Policy Framework for Gender Equality* was approved for the period 2011-2020 with the goal of highlighting the importance of gender equality for the socio-economic development of the country, including in education efforts towards this end. Furthermore, unlike many of its neighbours, Viet Nam now no longer has a ban on same-sex marriage<sup>28</sup> and recently passed a landmark law enshrining transgender people's right to legal recognition of a gender identity other than that indicated by their birth sex.<sup>29</sup> A *National Targeted Program on Gender Equality* was also developed for the period 2011-2015 and as Viet Nam moves forward with new strategies to achieve the SDGs, there is a clear opportunity for evaluation and reflection on current conditions around gender equality, protection and inclusion in education.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.3 Considering Contextual Influences

Evidence suggests that most forms of school violence are deeply rooted in unequal gender relations, gendered social norms, and discriminatory attitudes and practices.<sup>31,32</sup> The Government of Viet Nam, including the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), has demonstrated commitment in addressing gender inequality through the adoption of a law on gender equality; however, comprehensive programmes that address gender-based violence in education institutions are lacking. There are few studies and a limited number of small-scale programmes which address this issue.

The present report, commissioned by MOET with the support of UNESCO, aimed to build Viet Nam's evidence base on the nature, extent and impact of SRGBV, including that based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE). The overarching goal of this work was to generate research which could inform future programmatic initiatives to address these problems. In Viet Nam, in light of local contextual conditions and factors, so that Viet Nam can put into practice its commitments to international conventions against SRGBV and create safe schooling environments.

This report presents the rationale, conceptual framework, literature review, methodology, findings, implications and recommendations arising from the study. The next section considers the conceptual framework for the study, including key definitions and parameters of SRGBV.







# 2 Conceptual Framework

## What is SRGBV?

**“What we need is changed behaviour. We need to prevent the underlying attitudes, stereotypes and discrimination that give rise to these specific forms of violence.”<sup>33</sup>**

Former United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Navi Pillay**, on school-related gender-based violence

### Key Points

- School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is based on gender stereotypes, roles and norms.
- SRGBV can include, for example, verbal, psychosocial, physical and sexual violence.
- SRGBV can occur in a range of settings in and around school, from school bathrooms to virtual locations.

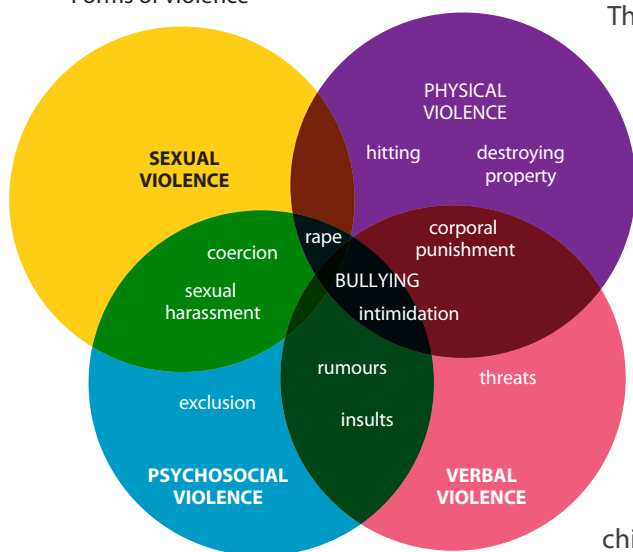
### 2.1 Defining SRGBV

Violence in and around schools is a global phenomenon, but contemporary sociologists argue that the gender dimension has been largely ignored historically.<sup>34</sup> Sociological and criminological views of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) have often either dismissed it as unworthy of consideration, or focused in an overly specific manner on distinct groups of offenders (male youth gangs from low socio-economic backgrounds for example).<sup>35</sup> Leach and Mitchell argue that education stakeholders need to take a more holistic approach to defining and conceptualising SRGBV, extending the definition from that commonly in use around physical partner or gang violence to also encompass, for example, other forms such as sexual violence. Jones and Hillier have applied the concept in an even more expansive manner to a range of experiences of school-related physical, verbal, social, and technology-related abuse and other forms of violence on the basis of students' gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>25</sup> Smith *et al.* further extended the definition to include school-related violence against students on the basis of their gender non-conformity and expression.<sup>36</sup>

Accordingly, SRGBV is framed in this report as an umbrella term. It covers acts and threats occurring in and around educational contexts that may result in physical, verbal, sexual, psychosocial or technology-related harm to children. SRGBV is based on gender stereotypes, roles and norms, attributed to or expected of children. Any learner, irrespective of their sexual orientation or whether they are female, male, transgender or intersex, may be affected.<sup>19</sup> The ways that schools impact SRGBV (for better or worse) are of key interest in this report.

SRGBV is further understood as a form of violence perpetrated as a result of unequal power dynamics such as sexism, homophobia, and other dynamics. It is also seen as potentially exacerbated by and intersecting with, other forms of marginalisation, discrimination and vulnerabilities. It can take place in school, or on the way to and from school. It can be perpetrated by peers, teaching and non-teaching staff. The Internet and mobile phone technologies have also extended the reach of psychosocial violence through cyberbullying.<sup>37</sup>

**Figure 1**  
Forms of violence<sup>38</sup>



## 2.2 What can SRGBV involve?

The forms of SRGBV identified are complex and diverse and include verbal, psychosocial, physical and sexual violence (see Figure 1).<sup>38</sup> Sexual violence is often recognised as threats and acts of unwanted sexual touching, comments and pictures, sexual favours and rape. Physical violence may occur when a learner is beaten, kicked, pinched, hit with something and, in some extreme cases, burnt with acid. Corporal punishment is also a form of physical violence, and as any punishment where physical force is intentionally used to cause pain or discomfort. Most involves “smacking”, slapping, or “spanking” children with the hand or an instrument (e.g. ruler) but it can also include shaking or throwing children, pulling hair or forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions. Verbal violence is characterised by

verbal taunting, teasing, gossiping, curses, harsh words and the spreading of rumours. Social exclusion, threats and humiliation exemplify psychosocial violence.



As seen in Figure 1, the different forms of SRGBV interact and overlap. Bullying, for instance, occurs when there is an imbalance of power between the “bully” and the “bullied” and can happen through physical contact, verbal attacks, social exclusion, and psychological manipulation. Students are bullied when they are repeatedly and intentionally exposed to harmful and/or aggressive behaviour that results in injury or discomfort.

In addition, SRGBV can also stem from everyday school practices, such as gender bias in school textbooks, curriculum and teaching practices, which reinforce rigid gender expectations and encourage harmful and unsafe practices and attitudes. This is referred to as institutionalised acts of SRGBV.<sup>39,40</sup>

### 2.3 Where does SRGBV occur?

SRGBV can take place anywhere in and around educational settings (see Figure 2); however, specific settings often prove more dangerous for students. Areas of specific concern within schools, particularly for girls, typically include bathrooms, hallways and classrooms, and in some settings, staff lodgings. The risk of sexual, physical, verbal and psychosocial violence travelling to and/or from school is also a reality for many children. Isolated facilities and inadequate supervision have been shown to magnify these risks.<sup>41-43</sup>

While SRGBV manifests in educational contexts, it does not exist in isolation; it is systemic in nature with root causes in all levels of a society. Although data on violence against children remains limited, often neglecting to explore the role of gender, the evidence base of SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region is growing.<sup>21,44,45</sup> The evidence that does exist, presented in the following section of this report, provides insight into common forms and drivers of SRGBV in the region.

**Figure 2**  
Settings where SRGBV occurs<sup>96</sup>







# 3 Literature Review

## SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific Region

**“Research from many nations and regions consistently documents the high levels of verbal, physical and sexual harassment, abuse, and violence experienced by young people in schools.”<sup>13</sup>**

UNESCO  
*Rio Statement on  
Homophobic Bullying  
and Education for All*

### Key Points

- Despite under-reporting, research literature suggests SRGBV is wide-spread globally and in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Research shows SRGBV can have long-term impacts on a child's education, and mental and physical wellbeing.
- There was a strong need for national research on the extent, nature, impacts and supports around SRGBV in Viet Nam.

### 3.1 Extent of SRGBV in Asia-Pacific

Globally, SRGBV has been characterised as widespread; estimates suggest that over 246 million girls and boys suffer from SRGBV every year.<sup>46 47</sup>

There are no systematic studies collecting data on all forms of SRGBV in Asia-Pacific, although there have been several systematic studies on violence that have found high levels of reported violence against women and girls. While there is significant variation, in these studies between 15-71% of females aged 15 and over have been estimated to have endured gender-based violence (including for example a third in Thailand and 16% in East Asia).<sup>48-51</sup>

Barriers to reporting and data collection in the region on this issue include shame and stigma,<sup>48,52</sup> financial barriers,<sup>53</sup> perceived impunity for perpetrators, lack of awareness of or distrust of available supports<sup>50</sup> with additional barriers in areas impacted by conflict or among mobile populations, such as in Bangladesh and Timor-Leste.<sup>54,55</sup> In addition, many people do not report or seek care because they accept violence as normal or do not perceive it as worthy of intervention.<sup>48</sup>

In 2014, a comprehensive UNESCO review attempted to pull together existing evidence of SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>19</sup> It found that SRGBV is most commonly seen in the forms of, but not limited to, acts and threats of corporal punishment, physical violence, psychosocial violence, bullying including cyberbullying, and sexual violence. The study also credited five fundamental driving factors for SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region. These included: gender inequalities and rigid gender expectations; societal norms, traditions and the acceptance of violence; disciplinary approaches within schools by parents, teachers and students; insecure or unsafe home and family environments; weak prevention or security mechanisms in communities.

Figure 3: Growing advocacy on SRGBV in Asia-Pacific<sup>47</sup>

# SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SRGBV) IN ASIA-PACIFIC

VIOLENCE IN, ON THE WAY, AND AROUND SCHOOLS IN ASIA-PACIFIC OFTEN STEMS FROM RIGID SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS



## WHAT IS IT?

IT TAKES PHYSICAL, SEXUAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FORMS



**CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**



**VERBAL ABUSE**



**BULLYING**



**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**



**SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT**

In Asia-Pacific, girls are more likely to face social exclusion, sexual and psychological violence while boys are more likely to experience corporal punishment, bullying and other forms of physical violence. Violence experienced by transgender students is poorly discussed and documented.

## WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?



**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

It can impact school participation, achievement and continuation, particularly for girls



**HEALTH IMPACTS**

Violence in schools, as in any setting, can have impacts on physical, mental and sexual health



**INTERGENERATIONAL VIOLENCE**

Boys who witness or experience violence are more likely to use it in their relationships as adults

## WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



**ENCOURAGE PROTECTION POLICIES IN SCHOOLS**



**PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND NON-VIOLENCE IN CURRICULUM AND TEACHING PRACTICE**



**ENGAGE YOUTH IN CREATING SOLUTIONS**



**STRENGTHEN LINKS BETWEEN SCHOOLS, HOMES AND SERVICES**



**IF YOU HAVE WITNESSED OR EXPERIENCED SRGBV SEEK HELP FROM SOMEONE YOU TRUST**



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In 2014, Plan International in collaboration with the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) published a base-line survey report on five countries in Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Viet Nam, select cities).<sup>56</sup> The study found SRGBV to be both common and highly prevalent in all five countries. Throughout the region, emotional violence was the most common form of violence experienced by students in schools, followed by physical violence and then sexual violence. Students noted that all forms of violence were factors that made their schools feel unsafe.

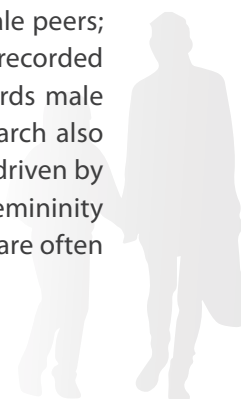
The study reported that both girls and boys can be victims or perpetrators of SRGBV; however, there were differences between their experiences of, and vulnerabilities to, violence. In all study sites a disproportionate number of boys reported facing physical violence in schools compared to their female peers, a finding also reflected in global data.<sup>1,39</sup> Sexual violence was recorded in all countries; however, there was no significant difference between the prevalence of boys' and girls' experiences of sexual violence in and around schools.<sup>56</sup> This stands in contrast to global data that confirms girls' experience of sexual violence in schools are significantly higher than their male peers.<sup>1,39</sup> Gender stereotyping, inequitable gender attitudes and exposure to violence and weak recording mechanisms were all recorded as potential drivers of SRGBV, particularly among peers.

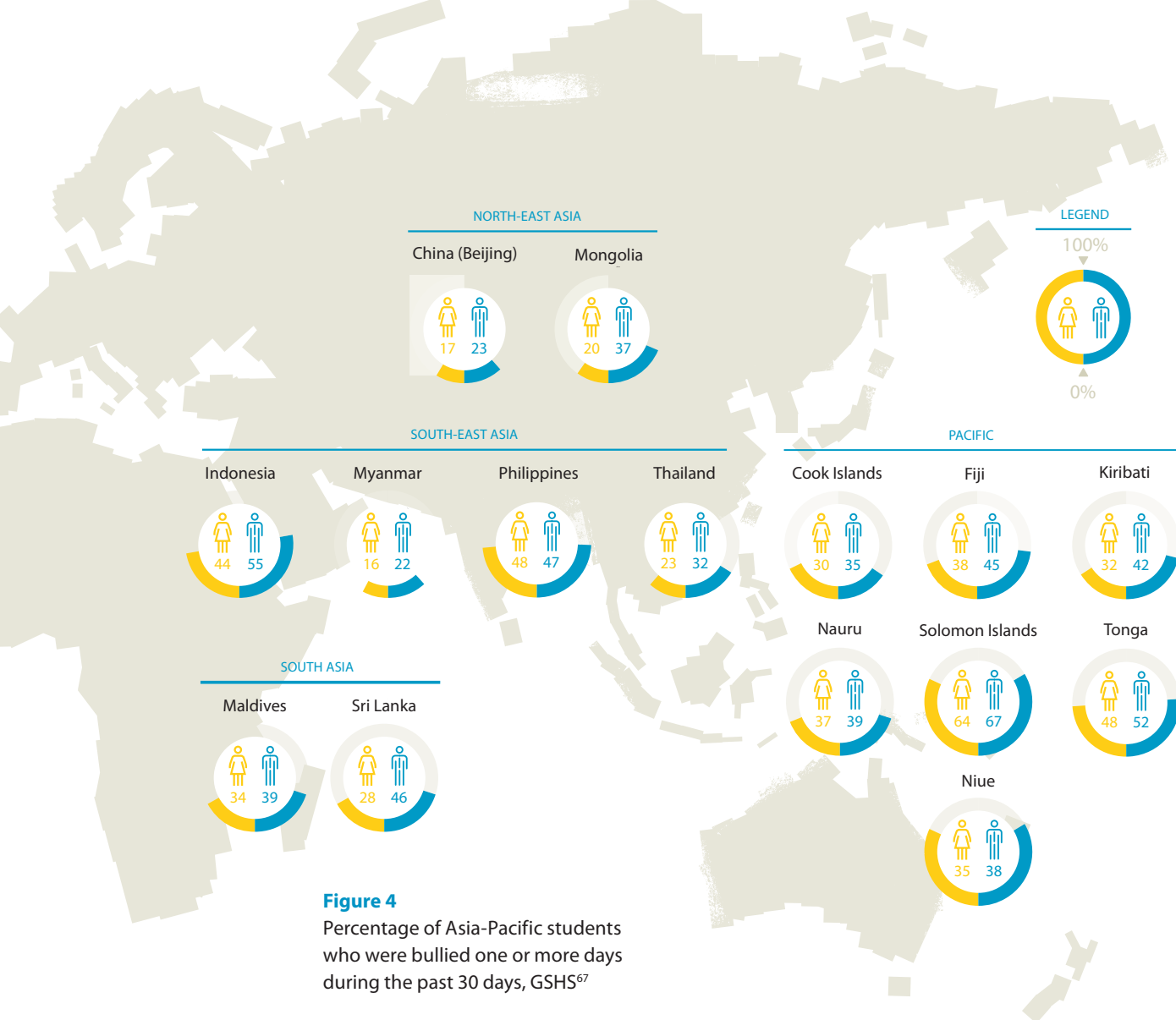
**Sexual violence** is often shrouded in secrecy and incidences are likely to be under-reported. Issues surrounding stigmatisation, regressive norms around femininity, virginity and sex outside of marriage, and the fear of severe repercussions are all factors that restrict the current evidence base.<sup>57</sup> While limitations in data exist, reviews and small-scale studies provide some insight into the threats and experiences of sexual violence that learners face in the region. Wider research focusing on violence against women and girls has been crucial to building this evidence base.

A review by UNICEF (2014) reveals that sexual violence is not uncommon in the lives of many girls in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>21</sup> Data from 40 low and middle-income countries, including countries in the Asia-Pacific region, show that women and girls are more likely to experience sexual violence than men and boys. The review recorded that 10% of adolescent girls aged 15–19 reported incidences of forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts in the previous year.

**Corporal punishment** is recorded as one of the most common and accepted forms of SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region. It is estimated that over half of all children worldwide live in countries where they are not legally protected from corporal punishment in schools. Research in China, India, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea reported it as the most common form of discipline and universally experienced in many schools.<sup>58-60</sup> Socio-economic status and other vulnerabilities have also shown to interact with the prevalence of corporal punishment.

Corporal punishment in schools occurs in gendered ways. Regionally and globally, boys are recorded to experience corporal punishment in schools more frequently and severely than their female peers; girls are more likely to experience verbal forms of discipline.<sup>19,61</sup> Male teachers have been recorded to be more likely to perpetrate physical forms of corporate punishment, particularly towards male students, while female teachers more commonly use verbal forms of punishment.<sup>14,18</sup> Research also suggests that physical forms of corporal punishment by male teachers towards boys can be driven by norms and expectations that reinforce masculinity as strong, aggressive and disciplined and femininity as passive, emotional and weak.<sup>18</sup> The acceptance of corporal punishment means that cases are often dismissed and may go unreported.<sup>62-64</sup>





**Figure 4**  
Percentage of Asia-Pacific students who were bullied one or more days during the past 30 days, GSHS<sup>67</sup>

**Bullying** is one of the most widely documented forms of SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region. Estimates on bullying rates vary depending on the methodologies, which often focus on physical forms of bullying and overlook the role of gender.<sup>19,31,65,66</sup> The Global Student-based School Health Survey (GSHS) is the most recognised systematic study of bullying in the region. It highlights that bullying is a relatively common occurrence in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region (see Figure 4).<sup>67</sup>

In a recent global study on cyberbullying of 7,644 youth aged eight to 17 years in 25 countries (with approximately 300 respondents per country), the countries with the highest rates of online bullying were in Asia.<sup>68</sup> Specifically, 70% of participants from China had experienced online bullying and 58% from Singapore – students in both these contexts experienced more bullying online than offline. Further, 53% of the participants from India had experienced online bullying, 33% from Malaysia, 26% from Pakistan and 17% from Japan. Other studies have shown online and offline harassment to be closely interlinked, both in the experience and the perpetration of violence. This suggests that violence and bullying prevention programmes should tackle both as interconnected problems.<sup>69,70</sup>

There has been limited attention to bullying, violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) as forms of SRGBV in Asia-Pacific. According to a recent regional review done by UNESCO, the majority of LGBT students reported having experienced bullying, violence or discrimination.<sup>38</sup> In many studies, rates of peer victimisation among LGBT are higher than among their non-LGBT peers, and victimisation appears to have a more profound effect. In many instances those targeted by violence and bullying do not seek help, as schools have insufficient support or response mechanisms to deal with the issues.

In the above review, the perpetrators of school violence and discrimination based on SOGIE were found to be largely other learners; however, teachers and other education staff were also reportedly responsible. Gender discrimination and the lower status accorded to women and girls in some settings have been found to intersect with homophobia and transphobia to make lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls particularly susceptible.<sup>71,72</sup> Institutional level discrimination and exclusion are also common, including misrepresentation in textbooks and curricula and an absence of gender-appropriate regulations and facilities.

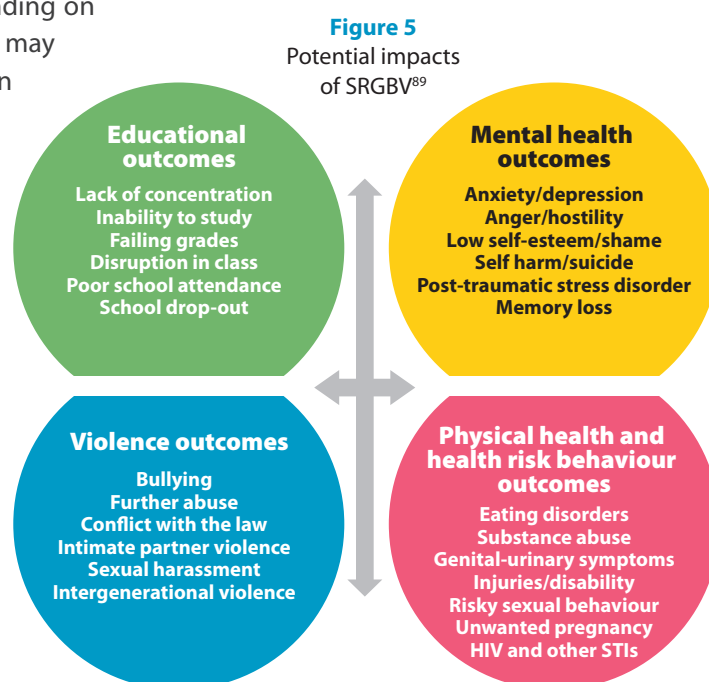
### 3.2 Impacts of SRGBV

SRGBV can have long-term consequences that follow a child into adult life and beyond (see Figure 5 below). The evidence indicates that exposure to and experience of SRGBV may impact a child’s mental and physical wellbeing, education and health status.<sup>19</sup> This may include low self-esteem, depression, increased risk of suicide, high-risk sexual and drug using behaviour, poor physical health and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>73</sup> Further, there is data linking experiences of sexual violence to sexually transmitted infections including HIV and others.<sup>49</sup>

There is also evidence that witnessing or experiencing violence as a child is linked to future acceptance of violence, either as a victim or a perpetrator, in future relationships including parenting. This is supported in research from the Asia-Pacific region, which has found that boys who are abused or witness violence are more likely to use violence in their relationships.<sup>19,57,74</sup>

At a national level, SRGBV incurs costs through negative impacts on individuals, families, schools, communities and society as a whole. Negative consequences are not only measured in social costs such as lost potential, but economies may be negatively impacted, by reduced earning potential and higher health service and law enforcement costs. Investing in the protection of children in schools may reduce the burden of government spending on the long-term consequences of SRGBV and may positively impact the economy and human capital of a country.

In an effort to mediate these impacts, some Asia-Pacific countries are now introducing new policies and programs to curb SRGBV. Several countries, including Viet Nam, are engaging in legislative measures to consider redressing inequities around gender.<sup>49</sup> In Australia, new laws and policies ban discrimination and violence in schools on the basis of gender, gender expression and sexual orientation;<sup>75,76</sup> and education programmes will be used to directly teach about gender-based violence.<sup>77</sup> In India, various prevention programmes have been trialled with athletes and the general student body.<sup>78</sup> Further data collection has been occurring in a range of countries including Australia, Cambodia and India.<sup>38,49</sup> The next section considers the data available about SRGBV in Viet Nam.



### 3.3 Need for a Viet Nam Study on SRGBV

There has been limited research on violence in schools in Viet Nam. The 2013 GSHS found that approximately one in six students, aged 13-17 years, reported being in a physical fight one or more times during the last 12 months, with this behaviour being more common for boys (26%) than girls (10%).<sup>79</sup> Reported experiences of bullying, one or more days within the last 30 days, were however similar for boys and girls (23% and 24% respectively).<sup>80</sup> Other small scale studies have confirmed that (i) school violence is common; (ii) forms of violence among students include physical, psychosocial and sexual violence as well as bullying; and (iii) students with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression are also reported to be targeted for violence.<sup>81-83</sup>

The first study with a clear conceptual SRGBV framework in Viet Nam was implemented by the Spanish international NGO for development, Paz y Desarrollo (PyD).<sup>84</sup> This research studied 815 students across 20 lower secondary schools in Da Nang City. This study has explored gender perceptions among students and found that half of those who experience violence do not report incidents, with female students being more likely to report than male students. Male students were more likely to suffer sexual, emotional and physical violence including that perpetrated by teachers.

In another recent study, Plan International surveyed 3,000 lower secondary and upper secondary students in Ha Noi.<sup>56</sup> The study found similar levels of reported violence by both lower and upper secondary students. Psychological violence was the most common form of violence. The impacts of violence included feelings of depression, sadness, fear of going to school and difficulty concentrating. Reporting mechanisms in schools appeared to be lacking.

Viet Nam has also had some research studies about violence against LGBT students including: a field survey by the Centre for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population (CCIHP) with 520 LGBT people with the average age of 21 in which 41% of participants suffered from discrimination and violence in either schools or universities.<sup>23</sup> Research on 168 LGBT street youth, organized by Save the Children and the Institute of Social and Medical Study found that discrimination against these young people (at home and school) could contribute to their increased risk of homelessness.<sup>85</sup> They were at high risk of violence at home, school and on the streets. Only 15.9% of the LGBT youth in the study had a post-secondary school education; 47.8% had only a lower secondary education, 27.6% had only a primary school education, and 8.7% had no schooling at all. Overall, 44% of the children who had dropped out of school would like to return. If there are no preventive measures put in place to change school responses to LGBT students, these children will only continue to experience discrimination and violence upon returning to school.

The review of existing research on SRGBV in Viet Nam allows us to state that there have been research studies that focus on SRGBV on a relatively large scale in terms of the number of participants; there have already been research studies on both lower secondary and upper secondary students; and both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been used. However, these studies are by no means representing the whole nation when the research location is only limited to one city or province (Ha Noi or Da Nang). Therefore, the key findings derived from these research studies only serve the intervention programmes at a small scale (i.e. Ha Noi).

These studies have compared the gender-based differences and explored awareness, attitudes and behaviours toward gender norms – one of the causes leading to SRGBV. Nevertheless, they have yet to provide comprehensive explanations on gender inequality, gender norms and stereotypes for gender differences related to school violence. In particular, none of the above school-based studies have considered gender or sexually diverse learners including LGBT students.

In conclusion, the literature review on SRGBV-related research showed that SRGBV has been studied from different scales and angles. Most of the national and international research reports emphasise the increasing frequency and negative effects of SRGBV as well as the importance and urgency of addressing this concern officially, deeply and on a larger scale. While Viet Nam has some SRGBV research, this has occurred only on a small scale. Further, research about SRGBV with LGBT students is still very minimal in the world and a gap can be observed in the existing data regarding this population in Viet Nam.

### 3.4 Research Objectives

The literature review therefore highlighted the need for a Viet Nam SRGBV study with the following **research objectives**:

- To gather information on the awareness levels and attitudes regarding SRGBV for students, teachers, school administrators and parents;
- To gather evidence on the nature and scale of SRGBV, including bullying, violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (SOGIE);
- To identify the main drivers or contributing factors toward SRGBV, including SOGIE-related school bullying, violence and discrimination;
- To explore the impacts of SRGBV, including SOGIE-related school bullying, violence and discrimination;
- To identify existing prevention and support measures in schools, and further effective actions that could contribute towards preventing various forms of SRGBV.

Clearly, a complex study needed to be completed to achieve these research objectives. The next section of the report outlines the methodological stance taken and the methods applied in the study.







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# 4 Methodology

**“The most worrisome form of violence is talking bad about each other on Facebook, sending SMS messages via phones and engaging with outsiders to beat fellow friends; thus it is very hard to investigate.”**

*In-depth interview (IDI), Lower secondary school teacher*

## Key Points

- An investigation was undertaken into the nature and extent of SRGBV in schools in North, Central and South Viet Nam.
- Ethical issues were carefully planned including informed consent and privacy for participants. The commitment and support of MOET was essential to enable stakeholders to freely discuss the sensitive topic of SRGBV. A range of local and international research experts, departmental and school contacts, and community organizations aided the project.
- The study applied an emancipatory methodology aiming to achieve social justice goals. Mixed methods of in-person and online surveys, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to collect data from four distinct groups of participants. These included general school students, LGBT students, school staff (administrators and teachers) and parents.

## 4.1 Research Approach & Design

The study investigated SRGBV among general secondary school students. It focused on all forms of violence that occur in various contexts related to school including school premises, the journey (...) (referred to this report as violence related to being LGBT, same-sex attracted, or transgender, or homophobic or transphobic violence), regardless of whether or not they were.

The research team used the **emancipatory theoretical approach**<sup>86</sup> while conducting research on, with and for victims of SRGBV. We aimed to serve social justice goals and inform change in the tradition of emancipatory research for Vietnamese educational institutions and community (rather than simply to generate knowledge for its own sake). The reference group was particularly helpful in refining the project's goals, ensuring the topics considered recent institutional changes emerging locally and internationally, and envisioning training and resource needs for schools and education stakeholders. In order to gather useful data for such ends, we ensured our methodological lens and specific methods/analyses were informed by:

- **A review of international and national research projects on SRGBV** to create a comprehensive synthesis and analysis of scale, current status, causes, effects, impacts and preventive measures against gender-based violence in schools and communities.
- **Consultations with local and international experts** from different disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, education management, sociology and sexual and gender diversity.<sup>87</sup>

**Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods** were used to achieve the research objectives. Johnson has argued that a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative research is particularly useful for breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.<sup>88</sup> Further, quantitative data is broadly argued by theorists to offer weight and convincingness to qualitative stories and opinions, by emphasising frequencies of occurrence, dominance of themes, and/or popularity of certain perspectives.<sup>89</sup> Research questions were adapted to the Vietnamese context after being piloted in one school in suburban Ha Noi and before the official survey was administered. Quantitative data were collected from students aged 11-18 studying in Grades 6-12 of lower and upper secondary schools using a self-administered, paper-based survey. The same instrument was used in an online survey among self-identified LGBT students. Qualitative data were collected from students, teachers, parents and school administrators through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

## 4.2 Study sites

The study was conducted in 6 provinces representing the three regions of the country: North, Central and South. Provinces were randomly chosen, with two provinces selected to represent each region. Four schools were randomly selected in each province from a list of 10 public schools provided by the provincial Department of Education and Training (DOET) including two lower-secondary schools and two upper secondary schools, of which one was an urban school and one a rural school. The names of the provinces and schools are not disclosed to safeguard participants' privacy and confidentiality.

## 4.3 Timeline

The study was conducted from August 2014 to May 2015. The research team undertook pre-testing of the tools in January 2015, the quantitative and qualitative data were collected from early February to late March 2015. Data cleaning and analysis of the qualitative and quantitative datasets were completed by the end of 2015.

## 4.4 Ethical issues

### *Review and approval of research involving human subjects*

There was no formal institutional review board (IRB) at the Viet Nam Institute for Educational Sciences, so this study has not been formally reviewed by an ethics board as per international practice on research involving human subjects. The instruments and methods used, however, draw on those used in a Mahidol University study in Thailand that had received IRB approval. Additionally, the research tools were reviewed by several departments within the MOET during the adaptation and refinement processes to ensure contextualization of language and content.

### *Informed consent*

All potential participants were provided with a participant information form explaining the project details and asking these potential participants (or their parents, for those under the age of 18) to express their written consent to participate in the study. Participants had the right to refuse to participate.

### *Confidentiality & Privacy*

Keeping the confidentiality of the data provided by the participants was an important aspect of the research. The research team safeguarded the confidentiality of the data collected in each school by not disclosing it to others in the school in a way that would have made it possible to identify who provided the data. Only the research team members, transcribers, and those working on this project at UNESCO had access to the IDIs and FGDs data. During FGDs and IDIs, the participants were allowed to choose

between using their real names or pseudonyms. To ensure no leakage of personal information through other FGD participants, participants in the focus groups were also reminded to keep others' information confidential. None of the names of the participants or schools or any other identifying information have been included in this report, to minimise the risk of participants being identified.

To ensure the privacy of self-identified LGBT students outside of the school sample, the location of the IDIs and FGDs were first selected by the students, and then communicated to the research team. The location selected for these events was often one considered safe and familiar, such as community-based organizations like ICS along with the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment (iSEE), while in some cases coffee shops were suggested by the participants.

## 4.5 Quantitative Research

### 4.5.1 Design

To collect empirical data on the status, prevalence, scale, causes/drivers, and consequences of SRGBV as well as interventions already in place, the research team used a survey questionnaire. The survey was offered to potential participants through two modalities: on-site in schools and online (for self-identified LGBT students of lower and upper secondary school age). Separate sets of questions were developed for different participants: students, teachers, school administrators and parents.

The set of questionnaires was developed and finalised through:

- Seeking input/feedback from international and local experts on questionnaire format and content.
- Testing questionnaires with pilot participants from all groups to determine suitability and feasibility.
- Finalising the questionnaires based on the insights provided by experts and the piloting processes.

### 4.5.2 Data Collection Instruments

#### *Survey Questionnaire*

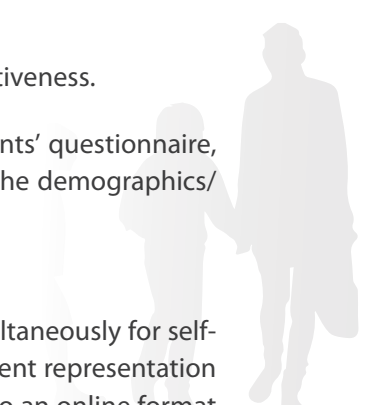
All three questionnaires comprised mainly closed (multiple-choice) questions in combination with some open (short answer) questions for adding/clarifying information. Specifically, the main questionnaire for students included the following themes:

- Demographic information;
- Awareness and attitudes on gender, violence and related issues;
- Experience being bullied;
- Experience witnessing violence;
- Experience committing violence;
- Consequences/impacts of SRGBV; and
- Existing SRGBV prevention and response programmes in schools and their effectiveness.

Questionnaires for teachers and parents followed the basic content of the students' questionnaire, but there were fewer questions for each topic, and supplementary questions on the demographics/professional lives of these participants.

#### *Online Survey*

To further support the on-site data collection, online data collection was used simultaneously for self-identified LGBT students of lower and upper secondary school age to ensure sufficient representation of their experience in the sample. The questionnaire for students was converted into an online format





(using the Google Docs online survey application) and recruitment of participants was initiated by LGBT organizations through different web pages/forums and through network members. The benefits of online research included cost reduction and the increased comfort and security of respondents to discuss sensitive topics about violence and LGBT themes in contexts not controlled by school staff.

### *Sample*

The sample for the quantitative data included students, teachers/administrators, and parents in six provinces representing Northern, Central and Southern Viet Nam. Students and parents were randomly selected with the coordination support of the Department of Student Affairs under MOET. The selected list was sent to each school together with the consent forms to offer these individuals the chance to participate in the research.

All students in the list were given opportunities to read about the research and freely signed the consent forms before the research team came to the school for data collection. For teachers and administrators, invitation to participate was offered where there was minimum disruption to the teaching work planned. In total 3,698 people participated in the surveys (a full break down of participant demographics is supplied in the Results section of the report).

### **4.5.3 Data Collection Processes**

After securing schools' agreement to participate in the study, a work plan for data collection was agreed upon at each school between the research team and school staff, with liaison support from the local Department of Education and Training (DOET) and Bureau of Education and Training (BOET). The research team operating at each participating school included four research officers, two technical staff and one focal person from the local educational management agency.

In each province, the research team directly carried out the on-site survey at two schools (one lower secondary, one upper secondary), while the DOETs and BOETs arranged the survey for the two remaining schools. These collaborators received full guidance from the research team for the administration of the surveys.

Participating schools assisted the research team to prepare the venue for data collection, and the communication with students and parents. While the process for ensuring that the consent forms were signed off by students and parents was new for the host schools, and some staff did not thoroughly understand its purpose, explanations provided by the research team via telephone aided staff in understanding and completing this task to ensure participants were not coerced into participation. During data collection, the host schools did not interfere with the activities led by the research team.

Questionnaires prepared for different groups of participants took place in different rooms of each participating school. These spaces generally included the school meeting hall, library, computer lab or classrooms. The school arranged sufficient tables and chairs in such a way as to avoid discussion and ensure privacy during the survey administration. Any inquiry or request for clarification raised by respondents was addressed directly by the research team members. Following the completion of the surveys, the research team members and technical staff checked each completed questionnaire to ensure that all questions had been accurately completed.

The average time spent completing the questionnaire was 45-70 minutes for students and 40-60 minutes for teachers/administrators and parents. Lower secondary students and parents in rural areas often took more time to complete the questionnaire than their counterparts elsewhere.

#### 4.5.4 Data Analysis

Data from the school-based surveys for students, teachers/administrators and parents were cleaned, entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and processed. The online survey data were processed separately, as respondents were identified from within the participating provinces but lived and studied in many different locations.

There were some questions/items students were allowed to skip/ignore as due to system issues. As some topics addressed in questionnaires were considered sensitive/unfamiliar for some students in schools, a small proportion of students have skipped some questions or items (random missing). In the processing of data collected, these two types of missing have been recognised and treated properly to ensure the final dataset is clean, sufficient and reliable.

### 4.6 Qualitative research

#### 4.6.1 Design

The research team collected qualitative data to achieve a contextualised understanding of the situation in Vietnamese schools and in particular to better understand: the complexity of the causes, motives and impacts of SRGBV; measures, policies and activities to prevent or address the problem; and possible inputs into the recommendations. Qualitative data was collected through:

1. Semi-structured In-Depth Interviews (IDI)
2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

#### Selection of Sample

Qualitative data were collected in 12 out of 24 participating schools or corresponding to two schools, one lower and one upper secondary school, per province. Qualitative information was also collected outside of the school sample among LGBT young people.

**Table 1:** Composition of in-depth interviews (IDIs)

*Eighty-five (85) IDIs were conducted as follows:*

Participants	IDIs
Students	36
Teachers	12
Administrators	12
LGBT students in community	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>

**Table 2:** Composition of focus group discussions (FGDs)

*All together 48 FGDs were convened with 280 persons (4-6 people/group):*

Participants	FGDs
Students	12 groups
Teachers	12 groups
LGBT students in community	12 groups
Parents	12 groups
<b>Total</b>	<b>48 groups (280pp)</b>



The selection of participants for FGDs and IDIs for the school sample was completed through the coordination and suggestion of key school contacts. In the 12 schools where qualitative data were collected, the researchers held in each school:

- 3 IDIs and 1 FGD with students;
- 2 IDIs with teachers and administrators;
- 1 FGD with teachers; and
- 1 FGD with parents.

The recruitment of LGBT students outside of the school sample was undertaken through LGBT networks, communities, and organizations active across the country. These included, for example, ICS Center (ICS), an organization that works to protect and promote the rights of LGBT people in Viet Nam, and iSEE.<sup>90</sup>

#### 4.6.2 Data Collection Instruments and Processes

Each IDI/FGD was conducted by two research officers, one acting as the main moderator and another recording and providing technical support (e.g. supporting the recording and documentation, and ensuring a quiet atmosphere without outside interruption). All IDIs/FGDs began by getting acquainted, greetings, and creating a friendly and open atmosphere in the first few minutes between the research team members and participants. The research officers only started the IDI/FGD formally after the participants felt comfortable and understood and agreed with the proceedings (i.e. having signed the consent form and agreed to the use of a recorder).

Following the design of the FGD guidelines, the research officers chose one of two options to proceed. One way was to lead the participant directly into the issues of investigation by asking questions. The other was to use some supporting aids such as colour cards, sticky notes or drawings to assist participants to easily approach the issues under investigation. Due to time constraints, in most FGDs, the first option was used.

Upon the request of the research team, the venues for the IDI/FGDs with students, teachers and parents were arranged in private quiet places within the school such as libraries, computer labs and counselling rooms to create a comfortable environment. To increase the comfort of the participants, the IDI/FGDs with students at schools were often done by young research officers, whereas the IDI/FGDs with adults were carried out by more senior researchers. Most of the IDIs and FGDs took around 60-75 minutes to complete.

Following the same approach, the self-identified LGBT students participating in the IDIs and FGDs were given the option of proposing the time and venue to carry out IDIs and FGDs to the research team; usually coffee shops and the offices of LGBT organizations. Most of the IDIs and FGDs took around 60-80 minutes to complete.”

#### 4.6.3 Data Analysis

Each IDI/FGD session was transcribed, and read through in full repeatedly by different members of the research team. Each research member that read the transcript coded the transcript based on the research objectives (e.g. key topics) as well as on common themes and responses encountered during data collection (emergent topics). Discussions within the research team were then undertaken to review these stated and emergent themes, and then tabulated, so they could be read and understood in relation to the quantitative findings.

## 4.7 Research Limitations

The research presented several distinct limitations. Some of these include:

- *Generalisability of the data:* As the data were collected from 6 provinces, it does not represent the national scenario and its generalisability is limited. Despite this limitation, all efforts were taken to ensure representative sampling within the provinces and selected localities represent both urban and rural areas.
- *Discomfort with discussions of gender and violence:* This research explored topics considered 'sensitive' (such as violence and sexual matters) both in Vietnamese society in general and at school in particular. Despite carefully designed tools which had been piloted, the possibility that discomfort with the questions could have influenced the responses cannot be ruled out. Additionally, there may have been some concerns from schools that the data could potentially affect the reputation of the schools. MOET's support and encouragement was critical to secure schools' participation and in communicating about the importance of valid and reliable data for action planning.
- *Quality of the research instruments:* Limitations on time and resources led to the simultaneous collection of both qualitative and quantitative research. As such, it was not possible to refine the tools for one method based on data collected in the field by the other method. This limitation was however somewhat overcome by ensuring pilot usage of all methods and instruments for all target groups before proceeding with the full research. Additional limitations were observed with the online survey, including challenges with responding to participants' queries in 'real time' and technical issues with skip questions. Future research using online instruments should consider how to address such limitations.
- *Categories used in data analysis:* There were some limitations to the use of categories in the study. Due to the complexity of young peoples' constructions of sexual and gender diversity which included but sometimes went beyond more widely accepted LGBT identity tropes, the LGBT category was defined by self-identification of traits and behaviors (including for example gender and sexual non-conformity beyond traditional notions of heterosexual males and females). Generally, it was therefore more useful to compare the LGBT group as a whole to male and female students, which could be seen as problematic, but where it was statistically significant male LGBT and female LGBT student group comparisons have been made.
- *Scope of the study:* As this a cross-sectional study, we can identify associations but not enable the establishment of causal relationships (e.g. the experience of bullying causing alcohol consumption). Additionally, the small number of respondents to the online survey (N=241) limits the complexity of statistical tests that could reliably be applied to this sample. Similarly, for the qualitative data collection outside of schools, the research team had limited recruitment networks to engage LGBT students. Community organizations were critical to expanding the scope of the networks, and in guiding the research team to ensure that respondents would feel comfortable discussing these issues with the researchers.







# 5 Findings

**“All violent occurrences I have observed and experienced are related to gender difference (...) Because of love jealousy, a girl’s boyfriend fought with another boy. Another example is a senior female student that had an argument with another one and when she was seriously insulted, she called a friend – boyfriend or brother – to fight for her.”**

*FGD, student,  
LGBT, North*

## Key Points

- Evidence from the 3,698 survey participants, and 365 FGD and IDI participants (students including self-identified LGBT students, school staff and parents), showed distinct gaps in all education stakeholder groups’ awareness and understandings of SRGBV.
- Stereotypes and prejudices against gender non-conformity, femininity and perceived ‘weakness’ were among the factors motivating SRGBV. LGBT students were at particularly high risk of experiencing violence – 71% of LGBT students had been physically abused, and 72.2% verbally abused.
- The study highlighted the existence of clear negative academic and wellbeing outcomes for victims of SRGBV, and new guidelines are needed to overcome a culture of inaction and fear around SRGBV so that schools can become safer and more supportive spaces.

## 5.1 Participant Demographics

There were 3,698 participants in the quantitative part of the study, along with 365 participants in the qualitative part. The basic demographics for participants follow – divided into Students, LGBT Students, Staff (teachers and administrators) and Parents group.

### 5.1.1 Students

In total 2,636 students completed the survey, 12 groups of students contributed to the FGDs and 36 students gave IDIs. Student survey participants covered broad demographics. More than half (1,329) were lower secondary students, and the rest (1,307) were upper secondary students. Student participants included 1,170 males and 1,466 females. Students were aged between 11 and 18, with a mean age of 15.1 (only seven students were between 19 and 20). They were based in various locations; around a third of the group came from each of the North, Central and South Viet Nam regions. Approximately, half of the students were from urban areas and half were from rural areas. Overall 90% lived with both of their parents, under 7% with their mother, under 2% with their father, and a small number lived with other carers or alone. More than three-quarters of the group had no religion. A large portion of the group (over 80% of females and over 70% of males) rated their academic performance in the last term as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. The vast majority (around 97% of females and 93% of males) rated their behaviour in the last term as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’. Overall, less than one-fifth of the students’ fathers or mothers were university-educated (under one-tenth had no education at all). Male students reported having slightly less access to the internet (70% had access) than female students (76.2%). Less than one-tenth of students did not have a mobile phone.

## **LGBT Students in the school survey**

To acquire data on sexuality and gender identity, the research team had to identify terms that would be understood by students in the survey instrument and that would be culturally appropriate within a Vietnamese school context. Students were not asked to self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender in the school questionnaires. Instead, they were asked about their sexual attractions and the preferred gender of their partner, as well as their level of gender-conformity on a scale of expectations related to masculinity and femininity. Students who responded that they were attracted to persons that were the same sex, both sexes or that they did not know, or identified themselves as gender non-conforming (being “less masculine than boys in general” or “less feminine than girls in general”) were categorised in this study as “LGBT” (N=755, or 28.6% of the sample). While someone with a gender nonconforming expression may or may not be transgender, they are included in our analysis as LGBT. All other students were, for the purpose of the analysis in this report, labelled as male (N=905, 34.3%) and female (N=976, 37.0%). In the cases where there are statistically significant relevant differences by sex within the LGBT students group, ‘LGBT male’ and ‘LGBT female’ have been used.

### **5.1.2 Additional focused recruitment of LGBT Students**

There were 241 self-identified LGBT students who participated in the online survey, and 12 groups of self-identified LGBT students contributed to the FGDs and 25 LGBT students gave IDIs outside of school (in community-based locations). Overall, there were few differences between the demographic information for the school-based student group and for the LGBT student survey respondents. There were no statistically significant differences to their location (37.5% North, 29.8% Central, 32.7% South) or rurality (52.3% urban, 47.7% rural); religion (79.2% had no religion); living arrangements (87.8% lived with their parents); academic performance (38.8% excellent, 37.9% good, 17.6% average, 5.1% weak, 7% poor) or behaviour at school (76.8% excellent, 17.5% good, 3.9% average, 1.7% weak). LGBT students in this sample were very slightly more likely to be in upper secondary school (54.3%), and to state that their parents had been university-educated than (over a fifth of LGBT students reported this) compared to participants from the broader student group.

### **5.1.3 Staff (Teachers and School Managers/Administrators)**

School staff study participants included 606 teachers and school managers/administrators who completed the survey, 12 groups of teachers who contributed to FGDs and 24 staff members who participated in IDIs. Staff survey respondents were mainly female (75.2%), and mostly married (87.4%). The vast majority had completed higher education training (82.8% had a Bachelor’s degree, 10.2% had a Master’s degree or higher). They represented a variety of school staff with different levels of career experience (6.3% had under 3 years of experience, 10.1% had 3-5 years, 16.9% had 6-9 years, 23% had 10-14 years, 19.2% had 15-20 years, 24.5% had over 20 years). Largely, participants reported having no religious affiliation (88.9%). The overwhelming majority owned or had access at home to a mobile phone (98.7%), computer (97.8%), television (96.3%), and the Internet (92.7%).

### **5.1.4 Parents**

In total 215 parents responded to the survey, and 12 groups of parents participated in the FGDs. Parents participating in the survey represented various ages; the mean age was 43.4 years and the median was 44. Most parent survey respondents were female (68.8% female, 31.2% male), and the overwhelming majority were married (99.5%). Compared to the school staff group, they had a wider variety of education levels and fewer had completed higher education studies (9.4% primary or lower, 30% lower secondary, 31.9% upper secondary, 3.3% vocational, 25.4% Bachelor’s degree or higher). The vast majority of parent respondents had access to a mobile phone (98.6%) and a television (98.1%). However compared to the school staff group, fewer owned or had access at home to a computer (76.6%) or the Internet (61%).

## 5.2 Awareness of, and Attitudes to, SRGBV

### 5.2.1 Awareness of SRGBV

There was limited awareness of all stakeholders (students, teachers and school managers and parents) of SRGBV overall.

**Participants most commonly constructed SRGBV in relation to physical abuse.** Specifically, SRGBV was often envisioned as actions that cause physical injury. It was particularly described in FGDs and IDIs with a range of education stakeholders in the context of ‘fighting’ between the strong and the weak, in a context of broader youthful social aggression and pecking orders, without consideration of specific gender dynamics or considerations of social bias. For example, participants from various groups defined SRGBV similarly as ‘hands/legs-related abuse contact that causes injury’ (FGD, teacher, upper secondary school, South) or ‘fighting (...) first and foremost, is associated with physical fight’ (FGD, parent, lower secondary school, South). When these individuals also included notions of bullying/teasing with physical fighting in their definitions of SRGBV, they generally saw this as a secondary element by comparison – making comments like ‘the most prevalent form of violence is fighting, even quite heavy fighting (...) other forms such as general teasing behaviours are negligible’ (IDI, LGBT student, North) and ‘when some student got beaten by a gang; a group of students bullied a very gentle school boy or girl; and/or when a school gang forced a peer to go and buy stuff for them’ (IDI, female teacher, lower secondary school, South).

**Some participants constructed SRGBV largely as verbal abuse,** referring to speaking badly about others behind their back and insults. For example, one student described SRGBV as ‘physical and emotional abuse, where people may use foul words to slander others or make them feel insulted and unhappy’ (FGD, student, lower secondary school, South) or ‘mutual disrespect and making trouble for or harassing other people’ (FGD, parent, lower secondary, South). When these individuals also included notions of physical fighting to verbal abuse in their definitions of SRGBV, they generally saw this as a secondary element and listed more examples of verbal abuse – defining SRGBV as ‘fighting, mutual cursing, insults, profanity, defamation, using bad language, talking bad about each other, preventing other friends from playing’ (IDI, upper secondary female student, North) and ‘acts like fighting, emotional abusing, teasing or ridiculing, and name-calling of the other(s)’ parents (FGD, teacher, lower secondary school, South). Some participants underlined the need to not overlook verbal abuse:

FGD, parent,  
lower secondary  
school, North.

*‘Teasing each other and saying humiliating or insulting comments about each other are of mental violence. It is not only fighting and causing injuries that should be called violence.’*

**Participants were unable to name five distinct types of violence, and no participant elaborated on how gender influenced the experience or perpetration of violence.** Some participants could name several forms. For example, a student referred to verbal, physical and sexual violence when sharing that ‘violence is cursing and swearing, fighting, saying disrespectfully the names of each other’s parents. Or it occurs when a male student pulls the hair of a female peer. It can also be a group fighting or touching breasts of each other’ (FGD, student, upper secondary school, Central). Another student also referred to technology-related violence (perpetuated via the Internet, mobile phones and similar media) when defining violence as including ‘fighting, mental terrorism, social media-related violence and hurtful cyber-teasing’ (IDI, lower secondary male student, North). A school administrator also referred to psychosocial abuse, indicating that ‘according to my opinion, violence occurs, beating peer(s), creating factions in class, teasing, and/or discriminating peers’ (IDI, administrator, lower secondary school, South) as did one parent ‘violence...could be in forms of fighting or physical touching. Besides that, violence includes behaviours leading to isolation’ (FGD, parent, lower secondary school, South).







One teacher demonstrated a more complex understanding of SRGBV; 'fighting, teasing, talking bad about the other person on the Internet, posting video clips on the web, taking off the clothes or touching the private parts of another person...all of these are called violence' (IDI, teacher, upper secondary, South).

**Different participant groups had greater awareness and concern about specific types of SRGBV.** Parents and teachers were comparatively more aware of, and concerned about, technology-related violence than other groups, although this kind of SRGBV was not widely spoken about by any

group overall. Many parents and teachers said that technology-related violence worried them most, since they considered it very difficult to control and monitor. 'The most worrisome form of violence is talking bad about each other on Facebook (social network),' said one teacher (IDI, lower secondary teacher, South), concerned that students were 'sending SMS messages via phones and engaging with outsiders to beat up classmates; thus it is very hard to investigate.' Parents commented that technology-related violence led to physical violence through online insults and misperceptions; 'My child has a male friend in Grade 9 through Facebook, who thought that my child had insulted his girlfriend so he slapped my child right in the schoolyard' (FGD, lower secondary parent, North). Some believed technology was behind SRGBV and wanted to see extreme measures taken; '(students are) mostly connected with each other via Facebook networking, and their fights also take place on Facebook. If Internet service was not available (...) conflicts and fights would not have happened' (FGD, lower secondary parent, North).

Students generally were more likely to relate SRGBV to sexual abuse, harassment and intimate partner violence than teachers or parents were. Some students defined SRGBV as 'sexual harassment or sexual abuse' (IDI, female student, secondary school North) or 'same-sex bad mouthing or male student friends fighting for girlfriends' (IDI, male student, secondary school North), for example. There were some cases where students also referred to LGBT students while talking about SRGBV, seeing SRGBV as associated with homophobic or transphobic bullying, or teasing people for gender non-conformity. 'In my school, there is a boy who is often teased' said one student; '...a male student, a bit sissy, weak and small, is frequently shoved and pushed down by other peers' (IDI, lower secondary, male student, South). A male upper-secondary student recalled a Grade 11 boy whom he said 'looks like a girl, walks like a girl, and only plays with girls'. He discussed how this boy was teased by male students particularly, 'being called "*pê-đê*" (a Vietnamese insulting term used to refer to gay men), or "*ái nam ái nữ*" (a Vietnamese insulting term used to refer to bisexual, homosexual, and transgender people)' (IDI, upper secondary male student, Central).

LGBT students participating in the study demonstrated stronger awareness of the negative long-term effects of verbal abuse than other groups, and expressed a stronger fear of psychological abuse than of the other forms of abuse due to the impact it caused on their mental health and wellbeing. This was shared by several persons, as seen in the following quotes: 'I am most scared of psychological bullying

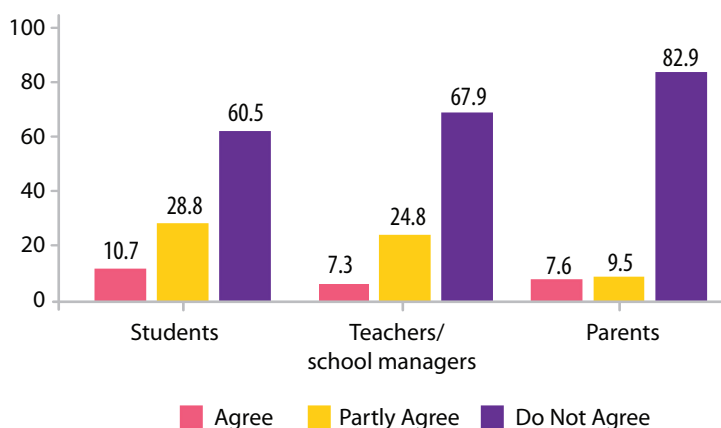
because it brings me down mentally' (IDI, lesbian, North), 'For me the most threatening form of violence is psychological violence because I am easily affected and sensitive.' (IDI, gay male, North), and 'I am more scared of mental violence (... [which]) would gradually be absorbed into the brain and follow me in all activities I do' (IDI, transgender male, North). Part of the psychological threat of verbal abuse for LGBT students was the use of discriminatory and scientifically inaccurate beliefs about their identities.

**Some participants were notably unaware of particular aspects of SRGBV.** Parents were often particularly unaware of school responsibilities to help prevent SRGBV off-campus. They were of the view that schools were responsible only for violent incidents that occurred on their premises, and not for those that happened beyond school boundaries. Some even shared that violent incidents which occur outside school are not SRGBV. One parent asserted that if the violence occurred outside school hours or without the awareness of the school staff 'schools have no responsibility for incidence that occur outside the school boundary. It is not that school does not care but indeed the school does not know about them' (FGD, upper secondary parent, South). Further, some LGBT youth did not understand that the discrimination that they experienced was a form of violence; 'I have never experienced gender-based violent events, but only discriminatory incidents' (IDI, gay male, Central).

### 5.2.2 Attitudes to SRGBV

In order to learn about attitudes to SRGBV, all students, school staff and parents were asked their opinions on a series of statements about SRGBV in the survey instrument. Figure 6 illustrates that the majority of participants disagreed with the statement that 'occasional student fighting is normal'. Specifically, parents most strongly disagreed (82.9%), followed by school staff (67.9%) and students (60.5%). However, it is important to note that over a third of students and school staff partially agreed or outright agreed with the statement – suggesting that for some fighting was an expected part of their school experience.

**Figure 6**  
Agreement with the statement 'Occasional student fighting is normal' (N-Students=2,636; N-Teachers and School managers = 606; N-Parents = 215)

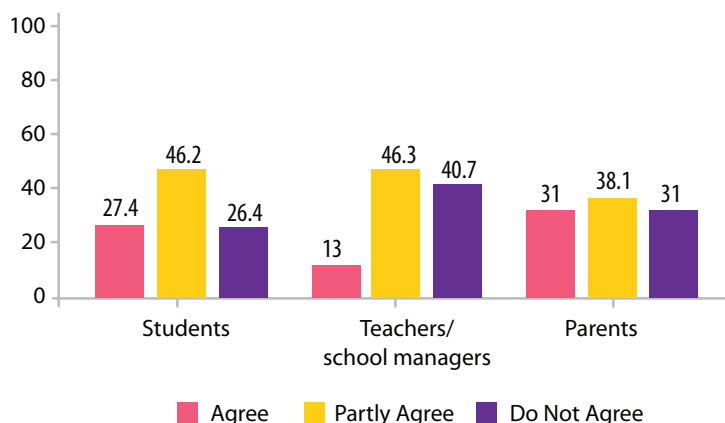


There appeared to be a relatively high acceptance of school staff aggression to maintain order, as illustrated in Figure 7 (next page). Students most strongly agreed or partially agreed (73.6%), followed by parents (69.1%) and school staff (59.3%) with the statement that 'teachers occasionally need to hit or yell at students to ensure that orders are complied with'. Some parents explained that if one spared the proverbial rod they might spoil the child. Parents stated 'I agree that if my children do not behave well, teachers can hit them in the way that they can understand that teachers just want them to be better' (FGD, parent, upper secondary, South), and 'if hitting can help to educate students better, teachers should do so. Teachers can yell or hit students' buttocks, legs or hands but they should do it with care' (FGD, parent, Central upper secondary school). Teachers expressed the most disagreement with the statement overall (40.7%), suggesting they may have a better



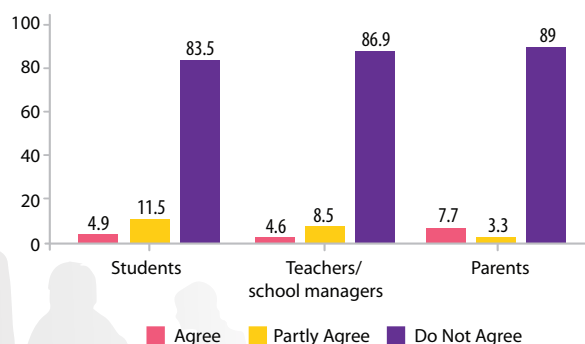
understanding of their professional obligations to protect children. As one teacher explained, 'child-related law limits teachers' discipline; teachers cannot hit them, cannot yell at them. It also damages teachers' reputation to their students' (FGD, teacher, South lower secondary school).

**Figure 7**  
Agreement with the statement 'Teachers occasionally need to hit or yell at students to ensure orders are complied with' (N-Students=2,636; N-Teachers and School managers = 606; N-Parents = 215)

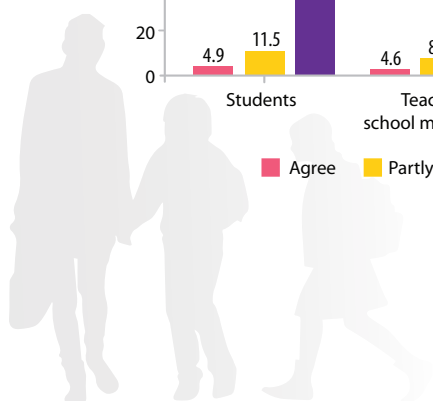
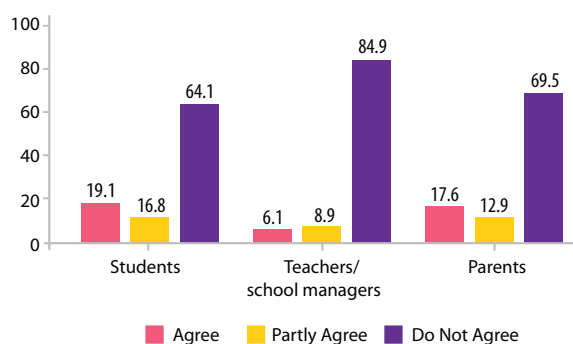


The majority of participants identified that calling someone harmful or discriminatory names is inappropriate, as seen in Figure 8. Parents most strongly disagreed (89%), followed by school staff (86.9%) and students (83.5%) with the statement that 'calling someone with nickname like 'thằng béo' (fatty), 'pê đê' (derogatory word for gay), 'nhà quê' (country bumpkin), etc. is not offensive at all. 'There was less agreement on whether teasing gender non-conforming learners through verbal and other forms of abuse was inappropriate or appropriate (Figure 9). While the majority of all participants disagreed with the statement 'teasing feminine male students or masculine female students is harmless', school staff most strongly disagreed (84.9%), followed by parents (69.5%) and students (64.1%). Teachers may be more aware of legislation in this area due to their strong educational background which may have increased their exposure to non-discriminatory thinking; however, this is not necessarily being passed on enough in their classrooms.

**Figure 8**  
Agreement with the statement 'Calling someone names like 'thằng béo', 'pê đê', 'nhà quê' etc. is not offensive at all' (N-Students=2,636; N-Teachers and School managers = 606; N-Parents = 215)



**Figure 9**  
Agreement with the statement 'Teasing feminine male students or masculine female students is harmless' (N-Students=2,636; N-Teachers and School managers = 606; N-Parents = 215)



## 5.3 Students' Experiences of SRGBV

This section presents respondents' experiences of different forms of SRGBV (physical, verbal, psychosocial, sexual or technology-related violence), drawing out the most important findings.

### 5.3.1 LGBT Students at Highest Risk of Victimization

Students that self-identified as being LGBT (including gender non-conforming learners) are significantly more exposed to all forms of SRGBV than their peers, as seen in Table 3 (next page). In our study, 71% of LGBT students had experienced physical violence, 72.2% verbal violence, 65.2% psychosocial violence, 26% sexual violence and 20% technology-related violence. A gay male student shared one example,

IDI, gay male student, Central

*'I was locked up in a room and beaten after having revealed my homosexual identity, as peers considered that people like me make the school impure.'*



**Table 3:** LGBT students' experiences of violence compared to non-LGBT students

	Male		Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<b>Physical violence</b>	<b>578</b>	<b>64.7%</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>51.1%</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>71.0%</b>	<b>.000***</b>
Was slapped, shoved, hit, kicked, pinched, or had hair pulled.	427	47.4%	342	35.3%	362	48.1%	.000***
Was threatened with a weapon [e.g. scissors, knife, or gun].	76	8.4%	31	3.2%	80	10.6%	.000***
Was locked into a classroom, toilet, or some other room.	430	47.8%	345	35.4%	430	57.1%	.000***
Had belongings stolen, hidden or destroyed [e.g. shoes, books, mobile phones, money]	113	12.5%	72	7.4%	135	17.9%	.000***
<b>Verbal violence</b>	<b>491</b>	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>507</b>	<b>51.9%</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>.000***</b>
Had money robbed or was extorted.	359	39.8%	337	34.7%	358	47.5%	.000***
Was insulted, heard insults against one's parents, imitated, subjected to sarcasm.	71	7.9%	42	4.3%	90	11.9%	.000***
Was verbally threatened.	316	35.0%	224	23.0%	276	36.7%	.000***
Was subjected to comments/stories aimed to humiliate, offend or ridicule.	280	31.0%	227	23.3%	321	42.7%	.000***
<b>Psychosocial violence</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>54.7%</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>45.4%</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>65.2%</b>	<b>.000***</b>
Was subjected to gossip, rumours, or bad talk behind one's back.	305	33.8%	335	34.3%	388	51.8%	.000***
Was boycotted against, isolated, banned, excluded from group or activity by students.	137	15.2%	169	17.3%	213	28.2%	.000***
Was given insulting, mean, disrespectful or unpleasant looks.	367	40.6%	403	41.3%	427	56.6%	.000***
<b>Sexual violence</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>.000***</b>
Had one's skirt pulled up, one's pants taken down or one's shirt taken off.	133	14.7%	74	7.6%	134	17.8%	.000***
Was subjected to non-consensual touching of private parts.	113	12.5%	44	4.5%	126	16.7%	.000***
Was forced to have sex.	8	.9%	4	.4%	35	4.6%	.000***
<b>Technology-related violence</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>.000***</b>
Was threatened, abused, or had a secret exposed or a story fabricated about oneself on the Internet or through a mobile phone.	48	5.3%	30	3.1%	67	8.9%	.000***
Had harmful photos or video clips spread about oneself on Internet or through mobile phone.	50	5.5%	21	2.2%	54	7.2%	.000***
Had messages or emails requesting unwanted sexual relations.	10	1.1%	14	1.4%	39	5.2%	.000***
Had 'identity' stolen, and fake personal information spread via the Internet.	58	6.4%	19	1.9%	74	9.8%	.000***

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

### 5.3.2 Male Students Generally at Increased Risk of Victimization

In comparison with female students, male students particularly suffer more physical abuse (64.7% versus 51.1%), psychosocial abuse (54.7% versus 45.4%) and sexual abuse (22.0% versus 10.6%). Students discussed a difference in the ways males and females were violent which meant that boys were more likely to suffer same-gender physical abuse. One student reflected 'in my school, male students fight each other more often than girls. They have conflicts, they fight and tear off each other's clothes' (FGD, LGBT student North). Another commented 'female students argue with each other more but have fewer fights. Humiliation happens to both male and female students but it is a bit more for female students' (IDI, LGBT student North). A third student made comments echoing this difference between how males and females are violent: 'If girls fought, they often tore each other's clothes (...) The boys often gathered in a group, and jointly beat a guy who they badmouthed. They could use a wooden stick or metal tubes' (IDI, lower secondary female student, North). There was also discussion regarding male students being sexually harassed, and sexual harassment of males in particular not being taken seriously in the lower years of school. 'In my class, there was a girl who touched the private parts of the boys (from Grades 6 to 9). The female teacher already talked to the girl but she continued to do it' (IDI, lower secondary female student, South). 'I used to be harassed by peers touching my private parts; students in the class often did that for fun' (IDI, lower secondary male student, South).

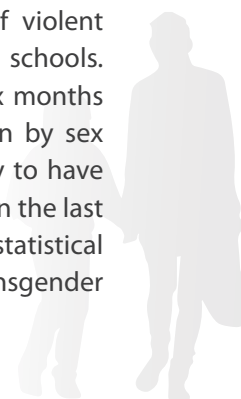
### 5.3.3 School Staff Sometimes Perpetrated SRGBV

Some students revealed in FGDs and IDIs that school staff had also perpetrated SRGBV. Some students recalled incidents where they felt humiliated, such as one teacher who called a student and her friends 'stupid like a cow and a buffalo' in front of the class (IDI, lower secondary school female student, North) or a male teacher having 'tweaked our ears because we could not do the exercises' (FGD, lower secondary school male student, Central). Some discriminatory actions were also taken against gender non-conforming learners, as shared by one female student who recalled how her male mathematics teacher had pulled her up in front of the whole class to shame her for her masculine appearance. She shared, 'I felt that I was not respected. (The teacher) said that I was not a boy and wrote some nonsense on the board to illustrate this. I was then extremely offended' (IDI, LGBT student, North). Another gender non-conforming student was told by a cleaner in the bathroom 'You are not normal, don't come in here anymore' (IDI, LGBT student, North).

Some parents discussed their disappointment in teachers who swore at, shamed or hit students; for example one parent said, 'Teachers without tenderness indirectly enable violence...The teachers should set good examples for students' (FGD, parent, upper secondary school, North). These examples support the quantitative findings presented in Figure 7 on page 30.

### 5.3.4 Types of SRGBV in the last six months

In the school survey, 51.9% students reported having experienced at least one kind of violent behaviour in the last 6 months, while 48.1% reported never having experienced violence in schools. In order to understand the rate of student groups who had suffered violence in the last six months (at the time of the survey), a comparison was undertaken by male and female and again by sex within the LGBT group. This comparison showed that male students were again more likely to have experienced all forms of violence than female students, and the highest frequency of SRGBV in the last six months was experienced by LGBT students (Table 4). This difference is highly significant in statistical terms ( $p=0.000$ ), with gay, bisexual and gender non-conforming male and male-to-female transgender students being particularly affected.





**Table 4:** Types of violence experienced by LGBT and non-LGBT students in the last six months

Have suffered violence in the last 6 months	LGBT				Non-LGBT				p-value
	Male		Female		Male		Female		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Physical violence	147	56.5%	176	36.3%	365	41.0%	266	27.7%	.000***
Verbal violence	126	48.6%	161	33.3%	282	31.7%	236	24.6%	.000***
Psychosocial violence	132	50.8%	187	38.9%	293	33.0%	288	30.1%	.000***
Sexual violence	90	34.6%	49	10.2%	114	12.8%	50	5.2%	.000***
Technology-related violence	53	20.4%	39	8.1%	65	7.3%	37	3.8%	.000***

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001



Students mentioned many types of **physical violence** such as being hit with hands, feet and/or legs, having objects thrown at or used on their body, and other experiences. A male student commented ‘physical abuse happens more often to male students as they do not like talking and usually prefer resolving disputes by physical strength’ (IDI, male student, lower secondary school, North). Physical abuse did not always occur on campus; ‘the students fight each other fiercely (and) frequently go together out of school to fight each other outside there’ (FGD, upper secondary teachers, Central).

Students said that **verbal violence** often happened under the forms of name-calling and ridiculing, and use of harmful names. A range of cruel words were used according to the students – ‘Since my skin is dark, my peers call me ‘grilled corn’ (IDI, lower secondary female student, South) and ‘schoolmates call me ‘pê đê’ (a derogatory word for ‘gay’), because according to them, I walk like a girl!’ (IDI, lower secondary male student, South). School Administrators and parents sometimes expressed their belief that such incidents were quite prevalent in schools – one principal said ‘Violence involving verbal abuse does occur frequently in schools’ (IDI, administrator, South), for example. In spite of that, some teachers considered this ‘foul

language’ between students and not a form of violence. A parent commented, ‘Female students just have a habit of bad-mouthing about or slandering each other’ (FGD, upper secondary parent, South). Some adults took too casual an approach to this form of violence.

**Psychosocial violence** was reported to exist in forms of social exclusion, isolation, and being ignored. The participating students in FGDs and IDIs acknowledged that these forms of violence had happened in their schools; however the groups of parents and teachers did not explicitly mention this form of violence. One girl recalled a student who was not talented at her studies and ‘a little bit bizarre, and sometimes said something that offended other peers so they excluded her.’ (IDI, girl, lower secondary school, South). Another student explained that students who get excluded include those who ‘are too naïve, those with average academic performance, and girlish boys’ (IDI, LGBT student, Central). One student explained how she had been excluded from a dance team she had led, after ‘someone stated on Facebook that it is unacceptable to have a transgender person as team leader’ (IDI, male-to-female transgender, Central).

Incidents of **sexual abuse** were reported less often than other types of violence in schools. Most of the cases were related to being spied on in the toilets or having once pants pulled down and private parts exposed. There were also several incidents of perpetrators taking sexually revealing pictures of others without permission, and uploading them to the Internet. Males were frequently perpetrators. Some recounted incidents of sexual abuse perpetrated by other boys they knew which they felt unable to stop, for example: ‘Once I saw some male students climbing on top of the wall of girls’ toilet to peek in, I just left then’ (IDI, lower secondary male student, Central); ‘One male student uploaded to the Internet some saucy pictures of a female peer, which he had secretly taken before’ (IDI, upper secondary male student, Central); ‘When I was studying in Grade 7, some classmates (male peers) took off my shirt and pulled down my pants...and laughed at me’ (IDI, upper secondary male student, South). Many students appear to lack the necessary skills to respond to their peers’ behaviours, and efforts are required to teach students more generally about respectful conduct.

**Technology-related violence** was less commonly reported, but is believed to be more frequent since the usage of mobile devices and the Internet has become more common. Participating students, teachers and parents all pointed out that this type of violence had happened in school, in such forms as bad mouthing, spreading bad rumours and expressing negative comments on social media. Students explained ‘some peers post on Facebook to ridicule the others regarding their family background (the negative things), or use fake accounts on Facebook to raise and/or pass on bad rumours against others’ (FGD, student, upper secondary school, North). Some conflicts originated on Facebook and then led to violence in the real world:

IDI, male student,  
lower secondary  
school, South

*‘One classmate and a group of students in Grade 7 had some kind of argument on Facebook. At first they made an appointment to meet for a talk, later, they met in a deserted place and ended up fighting.’*

A parent recounted how her son’s friend misunderstood a comment made by her son on Facebook and beat him in the schoolyard (FGD, parent, lower secondary school North). The miscommunications and anonymity online can enable misunderstandings and bullying, but no participants talked about the positive possibilities of the internet in addressing SRGBV. Despite its flaws, technology looks set to stay, so more positive practices around its use need to be explored and taught.



## 5.4 Perceived School Safety for SRGBV

### 5.4.1 Students' Perceived School Safety

Roughly three-quarters of students assessed their schools as a safe space, with higher rates reported by female and male students than among LGBT students (78.1%, 72.7% and 72.7, respectively; see Table 5). The relationship was statistically significant. This appeared to reflect the data on students' experiences of SRGBV, which showed LGBT students to be most at risk of violence of all kinds, and males to be more at risk generally than females. Relatively high perception of safety overall stands in contrast to the data on the experience of violence in the quantitative and qualitative data, and is somewhat hard to explain. A female student commented 'Violence happens weekly in my school... School is not a safe environment' (IDI, upper secondary female student, North).

**Table 5:** Students' assessments of their safety at school

	Male		Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Level of school safety adequate	663	75.6%	742	78.1%	536	72.7%	0.038*
Worried about being abused by schoolmates	234	26.7%	303	31.9%	244	33.1%	0.011*
Worried about being abused by teachers	99	11.4%	108	11.4%	121	16.5%	0.000

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

### 5.4.2 Teachers' Perception of School Safety

The study also considered teachers' perception of their school's safety level for their students, and for themselves. The results show that only 10.5% of teachers believed their schools were not safe for their students (see Table 6 regarding the data on 'School safety level for students'). This was a much more positive evaluation of school safety compared to that of students (24.3% of students considered their schools unsafe and very unsafe). Male teachers were more likely to consider their school unsafe *for their students* than female teachers were (14.2% of male teachers considered their school unsafe for students versus 9.2% of female teachers). Only 5.2% of teachers considered their school unsafe *for teachers*, and 2.5% very unsafe. Again, male teachers were more likely to rate schools as unsafe than female teachers. It was unclear whether this was due to increased experiences of SRGBV or other factors.

**Table 6:** Teachers' assessments of student safety at school

	Male		Female		Total		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
<b>School safety level for students (N=602)</b>							
Very unsafe	9	6.1%	10	2.2%	19	3.2%	0.004**
Unsafe	12	8.1%	32	7.0%	44	7.3%	
Fairly safe	60	40.5%	249	54.8%	309	51.3%	
Safe	57	38.5%	150	33.0%	207	34.4%	
Very safe	10	6.8%	13	2.9%	23	3.8%	
<b>School safety level for teachers (N=597)</b>							
Very unsafe	5	3.4%	10	2.2%	15	2.5%	0.037*
Unsafe	10	6.9%	21	4.6%	31	5.2%	
Fairly safe	35	24.1%	168	37.2%	203	34.0%	
Safe	67	46.2%	193	42.7%	260	43.6%	
Very safe	28	19.3%	60	13.3%	88	14.7%	

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

### 5.4.3 Unsafe Areas Within Schools

Within schools, there are places that students consider the most unsafe, especially toilet areas or places located far from the offices of school management and teachers, or places with no monitoring equipment. The most unsafe places in schools according to many students are male toilets and school halls. 'School halls are not usually used and they are often excluded from staff monitoring' explained one student (FGD, upper secondary student, South). Another said 'Toilet areas are the most unsafe areas as students often fight there (...) and teachers do not go so often' (FGD, upper secondary student, South)." Students also mentioned that areas behind schools were places where high threats of violence pervade. One student recounted 'Students often fight behind the school area where surveillance cameras do not exist. There will often be a person who watches and...notifies others if teachers come' (IDI, lower secondary male student South). Other unsafe areas included over-crowded spaces where students lined up, like the canteen' (IDI, upper secondary female student, North).

### 5.4.4 Unsafe Areas Beyond Schools

Focus groups and interviews showed that SRGBV happened in areas beyond the school grounds including, for example, in the area around the front school gate, behind the school, in local public areas or on the trip from or to home. Teachers said: '[T]hey did not fight at school but outside school (at drinking shops located around school) or in other places located far from school' (FGD, secondary school teacher, South) and 'Students who have study-related conflicts often fight outside school' (FGD, upper secondary teacher, Central). One principal admitted 'Violence happened outside school so it was difficult to control' (IDI, lower secondary school administrator, Central). Some violent incidents had root causes in frictions previously generated inside the school, but the students then "handled" it outside school in order to avoid trouble with school management or teachers.

There were also SRGBV incidents which happened outside of schools between students who were not from the same school. One student explained 'Violence happens weekly in my school. Recently, there was a person who came from outside and fought my schoolmate' (IDI, upper secondary female student, North). Girls were sometimes coerced into intimate relations through force; a parent related 'There was a case where a girl was called by a male classmate to go out of the school to meet two gangsters who forced her to become the classmate's girlfriend, or else she would be hit' (FGD, parent, Central).





## 5.5 Perceived Motivations behind SRGBV

### 5.5.1 Assertions of Masculine Strength as Motivation for SRGBV

Male students liked to appear confident and strong, and wanted to assert strength and power, presenting themselves as “conquerors and protectors” of girls. Sometimes fighting was a means to enact a masculine gender identity. A student gave one example where ‘a boy teased his classmate’s girlfriend, so he was beaten by the classmate’ (FGD, lower secondary student, Central). Another commented that masculine posturing and fighting ‘incidents were all connected to girls’ (FGD, LGBT student, North). A teacher agreed, saying ‘a motivation for violence is that students like to assert themselves. Males tend to do this more than females, sometimes to protect their girlfriends’ (FGD, teacher, lower secondary, Central). Some parents held similar perspectives, for example, one commented ‘Boys like to express, to assert their masculinity. Another motivation is to fight over girlfriends’ (FGD, parent, upper secondary, South). Conversely, weakness (often correlated to femininity or homosexuality) was often a target for attack: a student noted ‘peers who are gentle and naïve often tend to be bullied’ (FGD, upper secondary student, North). A teacher explained, ‘generally, more brave and fearless students are likely to bully others to show off their (masculine, tough) identity; on the contrary, those who are bullied don’t dare to react, fight back or report the event to teachers (IDI, upper secondary teacher, North).



### 5.5.2 Devaluing of Femininity as Motivation for SRGBV

The qualitative data repeatedly showed that male students who did not express their ‘masculinity’ in accordance with gender stereotypes, but appeared to be flamboyant, weak or gentle, often got nicknames and were excluded. One student said ‘There are girls who seem masculine but they are liked by many others, while girl-like boys tend to be disliked’ (IDI, upper secondary male, North). Another student agreed ‘More often than not, gay (homosexual males) and trans (transgender) are victims of violence.’ (FGD, lesbian student, Central).

Teachers concurred with this point; one said ‘male students with gentle behaviours are often teased by peers’ (FGD, upper secondary teacher, North), another reflected ‘seemingly flamboyant boys are considered gay and isolated’ (FGD, lower secondary teacher, South). Parents had also witnessed this phenomenon – ‘I noticed the students called some boys “aunties”. I asked my child why he called his friends that. He said that it was because those boys acted a lot like girls’ (FGD, parent, upper secondary, North). There seemed to be an indirect devaluing of women and femininity through the disdain of male femininity; a sense that femininity should not be aspired to and should be actively punished. There was also a greater chance of celebration of masculinity on anybody whether male or female (in comparison to femininity) – with teachers discussing how masculine girls were often seen as leaders in and beyond class.

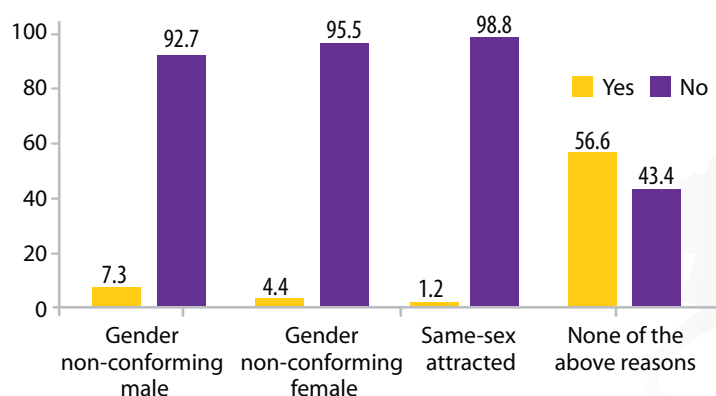
### 5.5.3 Gender Non-conformity as Motivation for SRGBV

When asked about what factors motivated the perpetration of violence, 12.9% of perpetrators indicated that their victims’ deviation from gender stereotypes in terms of masculinity, femininity or sexual orientation played a role (see Figure 10 below). It is important to note that their stated motivations may not always be their ‘real’ motivations, as these can be difficult or shameful to admit; however, we find the data on motivations important to consider. Students were more likely to admit that they inflicted violence on a boy who seemed feminine (7.3%) than a masculine girl (4.4%); or somebody who had feelings for individuals of the same sex (1.2%). The qualitative data (and data about who was subjected to violence most often) contrastingly all suggested that violence on the basis of gender was far more common than perpetrators admitted.

Students explained, ‘(Many LGBT students like us) were bullied because we were “neither boys nor girls” (FGD, LGBT, South) and ‘girl-like boys are teased more often since they seem weak like girls’ (FGD, lower secondary student, Central). Students also inflicted psychosocial violence (i.e. discrimination, isolation) on peers who did not dress according to ‘norms’ of masculinity and femininity. For example, one student spoke of an ostracised peer, saying: ‘He is fashionable with ear piercing, finger rings and laces. He speaks like a girl. He often hangs out with females. The classmates do not play with him’ (FGD, male upper secondary student, North).

**Figure 10**  
Student perpetrators’ reported motivations for their violence against peers  
(N-Students = 659)

Note: Gender non-conformity here was: ‘A male who behaves in a girlish way’; or ‘A female who behaves in a boyish way’





A parent commented that male students were sometimes told by staff that they looked too feminine at her child’s school, or even told to ‘go home and ask their mums to buy some girls’ dresses to wear. Whenever there is a boy that looks gentle and fragile with fair complexion, he also often gets teased’ (FGD, parent, upper secondary, North). A transgender student recounted a terrible episode of bullying based on gender non-conformity: ‘Because they noticed that I was a bit effeminate, they teased me as a homosexual and pulled my pants down to check my true sex. Then I felt very sad and angry, helpless and insulted’ (IDI, transgender student, South).

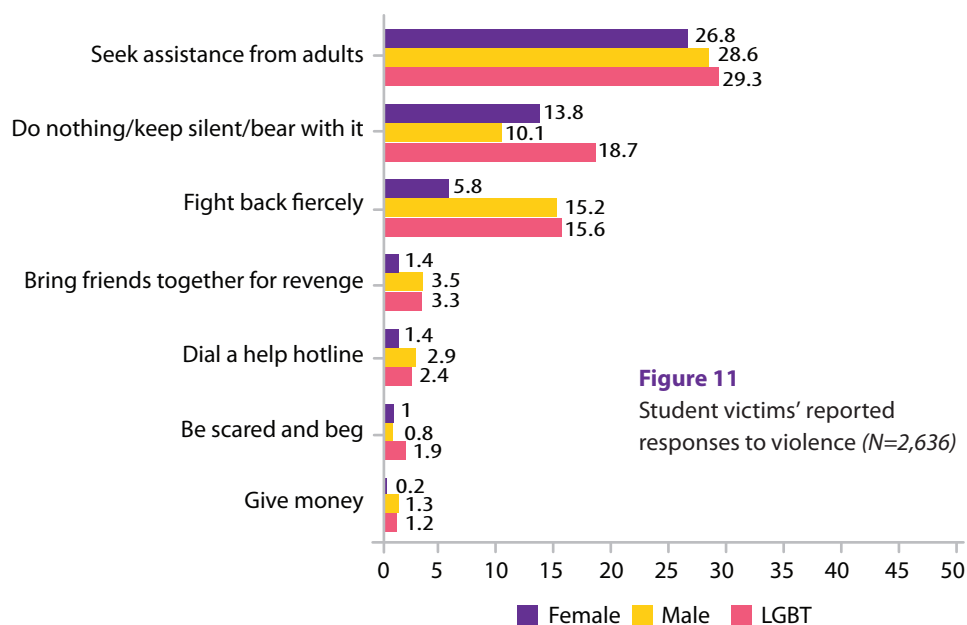
### 5.5.4 Intersections between Motivations

The qualitative and quantitative information overall showed that the most popular motivations for SRGBV were in the intersections of the reinforcement of gender stereotypes/norms, the devaluing of femininity (particularly on male or transgender bodies) and the belief that masculine identities could be asserted through shows of strength over perceived weakness. In addition, a number of teachers and parents believed that the violence between students was also enhanced by the physio-psychological characteristics of puberty, hormones and the need to assert an identity amongst peers. Teachers, administrators and parents also argued that some students from poor families, ethnic minorities, from the countryside coming to cities to study, or with different accents and dialects, were also often targets of teasing. Intersections of gender, sexuality and these other socio-economic factors can combine to create even further ostracism. One student explained: ‘my peers did not like migrants and some even said that I am useless as a gay. My good academic performance made my peers stigmatise me even more seriously’ (FGD, LGBT student, Central).

## 5.6 Responses to SRGBV

### 5.6.1 Student Victims’ Responses to Violence

Student victims of SRGBV surveyed were most likely to report that they responded to violence by seeking assistance from adults (see Figure 11) while the second most reported response, particularly among LGBT students, was to ‘do nothing or keep silent and bear with it’. Less popular options included seeking out assistance to get revenge, calling a hotline for help, begging and lastly, attempting to compromise with perpetrators by buying protection through money or gifts.



**Figure 11**  
Student victims’ reported responses to violence (N=2,636)

The information collected from IDIs and FGDs with students suggested more limited help-seeking, with many examples of why silence was often seen as the viable option. Many students said they felt that if they reported SRGBV, their attacker may take revenge upon them, so in lieu of gathering supporters around them or fighting, silence seemed their best defence. One boy explained ‘when we are bullied, we just keep silent and bear with it; if it beyond our capacity to bear it, we will often talk back’ (IDI, upper secondary male student, North). Another student shared:

IDI, upper secondary male student, North

*‘Sometimes (victims) gather a group (to defend us); if we don’t have one, then we have to keep silent and bear with it; usually those who are beaten are very unlikely to fight back, they do not report to a teacher either.’*

The interviews and focus groups also revealed that alerting a teacher could be framed as ‘snitching’ by other students and lead to further retribution. ‘When being beaten, the person who suffers from it usually bears with it. Snitching would even make the guy keep beating’ reflected one student in the focus groups; ‘there was a case when a peer snitched and then constantly suffered beating’ (FGD, upper secondary student, North).

### 5.6.2 Student Victims’ Assistance-seeking Attempts

To understand who student victims of SRGBV sought help from in the survey, we provided a question offering a list of key people in their lives whom they might turn to. Of the options provided, student victims of SRGBV were most likely to report that they sought assistance from school staff (17.7%; including teachers/administrators – 14.8%, and principals – 2.9%) or parents and members of their family (16.9%). Just over a tenth of respondents sought help from their friends.

Data gathered from FGDs and IDIs gave some indications of why reporting was, in practice, fairly minimal. Some participants shared that they feared revenge if they went to a teacher or parent, or that they lacked faith in teachers’ and parents’ ability to solve the problem. One student explained ‘the (beaten) peers do not report to teachers, fearing subsequent revenge’ (IDI, lower secondary female student, North). A teacher observed ‘usually the eighth and ninth graders would not report to teachers and, instead, solve the problem on their own’ (FGD, lower secondary teacher, South). Further, a parent noted that ‘more often than not, attacked students do not tell parents about the event until being asked about their injuries’ (FGD, upper secondary parent, South). Some school administrators acknowledged that students feared reporting SRGBV could make their situation worse:

IDI, lower secondary administrator, North

*‘In fact, there are many reasons that hinder a student from reporting to teachers or school board...(such as) the selfishness in the society, i.e. ‘if nobody harms me, then I have no reason to care about their business’. Moreover, it would even be better not to report because that could affect you...(you) don’t know if there is anything to gain from reporting, who knows, you may get beaten or revenged upon if you report.’*

### 5.6.3 Student Bystanders’ Responses to Violence

To understand the actions taken by student bystanders of SRGBV, those who reported witnessing violent behaviours were asked what they did in response. Table 7 (next page) shows that students were most likely to report that they called on teachers/staff in their school (just over one fifth did so), tried to prevent the violent behaviours (just under one fifth did so), or did nothing – an only slightly less popular option, more likely to be chosen by LGBT students.

**Table 7:** Reactions by student bystanders

	Male		Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Do nothing	161	17.9%	161	16.6%	156	20.7%	0.086
Try to prevent them	184	20.5%	177	18.2%	147	19.5%	Not sig
Encourage them	18	2.0%	7	0.7%	19	2.5%	0.010*
Support victim	105	11.7%	95	9.8%	112	14.8%	0.005**
Call teachers/staff in school	204	22.7%	217	22.3%	173	22.9%	Not sig
Tell parents	78	8.7%	129	13.3%	106	14.1%	0.001***
Tell friends	75	8.3%	103	10.6%	109	14.5%	0.000***
Dial the help hotline	21	2.3%	32	3.3%	35	4.6%	0.035*

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Bystanders intervening in violence were less common according to the focus group and interview data. Teachers and administrators saw student bystanders doing little and only a few intervening, with one stating ‘I found most of students just looked on what was happening, very few of them protected (the victim) or intervened’ (IDI, lower secondary teacher, North) and another recalled ‘most bystanders watched and even encouraged the attack’ (FGD, upper secondary teacher, Central).

Some teachers expressed concerns about the indifferent attitudes held by student bystanders of violent behaviours. As one teacher shared, ‘students now tend to ignore such events if they are not directly affected...many students are indifferent and this phenomenon is alarming’ (IDI, lower secondary administrator, North). Some parents were more sympathetic to bystanders who did nothing, recognising the risks for students if they intervene or report incidents:

FGD, lower secondary parent, North

*“Since they are still young, they just stand looking but not intervening. The children do not know each other, if he/she intervenes, he/she could be beaten, too. Often, the perpetrators call a big group to support the fight. The children just stand watching but could not be witnesses.”*

Findings from the IDIs and FGDs among students suggest that the option of doing nothing may have actually been more common amongst student bystanders. One student admitted ‘no one interferes... If I intervene when a peer is being bullied, I will likely become bullied like the victim’ (IDI, lower secondary female student, North). Another student shared, ‘I just stand by to watch, not daring to interfere for fear of being beaten’ (IDI, lower secondary male student, North). Some students reported on the dangers of intervening: ‘Passers-by also witnessed the attack but no one dared to intervene (when seeing a peer attacked by a gang). We did intervene later, but immediately got beaten’ (FGD, lower secondary student, South).

It also appeared that encouragement of, or collaboration with, perpetrators may have been under-reported in the survey data, given the frequency of group violence discussed in interviews and focus groups. A boy recalled how when he was being beaten by bullies, ‘some peers in the class even encouraged the attack, shouting ‘beat harder’. No one informed the teacher’ (IDI, lower secondary male, North). Such reactions sometimes depended on the relationships between the bystander and the victims, or the gravity of the incident; one girl said ‘I would cheer the attack against those who hate me’ (IDI, lower secondary female, North), another commented ‘If it is a physical attack, most people may walk away without caring about it, if it is a psychological one, everyone may join in’ (IDI, lower secondary female, North).



LGBT and gender non-conforming students also confirmed in the FGDs and IDIs that when they themselves were bullied, very few peers dared to defend them, interfere in or prevent the incidents, especially for physical violence. One student shared, 'students intervene if the victim is a friend; if not, they just witness as bystanders' (IDI, gay male student, North), while another shared 'my close friends are willing to include me in theory, but refrain from interfering if I am physically attacked' (FGD, LGBT, North). Explaining an incident that had occurred, one student said, 'nobody came to intervene (...) people thought that it was simply a normal encounter, so they did not interfere' (FGD, LGBT, Central). One student had chalk thrown at her and chalk powder repeatedly dumped on top of her head, and nobody ever spoke up for her or stood near her:

IDI, bisexual girl, North

*'At most, some female friends who felt sorry for me came to give me a handkerchief to clean my face. No one dared to stand by me. By the way, those things happened on a daily basis. Such childish things as teasing or trampling on a school bag, ordering me to leave my seat, so on and so forth became part of my daily life which I had to accept.'*

The indifference towards bullying behaviours against LGBT students also arose from the fear of being presumed to be an LGBT person if they defended them. For example, one boy said that when he was bullied, if somebody intervened, the perpetrator would likely say to him/her 'Are you also gay?'. He reflected that 'because they were afraid of being teased, they refrained from intervening' (IDI, GBT student, North). Not only watching with indifference, bystanders of violence sometimes cheered or even joined in the attack. One student explained that this could be to avoid reprisal: 'some even tried to cheer the attack without intervening, fearing they would be punished without doing so' (IDI, lower secondary female, Central). This kind of behaviour could have a cumulative effect, creating a mob mentality; 'if someone started teasing, the rest would flock in' (FGD, LGBT, North).

In short, when students personally experienced instances of SRGBV, they attached some importance (in theory) to seeking assistance from adults and consider teachers/school staff, and parents as significantly reliable people. However, a portion of them also expressed a lack of confidence in the adults' capacity to solve their problem. They therefore seemed to have more trust in friends and peers – especially in the case of LGBT students; even when those friends did not ultimately come through for them. All students who were victims wanted the aid of others, yet few actively and consistently gave aid to others in a climate of fear and uncertainty. As for bystanders of violence, besides some efforts to report such events to teachers or to prevent them, there were students who chose to watch or ignore the attacks for fear of revenge or the social implications of being an ally to someone who was gender non-conforming or LGBT (for example). Sometimes joining in the violence was even seen as a means to 'safety'. Such twisted logic needs to be challenged. It appeared to stem from such factors as broader indifference to SRGBV, unclear school processes and support levels for handling and preventing SRGBV, fear about not 'fitting in' to gender and sexuality norms and a lack of straightforward training on more assertive steps to protect themselves and others.



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## 5.7 Impacts of SRGBV

### 5.7.1 Student Victims' Wellbeing and Academic Outcomes

Table 8 indicates an obvious connection between having experienced violence and negative mental and physical health outcomes and academic performance outcomes. The associations between the experience of violence and academic and wellbeing outcomes were seen most clearly among the LGBT and gender non-conforming victims, and statistically significant for suicidal ideation, self-harm and alcohol consumption.

**Table 8:** Wellbeing and academic outcomes for student victims of SRGBV

	Victims					Non-Victims				
	Male/Female		LGBT		p-value	Male/Female		LGBT		p-value
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
Thoughts of suicide or self injury in the last 12 months	172	13.6%	149	24.9%	0.000***	39	6.9%	23	18%	0.000***
Intentionally self-injured or attempted suicide in the last 12 months	88	7%	89	14.9%	0.000***	17	3%	11	8.6%	0.007***
Dropped out	474	26.1%	225	31.1%	0.052	119	21.3%	33	26%	Not sig
Alcohol consumption	233	18.4%	155	25.8%	0.000***	69	12.1%	27	21.3%	0.007***
Final study results under average	50	3.9%	37	6.1%	0.025*	19	3.3%	5	3.9%	Not sig

Note: \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Victims of SRGBV often reported that they suffered from psychological and social disorders including anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. One student said that when he was subjected to verbal abuse he would 'get sad, fed up, and angry' (IDI, lower secondary male student, South); another said '(Whenever I got teased like that) I wanted to commit suicide' (IDI, transgender male-to-female student, North); and even very young students made comments like 'friends hated me and stayed away from me; I used to think of committing suicide at Grade 9' (IDI, upper secondary male student, South). Some victimised students had the tendency to become violent themselves. One student commented:

IDI, upper secondary male, North

*'I think these students who often bully others perhaps had been bullied before or have unfortunate home situations, so they want to prove themselves.'*

Table 8 also shows that 14.9% of LGBT and gender non-conforming students and 7% of male and female student victims of violence had self-harmed or attempted suicide in the last 12 months. One student commented, 'In the beginning of Grade 9, I thought of death, I was so afraid. I just wanted it to end and did not know what else to do' (IDI, lower secondary female student, South). Another recalled, '(the time when I cut my own wrist) was when I felt distressed' (IDI, female bisexual student, North). A third girl stated that her self-harm attempt was misunderstood and ridiculed at school; 'in Grade 9, I once cut myself and that ordeal was brought up in front of the whole school...they pried into what I did, and posted it on the school's Facebook page' (FGD, lesbian, South). A young man recalled 'I do not think of suicide because my life was given to me by my parents. Just once, I punched the wall and my hand was bleeding' (IDI, gay, Central).

In short, the quantitative and qualitative data showed that SRGBV had negative impacts on students in terms of their mental and physical wellbeing, and academic performance, leading to adverse behaviours towards others in some instances.

### 5.7.2 School Staff Assessment of Impacts of SRGBV on Students

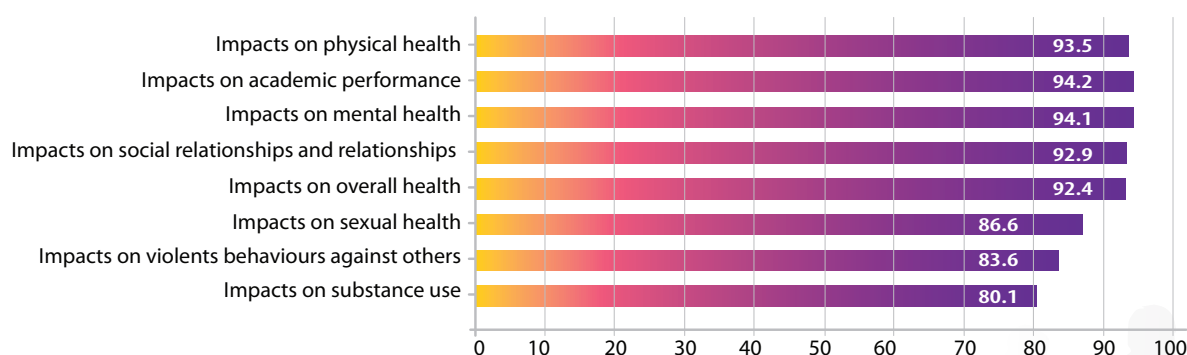
Figure 12 reveals that school staff overall have a high awareness about the likely negative impacts of SRGBV on students. Some teachers indicated that violence gave students scars or pain physically and sometimes for the long-term; one explained ‘the student in the story that I just recounted was kicked in the ribs. Two days later, there was pain which indeed affected his health severely’ (IDI, upper secondary teacher, North). Teachers appeared particularly aware of mental health outcomes during the FGDs and IDIs, and understood how SRGBV caused students to feel anxious, stressed, angry, afraid, isolated and insecure. One teacher shared an example of a student in her class where others had ‘even invented a song about him, so he was very stressed and angry. They keep singing that song, so that the student was very sad’ (FGD, lower secondary teacher, North). Another teacher commented on a situation where the pressures and stress accumulated to a point where the student became ‘less active in communicating with others’ and stopped participating in class. Another teacher shared that ‘being bullied makes students timid, unable to participate in activities; weak in academic performance. Being teased and isolated by peers makes students not to dare to participate in the class’ (FGD, lower secondary teacher, Central). Another teacher reflected ‘the students suffering from violence perform poorly academically and lack focus during class...they might not want to go to school or go to class, and might not want to interact with others’ (IDI, lower secondary teacher, North).

Some teachers had witnessed first-hand the decline of students over time. In some situations, ultimately the student left school, due to the immense weight of the bullying on their wellbeing. One teacher shared an example:

IDI, lower secondary teacher, South

*‘Recently, I dealt with a situation where a sixth grader decided to drop out. His parents punished him and no matter how much they tried, he would not go back to school. Later, we discovered that there was another student, who repeated Grade 6 for three years, who had bullied him and forced him to give up his lunch money every day.’*

**Figure 12:** Impacts of SRGBV on students



Other students were reported to have become hardened due to repeated bullying, as they were so used to having to be defensive as a form of self-protection. This was particularly true for the most visible LGBT kids and especially gender non-conforming or transgender students, who ‘got teased a lot, but then got used to it’ (FGD, upper secondary teacher, Central). Some teachers made comments that it was ‘difficult to interact with girlish boys as they seem to be indifferent and careless’ (IDI, upper secondary staff, South), as they had become so disconnected. Another teacher pointed out that sometimes in

being defensive, kids became bullies themselves by beginning to attack others; recalling a student who 'was beaten by other students, but somehow he joined those students that once hit him and went to bully other kids' (FGD, lower secondary teacher, South).

The negative impacts experienced by victims of SRGBV are also experienced by school communities including students who report increased fear as bystanders and may even be bullied by victims, and parents and teachers who must witness the decline and disconnection of the children in their lives. SRGBV leads to contextual and cultural problems impacting everyone at school. SRGBV is not just the business of victims; it is in the interest of the whole community to stop it.

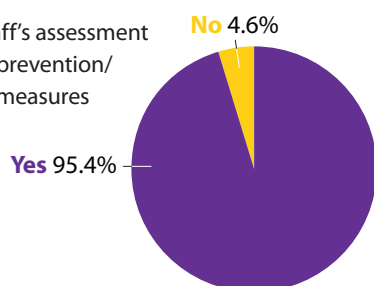
## 5.8 Prevention Programmes/Response Interventions

### 5.8.1 Mixed Assessments of School Prevention & Response

Quantitative and qualitative data show that there are vast differences between school staff's and students' assessments of SRGBV prevention/response mechanisms in school, with 95.4% of the teachers/school administrators and only 14.6% of students affirming measures in place (see Figures 13 and 14).

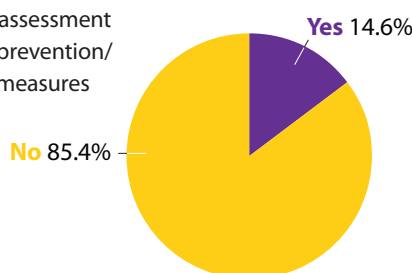
**Figure 13**

School staff's assessment of SRGBV prevention/response measures



**Figure 14**

Students' assessment of SRGBV prevention/response measures (N=2,636)



Broadly, administrators and teachers shared that they felt schools have proper programmes for educating about violence prevention. One administrator shared, 'I find that it is a good thing to educate about ethics for students. The best thing I have done is to coordinate school supervisors, security guards and the local self-defence and security forces' (IDI, Administrator, South). The administrator had also coordinated yearly thematic activities for homeroom teacher management. One teacher recounted an impressive range of holistic, multi-faceted programmes used at their school:

FGD, teacher, Central

*'The school organizes young pioneer club activities to have students become more sociable and engaged in exchanges among different squads, and conducts activities to facilitate their deeper learning about adolescent development. Right at the beginning of the school year, students wrote their commitments against school violence, which were also shared with their parents for effective coordination between the school and families. The school also often invited the youth union of the local community to join their celebration of special events to allow students to learn more about the traditions of the previous generations. Homeroom teachers held various extracurricular activities, class meetings and parents' meetings for effective coordination on a regular basis. As for the school, there are campaigns for promoting 'child friendly school and proactive students.'*

Administrators and teachers expressed their confidence in their schools' effective response in the event of violence: one administrator commented: 'My school is safe from violence; I cannot assure the safety outside the school, but nothing has been reported' (IDI, administrator, Central). Another indicated that 'The school detected violent behaviours and prevented them in time' (IDI, administrator, Central).

Teachers similarly felt they handled violence effectively, and a typical statement by teachers on this topic was ‘teachers’ handling of violence cases is effective’ (IDI, teacher, Central).

Students’ opinions vastly contradicted this assessment in both the quantitative and the qualitative data. One student shared, ‘Teachers are not effective in controlling school violence as there are a great number of cases in the school. Measures taken by the school are not useful too’ (IDI, lower secondary female student, Central). A male student offered this explanation for their school’s inadequacy:

IDI, student,  
Central

*‘School measures to respond to violence are not effective because the school campus is too large for teachers to take control of all situations. The teachers’ response to violence is not working and violent behaviours still occur in a great number.’*

Some students had become so disheartened by their experiences that they had even lost hope that any prevention programmes could help. A boy from the North explained: ‘It is best to teach students at the early age, because teachers cannot do anything if students fight outside school. Even if teachers learn about it, they can do nothing’ (IDI, lower secondary male student, North). Another student reflected ‘In my opinion, there is nothing you can do to reduce violence. It is too difficult’ (FGD, upper secondary student, North). LGBT students were even less confident in their schools’ efforts to prevent SRGBV, which is unsurprising considering their high risk of many kinds of violence. Several shared that they felt that the school focuses more on its reputation and results than the social context in which these assets are developed. ‘School management itself has no interest in this programme so there is no action taken. This means that they do not pay attention to issues other than learning and academic achievement, that’s all’ (FGD, LGBT student, North).

Parents also expressed concern in the FGDs and IDIs about the schools’ effectiveness and measures for violence prevention. They were of the view that teachers had not thoroughly understood students’ mentality or reacted in a timely manner when incidents occurred. One parent said ‘Students rarely share their problems and thoughts with teachers. For them, the teachers have no time for that since they come to school just to teach and return home after lessons. If they meet with students...the talks focus mainly on studying’ (FGD, parent, South). A parent whose Grade 9 student was beaten by another student reported that ‘neither teachers nor the school investigated or handled the incident’ (FGD, parent, South). Parents worried that, beyond not investigating incidents, sometimes schools blamed the wrong parties without taking the time to understand the social complexities of students’ situations. One parent argued that ‘the school does not understand the students’ situation; although the school knew that a student had an arm broken (...). If such a thing happened again, the concerned student(s) would be expelled’ (FGD, parent, Central).

There was a shared opinion among students and parents that teachers and schools could do more to prevent violence. Many envisioned this occurring through such strategies as protection policies, education programmes, relationship-building, better surveillance and intervention, and a respectful level of privacy in dealing with developing young people’s learning around SRGBV:

IDI, upper  
secondary male  
student, North

*‘I would prefer stricter security guards, stricter teachers. If there is a fight, there should be immediate intervention; instead of requiring the wrong-doers to do a summary self-review of their conduct, because after that, further fights happen. Sometimes, the wrong-doers’ names are made public to the whole school. This is not an effective way since it cannot solve the problem definitively. It is important to help the parties involved understand each other. I felt that the security guards are not helpful to the school.’*



There was a sense that public shaming of people either as perpetrators or as victims was not useful and attracted more violence and revenge; students needed to learn about SRGBV in ways that allowed them to ‘save their reputation’ in a complex youth social environment, as well as learn how to relate better to others and improve social relationships. Privacy was especially a key concern for several LGBT students and they wanted schools to handle their complaints in a more sensitive manner. ‘The homeroom/form teacher pays close attention to emotional matters...however, we find it unpleasant that she often brings such issues to the attention of the whole class’ said one student (FGD, LGBT student, Central), continuing, ‘I wish in the event of personal matters related to certain student(s), she would meet the students privately to address the problems’. Several students wanted teachers to be trained in contemporary perspectives on SRGBV, gender and sexual diversity to overcome traditional prejudices and sometimes sexist or homophobic views. ‘Many teachers in the school still hold gender-related biases. It is important to change their perspectives’ (FGD, LBT student, Central).

### 5.8.2 Structural Prevention and Response Features

Some schools had concrete structural measures to prevent violence from occurring, including camera surveillance systems and counselling rooms; however these measures were not widespread, seemed to be in their early days, and still of limited effect. For the schools with camera surveillance devices, staff considered these systems to be particularly effective, as shared by this teacher:

FGD, lower and upper secondary teacher, North and South : *‘The school has installed camera surveillance devices at many places where violence often occurs. For example, along the corridors, in the classrooms, or in the backyard area in order to allow it to have timely detection, and to prevent the occurrence, of violent behaviours at school.’*

On the contrary, students revealed that cameras did not prevent SRGBV on their own; they simply meant that students moved their fighting to alternate locations:

IDI, lower secondary student South : *‘Peers often fight in the backyard area where a camera surveillance device is not available. The fights often occur quickly with some students taking the role of signalling any intrusion by teachers. If they see a teacher coming, they disperse immediately.’*

This again showed a distinct difference between school staffs’ assessments of the effectiveness of intervention strategies, and students’ actual experiences of what worked in a practical sense.

Some schools had mental health counselling rooms. Whilst this appeared to be a potentially useful structural feature, services in the research schools were mostly delivered by teachers (for whom such doing so as an additional task on top of other pre-existing duties). One staff member explained the problematic matter of staff members having a lack of training for these roles:

IDI, upper secondary staff, South : *‘Currently, counselling in schools is ideally conducted by specialized staff, but only redundant teachers are assigned as counsellors. There are some people working under counselling contracts. It is under the method of learning through working. If I were in the position to choose, I would select the qualified teachers. But those who have the relevant capacities mostly work in teaching subjects and youth union activities.’*

Several school stakeholders also mentioned the difficulty of attracting students to school counselling rooms, as students did not feel assured this would be a safe and supportive space. A teacher reflected ‘students hesitate to enter (it), afraid that someone might see them there. They are shy because the room is located in a place where peers can easily spot them there’ (IDI, upper secondary teacher, South).

### A student explained:

IDI, upper  
secondary  
student, North

*'Students rarely come to the school counselling room for getting consultations about violence-related matters because they are afraid of teachers, and do not like to be spotted there by peers. Peers have never come to the school counselling room out of their reluctance to talk with teachers. The teachers, for their part, are not so open.'*

Several administrators did not understand the potential for a school counselling service to be used for arbitration, to educate perpetrators, or to even run whole-school education sessions against SRGBV. Instead, their visions for the rooms were limited to places of support for those with mental health struggles. One administrator illustrated this view, saying:

IDI, lower  
secondary  
administrator,  
North

*'The school counselling room mainly delivers consultations on mental issues of students and does not focus on mentoring the ones related to violence. In the event of violence, it is mostly teachers and the school who deal with it. The counselling room is not the place to deal with the wrong-doers when the incident has already happened. The counselling room here is only intended to resolve questions from students. Settlement of conflicts that have already occurred should be the school's responsibility.'*

This administrator expressed a complex view about the potential of the counselling room to be used to deliver aid in dealing with SRGBV:

IDI, lower  
secondary  
administrator,  
North

*'The counsellors can, in fact, help students solve psychological concerns related to school-based violence by providing companionship and sympathy to the affected students. It is the school to say what is right and what is wrong... It means teachers should be definitely clear-minded and sharp in their dealing with such matters.'*

This data showed that it was not necessarily the resources a school did or did not have that specifically determined the value of its approaches to SRGBV. Instead, it was more important that the staff had: realistic awareness about SRGBV; tried to understand social life in school contexts and to educate against SRGBV; and that they considered relationship-building, student-focused ways of dealing with problems rather than using tactics such as public shaming, public exposure, corporal punishment, or overly simplistic strategies that students could overcome or avoid. Resources alone were not useful without holistic plans to target and deal with SRGBV through many different angles.







# 6 Discussion & Recommendations

**“To be effective, the school needs to organise many activities, the teachers need support for skills. The school does have a psychological counselling room but the students do not dare to enter. Students are afraid that some one might see them (probably also due to the students’ poor self-esteem). The teacher managing the counselling room is gentle but students are hesitant and are afraid to be seen visiting the room. The students might gossip a lot.”**

IDI, upper secondary teacher, South

## Key Points

- Curriculum-developers and policy-makers need to actively redress the gaps in all education stakeholder groups’ SRGBV knowledge and process skills through clear education resources revision and policy development offering distinct guidelines in a number of areas.
- Schools need to address SRGBV directly through innovative education techniques and engagement with related campaigns on both SRGBV and diversity to create safe and supportive environments. Staff training, clear regulation codes and processes, specific counselling provisions, and community partnerships are also recommended.
- Further research may be needed to overcome some of the gaps in this study including representation of more provinces, longitudinal work, and investigation into what works to reform perpetrators and create resilience in groups at high risk of marginalisation.

## 6.1 Discussion

This study has focused on the following issues: awareness of SRGBV-related factors, manifestations of violence in practice; reactions from participants; causes, effects and impacts of violence; and prevention and response programmes that have been implemented in schools. Based on the key findings and analyses described above, the research team has put forth the following key insights for discussion in comparison with the results of other research studies having been conducted all over the world and in Viet Nam on the same theme. The research findings clearly revealed a number of issues that need to be further studied on a broader and deeper scale.

### 6.1.1 Gaps in Awareness & Understanding of SRGBV

The research results revealed, foremost, a lack of awareness and understanding of SRGBV among all stakeholder groups (students, staff and parents) participating in the research. Further, they evidenced the imprints of traditional notions of gender roles and social norms transmitted persistently and tenaciously from generation to generation. These views and perceptions can be problematic in that they appear to have led to contexts which contribute to SRGBV, the expression of SRGBV behaviours, and confusion around how to respond to, intervene in and prevent SRGBV.



Most of the students, parents, teachers and administrators participating in the research study did not yet have a thorough and comprehensive awareness of what possibly constitutes violence. In discussing violence, the participants tended to immediately equate it to fighting and quarrelling, yet overlooked other forms of violence such as sexual harassment and sexual violence, or psychosocial violence such as ostracism, spreading rumours, gossiping, making sarcastic comments, and so forth. This has led to a situation where a portion of school students have currently been suffering from violence without being aware that they were victims of violent behaviours, or realising the need for concern or to take any measure to effectively protect themselves. Particularly, LGBT students have experienced much psychological abuse which has in some cases had long-term effects for their wellbeing and mental health.

Parents, teachers and administrators also have minimal understandings of the complexity of violence; with some still framing SRGBV as 'normal fighting and teasing among children', and accepting the social infliction of harm on LGBT individuals as 'normal'. A portion of both students and parents still accepted teachers' methods of maintaining discipline in schools through such behaviours as beating and scolding. Teachers and administrators tended to attach special importance to violent incidents that occurred within school boundaries. Parents generally held the view that it would be considered the responsibility of school only if violence occurred on school premises and that if incidents occurred outside the school campus, they were outside the responsibility of the school. This was quite a complicated issue that may require more in-depth studies and consultations in order to specifically define the roles and responsibilities of school and their stakeholders regarding SRGBV.

### 6.1.2 Stereotypes and Prejudices

SRGBV incidents appeared to have a relation with participants' perception and attitudes toward gender and gender equality, and gender prejudices and stereotypes appeared to be one of the motivating factor for SRGBV. This research directly provided evidence that gender stereotypes are having impacts on many aspects of social life in general and on SRGBV in particular. Students' views on gender roles were generally more "open", although there were differences between male and female students in this regard; the proportion of male students who wanted to maintain current gender roles and stereotypes was notably higher than that of female students.

LGBT students held comparatively more open views on gender diversity. They often expressed their wish that people would respect their expressions of gender diversity. Some LGBT students in this study even revealed that they engaged in small educational efforts and activism at school, including discussions with teachers. After having talked with these students, some of the teachers themselves acquired a more flexible and supportive understanding of gender diversity. This indicated that LGBT students really aim towards generating, and in some cases actively work toward creating, increased understanding and respect from others.

A great majority of parents had little understanding of gender diversity, and therefore this group often suggested that parents and staff should interfere immediately when children show signs of diverse or non-conforming gender expression. This approach makes many LGBT children refrain from coming out and declaring their sexual or gender identity to their parents, out of fear that this will make their parents sad or that they would be abandoned and dismissed from their family.

Awareness of gender diversity among teachers and administrators still remains a gap that needs to be filled, since this lack of awareness amongst teachers and administrators can lead to their assigning themselves the responsibility of "correcting" and intervening in diverse gender expressions (which, according to those teachers, equated to non-compliance with and deviance from gender norms).

In doing so, teachers had at times unintentionally hurt LGBT students and indirectly encouraged approaches that could lead to SRGBV amongst their students. Unfortunately, such teachers genuinely still believed that that they were helping those who were “deviant” and creating conditions to enable them to “get on better” with peers.”

The differences between current approaches, and those which would create a “safe and supportive” environment need to be more clearly spelled out to teachers and administrators. Guidelines need to be developed which can clarify the professional roles of school staff under current international legislation and local efforts to prevent SRGBV.

### 6.1.3 High Risk Groups

The research unveiled a multi-dimensional picture of different forms and manifestations of SRGBV with frequency of occurrence and complexity levels worth of concern. Although the research findings record violence occurring in all forms to students of all categories, the frequency of SRGBV experiences by those whose gender-related characteristics are different from the prevailing gender norms (i.e. the self-identified or being perceived as LGBT) was remarkably higher than that experienced by the groups of students whose traits fell in line with gender stereotypes for males and females, respectively. Additionally, male students experienced higher rates of all forms of violence (except for being a target of gossip) than females.

During the 6 months preceding the surveys, incidents of all five forms of violence – i.e. physical, mental, psychosocial, sexual and technology-related violence – had occurred in all of the participating schools. Amongst these occurrences, incidents of physical violence were notably prevalent. LGBT students experienced the highest proportion of violent behaviours (in the full range of forms of violence), and also had the lowest perception of safety at school. Gender stereotypes, masculinity and femininity norms, and possibly a higher valuing of men above women in a society heavily influenced by Confucianism, is contributing to this reported violence against gender non-conforming men. In this study, gender non-conforming female students or those who self-identified as being lesbian or bisexual, were reportedly both popular with their peers. These findings, with the emphasis on the greater potential social value of masculinity for a range of people, differ from relevant studies in Thailand.<sup>26,56</sup>

Among the male and female students not associated with being gender non-conforming or same-sex attracted, male students appeared to be more exposed to the full range of violence than females. However, female students were more worried about possible exposure to violence perpetrated by their peers at school than male students. Another very noteworthy finding from this research is the fact that SRGBV incidents among lower secondary students in all forms of SRGBV are more prevalent than that amongst upper secondary students. These findings are in agreement with the broader literature.<sup>26,31</sup>

### 6.1.4 Negative Academic and Wellbeing Outcomes

The research study also revealed correlations between the causes and impacts of SRGBV, and the negative wellbeing outcomes and academic performance for victimised students. First, victims of SRGBV were more likely to experience reduced academic performance. The victims of SRGBV incidents all reported impaired concentration, hesitation to participate in school and class activities, and negative thinking. More seriously, many SRGBV victims had cut class, been afraid to attend school, changed schools, and/or dropped out. While these negative impacts were found in victimised students of all categories, this was more pronounced among LGBT victims. The hindered learning opportunities often further impacted and isolated the affected students who failed to meet the expectations of both their schools and families.



Secondly, the research findings on the impacts of SRGBV showed that victims of SRGBV often had symptoms of negative psychological wellbeing outcomes. This included increased crying spells, anger, rage, mood swings, withdrawal from others, self-isolation, anxiety and frequent feeling of insecurity, and for some, thoughts or attempts of self-harm or suicide. This may have contributed to the surprisingly high portions of both lower and upper secondary school students being affected by mental health problems reflected in Vietnamese research in recent years. Specifically, results from the second nation-wide survey on Vietnamese young people and adolescents (SAVY 2, 2006-2011) showed that today's young people have far better living conditions than five years earlier, but the rate of youth experiencing sadness also increased remarkably, with 73.1% used to experience some degree of sadness, 27.6% ever felt 'very sad' and seeing themselves so useless that they did not want to take part in any daily activities, while 21.3% felt completely hopeless about the future and 4.1% had suicidal thoughts.<sup>91</sup> Is SRGBV one of the contributing factors? There is no causal relationship that can be established through this research; however the importance of SRGBV as a factor was emphasised in the IDIs and FGDs conducted with students, teachers/administrators and parents, and this finding is consistent with broader research.<sup>19,92</sup>

### 6.1.5 Acceptance and Inaction

Acceptance and inaction towards every form of SRGBV unfortunately appeared to allow and even support violence to continue in schools. This culture of inaction flies against current efforts by the Viet Nam education system toward building fundamental life values, such as courage, advocating righteousness, tolerance, forgiveness and compassion. The research findings showed that there were three main types of reactions that student bystanders who witnessed SRGBV have most often taken: informing school staff, trying to intervene, and doing nothing. Notably, the popularity of all three options was relatively similar, although the proportion of LGBT students who would "do nothing" was higher than that of male and female students. Fear was a powerful determinant for inaction; the students who did nothing in response to SRGBV mainly said that they were scared of getting involved, of revenge being taken upon them or perhaps becoming bullied themselves. In some cases, student bystanders encouraged the perpetrators of SRGBV to commit further violence, or even joined in violent incidents to "*đánh hôi*" (to beat the victim), especially in the cases of physical abuse.

These findings offered a concerning lack of empowerment and skills amongst students to respond to school violence, and also suggested the likelihood that many had lost hope that they could speak out in safety or that appropriate actions would be taken in response to reports of SRGBV. This research finding echoed the prevalence of inaction seen in other recent studies.<sup>56</sup> Acceptance of SRGBV and inaction in response to it need to further be seen as reflections of the attitudes of families, school staff and wider society. In a civilised and progressive society, all violent behaviours must be bravely criticised and actively eliminated by its members, and young people should feel empowered and guided in how to achieve this by their elders.

### 6.1.6 Current Approaches as Barriers to SRGBV Prevention

Schools' and families' current methods of dealing with SRGBV sometimes constitute a barrier to best practice responses to SRGBV. The fact that a fair amount of student victims and witnesses of SRGBV have chosen to "keep silent and bear with it" and "do nothing" indicates that students have not found school to be a reliable and safe environment. At the same time, it points out that students do not have sufficient knowledge to enable them to fully recognise and actively respond to protect themselves and others when faced with violence. In several IDIs and FGDs, students acknowledged that they had kept silent and concealed incident(s) from both their parents and teachers, but that they had informed some close friends to seek their sympathy. Encouraging students into more proactive responses will require being able to ensure that school staff and parents can react to SRGBV in helpful and efficient

ways. This means that a comprehensive and holistic approach is needed which considers factors in preventing and responding to gender-based violence that engages schools, families and the broader social environment.

The inappropriate measures taken by adults to address violence pose difficulties in reducing SRGBV against children and adolescents. Further, adults can themselves be direct contributors to SRGBV. Some teachers have been applying traditional aggressive teaching measures, such as scolding and beating students to maintain discipline. Broader contexts of psychosocial violence, sexism, homophobia and transphobia can all also serve as “catalysts” that carry along negative impacts onto children. The study also showed that prevention education and response practices to SRGBV among schools remains slow and weak. While the necessary topics have already been included in school curriculum subjects, this has not yielded expected outcomes. The education sector and other relevant sectors need to work together to create enabling conditions for schools to set up new services and add qualified personnel who can play important roles in prevention education and in responding to emerging issues in a more effective manner, which students will be better able to rely upon.

### 6.1.7 Key Areas for Development

Newly emerging issues related to violence and school need to be addressed with changes in practice, resource development and inter-sectoral research studies. Specific topics for further exploration correlating with the limitations of this research include gathering more information on gender diversity in schools, deeper consideration of technology-related violence, the prevalence and factors involved in gender-related violence outside of schools’ gates, and best practice in the operation of school Counselling/Consulting services or rooms.

**The poor understanding of gender and gender diversity** of all surveyed groups suggested that relevant knowledge about gender, and gender and sexual diversity have only minimally been introduced to schools. Programmes of gender-related education for students and relevant refresher courses for school staff need to be conducted and regularly updated. This is very important to help educational administrators, teachers and students change their perceptions and attitudes, learning to accept the differences in the society and to respect these differences within schools.

**Technological environments offer a unique set of challenges and opportunities.** Along with the spectacular development of information technology at lightning speed, the negative aspects of technology have significantly contributed to the emergence of more types of violence beyond the classroom. Mobile phones constitute a very useful and convenient tool for students to explore and learn about the world, and establish virtual social relationships almost anywhere. However, in such spaces they may be easily influenced by objectionable and inappropriate attitudes and behaviours which can be generated spontaneously but very quickly spread as cases usually found in some cyber communities of teens (for example, online group fighting, creating “anti-pages” to isolate and/or defame others, posting sensitive and intimate pictures of others on the Internet, etc.). At the same time, the world of mobile phone applications, websites and emails may provide potential spaces where information about SRGBV could be effectively distributed to a variety of audiences and where help could be sought after anonymously or confidentially. Positive messages and practical guidelines, videos and scenario examples modelling best practice perspectives and responses could be developed for these arenas. It is important to consider how the demographic data showed that while all parents and teachers had access to mobile phones, and most teachers had computers, a portion of the students would need to access such technology in the school context rather than at home.



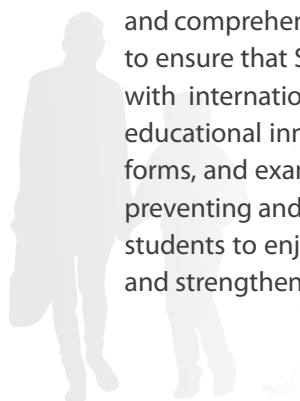
**It is essential to consider and properly frame the extent of schools' responsibilities for SRGBV both on and off its physical campus site.** Some school staff were of the view that the school's responsibility was limited to violence that occurs inside school premises—but then who will be held responsible for violent incidents taking place outside or adjacent to school? What about in virtual or online environments? Such questions are not easy to answer for both staff and parents. The study also showed that in many cases, causes leading to violent incidents even outside school started within the school. Students also can “entice” each other to an unattended place outside a school's grounds precisely to avoid engagement with school staff. Similarly, at times, students have had conflicts with each other outside school but, for some reason, they decided to “settle” their dispute right within school campus. Regardless of where or why SRGBV occurs, parents and the society at large may blame the school. The study shows that addressing this issue is not about who should be held responsible but how students can be educated and sensitised to shape a sense of responsibility for their actions and to prevent SRGBV – and schools are in a prime position to provide such education. Along with that, parents can assume more responsibility to educate students from home and try to understand their concerns as well as changes they undergo in the schooling years.

**Some schools have established psychological counselling and consulting services/rooms** for students as a solution for several issues relating to wellbeing outcomes from SRGBV. The study showed that this solution was not yet effective due to the following factors: 1) Students and teachers both have inaccurate understandings on the advantages of counselling and consulting rooms, considering the people who go to these rooms as severely mentally and psychologically ill. 2) The psychological counsellors and consultants sometimes are also teachers and have not been trained professionally to counsel or consult. 3) The activity programmes of counselling and consulting rooms have not been promoted appropriately to provide parents and students with the necessary familiarity to trust and seek out such services when needed.

## 6.2 Recommendations

### 6.2.1 Recommendations for curriculum-developers and policy-makers

**Curriculum developers and policy-makers should review current subjects, curriculum and education policies through the lens of SRGBV in order to remove prejudiced content and statements or content that are no longer suitable.** They are advised to add contemporary best practices in protection for high-risk groups (including LGBT students) in anti-violence codes and guidelines around professional approaches to prevention and responses, and explanations for terms and concepts related to gender diversity, gender expressions and sexuality – following in the path of the latest research and resources, and examples in UNESCO guidance.<sup>14,38,74,93</sup> Aspects related to gender and sex, gender equality, gender diversity and conflicts among adolescents should be reviewed in a thorough and comprehensive manner by educators, curriculum developers and textbook writers. This is important to ensure that SRGBV-related education content and activities in school will be designed in accordance with international legislation and Viet Nam's commitments to key conventions and contemporary educational innovation. This should include offering comprehensive descriptions of SRGBV in its many forms, and examinations of the restrictive beliefs behind it, as well as scenarios in which useful ways of preventing and reporting SRGBV are illustrated. This will aid in creating conditions for both teachers and students to enjoy more useful teaching and learning experiences, increase their awareness of diversity and strengthen their ability to solve SRGBV problems in an effective and efficient way.



**Supplement materials on gender and sex, gender equality, sexual and gender diversity to secondary schools' book boxes and libraries** to allow easier access for teachers and students.

**Incorporate aspects related to gender equality and gender and sexual diversity into teacher training curricula**, so as to equip future teachers with sufficient understanding and relevant skills related to these issues. This will enable them to be well prepared and to have the confidence to deliver lessons or participate in responding to problems regarding SRGBV including that perpetrated due to intolerance of sexual and gender diversity. These training updates should also be delivered to in-service teachers and administrators in the schools of all levels in order to help them develop more open attitudes on gender equality and diversity and acquire appropriate abilities to respond to SRGBV.

**Establish a well-structured intersectoral collaboration between education, healthcare, protection and information management authorities to build and enhance common understanding of SRGBV and awareness about gender and sexual diversity.** Create networks of cooperation and partnerships to connect schools and various civil society organizations that are working in the fields of gender diversity, and GBV prevention and response, in order to have effective and comprehensive measures to prevent SRGBV. This collaborative work is aimed at envisioning new ways of working which will update shared understandings about these themes to comply with Viet Nam's commitment to non-discriminatory and global best practice frameworks. This will help put an end to using stigmatizing and prejudiced terms and concepts such as "deviant sexuality", "gender deviance", "hormone deficiency", "social disease" and so on across multiple sectors' policies and practices. Strengthen social awareness and understanding about SRGBV, as well as the rights of LGBT people more broadly through awareness-raising campaigns in order to enable widespread and thorough understanding of these issues (for example, the use of mobile phone apps, websites and televised communications and information dissemination).

### 6.2.2 Recommendations for schools

**Education system leadership and schools need to conduct professional training programmes, workshops, seminars and the like for teachers and school management staff of the entire sector; on the issues related to gender equality, gender diversity as well as SRGBV prevention and response.** This is essential to aid teachers and school administrators in developing a stronger awareness of SRGBV in its many forms and features. This training should further be aimed at enhancing their understanding of Viet Nam's commitments to end SRGBV and specifically violence against LGBT students, so that schools can become safer and more supportive spaces for all. This will involve encouraging a new form of 'professionalism' which values equity and non-discriminatory attitudes and manners, and foregrounds due respect and treatment in dealing with every student regardless of their gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. Codes of conduct for teachers need to ban corporal punishment and encourage teachers and schools to adopt more holistic and supportive disciplinary methods of positive discipline and alternate motives for positive behaviours, and in dealing with issues related to students in a culture of care and respect.

**School staff are encouraged to organise rich and interesting activities that are suitable with the students' age group on topics related to gender equality and gender diversity so as to provide opportunities for students to develop their understanding and attitudes** toward these issues, build positive interactions and friendships between and among peers with due respect for differences, and develop practical skills for violence prevention and reporting. Ideally, students need to be exposed from a young age to concepts of gender equality, and the need to respect gender and sexual diversity according to human rights principles. It would be useful for students to be presented with information

on human rights, examples of scenarios and best practice behaviours, as well as resources they can refer to on these topics. Once they have gained such understanding, then possibilities for more informed discussions, role-playing activities and exploratory research projects may arise.

**School system leadership and staff are encouraged to create a culture of non-violence, non-stigmatisation and non-discrimination through engaging students, administrators and parents in awareness raising campaigns about tolerance of gender diversity in schools.** They should also provide more favourable conditions and environments for LGBT individuals to ensure their rights and to fully exhibit their personal identities and capabilities like any other students (the #PurpleMySchool Asia campaign was one example of an awareness-raising educational opportunity in 2015 which many Asian schools, including those in Viet Nam, engaged in, wearing purple and engaging in activities to support safe spaces for LGBT learners).<sup>94</sup> Schools should also consider establishing more flexible regulations regarding school uniforms, especially regarding the uniform dressing of Ao Dai (Vietnamese traditional costume for women and girls) for gender non-conforming students, as gendered school uniforms and gender-specific appearance requirements have been found to be highly problematic for gender-nonconforming and transgender students in other countries.

**Schools need to develop and implement school-level regulations on prevention of and response to SRGBV which have processes that are completely clear for students and teachers and that include acceptance of difference and intolerance for discrimination and violence as core principles.** Schools should adopt measures of strict and effective response to violent incidents or take the initiative in preventing seeds of violence from sprouting. Schools should also stipulate regulations for monitoring and controlling the usage of mobile devices, the Internet and Facebook by students in an effective way.

**Schools need to take the initiative in setting up school social affairs units, school psychological services or student counselling services which will be operated by professionally trained staff.** These experts will assume a role in contributing to prevention of violence in schools and at the same time, assist in a timely and effective manner when violence occurs. If there is difficulty in including these staff on the school payroll, it is possible that two or three schools can share the service of this/these expert(s).

**It is necessary for schools to establish and maintain, through various communication channels as well as more diverse forms of activities, close collaborative relationships with parents and local communities in order to protect and ensure the highest standards of safety for students and teachers as well as for school neighbourhoods.** Providing safer and friendlier spaces for those who are or are perceived as LGBT, such as gender-discrimination-free dormitories and community rooms, can be measures to protect LGBT individuals from suffering violence or bullying.

### 6.2.2 Research recommendations

**Further research studies on SRGBV need to be broader in scope and scale, covering educational institutions of all types across Viet Nam** (e.g. primary schools, continuing education institutions, high schools and junior colleges, universities, colleges, among others). This could help capture a more complete picture of this issue, whereby to introduce more comprehensive programmes and solutions across the country for developing SRGBV prevention and response.

**There need to be more studies examining various dimensions of SRGBV not thoroughly covered in this study**, including, for example, the impacts of anti-SRGBV education policies and methods; or the impacts of mass media, printed materials, the Internet and other phenomena on students in respect of gender diversity and LGBT in schools as well as in communities.

**Longitudinal studies and case studies on the motivations and impacts of SRGBV** that particularly consider what helps/hinders perpetrator reform, and resilience and recovery for victims.

**Build the capacity of public research institutions and enhance understanding of SOGIE-related terminology**, particularly around categorizations of LGBTI, thereby strengthening research methodology for future studies.

### 6.3 Conclusion

Through taking an honest and comprehensive look at the situation in Viet Nam's schools, this report was able to uncover some key approaches contributing to SRGBV and some problematic beliefs and practices which need to be addressed holistically by a range of stakeholders. The proposed recommendations to reduce SRGBV, including multi-faceted attempts to reduce violence against LGBT students, and to educate people about diversity, could signify a new and important period in Vietnamese education policies, curricula and practices. This could potentially lead to important shifts in Vietnamese education that could make our schools safer and more supportive spaces which tackle risks of educational disconnection and negative wellbeing outcomes for students who are victims of violence in its many forms. New developments in this area could offer opportunities for learning both locally and globally, as the world takes on the challenge of SRGBV and looks for new and effective means of combatting it more directly. It is still in the early days in the response to SRGBV, and so the broader outcomes of any proposed processes to reduce it will be of great interest internationally. With more extensive research and trials, further understanding about preventing and addressing SRGBV may be gained in Viet Nam. We encourage all education stakeholders to heed the call to join us in actively learning about SRGBV, and reducing it together.





# Endnotes

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