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Fact Sheet

What is the Cost of School-Related Gender-Based Violence?

Box 1

School-related gender-based violence is physical, sexual or psychological violence or abuse that is based on gendered stereotypes or that targets students on the basis of their sex, sexuality or gender identities. The underlying intent of this violence is to reinforce gender roles and perpetuate gender inequalities. It includes rape, unwanted sexual touching, unwanted sexual comments, corporal punishment, bullying, and verbal harassment. Unequal power relations between adults and children and males and females contribute to this violence, which can take place in the school, on school grounds, going to and from school, or in school dormitories and may be perpetrated by teachers, students, or community members. Both girls and boys can be victims, as well as perpetrators. SRGBV results in sexual, physical, or psychological harm to girls and boys.

In line with the Millennium Development Goals, there has been a focus in the education sector for over a decade on ensuring equitable access to school. Governments across many developing countries showed tremendous resolve and produced impressive results. However, more recently it has become apparent that it is at least equally important to improve the quality of education to ensure students are learning. One important aspect of education quality is the learning environment, which far too often in both developed and developing countries is characterized by widespread school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV, see **Box 1**). Research has shown that SRGBV not only affects students' psychological well-being but is also related to low enrollment and attendance, high dropout rates, and lower achievement¹, and thus poses not only a human rights but also an important economic problem for education systems. But how much does SRGBV actually cost²?

An approximation shows that SRGBV can be associated with the **loss of one primary grade of schooling**, which translates to a **yearly cost of around \$17 billion** to low and middle income countries — a figure that is higher than the total yearly amount spent on overseas assistance grants for education interventions.

Any attempt to quantify the costs of SRGBV in educational or financial terms is challenging: claiming “school violence costs X” requires confirmation that the violence directly *caused* the cost, which is difficult given the difficulties inherent in conducting fully controlled experiments to isolate SRGBV and the possibility that other factors influence both learning and prevalence of SRGBV. In addition, quantifying the violence itself proves problematic, as the pervasiveness and degree of threat and harm can only be subjectively reported. Nevertheless, data from international learning assessments such as PIRLS/prePIRLS, TIMSS, and PISA³ can be used to arrive at an approximation of the costs *associated* with SRGBV, and other studies have suggested that there is a causal link between SRGBV and reduced learning⁴. In this approximation, cost is represented by cognitive assessment results while SRGBV is represented by students', teachers' and head teachers'

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¹ Literature Review on the Intersection of Safe Learning Environments and Achievement

² This brief describes the analysis performed by Luis Crouch, Vice President and Chief Technical Officer of RTI International's International Development Group, in “Informational Technical Notes: An Approximation to the Costs Associated with School Violence,” Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International, 2014. The Technical Notes report serves as a companion piece to “Literature Review on the Intersection of Safe Learning,” at <https://www.eddataglobal.org/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=detail&id=84>

³ PIRLS is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study given to fourth graders; prePIRLS is administered in developing countries. TIMSS is the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study. PISA is the Programme for International Student Assessment; it offers a large sample size, has historical significance, and is given to 15 year olds, regardless of grade, which make it a valuable tool in this assessment.

⁴ For example USAID, forthcoming: “The Effects Of School-Related Gender-Based Violence On Academic Performance: Evidence From Ghana, Botswana, And South Africa”

reports on a range of behaviors related to bullying, lack of discipline and safety.⁵

The first step in the calculation requires establishing the differences in learning performance the presence or absence of SRGBV is associated with. The different PIRLS, prePIRLS and TIMSS assessments reveal performance differences around 32 points associated with violence, safety and discipline issues. A comparison of the point differences to the standard deviations is used to standardize the differences and yield an “effect size” of around 0.35⁶. The next step in the calculation uses PISA data to determine learning gains from grade to grade. PISA reveals an average grade-on-grade gain of 26 points⁷, and comparing the point difference to the standard deviation results in an effect size for one grade’s learning gains of 0.29. This means that the effect of school violence or lack of discipline and safety is comparable to the effect of losing one grade in primary school — or, in other words, SRGBV costs students one year of learning. The final step in the calculation is to determine what one year of primary education costs. Data from the World Bank EdStats database for low and lower-middle income countries provide reasonable figures for the calculation: A total GDP at \$5.5 trillion in 2012, multiplied by the percent of GDP spent on education (the 2012 median of low and lower-middle income countries is 4.3%), multiplied by the percent of education funding spent on primary schooling (2012 median of low and lower-middle income countries is 42.9%), divided by the median duration of the primary cycle, which is 6 grades¹, results in \$17 billion per year per grade spent on primary education in low and lower-middle income countries.

While \$17 billion might be a surprising figure, it is nonetheless a conservative estimate, because a) it only includes children who actually stay in school to be tested, not those who drop out or don’t enroll in the first place (and data show that SRGBV is often reported as a major reason for drop-out⁸), b) it does not include the possibly significant direct costs of school violence, such as diverting teacher and principal attention to the problem, requiring additional teachers or law enforcement resources or additional time for ministry of education officials for dealing with cases of severe maltreatment, and c) this estimate does not include the cost of any type of violence prevention programming. In addition, there may be other costs of school violence that are not captured here, such as reduction of self-image, self-control, and other “soft skills” that may lead to a loss of productivity over the life span⁹.

In summary, school violence is associated with significant cost worldwide to countries least able to pay it: the yearly cost of school violence — \$17 billion — is much higher than the entire yearly value of overseas development assistance for education — only \$13 billion.

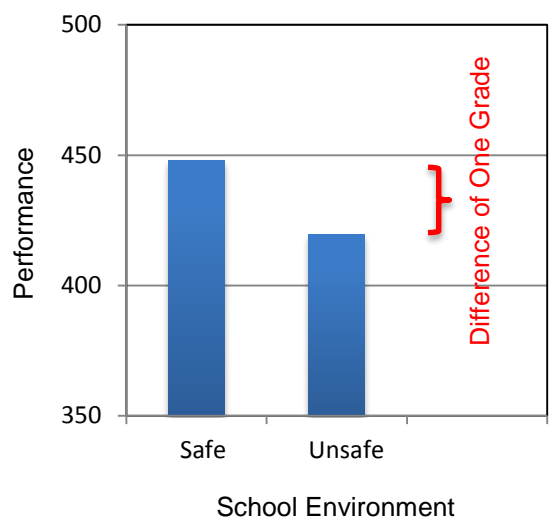


Figure 1: Learning (test score) as a function of learning environment (blue, aggregate data from PIRLS and TIMSS, only participating low and middle income countries), compared to difference in learning from one grade to the next (red, aggregate data from PISA, participating low and middle income countries).

5 Note that these assessments do not measure other aspects of SRGBV such as sexual violence or corporal punishment.

6 Calculations based on TIMSS and PIRLS 2011 data sets, including only low and middle income countries.

7 OECD (2014), PISA 2012 Results: What Students Know and Can Do – Student Performance in Mathematics, Reading and Science (Volume I, Revised edition, February 2014), PISA, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201118-en>. Note that this includes only low and middle income countries; the number is slightly higher (35) when all participating countries are included.

8 Literature Review on the Intersection of Safe Learning Environments and Achievement; UNICEF Hidden in Plain Sight, 2014

9 For example, one study (cited in UNICEF Hidden in Plain Sight Report, 2014) estimated that childhood experiences of abuse reduced a person’s earning potential (in the US) by an average of about US\$5,000 per year, with women being more likely to be affected by these economic costs of violence in the long-term than men, and another study, also in the US, found that the prevalence of child abuse and neglect costs over \$80 billion annually. The study’s calculations included direct costs of abuse (related to medical treatment, mental health services, the child welfare system and law enforcement) as well as indirect costs (related to special education, early intervention services, emergency/ transitional housing, physical and mental health care, juvenile delinquency, adult criminal justice costs and lost worker productivity). Although the numbers for developing countries may be very different, these data illustrate that long-term effects of violence can be economically significant.