# EdData II: Education Data for Decision-Making

## Brief Report on Review of Common Methodologies in Studying School-Related Gender-Based Violence

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) has been associated with poor attendance and retention and reduced learning outcomes, yet the evidence base is fragmented. Conceptualizations of SRGBV vary considerably, as do the indicators and methodologies used. Without an agreed-upon conceptual frame or common definitions for the various types of SRGBV, researchers and those in the international development community cannot fully understand the nature, extent, and impacts of SRGBV across countries and contexts. USAID Bureau for Africa—Education has commissioned a literature review intended to provide a framework for researchers examining SRGBV. This literature review provides a global overview of the common definitions of SRGBV, the nature of the investigations used to study SRGBV, and the common methodologies observed across studies.

### SRGBV in the Literature

SRGBV is studied in a variety of sectors, and the literature review drew from public health, sociology, psychology, and education. A total of 151 publications informed the literature review. To achieve completeness and balance across the articles, the articles were assessed against the following criteria:

- Address key SRGBV behaviors
- Focus on behaviors that were observed or experienced in, near, or on the way to school
- Involve geographical coverage and cross-country studies
- Discuss a variety of focal points of study, including descriptive studies, relational studies, and program evaluations.

> **What Is School-Related Gender-Based Violence?**
>
> As defined by USAID: "School-related gender-based violence includes sexual, physical, and 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."

General trends included a preference for SRGBV studies to target junior secondary and senior secondary school populations rather than primary school levels, particularly for sexual violence. However, it is important to note that students who are older than those for a particular grade level can often be enrolled in primary schools, especially in regions recovering from armed conflicts and where youth are being reintegrated into society and schools. These older students may present additional risk to their younger classmates as perpetrators or may be at higher risk of victimization themselves. Several studies targeted multiple grade levels and many types of SRGBV.

Only a limited number of studies investigated corporal punishment in non-African countries. Additionally, a large majority of studies on school-related sexual violence have been conducted in Africa. The following table summarizes the literature reviewed by region and type of SRGBV.

| Region | Corporal Punishment | Bullying/ Intimidation | Sexual Violence |
|---|---|---|---|
| North America | 1 | 7 | 6 |
| South America | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| Europe | 0 | 9 | 2 |
| MENA | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 19 | 11 | 29 |
| India | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| Asia (excluding India) | 2 | 5 | 2 |

Note: MENA = Middle East and North Africa.
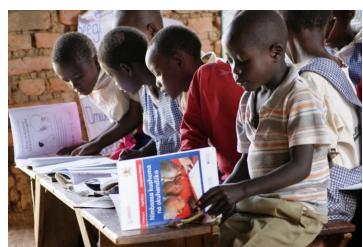
## Types of SRGBV

The literature review identified three overarching categories of SRGBV: bullying and other forms of non-sexual intimidation, corporal punishment, and sexual harassment and abuse.

Studies that examine bullying and other forms of non-sexual intimidation often adopt Olweus's definition[1] of bullying, which requires personal negative intent and a power differential. Bullying and intimidation are not easily distinguishable and can both be considered under the same category of SRGBV. The power differential that exists between the perpetrator and the victim leaves children, young women, and lower income populations especially vulnerable to acts of bullying or intimidation and to other types of SRGBV.[2] Although boys and girls experience bullying at similar rates, both genders may experience distinct types of bullying. Studies have found that girls experience more psychological bullying, whereas boys experience more physical intimidation.[3, 4] Much of the research on bullying is collected with self-report surveys, ranging from large country-wide questionnaires to a focused sampling of a small number of schools.

Corporal punishment involves deliberately inflicting pain on, humiliating, or ostracizing pupils to discipline them or to deter attitudes or behaviors deemed unacceptable. Only recently has corporal

punishment been examined through the gender-based violence lens, on the basis of its ties to aggressive masculinity. Male teachers are more likely to use physical forms of corporal punishment.[5] Rates of victimization are similar for boys and girls, yet the experience and impacts are different for boys and girls. When socially condoned, corporal punishment is very difficult to eliminate, even if corporal punishment is illegal. Many studies on corporal punishment involved mixed-methods research; researchers used questionnaires to collect quantitative data and conducted one-on-one interviews to understand the reasons why corporal punishment continues (in spite of laws against it) and the impacts on students who experience it.

Sexual violence and sexual harassment often have different conceptualizations in the literature, with sexual violence tending toward physical forms of abuse and assault and sexual harassment more often consisting of sexually driven psychological forms of abuse. Both boys and girls experience sexual harassment and abuse. The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys aged 18 years and younger to have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by people known to them, including teachers.[6] Among the articles reviewed, qualitative research was the most prominent methodology used to study sexual harassment and violence. Several studies used participatory approaches, which engaged informants in all aspects of the study.



Students working on a language lesson during in a classroom in Uganda, supported through USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Program. Photo by Medina Korda.

## Methodologies

Quantitative studies are largely focused on measuring the nature, extent, and impacts of one or more types of SRGBV and use group-administered paper-and-pencil surveys. Qualitative research has been instrumental in providing detailed information about the context and the complex processes and relationships that lead to and perpetuate SRGBV. Through qualitative inquiry, long-standing gender norms and beliefs, school environments, and day-to-day experiences of boys and girls in their pursuit of an education have come to be understood as interdependent and mutually reinforcing factors at play in SRGBV.

A mixed-method design uses both quantitative and qualitative methods and offers the advantage of integrating findings from the same study, in the same context, with the same sample population and thus provides both breadth and depth in a single study. A mixed-method design allows for contextualizing the behaviors in the broader social context and offers an opportunity to learn why and how the behavior is experienced and continues.

Of the many methods used to study SRGBV, each one has advantages and disadvantages. Each study's context varies, thus requiring researchers to make decisions about how best to collect data without endangering or causing unnecessary trauma to the participants. The sensitive nature of SRGBV introduces some special challenges to ensuring the validity and reliability of findings. There are some overarching challenges and best practices, as follows, that became apparent throughout the literature.

One of the overarching challenges in studying SRGBV is that informants, especially children, resist sharing information about their experiences of SRGBV because of the real or perceived risk of re-traumatization, secondary victimization, including retaliation, stigmatization, or further victimization. The literature provides excellent examples of methods that can be applied to solicit full and honest disclosure, all of which involve establishing trust between the researcher and informant. Some methods are listed as follows:

- Researchers should assure informants that the informants' names will not be associated with any information and that the information will be held in the strictest confidence.

- When selecting enumerators, consider the sex, age, and background to minimize the power differential between the enumerator and the informant
- Minimize the power differential between the researcher and informant by assigning researchers who are of the same gender and are not an authority figure to the informant
- Use child-friendly data collection methods, including ice breakers, participatory learning and action activities, and participant research techniques.[7, 8]
- Provide training to the enumerators regarding the nature of SRGBV, as well as special training on being sensitive to the needs and psychological support to informants.

If a study has the luxury of time, a progressive focusing technique can be effective in building trust. Using a progressive focusing technique, the researcher begins questioning with more general topics in focus group discussions and, as trust is established over time, gradually introduces more sensitive topics and solicits more personal information during the one-on-one interview.[9]

**Reliability and Validity of Findings**

When collecting information about the experiences of SRGBV, the following suggestions yield more reliable data and reduce ambiguity, thus improving comparability and usability of findings:

- Using terms that depict specific acts of violence (e.g., "pushed me," "called me names," "hit with the cane," "touched my breast") instead of using abstract terms (e.g., "bullying," "abuse," "violence").
- Providing a specific time frame that a young child can understand (e.g., "last week").

Routine monitoring and evaluation of programs aiming to reduce SRGBV are essential to determine what approaches bring desired results. As SRGBV prevention is a relatively new area of development, routine monitoring and evaluation is even more important to obtain continual feedback about what social change initiatives are successful. Involving multiple stakeholders when making decisions about key indicators, collecting data, and discussing results can help increase the school's and community's awareness of SRGBV and decrease their tolerance of such acts.

## Ethical Issues

All types of SRGBV are sensitive topics and difficult for many people to talk about, especially children and other vulnerable populations. Special ethical considerations are required. A child protection protocol, which provides for a professional counselor on site and gives specific steps for responding in cases where children are in danger, is needed. Researchers may be able to work through existing child protection structures such as the health, legal, or community welfare sectors. Depending on the context, a viable local child welfare service may or may not be available to provide responsive care and support to informants.

To maintain respect for all individuals involved in the research, informed consent should be obtained from either the informant or from his or her parents. Parents must understand the nature of the research, the topics of conversation, and any potential risks of a child's participation so that their consent is truly informed. Parents and informants should be aware of their choice to refuse consent initially or to opt out at any time during the course of the study.

This literature review provides a starting point for placing the methodological review in context but is not an evaluation of SRGBV or a comprehensive study of SRGBV around the world. Despite the gaps in the research and difficulties in exact comparisons between studies, SRGBV research and prevention efforts must continue. The risk of ignoring SRGBV and failing to act only serves to allow SRGBV to continue unquestioned, perpetuating the gender norms and power relationships that negatively impact children's academic achievement.

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[4] Roman, M., and J. Murillo. 2011. Latin America: School bullying and academic achievement. *Cepal Review 104*:37–53.

[5] Leach, F., M. Dunne, and F. Salvi. 2014. *School-Related Gender-Based Violence: A Global Review of Current Issues and Approaches in Policy, Programming and Implementation Responses to School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) for the Education Sector.* Paris, France: UNESCO. Available at http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/HIV-AIDS/pdf/SRGBV_UNESCO_Global_ReviewJan2014.pdf

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