

Building on work to address school related gender-based violence

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Introduction

- What can we learn from promising practice in preventing and ameliorating school related gender-based violence (SRGBV) to better address homophobic bullying and victimisation in low income contexts?
- Since 2000, there has been increasing research, policy and practice on SRGBV, but still evidence is lacking on how to reduce violence.
- Conceptual, methodological and political challenges and contestations limit the evidence base and the effectiveness of actions to tackle both SRGBV and homophobic violence in schools.
- A multi-dimensional framework on gender violence and poverty may have potential for addressing SRGBV – and homophobic violence?

Methodological and ethical challenges in researching violence with children

- Standard methods of data collection are less reliable with children and adolescents, especially on questions of sex and sexuality
- Imbalance of power between adults-children influencing informed consent and ease
- Participatory approaches e.g. children as co-researchers, art-based visual work, photography and video, and drama
- Risks of harm and distress, especially in contexts where there is weak institutional accountability and professionalism

Defining SRGBV

“This review takes SRGBV to include all forms of violence, including fear of violence, that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm to both females and males. It covers both explicit and symbolic forms of violence, violence which takes place on school premises, on the journey to and from school, and in school dormitories and other school related facilities; violence perpetrated by teachers and other education personnel, students and community members, both female and male, and both across and within gender lines. Individuals may be victims or perpetrators, or both.” (Leach, Dunne and Salvi 2014 p. 9)

- Shift from early work on violence in schools, which was either gender-blind, or viewed men as perpetrators vs women as victims
- Focus on manifestations and effects rather than causes generates 'sticking plaster' actions

The production and perpetuation of violence

Inequalities

- Unequal gender regimes
- Economic inequalities and deprivations
- Social inequalities
- Generational inequalities

Norms and institutions

- Abusive regulation in school, family, community
- Dominant social norms that support male dominance and condone violence
- Inadequate services to protect, prevent and respond to violence

Interpersonal/personal

- Desire for power and control, or to assert gender identity under threat
- Rage, resentment, suspicion, shame, disappointment
- Fear, helplessness, silence, avoidance, acceptance
- Conflicting capabilities

Mediators/mechanisms for countering violence

Addressing Inequalities

- Legal & policy frameworks & political will to address gender and violence
- Inclusive education system
- Poverty reduction policy
- Democratic political system, vibrant civil society, and independent responsible media

Norms and institutions

- Networks that challenge unequal norms
- Economic opportunities
- School culture addressing sex and relationships, gender equality, positive discipline
- Well trained and resourced officials in education, health, police etc.

Interpersonal/personal

- Knowledge, capacity to recognise violence and inequality, subjectivity that is reflexive
- Self-worth, confidence to take action against violence and to disrupt gender and sexual norms
- Solidarity, belonging, capacity to learn from non-violent influential people

Legal/Policy interventions

- Improvements in legislation to make it an offence for education professionals to have sex with children in their care, and tighten Teachers Codes of Conduct
- But implementation hindered by lack of political will and accountability, poor institutional capacity, cultural barriers, lack of resources (Leach et al 2014)
- While there has been increasing consensus at national/international level against some forms of violence against women/children, contestations around sexuality hinder political will to take action.

Localised SRGBV programmes

- Girls clubs (e.g. ActionAid's Stop Violence Against Girls in School, and TEGINT)
 - Student involvement in school affairs (e.g. Raising Voices; UNICEF Child Friendly Schools)
 - Focal teachers (e.g. USAID C-Change)
 - Community Conversations (e.g. Concern; Plan International)
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- Some gains in girls' confidence to report violence; some reductions in violence; some shifting attitudes
 - But need for more robust evidence; attitudes and knowledge do not necessarily translate into changes in behaviour; sustainability of short term interventions
 - Particular challenges in addressing taboo topics e.g. sexuality, where programme staff may need to reflect on their own prejudices, and deal with hostility in the communities they work in.

Some final reflections

- Building shared conceptual understandings e.g. sexuality, gender, violence
- Understanding context
- Building alliances
- Multi-dimensional or single focus
- Addressing the 'missing middle'

References

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