

## Gender violence in schools: taking the 'girls-as-victims' discourse forward

Article (Unspecified)

Leach, Fiona Elizabeth and Humphreys, Sara (2007) Gender violence in schools: taking the 'girls-as-victims' discourse forward. *Gender and Development*, 15 (2). pp. 51-65. ISSN 1364-9221

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**To be published in *Gender and Development*, 15,2, 2007**

***Gender Violence in Schools: taking the 'girls-as-victims' discourse forward***

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This paper draws attention to the gendered nature of violence in schools. Recent recognition that schools can be violent places has tended to ignore the fact that many such acts originate in unequal and antagonistic gender relations, which are tolerated and 'normalised' by everyday school structures and processes. After examining some key concepts and definitions, we provide a brief overview of the scope and various manifestations of gender violence in schools, noting that most research to date has focused on girls as victims of gender violence within a heterosexual context and ignores other forms such as homophobic and girl violence. We then move on to look at a few interventions designed to address gender violence in schools in the developing world and end by highlighting the need for more research and improved understanding of the problem and how it can be addressed. (142 words)

**Introduction**

The recent two-year global United Nations (UN) *Study on Violence Against Children* (UN, 2006) provides stark evidence both that violence in and around schools occurs worldwide, and that there is now international recognition that the issue needs to be addressed. The study drew on consultations held in nine regions of the world, questionnaires completed by governments, and submissions from specialist agencies and other stakeholders, including children. The report includes an examination of the scale and nature of violence against children in school, covering corporal punishment, bullying, gang violence and gender violence, as well as in other locations such as the home, the workplace and the street.

Existing research into gender violence in schools is limited and has focused on investigating sexual harassment and abuse<sup>1</sup>. Researching sexual matters is a sensitive issue, especially when children are involved and when Western researchers like ourselves are describing the 'developing' world (itself a problematic labelling). In so doing, we are engaging in the complex and problematic activity of constructing social 'truths' about 'others'. We are therefore conscious of the need to avoid oversimplified and implicitly judgemental accounts.

We start by examining some key concepts and definitions surrounding gender violence before moving on to a brief overview of its scope and various manifestations in schools (reported in English), highlighting some key issues (see Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006, for a more detailed account). We note that most research to date has focused on girls as victims of gender violence within a heterosexual context and suggest that other types which need to be researched more fully include homophobic violence, girl-on-girl violence and student-on-teacher violence.

We then move on to look at interventions designed to address gender violence in schools. The pool of resources to draw on is not extensive, as most work in this relatively new area of research has focused not surprisingly on identifying and understanding the issues around gender violence rather than on developing interventions – although we note that 'the act of identifying an issue can in itself constitute an intervention' (Leach and Mitchell, 2006: 4-5). Nevertheless, we briefly outline a number of interesting interventions from across the developing world, some working with young people (both mixed and male-only groups), others with teachers and trainee teachers, and with communities. While we highlight some general principles on strategies for change, we recognise

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<sup>1</sup> The legal definitions of 'abuse' and 'harassment' vary across countries, as do understandings on the ground. Sexual abuse usually refers to sexual exploitation of a child by an adult (and sometimes by another child or adolescent) by virtue of his/her superior power, and for his/her own benefit or gratification. Sexual harassment is more usually associated with adult victims, eg students in higher education and employees in the workplace and commonly involves unwelcome sexual advances of a verbal, physical or psychological nature.

that successful interventions are likely to be based on context-specific understandings of complex issues.

### **Gender violence as a field of study**

Heightened awareness of the existence of gender violence in schools in developing countries stems from the convergence of a number of disparate concerns in gender and development. Firstly, anxieties over increasing girls' access to formal education, as expressed at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien, Thailand, accompanied by the emphatic message that schooling leads to social and economic betterment, initially obscured the fact that schools may in fact reinforce gender inequalities and constitute unsafe sites for students. Subsequently, several studies in the mid-nineties investigating girls' low participation in education in Sub-Saharan Africa identified widespread sexual harassment of girls by male teachers and negative attitudes displayed by teachers (both male and female) towards girls, including verbal and physical abuse in the classroom (Hallam, 1994; Gordon, 1995; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995). During the same period, as the HIV/AIDS virus began to spread in Sub-Saharan Africa, the school was identified as a suitable location to teach about the disease. Paradoxically, however, as the gendered dimension of the disease was belatedly recognised, the school was also recognised as a site where sexual violence and gender inequalities occur (Mirembe and Davies, 2001). This, in turn, has given rise to increasing interest in issues related to gender, sexuality and schooling (Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006) and in transforming gender/sexual relations within schools (Pattman and Chege, 2003). Given international concerns to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is not surprising that most school-based studies of gender violence in developing countries (available in English) have been located in this region – hence the African bias in our review. However, we stress that the problem is neither confined to Africa nor to developing countries but is a global phenomenon (see Leach and Mitchell, 2006).

Further impetus to investigate and address gender violence has come from the rise in prominence of a rights-based discourse in development, as exemplified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993. The latter defines violence against women as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women' ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)). Significantly, the declaration singles out female children as a particularly vulnerable group and identifies educational institutions as potential sites for gender violence, even though most research to date has concentrated on domestic or intimate partner violence on adult women (Mirsky, 2003).

### **Definitions**

The elision of 'women' with 'gender' contained in the above UN declaration is symptomatic of the common narrow understanding of gender violence as being primarily violence by males against females. This is reflected in the current agenda on educational development, in which 'gender' is primarily conceived as a categorical variable and the drive for gender equality focuses on improving the access and retention in school of girls 'as-a-whole' in relation to that of boys 'as-a-whole' (Cornwall, 1997). In this discourse, girls' inability to access formal education has often been ascribed to poverty and/or culture (e.g. Colclough, Rose and Tembon, 2000) and the girls themselves have generally been constructed as victims. It is unsurprising, therefore, that studies of gender violence in schools in developing countries have used similar binary gender categories to position female students - and to a lesser extent teachers - as the victims of physical or sexual violence perpetrated by male teachers or students (e.g. Leach and Machakanja, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2001).

In wishing to take a broader view of what gender violence encompasses, we have avoided using the term 'gender-based violence' (GBV), even though it is common currency within the international development community. The term suggests that violence is not necessarily gendered and that forms of violence exist which are unrelated to processes of gender/sexual positioning and broader social gender inequalities. Our view is that *all* violence is gendered.

However, broadly speaking within schools it includes physical, verbal, psychological and emotional as well as sexual violence; it also includes the *fear* of violence, both *between* females and males and *among* females or *among* males. Significantly, looking at differences *within* gender categories can also shed light on patterns of social behaviour *between* them (Connell, 2002). These differences might relate to other social markers of ethnicity, age, location, sexuality, social class or caste, which always interact with gender. So far, very little work on gender violence, or even gender and educational development more generally, has explored these gender differentiations (one exception is Subrahmanian *et al.*'s 2003 study of social inclusion in South Africa and India which explores how gender, race, social class and caste interact in complex patterns of discrimination in schools). This is clearly an area for future work.

### **The research – the dominance of heterosexual violence**

Given the dominant understandings of gender and gender violence outlined above, it is not surprising that the primary focus in the literature has been on physical and sexual violence against female students. Studies have now been carried out in at least eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (USAID, 2003; Wible, 2004), depicting a consistent pattern of sexual abuse and/or harassment of female students by both male students and teachers. Many of the studies report male teachers demanding sexual favours from girls in return for good grades, preferential treatment in class or money, and other adult men and older male students also offering gifts or money in exchange for sex. Less commonly, cases have been reported of male students being raped at school (Rossetti, 2001, in Botswana; Burton, 2005, in Malawi) and of female teachers having sexual relations with male students (Mensch and Lloyd, 1997, in Kenya; Pattman and Chege, 2003, in Zambia). Parental fear for girls' safety both in school and on the way to and from school has also been identified in a number of studies as a key reason for girls being withdrawn from, or not being enrolled, in school, especially in South Asia (e.g. Brohi and Ajaib, 2006, in Pakistan).

Some recent studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have turned away from an exclusively 'girl-as-victim' perspective. They have highlighted female agency in what are termed 'transactional' sexual relationships, both among students and between teachers and students (Nyanzi, Pool and Kinsman, 2000; Luke and Kurz, 2002) and have also noted that girls may bully boys (Wood and Jewkes, 2001). Acknowledgement of female agency and/or complicity in the gendered landscape is critical, even if the 'choices' are limited within broader gendered constraints since it highlights the need for interventions to work with girls *and* boys, students *and* teachers to understand more complex and often contradictory interactions.

In most countries, relationships with students, whether coerced or consensual, are a violation of the teachers' code of professional conduct, yet cases are rarely reported or pursued (Leach and Machakanja, 2000). Even when regulations demand that teachers should be dismissed, very little is done; at most, a teacher might be transferred to another school. This discourages students from reporting cases. Prosecutions are also made more difficult when the family of a girl made pregnant by a teacher, especially in poorer rural areas, withdraws their initial complaint in order to agree a financial settlement with the man involved. Although reports have concentrated on male teacher/female student relations, there have also been some reports of liaisons between female teachers and male students (Mensch and Lloyd, 1997; Pattman and Chege, 2003), which imply the negotiation of different gender/authority power relations.

Outside Sub-Saharan Africa, the few studies that have been conducted into violence in schools have been couched in genderless terms. These have been predominantly quantitative and often involve self-report questionnaires about students' or teachers' experience of violence (including corporal punishment and bullying). While they have sometimes offered some gender-disaggregated data, they have not been analysed within a theorisation of gendered power relations. In Latin America and the Caribbean, violence in schools is usually associated with guns, gang violence and drug-trafficking (e.g. Guimarães, 1996, Abromavay and Rua, 2002) illustrating how schools get caught up in broader social conflicts. Yet the association of these forms of

violence with hypermasculinity (stereotypical traits of masculinity based on virility, aggression and strength) and their gender-differentiated effects have generally not been explored. Standing, Parker and Dhital's (2006) study of schools affected by conflict in Nepal is a recent exception<sup>2</sup>.

Forms of gender violence are also culturally specific. Examples include 'acid attacks' against young women ([www.asti.org.uk](http://www.asti.org.uk)) and 'eve-teasing' (sexual harassment) in South Asian contexts, and 'jack-rolling' (gang rape) in South Africa. Further, as the recent rise to prominence of cyber-bullying in North America has shown (see [www.cyberbullying.org](http://www.cyberbullying.org)), forms of gender violence are also dynamic, with new manifestations emerging and evolving.

Regardless of contextual variations, the causes of gender violence are similar, originating in structural gender inequalities in various social arenas. In school they are rooted in the formal and informal processes of schooling, which serve to establish the gendered norms of behaviour in what is commonly termed a 'gender regime' (Connell, 2002). Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa show that these informal processes include allocating higher status public tasks to boys and more domestic private tasks to girls (e.g. male students ringing the school bell for assembly, girls cleaning the classroom floors), allowing boys to generally dominate the physical and verbal space in class, and tolerating sexual harassment (Leach *et al.*, 2003; Dunne *et al.*, 2005) although in practice there is likely to be more nuanced gender differentiation. Authoritarian teaching practices, competitive assessment procedures and narrowly focused curricula often exclude particular groups of learners. For example, students from minority ethnic groups can feel marginalised when their cultures are omitted from, or undermined by, curriculum materials. These are all processes which sustain inequalities and in so doing promote the conditions for gender violence. The social practices of schooling both operate within, and serve to sustain, a gender regime which presumes the naturalness of heterosexual attraction (even as it attempts to suppress it), promoting aggressive masculinities and compliant femininities while discouraging other ways of being.

The studies in Africa have shown that double standards operate in terms of 'permissible' female and male sexuality in school (Pattman and Chege, 2003). Despite considerable variations among individuals and institutional contexts, the dominant expectation is for female students to be simultaneously sexually inexperienced yet available and desirable, whereas male students are expected to demonstrate physical superiority and (hetero)sexual prowess through 'winning' girlfriends. For boys, this often involves competing for partners with other males (including teachers) and negotiating for position in a gendered hierarchy based on age and authority. Thus, 'bullying' and 'fighting' become normalised in a 'boys-will-be boys' discourse. Students who do not conform to expected gender identities are targeted. Attempts are made to regulate their behaviour – sometimes through overtly violent means, such as physical and verbal abuse by teachers or other students, but often through less visible forms of violence which are 'normalised' as 'teasing', 'playing' or 'gossiping' (Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006).

### **Less well recognised forms of gender violence in schools**

Although corporal punishment is one of the most obvious and widely reported forms of school violence, which sometimes results in serious injury, truancy or drop-out (Hart, 2005; UNICEF, 2001), it has not usually been framed in gendered terms. However, it is strongly linked to performances of aggressive masculinity and its persistence and widespread abuse implicitly endorses physical violence in school relations, which play out differently among female and male students and teachers (Humphreys, 2006). In the nexus of gender and age/authority relations, corporal punishment on female students has been rationalised by some girls as socialising them to become obedient mothers and wives while the harsh beating of male students by male teachers is interpreted as the dominant male asserting authority over the younger male and a toughening up process as rite of passage into male adulthood. In contrast, female teachers are

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<sup>2</sup> This British Council-funded study explored the gendered impact on schools and school children in eleven public secondary schools in the Kathmandu valley within the context of the ongoing 'people's war'. While there was overlap in the experiences and fears of boys and girls, there were also important differences.

said to prefer verbal chastisement to caning, as male students, particularly older ones, may contest female authority and refuse punishment as a means of asserting their perceived masculine superiority.

Another largely unexplored form of gender violence is violence by girls, possibly because girls are generally perceived as victims and dominant understandings of femininity do not associate girls with violence. However, cases have been documented in South Africa of female students being physically violent towards other female *and* male students and sexually taunting boys (e.g. Wood and Jewkes, 2001). Violence by girls is often less overt and physical than that by boys, and hence less easily recognised. Yet some girls complain about the negative impact of other girls 'gossiping' (Leach *et al.*, 2003); when this involves spreading false rumours or ostracising girls, it constitutes a subtle form of aggression.

Little is also known about homophobic violence in educational settings in the developing world, which has been identified as a serious issue in the UK, US and Australia, for example (Warwick, Chase and Aggleton, 2004). However, its existence is likely to be widespread given the reported aggressive policing of heterosexual boundaries, which often takes the form of verbal insults, including sexual taunts and homophobic comments – the latter being particularly directed at boys (Morrell, 1998). A five-country study in Southern Africa has indicated some of the difficulties that gay and lesbian students experience in negotiating identities in schools in the face of considerable harassment and pressure to conform to heterosexual norms (Human Rights Watch, 2003). This is another area which needs researching.

### **Interventions**

As noted above, gender violence in schools is a relatively recent area of research and few initiatives have been developed to tackle it. Most of those documented are small-scale and context-specific. Most also originate in Sub-Saharan Africa, where concern over high HIV/AIDS prevalence among young people has led to initiatives to promote sexual health messages in schools, including the risks of multiple sexual partners and forced sex, and to provide advice on how to deal with sexual abuse or violence. Some school-based interventions address both girls and boys, others only girls or only boys. Others seek to raise awareness among teachers and trainees and to provide skills to address the problem. Less common are programmes involving parents and communities. In addressing violence against girls, recent interventions have recognised the need to work with boys as well as girls in a context that tries to unravel the complexity of gender dynamics – this is a welcome development in moving beyond the 'girls-as-victims' discourse. We will outline some innovative work in each of the following categories: mixed student groups, boys, teachers and communities. There is little available data about the impact of many of these interventions, especially where they are small-scale, a shortcoming that needs to be addressed.

Despite being context-specific, most of these interventions share a common set of methodological principles. The most important of these is a commitment to behaviour change and a belief that this can only be brought about through participatory methodologies inspired by PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and learning through reflecting on experience. This process is sometimes facilitated by the use of visual media such as drawings, film, drama, video and interactive web sites (Leach and Mitchell, 2006). Second is a commitment to seek out and value children's knowledge, opinions and perspectives, and for adults to engage in an open and democratic partnership, minimising the traditional adult-child power imbalance. Other principles include creating a non-threatening and safe environment in which young people can openly discuss sensitive topics, question traditional views, express fears and seek advice, encouraging and facilitating self-reflection, and providing space to learn and rehearse new behaviours.

### ***Working with mixed groups of young people***

The most common type of school-based initiative seeks to raise awareness and bring about behaviour change through the curriculum, usually in life skills or health promotion lessons. In one



example from Uganda, a small action research project (Mirembe, 2006) questioned how the official message of the AIDS curriculum - that negotiation and partnership in sexual relationships are fundamental to HIV prevention strategies - could be effective while the school allowed sexual harassment and aggressive male behaviour towards girls to go unchallenged. Research showed that students found the conventional AIDS lessons boring, irrelevant and a waste of time. The project provided them with the opportunity to determine their own topics for discussion in the AIDS lessons and to work collaboratively with the teacher on how the curriculum should be delivered. Female students identified issues of gender inequalities both in school and outside as of immediate concern to them. By linking these concerns with the spread of HIV/AIDS, the curriculum was adapted to address issues such as sexual harassment and male students' domination of the classroom, leading to the development of an agreed set of class rules and a more positive learning environment for both girls and boys. A commitment, with staff support, to promote similar changes across the whole school followed. Through this more democratic approach to teaching and learning, students were able to work out their own manageable solutions to problems.

Another curriculum intervention with mixed groups is the *Auntie Stella* activity pack and website ([www.auntiestella.org](http://www.auntiestella.org)), which provide opportunities for adolescents to talk about sexual and reproductive health and relationships in school lessons in a pro-active and imaginative way (Kaim *et al.*, 1999). First developed in Zimbabwe, *Auntie Stella* is based on a series of 40 letters, each written in the style of a missive to a newspaper agony aunt, with an accompanying reply. The topics include violence and coercion in sexual relations, male teachers propositioning girls for sex, and transactional sex. The approach is for small mixed sex groups to work on their own, reading a letter and discussing the identified problem through guided questions. They then turn to Auntie Stella's reply for advice and suggestions and to a number of supplementary activities, such as role-plays, quizzes, research projects, song-writing and storytelling, designed to assist them in exploring how that particular issue affects their lives and what they can do about it. This process encourages critical thinking and reflection, helps young people to assess risks and options, while also increasing their confidence and ability to communicate, negotiate and strategise. It also emphasises the importance of building social networks and a more supportive and youth-friendly social environment.

### **Working with boys**

Working with adolescent boys to constructively address aggressive masculinity and sexual violence is a relatively new field of activity. Initiatives have usually been located outside the school context, although some work in collaboration with schools. One well known example is *Program H* in Latin America, now also in India (Barker 2005), which focuses on helping young men question traditional norms related to manhood and violence and to promote health and gender equity. *Program H's* educational programme includes a manual series and video designed to promote attitude and behaviour change. Activities are usually led by a male facilitator and consist of role plays, brainstorming exercises, discussion sessions and individual reflections on how boys and men are socialised, positive and negative aspects of this socialisation, and the benefits of changing certain behaviours. These activities are supplemented by a social marketing campaign which taps into male youth culture through radio spots, billboards, posters and dances to promote gender-equitable lifestyle changes and changes in community and social norms relating to what it means to 'be a man'. This programme has been systematically evaluated through an in-depth two-year impact study covering a range of PROMUNDO activities in Brazil. It revealed that positive changes in male attitudes towards gender equity and male lifestyle behaviour were maintained up to a year after exposure to the programme.

In South Asia, where a culture of silence usually surrounds issues of sexuality, sexual relations and HIV/AIDS, a project called 'Let's Talk Men' has used film to open up discussion of such topics among children aged 10-16 in order to challenge entrenched gender stereotypes and raise awareness of the damaging effects of male violence against women (Seshadri and Chandran, 2006). In facilitator-led workshops, four specially produced films were screened, featuring various

real-life and fictional male characters who present different models of masculinity. These include boys portrayed as artistic, kind, caring and sensitive. The subsequent discussions encouraged boys to talk about their experiences of gender and sexuality and to understand how masculinity and violence are social constructs, not givens. The project worked with quite young children in the belief that promoting alternative models of masculine behaviour has to start early, when children are in the process of constructing their gender identity. Film was used to promote the message in recognition of the fact that visual media, especially cinema and television, rather than family conversations, provide children with information about gender, sex and sexuality. Visual media, which usually project conservative images of women and men in highly unequal gender relations, offer a potentially powerful tool for subverting and challenging such images.

### ***Working with teachers***

A number of projects have worked with both experienced and trainee teachers to raise their awareness of the damaging effects of gender violence in school and to provide them with strategies and skills to tackle it. This can be a challenging task in countries where the education system is particularly hierarchical and authoritarian, and where teaching methods are largely didactic and based on rote-learning, as such interventions require a fundamental change in the teacher-student relationship.

In South Africa, a training manual for teachers entitled *Opening our Eyes* has been introduced to address the very high levels of gender violence in schools (Mlamleli *et al.*, 2001). It starts from the belief that teachers must first possess the knowledge themselves in order to implement a curriculum of change. The eight interactive workshops show school staff what is happening in their schools and how they can respond to gender violence. The manual aims to heighten awareness of what constitutes gender violence and why it exists, increase awareness of the links with HIV/AIDS, provide tools and strategies for addressing gender violence, and contribute to 'whole school' strategies to develop a safe learning environment.

A small project at Kenyatta University, Kenya, started from the position that, if teachers are to effectively tackle violence in their schools, they first need to confront their own gendered experiences (Chege, 2006). Twenty male and female volunteer trainee teachers were asked to keep a diary over a five month period in which they relived important incidents of violence in their lives, which they then shared in oral narratives at regular group meetings. By encouraging future teachers to reflect on their own childhood experiences of violence, it was hoped that more effective strategies for transforming schools into non-violent spaces and more pupil-friendly pedagogies might emerge. Violence by teachers emerged as the key theme in the diaries, with most recalling being beaten or insulted by their teachers. Female trainees documented numerous incidents of sexual harassment, some at primary school. The initial shock of having to confront buried memories of childhood violence through their diaries generated feelings of pain, distress, fear, resentment and guilt. However, this process of individual reflection combined with collective analysis and shared understanding of how violence had impacted on their lives led the trainees to also experience therapeutic effects. Some expressed the intention to ensure a violent-free environment for children in their care. In this way, their memories of childhood violence were used to help construct their identities as future teachers and parents.

### ***Working with communities***

In the available literature, there are very few interventions involving parents and communities in addressing this issue. However, two examples exist of communities which, with outside support, decided to take collective action to address the sexual abuse of girls in their schools. In Ghana, a researcher persuaded local educators to help stage a community event (a *durbar*) to create awareness in the community of the very real abusive experiences that girls encountered in and around the school (Leach *et al.*, 2003). Key to the event's success was the support of the local chief and elders, who mobilised interest and created strong pressure on the community to attend. The centrepiece of the event was a play performed by students about a headmaster who demanded sex of girls in his school; after the performance, invited guests answered questions



from the audience and information was provided on the procedures for parents or students when reporting and following up a complaint with the authorities. The event was supported by a phone-in on national radio, with school children answering questions from the public, and newspaper reports. As a consequence of the event, an investigation was launched into sexual misconduct by teachers in one school and more girls and parents came forward to seek advice and help. Generally, girls felt safer as sexual abuse in schools was now a topic of open discussion in the community.

In rural Namibia, where many children are sent away to board in school hostels far from the family homestead, a British-based NGO worked with one local community on a long term participatory project aimed at halting what were perceived as deteriorating adult-child relationships and unruly and self-destructive behaviour by children (Kandirikirira, 2002). One negative aspect of social relations identified by the community was the demonstration of male power through violence and abuse. One prominent manifestation of this among schoolchildren was the ritual of boys breaking into the girls' hostels at night and raping them. To the boys, this was merely an evening's entertainment affirming their masculinity but for girls it was an evening of trauma and humiliation to be endured in silence. Such violence was sanctioned through the inaction of parents, teachers and hostel wardens, who over the years had come to see it as normal 'boys-will-be-boys' behaviour. As part of the collective response to the issue of male violence, forum theatre was introduced. In one series of plays, children acted out provocative scenes of girls being 'hunted' by boys and sexually exploited by teachers to mixed audiences of adults and children. In this way, drama provided children, traditionally silenced by adults, with a voice and a forum to develop the skills to articulate their perceptions, reflect critically on issues of power and participation, and establish a dialogue with adults. Through the performances, adults came to realise that children's perspectives were very different to their own, and men and boys began to see their violent behaviour as destructive. A collective commitment to address the issue by adults and a greater confidence among children to report abuse led to a decline in the incidence of 'hunting' and sexual abuse by teachers, and improved relationships generally between adults and children.

## **Conclusion**

In the first part of this paper, we have offered a brief overview of our current knowledge about gender violence in schools in the 'developing' world and discussed some of the difficulties of definition and interpretation. Adhering to a broad definition of gender violence which encompasses many forms of violence, some of them context-specific, suggests the need to reconsider the female/victim - male/villain dichotomy. It also means looking beyond the more obvious sensational forms of gender violence that grab the headlines to the more invisible forms often not perceived as violence, and/or not connected with gender, and addressing the way that school processes create the conditions for further violence. More importantly, there is a need to recognise and address the complex and nuanced interactions of different forms and understandings of gender violence and their implications in specific contexts.

In the second part of the paper we provide some examples of small-scale interventions which seek to address gender violence in schools with a range of different stakeholders. These interventions adopt an experiential approach to learning, one which engages young people as active participants in constructing knowledge and commits both adults and children to seeking solutions through behaviour change. The challenges are great: in a didactic authoritarian school culture, introducing such approaches is not easy but if schools are to change gender behaviour (and to teach effectively about AIDS), a more open, process-oriented and participatory mode of teaching and learning needs to be built into the school curriculum.

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