



Gender Based Violence Within Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe*

**Report produced by the Research and
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Introduction

GBV is an evil that has terrorised many women the world over and knows no economic, social or national boundaries. Studies show that 35% of women have at some point in their lives experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner, while national statistics show numbers as high as 70% who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.¹ UNFPA estimates that 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 49 and 1 in 4 have experienced sexual abuse by the age of 15 in Zimbabwe.² (Recent official statistics are not available) In 2016 alone 45 000³ cases of domestic violence were said to be reported to the Zimbabwe Republic Police between January and September. The total number might be much higher owing to the cases that go unreported because of the stigma associated with gender based violence.

When it comes to sexual violence, it is also evident that young women and very young women are in the majority in the reported cases of rape.⁴ The conviction rates were generally very low, 57% were acquitted, or had charges withdrawn. Of those found guilty, the rate was only 16% for those cases where the victims were over 18, but increased to 34% for those aged between 12 and 17 years, and 34% for those under 12 years. However, it is evident that, against the reported rates of abuse, the reporting rate is very low, and the conviction rate even lower.

Every year the world comes together to commemorate 16 days of Activism Against GBV from the 25th of November to the 10th of December centred around a theme. 2017's theme was "*Together we can end GBV in Education.*" It is against this backdrop that the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) and Girls Legacy carried out a study to interrogate the forms and levels of GBV affecting young women within schools which is an area lacking in information.

Methodology

Data collection was done through focus group discussions (FGDs), using guiding questions, with 130 young women between the ages of 16 and 25 years. The FGDs were done in partnership with Girls Legacy, a local girl's rights organisation that has members across the country.⁵ However, the focus of this report was in the following locations: rural Domboshawa, Mufakose in Harare, Norton, and Makokoba in Bulawayo.

Group	16-18 years	19-25 years
Domboshawa	22	9
Mufakose	19	23
Norton	10	15
Makokoba	12	20

* Report prepared by Tinotenda Chishiri

¹ UN Women. "*Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women.*" www.unwomen.org

² UNFPA Zimbabwe. "*Gender Based Violence .*" zimbabwe.unfpa.org/topics/gender-based-violence

³ New Zimbabwe. "*Domestic Violence:45000 reported this year.*" www.newszimbabwe.com

⁴ RAU (2015), What happens to the Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse: Examining the Outcome of Cases heard at Harare Magistrate's Court, 2013 to 2015. September 2015. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

⁵ <http://www.girlslegacy.co.zw>

This report is not aiming to present a quantitative picture of GBV in Zimbabwe but to show, qualitatively, the experiences of the young women who participated in the FGDs.

Meaning of Gender Based Violence

Gender Based Violence (GBV) was defined in the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey of 2015 as “*any act of violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, girls and men, including threats of acts such as, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.*” Although the definition includes acts of violence against men, women and girls in most cases, are predominantly the victims of such violence.⁶ When asked what GBV was the young women were not able to fully articulate a clear definition, however they were aware of the types of GBV that exist, citing physical, sexual and domestic violence. Economic and psychological abuse were not referred to as often, and, in some instances, had to be explained because the young women had a vague or no idea about what they were. Unfortunately, GBV education is not a part of the school curriculum, with the task of raising awareness around it being taken on by non-governmental organisations. Due to limited funds however, they are not able to fulfil this task to the fullest which leaves some young women unaware. It is important for the both young women and men to be aware of and identify the various types of GBV that exist in cases of occurrence and where to get to help, particularly because of its high prevalence rate.

Gender Based Violence in Secondary schools.

The right to education⁷ and equality and non-discrimination⁸ are rights that are enshrined in Zimbabwe’s constitution. GBV within schools is however infringing upon these rights and has a significant impact on educational participation of young women and gender equality.⁹ Young women and girls already face discriminatory barriers to entering the school system such as poverty whereby poor families opt to send boys over the girls to school; gender norms that confine them to doing solely household duties; and early or forced marriages whereby young girls and women are forced to drop out of school to get married.¹⁰ They also face barriers to staying within the school system with one such barrier being GBV. This section is going to look at the various forms of GBV that are found in the schools in the locations the study was conducted in.

⁶ See again RAU (2015), *What happens to the Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse: Examining the Outcome of Cases heard at Harare Magistrate’s Court, 2013 to 2015.* September 2015. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit

⁷ Section 75 of Zimbabwe Constitution

⁸ Section 56 of Zimbabwe Constitution

⁹ Leach F, Dunne M, & Salvi F. *School Related Gender Based Violence. A Global Review of Current Review of Issues and Approaches in Policy, Programming and Implementation Responses to School Related Gender Based Violence for the Education Sector.* 2014.

¹⁰ RAU (2011), *Married too soon: Child marriage in Zimbabwe*, Maureen Shonge. October 2011. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2014), *Let Them Grow First: Early Marriage in Goromonzi, Zimbabwe.* March 2014. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2015), *Marriage in Goromonzi District.* May 2015. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse was cited by majority of the young women as the most common type of GBV occurring in schools, in particular male teachers making sexual advances towards and having sexual relations with female students. In some cases, the teachers were threatening to fail the students if they did not give in to their advances. There are also some teachers who were said to be conducting private extra lessons at their homes and were taking advantage of the opportunity to sexually abuse female students, and, in some cases, in exchange for non-payment for the extra lessons services rendered. Many of the young women explained that in some instances they gave in due to fear of reprisals by the teachers within the class set up. This is a typical characteristic of GBV which is rooted in unequal power relations between firstly, men and women and secondly between the teacher and the student who take advantage of their positions of authority to get what they want.

“Some teachers can even give you an attitude or make you fail your exams if you reject their requests.”

“Sadly some girls end up dating these teachers fearing that if they reject them they will fail their exams.”

The first question that is asked in a case of GBV is what had the woman done to be on the receiving end of such with her behaviour or dressing being questioned? The focus is always put on what the victim did to bring such upon themselves instead of rebuking the perpetrator. It was revealed in the FGDs that in a few of the cases that were reported to the school authorities, whether it be to another teacher or the headmaster or headmistress, the young women were blamed for “inviting” the teachers to them because of their “provocative” dressing or their loose behaviour. A common result of GBV is the perpetrator is exonerated of all wrong doing with the blame being placed on the victim.

“However in reality most girls are not free to report cases of sexual harassment to teachers because most of these teachers are too judgmental and most of the time they take sides with their fellow colleagues.”

This is symptomatic of the patriarchal society in which we live. Men determine how women should dress, and, if a woman shows too much skin by wearing a short skirt, she is immediately labelled as being ‘loose’. Unfortunately this is a view that is fostered through socialisation and instilled particularly in young women and girls.¹¹ These young women, being a product of this patriarchal society gave the following responses as to why teachers were sexually abusing female students:

“Some girls are seducing teachers by their dressing (folding skirts so that they can be miniskirts) and some can even change their voices to soft romantic voices when they are talking to the teacher.”

“Some of these girls inflict these abuses upon themselves because you find them wearing miniskirts and sitting in very compromising positions which distracts and seduces the male teachers.”

¹¹ Dube, R (2013), “She probably asked for it!” A Preliminary Study into Zimbabwean Societal Perceptions of Rape. April 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

The stigmatisation that young women encounter when they report makes them lose trust in the system and discourages other young women from speaking out for fear of victimisation and ensures that GBV remains shameful.

Sexual Harassment

Furthermore the young women also referred to sexual harassment in the form of unwanted sexual comments on their body type or dressing from both male teachers and male students who chant words such *makanyanya*¹², or terms such as '*munodonhedza musika*¹³. Just like sexual abuse, harassment has stigma associated with it, and victims, again predominantly female, choose to tolerate the discomfort it brings and suffer in silence. In a study¹⁴ on sexual harassment in Zimbabwean workplaces, it was discovered that 75% of the participants in the survey who had admitted to being harassed were female. 62% of the participants found the definition of sexual harassment confusing and unclear, and were unsure about the boundaries between sexual harassment and harmless flirting. If adults find the definition of sexual harassment confusing, what more young women in schools? There are various studies that have been done on sexual harassment in the work place¹⁵, and, in institutions of higher learning, however, none on sexual harassment in the high secondary schools, and, because of the low reporting levels, the actual levels are not known. However, in the various focus group discussions it was a recurring issue that was cited.

Emotional abuse

The young women also cited emotional abuse both from teachers (both male and female) and from their peers. Teachers were said to emotionally abuse young women by making fun of them, calling them failures, or dull students. This is a reflection of the poor disciplinary methods used by teachers that are not constructive, but destructive. An example was given of a young woman's parents who could not afford to buy her proper school shoes and so she wore sandals called 'Savanna' to school. The female teacher would tease her and call her names such as 'Savanna girl'.

Male teachers were also said to be verbally abusing girls, particularly in cases where they reject their proposals. Teachers are in some cases insensitive to the plights of their students. Another example of a girl who was told by her teacher that she had ugly handwriting because she was ugly: therefore some young women end up leaving school because of the embarrassment and harassment. Teachers are meant to play a supportive role in the learning process and act as trusted custodians of the students, but, on the contrary, they can use destructive disciplinary methods and be insensitive to the plights of their students. There is therefore a need to interrogate the training methods that teachers undergo to ascertain if they are trained to identify and respond to various situations they are likely to encounter among the students.

Early/forced marriages

Early child marriage is recognised as a form of GBV by the United Nations and by other governments, which includes Zimbabwe. In January 2016, the Constitutional Court ruled that

¹² Literally translated 'you are too much' is a term used to tell a woman how beautiful she is.

¹³ Literally translated 'you make the stall fall' is a term used to tell a woman how beautiful she is.

¹⁴ *Sexual Harassment in Zimbabwean Workplace Survey Report. 2016.* Industrial Psychology Consultants (pvt) Ltd- www.ipconsultants.com (unpublished)

¹⁵

“...no person, male or female, may enter into marriage including an unregistered customary law union or any other union including the one arising out of religion or religious rites before attaining the age of 18.”¹⁶ The young women spoke of the high prevalence rates of teenage pregnancies within their schools which in many cases end up in either early or forced marriages. A RAU report on early child marriages cited teenage pregnancies as one of the leading causes of early child marriage.¹⁷ It is common practice that when a young girl falls pregnant, she is married off if the father of the child accepts responsibility. Usually when a young woman is married off, she drops out of school to take on the responsibilities of motherhood and being a wife. It was revealed that the pregnant young women are in many cases being expelled from school as a means of punishment, a policy which is illegal. An official from Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education stated that “according to Zimbabwe’s Education Act, every child has a right to education and should not be discriminated against.”¹⁸ In some cases of expulsion, if it is a fellow male student responsible for the pregnancy he is left to continue with his studies, a policy that is discriminatory towards the young women and favours the young men. She further went on to explain that impregnated female students must be given three months to rest after delivery and must be allowed to resume their studies at either their old school or another facility. However, it appears the exact opposite is happening as girls in some instances are being expelled as a result of falling pregnant.

“When a girl gets pregnant she is immediately expelled from school whilst the boy continues with his studies. Moreover if she gets pregnant whilst she had registered her O’levels she is allowed to write her exams however she will not be wearing school uniform.”

The Ministry official also cited parents as being the main reason why most impregnated girls failed to continue with school, forcing their children into marriage. A lot of ‘respect’ is placed upon marriage in Zimbabwe and getting married having fallen pregnant is considered as a means of removing the shame within the family, the community or the church associated with falling pregnant out of wedlock. These early/forced marriages expose the young women to GBV, as demonstrated by some of the experiences shared by some of the young women.

“There is a friend of mine who used to stay with her grandmother but was being abused. She got into a relationship with a guy who proposed marriage. She ran away from home and went to stay with her boyfriend. The boyfriend used to treat her well for the first few months and later changed. He began to abuse her, she wasn’t even allowed to look for a job or even communicate with anyone from home.”

“I was married to an abusive pastor who did not allow me to go outside even to the shops. If there was anything needed at home, he is the one who went to buy. He had even asked people to watch me if he was not around and if they told him they saw me outside the yard I will be in trouble. I was lucky to get out of the marriage unharmed.”

¹⁶ Charles Laiton. “Concourt Bans Child Marriage.” 21 January 2016. NewsDay.

¹⁷ RAU (2011), Married too soon: Child marriage in Zimbabwe, Maureen Shonge. October 2011. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

¹⁸ Helen Kadirire. “Expelling Pregnant Students Illegal.” 4 August 2016. Daily News.

Conclusion

GBV continues to be a serious problem in our schools, particularly sexual abuse and sexual harassment by male teachers, and unfortunately it is going on largely unreported. This is due to the lack of confidence by young women in the school system once a case has been reported, with young women facing stigma and victimisation from the very people they report to instead of receiving help. There are also a large number of emotional abuse cases inflicted by teachers and fellow male and female students on the young female students. RAU makes the following recommendations:

- Incorporate GBV within the school curriculum to enable young women and men to identify it and know available avenues for remedy;
- Reporting mechanisms must be strengthened in schools in a way that protects the young women and enables them to have trust in the system so as to encourage other victims to speak up. Due process must be followed in investigating the reported cases and if the accused teachers are found guilty they must be dismissed as an employee of the school and criminal proceedings take place;
- Independent complains mechanism within the education system is necessary to police the policy makers. Familiarity may prevent some schools from taken action but an independent third party may do so easily;
- Bring to account schools that have been illegally expelling pregnant female students as this is discriminatory and a violation of young women's right to education;
- Target awareness campaigns on early or forced child marriages to parents who in many instances are forcing young women into them particularly in cases where they fall pregnant;
- Incorporate psychological training for training teachers to enable them to identify and respond to various situations likely to be encountered with students.