

# Sexual violence of Liberian school age students: An investigation of perpetration, gender, and forms of abuse

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# Literature

- Sexual violence can manifest in numerous ways, one being within the school environment
- Postmus et al. (2015) found that sexual violence, sexual coercion, and transactional sex were common types of sexual violence experienced by school children in Liberia
- Teachers and men in positions of authority have been reported to engage in transactional sex for grades, with students describing parents and peers as encouraging of this practice in order to access education and status (Atwood et al., 2011)
- Most research on sexual violence in and around the school context in sub-Saharan Africa is limited to qualitative work (Leache, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014)

# Impact of Sexual Violence

- The impact of sexual violence on children is vast but includes:
  - School dropout
  - Low self-esteem
  - Health issues
  - Depression
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder (Wible, 2004; Smith et al., 2006)

# Parent Study

- Examine the extent of sexual violence experienced by children attending primary school in four Liberian counties:
  - Bong ( $n = 4$ )
  - Montserrado ( $n = 4$ )
  - Grand Bassa ( $n = 4$ )
  - Grand Gedeh ( $n = 6$ )
- Partnership with Cuttington University
- Anonymous survey distributed to students in primary schools
- 2,166 students participated
  - 1,236 boys
  - 930 girls



# Data Collection

- Study was approved by Institutional Review Boards at both Rutgers University and Cuttington University
- Consent was given by principals at each school
- Parents needed to opt out of having their children participate
- Survey was administered in person in classrooms and students were informed they did not have to participate
- Students were separated by gender
- To ensure anonymity survey did not ask age, only gender

# Current Study

- Research questions:
  - Are there differences in sexual violence experiences among primary school children in Liberia by gender?
  - Can the three forms of sexual violence victimization be identified based on the perpetrator of these acts?

# Measures – Sexual Violence Experiences

- 9 items total (3 each for sexual violation, transactional sex, and sexual coercion)
  - Transactional sex = sex for grades or money
  - Sexual coercion = forced sex
  - Sexual violence = peeping or inappropriate touching
- All items were binary (yes/no)
- Example items include:
  - “Has someone ever watched you go to the bathroom or get dressed? (peeped you)”
  - “Has someone ever asked you for sex to get a better grade?”
  - “Has someone ever forced you to have sex when you didn’t want to?”
- Adapted from Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss et al., 2006) to ensure cultural relevancy; significant changes were made
- Feedback was received from Liberian researchers, university students and the Liberian Research Consortium on Gender Based Violence

# Measures – Perpetration

- Children were asked to identify who perpetrated the sexual violence against them
- All items were binary (yes/no)
- Response options included:
  - Parent
  - Family member
  - Teacher
  - School staff member
  - Classmate
  - Religious leader
- Categories were not mutually exclusive

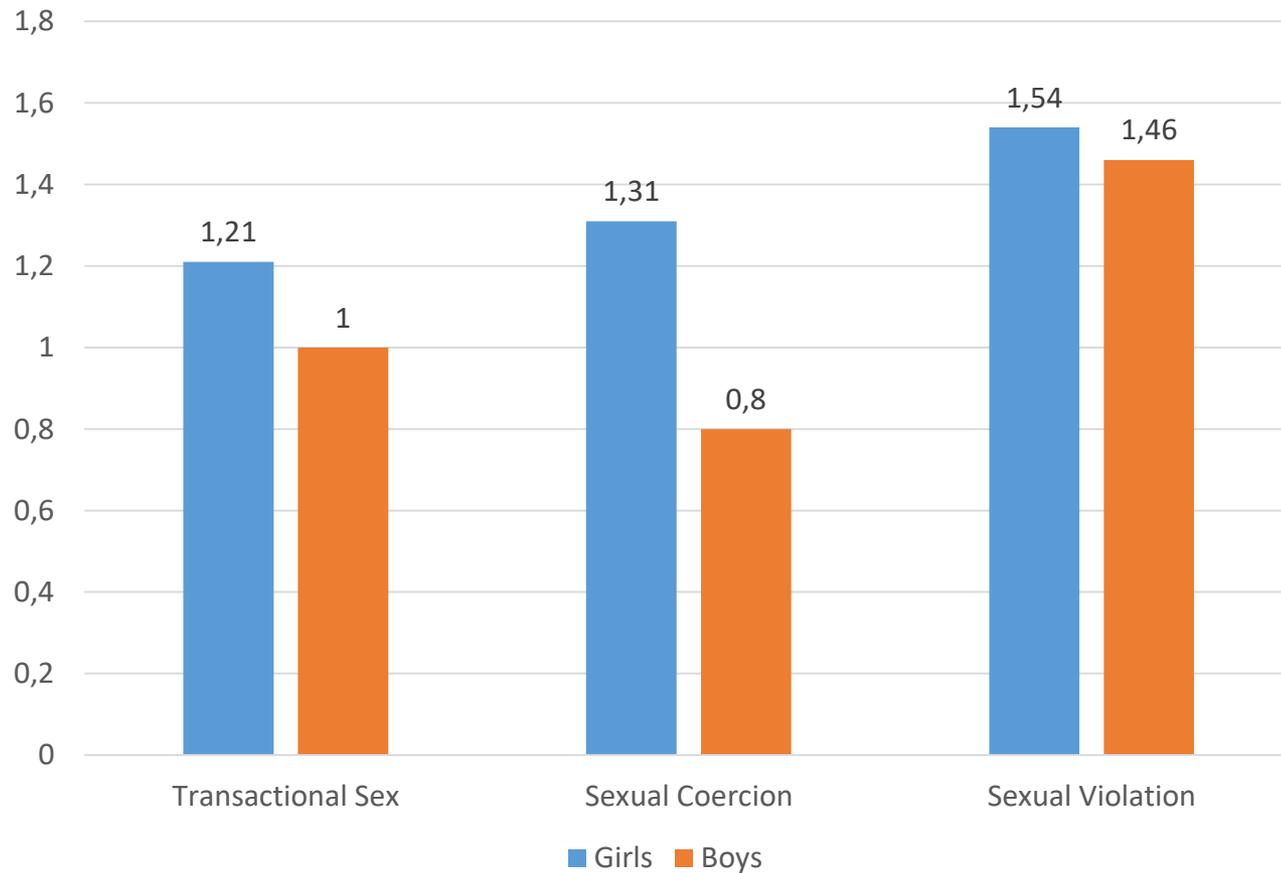
# Analytic Strategy

- Frequencies were examined for all individual survey items
- List-wise deletion was used to remove cases that had missing responses on any of the items used in analysis
- Analytic sample = 811 students
  - 298 girls; 513 boys
- For each of the three forms of sexual violence, the three items were summed and then recoded into binary outcomes
- Three logistic regression models were conducted

# Sample

Variable (% yes)	Total %
Girl	36.74
Perpetrator	
Teacher	24.66
School staff	31.32
<b>Classmate</b>	<b>54.75</b>
Parent	24.17
Family member	31.32
Religious figure	25.54
Form of abuse	
Transactional sex	48.46
<b>Sexual violation</b>	<b>90.26</b>
Sexual coercion	57.58

# Sexual Violence Experiences by Gender



# OLS Regression Results – Transactional Sex

## Model 1: Transactional Sex

	OR	95% C.I.
Teacher	3.664	2.483-5.405)***
School staff	2.161	(1.526-3.060)***
Classmate	1.354	(.977-1.878)
Parent	1.895	(1.296-2.770)**
Family member	1.219	(.863-1.723)
Religious figure	2.004	(1.377-2.917)***
Female	2.946	(2.130-4.075)***

\* $p \leq .05$  \*\* $p \leq .01$  \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

# OLS Regression Results – Sexual Violation

## Model 2: Sexual Violation

	OR	95% C.I.
Teacher	.739	(.432-1.262)
School staff	1.007	(.595-1.704)
Classmate	1.549	(.960-2.499)
Parent	.594	(.357-.988)*
Family member	.902	(.547-1.486)
Religious figure	.899	(.521-1.552)
Female	1.537	(.915-2.582)

\* $p \leq .05$  \*\* $p \leq .01$  \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

# OLS Regression Results – Sexual Coercion

## Model 3: Sexual Coercion

	OR	95% C.I.
Teacher	1.480	(1.019-2.149)*
School staff	1.668	(1.185-2.348)**
Classmate	1.081	(.788-1.482)
Parent	1.377	(.951-1.995)
Family member	1.586	(1.134-2.220)**
Religious figure	2.131	(1.455-3.120)***
Female	3.141	(.334-.662)***

\* $p \leq .05$  \*\* $p \leq .01$  \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

# Discussion - Practice

- Address relations between school staff, teachers, and students, especially transactional sex and its motivators
- Increase coordination between formal and informal systems, community and institutional levels to increase access to justice for students in context of sexual violence in school
- Develop and implement comprehensive prevention and education programs; focus on perpetrators

# Discussion - Research

- Scales adapted to specific cultural context; inspiration from validated scales
- Examine transactional sex practices between teachers and students
- Explore sexual violence consequences and characteristics
- Replicate this study to see what changes may have emerged since this study was conducted in 2012

# Limitations

- Convenience sample of schools based on access and preexisting relationships
- Did not have an opportunity to pilot instrument prior to study
- Need to further examine the linkages between perpetrators and types of sexual violence

# Cuttington University Research Team and Professors



Center on Violence Against Women and Children

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