

Reducing gender-based violence through investments in education

Education is central to efforts to prevent gender-based violence. Low levels of education can increase the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence. In contrast, higher levels of education can reduce such risks, and result in changes in attitudes and behaviours that may lead to abuse. Evidence of the links between education and gender-based violence is needed to inform interventions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where the level of education attained and the quality of schooling received needs to be greatly improved. To address this gap, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative and World Bank Group have funded several studies focused on this link.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND EDUCATION

Using data from 2004 to 2011, Stony Brook University examined the relationship between education levels and young women's experience of sexual violence in Malawi and Uganda. The study took as its starting point policies that removed primary school fees in the two countries in the mid-1990s. These policies led to increased educational attainment among women.

The study reveals that women's levels of education reduced the likelihood of their experiencing sexual violence in Uganda but not Malawi. This suggests that a certain minimum level of schooling may be needed to reduce these risks. Higher levels of education in Uganda led to delays in marriage and increases in literacy and working for pay (proxies for economic standing), which may in turn have decreased the risk of abuse. Further research is needed on the intersections between education and gender-based violence to better understand the relationship between the two.

SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Schools are uniquely placed to influence children's attitudes towards gender and violence before such attitudes become ingrained. To this end, La Strada aims to prevent gender-based violence among youth in relationships by designing, piloting and

implementing a course, Harmonious Couple Relationships, in Moldovan high schools. The course has identified the following risk factors: behaving according to gender stereotypes and accepting them as the norm; insufficient exposure to or understanding of positive relationships; an inability to solve conflict; lack of self-confidence; and negative peer influence.

To address these risk factors, the course will teach students to develop and follow positive relationship values and models, and strengthen their ability to be assertive in their relationships. La Strada is evaluating the course. If found promising, it will be offered as an elective one-year, classroom-based course (34 academic hours) to all high school students aged 16-18 in Moldova.

PUTTING EVIDENCE INTO PRACTICE

Education and school-based interventions play an important, if complex, role in efforts to prevent gender-based violence. Without programmes that address such violence, a longer time spent in school may not always equate to education on gender-based violence. Multi-faceted school programmes that encourage student retention and address social norms underlying gender-based violence are needed. These programmes should involve students, teachers and other staff, parents, as well as community leaders and structures.

Through these studies, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative and World Bank Group are striving to ensure that schools are places of learning, safety and empowerment for all, especially women and girls. ■

¹ Behrman, J. A., Peterman, A. & Palermo, T. 2017. Does keeping adolescent girls in school protect against sexual violence? Quasi-experimental evidence from East and southern Africa. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 60(2): 184-190. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.010>.

² Misail-Nichitin, D., Olaru, V. & Cheianu, D. 2016. Preventing gender-based partner violence among youth with a new school-based course: "Harmonious Couple Relationships". International Center for Women Rights Protection and Promotion "La Strada". Available: <http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/DM%20GBV%20Prevention%20-%20Posters%20formatted%20by%20Greg%2005a%20-%20Moldova%20-%2028Greg%20Wlosinski%2C%20April%207%2C%202016%29%201614018-GBV-PrestonPosters-v1.pdf> [2017, May 26].



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