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Research on Impact of Violence in Schools on Girls in Education

NOVEMBER 2022

Executive Summary

The Research on Impact of Violence in Schools on Girls in Education was developed by FHI 360, and commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the Federal and State Ministries of Education with the generous financial support and partnership with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.



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1. Introduction

This research report provides comprehensive mixed-methods evidence on the negative effects of school-related gender-based violence on educational outcomes in northern Nigeria. To answer the research questions, the research team conducted a quantitative survey of 1,087 pupils in 108 schools. Qualitative research (interviews and focus group discussions with pupils, teachers, parents and community leaders) was conducted in 12 school communities in three states in northern Nigeria (Bauchi, Niger and Zamfara). The team also analysed data from the Violence Against Children Survey that was carried out in Nigeria in 2014.

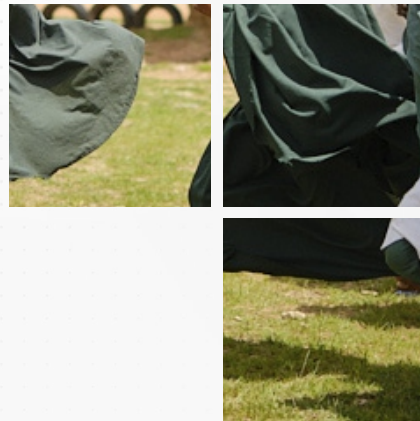
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KEY FINDINGS

- *Children who report ever having experienced one or more forms of violence are more likely to be currently out of school or to have dropped out of school in the past.*
- *Children who experience one or more forms of violence are less likely to be able to read an entire passage in the Hausa language.*
- *Sexual violence is associated with significantly worsened mental health, symptoms of depression and early marriage.*
- *Students who experience physical or emotional violence show worse social and emotional skills and self-efficacy.*

2. Literature Review

A review of existing literature revealed that physical, sexual and psychological violence is strongly associated with negative impacts on students' mental and sexual health. School-related gender-based violence, or SRGBV, has also been associated with negative impacts on educational outcomes. In northern Nigeria, researchers have found that SRGBV reflects gender norms and hierarchies in broader society. Effective strategies that have been used to prevent and respond to SRGBV include in-school, group-based programmes with students that build knowledge and shift attitudes. Sensitizing teachers, whole-school approaches and improved school- and community-based reporting mechanisms are also effective.



3. Purpose of the Study

This research aimed to promote improved opportunities for girls in northern Nigeria by understanding how violence in and around schools may be a barrier to educational participation. At the national level, 24 out of 36 states in Nigeria have implemented the Child Rights Act, which protects children's right to education and a life free of violence. Twelve states have yet to adopt this including Bauchi, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara¹. Based on an extensive literature review, the research team hypothesized that experiences of violence and bullying in childhood could lead to disparate mental health outcomes, reduced self-esteem, physical health and sexual health, school avoidance and poor attendance, increased school dropout and decreased learning, particularly for girls. The team also hypothesized that reduced school violence could improve girls' education and well-being.

4. Primary Research Questions

1.

What are the nature and extent of violence in its different forms and associated behaviours? What are the causes and effects of violence on children's enrolment, retention and active participation in school, especially for girls?

2.

Who are the perpetrators of violence against children, especially girls, and what are their characteristics? What are the drivers of violence across rural, urban, school and out-of-school settings?

3.

What are the perceptions of violence among different stakeholders (i.e. teachers, children, parents and community leaders) and what are the perceived impacts on boys and girls?

4.

What actions are being taken to prevent and respond to SRGBV at the national, state and community levels?

4. Methods

We employed a mixed methods analytical approach to address the primary research questions. The study received approval from the local and international Institutional Review Boards. Given the sensitive nature of the research, significant attention to ethical considerations during data collection ensured that the study would not put any participants at risk during or after their participation.



Quantitative strategy

The quantitative analysis drew upon two sources of data: the Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) conducted in 2014 and the primary student survey data from Bauchi, Niger and Zamfara carried out for this research in May 2019. **The primary data collection covered 1,087 primary school pupils in 108 schools** and was conducted via a tablet-based questionnaire administered by a trained enumerator, one-on-one with a pupil. We employed a two-stage approach to the quantitative analysis to investigate the relevant research questions adequately,

In the first stage, we investigated incidences of violence in various forms by conducting a simple descriptive analysis of the VACS. The VACS is a nationally representative survey of children and young adults in **Nigeria that enabled us to discern the proportion of youths aged 13-18 years who reported ever experiencing violence**, be it physical, emotional or sexual. We then replicated this analysis using the primary data collected from Bauchi, Niger and Zamfara public schools. The descriptive analysis enabled us to construct statistical profiles of different forms of violence and determine the most common traits of victims. In addition, the VACS and primary student survey data provided insight into the likely perpetrators and location of incidences.

The second stage of the quantitative analysis drew upon survey data from our primary data collection activity. The analysis examined the effects of violence on children's education and well-being and provided insight into the drivers of violence inside and outside school settings. We estimated the effects of physical, emotional and

sexual violence, or a combination, on access to education, mental health, early marriage and fertility, social and emotional learning, emotional regulation, self-efficacy and perceptions of school safety. The empirical strategy employed a multivariate regression analysis that compared the outcomes of children who reported experiencing one or more forms of violence to children who never experienced any violence but had similar observed characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status and ethnicity). Although the estimation procedure is non-experimental, the linear regression framework enables us to isolate, as much as possible, the relationship between exposure to violence and outcomes.

Qualitative strategy

The qualitative component of the study draws upon interviews and focus group discussions carried out with 576 pupils, parents, teachers and community leaders in 12 school communities across Bauchi, Niger and Zamfara states. Parental and youth consent was secured before participation in the study was permitted. All focus group discussions and interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. The analysis team developed a coding scheme based on the research questions and key themes under consideration. During analysis, emerging themes were noted and new codes were created accordingly. All data were reviewed twice by two different analysts to ensure high-quality and comprehensive coding.

5. Findings

The main finding of this report is that most northern Nigerian children have experienced some violence in their lives, and this violence shapes their educational outcomes in various ways, particularly for girls. Below are the specific research findings associated with each research question.

What is the nature and extent of violence in its different forms and associated behaviours?

What are the causes and effects of violence on children's enrolment, retention and active participation in school, especially for girls?

The quantitative analysis for the school-based primary data collection revealed that about 58 per cent of all boys and girls aged between 13 and 18 years in northern Nigeria had experienced some form of violence at least once in their lifetime. Of these, 49 per cent have experienced physical violence, 18 per cent emotional violence, and 10 per cent sexual violence. We found that girls were more likely to be affected by sexual abuse, while boys were more likely to experience emotional abuse.

The qualitative analysis revealed that physical violence is a normal part of life for most children in northern Nigeria, primarily in the form of corporal punishment in school and at home. Other forms of violence against children, including sexual and psychosocial violence, are less frequently reported but not rare. The degree and type of physical violence are described as harsher for boys than for girls. Stories of girls being raped by older boys and men, sometimes taking place in and around schools, were mentioned by multiple respondents. Psychosocial violence, particularly bullying and verbal assaults, appears to be common in schools. Examples of bullying include older students stealing food from younger ones and multiple examples of prefects abusing their power over younger pupils. Teachers, parents and prefects were repeatedly described as "ridiculing" students or verbally assaulting them.

The quantitative analysis demonstrated that children who experience one or more forms of violence ever were more likely to be currently out-of-school or to have dropped out of school in the past. Children who experienced one or more forms of violence were also less likely to be able to read an entire passage in the Hausa language, indicating lower levels of educational achievement and learning. Sexual violence was

associated with significantly worsened mental health with victims more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression and more likely to have married early. Students who experienced physical or emotional violence showed worse social and emotional learning skills and self-efficacy. We also disaggregated the effects of violence on outcomes by gender and socioeconomic status. However, we found that the effects of violence were not significantly heterogeneous, which means that the effects of violence were somewhat similar on boys, girls and low and high socioeconomic groups.

The qualitative analysis showed that students are generally resilient to physical discipline, describing it as a regular part of childhood that most children experience to some extent. However, after experiencing sexual violence, community members described girls as "traumatized" and "reclusive." Some did not return to school, while others returned only after a while. Those who experienced bullying and other psychosocial violence were described as less likely to feel free and socialize with others in school, which might affect their learning and overall educational participation.

Who are the perpetrators of violence against children, especially girls, and what are their characteristics? What are the drivers of violence across rural, urban, school and out-of-school settings?

Quantitative results revealed that for boys and girls physical violence is most likely perpetrated by a relative. In contrast, sexual violence, especially among girls, is most likely committed by a romantic partner or a peer. Most sexual violence occurs in the home, at the home of another adult, on the road to or from school and outside of school. Surprisingly, our data showed that children from different socioeconomic backgrounds in the north experience similar incidents of violence. However, children from ethnic or religious minorities are more likely to be victims of different forms of violence. We also found that external shocks to the child's household were associated with experiences of violence and subsequent outcomes. For example, children who experience an illness or death in the family are more likely to experience one or more forms of violence; households experiencing economic hardship by cutting down on meals are also more susceptible to violence; and children who do not live with their biological parents are more vulnerable to abuse. Overall, our analysis showed that children who experience violence are more likely to accept physical, domestic or gender-based violence as the norm.

In the qualitative study, results indicated that the main driver of violence in schools is connected to and reflective of violence in the broader society. For

example, a violent response in one situation leads to a violent response elsewhere, creating a cycle of violence that is difficult to interrupt. In addition, the research team identified a range of perceptions held by local stakeholders regarding the drivers of violence. Policymakers tended to blame gender-based cultural norms and beliefs for the high rates of violence in schools and the negative effects on girls' educational outcomes. For example, respondents stated that practices in school and at home reinforce beliefs portraying women as the "weaker sex," in need of protection and unable to attend school. Such gender roles are executed and maintained violently within the home. In contrast, boys are considered stronger and able to withstand harsh physical punishment. Community members blamed government inaction and economic and regional insecurity for violence in schools and within the broader society.

What are the perceptions of violence among different stakeholders (teachers, children, parents and community leaders) and what are the perceived impacts on boys and girls?

The answer to this question was investigated with qualitative methods. Through interviews and focus group discussions, nearly all stakeholders stated that boys are better equipped to withstand violence while girls are more affected by it. Boys are more frequently the victims of physical violence such as severe corporal punishment and fighting. Stakeholders reported that girls are almost exclusively the victims of sexual violence. This shapes girls' educational and life outcomes in extreme ways, mainly because the desire of families to protect girls from sexual violence often results in withdrawal from school. Both sexes are reported to experience and be affected by emotional violence.

Parents and community members tend to define violence as any act that goes "against the norms and values of the society." For many, corporal punishment is not seen as violence because it is meant to enforce the norms and values of society and is seen as an effective, preventative measure to promote compliance with community rules. However, communities are against corporal punishment that is too severe or unfairly given and consider the following actions violent: severe verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical fighting, stealing, disrespecting elders and banditry. While teachers, parents and community members held similar definitions of violence, teachers tended to place the drivers of violence in the home and described their

schools and classrooms as safe spaces.

Children share a diversity of opinions on violence that illustrates a more complex reality of what children face. Some pupils do not see harsh discipline as physical violence and, like their parents, view corporal punishment as a way to prevent rebellion against collective norms and values. However, many children describe corporal punishment as violence whenever it is considered unfair or too severe. Children tend to develop a sense of solidarity in their shared experience of corporal punishment. They also describe taking stress and challenges into their own hands rather than reporting them to a teacher and risking punishment. All children agreed that sexual abuse is violence. Children also describe ridicule or verbal abuse by prefects, teachers and parents as emotional abuse. Pupils shared that they do not feel comfortable going to adults with problems due to a lack of trust in authority figures and a tendency for children to be punished when they report problems, particularly in schools.

What actions are being taken to prevent and respond to SRGBV at the national, state and community levels?

Many schools do not address violence against children, and incidents often go unreported. There are a few accounts of schools that prevented prefects from flogging other pupils. However, it did little to stop the pervasive narrative of prefects abusing their power through bullying and corporal punishment. There are also accounts of teachers, administrators or hired security personnel taking steps (such as patrolling lavatories and secluded areas) to improve safety. However, there was no mention of measures to assist girls when walking to or from school. It was common to hear stories of violence against children being disregarded at the school level. Respondents reported that some pupils and teachers are "immune to punishment" for various reasons. Most concerning are multiple accounts of teachers being transferred to other schools after being convicted of sexual assault or engaging in the severe use of corporal punishment. At the community level, some respondents noted that School-Based Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations had been engaged in investigations when violence was reported. Top-down policies are not perceived to be very effective since, as one policymaker put it, "the only problem is implementation."

Recommendations

During the validation workshop held in July 2019 in Abuja, research findings were shared with over 40 stakeholders at the federal and state levels. A set of draft recommendations were shared for discussion and revision, leading to agreement on the following recommendations:

1. Domestication and implementation of the Child Rights Act in the northern states

In 2003, Nigeria adopted the Child Rights Act as a national version of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The law was passed at the federal level but is only effective if State Assemblies domesticate it. Currently, 12 northern states in Nigeria have not yet passed the Child Rights Act. They are Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Until these states domesticate and implement the Child Rights Act, the rights of children, including the elimination of violence against children, particularly against girls, will continue to be a low priority in northern Nigeria.

3. Criminalize adults who engage in the sexual abuse of children

The research reveals cases where adults, including teachers, engage in the sexual abuse of children and are not criminalized for their actions. Instead, some adults have been transferred to another school or punished in ways that do not adequately address their violations, leading to further abuse of children. Failing to criminalize these actions enables others to believe they can commit them without fear of punishment, perpetuating the cycle. Reporting every act of abuse to relevant authorities and ensuring that appropriate sanctions are meted out will help ensure that adults are held accountable and deter others from committing similar acts.

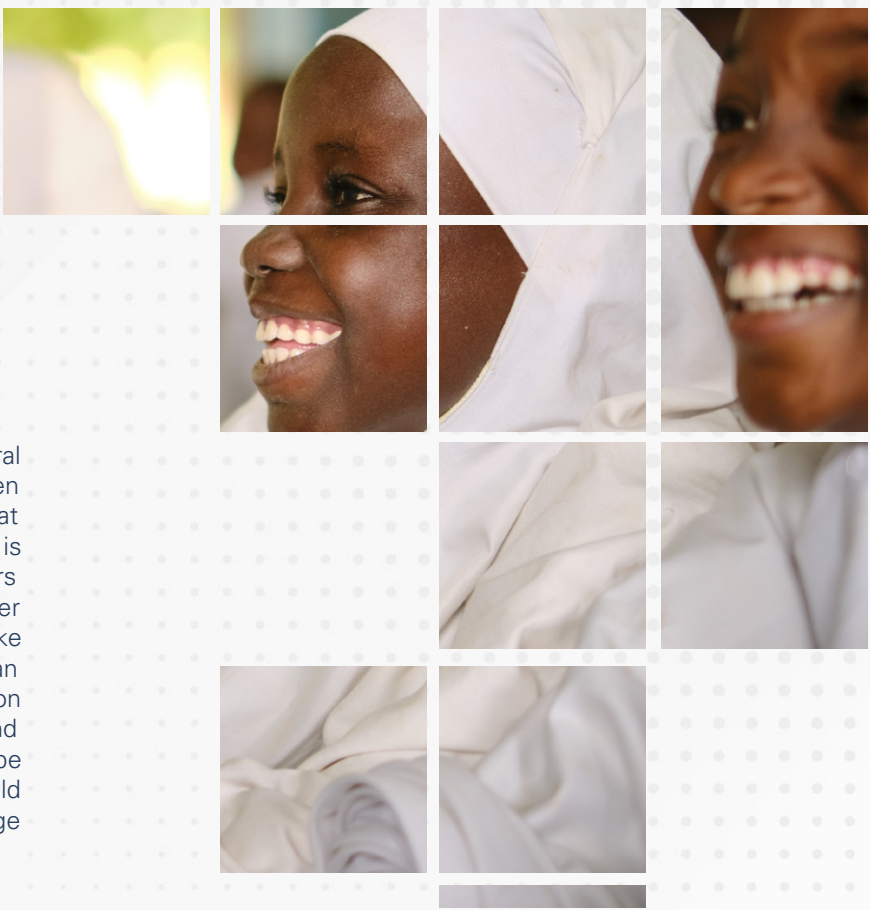
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2. Domestication and implementation of the Child Rights Act in the northern states

Many government entities, including agencies for education, women's affairs, health and social welfare, have a stake in reducing violence against children. Advances inside and outside schools could lead to improved educational participation and social outcomes. Policymakers need to consider integrated, cross-sectoral solutions to address the problem of violence against children in all its forms, avoid siloed solutions, and move towards holistic, improved outcomes for all children.

4. Review, strengthen and enforce the National Policy on Education based on new evidence

The National Policy on Education (2013) serves as the national guideline for the effective administration, management and implementation of education in Nigeria. Given this new evidence on how violence shapes the educational participation of girls and boys, it is recommended that the National Policy on Education undergo review. Paying attention to how schools can address violence more effectively through reporting mechanisms, providing training for teachers on alternatives to corporal punishment, expanding counselling services within schools and identifying and implementing other relevant strategies will strengthen this education policy.



5. | Expand teacher training on alternatives to corporal punishment

A clear finding from this research is that corporal punishment is a part of life for most Nigerian children at home and school. Children often feel unsafe at school, particularly when corporal punishment is considered unfair or extreme. However, teachers need to have training on positive discipline and other alternatives to corporal punishment that could make their classrooms and schools less violent. This can be incorporated into the Universal Basic Education Commission's professional development and teacher training programme and should be accompanied by sensitization and promotion of child protection, focusing on long-term behaviour change for teachers.

6. | Expand counselling services and reporting mechanisms within schools

The research shows that currently, many primary schools lack counselling services of any type and most school figures (e.g., teachers, head teachers and prefects) lack training on how to provide counselling services to pupils. Clear structures for reporting abuses are also mostly absent. Without trusted adults to report abuses to and gain support from, it is unlikely that children will feel empowered to report abuse and recover from violent experiences. It is also essential to create a counselling room so that counselling and reporting services are private.

7. | Improve school security

The research reveals that many challenges with school security, including security on the way to and from school, discourage children, particularly girls, from attending school. Schools should have basic security infrastructure, including fences, youth support groups and community members who are committed to localized security solutions.



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United Nations Children's Fund
United Nations House
Plot 617/618, Diplomatic Zone
Central Area District
P.M.B 2851, Garki
Abuja, Nigeria
Tel: +234 (0) 9-4616100
Web address: <http://www.unicef.org/nigeria>



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