Gender-based violence as a barrier to learning

Blog

Gender

Gender-based violence in schools poses a major obstacle to learning in many countries. Here we discuss a recent review of global research evidence and the publication of global guidance on addressing gender-based violence in schools, as well as other resources.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) includes a variety of forms of violence—psychological, physical, and sexual—committed against boys and girls in and around schools. The Global Working Group to End SRGBV estimates that 246 million students face such forms of violence each year, severely impacting their learning and their general well-being.

Two major publications were launched in 2016 on the topic of school-related gender-based violence: A rigorous review of global research evidence on policy and practice on school-related gender-based violence, from UNICEF and GPE among other partners, and the Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence from UNESCO and UN Women. Following are some of the highlights from each report for education planners hoping to improve learning outcomes by overcoming the barrier posed by violence in schools.

A rigorous review of the global research evidence on SRGBV

Based on a broad review of 670 studies, and an in-depth analysis of the most relevant 49, this global review identified evidence for several promising approaches to addressing SRGBV. Education planners working to address issues of sexual violence among students may consider promoting separate girls’ and boys’ clubs focusing on raising consciousness around such issues, with some opportunities for mixed reflection among girls and boys together—although careful strategies need to be developed to ensure the institutionalisation and sustainability of this approach. Such work is not necessarily limited to students; school staff, parents, and other community members may also be essential participants in the effort, particularly in engaging with men and boys on norms about masculinity and relationships.

Other issues of peer-to-peer violence, such as gang behaviour and bullying, are best addressed through holistic approaches in an entire school or the surrounding community. Similarly, while teacher practices of gender-based violence can be influenced through direct training, whole-school
approaches appear to be more effective, through approaches that include school leadership and students, alongside teachers, in developing new norms and protocols.

Overall, the review found that while attention to SRGBV has been increasing in national policies, there is insufficient follow-through to evaluate the impact of these efforts. Along with better monitoring, evaluation, and research, there is a need for clearer action plans, guidelines, resources and training to promote effective implementation. Furthermore, there is a need for stronger collaborations with other key actors, such as the medical, legal, and social protection sectors, teacher training institutions and teacher unions, and local education officials. Read the full research review at this link.

Global guidance on addressing SRGBV

This guiding document on approaches to addressing SRGBV begins with a compelling call-to-action for governments, policy-makers, teachers, practitioners, and civil society stakeholders—and it follows through with practical tools and approaches to addressing the issue, based on experiences around the world. The guidance is organized around six areas of action: laws and policies, the school environment, prevention through teaching and learning, responses to violence in and around schools, partnerships with key stakeholders, and the issue of how to monitor and evaluate efforts to address SRGBV.

Each of these topics offers specific practical guidance on particular actions that can be undertaken, and offers examples of how that action was accomplished in different contexts around the world. While it is not possible to offer a comprehensive summary here, two examples can help to illustrate the approach. One area of law and policy that is addressed, for example, is that of child protection systems. The guide provides a brief overview of what a child protection system entails, and the suggested practical action is to “ensure that child protection systems include SRGBV”. Selected countries’ experiences—Rwanda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Bhutan—are presented to illustrate that this can only be accomplished through coordinated systems and strategies that work across sectors and at a variety of levels.

As a second example, the guiding document also addresses the issue of curriculum approaches to preventing violence and promoting gender equality. The suggested practical actions include specific points related to planning curriculum development, determining the content to be included, guidance on how the curriculum can be implemented, and suggestions for pilot testing and review. A section also focuses specifically on the “entry points" in the existing curriculum that could be used for introducing new material on SRGBV. Some of these include existing comprehensive sexuality education programs, life skills education, and topics related to gender equality. For each approach, specific country examples are provided, including those from Uganda, Brazil, Canada, the U.S., India, Hong Kong S.A.R., Australia, and Venezuela.

With its highly practical approach and numerous tools and examples to draw on, this document is sure to be immensely useful for education planners and other stakeholders working to address gender-based violence in schools. Read the full guidance at this link.

Other resources you may find interesting:

- For a context-specific examination of school-related gender-based violence issues, see the 2010 report School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone
UNESCO has published a Guide for Teachers on stopping violence in schools
UNESCO and UNGEI developed a policy paper arguing that School-related gender-based violence is preventing the achievement of quality education for all
The Global Working Group to End SRGBV also hosts a rich list of resources and a blog focused on issues of gender-based violence in schools

Bookmark this

View PDF