

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL IN RUMPHI DISTRICT, MALAWI

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Abstract: *Gender Based Violence (GBV) is documented as one of the serious problems faced by students in secondary schools in Malawi. Subsequently, schools have become hostile places for the wellbeing students. Unfortunately it is not as if perpetrators of GBV are strangers, rather they are fellow students, teachers and at times their acquaintances at home. Ideally, in patriarchy societies, the act of GBV is mostly directed towards female, nevertheless, both boys and girls in school end up victims of GBV in one way or the other. The effects of GBV are countless, as it does not only affect student's academic performance but also their attention in class. Therefore, it is against this background that the study investigated the state of GBV among students in secondary school. The study employed Descriptive Survey Design with Simple Random Sampling Technique to solicit 55 participants for the study. Questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers and students of Bolero Secondary School, Chankhomi and Bwengu Community Day Secondary School in Rumphu, Malawi. The study revealed that, secondary schools are highly affected by GBV which ultimately affect the academic performance of students with increased cases of school dropout. Consequently, the study recommend for sensitization, community mobilization and law enforcement if schools are to root out GBV.*

Key Words: *Gender Based Violence, Legislation, Sensitization, Sexual Harassment, Submission.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The degree of violence in Africa is quite high and its consequences in school is complex and terrifying (Badri, 2014). As a result, schools have become less student-friendly as they were presumed to be. Owing to fear of violence, students are failing to access their right to quality education in schools. Ideally, violence in and around school occur in several forms namely; emotional abuse, psychological violence and neglect, physical and sexual assault as well as witnessing physical violence (Kanchiputu & Mwale, 2016). However, one form of violence which has entrenched schools is Gender Based Violence (GBV). Among others, GBV put the students' education at risk as their right to education is not guaranteed (Mwasya, 2015). Worse still, in pursuit to tackle GBV in schools, the society is dumbfounded with confusing statements of what constitute GBV. Such that, it is not surprising to note that, the concept of GBV is viewed to be too abstract, broad as well as complex to digest (Badri, 2014). Nevertheless, Badri (2014) further see GBV as a kind of violence suffered on the basis of gender variations. Specifically in the school context, GBV mean the act or threat of physical, sexual or psychological abuse that is based on gendered stereotypes or their sex, sexuality or gender identities (RTI International, 2016). Female infanticide, honour killing, female genital mutilation, humiliation, degrading treatment, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, acid attacks, forced abortion, early marriage all have been associated with GBV (Badri, 2014).

Nevertheless, it seems girls are normally on the receiving end of GBV in Africa and beyond. Studies show that about 150 million girls in the world experience GBV in school (Greene, Robles, Stout, & Suvilaakso, 2013). Furthermore, studies reveal that schools in African society experience high levels of bullying and aggressive behaviour from boys towards girls, witness undue punishment of girls by teachers like forcing them to take errands for them and even impregnating them (Bisika, Ntata, & Konyani, 2009). Similarly, Appiah and Cusack (as cited in Proulx, 2012) in Ghana reported girls to have been touched against their will from either teachers or students. Furthermore, girls are reported to be at greater risk of psychological and sexual abuse than their boy counterparts (UNICEF, 2009). Ideally, females are said to be susceptible to GBV due to the lower status they occupy which require obedience and submission, hence, incapable to resist the pressure (Leach, Kadzamia, & Lemani, 2004). Similarly, Musuguri (2018) observed that, the traditional gender customs that foster male dominance and power are the cultural vice that prolong acceptance of GBV. However, a study done in Pakistan revealed that due to the unlikelihood of female teachers to sexually abuse boys some parents enrol them in girls' schools (USAID, 1999). Likewise, reports in Africa also reveal boys to be the victims of GBV like sexual abuse in school. Thus, boys are found to receive abuse from their female counterparts in the form of peering at their private parts in toilets, fondling and forcing them into sexual relationships for material advances (Leach, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014). Nonetheless, the numerous cases of GBV in Africa show girls to be the main victims (Niehaus, 2000). Consequently, incidents of fellow students and the frequency of teachers assaulting female students

seem to be threatening (Bisika, Ntatab, & Konyani, 2009). Some teachers are reported to harass girls who refuse sexual relationships with them by repudiating to issue exit permits, punished on trivial mistakes and even being maltreated (Kadzamira, 2001). Regardless of teachers' relationships with students whether forced or consensual is an act of abuse of the teachers' code of professional ethics; however, such conduct in Malawi are rarely re-counted or pursued (Leach & Machakanja, 2000). Nonetheless, the consequences of GBV are frightening with regards to academic success and emotional wellbeing of students. Dunne and Humphreys (2003) established that, GBV like sexual threats, verbal abuse and physical attack leads to uneven attendance and lower academic accomplishments from concerned students. Hence, GBV has a long lasting impact on the victims as it affects their capacity to participate in school activities (Badri, 2014). However, where boys evade extreme corporal punishment, it leads them to permanent school drop-out (Dunne & Humphreys, 2003).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Schools have been challenged with proliferation of GBV among students. This among others leads to poor academic performance and increase in school dropout (Bisika, Ntata, & Konyani, 2009). However, it is not as if the government is not doing enough to its redress; the increase in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), gender equality act legislation and signing of international statutes remains to be a good sign (Bevan, 2014). Mellish, Settergren and Sapuwa (2015) reviewed that Malawi possess about seven GBV related documents, yet, reports by Jere et al (2017) disclose the persistent increase in cases of verbal and psychological harassment, sexual assault, rape and other forms of GBV being rife. Therefore, it is in the view of this background that the study wanted to investigate the state of GBV among students in secondary school with the aim of bringing out practical solutions to the problem at hand.

3. METHOD:

Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey design. According to Kumar (2011) this design endeavours to describe analytically a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or programme, or provides information about the living conditions of a community or describes attitudes towards an issue. Therefore, with quantitative and qualitative aspects engaged, the study intended to establish the state of GBV in the three secondary schools in Rumphi District.

Research Site

The study collected data from three secondary schools in Rumphi district namely: *Bolero Secondary School*, *Chankhomi* and *Bwengu Community Day Secondary School*. Bolero is a boarding secondary school whereas Chankhomi and Bwengu are for day scholars. Rumphi is a district located in the Northern Malawi in what is known as North Education Division (NED). The area was chosen owing to convenience as it was easily reached for data collection. Rumphi is basically a patriarchal society with observable high literacy rates among males (Saur, Semu, & Nda, 2003).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The study targeted 55 participants, 40 secondary school students and 15 teachers. Simple Random Sampling Technique was used to sample participants for the study. This technique helped to ensure that each participant in the target population has an equal and independent chance of being picked for participation in the study (Kumar, 2011).

Data Collection

The questionnaire was the basic data collection for both teachers and students for this study. This tool was chosen with the aim of ensuring non-interference of participants in replying questions (Ravilochanan, 2003). It include both open ended and close ended questions for participants.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from students was coded and assigned numerical values whereas qualitative data from teachers were written down into comprehensive text. Using excel spread sheets; tables, graphs and pie charts were generated to determine the trends of distribution of results of the study. Furthermore, this went along with assigning codes and grouping data into related themes for qualitative analysis of data from teachers. The study used descriptions of percentages of the quantitative aspects and explanations for the qualitative one in reporting the results of the study.

Pilot Study

Pilot study was conducted from two secondary schools in Mangochi district namely: *Chimwala and Nansenga Community Day Secondary School*. Pilot study is conducted to ensure improvements on the questionnaire contents, wording as well as length (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Concept of Gender Based Violence

The study sought to find out if the participants knew about the concept of GBV. The results from teachers indicated that, not all of them were familiar with the idea of GBV. Similarly, 31% of students did not clearly define the concept of GBV compared to 69%. However, participants generally referred GBV as any form of *ill-treatment of an individual or the negative attitude of people towards others based on their gender or sex*. As Badri (2014) puts it, the concept of GBV is hard to define, it is too abstract, too broad, and too complex. Hence, it was not surprising that Mellish, Settergren and Sapuwa (2015) in their study observed that, among the community members in Malawi, there existed perceivable lack of understanding of the concept of GBV.

Existence of GBV in Secondary Schools

The study also sought to understand the existence of GBV in secondary school. According to the results of the study, students' participants cited sexual harassment (22%) like touching breast of girls, rape (20%), stealing (15%) unequal treatment of boys and girls (13%), beating (13%), teasing (7%) and abusive language (6%) and teasing and bullying (4%) as some of GBV. Results from teachers revealed corporal punishment, stealing, unequal treatment of girls and boys as additional GBV reported in schools. Subsequently, the results concur with that of Bhana (2013) who reported that sexual harassment and bullying as some of GBV that school experiences. Shumba (as cited in Plan, 2008) also noted newly recruited teachers influencing sexual violence in schools.

Gender Greatly Affected by GBV

The results also wanted to find out from students and teachers the gender of students mostly affected by GBV. Results from students cited girls (55%) whereas (45%) specified that boys. Similarly, results from teachers revealed that girls are mostly on receiving end of GBV as they are regarded as inferior, cannot defend for themselves and fear of being punished for reporting cases of abuse by teachers. Likewise, Musuguri (2018) contend that, the traditional gender norms that foster male dominance and power are the cultural aspects that perpetuate acceptance of GBV. According to Leach, Kadzamira and Lemani (2004), girls seem to be on receiving end of GBV due the social cultural condition of them being subjective to submission. Similarly, at community level, cases of wife battering are seen as a norm such that people rationalize violence against girls in schools (Mellish, Settergren, & Sapuwa, 2015). Nonetheless, based on the study results from students, it has been found that boys are relatively affected by GBV as much as girls. Psaki, Mensch and Soler-Hampejsek (2017) reveal that girls and boys are equally affected by GBV in school. They have been reported to be abused by their female peers through peering at their private parts, fondling and forcing them into sexual relationships for material advances (Leach, Dunne, & Salvi, 2014).

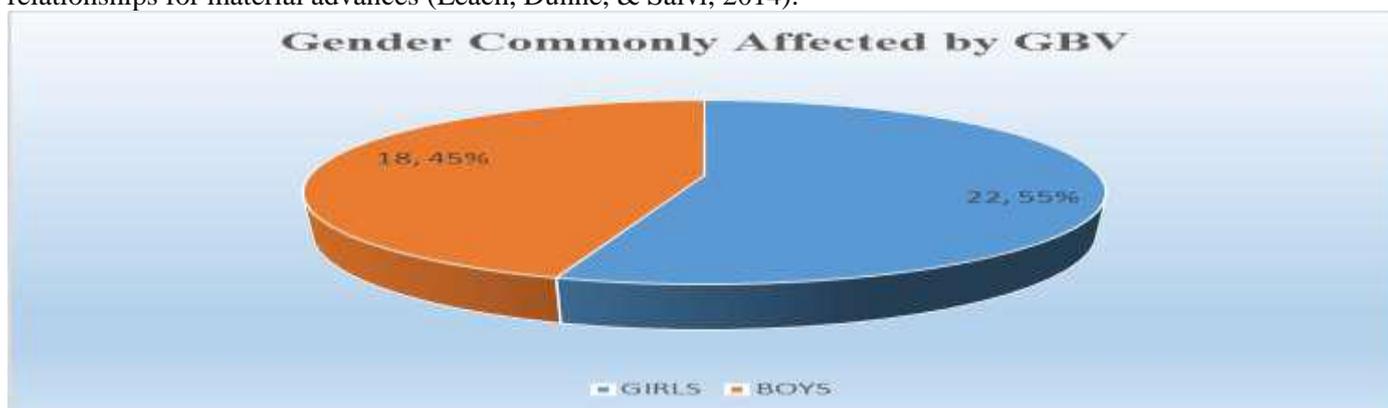


Figure 1: Gender of Students Commonly Affected By GBV in School.

Effects of GBV on Student's Well-Being

The study also wanted to find out the effects of GBV on student well-being. The study revealed similar results from that of students and teachers. According to results from students, 26% cited it leads to poor academic performance, 20% said they drop out of school, 12% cited early marriages, 9% cited students abscond classes. Furthermore, the study observed that GBV leads to low self-esteem from the victims, stress, make them contract Sexually Transmitted Infections and lack of confidence making a total of 33%. Similarly, teachers cited that GBV lead into students dropping out of school, experience early marriages, teenage pregnancies, development of low self-esteem and lack of participation in academic activities. The results concur with Psaki et al (2017) who discovered that, GBV leads to absenteeism, reduced literacy and numeracy scores and school dropout among students concerned. However, it has been documented that girls have greater probability of succumbing to the effects of school dropout compared to boys who generally

abscond classes in response to GBV (Psaki, Mensch, & Soler-Hampejsek, 2017). Therefore, GBV if left unattended would greatly affect the welfare of students greatly hence their participation and academic performance.

Ways of Dealing with GBV in Secondary Schools

The study revealed that, regardless of the trend of GBV, there is still room for improvement. The results from both students and teachers revealed community mobilization and the sensitization on child rights policies to be one of the ways of curbing GBV. These results concur with that of Fulu, Kerr and James (2014) who observed that involvement of local communities and parents through Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) help to change attitudes and behaviours at society level. Kanchiputu and Mwale (2016) contend that, sensitization is fundamental in dealing with violence of various nature, with parents' need to be briefed on the rights of children if related GBV is to be checked. Sensitization would awaken girls who are mainly victims of sexual violence but normally unwilling to report the crime to police or the family members (Wilson, 2008). Similarly, Wingood (2001) observed that, students need to be sensitized on the evils of GBV by providing programs in the curriculum development, community involvements and youth activities. Hence, the need to emphasize teaching of subjects that creates gender friendly settings in school and homes.

Furthermore, the results of the study revealed intensifying laws against GBV as one of the ways of dealing with GBV. The results concur with what Fulu, Kerr and James (2014) who observed government and other stakeholders need to work together and initiate laws from different sectors including schools and work place concerning GBV.

Besides, legislation of laws on GBV in school was observed by participants to help a lot in curbing the vice of GBV (Mellish, Settergren, & Sapuwa, 2015). The results emphasized the role of government, NGOs and other stakeholders in initiating and enforcing laws against GBV, educating students and teachers on the evils of GBV by informing and mobilizing the community on the dangers of GBV. This concurs with what Herstad (2009), who he indicated the need for all stakeholders to implement laws and policies as a crucial steps in addressing GBV.

5. CONCLUSION:

The study discovered that secondary schools in the study area are highly affected by GBV from time to time. Consequently, this results into poor academic performance of students, high school dropout, student's absenteeism more especially girls, stress, low self-esteem and lack of participation in school activities. Above all, GBV affects the general wellbeing of girls who are generally on the receiving end of GBV. Therefore, the study understands GBV to remain one of the serious problems affecting students. Besides that, it acts as a barrier to attaining sustainable social economic development of the society and hence needs redress. The study see the need for a more integrated approach in solving this challenge where all the stakeholders must endeavor to work together in creating a safe environment for both boys and girls. Sensitization of the community and the society on how to identify incidents of GBV, speak about them and analyze their root causes would help to deal with this vice as well. Above all, the study sees the need for teachers, students and community members to understand what constitute GBV for easy reporting and curbing this social problem.

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