

Background

Assessments in countries including Malawi¹, Ghana², and Senegal³ have found that primary and middle students, particularly female students, are at risk of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence by other students, teachers, and community members. In addition, many primary school teachers are not properly trained in ethics, codes of conduct, and/or prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. A study in Senegal found that “20% of sexual violence reported in local media involved school staff and about 90% of violence against school girls occurs either in school or around school.”⁴

Description

Numerous initiatives have conducted teacher trainings; this review looked at the Safe School Program’s Doorways III, the *Projet D’Appui a L’Enseignement Moyen* (PAEM), and an initiative by the University of Western Cape. These initiatives were conducted in conjunction with other interventions, such as community mobilization. The Doorways III curriculum was implemented in Malawi and Ghana, training a total of nearly 400 teachers and supervisors in 2004 on topics including “basic counseling and skills, children’s rights and responsibilities, teaching practices and attitudes that promote a safe learning environment, and how to prevent and respond to school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) incidents. In addition, the training underscore[s] the importance of educators understanding and following the Teachers’ Code of Conduct.”⁵ Similarly, PAEM used various curricula, including the Doorways curriculum, to train teachers in Senegal on attitudes and behaviors, safe learning environments, concepts of sex and gender, human rights, types of violence, teachers’ roles, and practices and strategies. In South Africa, the University of Western Cape’s School of Public Health developed a pilot module on gender and conflict. Two training approaches were used, with one type focusing on developing peer trainers and one type taking a broader, “whole school” focus that included the principal and administrative and support staff.

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Introduce, make use of, or further the (existing) legal protections for women (*critical criterion*).

Reviewers also found that this practice has the potential for, but insufficient documentation of, the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Take measures to end impunity for perpetrators of sexual harassment and other forms of gender discrimination (*critical criterion*)
- Provide information and education about discrimination or rights
- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms.

The inclusion of legal protections against sexual and gender-based violence in the curriculum of teacher trainings is a gender transformative feature of this practice. Depending on how institutions structure the content of such trainings, the intervention could have

greater transformative potential by challenging traditional gender norms and equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools necessary to prevent, mitigate, and counter violence against students or even fellow teachers and staff. Both PAEM and the University of Western Cape noted the importance of managerial commitment and buy-in.⁵

Assessments of the Doorways III program found that “more practice and post-training follow-up were needed to reinforce these new methods in the classroom.”⁶ However, surveys of teachers in Malawi and Ghana and an assessment of the University of Western Cape’s program indicate that the trainings contributed to changes in the beliefs and knowledge of sexual harassment and gender roles. For example, for the University of Western Cape’s program, the proportion of teachers who “felt that schools could play a meaningful role in addressing gender-based violence”⁷ increased from 30% to 70%; the proportion of teachers who “felt they were sufficiently familiar with the current laws and legislation”⁷ related to issues including sexual harassment increased from 21% to 47%; and the proportion of teachers who felt confident on how to handle incidents of gender-based violence increased from 26% to 74%.

Summary conclusions

In a the university setting, faculty and senior administrators serve many functions in countering sexual harassment, including serving as sexual harassment committee members, designated points of contact, or resource persons. To achieve the gender transformative potential of this practice, institutions should incorporate this practice into the recommended “basic bundle” of interventions so that teachers can better support, disseminate, and enforce existing sexual harassment policies and grievance procedures.

Reference(s) and source(s)

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Other references used in this review

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