



Elimination of Violence against Children in Schools: How is Uganda performing along this pathway to protecting the right to education?

Overview

Schools should be safe places for children to learn as they spend more time in school than they do elsewhere outside their home. Like parents, therefore, the adults who manage these institutions have an obligation to provide a caring and safe environment for all learners.

According to Health Management Information System (HMIS), Uganda recorded a 7% increase in cases of teenage pregnancy from 354,681 in 2020 to 378,790 in 2021 during the lockdown period. This is an indication that schools provide a safe place for children.

While every child has the right to safety in schools to ensure that learning is fulfilling, 60% of children regularly experienced violence at school (Raising Voices). According to the Violence against Children Survey (2018), 94% of girls and 86% of boys who experienced physical violence first suffered it at the hands of a teacher. Violence and abuse in schools defeats the purpose of education and forces children to either drop out, or perform poorly and fail to succeed in their lives.

The policy brief highlights the responses that have been made in elimination of violence against children. It identifies the gaps that should be addressed, and proposes options for ensuring that children's right to education is protected.

Introduction

The Uganda Children's Amendment Act (2016) defines violence as any form of physical, emotional or mental injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation including sexual abuse, intentional use of physical force or power threatened or actual against an individual. This may result in or has a high likelihood of

Key Issues

- At least 94% of girls, and 86% of boys who experienced physical violence first suffered it at the hands of a teacher.
- One in four children missed school after experiencing physical violence and 14,570 children were defiled in 2021.
- About 80% of interventions aimed at eliminating Violence against Children in Schools (VACiS) are financed by development partners which is not a sustainable measure in the long run.
- The inadequate education budget for VACiS and limited implementation of laws and policies on child protection impact negatively on the children's right to education.

resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.

According to the National Survey on Violence against Children (2018), 76% of children experienced at least one form of violence. In addition, one in four children missed school after experiencing physical violence, and twice as many girls missed school after experiencing sexual violence than boys. Additionally, the Uganda Police Annual Crime Report (2021), revealed that 14,570 children were defiled in 2021, of whom 14,226 were female juveniles and 344 males. A total of 10,053 (69%) were aged between 15-17 years.



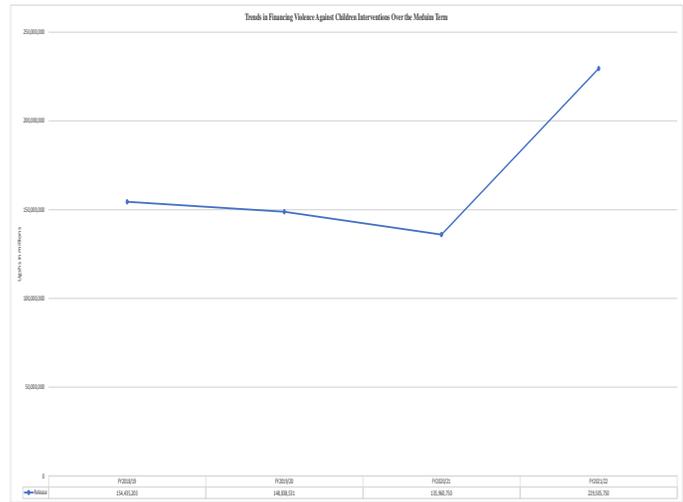
The school dropout rate (45%) has remained high and this has been majorly attributed to violence against children. For instance, in West Nile, out of 100 children in school, at least 90 were tortured or treated violently by teachers or parents which led to some of them leaving school (African Network for Protection and Prevention of Children against Neglect).

To this effect, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) continues to commit to ending violence against children in schools through; i) strengthening programmes on safe schools to empower learners with life skills and promote participation particularly to report cases of violence and seeking appropriate support services; ii) scaling up guidelines on ending violence in schools by putting more emphasis on teacher support and accountability mechanism to reduce violence; and iii) strengthening prevention, referral and response to violence in schools.

Trends in Financing VACiS Interventions

Over the medium term, the MoES through its Gender Unit has provided funds to facilitate interventions aimed at ending violence against children in schools and protect children’s right to education. However, there has been a fluctuating trend in financing (*figure 1*), and the funds have not been adequate to support the interventions. The ministry funded 80% of the Unit’s interventions through Development Partners (DPs).

Financing of critical aspects of the budget majorly by DPs is not sustainable in the long run as the Government can experience setbacks on progress made once the partners pull out.



Sector Responses

a) Development, Review and Dissemination of Policies/Guidelines

The MoES together with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) have developed and disseminated several policies, frameworks and guidelines in a bid to provide safe learning environments. For instance, the National Strategic Plan for Elimination of Violence against Children in Schools (VACiS-2015-2020) which is now under review.

To enable the improvement of reporting and referral pathways of VACiS cases; the Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response to Violence against Children guidelines were revised. Abridged versions for learners and community were translated into five languages of Aringa, Lumasaba, Kupsabinyi, Maida and Lugbarati. Simplified case management books were developed to ease the management of cases of violence against children in school settings and thus improve the reporting and referral pathway.



To operationalize the National Child Policy (2020) and the Implementation Plan 2020-2025, the MoES together with the MGLSD strengthened child wellbeing committees at the National and District levels for 88 districts in FY 2021/22. In addition, guidelines for the implementation of the roles and responsibilities of senior women and men teachers were developed to ensure that cases of violence against children are handled. With the amendment of the Children's Act (2016), corporal punishment was declared unlawful.

In a bid to provide a second chance to child mothers to re-enroll in formal and informal learning programs, the revised guidelines for the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings were disseminated to over 3,000 stakeholders at the national and district level.

To detect cases of violence and provide a response before they happen, the MGLSD finalized the Early Detection Tool. The MoES is working on an early warning system that will be used by schools to detect children who are likely to drop out due to violence.

The commendable progress in putting in place robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks notwithstanding, the implementation and enforcement has been adversely affected by inadequate personnel for case management. For instance, the Directorate of Public Prosecution (DPP) had a staffing gap of 537 prosecutors by August 2021 (*DPP Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2022/23*), hence the office was not present in 45 districts and was not serving 101 courts, yet they handle the bulk of child-related offences (defilement).

b) Capacity Building and Training

The MoES together with civil society organizations (CSOs) have trained children on their rights and existing legal frameworks to

empower them to speak out on issues affecting them, including violence in schools. For instance, the Uganda Child Rights NGO network trained children through their child rights club/media clubs on how they can utilize the existing frameworks to access justice in case of abuse, exploitation and harassment.

Additionally, 234 teachers (133 females, 101 males), and district technical teams were trained in creating safe schools in the districts of Kapchorwa, Kween, Arua, Kitgum, and Kyegegwa among others (Ministry of Finance, Planning Economic Development 2022). Additionally, the MGLSD trained 400 labour officers intending to eliminate child labour, and consequently, 50 children were withdrawn from the worst forms of child labour/hazardous working conditions.

c) Follow up on cases of violence

The MoES together with the District Community Development Officers (CDOs) and Uganda Police Force (UPF) followed up cases of violence such as strikes, defilement and suicide in different districts such as Kalungu, Rakai, Lyantonde, Bugiri, Pallisa, Butaleja, Ntungamo, Rukungiri, Kanungu, Kassanda, Mubende, Mukono, Namayingo, Namutumba and Mayuge (Gender Unit Report-MoES 2022).

The Uganda Child Helpline (Santi 116) was upgraded to handle cases of gender-based violence, physical, emotional, intimate violence and online sexual abuse. A total of 10,132 cases (female; 5,822; male; 3,809 and 498 unknown) were received and handled by the call centre. The majority of the cases were of child neglect and violence against children (sexual and physical abuse) in 2021.

Case referrals were done online by linking the victims with implementing partners such as the UPF, District Probation Offices, Legal Aid, Uganda Association of Women Lawyers,



children's homes and Community Development Offices. However, the lack of access to readily available phones that the children could use to reach out to the centre limited the usage of the service. Additionally, 75% of children were beaten in class despite corporal punishment being illegal. For example, in Mbale District, a student at Nyondo Secondary School died after being caned by a teacher (*Daily Monitor, Tuesday March 26, 2019*) and in Kamuli District, an 11-year-old girl fractured her spine when her teacher beat her with a stick (*New Vision, April 02, 2019*).

Progress on Elimination of VACiS

Models such as the Good School Kit, Community Engagement Strategy, INSPIRE, Village Child Protection Committees, the village child case management committees, and the Male Engagement Strategy implemented by MoES and MGLSD have registered positive impacts in the reduction of violence against children in schools.

For instance, a rigorous evaluation of the Good School Tool kit indicated a reduction in children's risk of physical violence by school staff by 42% over the 18 months of implementation. The model helped in the reduction of dropouts and absenteeism of pupils from schools since different forms of child abuse were handled effectively. Students who dropped out due to family break-ups were followed up.

Implementation Challenges

- i) **Inadequate education budget for VACiS** makes it difficult to implement its interventions.
- ii) **Inadequate implementation/enforcement of laws and policies** as a result of limited personnel and lack of information on child protection has made perpetrators of violence remain at large.

Conclusion

Violence and abuse in schools have the potential to worsen education outcomes and affect children's right to education. However, the sector has an opportunity to improve the interventions being undertaken through the strengthening of multi-sectoral collaborations with MGLSD, Health and Justice sectors for better results on VACiS especially for case referrals and management. In addition, there is a need for continued sensitization of relevant stakeholders on VACiS.

Recommendations

- i) The MoES should prioritize investment in VACiS. This should be informed by an exploration of the economics of child protection, cost of inaction and cost-benefit analyses to generate an evidence-driven case for increased funding or prioritization of VACiS and what the increase should look like.
- ii) The DPP and UPF together with MGLSD should prioritize the recruitment of the relevant staff for case referrals and management.

References

- DDP (2021), Ministerial Policy Statement FY 2022/23
- MFPED (2022), Human Capital Development Programme; Semi-Annual Monitoring Report FY 2021/22
- MGLSD (2018): Violence Against Children Survey
- Uganda Police Force (2021), Annual Crime Report, 2021

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