

School Girls' Experiences of Gender Based Violence: A Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Kaoma and Luampa Districts of Western Zambia

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Abstract: This study explored school girls' experiences of gender based violence in selected secondary schools in Luampa and Kaoma districts of western Zambia. The study established the causes and consequences of gender based violence against school girls including factors that compel abused girls to remain silent. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed in this study. Participants included twenty-eight (28) school girls who had been victims of gender-based violence, four (4) School Administrators, two (2) DEB Officials, and four (4) members of the community, all of whom were purposefully sampled. Data were gathered by semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The causes were centered on socialization and traditional treatment that girls face in African society. School girls who experienced gender based violence did not report their experiences, for fear of being stigmatized, blamed, retaliated against, and not responded to by school administrators. Those who reported their experiences did not receive appropriate help. Male teachers engaged in sexual relationships with school girls and promised the girls money for food, school fees, and other necessities. Some male teachers reacted, beat and punished the girls who refused their advances. School girls also faced gender based violence from their male classmates who proposed sex to them, touched their breasts or bums, or made sexual comments. Some boys threatened girls who did not submit to their sexual advances and used physical violence. School girls experienced gender based violence by men they encountered as they walked long distances to and from school which negatively affected their education and health. Sexual abuse exposed girls to sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy, injury or death from unsafe abortions, depression and anxiety. They also lost concentration on their academic work, transferred to other schools to escape the abuse and dropped out of school because of pregnancy. Lack of policies for responding to reports of gender based violence and blaming girls made it difficult for girls to report their experiences. Male teachers who sexually abused school girls never received stiffer punishment but just transferred to other schools.

Key Words: Schoolgirls, Secondary Schools, Gender Based Violence, Sexual Violence, Physical Violence Psychological Violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of gender based violence against school girls in Zambia is an observable phenomenon. Girls encounter gender based violence (GBV) in many areas of life in Zambia. Family members often uncles, cousins and

sometimes fathers perpetuate such violence in the homes. More significantly, girls experience GBV with teachers and fellow students at school. Literature indicates that the actual occurrence of GBV against school girls is certainly inadequately reported. The unreported occurrences of GBV make it difficult for the victims to utilize the Anti- Gender Based Violence Act of 2011 and ascertain the magnitude of the phenomenon (WLSA, 2012).

According to Women and Law in Southern Africa – Zambia WLSAZ (2012) gender based violence against girls occurs frequently in Zambian schools, and little is known about the precise scope or magnitude of the problem. Unreported cases of GBV against girls with few reported cases to the police, the Victim Support Unit of the Zambian police does not maintain separate figures on the number of incidents of gender based violence against girls that occur in schools. The WLSAZ research conducted in 2012 in Lusaka district of Zambia reveals that an average of 7 to 10 cases of gender based violence, particularly sexual violence against girls in schools are reported to DEBS office each year. However, reports to the police or DEBS cannot provide an accurate gauge of the scope of the problem, as many school girls rarely report incidents of GBV to their school administration, and such cases are even more rarely reported to the police (Mitchell and Mathobi –Tapela, 2004; Gulaid and Mthethwa, 2009; CDC, 2011; Blaya and Debarbieux, 2008).

Statement of the problem

Gender Based Violence experienced by school girls is often compounded by the fact that religious and cultural values promote the virtue of silence (Sharp (2011; Chirwa, Ng'andu and Kalimaposo, 2016). This tends to discourage victims from speaking out about the abuse and reaching out for legal assistance. Owing to the prevalence and magnitude of gender based violence, many studies have been done on gender based violence against women in society and its impact. However, little research exists from the Zambian context on school girls' experiences of gender based violence.

Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study was to find out the school girls' experiences of gender based violence in selected schools of Kaoma district of Western Zambia.

Research Questions.

The study was guided by the following questions,

1. What are the experiences of school girls regarding gender based violence?
2. How do school girls who fall victim to gender based violence react to the abuse?
3. How do community members perceive gender based violence against school girls?

Theoretical Framework

In search for a theoretical framework on gender based violence against school girls, this study focused on cultural feminism. Feminist theory comprises a diverse body of research in a variety of disciplines which share certain features. Cultural feminism and conflict theorists note that the family has traditionally legitimized and perpetuated male dominance. Historically men have been the 'sexual aggressors' and women the 'sexual prizes for men.' Women have been victimized and are vulnerable as child bearers. Women have been seen as sexual property, taken as booty in war, used by their fathers in economic bargaining, and considered as owned by their husbands. Women are the central subject in the investigative process and feminist theorists seek to see the world from the distinctive vantage point of view in the social world. The feminist school of thought is critical and activist on behalf of women, thereby seeking to produce a better world for them. Most cultural feminists characterize contemporary societies as patriarchal, that is, dominated by men, the primary source of female exploitation is by man rather than by other factors such as class, (Lorber, 2000).

Cultural feminism focuses on violence against women; in this study school girls as young women, identify patriarchal structures which reinforce gender based inequalities of power in society as the root cause of the problem. Giddens (2004) relates gender to power in an overarching theory of gender relations which integrates the concepts of patriarchal and masculinity. Patriarchy requires violence or a subliminal threat of violence against women and girls to maintain itself. Children who grow up in patriarchal societies learn a variety of control tactics designed to control women and girls from an early age and boys tend to live up to stereotypical roles expected and cherished in a patriarchal society. Gender based violence appears as a natural consequence of women's and girls' second class status in most African societies (Brown, 2007).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Gender Based Violence against school girls

Gender-based violence is defined as violence inflicted or suffered by girls on the basis of gender differences. It is an experience of violence that prevents young girls from developing and fully exercising their rights. Examples of gender-based violence are female infanticide, honor killing, female genital mutilation, humiliation, degrading treatment, sexual abuse, forced pregnancy, acid attacks, forced abortion, early marriage, and among others (United Nations, Commission on the status of women, General Secretary Report, 2004). The UN study on violence against children (2008) in schools identified four main forms of school violence namely; bullying, sexual and gender-based violence, physical and psychological violence and violence associated with gang culture, weapons and fighting.

*Types of Gender Based Violence**Physical Violence*

Physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause death, disability, injury or harm. Physical violence is the easiest form of violence to identify because usually there are physical findings to match it. Common forms describing physical violence and abuse in schools include, but are not limited to: physical bullying, physical threats and intimidation, physical assault, beatings, attacks with weapons, arson and theft, corporal and other physical punishments, (UNESCO. 2009). Physical violence and abuse against students in schools can be perpetrated by adults including teachers and other school staff, as well as by students, against other students.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence refers to the use of physical force to compel a person to engage in a sexual act against his/her will whether or not the act is completed or an attempted or completed sexual act involving a person who is unable, to understand the nature or condition of the act, decline participation and communicate unwillingness to engage Sexual violence is not as easy to identify. Often women do not show any signs of sexual assault either because they were unable to fight the aggressor or because they report the case late. Sexual violence takes the form of sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual exploitation in prostitution or pornography. It can happen in homes, institutions, schools, workplaces, in travel and tourism facilities, within communities, both in development and emergency contexts. Child sexual abuse is defined as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity to which he or she is unable to give informed consent (and may not fully comprehend), or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or which violates the laws or social taboos of society, (UNICEF 2013).

Verbal aggression and psychological violence

Verbal violence in school takes the form of ‘insults, humiliation or emotional blackmail while psychological violence is an umbrella term that encompasses bullying, harassment, victimization, abusive threats and intimidation (SAHRC, 2008: 9). Psychological violence involves form of cruel and degrading punishment that are not physical in nature. SAHRC further states that the presence of psychological violence in schools is underestimated and receives less attention.

UNICEF (2007:7) defines sexual violence as ‘any sexual act, attempt to obtain sexual acts, unwanted comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work. According to CDC, sexual violence takes different forms, including sexual abuse, harassment, rape or exploitation cuts across the whole world (CDC, 2011). Sexual abuse is committed if the child is not developed to fully comprehend sex matters or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. The Child and Law foundation (2007) further states that the abuse may be explicit when a person is touched, fondled or looked at in a suggesting manner using body language or when the child is physically assaulted. UNICEF (2007) further states that boyfriends and teachers were cited as major offenders while female learners indicated that they never reported sexual violence because they were not aware that what they had experienced was tantamount to abuse. Reporting of sexual violence incidents in school setting appears to be limited due to fear of being shamed, stigmatized, discriminated against or because they felt that they would not be believed or would face retaliation from the aggressors (Chirwa, Ng’andu & Kalimaposo, 2016).

In Swaziland, the global school-based child healthy survey showed that 335 of the respondents reported an incident of sexual violence before they reached 18 years of age; Of these 9.8% of girls aged 13-15years and 21% of girls aged 16years and older reported having been physically forced into sexual intercourse and 13% of secondary school learners described their first sexual experience as involuntary (Gulaid and Mthethwa, 2009). The survey further indicated that sexual violence not only traumatizes the victims, but it may also be associated with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, in addition to the risk of teenage pregnancies. The consequences of all these may prompt children to drop out of school.

Gender-Based Violence refers to a concept that involves a violation of human rights that result in all forms of violence based on gender relations (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002) in Dunne, Humphrey and Leach (2006). It is a special type of sex violence that involves man and women in which the female is usually the victim. GBV is derived from unequal relationships between men and women, stereotypes and society imposed roles (SRSG Report on Violence against Children, 2012). Further, the report noted that boys and girls

are subjected to this violence differently. Boys are generally more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment than girls, while the girls are harassed, taunted or even punished if they are seen to be behaving in an inappropriate manner that is perceived to be inconsistent with their assigned role in society. These harmful stereotypes that demean children because of their gender create environments in which children can be abused with impunity including by adults in positions of trust and authority.

GBV is one of the most common forms of sexual violence in high schools which is more often directed at girls and is motivated by the desire to intimidate, punish or humiliate (Chirwa, Ng’andu and Kalimaposo, 2016). Boys and teachers are also common perpetrators of GBV. Sometimes teachers promise higher grades or reduced fees or supplies in exchange for sex with girls. A study by SWAGAA, one of the organisations concerned with eradicating GBV and promoting human rights for all SWAZI citizens found that out of 1200 girls and women aged 13 to 24 years experienced sexual violence as children (Gardsbane & Hlathwayo, 2012). The authors note that most of these incidents were not reported because most of the victims did not know that sex violence was wrong.

Similar to the situation in Swaziland, the incidence of GBV in other Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American countries is alarming and in particular case of teachers that abuse learners. In a UNICEF report by Laetitia (2010:28), poorly paid teachers in West and Central Africa sometimes see sexual favours as a form of compensation. In Uganda, studies done by Young People’s Voice on HIV / AIDS prevention programmes in school showed that 8% of 16 and 17 year-old boys and girls had had sex with their teachers and 12% with ancillary staff (Blaya and Debarbieux, 2008).

The UNICEF (2004) report states that some male teachers and older men in the community often called *sugar daddies* propose to girls for sex in exchange for money or gifts and in some instances teachers give higher examination grades, extra tuition and other preferential treatments. Blaya and Debarbieux (2008) further report that higher levels of sexual aggression from boys and teachers towards school girls are common in Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe and generally in Sub-Saharan countries. In Kenya, the report states that 71 teenage girls were raped by their classmates and 19 others were killed at a boarding school. In Latin America, the World Bank (2000) as cited by Blaya and Debarbieux (2008) reports that in Ecuador, 22% of adolescent girls had been victims of sexual abuse within the school environment. The CDC report states that most children who are victims of sexual violence are also at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexual transmitted infections. The same report laments that even if these children do not immediately contract the sexually transmitted diseases, they are later unlikely to contract infectious and chronic conditions since sexual violence alters their life paths leading them down the road of depression, substance abuse and other high risk behaviours. Consequently, they lose out on their education prospects.

Although violent incidences may have their root causes outside the institutions of learning, the school head teachers with their staff members must take all necessary precautions to prevent it. (Chirwa, Ng'andu & Kalimaposo, 2016).

Root Causes of Gender Violence and Discrimination in Education

According to the UNESCO, Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, some traditional thinking based on caste, religion and culture may prevent girls from attending school because their labor has always been seen as necessary at home, and education is viewed as promoting behavior unfavorable to girls' marital prospects. For example, in many parts of Asia, it is considered inappropriate for girls to be seen in public walking to school because of the distance or fear of assault.

Some aspects of tradition and culture also support male domination. For example, boys are generally free to be educated, can work and move as they please, and are supported economically where necessary. In contrast, girls are socialized to believe that they are inferior to men, their role is to marry and procreate, and violence is used to enforce and perpetuate that status quo. In addition, violence against girls is rooted in structural and institutional patriarchy and unequal power relations that exist worldwide and is a symptom of the larger problem of gender equality in society at large. Gender stereotypes in society works to corroborate ideas and beliefs of the position and worth of girls in society, and where not systematically addressed for example, through education, these attitudes continue to take form in discriminatory and violent behavior, (Davies M 2007).

In the African continent, research indicate that the sources of violence are rooted in the inequality and gender-role stereotyping that exist between men and women, as well as the overall subordination of women and girls in greater society. For example, in Ghana and Kenya's periodic review, the Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has expressed concerns about prevalence of patriarchal ideology with firmly entrenched stereotypes and persistence of deep-rooted norms, custom which discriminates against women. Additionally, in the African context, social complacency and some general acceptance of violence as a form of discipline and traditional practices that support violence against women at large in society continue to exist, (Brown. L 2007).

Effects of Violence on Girl's Quality of Education

The harassment and violence affects school girls' academic performance resulting in decreased attendance, participation, and successful completion of primary or secondary education (Muyabi, et al. 2022). In addition, gender based violence against girl's results in low self-esteem and health issues such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and exposure to HIV/AIDS and other STIs for young girls. Additionally, barriers such as lack of sanitary facilities or resources and expulsion because of pregnancies are other manifestations of

discrimination that affect school girls' ability to succeed in school. Even more unfortunate is the fact that victims and their parents do not often know that there are laws that protect them and they are fearful of disgrace hence they rarely come forward to bring the issue to law enforcement for fear of retaliation. When left unaddressed the violence creates a hostile learning environment, and girls are at times left with no recourse but to live with the fear and intimidation or drop out of school altogether (Leach. F 2006).

Explicit (Sexual) Gender Based Violence against School Girls

Studies from sub-Saharan Africa have focused almost exclusively on heterosexual relations and violence against girls and have not investigated the incidence of violence against boys or against teachers. They have also addressed primarily the sexual abuse of female pupils by male teachers and male pupils. For example, Chirwa, Ng'andu and Kalimaposo (2016) explored the defilement of girls in urban schools of Lusaka District while Leach and Machakanja (2000) and Leach *et al.* (2003) examined the abuse of junior secondary school girls by older boys, teachers and 'sugar daddies' in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi and found that there was a high level of sexual aggression against school girls which went largely unpunished in the schools. In some cases teachers were cited for proposing sex with school girls. This behaviour was largely tolerated and went on uncorrected.

Implicit Gender Based Violence against school girls

There is a wide range of implicit gender based violence against girls in schools which is perpetrated by male teachers and school boys. (Bendera, Maro and Mboya 1998) looked at gender and violence in selected primary schools in six areas of Tanzania, which included insults and verbal abuse on school girls. Bunwaree (1999) found high levels of verbal abuse in schools against girls in Mauritius; this was also found by (Leach and Machakanja (2000) in Zimbabwe and was particularly prevalent among female teachers, who often preferred to use it rather than corporal punishment. Brenner (1998) studied gender differences in classroom interaction in Liberia and Anderson-Levitt *et al.* (1998) examined factors affecting girls' participation in schooling in Guinea. Some studies have uncovered gender violence while investigating underachievement, e.g. Gordon (1995) in Zimbabwe, (Dunne, Leach *et al.* 2003) in Botswana and Ghana. Terefe and Mengistu (1997) looked at violence in secondary schools in Ethiopia, and Human Rights Watch (2001) in South Africa. With the exception of the latter, they are all small-scale studies. There is evidence of very widespread use of corporal punishment in many of the above reports. This is reported against girls even where it is banned e.g. in Zimbabwe (Leach and Machakanja, 2000) and there are cases where teachers get students to give corporal punishment to other students (Anderson-Levitt *et al.*, 1998).

Gender Based Violence against Women and Girls in Zambia

The prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women and girls in Zambia is extremely high. A 2007

government survey reported that 47% of Zambian women had been the victim of gender based violence taking the form of physical violence at least once since the age of 15 and that at least one in ten women experienced sexual violence. In 2011, the Zambian Victim Support Unit (VSU), a unit of the Zambia police service responsible for responding to sexual offenses and other crimes against women and children, recorded 11,908 reports of gender-based violence, up from 8,261 in 2009. The actual occurrence of gender violence is almost certainly much higher due to the likelihood of underreporting. There has been a sharp increase in cases of defilement (statutory rape) reported to the University Teaching Hospital since 2008, from 1,237 cases in 2008 to 2,430 cases in 2010. Defilement cases reported to the VSU have also increased; from 1,676 in 2009 to 1,939 in 2011, (WLSAZ 2012)

III. METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study was purely qualitative and located within an interpretive qualitative paradigm using a descriptive research design built on the premise that reality has multiple layers and is complex. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore in detail how participants made sense of their personal and social world with regard to school girls' experiences of gender based violence in selected secondary schools of Western Zambia. According to Patton (2002), knowledge production in qualitative research is centred on people's experiences and interpretations. A qualitative perspective focuses on human experience and the meanings ascribed to those experiences (Burke, 2004). Creswell (2012) defines phenomenological study as a descriptive and interpretive study of how individuals experience and understand a phenomenon.

Target population, Sample size and Sampling Procedure

The study focused on four public secondary schools of Kaoma and Luampa districts of Western Zambia. The four schools were chosen on the basis that they were rural based schools. The participants of the study included twenty-eight (28) school girls, most of whom had personally experienced the violence, four (4) school administrators, two (2) DEB officials and four (4) members of the community. All the participants of the study were purposively sampled. The study used in-depth interviews with school administrators, DEB officials and members of the community, and focus group discussions with school girls. Members of the community were purposively

Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced in the field based on the interactive model of content thematic analysis as observed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014). The three main components of data collection, data reduction and data display were directed at drawing out participants' social realities based on regularities and sequences that linked these experiences. The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was employed in data analysis as the study intended to explore in

detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith, 2003). The interviews focused on the experiences of school girls' with regard to gender-based violence in selected secondary schools of Western Zambia. IPA was fundamentally concerned with exploring the meaning of experiences rather than attempting to produce an objective account.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Presentation of findings from School Girls School girls' experiences of gender based violence

School girls who were participants in all the four secondary schools where the study was conducted highlighted the high prevalence of gender based violence against them taking various forms, such as sexual violence, which included, unwanted touching, name calling and labelling, threatening behaviour and inappropriate sexual comments. Girls at school A reported that they were treated as sexual objects. They were subjected to unsolicited touching on their breasts or behinds.

“Some male teachers and male pupils talk to us in sexual manners, they treat us like sex objects, they even touch our bums. I don't like it.” (Grade 11 Girl).

Gender Based Violence against School Girls Perpetrated by Teachers

The girls that were interviewed in this study described teachers who subjected female learners to gender based violence taking the form of sexual violence. At school B, girls reported about one teacher who spent a lot of class time telling sexually-charged stories and making sexual comments to his students. Some teachers similarly would embarrass girls and talk about sex or say insensitive and embarrassing things that made the boys laugh. Others touched female learners' breasts or bums, sometimes could even ask to take them out.

“One day when I was walking, and the top burton of my shirt was a little bit open, the teacher drew nearer and said, “Wow, you have nice boobs.” I said, why are you saying those things? I'm young. He kept quiet but continued approaching me, telling me that I was beautiful, asking me out and offering to take me somewhere to a nice place.” (Grade 11 Girl).

Many participants reported teachers who proposed love to them or their friends or classmates, trying to use their position of power to persuade the female learners to engage in sexual relationships with them. A grade 9 girl at school C, said that two teachers had proposed love to her. The first one approached her when she was in the school hall, made comments about her breasts, and asked her to go out with him. The other teacher used to harass her in class:

“This teacher would come to my class, he would find me eating something and say, “I want what you are eating.” When are you going to visit me at my home?” He kept on doing such things for some time.” (Grade 9 Girl).

At school D, a grade 11 girl said that she knew about two teachers at her former primary school who liked asking school girls to go out with them. She further explained that she had been proposed twice by one of those teachers and had responded in a way that shamed that teacher.

It was observed that some teachers even abused their positions of authority by working against girls who refused their sexual demands or broke off a relationship. Girls reported that teachers sent learners out of class, refused to call on them, or even physically punished them in front of other students. As noted earlier, the Zambian Law prohibits the use of corporal punishment in schools, and a teacher or administrator who punishes a learner in this way is liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to one year. However, majority of the girls interviewed reported that they or their classmates had been subjected to corporal punishment at school. The girls reported cases in which teachers slapped or hit female learners in retaliation for refusing their sexual propositions. A grade 10 girl at school C narrated her experience in the following words;

“My Geography teacher proposed me, and I refused. After that, when I tried to answer a question in class, he wouldn’t call on me or would send me out of the classroom. When the noisemakers made noise, he would beat me. He used a stick on my hands or buttocks. When this happened, I was discouraged at school. When I woke up in the morning, I didn’t want to go to school because I knew that the teacher would beat me. I stayed home from school for one week until my mother got me changed to another class.” (Grade 10 Girl)

Gender based Violence Against School Girls perpetrated by School Boys

In addition to their experiences of gender based violence by teachers, schoolgirls reported being abused in various ways by their male classmates. During focus group discussions, many girls reported that they had personally experienced sexual harassment or abuse from fellow learners by being pressured to have sex, being touched in a sexual way without their permission, and having been the recipients of unwanted sexual comments by boys. They further reported that they knew of other girls who had experienced sexual harassment or violence by fellow pupils at their current or former schools.

Girls revealed that they were subjected to degrading language by male pupil and were often called by all sorts of abusive names such as bitches if they never cooperated with boys. At school B, a girl had the following comment;

“If you do not accept what they want, they would call you by all sorts of offensive names such as a bitch, a prostitute and so on. They can discuss the shape of your breasts and even speak about your private parts.” (Grade 12 girl).

While most of the school girls who participated stated that boys used threats to deter girls' actions, other participants revealed that boys' actions were not limited to verbal threats

but could also escalate to physical or even sexual violence if girls never complied with them. A girl from School B noted that:

“If he wants to have sex with you and you refuse, he would want to rape you. Like when me and another boy are talking, and he wants sexual intercourse and when I refuse he would hit you. Sometimes the guy would beat you just to impress his friends” (Grade 10 Girl).

The study found that boys used the threat of violence to scare girls into submission; violence was used as a mode of control over girls’ bodies, dresses, movements and social activities. Therefore, Girls' lives were often limited by the threat of violence. The power that male learners exerted on female learners' heavily controlled girls' choices at school, their academic performance as well as freedom of movement. At school A, a girl revealed the following;

“If you pass well in class and you are in a relationship with a boy who fails in class, he won't encourage you to pass.” (Grade 11 Girl)

Gender Based Violence on the Way to and from School.

The gender based violence that school girls encounter in Zambia while attending school is not limited to their interactions with male teachers and classmates. Rather, school girls are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence while travelling to and from school.

Rashida Manjoo, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, observed in her May 2011 country report on Zambia that, “Girls are not only at risk of being subjected to violence in schools but also on the journey to and from school. Long distances to schools also expose school girls to higher level of vulnerability to harassment on the way. Some girls who participated in this study reported walking long distances to school. They said they were uncomfortable and unsafe during their journeys to and from school because they frequently encountered men who sexually harassed them.

A grade 9 girl at school A, explained that her friend had been raped on the way home from school. The girl narrated as follows:

“My friend was raped by a man who worked as a conductor for local mini-bus. It wasn’t dark; he did it in the bush. Later my friend told her mother who started looking for the conductor but he was nowhere to be seen. Then my friend felt so ashamed of what had happened to her that she transferred to another school.” (Grade 9 Girl).

At school B, a grade 9 girl described her experience in the following words:

“When I walk home from school, some people bother me. Sometimes you find a man who is drunk, and he comes and touches you. You have to just go. There isn’t

anything you can do because that person is bigger than you.” (**Grade 9 Girl**).

Consequences of Gender Based Violence Against School Girls

The findings of this study suggested that the impact of gender violence against school girls had far reaching consequences for girls; it affected the girls' decision to remain in school, girls' concentration and their sense of self-esteem. Girls in this study were asked how they felt in the face of this harassment, intimidation and violence; their responses included use of words such as 'exploited', 'worthless', 'alone', 'scared', 'powerless' and 'guilty'. These responses highlighted the traumatizing effect of such violence and emphasized the sense of helplessness, fear and self-blame that many women experienced in abusive relationships. Gender Based Violence by teachers, fellow students or community members went along with serious consequences for young schoolgirls. They experienced a variety of physical, mental, and emotional health problems. They often had difficulty in concentrating in class, found their education derailed by a teacher's retaliation, or interrupted their education to transfer to another school in order to escape harassment. Some girls became pregnant and dropped out of school, often for good.

Findings from School Administrators

School administrators who participated in this study revealed that gender based violence against school girls existed in schools and that male teachers and male learners were the major perpetrators of the violence. Some school administrators maintained that sometimes school girls themselves invited the abuse especially sexual violence because they seemed to like it that they could be in sexual relationship with teachers. A guidance and counseling teacher school at A, who was one of the school administrators presented his view in the following words:

“Sometimes girls themselves invite sexual abuse, they have a tendency of behaving in a way that attracts sexual affairs with boys and male teachers. Hence the blame should not only be on male teachers and boys but on girls also.” (**School Administrator**).

With regards to school girls' reaction to the abuse, school administrators reported that abused girls reacted in various ways. Some of them reported the abuse while others decided to keep it to themselves for fear of embarrassment, especially issues to do with sexual abuse. It was clearly observed that the way the school administrators argued reflected the unfriendly environment for the abused girls to report their experiences.

A school administrator at school D, had this to say;

“My observation is that most girls who experience gender based violence find it difficult to report because they like it and they initiated it, so they fear that they will be exposed” (**School Administrator**).

Findings from District Education Board Officials

The District Education Board (DEB) office also pointed to the role that poverty plays in teacher-student relationships, noting that girls may submit to sexual advances in order to obtain resources needed for survival or items that their peers possess but they cannot afford. Other teachers gave the girls they were dating preferential treatment at school, helping them to pass even when they did not deserve good marks or refraining from punishing them when their classmates were punished. One officer from DEBS Office made the following remarks.

“Some female students believe themselves to be less intelligent than boys, leading them to seek favors from teachers in the form of good marks. Although girls truly choose to engage in these types of relationships, their choices are almost always coloured by elements of coercion given the sharp disparity in power that exists between themselves and their teachers.” (**District Education Board Officer**)

With respect to the prevalence of GBV on school girls, one District Education Board Officer under which school D fell indicated that there was high prevalence of gender based violence against school girls in secondary schools and that teachers and school administrators never took the consequences of the problem seriously. His lamentations were as follows:

“The prevalence of gender based violence against school girls in secondary schools is high and the implications are complicated and frightening. This problem in most cases is hidden and not reported by the victims. Also, teachers in schools and the school administration do not seem to take serious the consequences of the problem and its implications on the health and education standard of the girls. Moreover, many schools do not have a clear system for the prevention and management of gender based violence against girls in schools. It is worth admitting that school girls are subjected to various forms of gender based violence like physical, sexual and psychological violence.” (**District Education Board Officer**).

Findings from members of the community

Community members revealed that gender based violence against school girls was a common practice at school and within the community. While some clearly viewed girls as victims with little power in the transaction, forced into these practices by poverty, others saw girls as to blame, whilst others seemed to hold both these views at the same time. Men's desire and envy were seen as contributing to the problem, and girls were also seen as responsible through dressing in a way that attracted the opposite sex, male teachers, school boys and men in the community. In some cases, girls' subjection to sexual abuse was associated by parents with unruliness and indiscipline on the part of girls. The following were some of the views from the members of the communities within which schools A, and B were located;

“when you talk of gender based violence particularly sexual violence against school girls, I think some school girls give themselves to older men in the community during day and, at night time, so that they can buy school material and pay school fees for them.” (**Member of the Community**).

“For me, school girls are the problem in this issue of gender based violence just like women in the homes are a problem, because they are the ones who initiate sexual relationships with school boys and men and even male teachers. Then, they lose concentration on school and begin to have poor performance.” (**Member of the Community**).

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that there was a high prevalence of gender based violence against school girls perpetrated by male teachers, male learners and men they encountered while moving to and from school. The study ascertained the magnitude of gender based violence against school girls by considering the number of participants who lamented that the violence occurred frequently in secondary schools. The participants' expression of their personal experiences of gender based violence with male teachers suggest that school environment is not a safe place for them because schools are characterized by all forms of gender based violence against girls.

Chirwa, Ng'andu and Kalimaposo (2016) reported that advances that boys use involve the threat of violence to scare girls into submission which is a mode of control over girls' bodies, dresses, movements and social activities. Therefore, Girls' lives are often limited by the threat of violence. The power that male learners exert on female learners' heavily control girls' choices at school, their academic performance as well as freedom of movement. Girls at school B, where they go for weekly boarding maintained that groups of boys loitered around the girl's bathroom and if girls wanted to use the bathroom, they were humiliated. As a result, girls did not use the bathroom. This is also consistent with Chikwiri and Lemmer (2014) study on Gender-based Violence in Primary Schools in the Harare and Marondera Districts of Zimbabwe which observed that, “most girls identified toilets as the riskiest place because male classmates followed to peep at or grope them.

Many of the girls who participated in this study reported walking long distances to school. This study therefore indicates that school girls were uncomfortable and unsafe during their journeys to and from school because they frequently encounter men who sexually harass them.

This finding is consistent with Sadiyya Haffejee (2006), in South Africa who concluded that it was a particular problem in rural schools where girls feared harassment from herdsmen. “Because of the scattered settlement patterns homesteads and schools are a considerable distance apart and some girls walked long distances to school daily. In some cases, family

members took turns to accompany participants to school; however, this was not always feasible.”

The findings of this study suggested that the impact of gender-based violence against school girls had far reaching consequences for girls; it affected the girls' decision to remain in school, girls' concentration and their sense of self-esteem. The harassment, intimidation and violence girls are subjected to make them feel exploited, worthless, alone, scared, powerless and guilty resulting in the traumatizing effect sense of helplessness, fear and self-blame. This reflects many women's experiences in abusive relationships in Zambian society.

School girls who fall victim to gender based violence and attempt to report face multiple barriers in obtaining help thereby perpetuating a culture of silence. These barriers include the absence of straight forward policies and procedures for preventing and responding to abuse, attitudes among school authorities that tolerate abuse or blame the abused girls, inadequate or wrongly lenient responses by teachers at school and administrators, insufficient support services for children who are subjected to abuse, and a preference for resolving cases of abuse internally rather than reporting them to DEBS offices or police.

This study concludes that girls' reactions to gender based violence constitute an element of tolerance and normalization of gender based violence especially forced sexual relations that result in rape and defilement. Despite the existence of gender based violence topics in the Zambian school curriculum, no formal sex education exists in the curriculum, thereby leaving a gap in the provision of knowledge for school girls to protect themselves against gender based violence. However, in Anti-AIDS Club meetings or other gatherings, teachers tell girls to protect themselves by staying away from boys and refusing to believe what they say. Girls are also reminded to avoid wearing short dresses or sitting in a careless way so that boys and men could look up their skirts.

These messages suggest to girls that men are naturally aggressive and sexually charged, that harassment is something to be expected. The responsibility, therefore, is placed upon girls to resist the advances of their male teachers and male classmates. However, some girls do not realize that what they experience is an offense. This is particularly true in cases involving sexual harassment by boy classmates. Girls reported that it made them feel bad and scared when boys touched them sexually or made sexual comments to them, but many of them took it for granted as something that boys do. A girl from school commented

This study further perceives that in many cases school girls themselves assign responsibility of violence to themselves, a situation that allows them to condone or accept at the same time condemn the violence. Some of the girls still doubt whether they deserve it or not, and at times, emphasize on the patriarchal notion of men's rights over women, which serve to condone violence and excuse men's behaviour. School girls tend to remain silent about their gender based violence

experiences because of some discriminatory attitudes against them which exist in their communities and schools where the blame is centered on them. One girl at school D, explained her reluctance to report sexual abuse.

“Even If I want to report I find it difficult, because if I go to the head, what if he thinks I am lying? If I go to the police, they would say where is the evidence?” **(Grade 12 Girl)**

The study postulates that despite the known vulnerability of adolescent girls and the prevalence of violence against women, no interventions are underway in any of the schools that participated in this study. There is not even one deliberate policy or program put in place by any of the participant schools to deal with gender based violence against school girls. This suggests that within the schools not much is done to recognize the abuse girls are subjected to. This further indicates that, for many girls, the school is not a safe place because they are subjected to various forms of gender based violence while at school and teachers do not take such harassment seriously. This lack of action on the part of school officials once gain leaves girls feeling that their experiences are normal and acceptable.

This is consistent with findings in the literature that suggests that often schools are unsafe places; girl's toilets, in particular, are seen as sites of potential hazard. Schools are regarded as unsafe places and school responses to abuse are seen as unsatisfactory (Muyabi, et al. 2022). No mechanisms are in place to protect or educate girls on gender- based violence. This suggests that girls perceive that they are subjected to more abuse and disrespect from men within and beyond the school environment because the community condones such behaviour pointing to a sense of frustration and hopelessness at not being heard and not being helped. Findings from discussions with girls at school C, suggest that girls perceive that they are subjected to more abuse and disrespect from men within and beyond the school environment because the community condoned such behavior;

In view of the findings from the community members, the study conceives that gender based violence against school girls is a common phenomenon at school and within the community. School girls are viewed as victims of the violence with little power in the transaction, forced into the practices of sexual violence by poverty. At the same time, girls are blamed for the violence. Men's desire and envy are seen as contributing to the problem, while girls are also seen as responsible through their dressing in a way that attracted the opposite sex, male teachers, school boys and men in the community. In other cases, girls' subjection to sexual abuse is associated with unruliness and indiscipline on the part of girls by some parents.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is clear from this study that violence against young adolescent girls are a reality and it occurs at all levels, home, schools and streets. Our societies play a great role in shaping

the gender based violence against girls. This violence affects the girls' child psychology which leads to depression, frustration and isolation. Furthermore, findings of this study in corroboration with other studies suggest holistic approaches for prevention that enhances gender equality and improves school environments in a way to increase participation of all members of the school community. Gender based violence against school girls is a widespread barrier to girls' attaining educational equity, which also brings with it many health risks. Addressing power imbalances between men and women is central to preventing gender violence, and this process must be deeply rooted in schools. Successful efforts must include both boys and girls. The lives of girls/women and boys/men are intimately interlinked, and trying to address the problem by working only with girls is not a solution enough. Rather, working with girls and boys sometimes together and sometimes separately depending on the social context is the only way to implement approaches that can truly reshape the construction of gender roles. This requires a multifaceted approach with efforts involving all levels of schooling, teacher training programs, community efforts, and ministerial policy and practice.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Ministry of Justice and other stakeholders should reinforce the provision of legal aid for girls who experience gender based violence in school including cases where they may wish to file a civil complaint against the perpetrator.
- The Ministry of Education should strengthen guidance and counseling resources available to learners at school level by ensuring that all schools have trained teachers in guidance and counselling.
- The Ministry of Education in collaboration with civil society organizations should provide deliberate training programmes to teachers, school administrators and community members in curbing gender based violence in schools.

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