SUFFERING AT SCHOOL
Results of the Malawi Gender-Based Violence in Schools Survey

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October 2005
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Foreword

This report presents the major findings of the 2005 Violence against School Children in Malawian Schools Survey. This survey is the first of its kind to be conducted on a national scale in Malawi. The survey was conducted in government and government-aided primary and secondary schools. The violence fell into four categories: physical, sexual, economic and emotional. The children were divided into two groups: those who were 9-13 years of age and those who were 13 years and older. The objective of the survey was to determine the extent of personal safety (in relation to the nature of violence and perpetrators of violence) in schools and also to obtain perceptions of security and insecurity in and around schools (getting information on areas where children are at risk). The survey was conducted in February and March 2005.

I would like to thank most sincerely the British Department for International Development (DFID) for its financial assistance and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) for its technical support. I am also grateful to the Steering Committee for the useful contributions they made to the smooth running of this survey. Thanks are also due to the judiciary, the Malawi Police Service and the Malawi Prison Service for seconding some of their staff to the Crime and Justice Statistical Division of the National Statistics Office (NSO). Last, but not least, I would like to thank the general public, particularly those people who in one way or another assisted to make the survey a success.

Special acknowledgements are due to the entire staff in the Crime and Justice Statistical Division who worked tirelessly during the whole survey operation. They include Mr. Lameck Gondwe (head of the division), Mr. Christopher Manyamba (researcher), Mr. David Mphepo (researcher), Mr. Thomas Mhango (researcher), Miss Wandika Phiri (researcher) and Mr. Aaron Msukwa (project administrator). Special thanks also go to Mr. Eric Pelser, the project advisor and Patrick Burton, the ISS consultant, for their invaluable advice during the entire survey operation as well as during the preparation of this report.

Charles Machinjili
Commissioner of Statistics

Acknowledgements

This research and publication were funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) in Malawi. Their generous assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

The author would also like to thank all those who gave of their time to participate in the study, especially the children who took the time to answer personal questions. In addition, the participation of the following people is gratefully acknowledged:

- The officials of the Ministry of Education at a national and local level who facilitated access to the schools in which the interviews were conducted;
- The principles and staff of schools selected to participate in the study;
- The members of the Steering Committee for their advice on the study and questionnaire design;
- Members of DFID Malawi, the DFID Malawi access to Safety, Security and Justice (MaSSaJ) programme and DFID Education in Malawi, for their support and input into the project;
- Lameck Gondwe, head of the Crime and Justice Statistical Division (CJSD) of the National Statistics Office (NSO); and
- Christopher Manyamba, Wandike Phiri, Dave Mphepo, and Tom Mhango, researchers in the Crime and Justice Statistical Division, who managed the data capture and validation, and undertook the initial data analysis.
About the author

Patrick Burton is an independent research consultant specialising in crime and justice issues. Formerly a director of Development Research Africa (DRA), an independent development research company based in South Africa, he has undertaken work in South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania and India.

Executive summary

The Violence against School Children in Malawian Schools field data collection took place from 15 February to 22 March 2005. The objective of the survey was to assess primarily the extent and nature of gender-based violence in Malawian schools. School children aged nine years and older were interviewed. Core questions on perceptions of violence, fears, and feelings of safety were posed to all children, and questions probing experiences of sexual violence and bullying were posed to children aged nine to 13 years, and 14 years and older. Each module was designed for the specific age group, and where necessary, referrals for counselling and support were provided to children. Teachers and principals at each sample school were also interviewed.

A nationally representative sample of 4,500 children was drawn, consisting of 3,000 girls and 1,500 boys. In total, 4,412 children were interviewed, using a quantitative questionnaire.

Safety, and perceptions of safety, among Malawian schoolchildren

Despite a tendency to travel to school in groups, almost one quarter (23.8%) of Malawian children are scared when walking to school. This is predominantly fear of being attacked (71.1%), or of being bullied (12.5%) while travelling to school. More than one quarter (26.5%) of children personally know someone who has experienced a problem on the way to school. One fifth (19.4%) of children had themselves encountered problems on the way to school, resulting in high levels of fear. Almost one third (30.3%) of Malawian children fear specific places at their schools, most notably the grounds (i.e. sports or playing fields, gardens and the school periphery), and toilets and bathrooms.

Experience and nature of violence

Almost all (99%) of Malawian children reported being bullied, while just under one quarter (23.8%) reported having been forced to have sex against their will. More than one tenth (14%) reported having been touched on their genitals or
breasts against their will, and 3.9% of children over 13 years reported having been forced to engage in some form of oral sex. Girls are most commonly victims of violence; however, both sexual violence against and bullying of boys are also common. Levels of all forms of violence are higher among children older than 13 than among the younger children (9 to 13 years).

Children of all ages living in rural areas are more likely to be victimised than those living in urban areas. Location is particularly significant in the case of bullying and unwanted touching of the genitals and breasts. Bullying (55.3%) and forced touching (52.5%) is most likely to occur at school, while forced sex (57.3%) and, in the case of older children, oral sex (53.5%), is most likely to occur at home.

Repeated victimisation of Malawian children is common. In total, seven out of ten (70.6%) children who had been bullied experienced such acts on more than one occasion; 57.6% of the children who had been forcibly touched had been victimised more than once, and just slightly fewer (54.0%) of all the children who had been forced to have sex had gone through the experience on more than one occasion.

In the majority of cases the children knew the offender. In total, 93.5% of those who were bullied knew the bully; just under nine out of ten (88.7%) of those who had been touched knew the offender; and a fractionally higher percentage (89.4%) of those who had been forced to have sex knew the offender.

The most common perpetrators of violence were classmates, with the exception of children 13 years and younger, who mostly identified non-parental figures from home. Parents and others living at home were identified next most frequently as the perpetrators of all types of violence.

Just under one fifth (18.7%) of those who had experienced some form of violence reported being offered, or receiving, a gift or services as compensation for, or in return for, sexual favours. Most commonly this was in the form of money or food.

Transactional sex with teachers, or ‘love relationships’
Almost one third of all children reported that teachers at their school demanded sex from children in return for good grades. The majority of children 13 years and younger knew someone personally, or knew of an actual case where this had happened, while one third of older children could think of an actual incident.

Just under one fifth (19.8%) of teachers reported that they are aware of teachers who entice students into ‘love relationships’. Of those that reported awareness of such incidents, almost three quarters (73.7%) knew of these incidents happening at their school.

Reporting of violence
Based on the survey findings, between three fifths and two thirds of offences against children in Malawi are reported to someone, be it a parent, teacher or the police. Bullying is most often reported (65.5%), while forced sex (61.4%) and oral sex (60%) are the least reported. Reporting of abuse tends to be higher amongst older children, and among girls of both age groups. Abuse is most commonly reported to parents in the cases of forced sex (52.6%), oral sex (52.2%), and bullying (43.6%), and to friends (46.8%), followed by parents (31.5%), in the case of touching of genitals or breasts.

Support and knowledge of rights and life skills
More than seven out of ten (71.6%) children had heard the phrase ‘children’s rights’ before, with knowledge of the phrase higher among older children than younger children. When faced with a problem at school, most children reported that they would take steps to deal with it; most commonly talking to a parent (56%), or talking to a teacher or school counsellor (26%).

Most children reported approaching someone (usually a parent or a teacher) to talk about HIV/AIDS (74.9%), bullying (67.1%), making their schools safer (59.7%), the relationships between boys and girls (57%), and body changes through puberty (55.4%). These figures reveal the attention that safety and security, as well as issues around sexuality, receive from children.

The majority of Malawian children appear to know their rights regarding their body and their sexuality. Most boys and girls indicated an awareness of the right to refuse sex. However, the tendency to translate this knowledge into practice and behaviour is less certain, with many practices belying this knowledge.
Recommendations offered focus on both policy and implementation. These include the development of dissemination strategies to spread awareness of policies regarding sexual violence and corporal punishment; the targeting of school staff and parents to make them aware of the various forms of violence to which their children are exposed, and how to deal with incidents; the development and dissemination of support strategies for survivors of abuse; and the formulation and implementation of effective strategies to deal with ‘love relationships’ in schools.

Section 1: Introduction

Violence thrives in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights, and good governance. We often talk of how a ‘culture of violence’ can take root… many who live with violence, day in and day out, assume that it is an intrinsic part of the human condition. But this is not so. Violence can be prevented.
– Nelson Mandela

Background and objectives of the study

Violence against women and children is arguably one of the most important, and one of the most challenging, social issues facing governments and policy makers in all countries throughout the world. Every year more than one million people lose their lives to violence, and violence is cited as the leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 44.¹ The impact of violence against children in particular is not necessarily reflected only in mortality rates, but in the way that survivors experience the rest of their lives, the way they interact with others, and the potential for committing violent acts often associated with the experience of violence and abuse. Violence against women and children, often termed gender-based violence (although this may be just one aspect of such violence), is one of the most hidden forms of violence that there is, a characteristic that makes it even more difficult for government and institutions to effectively deal with the problem.

Because of the unseen nature of much of this violence, and the very low rates of official reporting of such crimes, there are few accurate and reliable data on violence against women and children. Data on the extent of violence against children are particularly limited. Where information is available, it tends to be based on qualitative evidence collected by nongovernmental service providers, researchers and government agencies,

rather than accurate and representative quantitative data gathered from either large-scale surveys or police statistics.

The existing information suggests that, although children face abuse in all countries, it is disproportionately common in countries throughout Asia and Africa, often countries that are classified as ‘developing’ or ‘under-developing’. A recent report by Human Rights Watch argues that sexual and physical abuse against girls in South African schools, for example, has reached “epidemic” proportions. Estimates from a recent study in Zambia put rates of violence against girls as high as 85%. These rates are significantly higher than figures cited in work undertaken in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom or in Europe.

Paradoxically, even fewer data exist on the trends within developing countries, compared to other more developed countries. This can be explained by a number of factors, including the limited resources channelled towards the collection of accurate data (given priorities such as the provision of basic services); as well as the ‘silent’ nature of the crime, as it is often pushed underground by communities that deny, and, at times, use local ‘culture’ as an excuse for, its existence. The situation is beginning to change, however, and there is a growing awareness at all levels of society, from community members to traditional leaders to governments, that such actions are occurring, that they are having devastating effects on the lives of millions of children, and need to be addressed.

The little existing data indicate a consensus that most violence against children occurs within the two environments in which children spend most of their time: home and school. What constitutes violence, or abuse, has been specified by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by a range of countries, including Malawi, in 1989. As conceptualised by the Convention, the violence perpetrated against children becomes part of the everyday life of many children, both within the sphere of home and of school – the two areas most important to any child’s life.

As the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) notes in a literature review of school-related gender-based violence in developing countries:

“In the developing world, where economic imbalances are extreme, literacy rates low, basic universal education is a goal rather than a reality, and the HIV pandemic is often devastating, the question of gender-based violence and its impact on education and health is particularly critical. However, little work has been done to systematically document and review information on the prevalence and consequences of this violence in formal education settings, nor to look carefully at intervention strategies that are or could be in place to address the problem”.

There can be no simple reason for the prevalence of this violence, just as there can be no simple solution. Violence has its roots in a plethora of individual, community, historical, economic and cultural specifics and, while addressing it requires a broad and common acknowledgement and definition of the problem, each context is different and requires its own specific solutions.

The impact of violence experienced by children cannot be over-emphasised. The effects are felt long after the incident, or incidents, occur and may continue throughout childhood and into adulthood (see Box 1). Nor can the effects be easily or distinctly categorised. In many instances, the effects are inter-related, a complex dynamic of emotions, behaviours and illnesses that may only present years after the incident. The effects of violence experienced in childhood, even where children are not direct victims of abuse, may impact on behavioural patterns that manifest throughout the life of the individual.

Given the dearth of empirical data on violence of any type within schools, this study presents the findings of research conducted into gender-based violence...
Box 1: The impact of violence on children

- Physical:
  - Injury
  - Unwanted pregnancy
  - Gynaecological problems
  - STDs (including HIV)
  - Miscarriage
  - Pelvic inflammatory disease
  - Chronic pelvic pain
  - Headaches
  - Permanent disabilities
  - Asthma
  - Irritable bowel syndrome
  - Self-injuring behaviour (smoking, unprotected sex, drug use)

- Mental:
  - Depression
  - Fear
  - Anxiety
  - Low self esteem
  - Eating problems
  - Obsessive compulsive disorder
  - Post-traumatic stress disorder
  - Self-imposed isolation

- Fatal:
  - Suicide
  - Homicide
  - Maternal mortality
  - HIV/AIDS

- Within a school environment:
  - Absenteeism
  - Poor grades
  - Social withdrawal
  - Reinforcement of existing unequal power and gender dynamics
  - Reinforcement and perpetration of cycles of violence and abuse.


Based violence against children in Malawian schools. In order to allow for a holistic picture of the violence experienced by school children, the study also considered the extent and nature of violence within the home environment. As such, it is the first real attempt at quantifying what has been recognised as a cause for concern by policy makers and other actors within the education arena in Malawi. It is hoped that this data will facilitate not only the formulation of education and safety policies and practices that allow for violence to be effectively managed and reduced, but that it will also inform the design of interventions to reduce violence at a school level, and provide support to survivors of such violence.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Collect baseline quantitative data on the extent of gender-based violence in schools, including sexual harassment through unwanted physical touching, forced penetrative or non-penetrative sex (rape), forced oral sex and bullying;
- Explore the nature of such violence where it does occur, including the identity of the perpetrators, places where violence occurs and reporting patterns;
- Gauge the extent of the fear of such violence among school children, and assess perceptions of violence in this population.

Defining violence against children

Conceptualising violence
There is no absolute definition of violence against children. What constitutes violence in legal terms may differ according to cultural and ethical belief systems within and between countries. The most glaring example of such variation is the attitude towards corporal punishment of children. While accepted and justified as a necessary evil of disciplining children in some societies, corporal punishment is viewed as violence, and is banned, in many other societies. Furthermore, violence against children is not limited to sexual or physical violence, despite the fact that these are the two forms that receive the most attention and occupy much of the literature. Violence can take the form of threats of violence, emotional abuse, neglect, or more
extreme crimes such as infanticide. An analysis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reveals five categories of violence: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and negligent treatment, emotional abuse and exploitation.

Gender-based violence, a phrase underpinning this research, is no simpler to define. While there is an increasing recognition that gender refers to more than just women and girls, and that gender-based crimes are inflicted against males as well as females, the United Nations definition of gender-based violence is:

“…any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.

The definition of violence as used in this study

Rather than exploring all the forms of violence perpetrated against children, this study chose to focus on specific types of violence. Of particular concern to policy-makers in Malawi, the location of this study, are forms of sexual and other physical violence perpetrated against children – violence that is more often than not gender-based. These aspects constitute a large part of what the Convention on the Rights of the Child classifies as child abuse:

“…any form of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development and dignity in the context of a relationship”.

Given the focus of this study on gender-based violence rather than a broad spectrum of violence against children, the primary focus of the research was on the physical and sexual violence perpetrated against school children. For the purposes of this study, these two categories of violence were further disaggregated to include:

- **Physical violence**
  - Bullying, or other forms of physical assault inflicted by peers and adults
  - The threat of physical violence (for children 14 years and older).

- **Sexual violence**
  - Forced sex, including penetrative and non-penetrative sex (such as thigh sex)
  - Unwanted touching of the body (non-sexual)
  - Sexual touching (unwanted touching of the genitals or breasts)
  - Forced oral sex (for children 14 years and older).

While these categories in no way represent the full range of physical and sexual violence experienced by children, the study was limited to the types of violence that are perceived (in the absence of existing empirical data) as the most common within schools, and to those on which data could be collected using a largely quantitative research instrument.

The decision to ask only older children about certain types of violence, specifically oral sex, and the threat of violence, was based on the response of younger children to these questions during the piloting of the study. It became clear during the testing of the questionnaire that while they were aware of other forms of sex, oral sex was relatively unknown among younger children. Younger children also had difficulty understanding the difference between the threat, as opposed to the act, of violence. Positive responses to these questions were almost minimal during the pilot study.

It is not altogether unsurprising that oral sex is alien to younger children. As Kaufman and Stavrou argue, oral sex plays little part in the sexual rituals of most black Africans, in stark contrast to those of white Africans, where oral sex is a significant factor in any form of sexual relationship or relationship building.

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6 Ibid, p 3.
8 The exact definitions of the different types of violence presented to the children are detailed in the analysis of each category of violence.
Methodology

The methodology used in the study was based on a combination and adaptation of research methodologies used elsewhere in similar studies. A Steering Committee was established to inform the design and approach of the study. Representatives from a range of institutions, including Save the Children, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Centre for Social Research at the University of Zomba, as well as representatives from the DFID MaSSaj programme and DFID Education were invited to sit on the committee.

While it was originally envisaged that only trained and experienced psychologists, counsellors and social workers would be selected to conduct interviews, the shortage of these skills in Malawi made it necessary to broaden the criteria used in choosing field staff. Prior experience in any of these disciplines was considered in the selection of the interviewers.

An intensive five-day training seminar was undertaken for all interviewers and supervisors selected to participate in the study. This included two days of sensitivity and gender awareness training, as well as looking at the dynamics involved in conducting research with children.

Sampling

The sample population was defined as all school children between the ages of nine and eighteen years. As the selected point of entry for interviews was schools, the National Ministry of Education Information Management System 2004 was utilised as the sample frame. The sample was stratified by primary and secondary schools, as well as by gender, and the sample drawn as representative of male and female school-going children at primary and secondary levels. The sample was also stratified by boarding and day schools. The total number of schools was divided according to Malawi’s six educational divisions. The result from each division was divided into districts, then districts into clusters and zones. A total sample of 4,500 was drawn, made up of 3,000 females and 1,500 males.

Within the schools, a quota of male and female students was set, based on the sample. Children in corresponding classes (standard 3 to form 4) were each allocated a number, and random numbers drawn by each team supervisor. Children with the selected numbers were then interviewed. Interviews were done in private, either in an unused classroom or outside, away from other students, staff and teachers. Girls were interviewed by female enumerators, while boys were interviewed by male or female enumerators.

At the outset of each interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant. The purpose of the study, the nature of the questions to be asked, the right to refusal, anonymity, the right to stop the interview at any time, and the right to privacy were explained to them. Each student who participated in the study signed a consent form. While there was initial concern at interviewing minors without the informed consent of their parents,
Malawian legislation places responsibility for all such decisions during school hours in the hands of the head teacher or principal. Accordingly consent was secured from the principal prior to starting the interviews. Before arriving at schools, each team also contacted the local Ministry of Education authority, as well as the local traditional leader. Co-operation was obtained from these authorities prior to arriving at the schools.

In total, 4,412 children were interviewed. As shown in Figure 1, respondents were most likely to be adolescent girl children living in rural areas. Two thirds (66.7%) of those interviewed were female. Just over three fifths (62.6%) of the sample was aged 14 years or older, while four out of five schools (81%) were in rural areas. Just 294 boarders were interviewed, representing 6.7% of the total sample. This accurately reflects the composition of schools on the Ministry of Education’s register.

Table 1: Distribution of sample by class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Std 3</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4412</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show the distribution of number of respondents by class (Table 1).

Including teachers in the study

In addition to the above, a series of interviews was conducted with teachers at each of the schools selected to participate in the study. This was intended to gauge teachers’ attitudes to gender violence in their classes, as well as whether, and how, aspects related to gender and gender violence were dealt with in class.

In total 632 teachers were interviewed, all drawn from standards 4 to 8, and forms 1 and 4 at secondary level. The majority of the teachers interviewed were male (57.6%), and were married (83.5%). Most (76.9%) had completed secondary schooling as their highest qualification obtained, while a little over one fifth (22.6%) had some tertiary or post-secondary education.

Most teachers had been teaching between six and ten years (34.7%) and between 11 and 15 years (34.5%). Just 3.8% had taught for less than one year, and 7.1% between one and five years.

Research instrument

A largely pre-coded quantitative questionnaire was used to gather information from respondents. This questionnaire drew on survey tools used in other studies conducted internationally on violence against school-going children, which were adapted to reflect the cultural and environmental context in Malawi. The questionnaire was tested and refined on the basis of a comprehensive pilot or pre-test exercise.

The questionnaire was divided into three components. The first was given to all children across the age spectrum, and explored perceptions and feelings of safety, general experiences of safety, as well as knowledge and utilisation of basic life skills and sources of support that are available to children in Malawi. This last component included the availability of people to talk to about issues such as sex, HIV/AIDS and bullying, as well as scenarios describing situations that might be faced by children of the sampled age, with options on how best to deal with them.

The second module of the questionnaire was given only to younger children, aged 13 years and younger. This age band correlates broadly with children at primary school. This component explored children’s actual experience of violence. Bearing in mind the difficulty of interviewing and maintaining the interest of younger children, as well as the sensitivity of the subject explored, this module was kept as brief as possible, contained simplified questions and utilised visual tools such as flashcards to depict...
key actions. These included depictions of physical violence (a child being beaten or hit), and sexual interaction. To explore issues around unwanted touching, children were shown a figure of a boy or a girl (depending on the gender of the respondent), and asked whether their body had ever been touched against their will. If they felt that they had suffered unwanted touching, they were asked to point out on these figures where they had been touched. A similar approach was utilised for sexual intercourse, where children were shown a flashcard of a couple having sex, and were asked whether they had ever experienced what was shown in the picture. If the children answered yes to either of these questions, they were asked a series of more detailed questions to explore the nature of the incident.

The third module of the questionnaire was given to children older than 13 years. Specific questions were posed as to their experience of various forms of violence and sexual violence, and as with the younger children, when answered in the affirmative, further exploratory questions were posed.

Given the administration of different modules to children 13 years and younger (often referred to as younger children in the following report), and children 14 years and older (older children in the report), much of the analysis has been broken down and presented separately for each age category. However, where possible, the data for both is combined, and the data presented for all children, prior to further disaggregation by age. This allows for a broader analysis of trends for all children.

The questionnaire was written in English but delivered in the language most comfortable for the respondent. Master copies of the questionnaire were translated into each of the indigenous languages of Malawi, and enumerators were provided with a written copy of each translation. As far as possible, enumerators were matched with areas most suited to their own language.

Each enumerator was also provided with local contact details for both public and private agencies offering support and counselling to children. Every child was made aware of these options on completion of their interview, thus ensuring that qualified, professional support was made available to any children who might be survivors of violence, or for any child in any way traumatised by the interview process.

In-field and post-field processes
An extensive quality control process was followed in field. Team supervisors quality-checked all questionnaires in field before submitting the completed forms to the central National Statistics Office (NSO) in Lilongwe. On delivery to the NSO, each completed questionnaire was again quality-controlled as part of the coding process, before being captured using the Statistical Programme for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Following validation and cleaning of the data, all analysis was conducted using SPSS.

Limitations of the study
Given both the extremely sensitive nature of the topic, and the challenges inherent in school-based research, when reading the following analysis two important methodological limitations should be considered:

- Firstly, the subject matter under discussion presents challenges to any form of quantification or survey. Violence, particularly sexual violence, is an issue that victims are often reluctant to acknowledge or talk about, especially to strangers. While such reservations are arguably often weaker among children than adults, they are nonetheless likely to have impacted on the responses provided. This could result in the under-estimation of gender-based violence in schools.
- Secondly, children who may not have been attending school will effectively have been excluded from the study. Given that the primary focus of the research is on gender-based violence in schools, this should not be seen as a failing in the methodology, but should be borne in mind when attempting to extrapolate these findings to the level of all ‘children in Malawi’.

Structure of the report
The analysis of the findings is presented in a format that reflects to a large degree the manner in which the data were collected.

The following section, section 2, analyses all the children's perceptions of safety, their fears and concerns, and their experiences when travelling to school. Where relevant, the data are analysed by key variables such as location, gender and age.
Section 3 presents an overview of the violence experienced by children in Malawi, based on reports of various incidents of sexual and physical violence.

Section 4 provides a more detailed analysis of these experiences. It examines where and how often violence occurs, who the perpetrators are, reporting patterns, and the impact of violence on the children. The section also considers the issue of transactional sex and perceptions of teachers’ involvement in sexual violence in return for good grades.

Section 5 details the reporting patterns of abuse victims, including whether they reported the incident to anyone, if so to whom, and what action was taken, as well as reasons for not reporting.

Section 6 analyses children’s knowledge and utilisation of life skills, as well as their access to various support structures both within the school and home.

Section 7 details the perceptions and experiences of teachers in the participating schools.

The report concludes by summarising the study’s key findings and discusses the implications of the results for Malawi. A series of recommendations are made on a possible way forward, based on the findings from the study.

Section 2: Safety and perceptions of safety among Malawian school children

Key findings

- Despite a tendency to travel to school in groups, almost one quarter (23.8%) of school children in Malawi are scared of walking to school.
- Children most fear being attacked (71.1%), or being bullied (12.5%) while travelling to school.
- More than one quarter (26.5%) of children personally know someone who has experienced a problem on the way to school.
- One fifth (19.4%) of children have themselves encountered problems on the way to school, resulting in high levels of fear.
- Almost one third (30.3%) of children fear specific places in their school, most notably the grounds (i.e. sports or playing fields/gardens and the school periphery) and toilets and bathrooms.

While the primary focus of this study is on violence in schools, it is not only within the school premises and during the school day that children are exposed to violence in the school environment. In an impoverished country such as Malawi, the very act of travelling to school exposes scholars to sexual and physical violence. This not only impacts on children’s sense of well-being and their physical and emotional safety, but is also likely to impact on their psychological states and attitudes towards school – all of which may negatively affect their schooling experience. In a country where few people own a car, and public transport is both unreliable and unaffordable for the majority, children are likely to walk to school. This exposes children not only to potential attacks, but also to accidental injury by vehicles and other road users.

With this in mind, a series of questions were devised to explore perceptions of safety and/or experiences of danger, both when travelling to school and on the school premises.
Safety and perceptions of safety when travelling to school

Few children in Malawi travel to school alone: more than half of them travel to school in the company of others, be they friends (45%), siblings (9.7%), or parents (2.6%). This suggests that there is, either subconsciously or consciously, a feeling of safety in numbers, and thus, an implicit sense of potential harm. This is borne out by the fact that almost one quarter (23%) of the children interviewed explicitly said that they were scared to travel to school. Of the children who reported that they were afraid, the highest percentage (52.5%) travelled in a group with their friends, rather than alone. Those who reported that they were unafraid were most likely to travel alone. Notably, older children – 14 years and older – were more likely to feel apprehensive about their journey to school than their younger schoolmates.

The reasons provided for these fears are interesting, and despite generally low levels of violent crime in Malawi, they are similar to those that might be found in a generally violent society. The most common reason for being afraid of travelling to school is that of being attacked (71.1%), followed by fear of bullying (12.5%). Other less common reasons included fear of witchcraft (5%), fear of getting lost (4.1%), fear of traffic or the roads (2.6%), and fear of Nyaus12 (2.1%) (see Table 2).

Children’s perceptions may be based on violent incidents perpetrated against friends and siblings, and an intimate knowledge of the experience they went through, or may be premised on a more abstract rumour or tales of the kind often circulated through schools. This may apply both to perceptions of travelling to schools and the safety of the school grounds. With this in mind, children were first asked about the experiences of people that they knew personally either friends or family when travelling to school, and later about their own experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting attacked</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting bullied</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of witchcraft</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting lost</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of traffic/road</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared of Nyau</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being raped</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of dogs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared of satanism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of rumours they hear</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,412</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings show that children’s fears are based on a combination of pure rumour, the experiences of friends and family, as well as personal experience.

When questioned about others’ experiences, slightly more than one quarter (26.5%) of the children surveyed reported that they personally knew someone who had experienced a problem when walking to school. These people tended to be friends (41%), schoolmates (31.6%) and siblings (13.1%).

Box 2: Comparative findings on perceptions of safety

Considerable attention has been paid recently to the issue of children’s safety, particularly girls’ safety, when travelling to school in Zambia. Research has shown that violence on the usually lengthy commute to school results in children staying in often insecure, unsafe structures close to school during the week. This may further expose the child to potential violence and abuse from strangers who have easy access to such abodes. Similar findings have been made in recent studies conducted by, among others, Human Rights Watch and CIET in South Africa.


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11 For example, a recently conducted national victim survey found that property crime, particularly thefts of crop and livestock, followed by petty theft, were the most commonly experienced crime, with violent crime not very prevalent at all. See E Pelser, P Burton, and L Gondwe, Crimes of need: Results of the Malawi national victim survey, Institute for Security Studies/National Statistics Office (Malawi), 2004.

12 Nyaus traditionally wear masks and disguises and are associated with witchcraft, often hiding behind hedges and trees and jumping out at youngsters to scare them.
A comparison between the fears related to walking to school, and experiences of friends, or others personally known to the respondent, reveals a strong correlation between the experience of others and the fears of the respondents. For example, children were most afraid of being attacked, while just less than one half (48.2%) of respondents reported knowing someone who had been attacked on the way to school (Figure 2). Interestingly though, while one sixth (15.8%) of children knew someone who had been sexually assaulted or raped on the way to school, the fear of rape was only seventh on the list of fears reported by children, having been mentioned by just 15 children (a little over 1% of the sample).

These incidents occur both on the walk to school and within the school premises. Almost three fifths (57.7%) of incidents happened on the walk to school, while almost one quarter occurred close to the school grounds. More than one tenth (14.9%) happened within the school premises themselves, undermining any possible sense of security that children might feel in their school environment. These incidents are distinct from other negative experiences, or instances of violence, that may be associated with class or break periods, and are specifically associated by children with the trip from home to school undertaken daily.

Incidents of violence against friends and family members, or other children known to the respondent, clearly have a direct impact on learners (even where they themselves are not victims), and explain the levels of fear concerning the walk to school. The vast majority of children, more than eight out of ten, reported that incidents experienced by other children had a negative impact on them, and, specifically, scared them (66.4%) or made them more cautious (29%).

When asked about their own experiences, it was clear that many children had themselves been victimised on the trip to school in ways that made them fearful of walking to or going to school. One fifth (19.4%) of all the children interviewed reported that something had happened to them that made them scared of going to school. Such incidents involved being beaten, teased or otherwise bullied by fellow scholars (30.5%), being ill-treated by the headmaster or teachers (20.9%), or having to submit to violent corporal punishment (10.9%). Other incidents included being chased (7.8%) or threatened (5.7%) by unknown people, or teachers making sexual advances or forcing scholars to have sex with them (5%). Only fractionally fewer (4.7%) reported that they feared being kidnapped or taken by Nyaus, or being verbally harassed by teachers (3.9%).
Perceptions of safety on school grounds

It is not only on the route to school that children fear for their safety. While schools should be places of safety for children, where the primary goal of learning can be achieved in a secure environment, schools all too often become yet another place where children are physically, emotionally or sexually victimised. The resulting impact on children is often reflected in poor academic performance, in volatile, weak or non-existent social interaction with peers and adults, and in a range of other psychological problems.\(^\text{13}\)

Incidents of violence may lead to fear and avoidance of certain areas of the school grounds – although such avoidance may also be the result of irrational fears associated with myths, superstitions and rumours. When asked if there were any specific areas of their school grounds that they were scared of, almost one third (30.3%) of the children confirmed that they were afraid of places in their school grounds. Of concern is that two thirds (65.4%) of those who reported being scared – 791 children in all – felt that all areas of the school grounds were frightening (see Figure 3).

Of those children who did report specific areas where they felt unsafe, the highest number (14.4%) cited toilets or bathrooms as frightening, followed by other school buildings (8.1%), classrooms (4.8%), the staffroom (3.5%) and the hostels (2.7%) (Figure 3). Bathroom facilities are essential to all persons spending whole mornings, afternoons or days at school, and the fear of such facilities reflects the level to which the most mundane and necessary actions of everyday life can be affected by violence.

As shown in Figure 4, the reasons given for fearing these areas broadly correspond with those given for being afraid of travelling to school. The most common fear cited was that of being physically attacked (44.7%) in these areas, followed by being sexually victimised (17.2%) and, only fractionally behind, fear based on the bad experiences of others in these places (16.7%). Just under one tenth (8.8%) of respondents were afraid of being bullied in these areas.

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Section 3: An overview of children’s experience of violence

Key findings

- Almost all (99%) of the school children surveyed report being bullied, while just under one quarter (23.8%) report having been forced to have sex against their will; more than one tenth (14%) report having been touched on their genitals or breasts against their will, and 3.9% of children over 13 years report being forced to engage in some form of oral sex.
- Girls are most commonly the victims of violence; however, boys experience significant levels of both sexual violence and bullying.
- Levels of all forms of violence are higher among older children over the age of 13.

The discussion thus far has largely been based on perceptions and fears, and on a rather abstract view of violence. A more detailed exploration of the various types of violence included in the study reveals that the negative perceptions of children and their fears for their safety may be well grounded. The following section presents an overview of the levels of different types of violence experienced by school children in Malawi, and provides a departure point for a more detailed analysis of the nature of violence against children presented in Section 4.

The levels of violence to which children are exposed present reason for concern. Malawi, a country that is predominantly peaceful and has not been exposed to any violent transition or internal civil strife, is not usually associated with violence of any form. Yet the varying forms of violence experienced by children of all ages cannot but negatively impact on them.

As shown in Figure 5, almost all children in Malawi are subject to various forms of violence. Virtually all (99.9%) of the children surveyed felt that they had been bullied or threatened with harm in some way. Almost one quarter (23.8%) of all respondents reported that they had been forced to have either penetrative or non-penetrative sex, while one sixth (14.9%) had been touched, either sexually or non-sexually, against their will. Just fractionally fewer had been touched on their breasts or genitals against their will, while a very small percentage of children over the age of 13 had been forced to engage in some form of oral sex.

More than seven out of ten children (71.5%) children aged 13 or younger reported that they had experienced some form of bullying. This included being beaten, kicked, punched, slapped or otherwise hit, as well as verbal abuse or threats, usually by siblings or children of a similar age or older.

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14 Given the focus of this study on sexual and gender-based violence, as well as bullying, forced touching of all types (i.e. sexual and non-sexual) is only presented in this overview section. The following, more detailed analysis of violence focuses on touching of a sexual nature. It should therefore be noted that all references in the text or figures of “forced touching” refer to forced touching of any nature, i.e. sexual AND non-sexual.

15 This question was only asked of children of 14 years and older.
Box 4: Definitions and presentation of violence used in the study

The definitions of the different types of violence explored in the study were designed to be as specific as possible. In the case of touching and sexual touching, respondents were first asked whether they had ever been touched, or forced to touch someone else, ANYWHERE on the body. Those who responded in the affirmative were asked whether they had been touched, or forced to touch, in a sexual way. In the case of children 13 years and younger, questions asking if they had ever been touched against their will, or forced to touch anyone against their will, were posed. If answered in the affirmative, they were then asked to point to a picture card depicting an outline of a figure to WHERE they had been touched. Further questions were only asked of those who indicated touching on the mouth, breasts or genital area. The following definitions were used in the study:

**Penetrative and non-penetrative sex:** the respondent was forced to have sex (including thigh sex); or the perpetrator attempted to insert his penis or other foreign objects into places the respondent was not happy with.

**Touching:** the respondent was kissed, touched or had his/her body felt against his/her will; or the respondent was forced to touch the perpetrator in places s/he did not want to.

**Oral sex:** the respondent was forced to touch the perpetrator’s private parts with his/her mouth, the perpetrator touched the respondent’s private parts with his/her mouth, or the respondent was forced to have any other kind of oral sex s/he did not want to.

**Bullying:** the respondent was slapped, beaten, punched or kicked, or threatened with harm in some way.

Bullying, like any form of violence, can not only provide a reason to fear going to school, it can also negatively impact on the relationship of victims with both their peers and adults, and affect their academic performance. Of equal concern is that more than one third (35.7%) of students in the younger group reported that they had been touched when they did not want to be. This excludes violent physical assault such as bullying, and implies a more covert physical contact that is unwelcome to the child. Approximately one tenth (9.3%) of the children reported explicit, unwanted touching of their breasts and genital areas by a second party.

While it may be unsurprising that most bullying occurs at school, or on the way to school, what is remarkable is the level of bullying that children experience outside of school – at home or elsewhere. Two fifths (40%) of all the children interviewed had been bullied at home or elsewhere, while only fractionally fewer (38.2%) children over the age of 13 had experienced bullying at home. It should be noted, however, that bullying, as defined by this study, could include forms of violence administered by parents, such as corporal violence or discipline. This suggests that bullying is not only a matter to be addressed by schools and the Ministry of Education, but an issue that needs to be addressed within the home environment as well.

A common perception exists that boys are more likely to experience certain types of violence and girls other types. For instance, it is often
assumed that boys are most likely to be bullied or experience unwanted non-sexual touching, while sexual victimisation is associated with girls. However, as illustrated in Figure 6, this is clearly not the case in Malawi, as schoolgirls are most prone to bullying. Moreover, while girl children most often experienced unwanted sexual touching or forced sex, a surprising number of boys reported sexual victimisation (Figure 6).

The stratification of the sample by younger children and older children reveals some interesting trends.

Levels of bullying are highest among older children, with four out of five children (80.1%) aged 14 years and older reporting that they had been bullied, compared to seven out of ten (71.5%) children under the age of 14 (see Figures 7 and 8). Anecdotal evidence suggests that bullying among younger children is most common among children between the ages of 11 and 13.
The findings also suggest notable distinctions between day scholars and children attending boarding school. As shown in Figures 9 and 10, boarders are fractionally less likely to experience most types of violence than day scholars, with the exception of forced sex, and, in the case of older children, forced touching of a sexual nature and forced oral sex. However, the difference between boarders and day scholars is minimal, and statistical testing reveals no significant differences between the two groups (p>0.05). The levels of violence reported by boarders nevertheless suggests that some measures do need to be taken by school authorities and those responsible for boarding houses or hostels, to address abuse against the children in their care. The fact that a greater percentage of day scholars report bullying can be attributed to incidents experienced on the daily trip to school and back. Bullying and other forms of purely physical violence are more common on such travels than incidents of sexual violence or harassment.

Building on this broad picture of violence against school children in Malawi, the following sections explore in more detail the nature of the violence experienced, the frequency and location of violent incidents, the identity of the perpetrators and the reporting patterns associated with these incidents.

**Box 5: Comparative findings on child victimisation in Uganda**

The levels of violence against children in schools (and at home) in Malawi reflect findings from similar studies undertaken elsewhere in the region. A recent study undertaken in Uganda, for example, found that between six and eight out of ten children had experienced the type of violence referred to as bullying in the Malawian study. Approximately 15% had been forced to engage in sexual intercourse, while between 35% and 40% had either been sexually harassed or otherwise touched in a sexual manner (see figure below).
Section 4: The nature of the violence experienced by school children in Malawi

Key findings

- Children of all ages living in rural areas are more likely to be victimised than those living in urban areas. Location is particularly significant in the case of bullying and unwanted touching of the genitals and breasts.
- Bullying (55.3%) and forced touching (52.5%) is most likely to occur at school, while forced sex (57.3%), and in the case of older children, oral sex (53.5%), is most likely to occur at home.
- Repeated victimisation is common. In total seven out of ten (70.6%) children who had been bullied experienced incidents on more than one occasion; 57.6% of the children who had been forcibly touched had been victimised more than once, and just slightly fewer (54.0%) of all the children who had been forced to have sex had gone through the experience on more than one occasion.
- In the majority of cases the children knew the offender. In total 93.5% of bullied children knew the bully; just under nine out of ten (88.7%) of those who had been touched knew the offender; and a fractionally higher percentage (89.4%) of those who had been forced to have sex knew the offender.
- The most common perpetrators of violence were classmates, with the exception of children 13 years and younger, who most often identified non-parental figures from home. Parents and others living at home were identified next most frequently as the perpetrators, for all types of violence.
- Just under one fifth (18.7%) of those who had experienced some form of violence reported being offered, or receiving, a gift or services as compensation for, or in return for, sexual favours. This most commonly took the form of money or food.

Those children who reported being forced to engage in sex, oral sex, or sexual touching, and those who had been bullied, were asked a series of questions designed to elicit more information on how, where and when these crimes were committed, as well as who was responsible. By collecting such information, both policy makers and practitioners are better equipped to design policies and interventions to prevent and deal with violence. Further information collected, for instance whether incidents were reported to police, adults or other authorities, provides some indication of how accurate official statistics are, and more importantly, how such instances are dealt with.

Figure 11: Experience of violence amongst children aged 13 years and younger by geographical location (n=1, 648)
It should be noted at this stage that while the primary focus of the study is on violence within schools, this section presents information collected on violence that occurred within the home, as all reports of violence included in this report were further explored in the questionnaire.

Location of abuse

Children of all ages living in rural areas are more likely to be victimised than those living in urban areas. Location is particularly significant in the case of bullying and unwanted touching of the genitals and breasts. Between 82% and 87% of all reported victimisation happened in rural areas.

Differences in victimisation by area type, victimisation type and age are illustrated in Figures 11 and 12. While respondents living in rural areas were more likely to be victims of bullying, touching and forced sex, geographical location was only a statistically significant factor in the case of bullying and touching of genitals and breasts (p<0.005). The relationship between location and levels of victimisation is strongest for incidents of unwanted sexual touching. One fifth (20.9%) of younger children living in rural areas reported being forcibly touched, as opposed to just 4.1% of children living in urban areas. The same trend is evident among older children, aged 14 years and older, where the difference in the level of victimisation between children living in rural and urban areas (24.2% as opposed to 18% for rural and urban areas respectively) is only fractionally smaller than in the case of bullying (81.5% as opposed to 73.8%). As with the younger children, those in rural areas are significantly more likely to be victimised than those living in urban areas (p<0.05).17

Analysis of where abuse occurs shows that the two environments that should be the safest for children have become sites of violation and violence of the worst kind (Figure 13). For children of all ages, bullying and sexual harassment through forced touching is most likely to occur at school, while forced sex, and, in the case of older children, oral sex, is most likely to occur at home. The observed trends are quite emphatic; more than half of all bullying (55.3%) happens at school, while only fractionally less (52.5%) of

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17 While observed trends may reveal certain trends, these trends may not hold up to statistical testing. Where various statistical tests reveal a reliable trend, this is indicated as statistically significant in the text, and a p-value result provided. P-values less than 0.05 are read significant, while those larger than 0.05 are not statistically significant.
forced touching of genitals or breasts happens at school. Less than one fifth (16.5%) of forced sex occurs within the school environment.

Some differences emerge when the data are broken down into age groups. As shown in Figure 14, children aged 13 years and younger were most likely to be victimised at school, or on the way to school. Almost three quarters (71.1%) of forced sex and more than half the incidents of sexual touching (56.8%) and bullying (53.5%) occurred within the school environment. The home was also the site of much abuse. Almost two fifths (38.2%) of reported bullying, a little over one quarter (28.2%) of forced touching, and one tenth (10.3%) of forced sex occurred at home – implicating family members in these acts.

The trend among older children is somewhat different, however. These children are most likely to experience violence and threats of violence at school, but are more likely to be sexually abused within their homes (see Figure 15). Over half (57.5%) of the children reporting bullying experienced these incidents at school. A similar number (53%) experienced forced penetrative (53.9%) and forced oral sex (48.6%) at home (compared to the 18.1% and 32.1% of incidents respectively at school). This not only reduces a traditional place of safety and refuge to merely another place to escape from and be scared of, but suggests that there are likely to be very few places left for children to feel safe and protected.

Repeat victimisation
As with adults, victimisation of children often fits certain patterns. Those who suffer physical, emotional and sexual abuse are often repeatedly victimised. School children in Malawi appear no different (see Figure 16). In total, seven out of ten (70.6%) children who had been bullied experienced such incidents on more than one occasion. More than half (57.6%) of the children who had experienced unwanted sexual touching had been victimised more than once, while just slightly fewer (54.0%) of all the children who had been forced to have sex had gone through the experience on more than one occasion.

When disaggregated by age, the same patterns for both age groups are evident. Roughly seven out of ten bullied children (73.1% and 69.4% of
younger and older children respectively) had experienced bullying on more than one occasion, while three fifths (60.9%) of younger and a little over half (55.4%) of older children experiencing unwanted touching had been repeatedly victimised. Only slightly fewer children who had been forced to have sex reported repeat victimisation (55.7% of children 13 years and older, and 53.7% of older children).

Such patterns not only exacerbate the trauma experienced by children, but each repeated incident makes it harder to break the cycle of abuse. They also multiply the negative effects of victimisation on the psyche and, in all likelihood, the subsequent behaviour of the victim. In the case of younger children (and to a lesser extent older children), repeated abuse can serve to normalise abuse, so that violence is perceived as an accepted part of everyday life.

Perpetrators
The above discussion to some degree pre-empts the question whether children knew their abuser. In the vast majority of instances the identity of the offender is known, for all types of abuse. In total 93.5% of those who were bullied knew the bully; while just under nine out of ten (88.7%) of those who had been touched knew the offender. A fractionally higher percentage (89.4%) of those who had been forced to have sex knew the offender.

As revealed in Figure 17, there is little difference between older and younger children in this regard, as both tend to know the identity of the offender. With the exception of incidents of forced sexual touching, where a little over four fifths (86.4%) of children in the younger age group know the perpetrator, over 90% of children who have experienced each type of violence know their abuser.

Given that most abuse occurs within the school and the home, it is unsurprising that perpetrators tend to be people from school or those living with the victim. With the exception of those experiencing forced sex, children most frequently identified classmates as being responsible for abuse. Three fifths (60.9%) of children who experienced sexual touching reported that their classmates were the perpetrators. Classmates were held responsible for more than two fifths of bullying amongst younger (48.8%)
and older children (43.7%), and a little under one third of the incidents of sexual victimisation (see Table 3).

The only significant variation between the younger and older age groups appears in instances of forced sex. In this case, children aged 13 years and younger were most likely to identify unrelated people living at home (35.2%) as their abuser (see Table 3). These would include people who were typically hired employees of the family, such as 'house boys' or other cleaning or security staff, as well as family friends staying in the child’s home. Among the older children, classmates were most often held responsible for such acts (31.7%).

Family members are nevertheless implicated in incidents of both physical and sexual violence. One quarter (24%) of the older children who had been forced to engage in oral sex reported that it was a parent who had forced them to do so; while more than one tenth (15%) reported that the perpetrator was a hired employee. Similarly, just under one fifth (16.6%) of the older children who had been forced to have sex reported that it was a parent who had forced sex on them.

In addition to their classmates, children of all ages often implicated teachers and principals in bullying. This suggests that a significant number of reports of bullying are in fact acts of caning by teachers or principles. This is noteworthy given that corporal punishment is illegal in Malawi. Similarly, reports of bullying inflicted by parents are most likely acts of discipline or corporal punishment that involve physical violence. There is some variation within the age groups, with a little over one tenth (11.7%) of younger and one fifth (20.4%) of older children attributing abuse to school staff. Teachers and principals are implicated in about 1.1% of the cases of forced sex among children under the age of 14, and 7.4% of the incidents of forced oral sex experienced by children over the age of 14.

There were also the odd instances of engagement with sex workers. These were confined to children aged 14 years and older, and varied from just over one tenth (12.2%) of those responsible for forcibly touching the victims, to one fifth (20.3%) of those forcing children to engage in penetrative or non-penetrative sex. While the emphasis in the interview was on the forcible, or involuntary nature of the encounters, these responses initially suggest an encounter of a more voluntary nature. However, it is possible that the very act of forced sexual contact with a woman may have led to labelling her a prostitute, or that voluntary encounters are reported as forced in order to alleviate any shame or regret the child may have felt over the incident.

Transactional sex among older children
The provision of sex, or sexual favours, in return for goods, money, services or favours does not necessarily constitute sexual violence or abuse per se. Transactional sex does imply a level of consent on the part of the child, and thus often defies the label of abuse. However, the act is an abuse of the power and authority of adults over children. Such processes are often common in environments in which various forms of sexual violence are rife, and may result in expectations of entitlement and rights over children’s bodies that violate their rights. It is also conducive to an environment of exploitation and abuse.

Children in the older age group were asked if they had been promised anything in exchange for the most recent incident of sexual abuse. This

Table 3: Perpetrators of violence by abuse type (n=4,909)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Forced touching</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Forced oral sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children 13 years and younger</td>
<td>Children 14 years and older</td>
<td>Children 13 years and younger</td>
<td>Children 14 years and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School teacher/ head teacher</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School class-mate</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home – parent</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home – other</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relative</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other person from village/community</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes prostitutes (1.4%) ** includes prostitutes (1.7%) *** includes prostitutes (2%)
could include goods, money, transport, or anything else desired or needed by the child. The giving of such goods is often a method of reducing the seriousness of the act in the mind of the perpetrator and making the incident appear as a mutually beneficial transaction, rather than abuse. It may also simply be a way of securing the co-operation of the child, as well as his or her subsequent silence.

The findings suggest that transactions in exchange for some form of sexual activity are common among school children in Malawi. In total, just under one fifth (18.7%) of children who experienced some form of sexual victimisation received or were offered something in return for sexual favours. As illustrated in Figure 18, this varies between the different types of sexual activity. Such an exchange was most common in cases of penetrative or non-penetrative sex, where a quarter (25.6%) of victims reported being promised or given something, but also occurred frequently in cases of forced oral sex (20.7%) or unwanted sexual touching (14.6%).

In the vast majority (82%) of instances children were promised or given money. This is not unusual in a poor country like Malawi. Similarly, it should be no surprise that food constituted the second most common offering by the perpetrator in return for sex (11%). As shown in Figure 19, over four fifths of the victims of unwanted touching (82.4%) and sex (82%) were offered money in return, while approximately half (52.2%) of those experiencing oral sex were offered cash. Two fifths (21.7%) of the victims of unwanted oral sex were offered food, as were one tenth (11%) of the victims of unwanted sex or touching. Interestingly, although many children reported sex between students and teachers in return for good grades (see below), only a small number of children reported being offered better grades.

**Box 6: Transactional sex amongst children and youth in Southern Africa**

The participation of children in transactional sex has been identified throughout Africa as a cause for concern. It is differentiated from sex work, as it is seen as happening on an ad hoc or infrequent basis. The phenomenon’s relationship to poverty, and its justification as a means of survival, has also been recognised. The Zambian government, for example, reports that “exchange of sex for money or gifts is a coping strategy for dealing with poverty, and may not be perceived as commercial sex work”.

Transactional sex assumes different guises in different environments, but certain common characteristics can generally be identified. Usually, relationships involving transactional sex are formed between younger women and older men. Services and goods may include money for transport, or in developed countries, money for designer goods and clothes. In developing or poor countries money for food or transport, or even food itself, is the most common commodity exchanged for sexual favours. Such relationships, while often excluded from definitions of abuse (but with abuse premised on exploitation and taking advantage of the vulnerable and innocent) leave children more vulnerable to teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, which can then entrap them in cycles of poverty.

Such a scenario emphasises the complex relationship between crime and the socio-economic environment. While it is often hypothesised that much crime is caused by poverty, in this case, forms of abuse are perpetrated by those who have goods, or are economically advantaged, utilising their position to take advantage of those who are socio-economically worse off. It further exemplifies the need for an integrated social needs approach to crime prevention and management, involving a range of role-players; including the Ministries of Education, Welfare and Health as well as the more obvious law enforcement agencies. If more support is provided to poor communities, there will be fewer opportunities for abuse, and less ‘need’ for such exchanges in order to survive.

Abuse by teachers – awareness and occurrence
Exploitative sex between students and teachers is thought to be a growing problem in many African countries, and is an issue of growing concern to educationalists and policy-makers – although at present incidents go largely unreported and the true scale of such abuse is unknown. Teachers occupy a position of trust and authority over the children in their care, and such behaviour constitutes a betrayal of this trust that can have the same enduring negative consequences for children as any form of violence or abuse (see Box 1). Also of concern is that incidents in schools are unlikely to be isolated occurrences and such exploitation is unlikely to be restricted to the school environment. It has been argued that schools, as a microcosm of society, reflect the traditions and values inherent in the society as a whole.\(^\text{18}\) What occurs within the school environment is thus likely to reflect what is already happening, or likely to happen, within the broader community. The acceptance of teachers engaging in sexual relationships of any form with children is likely to impact on, and in various forms be replicated within, the whole community surrounding that school.

Like transactional sex, the boundaries between consensual sex and abuse may be blurred. While consent may often be implied, the abuse of power and manipulation of the child for the teacher’s pleasure constitute abuse.

Levels of sexual abuse by teachers appear to be quite high in Malawi. Approximately one third (33%) of children aged 14 years and older and one fifth (22.9%) of the children 13 years and younger reported that teachers sleep with children in their school in return for better grades. The majority (83.6%) of the younger children, and approximately one third (33.8%) of older children, reported knowing someone who had been sexually victimised by a teacher in return for good grades. The large number of younger children identifying actual incidents of abuse is concerning, as it suggests that younger children are perhaps being disproportionately targeted by teachers – presumably because younger children are easier and more malleable victims (see Figure 20).\(^\text{19}\)

Knowledge of incidents appears to be influenced by both gender and geographical location, particularly among children in the older age group.

\(^{18}\) Wellesley Centre for Research on Women, op cit, p 4.

\(^{19}\) While this may initially appear to contradict earlier findings, reported in Section 4, of who was responsible for the abuse, it must be remembered that only children of the older age cohort were asked who was responsible for the various forms of abuse.
While there was no significant relationship between gender and awareness of incidents among children aged 13 years and younger, girls in the older group were more likely than boys to report that such incidents occurred in their school (35% as opposed to 29.3%, p<0.005). Rural children in both age groups were also statistically more likely to know of incidents than their urban counterparts (25.2% as opposed to 14.7%, p<0.005, and 35% and 23.8%, p<0.005, for younger and older rural and urban children respectively).

Girls in the older age group were statistically more likely to know someone who had been abused by a teacher than boys of the same age (36.1% of girls as opposed to 29.6% of boys, p<0.005).

Section 5: The reporting of incidents and whether action was taken against perpetrators

Key findings
- Based on the survey findings, between three fifths and two thirds of offences against children in Malawi are reported to someone – usually a parent, teacher or the police.
- Bullying is most often reported (65.5%), while forced sex (61.4%) and oral sex (60%) are the least reported.
- Reporting of abuse tends to be higher among older children, and among girls of both age groups.
- Abuse is most commonly reported to parents in the cases of forced sex (52.6%), oral sex (52.2%) and bullying (43.6%), and to friends (46.8%) and parents (31.5%) in the case of unwanted touching of genitals or breasts.
- When abuse is reported, perpetrators are most often simply given a warning. Despite this, most children reported that they were satisfied with the response.
- The most common reason provided for not reporting was that the offence was not serious enough, that there was no need (39.7%), or that the victim was too afraid to report the incident (35.1%).

The official reporting of crime, whether by adults or youth, is often a tenuous indicator of levels of victimisation, as many incidents go unreported. Both internal and external factors can influence an individual’s inclination to report. External factors may include victims’ access to authorities where crime can be reported, threats against the victim or fear of retribution, and victims’ physical ability to make reports in the case of serious violent crimes.

Internal factors may include feeling that the crime is not serious enough to warrant reporting, or that nothing will be done if it is reported, as well as shame and self-recrimination – feelings that are commonly associated
with incidents of sexual violence. The reporting of sexual victimisation, or crimes occurring within the household, is also often influenced by the fact that the perpetrator is known, and may in fact be a family member. Repeat victimisation may also result in the normalisation of incidents, which shifts the crime out of the realm of the criminal and into that of usual and accepted behaviour. These factors also influence whether victims decide to tell anyone else of the incident, be it parent, teacher, friends, other relatives, or any other adult in a position of authority.20

Sexual violence against children that occurs at home tends to remain unreported and unchallenged, more so than in other environments. Victims often acutely fear a loss of support, and rejection. The shame and stigma associated with abuse serves as a powerful barrier to reporting. Even where the family is aware of the abuse, victims are frequently silenced and told not to bring the shame and embarrassment of incest on the family. As with abuse that occurs elsewhere, reporting of incidents can result in further physical violence by the offender.

Sexual violence that occurs at school has another set of dynamics that serve as a barrier to reporting and are particularly destructive to the victim. Abuse at school often results in children dropping out of school, a decision that may exacerbate both poverty and, it is increasingly argued, the spread of HIV/AIDS. Reporting of abuse perpetrated by fellow students can result in further victimisation, especially where action is not taken – as it often is not. Reporting of abuse committed by teachers can similarly lead to the

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There are no significant differences in levels of reporting by victims in urban and rural areas. However, as shown in Figure 22, girls in all age groups were more likely than boys to have reported the last incident of abuse. Female victims of unwanted touching or forced sex in the younger age group were statistically more likely to have reported the incident than boys of the same age ($p=0.000$). This may be due to the acceptance of violence amongst boys and/or the stigma and shame associated with sexual violence against males. A similar trend can be identified among children in the older age group. Girls in this age group were statistically more likely to report all types of abuse than male victims ($p=0.000$ for bullying, sex and oral sex; $p=0.001$ for touching).

Children who had been forced to have sex, engage in oral sex, or had been bullied, were most likely to tell one or both of their parents about the incident, while those who had been sexually harassed (touched) were most likely to tell a friend. Reporting incidents to teachers was most likely to occur in cases of bullying, but was decreasingly likely to occur in cases of harassment, sex, or oral sex (Figure 23).

Whether action was taken against the perpetrator

Older children who reported incidents were asked if those persons they reported the incident to took any action, either against the abuser or in support of or response to the child’s disclosure. These questions were only asked of children over the age of 14, as it became clear during the pilot that younger children tended not to know what had happened to the perpetrator after the abuse was reported.

The results show that reporting does not necessarily result in action being taken. Action was most likely to be taken in cases of bullying, where almost three out every five cases (58.3%) reported resulted in some follow-up of the incident. In the cases of forced touching and sex, only a little over one half of reported incidents resulted in action being taken (53.4% and 53.7% respectively), while incidents of forced oral sex resulted in fractionally lower response rates (51.6%). There was no statistically significant difference in action taken in cases reported by males and females. (See Figure 24.)
The most common response was to give the perpetrator a warning, particularly in the case of forced touching (77%), forced sex (75%) and forced oral sex (75.8%). The next most common action was to punish the offender in some way, usually by beating or some other form of corporal punishment. This was most frequent in cases of bullying (46%), followed by incidents of sexual harassment (15.2%) and forced sex (8.3%) (see Figure 25).

Despite this apparent lack of decisive action, in the vast majority of cases where action was taken, children felt satisfied with the response. As illustrated in Figure 26, just under four fifths of the victims of bullying or sexual victimisation felt satisfied with the action taken, while an even greater proportion (92.2%) of those who reported unwanted touching felt similarly satisfied. This may reflect a lack of awareness on the part of children about the seriousness of the violence perpetrated against them. It may also reflect low expectations, with children expecting that little or nothing will be done to stop the abuse occurring again. This notion is supported by the findings, which show that levels of satisfaction were lower among children who had been repeatedly victimised, compared to those who reported only a single incident of violence.

Reasons for not reporting crime
Children who did not report abuse were asked why they had chosen to keep silent. The findings suggest that a lack of appreciation for the seriousness of abuse, fear and embarrassment are major disincentives to younger children in reporting abuse. The most common reason given for not reporting incidents was that there was no need to (39.7%), followed by the victim being afraid to report the incident (35.1%). Feelings of embarrassment (15.6%), and guilt (4.1%) were the next most common reasons cited for not reporting the crime (Figure 27).
As shown in Figures 28 and 29, when disaggregated by age and by offence type, the reasons provided for not reporting the last incident of abuse vary somewhat from the combined picture.

As illustrated in Figure 28, younger victims of bullying and unwanted touching were most likely to feel that the abuse was not serious enough to warrant reporting (42.3% and 34.1% respectively). However, fear and embarrassment also played a part in their decision not to report. Only fractionally fewer (41.3%) bullied children felt afraid to report their abuse or, in the case of forced touching, were embarrassed to report the incident (31.8%). Victims of sexual abuse, on the other hand, were most likely to report being too embarrassed (34.5%) to tell others, followed by feeling afraid (27.6%). Of some concern is that over one quarter (25.9%) of those who were sexually victimised felt that the incident did not warrant reporting.

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As shown in Figure 29, older victims of bullying and unwanted touching were again most likely to feel that the abuse was not serious enough to report (45% and 31% for bullying and touching respectively). Feeling afraid was the second most common reason for not reporting bullying (34.6%),
Most practitioners who work with children recognise the importance of sources of support, and an environment that enables children and youth to talk about their fears and experiences. This is particularly so within cultures that tend to be ‘closed’ to the expression and questioning of personal issues, especially those to do with sex. The creation of avenues for expression has been central to the success of internationally acclaimed life skills interventions.21

On the most basic level, the ability to use support systems, including those provided by parents, friends, family and other trusted adults,

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21 See the Soul City edutainment initiatives in South Africa, for example.
contributes substantially to how young people deal with peer pressure, sex and violence. Children with access to support may be more aware of their rights, what constitutes a violation of those rights, as well as their own sexuality and the changes associated with puberty.

The following section explores children’s knowledge of basic human rights and the availability of sources of support for children, including sources of information on key issues that may face children of a school-going age. It also details the response of children to questions exploring their rights over their body and sexual behaviour.22

The children interviewed were asked a series of questions designed to explore:

- their access to people with whom they can discuss the issues that affect them as children; and
- their knowledge and understanding of their rights and some of the key changes associated with puberty.

On a positive note, just over seven out of ten (71.6%) of all the children interviewed had heard the term ‘children’s rights’ before. They may have heard the term from a range of sources, including media such as radio or television, school-targeted interventions,23 or friends and family members.

As shown in Figure 30, almost four out of five (78.4%) of the older children had heard the term, as opposed to three out of five younger children (60.1%). This may reflect the impact of life skills curricula in schools, as life skills materials are only introduced in grade four. Awareness of the term was also higher among urban children (76.5% as opposed to 70.4% of rural children). This may be explained by both greater access to information about children's rights, as well as the higher levels of school attendance in urban areas. While boys were slightly more likely than girls to have heard the term, there was no statistically significant difference in levels of knowledge between the genders.

When asked to list their rights, almost half (47.7%) of those who knew the term cited the right to attend school, a smaller proportion (13.7%) recalled the right to express their thoughts and opinions and have these respected, while slightly fewer noted the right to live free of abuse and exploitation (11.6%), and to live free of discrimination on the basis of race or sex (9.1%) (see Figure 31).

To find out how children deal with adversity and to whom they talk if they are in trouble, children were asked what they do if they experience a problem. As shown in Figure 32, the majority of the children reported that they would take steps – most commonly in the form of talking to someone – to deal with the problem. Over half (56%) of the children interviewed would talk to their parents, while one quarter (26%) would talk to a teacher or counsellor and just under a tenth (9%) would discuss their issue with friends. Just 2% of the children interviewed said that they would do nothing, and ignore the problem until it went away.

In a further effort to gauge children’s responses to problems within the school environment, respondents were read a story detailing an incident...
they might encounter at school (see Box 8). They were asked whether the child in the story could do anything about the problem encountered and what they would do if placed in the same situation.

Almost all (88.6%) of the children surveyed thought that the boy or girl in the story could do something about the problem, with no statistical differences evident between genders, locations or ages. This suggests that many children have a sufficient sense of self to seek help for at least some types of abuse – a positive attribute that can be further targeted and strengthened by interventions aimed at curbing violence in schools.

**Box 8: Scenario used to gauge children’s sense of self-efficacy**

Peter/Lindiwe is a boy/girl about your age. S/he has a problem at school. A child at school keeps on picking on him/her. The bully and their friends push Peter/Lindiwe around and steal his/her lunch. Peter/Lindiwe feels weak and embarrassed. Do you think Peter/Lindiwe can do something about this problem?
As shown in Figure 33, the preferred solution was to seek help from a teacher or headmaster (73.2%) and, to a much lesser extent, from a parent or guardian (12.1%). This illustrates that, while most children feel they can seek help from their parents, the choice of person they approach is likely to be influenced by where the problem occurs, and teachers and principals constitute an important source of assistance. This suggests that both parents and school staff should be targeted by interventions seeking to address gender-based violence in schools.

These responses should be contextualised within the findings presented earlier. Bullying was the form of violence most likely to be reported to someone. However, actual victims were most likely to report to parents, rather than to teachers and other authorities. This difference reflects the variations that may occur between actual experiences and more hypothetical situations put to children.

When asked if they ever talked to someone about the key issues that concern them, most children reported discussing issues with those around them. Perhaps reflecting the attention that HIV/AIDS is receiving in both the media and school curricula, just over three quarters (74.9%) of respondents maintained that they sometimes talked to someone about HIV/AIDS, while just over two thirds (67.1%) spoke to someone about ways to stop bullying. Three fifths (59.7%) spoke to others about ways of making their school safer, while slightly fewer (57.0%) spoke to people about relationships between boys and girls. More than half the children (55.4%) spoke to people about body changes during puberty (see Figure 34).

The levels of discussion around HIV/AIDS are positive, but it is worrying that between a third and one half of children do not speak to anyone about violence in the school environment, nor the physiological or relationship issues that are likely to directly impact on their lives – particularly given the high levels of sexual and non- sexual violence revealed by this study.
When school children in Malawi do speak to others about these issues, they are most likely to talk to a friend, or, perhaps more surprisingly, a teacher, headmaster or counsellor. This contrasts with the more abstract question of to whom children speak most about problems, where parents were most frequently cited. As shown in Table 4, children were most likely to talk to their friends about ways of making their school safer (50%), relationships (48.7%) and body changes during puberty (44.7%), while they were more likely to speak to school staff about how to stop bullying (48.6%) and prevent and manage HIV/AIDS (48.3%).

Small numbers prevent any meaningful statistical testing, but a superficial analysis of children who reported accessing support (as indicated by the availability of people to talk to about these issues), suggests that children who do not discuss these issues with others are at greater risk of victimisation than those who do.

Finally, children were asked questions on the rights of children with regard to their bodies. These attitudes and perceptions often inform much of the sexual violence and abuse that occurs between peers, and adults and children. As Figure 35 illustrates, the majority of children were aware of their right to personal space and freedom from unwanted sexual touching. Virtually all (96%) of the children interviewed felt that it was unacceptable for a boy to touch a girl, or a girl a boy, in places they are not happy with, while a little over four fifths (81.6%) felt that it is acceptable for a girl to refuse to have sex with a boy if she does not want to. More generally, nine out of ten (90.2%) stated that neither boys nor girls need to have sex to show that they are adults (90.2% and 92.4% respectively). A slightly smaller proportion (87.9%) felt that one need not have sex with a partner to prove one loves him or her, and that when a boy has an erection it does not necessarily mean he needs to have sex (87.4%).

These findings suggest a remarkable appreciation of the right to sexual choice. However, as indicated by the information in the preceding sections, translating awareness into everyday behaviour remains a challenge, and should serve as a key entry point for any interventions aimed at addressing abuse in schools.

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24 The full value labels for each bar reflected in the figure, from left to right, are: “It is all right for a boy to touch a girl in places she may not want him to, or for a girl to touch a boy in places he may not want her to”; “a girl has a right to refuse to have sex with a boy if she wants to”; “a boy needs to have sex to show he is a man”; “a girl needs to have sex to show she is a woman”; “a person needs to have sex with their boyfriend/girlfriend to show they love them”; and “a boy’s erection means he has to have sex”.

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Section 7: What Malawian teachers say

The safety of school children in schools and the impact on education is particularly critical in Malawi’s pursuit to make universal education a reality. Teachers play a crucial role in respect of personal safety of students in schools. Together with parents, they arguably have the most significant impact on young children’s lives, as they are in contact with children throughout the school day. The survey sought to establish how attitude, behaviour and some topics in schools assist teachers to address the problem of personal safety in schools. It is pertinent to state that the survey was restricted to primary school teachers from standard four to standard eight, and form one to form four at secondary level.

Teachers were initially asked about the life skills material taught in school. When the study was initiated, education authorities pointed out that, while the course and material were new, these issues were already being taught in all schools across Malawi. Given this, a range of individual topics or themes was selected, rather than a single generic life skills label.

As Figure 36 reveals, HIV/AIDS, and how to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS, is the most commonly taught life skills topic (78.6%), followed by gender equality (75.2%) and rights and responsibilities of individuals (74.1%). At the other end of the spectrum, tolerance and temperance are taught at just over one half of the schools (54.1%), while reproductive biology is taught at fractionally more (57.4%).

### Figure 36: Percentage of teachers who reported that various life skills topics were taught at their school (n=632)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS and preventing transmission</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and substance abuse</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender roles</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/sexual abuse/child abuse/rape etc</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality/relationships with opposite sex</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive biology</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance and temperance</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Teacher’s views on key life issues (n=632)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children have the right to disagree with teachers</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only girls are allowed to cry to show their feelings</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is right that boys and girls around the age of ten start to learn about relationships with the opposite sex.</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is usually better to mix with people from one's own religion</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls should have the right to refuse to have sex with their boyfriend or other boys if they so choose</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys and girls should have the same opportunities in life.</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have rights that adults should respect.</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is wrong for children to be taught to respect each other</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should be taught to deal with choices, and the consequences</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing some topics, like sexuality and contraception, will make children promiscuous</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should be allowed to dress as they wish</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children should be allowed to have any type of hairstyle</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of these responses across all the schools surveyed reveal that at least some of the subjects are taught in all schools, but vary between grades; some subjects are taught in the higher grades but not the lower grades.

However, while many of these subjects are taught, much of the time the curriculum materials are incorrect or inadequate. Just over one half (55.1%) of the teachers surveyed reported that there were materials or syllabi available to them. Furthermore, only two thirds (38.9%) of the teachers had ever undergone any kind of training in, or were qualified to teach, these materials. This lack of training and materials raises doubts as to how effective much of the teaching may be.

The teachers were then asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements reflecting the choices of children, both in relation to the teachers and in more general terms. These responses are depicted in Table 5. Positively, seven out of ten (70.3%) teachers thought that children have the right to disagree with teachers; and only 2.8% thought only girls were allowed to cry to show their feelings. The vast majority (91.9%) thought that girls had the right to refuse sex; an even higher percentage (98.3%) thought boys and girls should have the same opportunities in life; and a similar percentage (95.6%) thought children had rights that should be respected.

Conversely, a significant percentage of children answered that they disagreed that boys and girls should start to learn about relationships at around age ten. Given the research revealing that children as young as ten years old are increasingly engaging in sexual activities, including intercourse, this is of some concern. Without the knowledge that could be taught at this age, children are more susceptible to be forced into sex, leading to teenage pregnancies and to HIV infection. Related to this, more than one third (36.9%) of teachers agreed with the statement that discussing some topics, such as sexuality and contraception, would make children promiscuous.

Also of some concern is that almost three tenths (29.3%) agreed with the statement that it is better for children to mix with people from one’s own religion, showing a remarkable lack of tolerance. Similarly, almost one quarter (23.6%) of teachers disagreed with the fact that children should be taught to respect each other.

In relation to disciplining their scholars, one quarter (25.0) of the teachers surveyed reported that they allowed their children to express their feelings over a disagreement with the teachers in class, while just three teachers (0.5%) disciplined their scholars while they were still angry. Corporal punishment (including manual labour) is most commonly utilised as the means of discipline (36.3%), despite the fact that corporal punishment
is banned. However, the same percentage (36%) indicated that they talked to their pupils about what they had done wrong. Less than one tenth (8.2%) disciplined children by giving them extra homework, and 6.4% took away their privileges.

Teachers were then asked how often they spoke to their children about certain issues (see Figure 37).

As the figure shows, HIV/AIDS and bullying are the most often spoken about issues, with more than seven out of ten (71.2%) and three fifths (62.3%) of teachers often speaking to their pupils about these subjects respectively. Sex and sexuality is perhaps the least spoken about issue, with almost one fifth (18.4%) of teachers reporting that they never speak to their children about this.

Table 6 reflects some level of openness within the classroom setting, with a slight majority of teachers reporting that children sometimes talk to them, or ask questions, about the relationships between boys and girls, or about issues of violence (53.5% and 64.4% respectively). However, pupils appear not to be too comfortable asking or talking to teachers about sex or issues of sexuality.

Finally, teachers were asked about teacher–student relationships. Just under one fifth (19.8%) of teachers reported that they are aware of teachers who entice students into ‘love relationships’. This is remarkably similar to the percentage of children who reported knowing about these situations, and suggests that such engagements are in fact common throughout the schools.

Of those that reported being aware of such incidents, almost three quarters (73.7%) knew of such incidents happening at their school. They most commonly became aware of these through reports at the school committees (24.0%), or through media reports (11.2%). Despite the clear knowledge of these relationships, only 37.3% reported that action was taken against the teachers involved in these relationships. This suggests a lackadaisical response on the part of the school and education establishment, and would indicate that no other authorities take such relationships seriously.

Conclusion – what this data implies for Malawi

Violence against children is common throughout the world and may constitute a growing problem in developing countries such as Malawi. This quantitative survey, designed to measure the extent and nature of gender-based violence in schools in Malawi, reveals that abuse is common and is a source of fear for children. The findings further show that while most violence tends to occur at school, much abuse also occurs at home and on the daily trip to and from school. There are also many places within the schools that hold particular fear for children: the periphery, grounds and fields, and toilets and bathrooms. This fear originates from both direct experience of being victimised, as well as from the experiences of others. Schools, traditionally perceived as a safe haven for children, and sites of learning and positive growing experiences, are rapidly becoming sites of violence associated with fear and trepidation.

Such a scenario, where school is feared and holds horrors for children, not only undermines the children's psychological and emotional well-being, but also undermines the quality of education that is available to them. Children are unlikely to concentrate on learning when they are scared of being attacked at any time on the school premises or on the way home. This in itself provides one of the major motivations for dealing with violence and abuse within schools. A second motivation is the importance of addressing violence so that schools can become agents of change within a society.

Schools are microcosms of the societies they serve, and reflect the particular dynamics, influences, experiences and histories of the communities in which they are located. As such, they reflect values, traditions and norms as much as they serve as agents of social change. In order for schools to become agents of social change a process required to reduce gender-based violence in both schools and society more generally communities must

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understand and support these changes. As shown in Figure 38, children are moulded by all the environments in which they operate: their schools, families, communities and broader society as a whole. Conversely, each of these environments can serve as an agent of change, and can catalyse change for the good in the child or in the broader social environment.

In order to address gender-based violence, it is not enough to focus on effecting change at either a policy or an implementation level. Any attempts to reduce abuse have to take cognisance of the social context in which interventions occur, and need to pursue the goal of fundamentally shifting societal attitudes about the acceptability of physical and sexual violence against children.

As the findings of this study reveal, gender-based violence is not confined to the immediate school environment. This clearly illustrates the need to shift attitudes and behaviour within schools (at the level of teachers and principals as much as among the children themselves) but also within communities and society as a whole.

**Figure 38:** The moulding of children by schools, parents and communities

Good information should form the cornerstone of any response, and the data collected in this study should inform interventions by policy makers and educationalists to address gender-based violence in schools. Figure 39 depicts the process of identifying and addressing issues of violence against children, as proposed by the International Symposium on the Impact of Global Issues on Women and Children.

The key findings of the survey are depicted in Figure 40, where the extent and nature of the problem of gender-based violence in schools in Malawi is defined, and the key risk factors are identified. Using this information, a series of implications and recommendations are suggested.

26 Ibid, p 32.

Figure 40: Gender-based violence against Malawian school children

Defining the problem:
- One in four children fear travelling to school. Fear is often based on experience; one half of all fearful children know someone who has been victimised on the trip.
- One third of children fear areas within their school.
- Virtually all the children surveyed have been bullied, although rates were highest among older and girl children.
- Almost one in four children have been forced to have sex against their will, with rates highest among older children and females.
- More than one tenth have been touched against their will on their genitals or breasts. Rates are highest among younger and girl children but boys also experience victimisation.
- Just under 5% of children older than 13 have been forced to perform, or be subject to, oral sex.
- Instances of all abuse are most common in rural areas.
- Repeat victimisation is common.
- Most abuse occurs at school, although older children above the age of 14 most frequently experience sexual abuse at home.
- The perpetrator is almost always known to the victim. With the exception of sexual abuse among children in the older age group (where perpetrators tend to be non-relatives living with the child), perpetrators are most often classmates of the victim.
- Transactional sex is common, with one in four sexually abused children reporting receiving, or being promised, goods in exchange for sex.
- Sex between teachers and learners is also common. Four out five children below the age of 14, and one in three children over the age of 14, report knowing someone who has been promised good grades by a teacher in exchange for sex.

Identifying risk and protective factors:
- Gender: girls are generally at greater risk for all types of abuse
- Distance travelled to school: children who travel longer distances to school are at higher risk of abuse than those who live closer to school.
- Boarding: boarders are more prone to forced sex by classmates.
- Age: younger children are most likely to experience sexual victimisation at school, while older children are most at risk at home.
- Socio-economic background: economic and social environment play a significant role regarding risk of victimisation.
- Availability of support systems: children who speak to others about the key issues affecting them are less likely to be victimised than those who do not.

Reduction of gender-based violence against school children

Implementation of interventions:
- Application of interventions tailored to the social, cultural and educational environment in Malawi.

Developing interventions:
- Using the data collected in this report, detailed and specific interventions need to be developed. This could be further informed, prior to design, by research, including focus groups conducted with children within schools – thus allowing the children themselves to input into interventions aimed at ensuring their well-being.

Conclusion – what this data implies for Malawi

The prevalence of violence, both physical and sexual, is in part linked to the socio-economic environment in which children are raised. Situations of extreme poverty are likely to encourage violence, while the breakdown of social norms and values associated with poverty often results in the normalisation of behaviour that would otherwise be unacceptable. The prevalence of repeat victimisation within the home and schools, and the apparent tendency of teachers to engage in sexual relations with their students, highlight the breakdown of conventional relations of trust and authority in Malawi, and point to a widespread abuse of power by teachers and other education staff.

Practitioners addressing sexual violence against both boys and girls in South Africa have identified a number of potential reasons for the high levels of abuse in the country. Several of these may be of use in understanding similar violence in Malawi, including:
- The living conditions associated with extreme poverty (where large families live in confined spaces and children often share beds or rooms with adult couples);
- A lack of privacy and space;
- Low levels of maternal education;
- Poor maternal care (neglect, lack of attention);
- The disempowerment of young mothers who often have few skills or resources and are dependent on men for both shelter and an income;
- The widespread acceptance of a ‘traditional culture’ where men take little or no responsibility for their children’s well-being; and
- Associated with this, a lack of male education on issues of child responsibility and child care.

Related to the above, but a distinct point, are patriarchal attitudes that expect, condone and perpetuate aggressiveness in males, and submissiveness and dependency in females. In many instances, this is attributed (often misleadingly) to ‘culture’ and history.

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29 Ibid.
Many of these ‘drivers’ or environmental factors do not explicitly relate to violence within schools, but rather catalyse or generate sexual violence generally. However, many of these factors are experienced within Malawi in society as a whole, and serve to legitimise violence in all spheres, including the school environment.

Many of these possible causes, or facilitating factors, are clearly inter-related, and addressing them requires an integrated, inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary approach that goes beyond simply educating teachers, principles and parents about the existence of abuse.

These findings point to the need for urgent action on the part of all those engaged in policy making and implementation, as well as oversight of such processes. A number of recommendations can be made.

- **Recommendation 1.** Urgent action must be taken to address gender-based violence in schools. This strategy should target school children, school staff and parents, both within the school context and within broader society.

- **Recommendation 2.** At a macro level, the welfare of children – and in particular the issue of violence against children – needs to be mainstreamed into all government policy. This requires that addressing these issues forms part of the core mandate of all government departments, rather than just that of the Ministry of Education. Efforts to make children’s daily trips to and from school safer, for example, could include the Ministries of Education, Transport and the Malawi Police Service.

- **Recommendation 3.** While girl children are more frequently victimised than their male counterparts, boys also fall victim to abuse (including sexual abuse) in the school and home environment. All policy formulated to prevent and deal with gender-based violence should therefore target both boys and girls.

- **Recommendation 4.** Given the pervasive violence at all levels of Malawian society, it is not enough to ban behaviour such as corporal punishment. The implications of banning such punishment – and the rationale behind its banning – need to be disseminated down to a school level and measures need to be put in place to monitor the behaviour of teachers within schools.

- **Recommendation 5.** There is need for a widespread education and awareness campaign. This should target all teachers and caregivers and should seek to create awareness about the extent and nature of violence against children in Malawi, how to recognise symptoms of victimisation, and what to do in cases of abuse.

- **Recommendation 6.** Malawi’s life skills curriculum needs to address the root causes of many forms of gender-based violence, including gendered power relations, and attitudes towards male and female sexuality. It should also include components aimed at improving children’s sense of self-efficacy and assertiveness, as well as materials to improve children’s awareness of their rights, and should assist children in translating this knowledge into protective behaviour. Finally, materials should educate children on how to deal with violence, including to whom to report incidents and what actions they are entitled to expect from the authorities in response to reports.

- **Recommendation 7.** Strategies should be developed to extend such information to parents, albeit at a different level. There appears a particular need for parents to come to terms with some of the underlying power inequalities between the genders, and how these can translate into violence against their children. Parents who are aware of potential discrimination, peer pressures and discrimination will be better equipped to provide support to their children.

- **Recommendation 8.** While children are generally aware of their rights, as well as some of the changes and rights associated with puberty, relationships and sex, it appears taboo to frankly discuss sex and sexual violence. This is not unique to Malawi, but addressing gender-based violence requires openness about these issues and it is imperative that an environment is created in which children and adults can discuss them.

- **Recommendation 9.** Support mechanisms and structures need to be developed at a range of levels to effectively, efficiently and sensitively deal with child victims of gender-based violence. Such structures need to be created at the national, regional and school level. Effective measures also need to be put in place to deal with the perpetrators of violence.
• **Recommendation 10.** At the school level, formal procedures should be developed to deal with violence. These should include mechanisms to address violence by both teachers and school children in a way that assists the police and other authorities in responding to incidents of abuse.

• **Recommendation 11.** Schools in Malawi need to develop policies that recognise the seriousness of bullying and the impact that bullying can have on victims. Such policies should include effective ways of dealing with abuse itself, as well with victims and perpetrators.

• **Recommendation 12.** Similarly, schools and the regional and national education authorities need to recognise the seriousness of ‘love relationships’; and teachers engaging in sexual activities with students in return for grades. Clear, effective and efficient policies and measures need to be put in place to deal with incidents when they occur. This should include suitable disciplinary, and, where necessary, criminal action against the teacher, and, where necessary, support for the child involved.

• **Recommendation 13.** Given the prevalence of gender-based violence among school children in Malawi, a detailed study on the implications and outcomes of such violence on children is required. This should inform the design of interventions and support mechanisms for victims. As yet, there is little empirical research on the outcomes of violence on later education processes, or on social interaction and skills.