

Very high rates of sexual violence with younger learners most vulnerable

The SeViSSA Kwanele* baseline study found that learners at Khayelitsha schools experience high levels of sexual violence, including intimate partner violence in heterosexual dating relationships.

This research brief discusses this widespread violence, to which younger learners are particularly susceptible, and makes recommendations for school-based interventions that address intimate partner violence.

High rates of sexual violence

The baseline results revealed that violence is commonplace and occurs mostly in classrooms, on sports fields, or in bathrooms.

High rates of learner- and teacher-perpetrated sexual violence in schools were surprising and concerning, with relatively high rates of sexual violence committed by teachers, experienced by two out of ten primary school learners and one out of ten high school learners. Also worrying, was the apparent culture of silence surrounding sexual violence, discussed in brief 2 of this series, *A culture of silence that normalises widespread violence*.

Intimate partner violence is widespread

Learners in romantic relationships experience high levels of violence at the hands of their partners with higher levels among primary school learners, as shown in figure 4.

Learner- and educator-perpetrated sexual violence

In the preceding 12 months by cohort

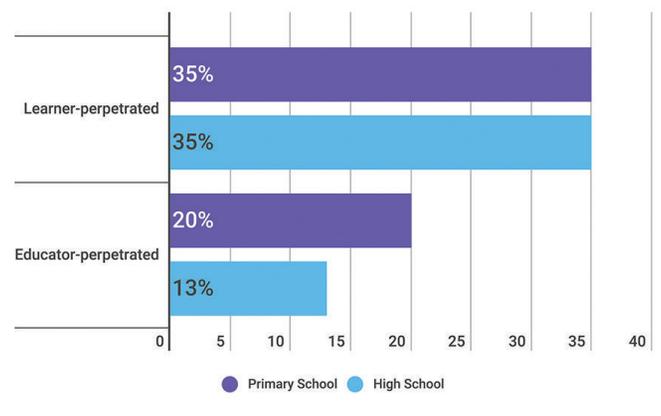


Figure 1: Learner- and educator-perpetrated sexual violence in preceding 12 months



Figure 2: Girls at a school in Khayelitsha participate in a Generation Skillz activity that encourages the discussion of gender issues

Most common forms of IPV (ranked)

1. Verbal threats
2. Slapping
3. Pushing/hair-pulling
4. Hitting (with a fist or object)
5. Kicking, dragging, beating, choking, burning
6. Threats with weapon



41% of primary school learners experienced sexual violence in an intimate partnership in the 12 months preceding the study

*The Sexual Violence in Schools in South Africa (SeViSSA) initiative aims to create safe school environments by dealing with violence against girls. It is being implemented by Grassroot Soccer and Soul City Institute in Khayelitsha schools, through their Kwanele Project. A baseline study gives a picture of the situation prior to the project starting and will help monitor its progress. See the full report at: <https://www.ru.ac.za/criticalstudies/policybriefsfeedbackreports/>

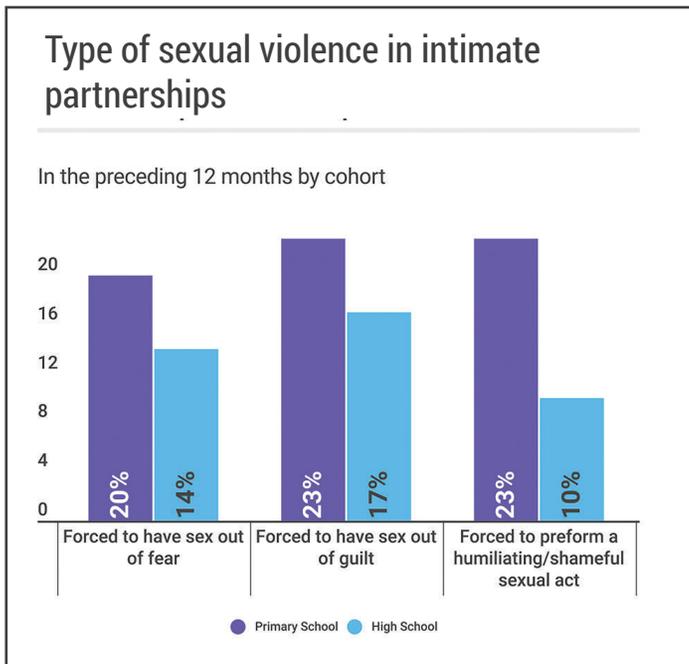


Figure 3: Type of sexual violence among learners experiencing IPV

What can school-based interventions do to address intimate partner violence?

The findings from the baseline study will be used to monitor and evaluate the Kwanele intervention. They also point to some important lessons for school-based interventions seeking to prevent IPV.

Sexual violence also featured as a form of intimate partner violence

Girls experience such violence at much higher rates than boys. It is also troubling to note the high numbers of primary school learners reporting experiences of intimate partner violence. The study also found that younger learners are less likely to report IPV.

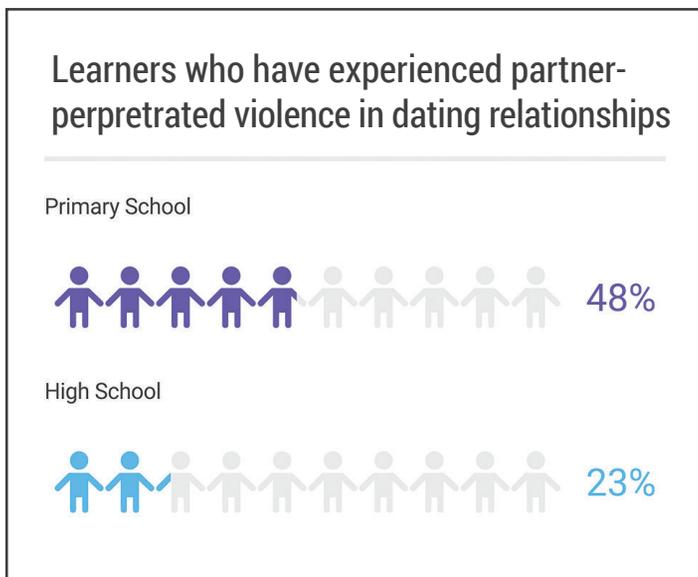


Figure 4: Experiences of partner-perpetrated violence by cohort



1 Primary school learners need more attention.

Primary school learners are at high risk, but are often underserved. Interventions need to:

- speak to their developmental and gendered issues, while taking care not to reinforce stereotypes;
- engage both boys and girls in interventions;
- include violence and dating relationships as important issues.



3 Question harmful gender norms.

Challenge harmful narratives and strengthen those that do not contribute to violence (like the alternative 'dating rules') through:

- peer educators, who may be especially well positioned as they are likely to be more familiar with existing youth cultures;
- teachers and care-givers, who can have a powerful influence in questioning local gender and relationship norms that inadvertently promote IPV.



2 Engage with youth cultures and local understandings.

Unpack learners' own understandings of:

- gender and relationship norms (such as the 'dating rules' discussed in Brief 2);
- meanings of sexual encounters;
- what counts as sexual violence.



4 Stimulate further research with this age group.

Further research is required to better understand gender issues among primary school-aged children and how these shape their experiences of IPV.

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