

Sexual violence and girls' performance in Rwandan schools: A case study of some 12 year basic education schools in Muhanga District.

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the nature of sexual violence among schoolgirls in Rwanda and its impact on their school performance. In addition to the structured questionnaire administered to 182 respondents sampled from four 12 YBE schools in Muhanga District and the interviews, the study used respondents' grades at the Ordinary Level national examinations of 2012 to validate the study hypotheses.

As for the nature of sexual violence faced, the study indicates that a half of adolescent schoolgirls experience either sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. The major causes of sexual violence include perpetrators who pretend to be inoffensive while committing sexual abuse; curiosity of adolescents to perform sexual acts and the need for money and/or materials. The main perpetrators of sexual violence against schoolgirls include their boyfriends, schoolboys, relatives living with the victims and family friends. The findings show also that sexual violence is one of the factors for the girls' low school performance.

Key words

Sexual violence, schoolgirls, school performance, 12 YBE

Résumé

Cette étude visait à montrer la nature de la violence sexuelle parmi les filles écolières au Rwanda et son impact sur leur performance scolaire. En plus du questionnaire adressé à 182 répondants échantillonnés dans quatre écoles de 12 YBE dans le District de Muhanga et des interviews, l'étude a aussi utilisé leurs grades obtenus à l'examen national de tronc commun de 2012 pour vérifier les hypothèses.

L'étude révèle que la moitié des répondants ont subi soit l'abus sexuel, soit l'exploitation sexuelle. Elle montre aussi comme causes majeures de la violence sexuelle l'abus de confiance de la part des auteurs, la curiosité des adolescents à commettre des actes sexuels et le besoin de l'argent ou du matériel dont elles ont besoin. L'étude révèle que leurs amis, leurs pairs de classe, les membres et les amis de leurs familles sont les principaux auteurs de la violence sexuelle contre les filles écolières. Finalement, les résultats montrent que la violence sexuelle est l'un des facteurs qui baissent la performance scolaire des victimes.

Mots clés

Violence sexuelle, écolières, performance scolaire, éducation de base de douze ans.

Introduction

Violence against women has been recognized as a major humanitarian problem that the World has been facing over the last 20 years up to date (Slegh&Kimonyo, 2010; UNFPA, 2008). This is especially the case in Africa where gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread and an escalating phenomenon (Ampofo et al., 2004). Indeed, referring to the studies done worldwide, one out of three women has experienced gender-based violence (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottemoeller, 1999). Regarding the case of Rwanda, the available statistics and information from various sources confirm the existence of a persistent high incidence of GBV in Rwanda (MIGEPF, 2011b; UNIFEM, 2008). Re-

garding the study area, a study by Slegh and Kimonyo (2010) revealed that Muhanga district ranked first in the Southern Province in committing rape with 16.7%.

GBV has various types including sexual violence, forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced and child marriage; and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honor killings, widow inheritance, and others (UNFPA, 2008). This study focuses on sexual violence against school girls, entailing sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

Considering the existing evidence indicating that high levels of education can reduce women's vulnerability to GBV (Bott, Morrison and Ellsberg, 2004) and in order to achieve its long term vision of development, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) has deployed a lot of efforts to ensure free basic education for all Rwandans, both girls and boys, by setting up the 12 year basic education schools across the country.

Statement of the problem

Despite the existence of Rwanda's political will, institutional, policy and legal frameworks to fight against GBV, the latter is still observed in the country due to the socio-cultural and societal factors including mainly culture and tradition, unequal power relationships between women and men, religious practices and beliefs, economic dependency of women on men and poverty (MIGEPROF, 2011a; Saffitz, 2010; Abdur-Rahman et al, 2006). In addition, several studies, for example those of Plan International (2013), DFID (2005) and Human Right Watch (2001), point out the occurrence of GBV in and around schools, in both developing and developed countries. They emphasize that girls are at a high risk with around 150 million who are victims of sexual violence of whom sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years old. As for Rwanda, GBV and sexual violence in and around schools indeed exists (Asemota&Randell, 2011); and recent statistics from MIGEPROF point out that around 17 000 young female adolescents aged between 16 and 17 years were impregnated (Munezero, 2017).

Thus, even though there may be other factors which may be sources of girls' lower school performance as compared to the one of boys as they transit from lower to upper secondary as it is shown in the table below (MINE-DUC, 2012), sexual violence would hamper schoolgirls' performance given the fact that girls are most affected by sexual violence than boys as highlighted by the studies above.

Table 1: Ordinary Secondary performance from 2005 to 2010 in Rwanda

Year	Candidates who sat for exams			Passed			% of student passed		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
2005	16786	18344	35130	4193	8755	12948	25.0%	47.7%	36.9%
2006	21022	23846	44868	4348	9183	13531	20.7%	38.5%	30.2%
2007	22264	24461	46725	4145	9197	13342	18.6%	37.6%	28.6%

2008	23486	25396	48882	16551	21990	38541	70.5%	86.6%	78.8%
2009	25065	26730	51795	18492	23402	41894	73.8%	87.5%	80.9%
2010	29783	29411	59194	23296	26933	50229	78.2%	91.6%	84.9%

Source: MINEDUC, 2012

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the nature of sexual violence among schoolgirls in Rwanda; and its impact on their school performance. Specifically, the study pursued the following three objectives:

- 1) **To find out the nature (magnitude, types, causes, perpetrators, settings and effects) of sexual violence encountered by girls in and around Rwandan schools;**
- 2) **To determine the impact of sexual violence encountered by girls in and around Rwandan schools on their school performance;**
- 3) **To suggest appropriate strategies to effectively solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools.**

It also intends to validate the hypotheses formulated as follows:

1. **There is a high incidence of sexual violence among schoolgirls in Rwanda and the nature of sexual violence expresses itself in various aspects.**
2. **Sexual violence has a negative impact on schoolgirls' performance.**
3. **More efficient strategies should be developed to effectively solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools**

Literature review

The study began by a desk review about GBV and sexual violence worldwide, in Rwanda and in schools. In total, 58 published and unpublished documents were consulted including books, scientific journals, and official government and NGOs reports.

Theoretical framework

Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances... using coercion by any person regardless of their relationship with the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (WHO, 2002). For UNFPA (2008: 9), "sexual violence refers to any act, attempt or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result, in physical, psychological or emotional harm". Sexual violence encompasses a large range of manifestations that include verbal harassment, unwanted touch, molestation, assault and penetration. It entails sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

Sexual abuse covers any act or attempted act of a sexual nature, committed by an adult against a child, including inappropriate touching, carried out using force, perpetrated under duress or by taking advantage of a situa-

tion of superiority. Sexual exploitation refers to any abuse of vulnerability, position of authority or trust, for sexual ends, with remuneration in cash or kind to the child (Antonowicz, 2010).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetuated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females (UNFPA, 2008). It involves men and women, in which the female is usually the victim due to unequal relationships between them or gender inequality (Slegh & Kimonyo, 2010).

GBV in Rwanda encompasses a variety of forms, but four forms are the major identified by GMO (2010b). Those are: sexual violence, physical violence, psychological violence and economic violence. In addition, it is important to note that GBV could be committed at home (domestic violence), at workplace or within the community.

A study carried out by GMO (2010b) revealed that the minors and the female adolescents were the most targeted by sexual violence; and statistics from MIGEPROF in 2017 point out that around 17 000 young female adolescents aged between 16 and 17 years, i.e. school-going age, were impregnated (Munezero, 2017). Amongst the perpetrators of GBV against these categories of victims, the study ranked in the first positions the houseboys and house girls, the teachers and the people suffering from alcoholism.

As the Rwandan society is in transition from gender inequality to gender equality, the same study found that the physical violence is a countrywide lived reality, mainly due to the misunderstanding of the concept "gender" and the wrong interpretation of gender roles. As noted by Jewkes cited by Bott, Morrison & Ellsberg (2004), the social and economic empowerment of women appears to increase in the short term run her risk to violence as this empowerment challenges traditional gender roles. Thus, husbands, alcoholics and employers are ranked as the main perpetrators of physical violence against women (GMO, 2010b).

Being often verbal or non-verbal, psychological violence has roots in cultural practices and covers 50% of the national territory with particular emphasis in the Southern and Northern Provinces (GMO, 2010b). The majority of its perpetrators is people with authority over the victims and includes mainly teachers and employers. The latter use their position of power to oppress the staff or other people under their authority.

Economic violence was found to be perpetrated throughout the whole country with high incidence in Kigali City and Eastern Province (GMO, 2010b). It involves putting the victim in a situation in which she must beg for the money to the abuser until he gives some of it or does not according to his will. It also includes preventing the victim from finishing her studies or obtaining employment; or simply squandering family resources. Its causes are rooted in unequal power relations between men and women.

It is important to remind here that, among those different forms of GBV, the present study deals with sexual violence against girls in Rwandan schools.

As for the causes of GBV, the ecological model accounts for GBV as a complex phenomenon which involves complex interactions of gender and power and that originates from forces operating at mainly four levels: individual, relationship, community and societal (Bott, Morrison & Ellsberg, 2004). The individual level risk factors of GBV include biological and personal history (including pathological personality traits) factors among either victims or perpetrators. Regarding the relationship level, it represents one's immediate and social relationships, mostly those between intimate partners and within the family. The community level refers to institutions and social structures such as peer groups, schools, churches, workplaces and neighborhoods in which social relationships are embedded. As for societal level risk factors that increase the likelihood of violence against women, they account for socio-economic and cultural environment which create an acceptable climate for violence such as power asymmetries, gender norms and roles, societal representation of women, conflicts and humanitarian crises (Cooper, Paluck & Fletcher, 2012).

Concerning the relationship between violence against girls and their school performance, Walberg (1981), through his psychological theory of educational productivity, determined three groups of nine factors that affect the learning process and the quality of school performance. Those factors, based on affective, cognitive and behavioral skills, are aptitude (ability, motivation and age), instruction (quantity and quality) and environment (home, classroom, peers and television). Those variables are principally linked to personal learner characteristics and inside (support or threat from teachers and peers) and outside school environment (family, community). The school, peer students, family members and communities play an important role in supporting or not the student for the quality of her / his academic performance (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq&Berhanu, 2011). Thus, when this learning environment is not safe for a student but threatening, as is case for sexual violence against school girls for instance, it is obvious that learners' school performance will be hampered. Although not exclusive to them, sexual violence principally affects women and girls across all cultures, and then has a negative impact on their physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person which finally results in low performance (Benjamin & Murchison, 2004).

In order to fight against GBV in Rwanda, not only developing a national anti - GBV policy framework and enacting anti - GBV laws, strategies to curb with this problem includes anti GBV focal points and desks in different institutions like schools, police, health facilities and National Public Prosecution Authority; "*Isange* One Stop Center" to help GBV victims in terms of health care and counseling; and toll-free hotlines telephone to receive GBV complaints and give advice to the victims. Other measures to fight against GBV among students include mainly setting up and equipping a girls' room at school as well as providing specific dialogue for girls about reproductive health, sex education and appropriate behavior to adopt and protect them against sugar-daddies.

Methodology

The 12 year basic education (12 YBE)

The Rwandan education system can be divided into three phases which are (1) pre-primary; (2) the 12 YBE and (3) higher education (MINEDUC, 2010). The pre-primary education is destined for the children aged between 3 and 6

before they start primary. The 12 YBE has been instituted in the framework of the “Education for All”, training skilled labor and equipping students with life skills. They encompasses 6 years of primary, 3 years of low secondary (9 YBE) and 3 years of upper secondary (12YBE) education. The upper secondary of the 12 YBE is either in General Secondary (GS), a Teacher Training College (TTC) or Technical Vocational Education and Trainings (TVET). The Higher Education in Rwanda has three levels: (1) TVET; (2) Higher Learning Institutions; and (3) Non-degree awarding high education.

Indeed, with the old system, students did exams at the end of primary to enter secondary schools; and most of the secondary schools were boarding schools located very far from children’s families so that a small percentage of them could pursue their studies. Aiming at allowing a big cohort of students to have access on secondary education, the Government of Rwanda instituted also non-boarding schools system (9 & 12YBE). The 9 and 12 YBE are non-boarding schools near the communities, where students commute from home to school to receive primary and secondary education. Thus, adolescent girls in this level of learning are more exposed to sexual violence compared to their peers studying in boarding schools given that they are in frequent contacts with sexual violence perpetrators both at school and at home.

Participants and research design

The study targeted the population of 427 school girls of Senior 4 studying in fifteen schools of 12 YBE in Muhanga District. The choice of Senior 4 was motivated by the fact that students at this level have taken the O’ Level national examinations at the end of lower secondary (Senior 3 - O’ Level) to be allocated to upper secondary levels of education; and the researcher aimed at using the grades obtained by school girls already allocated in senior 4 to measure the impact sexual violence had on their performance at those exams.

Based on two selection criteria set up which are the highest number of girls and the location of the school to cover different aspects, the study selected four among those fifteen schools. Two urban schools namely G.S. Gitarama in Nyamabuye Sector and G.S. Munyinya in Shyogwe Sector, and two rural schools namely G.S. Kanyanza A in Kiyumba Sector and G.S Rongi in Rongi Sector were selected. They totalized 218 girls studying in Senior 4.

As for the sample size, the study took the entire population as a sample to give more weight to the findings. As highlighted by Bailey (1994), Schiffman and Kanuk (1997), this kind of sampling - is appropriate for a small population. This means that all the girls in Senior 4 from the four 12 YBE schools mentioned above participated in the study. However, due to different reasons such as participating on the pre-test of the questionnaire, absenteeism of some of them on days of data collection or the presence of those who did not sit for the Ordinary Level national examinations in 2012, 182 girls participated in the study.

The study collected data about the nature of sexual violence among schoolgirls (to verify the first hypothesis). To validate the second hypothesis, it analyzed statistically the grades of those girls at the Ordinary Level nation-

al examinations done in 2012 to assess the impact of sexual violence on their performance. After collecting the data about the status of sexual violence among the schoolgirls, those girls were divided into two categories. First of all, school girls who were victims of sexual violence constituted experimental group whereas those who were not constituted control group. Secondly, girls in urban schools who were victims of sexual violence constituted experimental group whereas girls in rural schools victims of sexual violence constituted control group. Even though there may be other factors affecting rural girls' performance compared to urban girls in addition to sexual violence, the researcher assumes that differences in experiencing sexual violence for the two categories may also results in different impact on their performance. Thereafter, the statistical significance of the difference between the mean grades of the two groups, for each category, was calculated using Z test (Gauss curve) and appropriate statistical formulas to compute the difference stipulated in the hypothesis. The third hypothesis was verified through the information collected from the respondents and key informants.

Procedure and research instruments

The study proceeded first by a desk review about GBV and sexual violence in general, and in Rwanda and in schools in particular. Also, secondary data in relation with statistics about 12 YBE and the number of girls in those schools were collected from the Directorate of Education in Muhanga District.

Thereafter, the questionnaire, designed referring to the objectives and hypotheses of the study, was pre-tested before its administration by conducting randomly a *pilot survey* with 20 school girls of Senior 4, excluded from the sample, in the concerned schools. This helped to adjust the questionnaire in that some questions were combined and other questions were rephrased. Moreover, the pre-test enabled the researcher to set up the appropriate conditions of responding to the questionnaire as it showed that the respondents filled it comfortably when each was alone.

Then, the respondents were contacted at their respective schools and briefed about the research aims. After ensuring them secrecy and confidentiality, they manifested their willingness to participate to the research and they filled themselves the questionnaire.

In addition, semi structured interviews were held with key informants including the headmasters and deputy head teachers, teachers, parents-teachers committees members at selected schools; education and gender and family promotion officers in Muhanga District; police officials at District Police Unit Muhanga; National Public Prosecution Authority - High Instance of Muhanga and professionals at Kabgayi Hospital in charge of managing GBV issues. The data about respondents' grades at the Ordinary Level national examinations done in 2012 were also collected as their grades were available in schools. Before computing those grades, respondents who were victims of sexual violence (experimental group) were distinguished from those who were not (control group) on the basis of their answers.

As regards the validity of the data collection instruments, it was ensured through the choice of adequate tools namely the use of the experiment (to guarantee internal validity) and the use of the study population for sample (to ensure external validity). Also, survey questionnaire and interview protocol were used to promise face validity. Concerning the reliability of the measures, it was ensured through clear wording on questions as well as particular emphasis on pre-testing the questionnaire before its administration and the use of closed ended questions.

The analysis of collected quantitative data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 20) and Microsoft Excel software. Moreover, the test of hypotheses used both inferential and descriptive statistics. Furthermore, the thematic analysis was used to analyze collected qualitative data.

Results

Profile of participants

The results indicated that 92.9% of the respondents were in the age bracket 16 - 20 with the mean age of 18.37. They showed that 60.4% of the respondents had both parents whereas 29.1% of them had a single parent. Others lived mainly with relatives. In addition, results revealed that 80.1% of the persons who were taking care of the respondents lived on agriculture whereas 11% practiced small private businesses.

Nature of sexual violence among Rwandan school girls

The results showed that 50.5% of the respondents had experienced sexual violence; and among the victims, 60.9% of them suffered from sexual abuse whereas 39.1% experienced sexual exploitation. Ninety point two per cent (90.2%) among the victims experienced sexual violence when they were aged between 13 and 17 years (secondary level of education) against 8.7% who faced it at the age between 7 and 12 years (at primary level). The study found that forced sexual touching is higher among rural girls (26.6%) against 14% of urban ones whereas forced kissing and sexual harassment were higher among urban girls (18.4% and 6.8% respectively) against 7.1% and 2.3% of rural girls. It was observed that the school girls living with distant relatives (25%) or with no kinships (33.3%) as well as those who had mother only (13.6%) were most affected by rape; whereas the rate was 4.5% for those living with close relatives. Results showed that the girls in urban schools were mostly affected by sexual exploitation (42.3%), particularly orphans and school girls who lived with mother only against 22.1% of rural school girls, whereas those in rural schools were mostly affected by sexual abuse (65%) against 10% of urban ones, threatening especially school girls who lived with father only and those who lived with distant relatives.

Regarding the causes of sexual abuse encountered by Rwandan school girls, 80.3% of the respondents affirmed that the perpetrators pretended to be inoffensive (*“rwubikangohe”*) to their victims. Concerning sexual exploitation, 61.8% of the respondents said that they experienced GBV due to curiosity to perform sexual acts while 26.5% manifested the need to obtain money or needed materials. Others identified hunger as a cause of sexual vi-

olence considering that the majority of students did not take lunch at school and could not afford it elsewhere (67%), long distance traveled by students to reach school (67%) and poverty particularly in rural areas (84%).

In addition, among 45.6% of school girls who indicated that they reported the sexual violence cases they faced, 78.6% of them reported it to peer girls or sisters, 10.7% to benefactors, 7.1% to local authority and 3.6% to female teachers. For those who did not report the sexual violence cases (54.4%) when asked the reasons, they answered that they were afraid of being beaten or scolded by the persons who take care of them (43.8%), they did not to bear that shame (18.8%), they thought that there would be no negative effects (15.6%) and thus no need to report it, they were afraid of being stigmatized (12.5%) or of losing support (9.4%). Also, results revealed that among the kinds of help obtained for those who reported sexual violence cases, they cited the reconciliation of the victim with her perpetrator (22.2%), advising the victim to go to a health facility (14.8%), advising the victim to report the case to the police or judiciary (3.7%) or receiving other advice (how to behave in order to never face sexual violence, say no to men...).

Furthermore, results revealed that the main perpetrators of sexual violence against Rwandan adolescent school girls were their boyfriends (46.7%). Other perpetrators included family friends (7.8%), peer school boys (7.8%), close relatives (6.7%), motorcyclists (5.6%) and shopkeepers (4.4%). The school girls who asserted to have faced sexual violence added that their offenders were familiar with them (91.1%) compared to 8.9% who said that they were strangers. As far as the age of perpetrators was concerned, 49.4% of the victims said that they were adolescents who were older than the victims, 41.6% said that the perpetrators were of the same age as the victims whereas 9% of the victims responded that the perpetrators were either married or much older.

Besides, 90.7% of the victims argued that their perpetrators did not use any weapons to commit sexual violence against them; instead, they used lovely words (38.8%), gifts such as clothes, money, telephones and watches (30.3%), promising the victims everything they needed (13.3%); promises for marriage (7.9%), using terrorism or blackmail (8.4%) or inviting victims to picnics (1.2%). Particularly, the peer school boys (as a cohort of the main perpetrators mentioned earlier), in addition to telling lovely words to their victims (43.8%), they bought food for their victims: biscuits, sweets and cakes in school canteens (26.2%) and promised to marry them (8.8%).

The results of this study showed that the main settings in which sexual violence against Rwandan school girls took place were the bush (31.5%, including forests), the perpetrators' houses (25.8%) and the victims' family houses (16.9%). Other settings included classrooms (9%), shops (5.6%) and lodge (4.5%). Additionally, among the effects of sexual violence on school girls' achievements and health, the results found low school performance (46.2%), lack of self-esteem (25%), public shame (6.2%), trauma, depression and isolation (5%), pregnancy (3.8%), class repetition (3.8%) and frequent school absenteeism (2.5%).

Impact of sexual violence on girls' school performance

As regards the second hypothesis, the findings obtained through statistical analysis indicated that the mean grade (61.3) of school girls who were victims of sexual violence (experimental group) was higher than the mean grade (58.9) of those who were not victims of sexual violence (control group). In addition, the inferential analysis found a significant difference between the school performance of girls who were victims of sexual violence and those who were not.

Furthermore, the statistical analysis showed small difference in the mean grades of girls who were victims of sexual violence in rural (62) and urban schools (60.66). However, the inferential analysis found that the difference in their school performance was not statistically significant.

Thus, the results on the impact of sexual violence on girls' school performance obtained through statistical and inferential analysis corroborate the effects of sexual violence on schoolgirls' achievements highlighted above. The study indicated that sexual violence affected the identity and dignity of the victims; it caused them to lose their self-esteem or experience public shame, trauma, depression and isolation. Some even repeated class or faced the problem of frequent school absenteeism. In sum, they faced psychological and emotional harm which finally results in low school performance.

Strategies to solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools

Among the existing strategies to fight against sexual violence among students, participants to the study mentioned two strategies consisting of setting up and equipping a girls' room at school as well as providing specific dialogue to girls about reproductive health, sex education and appropriate behavior to adopt and protect them against sugar-daddies. They added anti GBV focal points and desks in different institutions like schools, police, health facilities and National Public Prosecution Authority; "Isange One Stop Center" to help GBV victims in terms of health care and counseling; and toll-free hotlines telephone numbers for reporting GBV cases by victims.

However, respondents said that those strategies were not sufficient to eradicate sexual violence. They suggested additional strategies including mainly giving serious punishments to the perpetrators (23.6%), holding discussions about sexual violence and GBV in schools and in the communities (17%), responding to the specific needs of girls (8.5%), and sensitizing parents to discuss with their children about sexual violence and sex education (7.3%), school feeding and increasing the number of 12 YBE schools within the administrative Sector (6.6%).

The key informants emphasized enforcing public sensitization against GBV and trainings of facilitators; sensitizing parents to discuss with their children about reproductive health, sex education and GBV; holding closer communication and interactions between schools and parents about the students' behaviors.

Discussion

It is of paramount importance to recapitulate that this study pursued three specific objectives: (i) to find out the nature of sexual violence encountered by girls in and around Rwandan schools; (ii) to determine the impact of sexual violence encountered by girls in and around Rwandan schools on their performance; and (iii) to suggest appropriate strategies to effectively solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools. The study also intended to validate three hypotheses formulated as follows: (1) there is a high incidence of sexual violence among schoolgirls in Rwanda and the nature of sexual violence expresses itself in various aspects; (2) sexual violence has a negative impact on schoolgirls' performance; and (3) more efficient strategies should be developed to effectively solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools.

Firstly, the study showed that 50.5% of the respondents had experienced sexual violence; meaning that sexual violence is a lived reality among girls in Rwandan schools. Besides, sexual violence against Rwandan adolescent school girls originates from forces operating at mainly individual, community and societal levels, with reference to the ecological model.

At the individual level risk factors of sexual violence against schoolgirls, the findings revealed the age of both the victims and the perpetrators that corresponds to "adolescence". Indeed, adolescence is a troubling stage in the human life with so many physical, biological and psychological transformations which lead to uncontrolled impulses and that incite adolescents to initiate love with opposite sex and to feel curious to perform sexual acts (Lafon, 2010). This led to the "boyfriend and girlfriend mentality" among adolescent students.

Concerning the community level, results showed that the main perpetrators of sexual violence were their boyfriends, family friends, peer school boys, relatives, motorcyclists and shopkeepers. By noticing the category of perpetrators, it is observed that they use especially the abuse of vulnerability and trust against the victims' will, for sexual ends, thus committing sexual violence against them.

With regard to the psychological theory of educational productivity, the perpetrators of sexual violence against the schoolgirls from the families, the schools and the communities did not constitute safe learning environment for the latter. On the contrary, they constituted a threat to the girls' good school performance as the current study found that sexual violence resulted in poor performance.

As for societal level risk factors that increase the likelihood of sexual violence against Rwandan schoolgirls, the study revealed socio-economic and cultural environment factors which create an acceptable climate for violence. The socio-economic factors include poverty and economic stress, inability to afford lunch at school and to satisfy their personal needs as well as long distance between home and school. Therefore, the victims accepted to experience sexual violence against their will due to the fear of losing support (livelihood dependency of the victim to the perpetrator), particularly for the victims who lived together with their perpetrators.

The cultural environment factors include the lack of close communication between the children and their parents / benefactors, especially the advice and discussions on sexual violence and sex education that are considered in the Rwandan culture as taboo subjects; fear to be stigmatized for the victims; the discouraging behavior and feedback of some parents / benefactors vis-à-vis the victims when sexual violence cases are reported to them; and the lack of strictness from their parents / benefactors. Consequently, the majority of the victims preferred not to report the sexual violence cases committed against them because they did not want to be stigmatized. In addition, sometimes parents / benefactors preferred silence in order to protect the victim and family honor considered more important than the health and safety of the victim; or opted for the reconciliation between the victim and her offender in case they want to protect relatives and friends against punishments!

Concerning the impact of sexual violence on schoolgirls' performance, the findings indicated that the mean grade (61.3) of school girls who were victims of sexual violence was higher than the mean grade (58.9) of those who were not. Also, the inferential analysis found a significant difference between the school performances of the two groups. Considering that in the Rwanda Education Board system of grading, the more you get a small aggregate, the more you perform better; this means that school girls who were not victims of GBV perform better than those who were not. In addition, the study pointed out that sexual violence impacted differently on the victims' performance in rural (with the mean grade of 62) and urban (with the mean grade of 60.66) schools; but without statistically significant difference in their school performance. In sum, the statistical analysis proved that sexual violence has a negative impact on girls' performance in Rwandan schools. Besides, as girls in rural schools experience differently sexual violence from those in urban ones; the same the negative impact of sexual violence on their performance differs slightly.

The findings of this study corroborated those of the studies done by Wible (2004) and Human Right Watch (2001) which found that sexual violence impacted negatively on victims' school performance. However, the findings of this study differed from those of other studies in the motives behind sexual violence, its main perpetrators and settings in which it took place. The study found that Rwandan adolescent school girls experienced sexual violence principally due to the curiosity to perform sexual acts and the need to obtain money because of poverty. In Rwanda, the girls' boyfriends constituted the main perpetrators of sexual violence against school girls and the study revealed that sexual violence was mainly committed in bush, perpetrators' and family houses. On the contrast, in Benin, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa, the school girls engaged in the teacher - student sex on the promise of good grades. In those countries, the teachers and peer school boys were the main perpetrators of sexual violence against schoolgirls and sexual violence was perpetrated mainly in classrooms, school administrative offices, latrines and sports fields (Asemota and Randell , 2011; Slegh and Kimonyo; 2008; Wible, 2004; Leach and Machakanja, 2000; Omale, 1999; Haffejee, 2006).

As far as appropriate strategies to solve the problem of sexual violence among schoolgirls are concerned, the study found that respondents and key informants argued that the punishments against the perpetrators of sexual violence were not suitable; they proposed more serious punishments. In fact, it was found that the school administrators and teachers put more efforts in equipping a girls' room at school as well as providing specific dialogue to girls about reproductive health, sex education and appropriate behavior to adopt and protect them against sugar-daddies. Their strategies concentrated on girls rather than on both sexes while the boys were among the main perpetrators of sexual violence against their peer girls. This behavior took girls as scapegoat and victimized them more. Rather, it would be better to concentrate efforts on both sexes; and more efforts should be put on addressing the risk factors at individual, community and societal levels that increase the likelihood of sexual violence against Rwandan schoolgirls.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, main conclusions were drawn. First of all, the study indicated that there is a high incidence of sexual violence among adolescent girls in Rwandan schools. Secondly, it pointed out a negative relationship between sexual violence and girls' school performance. Thirdly, it showed that more efficient strategies are needed to effectively solve the problem of sexual violence among girls in Rwandan schools.

In regard to the findings of the study, it is recommended to the Government of Rwanda, in collaboration with its partners, to put in place more suitable punishments for the perpetrators of sexual violence against girls and women. Besides, they should strengthen clear school and community - based reporting and response systems by providing safe spaces for students to report sexual violence cases and making effective follow up through formal protection mechanisms without reprisal. They should also put more efforts in sensitizing the parents to discuss with their children on sexual violence, reproductive health and sex education. The government has to focus on reinforcement of women councils, parents' evenings and other structures at the Village level, in terms of budget and capacity building, to eradicate sexual violence against girls and other victims. In addition, the government has to increase the number of the 12 YBE schools within the administrative Sector to reduce the long distances some students commute to reach schools. Furthermore, it should continue to support poor families with social protection programs such as one cow per poor family and VUP to fight against poverty. Additionally, they should look for ways of assisting all poor students, especially schoolgirls, to take lunch at school within 12 YBE schools.

As for the school administrators and teachers, it is recommended to them to provide with adolescent students the knowledge on psychology of human development so that it helps them to manage the crisis and changes they face at this period. They should also hold closer communication and interactions with students' parents / benefactors on the students' behaviors and joint strategies to address sexual violence issues in and around schools.

As regards the schoolgirls' parents / benefactors, they should take guidance and making a constant follow - up of their children at school, in the family and community. Besides, they should satisfy the needs of their children as much as possible, in the limit of their means; and discuss with their children on sexual violence and sex education.

As far as the schoolgirls are concerned, they must adopt safety precautions and preventing behaviors against sexual violence such as avoiding being alone with their boyfriends, boys or men; and report on time the sexual violence cases and threatening situations they face. They should be self - confident in saying "no" to the perpetrators of sexual violence and be satisfied with their living conditions.

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