'DATING RULES' AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS:

Findings from the SeViSSA Baseline Study

OVERVIEW

Sexual violence is a common and worrying form of School-related Gender-based Violence (SRGBV) in South Africa. In this research brief, we report on findings from baseline research conducted at 24 schools located in the Western Cape township of Khayelitsha.

These findings will guide and help monitor progress on the Sexual Violence in Schools in South Africa (SeViSSA) programme currently being implemented at the schools by Grassroot Soccer and Soul City Institute. We found very high levels of sexual violence, including intimate partner violence in heterosexual sexual and dating relationships. We also noted that accompanying these forms of violence was a culture of silence and the tendency for young people tended to normalise and justify such violence.

In this brief we

- give an overview of the rates of sexual and intimate partner violence that were reported
- explore some of the ways young people justified these forms of violence through common 'dating rules'
- point to moments when young people disagreed with these 'rules' and proposed alternatives and the implications of these for interventions
- Provide some recommendations based on our findings for tackling sexual and intimate partner violence in school-based interventions

Sexual violence as a form of School-related Gender-based Violence

Schools are meant to be safe spaces, but sexual and gender-based violence regularly occurs in schools across the world. School-related Gender-based Violence (SRGBV) affects all learners and teachers, either directly as targets of violence or indirectly by witnessing or being fearful of violence in and around their school.[1]

SRGBV has a range of negative short- and long-term health, social, and economic consequences for learners, as well as families, communities and for wider society.[2] Sexual violence is a particularly worrying form of SRGBV, because it also compromises sexual and reproductive health outcomes, especially for girls and young women. Such violence increases chances of unwanted pregnancy or of contracting HIV. For example, in Southern Africa, girls aged 15-19 are eight times more likely to contract HIV than boys of the same age.[3]

Sexual violence and gender

Girls are disproportionately affected by SRGBV, especially sexual violence. South African research shows that girls are much more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape than their male counterparts. Boys, on the other hand, are much more likely to be perpetrators of such sexual violence, including within intimate heterosexual relationships [1]—a key site of sexual violence and exploitation of girls and young women. [4]

A vast amount of South African research on SRGBV shows that gender inequality is a major reason for these trends. [5] South Africa is a society in which there is widespread male privilege and unequal and sometimes abusive relationships between women and men. This privilege is supported by gender norms that disadvantage women as well as other contextual factors. For example, in impoverished spaces like Khayelitsha and other townships, poorer girls and young women may have sex with 'sugar daddies' or 'blessers'—usually older men—in exchange for goods or money to pay school fees, buy food, or make ends meet. [6]

The findings that we report on in this Brief point to the importance of locating school violence within the context of wider societal violence, where social norms and deep-rooted inequalities support and often condone sexual violence. [7]

The SeViSSA Intervention - background

The role of gender norms

Deeply rooted beliefs about women's and men's roles in heterosexual relationships can open girls up to sexual harassment, rape, exploitation and discrimination in school settings. [8] These norms can also create silences around sexual violence either through fear or, as we show in this report, because this violence is seen as normal and sometimes even acceptable in certain situations. Discriminatory gender norms can also be upheld by other social norms, for example, respect for elders may mean children do not report sexual violence perpetrated by adults.

Prevention of sexual violence – school-based interventions

Schools (and the larger education system) function within the wider social and cultural context, and are therefore shaped by the societies in which they are located. [9] All school members – including staff and learners – are part of this context and are socialised in ways that often maintain gender power imbalances. [8] It is therefore important for interventions to take a wide-ranging approach, focusing on schools as well as the broader environments that they are located in as well as to tackle the link between sexual violence and HIV. [11] School-based interventions that take a holistic approach have been identified as being effective and potentially having a ripple effect beyond the school itself. [10] The SeViSSA intervention that we focus on in this Research Brief takes such an approach, as described in the following section.

The SeViSSA programme is a five-year pilot intervention recognises sexual violence as a particularly common and worrying form of SRGBV in South Africa. The intervention is intended to address sexual violence both in relation to the individual and well as the environment that supports violence (communities and wider society). This broad approach hopes to bring about deep-seated changes to values, norms, and behaviours, rather than just superficial changes in individuals.

Intervention aims:

1. Empower girls to take action against violence in schools
2. Strengthen the capacity of schools to identify, prevent and address violence against girls and respond effectively to the needs of survivors of sexual violence
3. Improve knowledge and skills of care-givers of learners on non-violent, positive, non-sexist, parenting strategies and increase their participation in their child's education
4. Improve the attitudes and practices of boys in relation to violence against girls and foster agency for championing the rights of girls
5. Engage community members surrounding schools and relevant government departments to take action to prevent and address violence against girls and its social and structural drivers in schools and communities

Table1. Intervention activities in the SeViSSA intervention

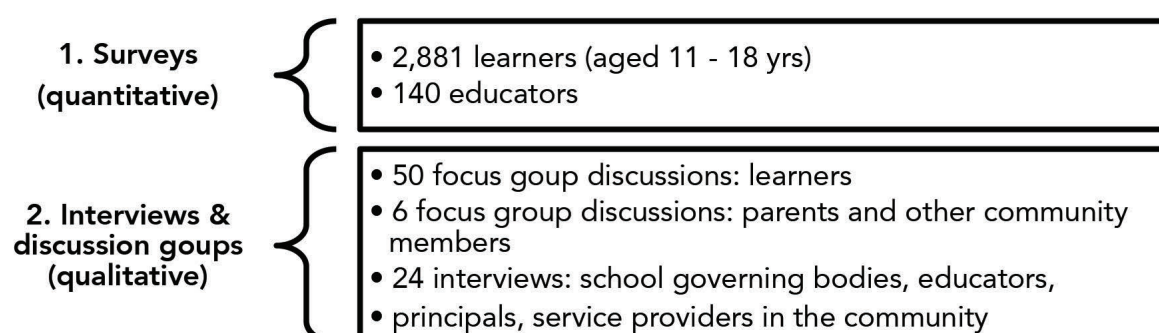| Target group	Intervention activity	Implemented by
Primary Schools (10) Grades 6 & 7	SKILLZ Street: a 10-session intervention run by female coaches for primary school girls that fosters a safe space for adolescents to deal with SRHR, HIV and gender-based violence.	Grassroot Soccer
	Soul Buddyz Clubs: teacher-led groups providing female and male learners with health information and skills, related to HIV/AIDS and sexuality	Soul City Institute
High Schools (10)	Generation SKILLZ and Utshintsho: a set of two 7-session interventions run by male and female coaches in mixed gender groups (grades 8 to 10), interrogating gender norms, power dynamics, intimate partner violence, substance abuse etc.	Grassroot Soccer
	Young Women's Clubs, peer-led groups for female learners aged 15 and older focused on sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence	Soul City Institute
Relevant adults	Advocacy activities with principals, teachers and school governing bodies; parenting programmes with caregivers	Soul City Institute

The baseline study

Before any programme activities (see table 1) began, research was conducted in order to provide a baseline picture of the situation at the schools. The baseline study was conducted in 2015 at 12 primary schools and 12 high schools (4 of these being control schools for surveys that were conducted). The findings provide a reference point to determine later on whether progress is being made in decreasing SRGBV. The baseline study will therefore help determine how effective and appropriate the programme activities are, and whether the joint intervention is able to change the climate at schools by empowering girls and boys to remain safe and secure in schools.

In our study, learners, educators and other adults described violence occurring in their schools in the context of overall high levels of violence and crime in their community. A large majority of learners (70%) reported having experienced violence in their homes. Participants also emphasised the possibility of being robbed or assaulted when travelling to and from school.

We collected data for this study in two ways:

1. Surveys (quantitative)
- 2,881 learners (aged 11 - 18 yrs)
- 140 educators

2. Interviews & discussion goups (qualitative)
- 50 focus goup discussions: learners
- 6 focus group discussions: parents and other community members
- 24 interviews: school governing bodies, educators,
- principals, service providers in the community

The survey allowed us to get an overall statistical picture of learners' knowledge, attitudes and experiences of SRGBV. For instance, we asked about the kinds of violence they had been exposed to/ experienced, what they know about SRGBV, and their beliefs around gender norms. Interviews and group discussions allowed us to delve deeper into these aspects, including: young people's perceptions of intimate relationships, sexual experiences and violence, as well as how they make sense of gender norms and power relations more broadly; and the extent to which the school and community support girls' and young women's rights and safety.

We report below on the overall rates of sexual violence in the schools we studied, before zooming in on the prevalence of intimate partner violence in particular, and how participants made sense of this type of violence. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, we do not include the names of participating schools or the real names of learners.

High rates of sexual violence within a culture of silence

The findings show that, in addition to experiencing other forms of violence committed by teachers and fellow learners, sexual violence is relatively common 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. Well over one-third (35%) of all learners had experienced some form of sexual violence committed by fellow learners. Of concern, is the relatively high rate of sexual violence committed by teachers, experienced by two out of ten primary school learners and one out of ten high school learners (see Figure 1: Learner- and educator-perpetrated sexual violence in the preceding 12 months below).
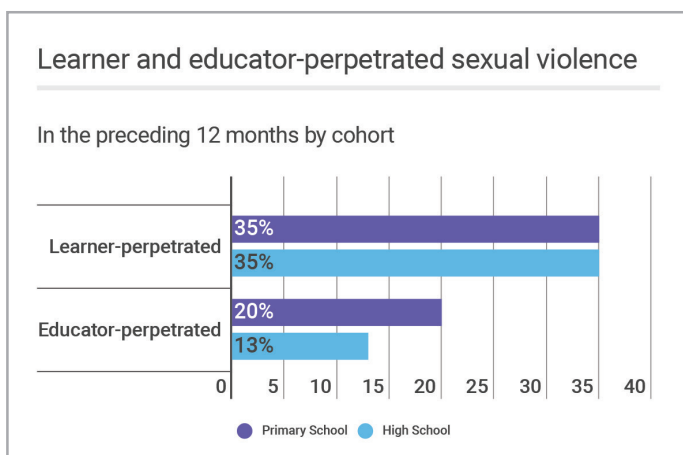
Also worrying, was the apparent culture of silence surrounding sexual violence. In general, only around half of learners in the study disclosed such experiences to someone else, usually telling a friend or their mothers, as shown in Figure 2: Reporting of sexual violence). Notice that reporting among primary school learners is somewhat lower, despite this age group experiencing higher rates of sexual violence than high school learners. This shows younger learners are at greater risk than anticipated, both in terms of experiencing violence and seeking support.

Reporting of sexual violence by cohort

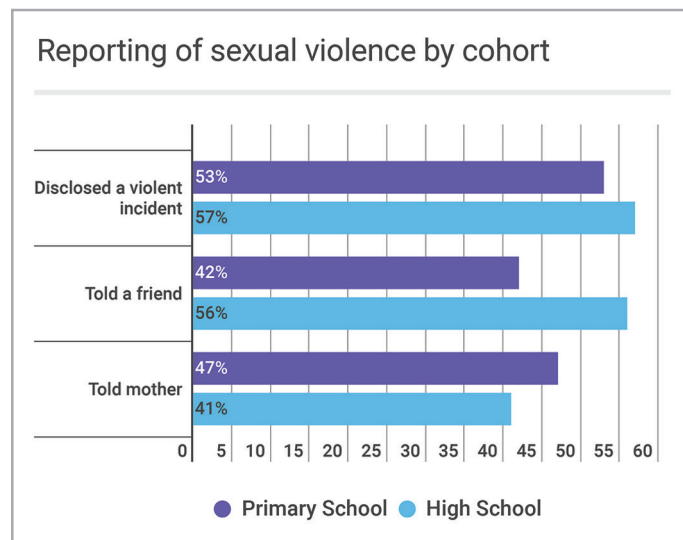|	Primary School	High School
Disclosed a violent incident	53%	57%
Told a friend	42%	56%
Told mother	47%	41%

Figure 2: Reporting of sexual violence by cohort

This trend underreporting was also explained further in the qualitative data, which helped us to understand how school communities make sense of SRGBV. Reluctance to bring incidents of sexual violence into the open is linked to fear of negative consequences – both for the victim and the perpetrator – as well as the perception that teachers fail to act on reports, as the following discussion about sexual harassment, during a focus group with Grade nine girls, shows.

> **Sibongile:** Mostly here at school, girls are being harassed - it is one thing that is not being attended to by teachers. Sexually we are harassed by boys a lot. You'll find them touching us but we are also afraid because this person is with you in class. You will have him expelled, you end up feeling sorry for him but you would be touched and touched or being called names like we are whores. A person doesn't even know you, but he'll, like, call you a slut, things like those.
>
> (Grade 9 girl in an all-female discussion group)

For younger learners in particular, their reluctance to report violence was often linked to fears of being blamed or punished.

Learner and educator-perpetrated sexual violence

In the preceding 12 months by cohort

	Primary School	High School
Learner-perpetrated	35%	35%
Educator-perpetrated	20%	13%

Figure 1: Learner- and educator-perpetrated sexual violence

The decision to report sexual violence was also influenced by whether the learners thought that the violence they had experienced was wrong. The data suggest that under-reporting of sexual violence is common in intimate (dating) relationships. In this context, only 6 in 10 learners who had experienced sexual violence in an intimate partnership (thus, by a boyfriend or girlfriend) felt that it was wrong. The qualitative data shed some light on this, indicating a widespread view of sexual violence as normal in heterosexual dating processes, which we discuss further below in the following section.

Learners walking to school in Khayelitsha

Intimate partner violence among learners'

Out of the total sample, 48% of primary school and 78% of high school learners reported having ever been in a romantic relationship. We asked them about their experiences of violence in these relationships. Our findings suggest that learners in romantic relationships experience high levels of violence at the hands of their partners, with somewhat higher levels among primary school learners.

A relatively large share of dating learners had experienced verbal, physical, and sexual violence in their relationships. The most common types of IPV experienced were verbal threats, followed by physical violence and then threats with weapons. Figure 4: Types of IPV experienced in the preceding 12 months below shows the percentage of learners who reported experiencing these forms of violence in the preceding year.
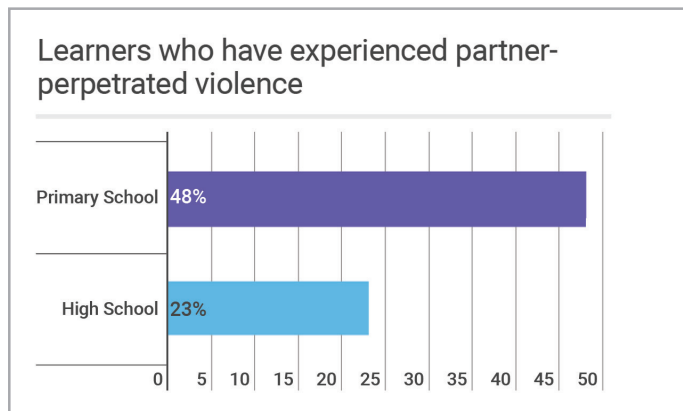
Learners who have experienced partner-perpetrated violence

Primary School: 48%
High School: 23%

Figure 3: Learners who have experienced partner-perpetrated violence

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

Types of IPV experienced in the preceding 12 months

Primary School (n=360)
High School (n=1362)

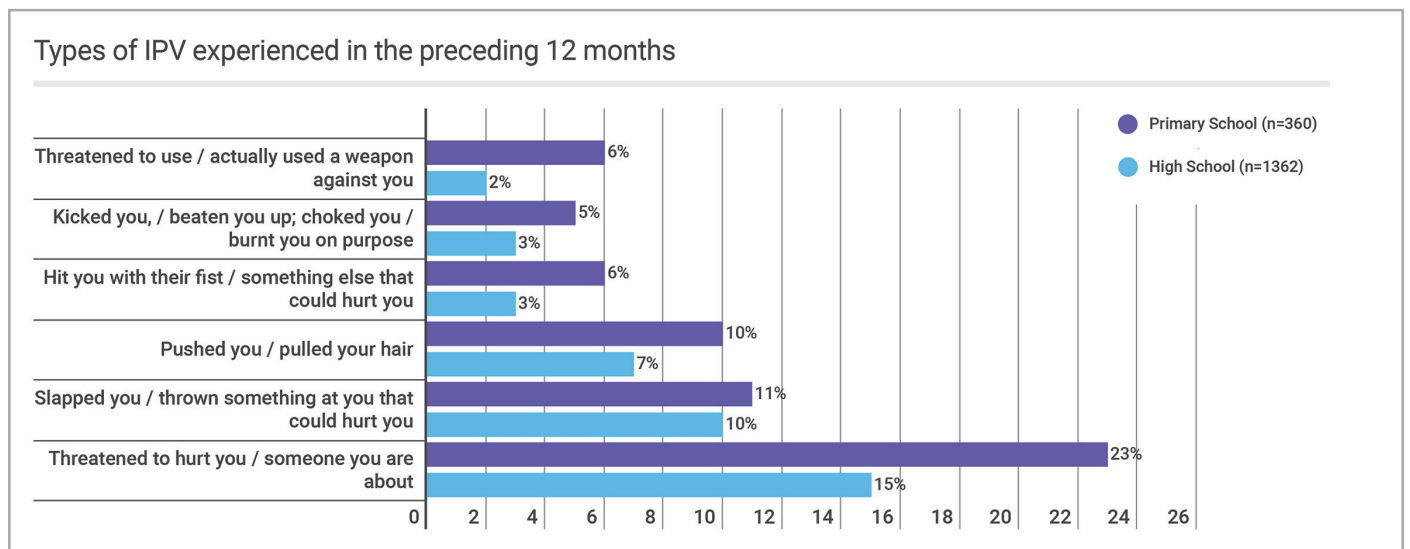| Type	Primary School	High School
Threatened to use / actually used a weapon against you	6%	2%
Kicked you, / beaten you up; choked you / burnt you on purpose	5%	3%
Hit you with their fist / something else that could hurt you	6%	3%
Pushed you / pulled your hair	10%	7%
Slapped you / thrown something at you that could hurt you	11%	10%
Threatened to hurt you / someone you are about	23%	15%

Figure 4: Types of IPV experienced in the preceding 12 months

Sexual violence also featured as a form of IPV. This included being forced to have sex through fear or manipulation (being made to feel guilty or bad for refusing sex), as well as being forced to perform sexual acts that are experienced as humiliating or shameful.
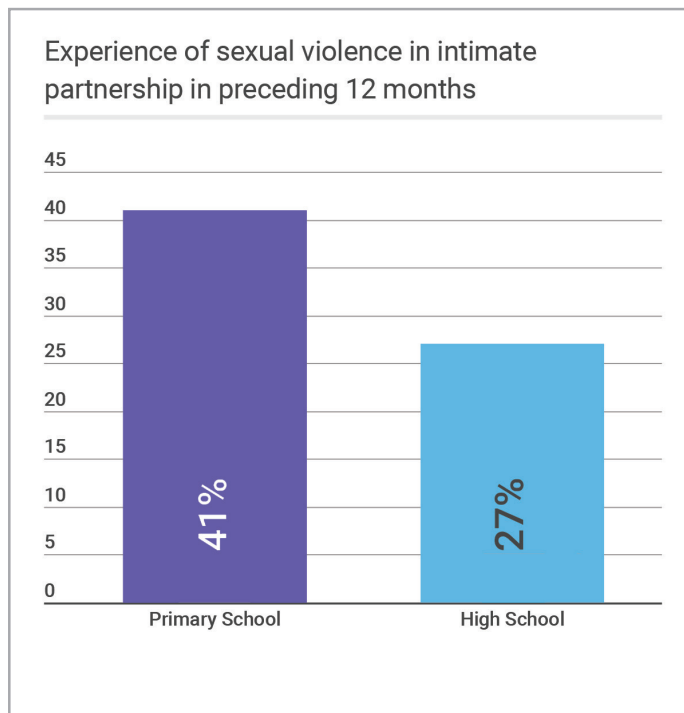
Types of sexual intimate partner violence experienced in the preceding 12 months

Figure 6: Types of sexual intimate partner violence experienced in the preceding 12 months

Experience of sexual violence in intimate partnership in preceding 12 months

Figure 5: Experience of sexual violence in intimate partnership in preceding 12 months

Across all the different forms of intimate partner violence discussed above, girls experience such violence at higher rates than boys. We unpack the gender norms that underpin IPV in the next section. Again, it is troubling to note the high numbers of primary school learners reporting experiences of intimate partner violence.

Normalising intimate partner violence

The qualitative data indicated how learners normalised IPV that could lead to silencing and under-reporting. The majority view that emerged in our discussions with learners of all age groups was that violence against female partners was a normal, expected part of intimate heterosexual relationships. The learners explained this dominant view of male-perpetrated IPV according to common, unwritten 'dating rules' (or norms) that they believed "everybody knows". There were two common sets of norms that they described (illustrated in the quotes on the following page).
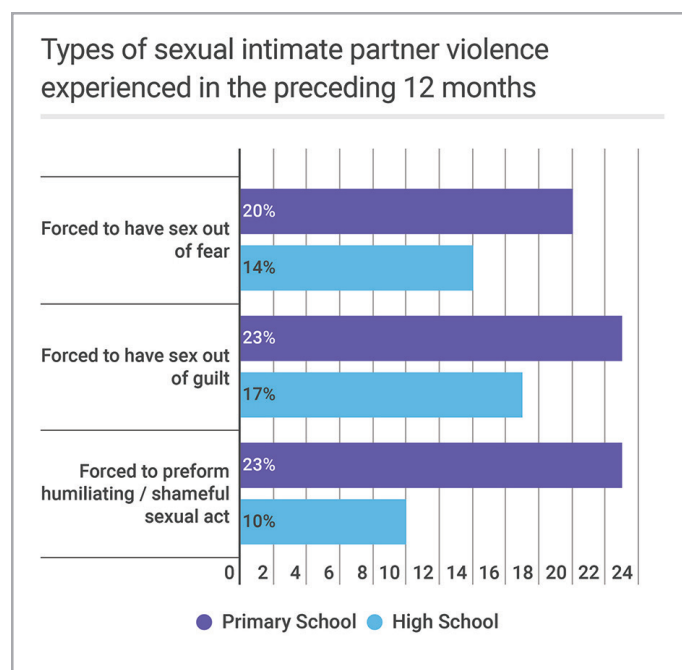

Primary school girls participate in Grassroot Soccer's Skillz Street intervention.

***Dating rule 1:** Women provide sex in exchange for men's material and emotional provision*

According to this dating norm, boys who give girlfriends (and even other girls) any form of monetary or material gifts or support (e.g. buying drinks on a night out, helping to buy food and clothing) have a right to expect sex in return. Girls who refuse to offer/agree to sex in exchange, break this unspoken rule and can be accused of 'gold-digging' or 'eating a guy's money' without offering anything in return. These girls can therefore expect to experience violence in some form. This rule simultaneously excuses male violence and creates a 'deserving' female victim of IPV.

Researcher: Would you advise Noloyiso [the girl in a case study being discussed] to go to the police station and report [forced sex by her boyfriend, Xolani]?

Lifa: No, no.

Researcher: Why not? Isn't there a crime committed here?

Lifa: No, eish, but he's our brother! ((Laughter)) He just wanted what he had a right to have.

Mbulelo: It is a normal thing that one. In a way that, especially with us, Black people, you will find that Dad can shout at Mom or even beat Mom. So even when others picture themselves, they will see that, 'No man, this is normal'. They don't take it like, in a way [that] it is a fight, no... (Grade 11 boys in an all-male discussion group)

Dineo: I don't think this girl [Noloyiso] is right [to worry about having sex with her boyfriend]. Why does she have to worry? She says she loves him and Xolani loves her. He gives her money for things she needs, so when Xolani wants something she must give him [sex]. He deserves that, as he too gives Noloyiso what she needs. (Grade 8 girl in a mixed gender discussion group)

Dating rule 2: *Girls want to be 'pleaded' or persuaded to have sex*

This dating norm deals with consent to sex, which the learners generally described as having blurry boundaries. According to this 'rule', sometimes girls do not really mean 'no' when they refuse sex. This belief is based on the view of having sex as a romantic conquest, where hormone-driven boys are the ones who pursue sex and win girls over (by convincing them to have sex). Within this belief, girls are given the responsibility of saying no to unwanted sex.

As part of the conquest, boys may use various means to convince girls to have sex: described by learners as 'sweet talking', 'lying', 'begging', or 'pleading'. Girls explained that it is flattering to be 'sweet talked' or chased by a boy, because this shows that a girl is desirable or popular. What is concerning about this dating rule is that it supports the belief that girls who say 'no' to sex are sometimes simply 'playing hard to get', and that consent to have sex doesn't have clear boundaries.

Veliswa: [Explaining when a girl's refusal to have sex is serious] It depends, where that "no" is. Sometimes others say "no", because she wants to be pleaded, neh [right]? But a "no" that is asking to be pleaded with is like smooth: "no, no, no…" But if you don't want something, you don't even say no, you say ((loudly)) "HAYI!" [NO!] And, you say ((loudly)) "NO!" and you even change your face. You don't even smile. You say "no". (Grade 11 girl in a mixed gender discussion group)

Girls at a school in Khayelitsha participate in a peer-led Young Women's Club focused on sexual and reproductive issues, including HIV and sexual violence.

Challenging the rules

While it is worrying to observe this common trend of normalising or condoning violence in dating relationships, it is important to note that there were instances where some learners disagreed with these beliefs. Two common counter-arguments, contradicting 'dating rules' 1 and 2 respectively, included the ideas that:

(1) Love comes from the heart and is not proven with sex or money.

(2) If you love someone, you will wait for the person to feel ready to have sex with you.

These two counter-arguments provide possible entry points for creating and encouraging new relationship norms with learners, which do not normalise violence or forced sex. We provide some further ideas of how to intervene in IPV and sexual violence in the following section.

What can school-based interventions do to address IPV?

1. Early intervention: There is a need for early IPV interventions planned with the systemic nature of violence in mind, because intimate partner violence is experienced across age groups, including among learners as young as 12 years old. Violence and relationships clearly need to be part of interventions with primary school learners, who are at high risk (as the research indicates) and are notoriously underserved. Interventions need to speak to the particular developmental and gendered issues of learners, while taking care not to reinforce stereotypes.

2. Comprehensive sex education that unpacks and challenges harmful gender norms: Sex education should engage with the meanings of sexual encounters and clearly define what counts as sexual violence. Educators should engage with learners' own understandings of gender and relationship norms in their local context (such as the 'dating rules' described above), challenging these where needed and strengthening narratives that do not contribute to violence. Other local understandings, which are meaningful to young people (like the alternative 'rules' we identified) could be used to develop ways of resisting violence.

3. Use youth friendly and peer educator approaches: Peer educators may be especially well positioned to tackle local gender and relationship norms that promote IPV as they are likely to be more familiar with existing youth cultures. A slightly older peer educator or young adult mentor is better equipped to engage learners in a youth-friendly manner.

4. Challenge social norms of authority and obedience: In order to break the silence around sexual violence, and IPV specifically, norms that promote female subservience and obedience need to be challenged (e.g. giving girls and women the opportunity to play soccer challenges norms of what acceptable behaviour is for females). Interventions with parents and other caregivers will also benefit from content that challenges such norms.

5. Work with teachers and care-givers to question the same gender and relationship norms as those identified above. Interventions targeting parents should build on parents' abilities to be supportive and responsive to reports of violence.

6. Provide educators and learners with clear reporting procedures: Furthermore, interventions should establish clear policies and protocols for dealing with SRGBV, especially for when teachers are perpetrators. Clear professional codes of conduct, which specify the boundaries between teachers and learners, may also help. It is also important that the adults receiving such reports from learners are clearly identified and trusted by learners.

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

Key terms used in this document

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)
Different forms of violence that happen in and around schools that are rooted in unequal power relationships. Different forms include: threats (verbal or written) or acts of physical violence, bullying (including cyber bullying), verbal or sexual harassment, non-consensual touching, forced sex and assault, and rape.

Sexual violence
Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence that involves the use of violence or intimidation to commit or attempt to force someone to have sex (rape) or perform sexual acts against their will, as well as other types of sexual assault, unwanted sexual comments or advances (sexual harassment), sexual abuse, preventing someone from using contraception (e.g. condom) or acts against a person's sexuality.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)
A pattern of abusive and threatening behaviours acted by one partner in an intimate relationship on another. This may include physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse as well as intimidation and isolation.

Gender norms
Gender norms are a set of "rules" or ideas not based in biology, but instead determined by a culture or society. For example, women are not better than men at doing household chores, but often they are expected to perform these tasks.

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