Leh Wi Lan

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Research findings on violence, exclusion, and sexual and reproductive health education in schools

Draft report

29 January 2024

Introduction

Purpose and aims of the research

This research was commissioned by SSEIP2 to inform the design and implementation of SSEIP2's work to (a) strengthen the response to SRGBV and challenge harmful gender norms (intervention area 5) and (b) increase access to quality Child and Adolescent Health Skills and remove barriers to retention for adolescent girls (intervention area 6).

The research was designed to meet this overall aim through delivering on the following 3 objectives:

- Generating evidence, lessons and recommendations regarding the problem of violence in schools and the perceptions of and responses to violence in schools (e.g. treatment of children who report violence), as well as potential strategies to improve safety and strengthen implementation of the National Referral Protocol.
- Generating evidence, lessons and recommendations regarding how discriminatory social norms impact on access to education among certain groups of young people and potential strategies for addressing these norms to improve access.
- Documenting current practice and developing lessons and recommendations regarding how best to deliver the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum and communicate effectively on SRH issues so that all young people can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Annex 1 contains the Research Matrix showing the main questions that the research covered, the sub-questions that it investigated in order to answer each of these questions, and the lessons, type of evidence it gathered.

Research approach and methodology

The research was action oriented, in that it sought to gather evidence that can inform the strategies and activities of SSEIP2 in relation to violence, social norms and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education. Therefore, while it used robust methodologies and analytical approaches, it did not involve the in-depth analysis or rigour of academic level research. Critically, rather than seeking to be comprehensive, the research focused on identifying and learning from key pieces of evidence and experiences that have most relevance for the work of SSEIP2.

The research sought to be participatory and empowering in its approach, with a strong focus on including all stakeholders in identifying problems, solutions and lessons, and on using methodologies that enable the most marginalised to safely share their perspectives and experiences. This required taking account of existing power dynamics, and of the sensitivities of the research topics, at every stage of the research design and implementation.

The research was purely qualitative in nature, as it is sought to enrich the understanding of SSEIP2 partners regarding the complex factors that shape violence, exclusion or the successful delivery of SRH education, by learning from the experience of a handful of schools and their communities. It was intended to complement the existing evidence base, which includes more quantitative data about these issues at national level.

The research tools are included in Annex 2.

Research sample

The research was undertaken in 11 Schools and their communities in Western Area Urban, Western Area Rural, Koinadugu, Bombali, Bo, Karene and Falaba. A full list of schools and communities is found in Annex 3 The schools comprised a mixture of JSS and SSS, and of Christian schools, Muslim schools and secular schools.

In each school and community individual interviews, focus group discussions or participatory research exercises were conducted with the following categories of stakeholders:

- School students (including students with disabilities, pregnant students and students who are mothers, and students from other marginalised groups such as those living away from families)
- School leadership (principal/ senior teachers)
- Teachers with specific responsibility for areas covered by the research
- Classroom teachers
- School management committees (SMC)
- School Safety Committee
- Community Teacher Association
- Parents/ guardians
- Relevant local officials (district education official, police, social work)
- Community leaders

Limitations

The following issues may limit the study's findings:

- Participating schools were identified by SSEIP2 partner organisations, as schools that were already known to them. The schools were therefore not a truly representative sample of schools in Sierra Leone, but were mostly schools where some interventions or activities related to issues of violence or exclusion had already been conducted.
- Though the research team made efforts to ensure students' confidentiality, it is possible they were constrained from speaking out freely for fear of repercussions if they were critical of teachers.
- While the research team provided schools with criteria for selecting a diverse group of students to interview, they were unable to check that these criteria had been followed.
- There were some types of violence that were not mentioned at all, notably sexual abuse of boys. This should not be taken to mean such types of violence are not happening, but may be because they are too taboo to be mentioned.
- This research focused on the social norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive violence and exclusion in school. Clearly these norms, attitudes and behaviours relate to wider structural issues and socio-economic factors. Although the research touched slightly on such structural and socio-economic factors it did not comprehensively explore them. The report therefore provides a partial picture of the factors driving violence and exclusion. This was intentional as it was decided that there is sufficient existing evidence on the more structural aspects of these problems.
- The original research design included undertaking interviews with local CSOs. However, due to time and logistical constraints this was not possible. These stakeholders perspectives are therefore not included in the findings.

Structure of this report

This report summarises the findings from the research study. The introductory section details the research aims, approach, methodology, research sample and limitations. Section 1 presents key findings on the issue of violence in schools. Section 2 presents key findings on the issue of exclusion in schools. Section 3 presents key findings on the issue of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education. Finally, the conclusion identifies areas for future investigation.

Section 1. Violence in schools

In relation to the issue of violence the research sought to answer the following overarching research question: **Which types of violence take place in school, how is this violence perceived and responded to, and what strategies could address this violence?** It included a focus on violence against marginalised groups of students, namely students with disabilities, students who are pregnant or are mothers, and students experiencing high levels of poverty or without family support.

To answer this question, the research investigated:

- Manifestations of violence
- Causes of violence
- Marginalised students' experiences of violence
- Responses to violence by a variety of actors (school, students, parents, external authorities, community)
- Possible strategies to address the problem of violence and strengthen responses to it

Manifestations and perceptions of violence

The types of violence that the research identified were very similar across all the districts and schools where the research was conducted. Different stakeholders' attitudes to this violence and the extent to which it is perceived as normal or problematic were also similar across all research sites.

Violence perpetrated by teachers

The most common type of violence by teachers was **corporal punishment**, which was reported as widespread and largely takes the form of flogging. There were reports of students being beaten for a range of offences including being late, not completing their work, challenging or disobeying the teacher, bullying or fighting other students. Although both male and female students reported being beaten, male students raised this issue more, which is in line with findings from other studies that teachers tend to beat boys more frequently.[1] There were no reports of teachers beating students with physical disabilities.

There were also reports of teachers beating students without any reason, because they were generally frustrated and angry. Likewise, it was reported that many teachers are very quick to beat students for perceived infractions without attempting to understand the details or circumstances of the student's behaviour. For example, a student in Bombali reported that "*One common type of violence in school is flogging, and even if a colleague provokes you in school, the teachers do not have the patience to*

[1] Report on findings from school-related gender-based violence action research in schools and communities in Sierra Leone, UNICEF, 2023

investigate so that they will understand the problem; they will just flog both of us." Students frequently feel that they are beaten unfairly and this is a source of significant resentment towards teachers.

Corporal punishment is viewed by most stakeholders as a normal, acceptable and necessary form of disciple. Some school staff stressed that is it is important to beat children in order to maintain discipline, making statements such as "*African children can't be corrected without the cane"* (Teacher, Bombali). The research found that school staff have limited awareness of alternative discipline methods, and many are concerned that not beating students results in teachers losing control. For example, a school mentor in Bombali reported that *"With the absence of cane in disciplining the children, they have become lawless, they don't come to school on time, and they go home when it is not time for them to go."* Most parents are supportive of the use of corporal punishment, which they see as a normal part of discipline both at school and at home, and is something that they also experienced. Indeed, parents sometimes come to school to ask the teacher to beat their child for misbehaviour at home.

However, while corporal punishment is still common and widely accepted, it does seem that there is some shift in behaviours and attitudes in this area and that this is perhaps a norm that is in the process of changing. Multiple stakeholders reported that there has been a reduction in flogging at school in the last few years, and attribute this to growing awareness among teachers that corporal punishment is now prohibited. For example, an education official in Koinadugu reported a significant reduction of corporal punishment in local schools. Likewise, a Family Services Unit (FSU) officer in Falaba reported that, while corporal punishment was once considered a standard punishment, with increased awareness and sensitisation this is changing.

Where teachers have stopped using corporal punishment, it was reported that there is a mixed response among parents, with many unhappy with this change, but some supportive of it. For example, one teacher in Bombali reported that "*The parents thought that we beat the children as they do at home, but they are surprised when we tell them that we have been cautioned not to use canes on their children any more or administer any form of corporal punishment. Some community members are happy, while others are not happy about it at all. Some parents even say the government is not providing for their children, and that they should discipline them to become reasonable people in society."* While many parents expressed the belief that children should be beaten at school, some parents said they are concerned about the physical harm caused by beating and are pleased that it has been banned.

Sexual harassment and exploitation of students by teachers was reported across all the schools where research was conducted. This ranged from sexual comments and sexual touching to full sexual relationships between teachers and students. It was reported that girls are coerced into sexual relationships with teachers in exchange for money and material goods, or for good grades, or because they fear reprisals – such as bullying and beating - from the teacher if they do not consent. For example, a student in Koinadugu reported "*teachers in this school like to make advances on girls to have sex with them. When a girl refuses their request, they will punish her every day.,"* while another student stated *"Some male teachers are in the habit of touching our buttocks, and they like to tell us some inappropriate words about sex. If you stop them, they will punish you."* In some cases, parents encourage such abusive sexual relationships between teachers and students, as they see as having material benefits for their family.

Most stakeholders reported being disapproving of teachers coercing students into sexual relationships, and stated that teachers behaving in this way should face sanctions. While this demonstrates a shared understanding that this behaviour is prohibited and cannot be openly condoned, the fact that it is in

effect ignored and tolerated in many contexts suggests that there is a gap between the beliefs people express and the underlying norms that inform their behaviour.

This is borne out by the fact that various stakeholders see the main problem, not as the fact that girls are being sexually exploited, but as the students losing respect for the teacher because they are engaged in a sexual relationship with a student. For example, a student in Bo reported that *"some of the teachers will ask the students to date them, and that will make the students not respect you, and they will start speaking to teachers rudely."* Likewise, a community leader in Bombali reported that *"The other thing that is common in school is that we have teachers who use the students as their wives. In this case, the teachers will not be respected because, as far as I know, if a man has a sexual relationship with a woman, that woman will not have respect for the man. This is the situation that the teachers normally put them in. The students are not respecting them in school because they are using them as their girlfriends and their wives."*

It was also reported that teachers are more likely to punish and beat male students if they see them as competing for the attention of a female student that the teacher is interested in. For example, a student in Bo reported that "*Some of the teachers and male students were rivals in dating a female student, and they would start beefing themselves whenever the male student did something wrong, and the teacher would find any way to just punish the male student."*

There were widespread reports of **economic exploitation by teachers,** which while it does not usually involve physical violence is clearly a form of abuse. It is very common for teachers to demand money from students and to charge illegal fees. Students and parents reported that these constant demands for money are a form of harassment and that students who cannot meet these demands often end up staying away from school as a result. It was also reported that some students must engage in child labour or in transactional sex in order to meet teachers demands for money if they wish to stay at school. In addition, teachers request material goods and favours such as using a student's phone to make personal phone calls.

Another form of economic exploitation is that teachers often make students do unpaid physical labour, including working in the teachers' home or on the teachers' farm. Teachers also make students work on the farms of parents and community members, presumably in return for some benefit or payment for the teacher. For example, a parent in Koinadugu reported *"Sometimes, we, the parents, will ask the teacher to help us with some abled students to work on our farm, and even the teachers themselves use the boys to work on their farms. This is very common here on Thursdays; instead of teaching the students in school, they will ask them to go to the farm to work for some parents who have prearranged with the teacher."*

Verbal abuse of students by teachers is very common. These insults can take the form of personal comments about the student, or are related to a student's perceived lack of academic capabilities. Making comments to humiliate a student in front of the class is used a form of discipline, again suggesting that there is little awareness of more positive discipline methods. Pregnant students were particularly targeted for insulting comments by teachers, as discussed below. The research found no evidence of teachers making insulting remarks based on a student's disability or poverty.

Violence perpetrated by students

Bullying among students is common and can involve both physical and verbal forms of violence. Girls of all ages, and younger boys were reported to be at greater risk, with both boys and girls perpetrating bullying. Younger students tend to be bullied by older ones. Verbal bullying was often based on a

student's physical characteristics, on their perceived poverty, on their academic weakness, or on their marginalised status, such as having a disability or being an adolescent mother (discussed below).

Across all the schools it was reported that **students get into physical fights** with one another. This tended to mostly involve boys. Fighting takes place over a variety of things, including sports competitions, lunch and seating in the classrooms.

There were numerous reports of **sexual harassment and assault among students**. Students reported that sexual comments were widespread, and that both male and female students receive and make such comments. Meanwhile, many female students experience unwanted touching by male students and this makes them feel uncomfortable. Most stakeholders reported that sexual harassment is bad and should not take place at school, although – as with sexual exploitation by teachers – there was also an acceptance that this is common behaviour.

It was reported that many girls face a combination of sexual harassment and bullying by boys which results in them feeling unhappy and school and in some cases dropping out. For example, a female student in Koinadugu reported that "*some of the boys just see themselves as being more important than the girls, and they have the power to handle them physically and have what it takes to use some bad words against them that will cause them to leave the school.*"

More serious sexual violence among students, including attempted rape, was also reported by some students. For example, a female student in Koinadugu reported that *"The boys in the school are asking us to be in a love relationship. If you refuse them, they will wait in the community, where they will either find ways to punish you or find ways to get you somewhere and try to have sex with you by force.*"

There were some reports of **students being violent to teachers**, although this is not common. Such violence is only perpetrated by male students and is often linked to drug use. In a number of schools, it was reported that male students take drugs at lunchtime and then return to school and attack their teachers. This appears to be a new and growing problem related to the spread in the use of drugs, notably Kush. It was noted that while drug use was previously found mostly among SSS students, that JSS students are now also increasingly using drugs.

Causes of violence

Patterns of violence such as those found in schools in Sierra Leone, tend to be driven by an interplay of complex normative, structural and institutional factors at multiple levels. A thorough investigation of such drivers was beyond the scope of this research. However, the research examined what different stakeholders perceive to be the main causes of violence in their schools. It found a high level of agreement across different research locations and among different categories of stakeholder regarding the causes of violence in school.

Some forms of violence were perpetuated despite being prohibited, such as corporal punishment and economic exploitation by teachers because they are seen as normal and acceptable by many in the community. For example, one mentor in Koinadugu stressed that a central factor undermining efforts to end corporal punishment was the strongly held "*traditional belief that African children, unless you flog them, will not listen or take control.*" While some teachers reported that they continue to use corporal punishment because parents are in favour of it: *"The parents themselves are asking us the teachers to flog their children. So, we flog them in some cases because we have the permission from their parents,"* (teacher, Bombali). Meanwhile, some education officials reflected that violence in schools reflects the prevalence and acceptance of violence within wider communities.

Lack of teacher awareness of the Code of Conduct is undermining efforts to reduce violence by teachers, particularly untrained teachers. While teachers mostly know of the existence of the Code of Conduct, many have not read it. Likewise, lack of sensitisation about violence or training on alternative discipline methods was reported as contributing to continued teacher violence.

Weak systems of oversight and accountability of school staff, including both principals and teachers, creates conditions in which some teachers can act violently with impunity. Likewise, the widespread use of untrained teachers, and the fact that many such teachers are not on the payroll, contribute to creating school environments where teachers are more are likely to violate the Code of Conduct and to engage in violence.

School staff in several sites reported that teachers take out their personal frustrations in violence against students, as they have the opportunity and impunity to do so. For example, a mentor in Falaba reported that "*When the teacher has some problems at home and comes to school to teach, the little problem a student causes, he will correct them the wrong way by using violence.*"

Discriminatory gender norms drive much of the sexual harassment, violence and bullying experienced by girls in school, which reflect wider patterns of gendered inequality and violence in society. Indeed, various education officials interviewed suggested violence against girls in school is an extension of the wider violence that girls face in society, including sexual abuse perpetrated by their relatives, peers, affluent individuals, and traditional rulers in their communities. In addition to directly driving violence, discriminatory gender norms also result in some girls not being economically supported by their families, making them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation for money both within school and in the wider community.

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours within wider society also drive patterns of violence within schools. Most notably, the violence and bullying experienced by students with disabilities, students who are pregnant or who are mothers, and students experiencing high levels of poverty or lack of family support, reflect wider negative attitudes and patterns of discrimination towards these groups within communities.

Community leaders, parents, and school staff all identified the growing availability and use of drugs within communities, and particularly the widespread use of Kush by young men, as a key driver of violence by male students, directed both at peers and at teachers. This rising drug related violence was reported across all districts. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of any systematic information and support on drug issues for adolescents.

The high levels of bullying and fighting among students were identified by some stakeholders as reflecting wider norms about the acceptability of violence to resolve conflict or exert dominance, and the prevalence of violence in a variety of forms within communities. Competition among students appear to be an important trigger of fighting among students. This includes competition over academic success and over sporting prowess. For example, an FSU officer in Western Area Rural observed that "*the aspect of sporting activities wherein there is a king or queen is really creating violence, as whenever such competition involves monetary affairs, we realise it will result in violence.*" Likewise, conflict among students over debts and loans also led to violence.

In addition, inadequate school infrastructure and facilities were reported to contribute to violence. For example, with lack of fencing of school property enabling people from the community to enter the school and engage in violent or disruptive activities, and competition among students for seats resulting in fighting. One teacher from Falaba reported that *"we do not have enough sitting*

accommodation in school. Those who come late for admission will tend to fight for sitting accommodations, and we do have those complaints almost on a weekly basis"

Finally, school staff, community leaders, and a variety of officials all reported that students' home environments contribute to violence by students. In particular, that parents do not effectively educate, discipline and monitor their children, and that parents are unable to provide for children's material and emotional needs. Some reported that students are copying the violent behaviour of their parents.

Marginalised students experience of violence

The research involved a particular focus on violence experienced by marginalised students. These include students with disabilities, students who are pregnant or are mothers, and students who are experiencing high levels of poverty or living without family support.

It was reported that **students with disabilities** experience high levels of bullying from their peers. This is a significant cause of concern for both students with disabilities and their parents. Mostly this bullying is verbal, with peers making insulting comments and laughing at students with disabilities. For example, a parent of a student with disabilities in Western Rural Area reported that *"She used to tell me that some of her colleagues were telling her that she had one hand, and they were laughing at her because of the partial stroke that she had."* However, this bullying can also be physical, for example a student with a disability in Bombali reported *"The same thing is happening to me; those senior boys are in the habit of hitting me on the head, and they are calling me names for the problem I have with my foot."*

This verbal and physical violence against students with disabilities by their peers was reported as reflecting wider discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities within communities, including a common perception that they do not belong in school. For example, a principal from Bombali reported that *"People in the community and in the school will see them [students with disabilities], and instead of helping them they will provoke them, and they are provoking them even to come to school. They give them nicknames; they always discourage them to come to school."*

Across all the research sites it emerged that school staff are concerned about the bullying of students with disabilities. It was also reported that most schools encourage students with disabilities to report bullying by their peers and discipline those responsible, although – problematically – this discipline often takes the form of corporal punishment. Students with disabilities and their families tend to report violence to the school principal or teachers, to the headman, to organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) or to the FSU. They also use suggestion boxes for reporting.

Pregnant students and students who are mothers experience high levels of verbal bullying at school, which takes the form of insults and humiliating comments made both by peers and by teachers, particularly focused on 'shaming' the student for becoming pregnant.

School staff did not express concern about bullying of pregnant students, in large part because they often share negative moral judgements about these students (as discussed in section 3). This means that pregnant students are unlikely to seek support from the school when being bullied. In addition, it was reported that pregnant students were less likely to have support from parents in addressing bullying or raising concerns with the school, as their parents were already angry with them about becoming pregnant. Indeed, it was reported that parents are frequently violent to their pregnant daughters because they are angry about the pregnancy. This situation makes pregnant students particularly vulnerable to unchecked bullying and violence.

Pregnant students did not report being subjected to violence once the pregnancy was visible. However, several of them said that they worry about being subjected to violence by peers or teachers before their pregnancy is known about, and the damage this could cause to their baby. In some cases, this fear of violence was one of the reasons that pregnant girls stopped attending school. One parent of a pregnant student in Koinadugu stated that "*At the initial stage of her pregnancy, not everyone will know about it. So, if, for instance, a teacher holds her and beats her severely, not knowing of her pregnancy because she might be hiding it, or maybe she had a fight with a friend who unknowing of her pregnancy hit her in the stomach, it will affect her or maybe even the unborn baby*."

It is important to note that in some cases the students' pregnancy itself is a result of sexual violence or exploitation. This creates a situation where girls who are victims of sexual violence are then subjected to verbal bullying at school and physical violence at home because they have become pregnant. Despite this, few stakeholders expressed sympathy with pregnant students and most made negative judgements about them.

Students experiencing high levels of poverty or living without family support, as well as children coming from more remote villages, face physical and verbal bullying from peers, including insults regarding their appearance, poverty or way of speaking. For example, a teacher in Bombali reported that "*village children and those who can't express themselves or pronounce words very well sometimes face serious provocations from their colleagues; they call them by their mistakes*." Some school staff reported that these students are reluctant to report incidents of violence because such behaviours are considered normal among their peers and because they will be further victimised.

Girls living in poverty or without family support were reported to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation by teachers. It was reported that teachers sexually exploit these girls in exchange for both money and good grades. For example, one mentor in Western Area Urban reported that "[*girls living in poverty] are facing more violence because they will go to school without lunch; they will go to school very weak… they will depend on the teacher for an extra mark, and when they depend on the extra mark from the teacher, some of the teachers will take advantage of that."* Likewise, teachers' constant demands for money contribute to pushing poorer children into child labour and economic exploitation. One girl in Koinadugu told researchers *"My mother died when I was two weeks old, and not long after my mother's death, I also lost my father. When they asked us to contribute money at school, and I had to be involved in manual labour by carrying timber on my head. I was paid NLe 2,5 per trip. I would make six trips per day. That was a normal routine for me every day after school"*

It was reported that male students are also able to sexually exploit poorer girls, both because of their need for money and material goods and for their desire for greater social status. For example, a school staff member from Western Urban area reported that *"Once they have seen a boy that they think is high up there… they will always want to mix with such boys, and those boys will take advantage of that, so such girls will always become victims"*

Responses to violence

Responses of students and parents to incidents of violence

It was reported that parents and students are generally reluctant to report incidents of violence at school. Key reasons for this reluctance were identified as lack of confidentiality; lack of parental support to make a report; parents feeling inferior to teachers and ashamed to approach the school; generally low levels of engagement between parents and school (although this is reportedly improving); time and transport costs for parents coming to school to make a complaint; and fear of reprisals, particularly where the violence was perpetrated by a teacher. It was also reported that

students and their parents often do not know their rights, and do not know that students should not be subjected to violence at school and that they can complain about this.

More broadly, some stakeholders reported that there is a culture of silence around violence within communities which discourages people from reporting incidents and can result in disapproval towards those who do. There is also a strong tradition of 'compromise' in cases of violence, which means that even if an initial report is made, victims and their families may not follow up on it as they prefer to compromise in return for some material gain. As an education official in Karene explained *"Even if they are reported, people are shy about continuing to prosecute the matter. At some point in time, you see compromises between the people that are involved."*

However, while students and parents are generally reluctant to report violence, the extent of this reluctance depends on the type of violence, and the identity of the victim and perpetrator. Students and parents are more likely to report violence perpetrated by other students than by teachers, as the potentially negative consequences of reporting are far lower. Meanwhile students with disabilities and their families appear particularly likely to report violence by peers to the school, and to have confidence that the school will take some action. This finding is in line with the fact that school staff generally expressed empathy and concern in relation to violence against students with disabilities. Some girls stated that they report sexual harassment or aggression by their peers to the principal.

As mentioned previously, pregnant girls and students who are mothers are particularly reluctant to report bullying by peers, as they experience judgement and stigmatisation from school staff and lack support from parents. Students living away from family are also disadvantaged in terms of reporting violence, as they do not have family available to support them in this.

In cases of corporal punishment by teachers, students and parents do not generally report this for several reasons. Firstly, students found this normal and expected behaviour and did not see the need to report it. Also, students were wary of reporting such punishment to their parents because parents are largely supportive of corporal punishment and would often be angry with the child for misbehaving at school or respond that this type of punishment is normal. Only in cases where beating was severe did students and parents think it appropriate to complain. However, even in these cases they were often reluctant to approach the school for fear that the student would face reprisals from the teacher. Some parents and students were also unaware that this type of punishment is prohibited.

It was reported that families do sometimes report sexual harassment and abuse by teachers, by complaining to the principal, or else to the chief who then takes the case up with the school authorities or with the FSU as he deems appropriate. However, it was reported that female students rarely report this type of violence to their family, but instead try to keep it secret. This can be because parents frequently blame their daughter for the sexual harassment she is experiencing; because of the benefits girls receive from engaging in a sexual relationship with the teacher in terms of grades or material goods; or because girls are frightened of reprisals from the teacher, particularly that the teacher will fail them in their tests or will physically harm them.

Responses of school staff and school authorities to incidents of violence

Across all the schools, it was reported that school staff now have increased awareness and understanding of the problem of violence in school, and that this problem is being taken more seriously. However, the extent to which schools respond with appropriate action to an incident of violence was very mixed.

Some schools appeared to be taking appropriate action in **responding to violence by students**. This includes counselling the student regarding their behaviour, issuing warnings, calling in the student's parents, suspending the student, and even referring them to other authorities in serious cases. For example, a student in Karene reported that in cases of student violence *"the pupils are sent home to call their parents; the school suspends, expels, and even hands over to the police if the offence seems to be above them."* However, in other schools, students reported that they were not aware of any action being taken to respond to violent incidents even when these were reported. Problematically, in some schools it was identified that violence by students is punished by flogging.

Some schools have functioning mechanisms to respond to incidents of violence. Where there are active school mentors, these people often play a crucial role in addressing sensitive issues related to violence and mediating between students, school authorities and parents. This includes providing support and guidance to students and engaging with parents in cases where parents expect teachers to use corporal punishment despite this being prohibited. School guidance or counselling departments and staff were also reported as playing a role in supporting students affected by violence, as well as being a place where violence could be reported. In addition, some schools had established School Disciplinary Committees to address disciplinary issues, including those related to violence.

The performance of schools in **responding to violence by teachers** appears to be much weaker than the responses to violence by students as detailed above. For example, it was reported that if parents do report cases of flogging to the school authorities – which tends to be only when the violence is particularly severe – the issue is generally settled by calling the perpetrator and the students' parents together to discuss and settle the matter. This means that there are no further implications for the teacher who has committed the violence. Likewise, that where female students do report sexual harassment or violence by teachers to the school, they are often dismissed and not believed.

Lack of meaningful action is not the only problem with the schools' response to teacher violence, but also failure to respect confidentiality. Students repeatedly stated that this is a reason that they do not complain about teacher violence. For example, a student in Bo stated that "*Some teachers do not keep secrets; when you tell them something, they will go and share it with others*." Another student told the researchers that some girls had complained to the principal about a teacher that was touching them in a sexual manner. The principal spoke to the teacher, naming these girls, and from then on, the teacher continually threatened and harassed the girls. In discussing sexual harassment and violence by teachers, a female student in Bo stated "*some teachers will threaten you that if you report, they will fail you until you leave the school. For instance, in our communities, when someone rapes you, he will threaten you that if you say it out loud, he will kill you."*

It appears that in the case of violence by teachers, while there is more awareness of how teachers are expected to behave, and even some reduction in use of corporal punishment by teachers, there remains significant impunity for teachers who are violent to students.

Existence and effectiveness of reporting mechanisms within schools

The research found a variety of mechanisms for reporting violence within schools. However, the extent to which these mechanisms provide a safe and confidential option to report, or have the confidence of students and parents, varies significantly.

Many schools have suggestion boxes, into which students can put anonymous notes. While some students did report using suggestion boxes for a variety of concerns, many students were reluctant to use them to report teacher violence. These boxes are often placed in locations where teachers can monitor which students are making complaints, and students reported being afraid that they will be

identified - either because they are seen leaving a complaint or by their handwriting - and will then face reprisals from the teachers concerned. Some students were also sceptical that any action would be taken as a result of making a complaint about violence through the suggestion box.

Another mechanism for reporting violence was the school safety committee. These committees are responsible for recording and addressing any violence reported in the school. The extent to which these committees were active was mixed across the schools. While they were mentioned by some school staff, they were not mentioned by either students or parents as a route for making a complaint, suggesting there is limited awareness of them.

Some students and parents reported issues related to violence to school mentors or guidance counsellors, who do tend to be seen as trusted adults within the school. There was limited evidence on whether reports made in this way resulted in action, and to some extent this appears to depend on the commitment and capacity of the mentor or guidance counsellor involved and their ability and willingness to escalate complaints to more senior colleagues where needed.

It appears that one of the most effective mechanisms for reporting violence is students and parents directly reporting to the principal, although only in those schools where the principal was generally open to and supportive of students. For example, in one school the principal has provided their phone number to students, encouraging them to report complaints directly. Directly reporting to the principal appears to be the best way to ensure action is taken in response to complaints.

Reporting school violence to external authorities

In cases of severe violence students and their parents sometimes report to authorities outside the school. For example, to traditional authorities such as the chief or mammy queen, to the FSU, to the District Education Officer, to local NGOs, or using the toll-free line for reporting GBV.

Reports to the FSU were made only in the most serious cases, and particularly those of sexual violence or severe beating by teachers. Reporting teachers to the police was often a last resort, as value is placed on resolving conflict within communities and going to the police is seen as an extreme measure that is generally disapproved of. FSU officers in both Bombali and Western Area reported that parents choose to report incidents to the FSU because they doubt that the school will deal with the problem properly.

FSU officers identified that students and parents face some challenges in reporting school violence to them. Students and their parents are often afraid to come forward to report violence by teachers to the FSU as they fear repercussions. Also, students and parents from poorer or marginalised backgrounds do not report violence by teachers because of feelings of inferiority and lack of confidence. In some cases, students and their families only come forward to report when the wider community, or community leaders, bring a case to the attention of the FSU. FSU officers also reported that some students do not know about reporting channels. To address this challenge, Fabala FSU has ensured that the FSU contact number is published in all schools.

FSU officers reported responding in a variety of ways when cases of severe violence by teachers are brought to them. Bombali FSU reported that when they get a report of a teacher violently flogging a student, they invite that teacher to come to their office to discuss the matter. Meanwhile Western Area Urban FSU reported that in some cases they launch an investigation process involving senior teachers and the school principal, which can lead to submission of reports to the Director of Public Prosecution for guidance on legal proceedings. This mostly happens only in cases involving sexual

violence. Some FSUs also report that they refer students who are victims of violence for medical and psychological support at organisations such as Rainbo Initiative and Street Child.

Measures taken by schools to prevent violence

In general, it appears that schools are stronger in their efforts to prevent violence, than in their response to incidents of violence. For example, a variety of awareness raising and sensitisation initiatives aimed at preventing violence have been undertaken within schools, with parents and in communities, and were reported to have contributed to changed attitudes and behaviour. Although it is important to note that the existence and effectiveness of such efforts varies widely depending on the individual commitment of key actors, such as school principals, as well as the availability of adequate human and material resources.

The schools that participated in this research reported that they are undertaking a range of activities to prevent violence. These include:

- Formation of School Safety Clubs. These are clubs dedicated to promoting a culture of safety and well-being among students, and fostering a sense of responsibility for students' collective security.
- Sensitisation programmes during devotions, classes, and assemblies. These include awareness raising sessions on a range of issues, including those related to violence, which are sometimes conducted by external parties, such as the paramount chief, priest, child protection services, and representatives from Leh Wi Lan.
- Drama in assemblies. This involves drama by the students to raise awareness about maintaining a safe and respectful environment at school.
- Appointment of Class Prefects/Class Masters. These students act as a point of contact for students to report issues and can play a role in improving communication between students and school authorities.
- Conducting CTA Meetings. All schools had CTAs and these provide a platform for dialogue between school community and teachers.
- Teacher Training on Violence Management. Some teachers have participated in training on how to deal with violence and conflict.
- Involvement of Trained Students. Some students are trained to educate their peers on issues including related to violence, and to serve as role models for positive behaviour.
- Mentorship Programs: Teachers who have been given a mentoring role receive training on issues, including related to violence, and play a pastoral role.
- Learning circles. These are used for teachers to learn about and discuss violence in school and how to respond to it.
- Mural display. A mural display at the school entrance, providing information on types of violence, and reporting channels.
- CTA meetings. Using these meetings as a forum to discuss and address issues related to violence in school.
- Implementation of rules / By-Laws Against Violence: Schools have implemented by-laws focused on violence in school, with the aim of setting clear expectations and consequences.

It is important to note that these are mostly activities aimed at addressing violent behaviour by students. Schools only reported a few interventions aimed at strengthening teacher's knowledge about and response to violence, or improving their professional conduct. It is possible that this shows

a bias towards addressing student violence, which is easier to discuss openly and address than violence by teachers, and which principals are more willing to admit is a problem in their school.

Recommendations to tackle violence in schools

The research identified a range of measures that stakeholders believe could address the problem of violence in schools. This is a highly complex problem, which requires a variety of responses at multiple levels and over the long term. The recommendations below therefore do not claim to be comprehensive, but to provide a snapshot of some of the priorities for action that emerged from this research.

- It is important to support the professional development of principals and strengthen their ability to lead on issues of violence. Given the very hierarchical cultures within schools, principals and other senior staff wield a lot of power and set the framework within which teachers operate.
- There is a need to address the limited compliance among teachers with their Code of Conduct. This requires ensuring that teachers are familiar with the Code of Conduct by providing in-service training and regular learning sessions within schools for all teachers (qualified and unqualified). Actions should also be taken to strengthen student and parent awareness of the Code of Conduct and to give a clear message that the school takes the Code of Conduct seriously, for example through the principal speaking about the Code of Conduct in assemblies.
- There is a need to improve oversight of teachers' conduct both within the school structures (e.g. by the principal and senior teachers), and from external actors. There is also a need to ensure that serious violence by teachers is investigated in a fair and transparent process, that it is reported to external authorities where this is appropriate, and that teachers responsible for violence face appropriate sanctions.
- It is important to improve teachers' knowledge on positive teaching methods so they have alternatives to flogging that they feel confident in using. Even just one or two teachers within a school using different discipline methods can inspire others and create a catalytic effect.
- Addressing violence in school must be part of a wider shift in community attitudes about violence and about children's rights. There is strong demand among stakeholders for more community level sensitisation on these issues and for efforts to address the norms and behaviours within communities that contribute to violence within schools.
- Addressing gender-based violence in school requires addressing the discriminatory gender norms that drive this violence. This involves wider work on gender norms and attitudes in the communities of which teachers and students are part. It could also help to develop standardised approaches for how schools should respond to incidents of sexual or gender-based violence among students, to make these widely known throughout the school community, and to systematically implement these.
- Addressing violence and bullying against marginalised students, such as students with disabilities, requires working both on social norm change and on putting in place appropriate policies and processes. This includes work to address discriminatory norms and attitudes both among school students and within the wider community to which students and teachers belong. It also includes developing clear policies and processes to prohibit and respond to such violence, including appropriate sanctions. While some schools do have such processes they are not applied in a consistent manner.
- There is limited understanding of or respect for confidentiality within schools. This is a major disincentive for students to report cases of violence. It could be useful to develop basic training

and clear guidelines on confidentiality, as well as consequences for school staff who breach confidentiality.

- There is a clear need for more effective monitoring and oversight that could assess how well schools are dealing with violence. Also, for mechanisms to hold the school and its leadership accountable for how they respond to reports of violence. There is a strong demand for more regular supervisory visits and inspections in schools that include a focus on the problem of violence.
- It could be useful to work with parents, to provide positive parenting information and education to help curb violence in homes and help them to have stronger and more supportive relationships with their children and to better manage their children's behaviour. This can contribute to reducing violence by students in schools. This can be done through parenting workshops provided in collaboration with the school.
- Fostering stronger relationships and more regular communication between school and parents can help them to jointly manage discipline issues related to students. It can also enable schools and parents to collaborate to address specific violence related problems that the school may be facing, such as gender or disability-based bullying or the use of drugs.
- Counselling services in school are highly valued and there is demand for these services to be strengthened and extended. These provide a safe and confidential space for students, and are of particular value of girls and marginalised students. Counsellors could be provided with training to strengthen their skills in addressing conflict and violent behaviour.
- Students have limited awareness of their rights, or of mechanisms to report when their rights are violated. It is important to strengthen this awareness, particularly for those students, such as girls and those from marginalised groups, who face the most serious violence in schools. This information can be provided in assemblies, including through drama by the students themselves, as is being done in some of the schools included in this research.
- Stakeholders placed a strong emphasis on the need for training, information and sensitisation to address violence in schools. While these are critical, it is also important to strengthen structures within schools that can help address this problem. This can include strengthening capacity and functioning of structures such as the Community Teacher Association (CTA), Board of Governors, School Management Committee and School Safety Committee. It may also be useful to establish Disciplinary Committees, as has been done in some of the schools where this research was carried out.
- It is important to address the growing problem of drug use among students, given that this is increasingly a driver of violence in schools. A starting point could be more research to understand the extent and nature of the drug problem, including identifying which students are most vulnerable and pathways through which become involved in drugs. There are examples of drug education and school-based interventions from other countries that could be useful models for the Sierra Leone context.

Section 2. Exclusion in schools

In relation to the issue of exclusion the research sought to answer the following overarching research question: **How do social norms drive exclusion from school and what works in addressing these social norms and promoting inclusion?** It focused on exclusion faced by three categories of marginalised students: pregnant students and students who are mothers; students with disabilities; and students experiencing high levels of poverty or without family support.

To answer this question, the research investigated:

- Manifestations of exclusion
- Social norms, attitudes and behaviours that drive exclusion
- Existing responses to address exclusion
- Possible strategies to strengthen inclusion in schools

Exclusion experienced by pregnant students and students who are mothers

Among the marginalised groups that were the focus of this research, pregnant students experience the greatest stigma and exclusion. They are widely perceived within communities as immoral because they have engaged in pre-marital sex and become pregnant, and are viewed as a corrupting influence on other girls.[2] These attitudes were shared by majority of stakeholders interviewed for this research, who were largely judgemental of these girls and expressed very little empathy for them.

Pregnant students face high levels of exclusion by their peers. Other students actively avoid them, resulting in them being very socially isolated at school. One student in Koinadugu reported "*They are not treating me well because they are not playing with me, and they are not even coming close to me. They said because I was a pregnant girl,"* while her parent reported "*They used to provoke her, and they also used to isolate her; she is always alone in school."* Pregnant students reported facing constant insults and stigmatising remarks about the fact that they are pregnant from their peers. As one student described "*When we are out for lunch, some of my friends will point and say, "Look at that girl—a very small girl—now she has got pregnant." They will keep on saying this repeatedly, but without asking the cause of what makes you pregnant. I feel ashamed in school with this kind of attitude from my friends…so, as a result, I had no courage to attend."* (Pregnant student, Koinadugu).

A major cause of the social exclusion that pregnant students face from peers is the attitudes of the parents of these peers. Most parents interviewed strongly oppose pregnant girls being in school, fearing that their presence will encourage other girls to engage in sex and become pregnant. These parents warn their children to stay away from pregnant girls, even if they have previously been friends. As one parent of a pregnant student in Koinadugu reported "*Most parents advised their children, who are her colleagues, to move away from her so that they too could not be victims or do similar things. They said she was pregnant without achieving anything, so they didn't want their children to be the way she is."* Likewise, a student in Bo reflected "*They will conclude that she was guided by bad friends, and they will advise anyone to keep away from her, so they are not influenced by her bad behaviour*." This suggests that any efforts to reduce the social exclusion experienced by pregnant girls need to address not just the attitudes and behaviours of their peers, but crucially the attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of the parent community.

There is significant variety in the way that teachers treat pregnant girls. Many girls and their parents reported that teachers make judgemental and humiliating comments about them in front of their peers and tell them that they should stay at home. As one parent in Koinadugu reported *"Some teachers told her that, with pregnancy, it is very difficult for her to continue learning, and now she is a big girl, so let her stay at home*." There appears to be a common assumption among teachers that once a girl is pregnant, she is unlikely to be successful in education, so the teacher gives up on the student, overlooking them in class, no longer investing time in them, and not expecting anything from them.

[2] It is important to note that only girls face negative moral judgements for engaging in pre-martial sex. These judgements are not applied to boys.

However, there were also some reports of teachers being supportive of pregnant girls and encouraging them to continue with their education despite the social exclusion that they are facing in school.

The attitudes displayed by the parents of pregnant girls is mixed. Some are very supportive of their daughters continuing at school and advocate with the school to make appropriate provisions and provide support for them. However, it was reported that very commonly parents are ashamed when their daughters become pregnant, especially if the girl is still in JSS, and keep their daughter at home in order to hide their pregnancy and avoid social stigma. It was also reported that because parents are often angry with their daughters about the pregnancy, and that therefore they do not support their daughter when she is facing exclusion by peers and teachers, saying that she has brought the problems on herself.

Pregnant girls reported feeling isolated and ashamed at school. As well as being deliberately ostracised by their peers, they also self-exclude by staying away from classmates and friends as they are worried about being excluded or bullied. This means pregnant girls often opt out of voluntary school activities and generally try to stay as quiet and unnoticed as possible. Pregnant girls also reported not feeling physically safe at school, as they are afraid of being accidentally kicked or stepped on when sitting on the floor, as well as being flogged by teachers. For example, one pregnant student in Koinadugu reported *"I don't feel safe in school because I don't want to be flogged in school since I am pregnant. That is why I am very careful with my friends so that I will not do something in school that will allow the teachers to flog me."*

Some aspects of school life were reported to be difficult or inaccessible for pregnant students. Most notably, it was widely considered that pregnant students should not take part in any sports activities, resulting in these students being excluded from an area of school life which has significant social vale for students. It was also reported that some students felt very tired due to pregnancy, making it difficult for them to concentrate or even stay awake in class, and resulting in them missing out on learning. For example, a parent of pregnant student in Koinadugu reported that "*her participation was limited because, when a child is pregnant, she sleeps a lot in the classroom. When the teacher is in the classroom teaching, she might be sleeping; she cannot know what has been taught because she has been sleeping. She will be weak, and the signs and symptoms of pregnancy cannot allow her to focus."*

The combination of the exclusion, isolation and support that pregnant students face; the feelings of shame they experience; and lack of support from parents and teachers, leads to many of these students dropping out of school. Although it was reported that some girls who stop attending school do still come to school to sit exams, demonstrating that they are still interested in pursuing their education and gaining qualifications even though they do not feel comfortable to attend school. As one principal in Western Area Urban described "*The moment they notice that they are pregnant, they will stop coming. Even if we call the attention of the parents to allow them come, they don't. The only time you see them is during the examination, especially the BECE or WASSCE, and they are always allowed to take the exams. But to say they will come, their parents will not allow them*." Moreover, it was reported that, for some girls, pregnancy leads to early marriage, which means they must leave school permanently. It is important to note that given the widespread belief – shared by teachers, parents, students and the wider community - that pregnant girls should not come to school, it is very difficult for them to continue attending, even if they want to do so.

Students who return to school after having a baby also face stigma and exclusion, although this appears to be less intense than for pregnant students. Indeed, some students who returned after giving birth reported that, although they were excluded by peers initially, over the long term they were able to reintegrate socially. However, fear of this exclusion is a factor that prevents girls from returning to

school after giving birth. One teacher in Fabala reported that *"Some girls who have a baby don't want to return to school because they are afraid that others will stigmatise and provoke them. Sometimes these students do not return to school again, thinking that their colleagues will provoke them*"

It was reported that in some cases students try to keep peers from finding out that they are mothers, because of the stigma and exclusion that they might face. For example, a teacher in Bombali reported that "*Recently, a girl left her child at home, but because the woman who used to help breastfeed the child was not around and the baby was crying, they brought the child to school in order to breastfeed her. However, it was a surprise to the school to learn that this girl had a child, so some of her schoolmates started provoking her*." As illustrated by this quote, it was also reported that students find it hard to combine breastfeeding and school, and this can result in students that have returned to school after giving birth ultimately dropping out of school.

It appears that schools are in general more supportive of students who return after having a baby than they are of pregnant girls participating in school. Some students reported being encouraged to return to school. For example, a student with a baby in Western Area Rural reported "*The school authorities, especially the principal, always encourage me to continue schooling till I sit for my WASSCE exams…I don't want to disappoint them again by dropping out of school. I have never failed any subject since my return. I have promised myself not to drop out again."*

Exclusion experienced by students with disabilities

Students with disabilities face social exclusion by their peers, which generally takes the form of other students keeping away from them and not wanting to be friends with them. They also experience harassment and insults from other students because of their disability. This treatment results in some students with disabilities feeling shy, unhappy and isolated at school.

It is clear that this exclusion in schools reflects wider discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities in communities. However, it was reported that, due to sensitisation efforts, there has been a positive change in attitudes to people with disabilities in recent years. This includes greater acceptance within communities that children with disabilities should go to school.

While exclusion and bullying are common, the research also found examples of students with disabilities being supported by their peers in ways that help them to participate and integrate in school life. For example, in some cases the friends of students with disabilities carry their bags and books for them. A father in Bo described the support that his son gives to a schoolfriend with disabilities: *"very early in the morning, my son will wake up and get dressed, then rush to school. One day, he was asked by his mother, why do you go to school so early? And he said 'I have a friend who is disabled, and I have to help him, I have to give him support in his wheelchair to carry him to school.' So, this is how children should behave, they should be very friendly to those with disabilities."* These are positive examples that schools can build on and highlight, as making such 'positive deviance' behaviours visible can contribute to changing norms about how students treat peers with disabilities.

In general students with disabilities do not experience much direct exclusion or stigmatisation by teachers, with teachers mainly reported as being empathetic and supportive to students with disabilities. However, there were some reports of teachers overlooking or ignoring students with disabilities in class, or assuming that they do not have the capacity to undertake particular activities.

There was variety in the extent to which the families of students with disabilities support them to access and participate in school, or to overcome exclusion. Some parents are very strong advocates for their children with disabilities, approaching the school to discuss their children's needs. However,

it was also reported that some children with disabilities are seen as a burden by their family and not supported to go to school. In addition, it was reported that fathers often abandon children with disabilities as they believe that the disability is due to witchcraft. This increases these children's vulnerability and lack of support, and makes girls with disabilities particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation within schools and the wider community due to lack of economic support within the family.

Students with disabilities are unable to participate in some aspects of school life because of misunderstandings about what they can do, or because the school does not provide alternative options for participation or the necessary support for participation. For example, education officials reported that students with disabilities face exclusion in activities such as school sports, with limited provision made for their physical challenges. Indeed, a school staff member in Bombali reported that "*the disabled are excluded when it is time for sports and football because they are not able to do physical exercise. Although they do not like that, they are excluded in most cases because of their condition."* Meanwhile a student in Karene reported that *"Some people do not consider physically challenged students in what they are doing; they neglect them because of their condition."* Given the important social role that sports activities play in school, this situation exacerbates the social exclusion of students with disabilities. It was also reported that students with limited hearing and vision, as well as students who do not speak, are often unable to fully participate in classroom activities.

In addition to challenges in fully participating in school, it was also reported that students with disabilities face challenges accessing school. For example, some students with disabilities must walk far to get to school, but find walking difficult, and end up being frequently punished for being late to school. Students with disabilities in especially in hard-to-reach communities often experience particularly serious problems in getting to school. However, it was reported that some community members do try to help students with disabilities access school, for example Okada riders will often give them a free ride if they see them walking on the road. Such examples of individual support from community members could perhaps be built on to generate wider volunteerism within communities to support disabled students' access to school.

Schools identified some types of disability as resulting in particularly high levels of exclusion. These include students with learning disabilities or cognitive disabilities, for whom there is usually no support provided in school and who tend to drop out. They also include children with a visual impairment, as one teacher in Karene commented "*the visually impaired children are not sent to school because I have never seen one in our schools here. I think they are excluded*." While not disabled, students with albinism were reported to experience particularly high levels of discrimination by peers. An education official in Western Area Urban reported "*We have Albinos in school; it is difficult for them to make friends. At times, their colleagues shy away from them because of their condition. Even if he or she wants to make friends, the other children will refuse to make him or her friends."*

As a result of the exclusion that students with disabilities face, they frequently drop out of school, particularly if they do not have the family support required to address these challenges. As a member of the CTA in Karene stated "...*Children with disabilities are leaving school not because they are stupid but because they are excluded, and if they feel excluded, they will stop going to school."*

Exclusion experienced by the poorest students and those living without family support

Another category of students that face high levels of exclusion in school are students from the poorest backgrounds, along with students that live away from their family and who often experience

particularly high levels deprivation and lack of care. In some cases, this type of exclusion based on socio-economic status is also experienced by students coming from more remote villages.

These students face bullying and stigmatisation from their peers, who make insulting comments about their poverty, their appearance and clothes, their lack of lunch, their 'dirtiness,' or the way they speak. They are also socially isolated by their peers, who keep away with them and do not befriend them. It was reported that these marginalised students also chose to self-isolate because of feelings of shame and fear of stigmatisation. As a teacher in Bo described "*Most of the time, those who come to school without lunch tend to isolate themselves in school. And they also isolate themselves either because they do not speak good Krio or because they are not dressing as their colleagues do.*"

It was widely reported that these students do not participate much in class because of a lack of confidence, and that they often avoid school events or classes because they are ashamed. As a teacher from Bombali described "*They find it very hard to participate in a class or even join assembly because they don't have good shoes, and they may not want to be amongst their colleagues, so they will decide to boycott classes. They are ashamed of being amongst their colleagues because of provocation, and some of them feel ashamed of even answering questions in class*"

Beyond exclusion by peers there are a range of other factors that contribute to these marginalised students being unable to fully participate in the educational or social aspects of school. These include the fact that these children do not have adequate food, do not bring lunch to school, and are therefore hungry and cannot concentrate in school. Also, that they lack money for school fees, school materials and uniform, or to meet demands for payment from teachers.

This group of marginalised students tend to spend a lot of time engaged in income generation activities for their families or host families, as well as undertaking extensive chores at the demand of host families who often exploit them. As a result, these students are very tired and unable to concentrate when they are in school. Indeed, a principal from Bombali reported "*When they come to school, you will see them sleeping. When you ask them, they will tell you they are staying with people who sell food very early in the morning. So, they have to wake up very early in the morning to help prepare the food. They don't have time to study. Here is the only place they have time to rest.*" Moreover, these students' extensive workload outside of school generally results in them missing a lot of school time and falling behind in their studies. They then face further stigma and humiliation by their peers because of being behind or having low grades.

It is important to note that female students who are from the poorest families or are living away from their families are at particular risk of sexual exploitation, and therefore of pregnancy. Hence those students who are already marginalised at school because of poverty frequently end up facing further exclusion and isolation because of pregnancy, which increases the likelihood that they will drop out of school. For example, a mentor[3] from Bo described how *"[Girls not living with their parents] will not be getting sufficient food or lunch to bring to school. They can be fooled by these Okoda riders easily, begging to have sex with them and possibly becoming pregnant."* Likewise, a student in Western Area Rural who had become pregnant while living away from her parents to attend school described how *"I was finding things very difficult because my aunt refused to pay the money for my school that was sent by my uncle to her. So, I had to date a boyfriend just for me to survive and support my education. I really didn't intend on keeping my boyfriend, but I had no choice... just to have something to support myself and my education"*

[3] Mentors are teachers that have been given a mentoring role

School responses to exclusion within framework of radical inclusion policy

The radical inclusion policy creates a framework for schools to address issues of exclusion and to ensure that school is accessible to and inclusive of all children. It has a particular focus on the inclusion of children with disabilities; children from low-income families; children in rural and underserved areas; and girls - especially girls who are currently pregnant and in school or are parent learners.

The research found high levels of awareness of this policy among school staff, parents and community stakeholders. Stakeholders reported that in the research schools and communities there have been a variety of initiatives to promote inclusion in line with the radical inclusion policy, which have been carried out by MBSSE, Leh Wi Lan, NGOs and the schools themselves. These initiatives include strengthening internal leadership and policies on exclusion within schools; training teachers on inclusion issues; sensitisation on inclusion among students and with parents and communities; working with community and religious leaders to promote inclusion; and the provision of support by external actors such as OPDs. However, the research revealed that while the radical inclusion policy is undoubtedly contributing to changing attitudes and action, this impact is seen more in relation to some marginalised groups than others.

It was widely reported that the radical inclusion policy, along with sensitisation initiatives on the rights of people with disabilities, has contributed to a shift in attitudes around the inclusion of **students with disabilities** in school. Most notably, across all schools, teachers were reported to be much more supportive of students with disabilities. It was reported that teachers were generally welcoming of students with disabilities and sought to help them participate in the classroom and to integrate socially. Teachers themselves stated that they see it as their duty to support students with disabilities. Several students with disabilities reported that teachers have encouraged them to stay in school when they were thinking of dropping out due to the challenges they face. For example, a student with a disability in Western Area Rural reported *"I feel like leaving the school, but the teachers will come to me and tell me not to leave the school."* However, it is important to note that while most reports were of teachers showing positive support, there were a few reports of teachers ignoring students with disabilities in the classroom.

It is important to note, that while the attitudes of principals, teachers and other school staff has shifted positively in relation to students with disabilities, their focus is strongly on "protecting," or "ensuring the safety of" students with disabilities. This focus on protection includes excluding students with disabilities from activities such as sport because of a perception that they cannot participate and it may be dangerous for them. There seems to be much less emphasis on empowering students with disabilities or consulting with them to identify how they can best participate. This is something that can perhaps be strengthened, building on the positive changes in attitude that are already taking place to develop more emphasis on empowerment.

Parents of students with disabilities reported being more aware of their child's rights and feeling more empowered to make demands from the school because of the radical inclusion policy. Some parents have played a critical role in pushing schools to take greater action to ensure their child's inclusion. It was also reported that the radical inclusion policy is contributing to more supportive attitudes in the wider community regarding children with disabilities attending school.

Critically, there were some reports that awareness about the radical inclusion policy is contributing to changing the attitudes of, and reducing discrimination by, the peers of students with disabilities. However, it was reported that this change is so far very gradual and limited. An example of such changed attitudes can be seen in the statement of a student with disabilities in Bombali, who reported

that *"since this programme was brought to this school, my colleagues are encouraging me to come to school, even if I want to stay at home. They will check on me and ask me to come to school."*

The extent to which greater awareness and more positive attitudes about disability is translating into concrete actions by schools to overcome the challenges that students with disabilities face was mixed. While in some schools there was no evidence of changed practices, other schools had taken various actions to support students with disabilities. These included:

- Providing extra learning provision for students with disabilities
- Giving students with disabilities leadership roles, for example as prefects
- Giving students with disabilities priority seating at the front of the class
- Taking a strong stance on bullying and teasing of students with disabilities
- Adapting school building and facilities (e.g. widening doors, installing ramps)
- Prioritising the needs of students with disabilities when installing WASH facilities
- Providing learning materials appropriate for students with disabilities
- Awareness and sensitisation on rights of students with disabilities
- Pairing students with disabilities with non-disabled peers in the classroom
- Getting students with disabilities to lead class devotion
- Giving students with disabilities a referee role in sports activities where they cannot play the game
- Providing a support person to assist students within disabilities in undertaking physically challenging activities such as working in the school garden
- Providing accessible devices for students with disabilities to support learning
- In one school a teacher with disabilities had been employed and acts as a role model

School responses to address exclusion of **pregnant students** were much weaker, reflecting the high levels of judgement and stigmatisation of these girls found within the community and among school staff. Although there is widespread awareness that the radical inclusion policy provides for pregnant girls to attend school, most school staff, parents and community stakeholders profoundly disagree with this aspect of the policy and see it as out of line with dominant social values. For example, a teacher in Bo reported *"If the government had asked the students in the schools and the teachers before implementing the policy, they would have rejected the idea of allowing pregnant girls in school."* While a parent in Bo stated that *"To me as a mother, radical inclusion is something I don't like at all because… students in JSS and SSS will copy directly from the one that sits close to them, the student who has gotten pregnant. To me, the community frowns on it, and the parents see it as something that is not good."* Despite this general disapproval, it is important to note that, in both schools and in communities, there are a small minority of stakeholders who are supportive of pregnant students attending school. This includes a few teachers that have encouraged pregnant girls to stay at school.

It seems that while radical inclusion has not yet resulted in much of a shift in attitudes towards pregnant students attending school, it is preventing schools from ordering these girls to leave because of their pregnancy. Although there were many examples of teachers informally telling pregnant students that they should stay at home. Radical inclusion is also reportedly providing a basis for some pregnant students and their parents to make demands of the school, including in relation to addressing bullying.

The research found that schools were more positive in their response to students who are mothers than to pregnant students. For example, reports of school staff and the wider community supporting students to return to school after having a baby were more common. This was attributed in part to the

influence of the radical inclusion policy. As one parent in Koinadugu reported "*with the introduction of radical inclusion in schools… we are seeing some of them in school. I have hosted many breastfeeding mothers in my house when they come to sit for BECE exams.*"

It was also reported that girls who had dropped out of school some time ago because of pregnancy were being supported by schools to return, as part of implementation of the radical inclusion policy. One student from Bombali who had experienced intersectional exclusion and dropped out, but had ultimately returned to education told researchers *"When I was born, I started well until at 11 years old I became disabled, but I was still going to school. When I was 16 years old, I became pregnant, and I had to drop out of school. I went through a lot, but when this programme was brought into the school, I was encouraged to return to school so that I would be able to complete my schooling."*

The research identified just a few concrete steps that schools have taken to make special provision for pregnant students and students that are mothers. Although such provisions were not common. These include:

- Helping pregnant students access medical care for their pregnancy
- Providing appropriate space for pregnant girls and breastfeeding mothers to sit exams
- School counsellors providing emotional support and advice to students that are pregnant

The research found limited response by schools to address the exclusion faced by the **poorest students and those living away from family**, as well as little awareness that such students are a particular target of the radical inclusion policy. However, there were reports that the radical inclusion policy is resulting in increased enrolment of students that had previously dropped out of school, which would include many of those who faced exclusion due to poverty or lack of family support. For example, a teacher in Bo reported *"There are people who have left school for years, but because of this radical inclusion, they are back."*

It is likely that one of the reasons that school staff, community leaders and others are less focused on the exclusion faced by the poorest students and those living away from family, is because these students and the marginalisation that they face may be less visible than is the case for students with disabilities or pregnant students. It is also possible that schools have less knowledge about how to address such poverty-based exclusion. This suggests that creating greater awareness about such exclusion, and providing information on how to address it would be of value.

Very few measures have been taken to address exclusion of the poorest students and those living without family support. Those that were identified include:

- A school in Bombali had initiated a 'Bring and Share programme, in which students all share the food they bring to school. In this way students who do not bring lunch still get to eat.
- Where NGOs offer supplies and material support for poorer students, schools identify these groups of students as particularly in need. However, it was also reported that teachers take supplies that are donated for the most deprived students. For example, a student in Koinadugu reported that *"when NGOs send supplies for children in this school, the teachers will sort the supplies and take all the good ones for their own children and leave the others that are not good for other children."*

Recommendations to promote inclusion in schools

The research clearly identified that norms and attitudes are shifting about the inclusion of marginalised students in school, although there is still particularly strong resistance to the inclusion of pregnant girls. While schools are taking some action in this area, this action could be more systematic in nature, as well as more comprehensive in addressing the multiple ways in which different marginalised students are excluded. Particularly important areas to address include strengthening knowledge on the rights of marginalised students; strengthening understanding of the potential of marginalised students to learn and be successful despite their challenges, and hence the value of supporting their education; addressing the pervasive gender discriminatory attitudes about marginalised girls; and raising awareness about and offering strategies to address the exclusion experienced by the poorest students and those without family support.

Stakeholders identified a range of measures that they believe are important to address exclusion against marginalised students. These measures fall broadly into three categories: addressing discriminatory social norms and attitudes and promoting more inclusive behaviour; taking practical steps to facilitate inclusion in school; strengthening the capacities of schools to promote inclusion.

Stakeholders suggested that such work to address discriminatory norms and attitudes could involve:

- Regular engagement between school and parents on inclusion and child rights issues, recognising that parents have a powerful influence over their children's attitudes and behaviours, and can also play an important role in advocating for their children's rights.
- Engagement between schools and the wider community on inclusion issues to address discriminatory norms and promote more inclusive ones.
- Encouraging influential leaders in the community, such as chiefs, mammy queens and religious leaders, to show leadership on inclusion issues.
- Sensitisation for students on inclusion and rights issues, through a variety of formats such as drama, presentations by external actors such as OPDs, discussion in class etc.
- The use of role models. This could include talks by people with disabilities or by those who were teen mothers, who have gone on to be successful. It could also involve employing such people within the school. These people would not only provide role models for marginalised students, but would challenge negative stereotypes within the wider school community.
- Supporting marginalised students to take on student leadership roles in school. This is already being done in a few schools where students with disabilities were made prefects. A greater challenge in terms of dominant norms would be giving leadership roles to students who are pregnant or who are mothers, given the concern about them being 'negative' role models for others. However, such girls taking leadership roles could have a very powerful impact.
- Highlighting positive examples. This would include peers who support students with disabilities, or teachers and parents that support pregnant students to stay in school. Making visible, and where possible publicly praising or rewarding such alternative behaviour, can be a powerful tool in shifting social norms.
- Learning from what has worked. There appears to be a shift in attitudes underway around the inclusion of students with disabilities. Learning how this came about, and what was required to enable it, could be useful in addressing the exclusion of other marginalised groups.

Stakeholders suggested that practical steps to facilitate inclusion could involve:

- Designing school activities (such as sporting competitions) in ways that facilitate the inclusion of all students, including those with disabilities.

- Systematically providing mobility aids and specialised equipment required for students with disabilities to access the school and participate in learning.
- Reviewing and adapting the school facilities, including WASH.
- Providing spaces for breast feeding, and spaces where pregnant girls can rest during the school day.
- Making provisions for students who are breast feeding to sit exams.

Stakeholders suggested that strengthening school structures and capacities to promote inclusion could involve:

- Training for all teachers on inclusion issues, and the rights and needs of marginalised students. It would be useful if this included a focus on empowering marginalised students.
- Development of a school wide inclusion policy that provides:
    - Clear guidance for teachers on how to support marginalised students and oversight of teacher behaviour in relation to these students
    - Rules and consequences for students regarding bullying of marginalised students
- Financial support for the poorest students or those without family support, including to purchase materials required to participate in school.
- Systematic availability of emotional support /counselling to students who are experiencing exclusion in school.
- Strengthening student-teacher communication channels so students can raise exclusion related challenges and seek teachers help. This could be through student – teacher committees.

It is important to note that while some of these measures can be adopted at school level, others, such as adapting classrooms and WASH facilities, providing accessible learning materials, or providing financial support to students, require either significant funding and/or expertise and are challenges that need to be addressed at a systemic rather than individual school level.

Section 3. SRH education in schools

In relation to the issue of SRH education in schools, the research sought to answer the following overarching research question: What is required to deliver the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum and communicate effectively on SRH issues so that all young people can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health?

In order to answer this question, the research investigated:

- Current knowledge of SRH issues and concerns about sex and relationships among adolescents
- Existing provision of SRH education for adolescents
- Preferences regarding who should deliver SRH education and what information should be included
- The acceptability of schools delivering SRH education, and the capacity of schools to do this

Current levels of SRH knowledge among adolescents

There were mixed levels of knowledge about SRH among the students that participated in the research. Most students understand the need to use contraception to avoid pregnancy and were

aware of the following types of contraceptives: contraceptive implants (captain band), condoms, contraceptive pills, IUDs, and contraceptive injections. However, some students also believed that the traditional method of tying a rope around a woman's waist could be effective to prevent pregnancy. Some students reported being aware of the importance of consent, respect and joint responsibility for contraception and family planning within sexual relationships.

Girls had limited information about the menstrual cycle, but they were aware of the importance of personal hygiene during menstruation. However, they reported that they were not always able to maintain personal hygiene because of lack of access to menstrual pads. They would like these to be made available free at school. Students were aware that some women and girls have abortions and reported that parents sometimes encourage their daughters to do this if they become pregnant. Most students did not have a solid understanding of puberty, the changes that girls' and boys' bodies go through at this age and the causes of these changes.

Adolescents' concerns in relation to sex and SRH

Students reported a variety of concerns around issues of sex and SRH. These varied greatly between female and male students.

Female students reported worrying about the dangers of having sex at a young age, and about the risk of pregnancy and the negative impact this could have on their future education and prospects. They were also worried about the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In addition, female students were concerned about the possibility of being negatively influenced by peers in relation to sexual behaviour, and about receiving incorrect or bad advice about sex from their friends.

Female students reported that they frequently have to enter a sexual relationship that they do not want or engage in transactional sex in order to get money for basic needs. This is a cause of deep distress and anxiety for them, especially as they know they are risking pregnancy. This was particularly the case for girls who are not residing with their family. For example, a student in Koinadugu reported "*The thing that worries me most about sex and relationships is the stress we get from the people we are residing with. Some of our carers don't help us with money for schooling and basic needs, or when they do give us money their children are so jealous that they take the money away from us. That is why we engage in sexual relationships, at least our boyfriends give us money we can keep."* Likewise, a student in Fabala reported *"For the girls that are coming from the village, most of them need to have boyfriends so that they will be able to survive in the big town; otherwise, they will not be able to survive because their parents are not here."* However, those living with families are also sometimes pressured by parents to engage in sexual relationships for money. For example, a student in Western Area Urban reported *"Some parents actively contribute to their daughters getting pregnant by advising them to find a boyfriend and take care of themselves, even suggesting that the boyfriend take care of the parents as well. Some parents even deliberately withhold lunch, compelling their daughters to seek support elsewhere."*

Female students were also very concerned about sexual violence and rape. They reported that many girls experience such violence, and that girls that hawk in the streets are particularly vulnerable. Students in Koinadugu made the following statements: *"They will encounter some male customers who may want to take advantage of them by having sex with them"; "There are some specific sets of men who used to stand at unfinished buildings and call them as if they wanted to buy from them. When they go to these unfinished buildings, they will push them in and have sex with them forcefully without their consent. Sometimes they cover their mouths, so they do not shout;"* and *"Sometimes, the men will call you into their room to sell; when you enter their room, that is when they will rape you."*

While adolescent girls do have some information about SRH matters such as contraception and STIs, the fact that they are being forced into unwanted sexual relationships or exposed to sexual violence and rape means that they unable to use this information to protect themselves. Therefore, meaningful SRH education for adolescent girls must be based on the realities of girls experience of sexual exploitation and violence.

Male students expressed far fewer concerns about sex and SRH. One point that was raised by a few of them is that boys are not listened to when they ask questions about sex, and SRH information provision is less targeted at them. They were concerned that parents do not have the time or interest to discuss sex and SRH issues with their children.

Current sources of SRH information

Students reported getting information on relationships, sex and SRH from a variety of sources. The most commonly reported sources were family and others in the community. However, these are not necessarily reliable sources of information. They included:

- Friends and peers
- Parents and family (particularly mothers and sisters providing information to girls on menstruation and on sexual health and contraception. There were less reports of boys receiving information from parents and family)
- Other adults in the community
- Older boyfriends (in the case of female students)
- Religious leaders preaching and leading discussions about these issues within the community

Some students get information from different types of media, some of which appear to be more appropriate and reliable than others. These include:

- Social media (WhatsApp, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram)
- Internet (including online pornography)
- Films and television
- Radio (information programmes provided by authorities, NGOs and others working in the SRH field, and hence largely reliable and appropriate)

It was also reported that some students get information from more formal SRH education provision, both in school and outside of school. These information sources appear the most likely to be reliable and appropriate. However, they are not available in all communities. They include:

- School teachers (SRH issues were reported to be covered in the Personal and Social Development curriculum, as well as in some Biology and Physical Health Education classes. However, whether any SRH information was provided at school, and the extent of such information, varied between schools)
- NGOs (A variety of NGOs were reported to provide life skills sessions; community outreach and sensitisation; community drama; and presentations in school assemblies and other spaces. NGO’s provide detailed information about and sometimes direct access to contraception)
- Community Health Officers visiting schools to provide SRH information.
- Community members and "School Mamas" trained by Leh wi Lan

Preferences regarding who should provide SRH education to adolescents

Across the different stakeholders there were a variety of preferences and suggestions regarding who should deliver SRH education to adolescents. However, it is noticeable that almost all stakeholders believe that schools should play a central role in doing this, alongside other institutions and actors.

Students are strongly in favour of receiving more comprehensive SRH education within school. They would also like to receive SRH information from their parents. Girls, in particular, stressed that they want to receive SRH information from their mothers because of the close and trusting mother-daughter relationship. Although it was also reported that discussing issues related to sex can be taboo within families. In addition, students reported that they would like opportunities for peer learning and sharing of experiences on SRH issues, and that they would also like to have information provided by NGOs.

These findings suggest that adolescents would like SRH information to be provided by a variety of sources. Some, such as schools and NGOs, with more focus on accurate information provision, and others, such as peers and parents, providing space to discuss issues with people that they trust.

Parents would like to provide SRH education to their children themselves, although some recognise that they may lack the necessary information to do this. They would also like teachers, youth leaders, community leaders and NGOs to play a role in educating adolescents on SRH issues.

School staff believe that schools have a central role to play in delivering SRH education. However, they also suggested that other actors should be involved in this, including community health workers and nurses, religious leaders, and community leaders and traditional authorities.

Local officials and community leaders agreed that schools should play a central role in providing SRH education and suggested this could be done both by teachers and school mentors. They also suggested that the following actors play a role in providing SRH education: parents, health professionals and community health workers, mothers clubs, chiefs, and mammy queens.

Preferred content of SRH education

Stakeholders identified a wide range of issues that they belief SRH education should cover. While there was strong overlap between the issues identified by different categories of stakeholders, there were also some clear differences that could cause sensitivities when designing and delivering a SRH curriculum.

Students identified that they would like SRH education to cover the following issues:

- The menstrual cycle and menstrual hygiene (identified as important only by girls)
- Relationships, including discussion of different types of romantic and sexual relationships, and what makes a healthy relationship
- Preventing pregnancy, including information about different forms of contraception, how to use them correctly, and their benefits and drawbacks
- Prevention of STIs
- Risks of engaging in early sex (e.g. Emotional immaturity to manage sexual relationship, risk of pregnancy and early marriage etc)
- Information about sexual intercourse (boys reported that they want information about ‘how to have sex’)

Parents reported that, while they want their children to receive SRH education, they are concerned that this education might encourage their children to have sex. Parents identified that they would like SRH education to focus strongly on promoting abstinence and providing information on the risks of engaging in early sex. In this sense, there is a clash between the preferences of parents and students in terms of preferred SRH content. Parents preferences focus more on encouraging adolescents not to have sex, while students preferences focus more on information that equips them to engage safely in sex and relationships.

However, parents did also report that they would like their children to have information on how to avoid pregnancy and on the menstrual cycle and hygiene, both of which were areas that adolescents also prioritised.

The majority of school staff reported that SRH education should cover all aspects of sex and relationships, including clear information on how to access family planning services and contraceptive products. However, a few teachers did express concern that providing such comprehensive SRH education might encourage students to have sex.

Acceptability of schools providing SRH education

All stakeholders welcomed the idea of schools providing SRH education. This was widely viewed as a means of ensuring all children get comprehensive and accurate SRH information, and of avoiding unplanned pregnancies among school students. Several stakeholders reported that covering SRH issues at school is particularly important because cultural taboos prevent many parents from talking to their children openly about sex at home. Many stakeholders stated that they would like to see a health professional, such as a nurse, play a role in providing SRH education in schools, which they see as preferable to teachers delivering this alone.

Students suggested that teachers are already recognised as a trusted source of information and would therefore be well placed to provide education on SRH. They also believe teachers have the necessary knowledge to do this. Students would like to receive dedicated classes on SRH that cover all the relevant issues in a structured way, as they are aware that they currently have gaps in their knowledge about SRH. Female students would like to receive SRH education from female teachers.

Parents would like schools to deliver SRH education and believe that teachers are knowledgeable enough to do so. However, they also suggested that having a health professional involved could make the information provided more accurate and detailed. Meanwhile, community leaders reported that they would like to see SRH as a mandatory part of the school curriculum, but that this should be combined with a robust community sensitisation programme.

School leaders and staff generally agreed that providing more systematic and in-depth SRH education in schools would be positive and beneficial for students, and reported that they were willing to take on this role. They stated that providing SRH education in school would ensure that students have accurate information; combat misinformation from peers or social media; enable female students to avoid pregnancy and dropping out of school; and better prepare students for adult life. They also believe that students will act as a conduit in sharing the SRH information that they receive at school with the wider community. School staff suggested that classroom teachers are the most suitable people within the school to deliver SRH education, although school mentors and counsellors could also play a role.

Supporting delivery of SRH education through schools

It is clear that there is widespread demand for SRH education to be provided at school, as well as a willingness within schools to deliver this. However, school leadership and staff, as well as education officials and other stakeholders, stressed that schools require significant support and capacity development if they are to deliver SRH education in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Recommendations for strengthening school capacity to deliver SRH education are listed below:

- While a very small number of teachers have already received training on SRH education, the vast majority have not. Teachers require training and materials to be able to deliver SRH education effectively. This involves not just training on the information and knowledge that teachers will need to impart, but also training on how to discuss SRH issues with students in a respectful, sensitive and non-discriminatory manner. This is particularly important given the current high levels of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour by teachers. Training should be followed up with refresher sessions, oversight and mentoring to ensure that teachers are delivering SRH education correctly.
- Schools should be provided with SRH educational materials, including teaching materials for teachers and learning materials for students.
- SRH education in schools should be provided separately for girls and boys and led by female and male teachers respectively. Not only is this good practice, in the Sierra Leone context is it particularly critical that women deliver SRH education for girls, in order to create an environment of trust given the high levels of sexual harassment by male teachers. However, this is particularly challenging given how few female teachers there are in schools. Schools may need to draw on mentors/counsellors or outside resources such as health professionals or NGO staff to ensure that SRH education sessions for girls are led by women.
- It is important that SRH education for girls takes account of the exploitative and violent contexts in which many girls have sex. For example, taking account of the fact that in such situations girls may not be able to negotiate safe sex even if they have all the necessary information about contraception. It should also include providing girls with information about sexual harassment, sexual violence, and related support services and reporting mechanisms.
- SRH education for students, as well as engagement on these issues with parents, should address the issue of families encouraging their girls to engage in sexual relationships for material gain. This needs to be done sensitively, with a focus on shifting the way that adolescent girls are viewed and valued within families.
- Health professionals should be invited to visit schools and discuss SRH topics with students as part of SRH education. This is particularly important for providing more detailed information and answering students' questions where teachers may not have the knowledge required to do this.
- SRH education content must be tailored to be age appropriate and suitable for the maturity level of students.
- It is important to understand the specific SRH education needs of students with disabilities and to ensure that these needs are addressed within the SRH content provided in schools. Also, that all materials used for SRH education are accessible.
- SRH education should take into consideration the traditional backgrounds of students, aiming to deliver all the necessary information without causing offense or alienating communities.
- It is important to combine SRH education in schools with engagement and information for parents on SRH issues. This can help to overcome existing concerns among parents that SRH education will have a negative effect and encourage students to engage in sex. It can also enable parents to provide correct information and reinforce positive messages to their children at home.

- It is important to ensure that SRH education reaches rural communities without schools. Therefore, provision must not be limited to schools, but also taken into communities. A good option could be a radio programme that provides SRH content in an engaging way, which families are encouraged to listen to together. This would not just serve to provide information, but also prompt more discussion and openness about SRH issues between parents and children.
- Delivering systematic and comprehensive SRH education through schools requires funding and investment, for example in teacher training, staff time, materials and resources, bringing in experts, and outreach to parents and communities. Without such investment it is unlikely to work.

Conclusion

The findings from this research demonstrate that violence and exclusion remain serious and widespread problems within schools in Sierra Leone, undermining the rights of many children to education and to freedom from violence. This is in line with existing evidence from previous studies in schools in Sierra Leone. Critically, the findings show that patterns of violence and exclusion are driven by a combination of interrelated structural and systemic factors, and social norms and attitudes. Efforts to address violence and exclusion in schools must take account of these complex drivers.

Although levels of violence and exclusion remain high, the research identified that some important positive shifts in attitudes and behaviours are underway. These appear to be due to policy changes and to awareness raising and sensitisation in support of new policies. Most notably, the Radical Inclusion policy, and sensitisation related to it, is raising awareness about marginalised students' rights to be included in school and resulting in new policies and practices in some schools. Most notably, in the case of students with disabilities, the combination of the Radical Inclusion policy alongside sensitisation work appears to be contributing to a significant shift in norms, attitudes and behaviours. Likewise, while violence and abuse by teachers remains high and must be addressed as an urgent priority, the research found some evidence that the banning of corporal punishment is reducing this practice to some extent. Documenting, making visible and learning from such positive change is critical both for its catalytic effect and to inform future interventions.

In relation to SRH education, while current provision is weak, there appears to be strong consensus within communities on the need for such education, and widespread agreement that it should be provided by schools. However, there are differing visions for, and some concerns about, what the content of such SRH education should involve. Likewise, there are serious questions regarding schools' existing capacity to deliver SRH education.

It is important to stress that this research focused on problems, and their potential solutions, at school level. The recommendations in this report can therefore be used by schools to help address challenges related to violence, exclusion and SRH education. However, these problems - of violence, exclusion, and inadequate SRH education - must be understood as deeply ingrained and systemic, and cannot be adequately addressed by individual schools in isolation. Wider action is needed to address challenges within the whole education system, for example in relation to systems of accountability and oversight, teacher recruitment and training, and school infrastructure and facilities. Likewise, much wider work is needed to address the underlying norms and attitudes that fuel violence and exclusion, such as gender discriminatory norms that make girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation and stigmatise them for

becoming pregnant. More broadly still, structural factors, including those that result in the poorest students dropping out of school to work, must also be taken into account.

The findings from this research indicate further areas that it would be useful to investigate. It could be useful to document in greater detail the way in which attitudes to students with disabilities are shifting and how this shift has come about. This could deepen understanding about 'what works' in to promote more inclusive norms within schools and communities in Sierra Leone. Likewise, given that so many girls engage in sexual relationships to get the money needed to fund their basic needs, more in-depth research could be useful to understand the experiences of these girls and identify entry points to support them and their families to avoid this outcome. There is also is a clear need to know more about the experiences of students facing intersectional exclusion, such as pregnant students who have a disability, and to understand how best to reach and support these students. Finally, given the concerning rise in drug use among boys as a factor in school violence, it would be useful to understand more about the pathways through which boys become involved with drugs and possible intervention points.

Annex 1, Research Matrix

The below matrix outlines the main questions that the research will seek to answer, the sub-questions that it will investigate in order to answer each of these questions, the type of evidence it will gather, and the tools it will use to do so.

The literature review reveals that in relation to Research Questions 1 and 2 there is already a significant amount of general evidence available about patterns of violence and exclusion in schools in Sierra Leone. Therefore, in investigating these two questions the research will focus heavily on the implications of violence and exclusion for specific groups of marginalised students, about which there is far less available evidence. These groups will include students with disabilities, pregnant girls, students who are living away from their families, and any other group that is facing marginalisation within a particular community.

For this reason, in addition to the research questions and sub-questions outlined below, the research will also seek to identify in each community which groups beyond those already mentioned may be facing marginalisation. For example, this could include students experiencing high levels of poverty, living in a stigmatised sub-community or location, or from a particular ethnic group. Questions to identify locally specific patterns of marginalisation will be included in key informant interviews and FGDs with school leaders, community leaders and local CSOs.

For question 3, as the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum is not yet being rolled out in schools, the research will primarily look at other examples of SRH information provision to adolescents to identify lessons from these. It will also gather evidence on the perspectives of different stakeholders regarding how the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum should be delivered, as well as existing willingness and capacity to deliver this curriculum through schools.

Main research question	Sub-questions	Types of evidence	Research tools
Research question 1. Which types of violence take place in school, how is this violence perceived and responded to, and what strategies could address this violence? (with a focus on marginalised groups of students)	*Understanding general manifestations of violence:* • What are the most common forms of violence perpetrated in schools? • Who are the main perpetrators and victims of these forms of violence? *Understanding marginalised students experience of violence:* • Do students with disabilities have a different experience of violence and why? • Do students living away from their family have a different experience of violence and why? • Do pregnant girls have a different experience of violence and why?	Descriptions from students of experiencing or witnessing violence. Descriptions from students and their families of experiences reporting violence. Perceptions of students and their families regarding school attitude to violence and response to violent incidents. Perceptions of students and their families regarding	In-depth individual interviews with students with disabilities, pregnant students, students living away from family, other categories of marginalised students. In-depth interviews with the parents/ guardians of marginalised students. Mapping exercise with mixed groups of students, mapping sites and types of violence in school premises.

	• Do other marginalised groups of students have a different experience of violence and why? *Understanding responses to violence:* • Are any of these forms of violence perceived as acceptable? If so, by whom and why? • Which types of violence are most likely to be reported and by whom? • Which types of violence do not get reported and why? • What happens to a victim of violence when an incident is reported? • What happens to a perpetrator of violence when an incident is reported? • Do marginalised students face particular barriers in reporting violence? • Are marginalised students treated differently when they report violence? • What mechanisms are in place to report violence? Are these mechanisms used and are they effective? • Is the national referral protocol being effectively implemented? Why/why not? *Identifying strategies to strengthen responses to violence:* • What could be done to strengthen knowledge and skills among school staff and other key stakeholders to prevent and address violence? Particularly violence against marginalised students? • What could be done to address the norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence in school? In particular those that perpetuate violence towards marginalised students? • What could be done to strengthen reporting and response mechanisms? To make these mechanisms more accessible and responsive to marginalised students? To	effective strategies to address violence. School leadership and staff perceptions regarding manifestations of violence in school, particularly towards marginalised students. School leadership and staff description of existing attitudes and practices in relation to reporting, responding to, or referring violent incidents. School leadership and staff perspective regarding effective strategies to prevent and respond to violence, particularly for marginalised students. Perspective of community leaders, members of relevant committees, officials, and local CSOs on manifestations of violence, attitudes to violence and current responses to violence, with a focus on marginalised students. Perspective of community leaders, members	KII interview with school principal KII with key teachers (including those responsible for safety) Root cause analysis of violence and identifying pathways of change (fishbone diagram) with representatives of school management committee, school safety committee, community teacher association. FGD with community leaders KII with relevant local CSOs or support groups KIIs with relevant officials (education, social work)

	strengthen implementation of the National Referral Protocol? • What could be done to support and empower marginalised children and their families to report or take a stand against violence? • Are there examples of successful prevention efforts or responses to violence? What were the factors that contributed to this success?	of relevant committees, officials and local CSOs on potential strategies to address violence, particularly towards marginalised students.	
Research question 2. How do social norms drive exclusion from school and what works in addressing these social norms and promoting inclusion? (with a focus on marginalised groups of students)	*Identifying exclusionary social norms:* • What are the social norms that drive exclusion of pregnant girls from school? • What are the social norms that drive exclusion of students with disabilities from school? • What are the social norms that drive exclusion of other marginalised groups of students from school (e.g. students living away from family, students living in extreme poverty etc?) • How do different forms of discrimination intersect to exacerbate exclusion from school? • Are there differences between how people think marginalised students should be treated and how marginalised students are actually treated (injunctive vs descriptive norms)? • Is it possible to identify overarching meta norms that drive multiple forms of exclusion? *Understanding manifestation and impact of social norms that drive exclusion from school:* • How are these social norms expressed or communicated? • Through what positive or negative sanctions are these social norms enforced (e.g. approval / disapproval)? • How do these social norms affect the choices and behaviours of those around marginalised students? (e.g.	Beliefs of marginalised children and their parents regarding whether child should go to school. Perceptions of marginalised students (or ex-students) regarding their treatment by school staff and peers and how this impacts their access to and participation at school. Perceptions of parents of marginalised students regarding treatment of their child by school staff and peers and how this impacts their child's access to and participation at school. School staff and students' beliefs about whether marginalised students should be at school and the impact of their presence (e.g. bad	River of life activity with groups of marginalised children In-depth interviews with marginalised children and their parents. Participatory root cause analysis on drivers of exclusion and enablers of inclusion (using fishbone diagram) with representatives from school management committee, school safety committee, community teacher association. KII with school principal. KII with key senior teachers (including any with responsibility for issues of inclusion) KIIs with local CSOs or support groups FGD with community leaders KIIs with relevant officials (education, social work)

	parents, teachers and school leadership, fellow students, wider community) • How do these social norms affect the choices and behaviours of marginalised students themselves? • How do exclusionary social norms interact with structural barriers to drive exclusion of marginalised students? *Learning from what is working:* • Are there examples where marginalised students have been able to stay in school despite exclusionary norms? What factors made this possible? And did these positive examples influence the beliefs and behaviour of others? • Have there been any efforts to address exclusionary social norms and promote inclusion in schools (e.g. training for teachers, discussion in class, special provisions for marginalised students etc)? If so, what impact has this had and why? • Have exclusionary social norms shifted or changed in recent years? If so, in what way and what contributed to these changes? • Has there been sensitisation on 'Radical Inclusion' policy? If so, is this having any impact on social norms and behaviours that drive exclusion? *Identifying entry points and strategies to support norm change:* • Who are the reference group and opinion leaders for these social norms? • Who within school/ community could act as change agents to work for norm change? • What could be an alternative, inclusive social norm that could be promoted? What legal, moral, social factors could give legitimacy to a new norm?	influence, hold the class back etc.) School staff and students' beliefs about how marginalised students *should* be treated and their descriptions of how these students *are* treated. Perspective of community leaders, members of relevant committees, officials, and local CSOs on whether marginalised groups of students should attend school; the impact of their attendance; how they are and should be treated; and existing barriers to their full attendance and participation. Perceptions of all stakeholders regarding whether, how and why norms are changing. Reports from all stakeholders of any examples of positive deviance and impact from this. Perspectives of all stakeholders regarding who to work with for norm change and alternative norms. Perceptions of all stakeholders	

		regarding effective strategies to change exclusionary norms.	
Research question 3. What is required to deliver the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum and communicate effectively on SRH issues so that all young people can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health?	• Who is currently delivering SRH information to adolescents, in what settings and to what groups of adolescents? • What approaches and delivery modes do they use to do this? • How effective are these approaches and delivery modes? Are there any that show results in supporting behaviour change? • Which approaches and delivery modes do adolescents prefer and why? • Which approaches and delivery modes do parents prefer and why? • What approaches and delivery modes are most appropriate to ensure that girls, adolescents with disabilities, and other marginalised groups of adolescents can fully participate in and benefit from SRH information provision? • Who do adolescents/parents/ teachers/other key stakeholders think is best placed to deliver SRH information? Why? • Do school staff want to deliver the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum? Why / why not? • Do school staff believe that they have the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to deliver the CAHS curriculum? What further skills, knowledge and support do they require?	Map of actors providing SRH information to adolescents in research communities (boys/girls clubs, CSOs etc.). *(Research sites will include areas where there is some SRH information for adolescents being provided. For example, where Save the Children is working on this in Kailahun.)* Description of actors providing SRH information regarding their approach and impact. Perspectives of adolescents regarding desirable and effective SRH information provision. Perspectives of parents regarding desirable and effective SRH information provision. Perspectives of school leaders and teachers regarding willingness, knowledge, and capacity to deliver Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum.	Mapping of SRH information provision in community. KIIs with providers of SRH information to adolescents. KIIs with school principals KIIs with key teachers (including any with responsibility on SRH education). Brainstorming exercise on SRH provision with adolescents FGD with groups of parents KIIs with MBSSE officials responsible for rolling out Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. KII with relevant officials FGD with community leaders

		Perspectives of all stakeholders regarding most effective way to deliver Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum.	

Annex 2, Research Tools

This document contains all the research tools that will be used with different stakeholders.

It is important to note that some core research tools, such as interviews with school principals and teachers, will be conducted in every school that the research covers. However, other research tools, such as the river of life exercise with marginalised groups of students, will be conducted only in some locations where it is both possible and relevant to do so. This is indicated in the list below.

List of all research tools:

1. KII with school principal, key teachers (including those responsible for safety, pastoral care or inclusion), school counsellors and school mentors. *Conducted in all locations*

2. KII with marginalised students or ex-students, including: students with disabilities, pregnant students, students who are mothers, and students living away from family. These interviews could be done at the school premises or an alternative site, for example in a CSO/OPD office or in the child's home. *Conducted only in locations where it is possible to identify such students.*

3. KII with parents/ guardians of marginalised students. We need to identify the best place to conduct these interviews. We could consider interviewing both marginalised children and their parents in their homes or in the office of a local CSO/OPD that works with them. *Conducted only in locations where it is possible to identify such students.*

4. KII with a member of staff from relevant local CSOs, OPDs, support groups for teen mothers etc. *Conducted in locations where such entities exist.*

5. KIIs with providers of SRH information to adolescents. These could be CSOs, NGOs, boys and girls clubs, or other entities that provide SRH education. *Conducted in locations where such entities exist.*

6. KIIs with relevant officials. In each case there should be an interview with the district education official. There can also be one or two more interviews with other officials including social workers, or FSU officers. *Interview with district education official in all locations, with other officials as considered relevant depending on context.*

7. FGD with groups of parents. This would be a mixed group of parents from the school, with children of different ages. It does not need to include parents of marginalised children, although it could do so. We need to identify the best place for this FGD to be conducted. *Conducted in all locations.*

8. FGD with community leaders such as chiefs, religious leaders, female community leaders such as Mammy Queens or heads of women's groups. *Conducted in all locations.*

9. FGD with representatives of school management committee, school safety committee, community teacher association. *Conducted in all locations where such committees /associations are functioning.*

10. River of life activity conducted with (a) group of students with disabilities in schools where Sight Savers has had interventions and (b) group of students or ex- students who are pregnant or are mothers. *Conducted in some locations.*

11. Discussion on violence and exclusion with separate groups of male and female students. *Conducted in all locations.*

12. Exercise and questionnaire on SRH information needs with separate groups of male and female adolescents. *Conducted in all locations.*

1. Interview guide: Principal, teachers, school mentors, guidance counsellors

Introduction

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IfD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help MBSSE improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and to support the delivery of the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. The findings may also be included in published reports.

When the research is complete, we will share the findings with the schools, communities and other people who took part.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to understand the views and experiences of school principals and teachers about violence, exclusion, and sexual and reproductive health education.

We will record the name of your school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Questions on violence:

- What are the most common types of violence that occur in this school? (Prompt: violence perpetrated by adults, violence perpetrated by children, sexual harassment, violent disciplinary methods, bullying)

- How are these different types of violence viewed? Are people concerned about them or do they think they are just a normal part of school life?

- What do you think are the main causes of this violence? (prompt on drivers such as social norms, poor infrastructure, teachers low professional training, lack of awareness of code of conduct etc)

- Thinking about these different types of violence. Are there any types that are frequently reported to school authorities? Why are these types reported and not others?

- What mechanisms does the school have for reporting violent incidents? What does the school do when it receives such a report? (Prompt: Check if there is awareness of national referral protocol)

- Which groups of students face most marginalisation at school and in the community? (Prompt: children with disabilities, pregnant girls, children living away from home, what other groups?)

- Do these marginalised students experience more violence or different types of violence in school? If so, why and in what way?

- Is it more difficult for marginalised students to report violence? Are they treated differently if they do report violence?

- Has the school undertaken any actions to address the problem of violence in school? And particularly violence towards marginalised students? If so, was it effective?

- What do you think should be done to prevent and respond to violence in school? And particularly violence against marginalised students?

Questions on exclusionary social norms

- Which groups of students are most at risk of dropping out of school and why? (Prompt: students with disabilities, pregnant girls, other marginalised groups, those with intersecting forms of marginalisation such as disabled girls)

- Are there groups of students who come to school but cannot fully participate in classes or are socially excluded by their peers? If so which groups and why? (Prompt on above categories of marginalised students)

- Is the fact that these groups of students drop out or are excluded something to worry about? Or is it just inevitable?

- I am now going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help understand the experience of marginalised students:
    - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the school. How would teachers react to having him in class? How would other children treat him? Do you think this treatment would be the same in other schools?

- If the 13-year-old boy has a cognitive disability then how would teachers react to having him in class? And how would other children treat him? Do you think this treatment would be the same in other schools?
- Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? Will people think that she should stay in school or leave school? Do you think this treatment would be the same in other schools?
- Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her? Do you think this treatment would be the same in other schools?

- Are there examples of students with disabilities staying in school and being able to participate? If so, what made this possible? And did this change people's attitudes about disabled students?

- Are there examples of pregnant students staying in school? If so, what made this possible? And did this change people's attitudes about students who are pregnant or are mothers?

- Have there been any efforts to promote inclusion in this school? If so, what impact has this had and why? (Prompt: examples would be training for teachers, discussion in class, special provisions for marginalised students etc)

- Have people's attitudes and behaviour towards marginalised students changed in recent years? If so, how, and why? Has the Radical Inclusion policy changed attitudes and behaviour?

- What could change people's attitudes towards marginalised students? Who could lead or influence such a change? (Prompt: who in the community has moral authority, who is a role model etc)

Questions on SRH education

- Do you think it is a good idea for schools to deliver education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents? Why / why not?

- If not, who in the community should deliver this curriculum and why?

- Do teachers have the necessary skills, knowledge, and support to deliver education on sexual and reproductive health? What further skills, knowledge or support do they require to do this?

2. Interview guide: Marginalised students

This interview guide can be used with students or ex-students with disabilities; students who are pregnant or are mothers; or students from other marginalised groups, such as those living away from their families. The terminology used in the questions will need to be adapted depending on the marginalised group that the student comes from.

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IfD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to understand the experiences of children with disabilities/girls who get pregnant/ other marginalised group in school.

We will record the name of your school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Background questions:

- What is your age and what school year are you in (if applicable)?
- Do you still attend school, and do you attend regularly? If not regularly, then why not?
- *For interviewees that have dropped out of school*: When did you leave school and why?

Questions on exclusionary social norms:

- Can you tell me how other children in the school treat you? (Prompt: Are they treated differently because of disability/pregnancy/other marginalised status? In what ways?)
- Can you tell me how teachers in the school treat you? (Prompt: Do teachers treat them differently because of disability/pregnancy/other marginalised status? In what ways?)
- When you are in the class are you able to participate fully in all learning activities? If not, why not?
- When you are in the playground do the other children include you? If not, why not?
- *For those students who are still attending school*: Do you ever think about leaving school because of the way that teachers and other students treat you? What are the things that have made it possible for you to stay at school? (Prompt: for example, a supportive teacher, adaptations in the classroom, support from peers etc)

- *For those students who are still attending school:* Are people surprised by the fact that you go to school? What do they say about it?

- *For those students who have dropped out:* What do people say about the fact that you left school? Do they approve or disapprove of this?

- *For those students who have dropped out:* What could the school have done to stop you from leaving school? Is there anything the school could do to encourage you to go back?

- What do you think could change people's attitudes towards students with disabilities / pregnant students/ other marginalised students? Who in the school or community could lead or influence such a change? (prompt: you may need to suggest some potential influencers – e.g., religious leader, school principal, youth leaders etc. Identify those with moral authority to prompt change)

Questions on violence:

- Do you feel safe at school? If not, why not?

- How do other students speak to you? Do they say different things to you because of your disability/pregnancy/other marginalised status? (Prompt: do other students say abusive things, patronising things etc)

- Are other children ever violent to you at school? Can you give me some examples of this violence?

- What happens when other children are violent to you? What do you do? Do teachers get involved?

- How do teachers speak to you? Do they say things to you that they do not say to other children? (Prompt: do teachers say offensive things, patronising things etc)

- Are teachers at your school ever violent to students? Have they been violent to you? Can you give me some examples of this violence? (Prompt on different forms of violence)

- What do you do if teachers say offensive things or are violent to you?

- Have you ever reported an incident where another student has said abusive things or been violent to you? Who did you report it to and what happened? If not, why didn't you report it?

- Have you ever reported an incident where a teacher has said abusive things or been violent to you? Who did you report it to and what happened? If not, why didn't you report it?

- What do you think the school could do to make you feel safer at school?

Questions on SRH education

- Have you ever received any information or education on sexual and reproductive health? Who provided this information (school, club, CSO etc)? What did you learn from it? Was it useful? Where you able to apply it to your everyday life?

- What type of information would you like about sexual and reproductive health? Who would you like to provide this information?

Final Question

- Can you tell me what you would like your life to be in 5 years time? What are your dreams and ambitions?

At the end of the interview ask the student if there is anything else they want to tell you or anything they want to ask you.

Also, tell the student that if they want to seek support in relation to violence or exclusion there are various organisations they can contact and talk through these options (local NGO service providers, OPD, support groups, social work, and FSU). Provide the student with a paper giving contact details of these organisations, so they can refer to it later.

3. Interview guide: Parents/carers of marginalised students

This interview guide can be used with parents of students or ex-students with disabilities; who are pregnant, or who are mothers. The terms used in the questions will need to be adapted depending on the marginalised group that the student comes from.

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to understand the experiences of children with disabilities/girls who get pregnant in school.

We will record the name of your child's school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Background questions:

- What is your child's age and school year?

- Does your child still attend school, and do they attend regularly? If not regularly, then why not?

- *Where the child has dropped out of school*: When did your child leave school and why?

Questions on exclusionary social norms:

- Can you tell me how other children in the school treat your child? (Prompt: Are they treated differently because of disability/pregnancy? In what ways?)

- Can you tell me how teachers in the school treat your child? (Prompt: Do teachers treat them differently because of disability/pregnancy? In what ways?)

- Why do you think teachers and children treat your child differently? (prompt: is this because of moral judgements, fear, misconceptions about people with disabilities etc)

- Can your child participate fully in class and in the playground? If not, why not? (prompt: this could be social exclusion or failure to adapt classes to child's needs)

- *Where child is still attending school*: Does your child ever think of leaving school because of the way they are treated? What are the things that have made it possible for your child to stay at school? (Prompt: for example, a supportive teacher, adaptations in the classroom, support from peers etc)

- *Where child is still attending school:* Are people surprised by the fact that your child goes to school? What do they say about it? (Prompt: are people approving or disapproving?)

- *Where child has dropped out:* What do people say about the fact that your child left school? Do they find this normal or are they surprised by it? (Prompt: are people approving or disapproving?)

- What could the school do to make your child feel more welcome and included? What could the school do to make you feel more involved as a parent/carer?

- What do you think could change people's attitudes towards students with disabilities / pregnant students/ other marginalised students? Who in the school or community could lead or influence such a change? (prompt: you may need to suggest some potential influencers – e.g., religious leader, school principal, mothers' groups etc. Identify who has moral authority to lead change)

Questions on violence:

- Do you think your child is safe at school? If not, why not?

- Are other children verbally abusive or violent to your child? What do they do?

- Are teachers verbally abusive or violent to your child? What do they do?

- Do people in this community think it is acceptable to be violent to children with disabilities/pregnant girls? If so, why do they think this?

- Have you ever reported an incident where another student has said abusive things or been violent to your child? Who did you report it to and what happened? If not, why didn't you report it?

- Have you ever reported an incident where a teacher has said abusive things or been violent to your child? Who did you report it to and what happened? If not, why didn't you report it?

- What do you think could be done to make your child safer at school?

- *In case parents have reported there is no violence or abuse:* Many children with disabilities/ pregnant girls face abuse or violence at school. What do you think are the reasons that your child has not abuse or violence? (prompt: positive actions by school, supportive community attitudes, etc)

Questions on SRH education

- Has your child ever received any information or education on sexual and reproductive health? Who provided this information (school, club, CSO etc)?

- What type of information would you like your child to receive about sexual and reproductive health? Who do you think should provide this information?

Final question

- Can you tell me what you would like your child's life to be in 5 years time? What are your dreams and ambitions for your child?

At the end of the interview ask the parent if there is anything else they want to tell you or anything they want to ask you.

Also, tell the parent that if they want to seek support in relation to violence or exclusion there are various organisations they can contact (local NGO service providers, local support groups for people with disabilities, social work, and FSU). Provide the parent with a paper giving contact details of these organisations, so they can refer to it later.

4. Interview guide: local CSOs

This interview guide can be used for KIIs with local CSOs that either work on supporting families who have children with disabilities, or on supporting teen mothers. You can adjust the wording of the questions to speak more specifically about 'children with disabilities' or about 'teenage girls' and 'adolescent mothers' depending on the focus of the CSO's work.

Introduction

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help MBSSE improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and to support the delivery of the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. The findings may also be included in published reports.

When the research is complete, we will share the findings with the schools, communities and other people who took part.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to get your insights about exclusion and violence that children in this community (or children with disabilities/ adolescent mothers etc.) face at school, as well as about what type of sexual and reproductive health education is most appropriate for them.

We will record the name of your organisation, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Questions on violence:

- What do you think are the most common types of violence that children face in school? (Prompt: violence perpetrated by adults, violence perpetrated by children, sexual harassment, violent disciplinary methods, bullying)

- How are these different types of violence viewed? Are people concerned about them or do they think they are just a normal part of school life?

- Which groups of children do you think are most marginalised in this community?

- And do these marginalised children experience more violence or different types of violence in school? If so, why and in what way?

- Is it more difficult for marginalised students and their families to complain about violence at school? Are they treated differently if they report violence?

- Have you been involved in supporting children and their families to report violence at school? If so, could you give me some examples of this?

- What do you think should be done to prevent and respond to violence in school? And particularly violence against marginalised students?

Questions on exclusionary social norms

- Which groups of students are most at risk of dropping out of school and why?

- Are there groups of students who go to school but cannot fully participate in classes or are socially excluded by their peers? If so which groups and why?

- Are people in the community concerned that these groups of students drop out or are excluded? Or do people think this is normal or inevitable?

- I am now going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help examine the experience of marginalised students (use the first two scenarios for CSOs working on disability, the second two scenarios for CSOs working with pregnant girls/teen mothers)
    - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the local school. How do you think that teachers and other children would treat him?
    - If the 13-year-old boy has a cognitive disability then how would teachers and other students treat him?
    - Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? What is likely to happen to her?
    - Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- Are there examples of students with disabilities/ teenage mothers staying in school and being able to participate? If so, what made this possible? And did this change people's attitudes about marginalised students?

- Have there been any efforts to address issues of discrimination against marginalised groups in the school or the community? If so, what impact has this had? (Prompt: the CSO may have examples from their own initiatives of something that has worked to address exclusion)

- Have people's attitudes and behaviour towards marginalised groups of children changed in recent years? If so, how, and why?

- Has there been sensitisation on 'Radical Inclusion' policy? If so, is this having any impact on exclusionary attitudes and behaviours in school?

- What could change people's attitudes towards marginalised children in school and in the community? Who in the community could lead or influence such a change?

Questions on SRH education

- Do you think it is a good idea for schools to deliver education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents? Why / why not?

- If not, who in the community should deliver this curriculum and why?

5. Interview guide: SRH education providers

This interview guide can be used for KIIs with any actors that provide SRH education to adolescents within the community such as CSOs, NGOs, boys and girls clubs, or other entities that provide SRH information and education. The main questions for these interviews only focus on SRH education and do not address the first two research questions. However, if the stakeholders being interviewed are likely to know about violence or exclusion in schools (e.g., they are school based clubs) then you can include the questions at the end.

Introduction

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help MBSSE improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and to support the delivery of the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. The findings may also be included in published reports.

When the research is complete, we will share the findings with the schools, communities and other people who took part.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to get your insights what sexual and reproductive health education currently exists for adolescents in the community, as well as how sexual and reproductive health education can best be delivered in future.

We will record the name of your organisation, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Main questions on SRH provision:

- Which groups of adolescents do you provide SRH education to? (prompt: ages, girls/boys, adolescents enrolled in specific programme or activity etc).

- What are the main topics that are covered in the SRH education that you provide? Are you using a specific curriculum?

- What approaches and delivery modes do you use to deliver SRH education? (prompt: information provision, discussions, activities etc.) Which of these approaches and delivery modes are most effective?

- What approaches do you use to encourage adolescents to adopt positive sexual and relationship behaviours? Are there any approaches that have been particularly effective in supporting behaviour change?

- What approaches and delivery modes do adolescents prefer for SRH education and why?

- Which approaches and delivery modes do parents prefer for SRH education and why? Are there any aspects of SRH education that parents are resistant to?

- What approaches and delivery modes are most appropriate to ensure that girls, adolescents with disabilities, and other marginalised groups of adolescents can fully participate in and benefit from SRH education?

- Who do you think is best placed to deliver SRH education to adolescents in this community and why?

- As you may know, it is planned that schools will deliver the new Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. Do you think that schools should deliver this curriculum and why/why not?

- Do you think teachers have the necessary skills, knowledge, and legitimacy with adolescents to deliver the curriculum? What support do you think schools might need to effectively deliver this curriculum?

- What do you think should be done to improve SRH education for adolescents?

If the stakeholder being interviewed on SRH education is also knowledgeable about violence or exclusion in schools (for example if they lead a school-based boys/girls club) then you can ask the following questions:

Additional questions on violence if the interviewee is likely to have knowledge on this:

- What do you think are the most common types of violence that children face in school? (Prompt: violence perpetrated by adults, violence perpetrated by children, sexual harassment, violent disciplinary methods, bullying)

- How are these different types of violence viewed? Are people concerned about them or do they think they are just a normal part of school life?

- Do marginalised children experience more violence or different types of violence in school? If so, why and in what way? (prompt: students with disabilities, pregnant girls and teen mothers, children living away from family, others)

- What do you think should be done to prevent and respond to violence in school? And particularly violence against marginalised students?

Additional questions on exclusionary social norms if the interviewee is likely to have knowledge on this:

- Which groups of students are most at risk of dropping out of school and why? (prompt: students with disabilities, pregnant girls and teen mothers, children living away from family, others)

- Are there groups of students who go to school but cannot fully participate in classes or are socially excluded by their peers? If so which groups and why? (prompt on different marginalised groups as above)

- Are people in the community concerned that these groups of students drop out or are excluded? Or do people think this is normal or inevitable?

- Are there examples of marginalised students (students with disabilities, teenage mothers etc) staying in school and being able to participate? If so, what made this possible? And did this change people's attitudes about marginalised students?

- Have there been any efforts to address discrimination against marginalised groups in the school or the community? If so, what impact has this had?

- Have people's attitudes and behaviour towards marginalised groups of children changed in recent years? If so, in what ways and why?

- What could change people's attitudes towards marginalised children in school and in the community? Who in the community could lead or influence such a change?

6. Interview guide: local officials

This interview guide can be used for KIIs with local officials, such as district education officials, social workers, FSU or others that are identified as relevant to the research. As different types of officials will have different sets of responsibilities and areas of expertise, it is not necessary to ask all these questions to each official. Instead, you can choose from the below list the questions that are relevant to the official that you are interviewing.

Introduction

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help MBSSE improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and to support the delivery of the Child and Adolescent Health Skills curriculum. The findings may also be included in published reports.

When the research is complete, we will share the findings with the schools, communities and other people who took part.

You have been asked to participate in this interview as we want to get your insights into issues related to violence and exclusion schools, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health education to adolescents (NOTE: You may want to just mention one or two of these issues as relevant to the interviewee. For example, if speaking to FSU the focus would probably just be on violence.)

We will record your job title but not your name, and we will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research or choose not to answer any question. Are you happy to participate in the interview?

Questions on violence:

- What do you think are the most common types of violence that children face in school? (Prompt: violence perpetrated by adults, violence perpetrated by children, sexual harassment, violent disciplinary methods, bullying)

- How are these different types of violence viewed? Are people concerned about them or do they think they are just a normal part of school life?

- Which groups of children do you think are most marginalised in this community?

- And do these marginalised children experience more violence or different types of violence in school? If so, why and in what way?

- Is it more difficult for marginalised students and their families to complain about violence at school? Are they treated differently if they report violence?

- Have you been involved in supporting children and their families to report violence at school? If so, could you give me some examples of this?

- What do you think should be done to prevent and respond to violence in school? And particularly violence against marginalised students?

Questions on exclusionary social norms:

- Which groups of students are most at risk of dropping out of school and why?

- Are there groups of students who go to school but cannot fully participate in classes or are socially excluded by their peers? If so which groups and why?

- Are people in the community concerned that these groups of students drop out or are excluded? Or do people think this is normal or inevitable?

- I am now going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help examine the experience of marginalised students:
    - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the local school. How do you think that teachers and other children would treat him?
    - If the 13-year-old boy has a cognitive disability then how would teachers and other students treat him?
    - Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? What is likely to happen to her?

Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- Are there examples of marginalised students (students with disabilities, teenage mothers etc) staying in school and being able to participate? If so, what made this possible? And did this change people's attitudes about marginalised students?

- Have there been any efforts to address issues of discrimination against marginalised groups in the school or the community? If so, what impact has this had?

- Have people's attitudes and behaviour towards marginalised groups of children changed in recent years? If so, how and why?

- Has there been sensitisation on 'Radical Inclusion' policy? If so, is this having any impact on exclusionary attitudes and behaviours in school?

- What could change people's attitudes towards marginalised children in school and in the community? Who in the community could lead or influence such a change?

Questions on SRH education

- Do you think it is a good idea for schools to deliver education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents? Why / why not?

- If not, who in the community should deliver this curriculum and why?

7. Focus group discussion with parents from school

The following FGD should be undertaken in each school with a mixed group of parents whose children are at the school.

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this discussion as we want to understand the perspectives of parents on these issues. We will record the name of your child's school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You do not have to participate in the discussion if you do not want to, and you are free to leave at any time. Do you have any questions?

Violence:

First, we are going to talk about violence at school. That could be violence by teachers towards students, or violence between students.

- What types of violence do you think are common in your child's school? (Prompt: if there are types of violence that they do not mention in the discussion ask about these. Ensure that you discuss both violence perpetrated by adults and violence perpetrated by other students).

- Which children are most of risk of violence at school? (Prompt: girls, boys, older students, younger students, students with disabilities, other marginalised students etc).

- Do parents or students report incidents of violence at school? Why/why not? If a parent or student does report a violent incident what action is taken?

- Has the school taken any action to address violence at school? What do you think the school should do to stop violence at school? (probe on how to end different types of violence – physical punishment, sexual harassment and exploitation, bullying, dating violence etc)

- Now we are going to discuss some different situations to understand what people think about these and how they usually respond:
    - Imagine a 14-year-old student is hit by his teacher because he or she spoke to the teacher rudely. Would most parents think this is a suitable punishment? Are there any situations where families would complain to the school if a teacher hit a student? Does this kind of violence happen often in your child's school?
    - Imagine a teacher tells a girl that he will give her good grades if she has sex with him. What would most girls do in this situation? If the girl or her family report the incident to the school, how would the school respond? Do you think teachers do this at your child's school?
    - Imagine there is a group of teenage boys who regularly make sexual comments to girls in their class. Do you think this is a problem or normal teenage behaviour? Should the school do anything about this?
    - Imagine a 13-year-old girl no longer wants to go to school because she is being bullied. What could the school do to respond? How do you think the school could prevent the bullying happening in the first place?

Exclusionary social norms:

Now we are going to talk about which groups of students are excluded in school and why that is.

- Which groups of students do you think are most socially excluded in this school? In what ways are they excluded? Why do you think they are excluded?

- I am going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help understand the experience of marginalised students:

- Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the school. How would teachers treat him? How would other children treat him? How do you think teachers and students should treat him? What about if the boy had a cognitive disability?
- Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? Will people think that she should stay in school or leave school? What do you think should happen to this girl?
- Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- What do you think the school could do to make sure all students are included and treated well? What do you think that parents and wider community members can do?

SRH education:

Finally, we are going to talk about sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents.

- Have your children ever received any information or education on sexual and reproductive health? Who provided this information? Were you happy with it?

- What type of information would you like your children to receive about sexual and reproductive health? Who would you like to provide this information? (Prompt: are they happy with the idea of school providing the information)

8. Focus group discussion with community leaders

The following FGD should be undertaken with a mix of different community leaders (e.g. chiefs, religious leaders, female community leaders such as Mammy Queens or heads of women's groups)

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this discussion as we want to understand the perspectives of different community leaders on these issues. We will record the name of this community, but not your name. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You do not have to participate in the discussion if you do not want to, and you are free to leave at any time. Do you have any questions?

Violence:

First, we are going to talk about violence at school. That could be violence by teachers towards students, or violence between students.

- What types of violence do you think are common in the local school? (Prompt: if there are types of violence that they do not mention in the discussion ask about these. Ensure that you discuss both violence perpetrated by adults and violence perpetrated by other students).

- Which children are most of risk of violence at school? (Prompt: girls, boys, older students, younger students, students with disabilities, other marginalised students etc).

- Do families ever report incidents of violence at school? Who do they report this to and what action is taken?

- Now we are going to discuss some different situations to understand what people think about these and how they usually respond:
  - Imagine a 14-year-old boy is hit by his teacher because he spoke to the teacher rudely. Would most people think this is a suitable punishment? Are there any situations where families would complain to the school if a teacher hit a student?
  - Imagine a teacher tells a girl that he will give her good grades if she has sex with him. What would most girls do in this situation? If the girl tells her family what would the family do? What would happen if the family reported the teacher?
  - Imagine there is a group of teenage boys who regularly make sexual comments to girls in their class. Do you think this is a problem or normal teenage behaviour? Should the school do anything about this?
  - Imagine a 13-year-old girl no longer wants to go to school because she is being bullied. What could the school do to respond? How do you think the school could prevent the bullying happening in the first place?

- What do you think the school and the community could do to stop violence at school? (probe on how to end different types of violence – physical punishment, sexual harassment and exploitation, bullying, dating violence etc)

Exclusionary social norms:

Now we are going to talk about which groups of students are excluded in school and why that is.

- Which groups of students do you think are most socially excluded in this school? In what ways are they excluded? Why do you think they are excluded? (prompt: probe on different marginalised groups)

- I am going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help understand the experience of marginalised students:
  - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the school. How would teachers and other children would treat him? How do you think teachers and students should treat him? What about if this boy had a cognitive disability?

- Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? Will people think that she should stay in school or leave school? What do you think should happen to this girl?

Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- What do you think the school could do to make sure all students are included and treated well? What do you think that the wider community can do?

SRH education:

Finally, we are going to talk about sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents.

- Have there been initiatives to provide education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents in this community? Who provided this information? Were people happy with it?

- Who do you think should provide education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents in this community? (Prompt: are they happy with the idea of school providing the information)

9. FGD - Representatives of school management committee, school safety committee, community teacher association

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this discussion as we want to understand your perspective on these issues. We will record the name of the school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You do not have to participate in the discussion if you do not want to, and you are free to leave at any time. Do you have any questions?

Violence:

First, we are going to talk about violence at school. That could be violence by teachers towards students, or violence between students.

- What types of violence do you think are common in this school? (Prompt: if there are types of violence that they do not mention in the discussion ask about these. Ensure that you discuss both violence perpetrated by adults and violence perpetrated by other students).

- Which children are most of risk of violence at school? (Prompt: girls, boys, older students, younger students, students with disabilities, other marginalised students etc).

- Do parents or students report incidents of violence at school? Why/why not? If a parent or student does report a violent incident what action is taken?

- Has the school taken any action to address violence at school? What do you think the school should do to stop violence at school? (probe on how to end different types of violence – physical punishment, sexual harassment and exploitation, bullying, dating violence etc)

- Now we are going to discuss some different situations to understand what people think about these and how they usually respond:
    - Imagine a 14-year-old student is hit by his teacher because he or she spoke to the teacher rudely. Would most parents think this is a suitable punishment? Are there any situations where families would complain to the school if a teacher hit a student? Does this kind of violence happen often in this school?
    - Imagine a teacher tells a girl that he will give her good grades if she has sex with him. What would most girls do in this situation? If the girl or her family report the incident to the school, how would the school respond? Do you think teachers ever do this at this school?
    - Imagine there is a group of teenage boys who regularly make sexual comments to girls in their class. Do you think this is a problem or normal teenage behaviour? Should the school do anything about this?
    - Imagine a 13-year-old girl no longer wants to go to school because she is being bullied. What could the school do to respond? How do you think the school could prevent the bullying happening in the first place?

Exclusionary social norms:

Now we are going to talk about which groups of students are excluded in school and why that is.

- Which groups of students do you think are most socially excluded in this school? In what ways are they excluded? Why do you think they are excluded?

- I am going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help understand the experience of marginalised students:
    - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the school. How would teachers treat him? How would other children treat him? How do you think teachers and students should treat him? What about if this boy had a cognitive disability?
    - Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? Will people think that she should stay in school or leave school? What do you think should happen to this girl?

Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- What do you think the school could do to make sure all students are included and treated well?

SRH education:

Finally, we are going to talk about sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents.

- Do you think it is a good idea for schools to deliver education on sexual and reproductive health to adolescents? Do teachers have the necessary knowledge, skills, and authority?

- Who else in the community could deliver this curriculum?

10. River of life exercise with marginalised students /ex-students

This exercise is to be undertaken with (a) groups of students with disabilities in schools where Sight Savers has had an intervention and (b) groups of pregnant girls and teen mothers.

The exercise could be done at school or in another place (CSO office, quiet outdoor space?), whichever is most practical in each context.

The exercise requires flip charts and marker pens for each participant as well as for the facilitator.

Purpose:

Through drawing a river, this method helps to access and communicate personal experiences, and facilitate group dialogue around the issues that the groups themselves identify. The expectation is that, through staged group activities moving from individual activity to group discussion, trust and rapport can be built with the researcher, and between the participants.

Rivers of Life can be useful to:

• generate reflection on experiences, enablers, influences and barriers or challenges;
• appreciate personal experiences
• generate dialogue
• identify and discuss the reasons behind the enablers and challenges,
• identify strategies for change

Things to consider:

- The river is a symbol of one's life course which is appropriate in many settings, but can also be drawn as a road or in another way – allow flexibility for cultural preferences.
- The river/road will flow through the key stages of the person's life. Each participant creates a visual map of their life, represented by the river. They will add tributaries, rough waters, rocks, flowers, fish etc to represent positive experiences and challenging times. The river and detail can be drawn on a flipchart, or represented using objects placed along the river if drawing is challenging.
- Careful facilitation to allow individuals to present their river without interruption, and to enable constructive dialogue in the group stage, can build trust and rapport in the group. This is of particular importance when sensitive topics are discussed.

- Since people are talking about their personal lives, they may share experiences that are upsetting. It is important to have appropriate safeguarding, counselling, and signposting support in place.
- The group should be no more than 8 people. Once all have drawn their rivers, one by one they present them, telling their story without interruption, but with gentle prompting if needed
- The group asks questions at the end. Once all have presented, the facilitator invites the group to identify common influences and challenges, and why these occur. A further step can be to prioritise these and agree actions.

Practical steps:

Part A: Drawing the river

- Introduce yourself, the research and why these students have been chosen (you can use the introductory text for the KII protocols)
- Explain that the exercise is to explore the experience that each of these students has had at school and to understand what challenges they have faced and how these have been overcome, or could be addressed. Explain that what is discussed during the exercise should be kept confidential and not shared with others.
- Explain that the exercise could be upsetting as they will talk about difficult things that happened to them. Say that if anyone does not want to participate that is fine and they can leave.
- Explain that they will be showing their life as a river with positive moments represented by fish, flowers, calm water, and negative moments represented by crocodiles, rocks and turbulent waters, or any other symbols they chose.
- Explain that the river should show their life from when they started Secondary School until now (or if more appropriate from when they were in Primary School until now, depending on the age of the student)
- Give each participant their own piece of flipchart paper and pen (note: if there are participants with disabilities who cannot draw on the paper, then they can give instructions to someone else to draw their river. This could be a parent, fellow student etc depending on where this exercise is conducted)
- Provide the questions that their river should address: “what are the most important challenges you have experienced at school since you started Secondary (or Primary) school and until now?” and “what factors have helped you to cope?”
- Draw an example of a river by drawing your own at the front of the room on a flipchart. Add examples from your own experience. Use symbols to show positive and negative moments in your river/story.
- Give participants time to individually draw their own rivers. While they are doing this you should go around the room checking that everybody has understood the activity and to answer any questions they might have.

Part B: Presentation and analysis of the rivers

- Invite each participant to present their river, asking others to listen respectfully, and to notice common and different factors.
- Once everyone has shared their river, ask the group to identify key points (e.g., challenges, enablers). Deepen the discussion about key points by asking ‘why’ questions to understand more about why the participants have faced these challenges and what have been the consequences. Ask what could be done to change things, who could lead change.

- If any of the participants do not want to present their river to the group because they feel shy or would find it distressing, they can also present it one-to-one to the researcher at the end of the session.
- Keep notes of the discussion

Wrapping up

As a final exercise ask each participant in turn the following question: Can you describe how you would like your life to be in 5 years time? What are your dreams and ambitions?

Thank the participants.

Share information with them on where they can report or get support for some of the issues discussed (violence, exclusion etc). This should be written information on a paper that they can take away with them.

(This has been drawn from: IDS, Practical guides for participatory methods series)

11.FGD with groups of female and male students

The following discussion should be undertaken in each school with a group of boys and a group of girls separately. These groups should be of mixed ages and include marginalised students if possible. Ideally the girls' group should be facilitated by a female researcher and the boys' group by a male researcher.

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IFD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project to understand issues of violence and exclusion in schools, as well as how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to help improve the way that schools address violence and exclusion, and deliver sexual and reproductive health education. The findings may also be included in published reports.

You have been asked to participate in this discussion as we want to understand the experiences of different students in this school. We will record the name of your school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You do not have to participate in the discussion if you do not want to, and you are free to leave at any time. Do you have any questions?

Violence:

First, we are going to talk about violence at school. That could be violence by teachers towards students, or violence between students.

- What types of violence are common in your school? (Prompt: if there are types of violence that they do not mention in the discussion ask about these. Ensure that you discuss both violence perpetrated by adults and violence perpetrated by other students).

- Which children are most of risk of violence at school? (Prompt: girls, boys, older students, younger students, students with disabilities, other marginalised students etc).

- Do parents or students report incidents of violence at school? Why/why not? If a parent or student does report a violent incident what action is taken?

- Has the school taken any action to address violence at school? What do you think the school should do to stop violence at school? (probe on how to end different types of violence – physical punishment, sexual harassment and exploitation, bullying, dating violence etc)

- Now we are going to discuss some different situations to understand what people think about these and how they usually respond:
    - Imagine a 14-year-old student is hit by his teacher because he or she spoke to the teacher rudely. Do you think this is a suitable punishment? Would the student's family complain to the school if this happened? Does this kind of violence happen often in your school?
    - Imagine a teacher tells a girl that he will give her good grades if she has sex with him. What would most girls do in this situation? If the girl or her family report the incident to the school, how would the school respond? Do you think this ever happens at your school?
    - Imagine there is a group of teenage boys who regularly make sexual comments to girls in their class. Do you think this is a problem or normal teenage behaviour? Should the school do anything about this?

Exclusionary social norms:

- Which groups of students do you think are most socially excluded in this school? In what ways are they excluded? Why do you think they are excluded?

- I am now going to present some hypothetical scenarios to help understand the experience of marginalised students:
    - Imagine that a 13-year-old boy with a physical disability joins the school. How would teachers treat him? How would other children treat him? How do you think teachers and students should treat him? What if the boy had a cognitive disability?
    - Imagine a 16-year-old girl becomes pregnant. What will teachers and other students think of her and how will they treat her? Will people think that she should stay in school or leave school? What do you think should happen to this girl?
    - Imagine a 14-year-old girl who has come from the village to live with friends of her parents/ extended family members. She often has no lunch because her parents cannot afford to send money regularly to her. How will other children treat her? How will teachers treat her?

- What do you think the school could do to make sure all students are included and treated well? What do you think that other students can do?

At the end of the discussion tell the students that if they want to talk in confidence about violence, or that if they want to seek support for violence they have experienced or report a violent incident that there are various organisations they can contact and talk through these organisations (local NGO service providers, social work, and FSU). Provide each child with a paper giving contact details of these organisations, so they can take this away and refer to it later.

Also, at the end of the discussion say that any child that wants to speak individually to one of the researchers they can do so and make some time for this.

12. Participatory exercise and questionnaire on SRH education needs

This exercise will be undertaken by separate groups of boys and girls and facilitated by female/male researchers respectively. The aim is to understand what SRH education young people need in order to make informed choices about sex and relationships. The exercise requires flipchart paper and markers. It might be convenient to conduct this exercise with the same groups of students that took part in the FGD discussion, straight after the FGD discussion. However, it can also be done with a different group of girls and boys, or at a different time, if that works better in a given location.

Introduction:

Begin by introducing the study and ensuring that you have informed consent from the research participants. You can use the text below as a model, adapting the language as needed to make it as clear as possible:

My name is X and I am a researcher with the Institute for Development (IfD) based in Freetown.

We are conducting a research project that includes finding out how sexual and reproductive health information is provided to adolescents. The findings of this research will be used to improve the sexual and reproductive health information that you receive.

When the research is complete, we will share the findings with the schools, communities and other people who took part.

You have been asked to participate in this exercise as we want to get your opinion about what girls/ boys need in order to make informed decisions about sex and relationships. We will record the name of your school, but will make sure that anything you tell us cannot be traced to you. You will not be identified by name and we will not report what you say to anyone without specifically discussing this with you first.

You can decline to participate in this research if you wish to or leave at any point.

The Exercise:

The facilitator explains the exercise and draws the 'fishbone diagram.' The facilitator will fill in the diagram with the children's suggestions throughout the exercise.

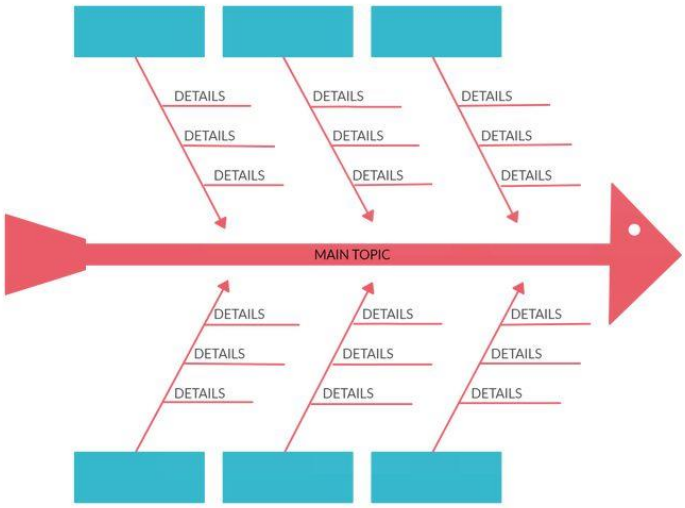
The facilitator asks *'what are the main things that girls and boys need in order to make informed decisions about sex and relationships*?' In order to stimulate the discussion, the facilitator can prompt with follow up questions like: what do girls and boys need to know about their bodies / sex/

relationships? What is the best way to give them this information? Who should give them the information? What should happen if they have questions or need support? How can they be helped to develop more positive behaviours such as respect in relationships or contraceptive use?

Each of the main factors that are needed for girls and boys to make informed decisions about sex are written in boxes at the top of 'bones' sticking out from the fish. You can add as many bones as you need.

Once all the main factors have been identified the group talks about each one in turn, discussing what it involves and how it should be done. For example, if a main factor is that they need someone they can talk to in confidence about these issues then the discussion would explore who this person should be, what their role would be, should this happen at school or elsewhere in the community etc. The facilitator will need to ask prompting follow up questions for each of the main factors identified.

What comes out as important for each main factor is written alongside the relevant 'bone' (where it says 'details' on the diagram. You can add as many points as needed.



Girls and boys have knowledge and can make informed decisions about sex and relationships.

Please keep the diagrams and take photos of them so we can draw on them for analysis.

Anonymous questionnaire:

Once the exercise is finished the children are given a piece of paper with the following questions written and space for them to provide answers.

1. What most worries you about sex and relationships?
2. What sex or relationship topic do you need more information about?
3. Where do you usually get information about sex and relationships?
4. Who would you like to give you information on sex and relationships?

The facilitator reads each of the questions out loud and explains them. The facilitator tells the children that this exercise is anonymous and no one will know who gave what answer.

The children individually write their answers on the paper, fold them and place them into a box.

Wrapping up

At the end of the session tell the students that if they want to talk in confidence about sex and relationships there are various organisations they can contact and give them details of these. Provide each child with a paper giving contact details of these organisations, so they can take this away and refer to it later.

Also, at the end of the session say that any child that wants to speak individually to one of the researchers can do so and make some time for this.

Annex 3, List of schools that participated in research

Sengbeh Pieh Memorial Senior Secondary School, Hamilton, Western Area Rural

St. Anthony Junior Secondary School, Yiffin, Koinadugu

Bafodia Agricultural Secondary School Bafodia

Wesleyan Secondary School, Kamabai, Bombali

Freetown Secondary School for Girls (FSSG), Brookfield, Western Area Urban

Gbinti Junior Secondary School, Gbinti, Karene

Falaba Junior Secondary School, Falaba, Falaba

Sierra Leone Muslim Brotherhood (SLMB) Secondary School, Makeni, Bombali

Experimental Junior and Senior Secondary School, Torwama, Bo

St Theresa Junior Secondary School, Bo City, Bo

Grey Bush School, Grey Bush, Western Area Urban